



# Princess Victoria Melita: Grand Duchess Cyril of Russia 1876-1936

*John Van der Kiste*

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Princess Victoria Melita played a colourful role from her birth in 1876. The second daughter of Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, she made a brief and unhappy marriage at the age of 17 to her cousin, Ernest, Grand Duke of Hesse. In the face of strong opposition from her family she divorced him seven years later and married another cousin, Grand Duke Cyril of Russia, resulting in three years of exile. When revolution toppled the empire in 1917, the Grand Duke and Duchess and their children escaped to Finland, living in danger for three long years. Following the atrocities of the Bolsheviks at the time, including the murder of most of the Romanov family, the Grand Duke believed he was the senior surviving member of the imperial house, and proclaimed himself Tsar. However, they were never able to return to their homeland, and the Grand Duchess died in exile in 1936. Using previously unpublished correspondence from the Royal Archives and Astor papers, this is a portrait of the Princess, set against the imperial court of the turn of the 20th century and inter-war Europe.

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