

Catherine's was a remarkable success story. Not only did she manage, with Peter's help, to invent a new identity as empress-consort, but her short reign also illustrates how the autocracy could continue to operate successfully under an undistinguished female ruler. Her gender proved to be an advantage, for the last thing the men close to the throne wanted was another Peter. The new six-man Supreme Privy Council under Menshikov dismantled some of Peter's unsuccessful experiments in provincial government, downsized the army and navy, and reduced the poll tax. In 1726 an alliance with Austria formed the cornerstone of Russian diplomacy for decades to come. Peter's plans for an Academy of Sciences were implemented, and western culture remained central for the elite.

Catherine bore Peter probably ten children in all, but only two survived into adulthood, Anna (1708–1729) and Elizabeth (1709–1762). Catherine would have preferred to nominate one of them as her successor, but Menshikov persuaded her to name Peter's grandson, who succeeded her as Peter II in May 1727.

*See also:* MENSHIKOV, ALEXANDER DANILOVICH; PETER I; PETER II

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## CATHERINE II

(1729–1796) Yekaterina Alexeyevna or "Catherine the Great," Empress of Russia from 1762–1796.

Recognized worldwide as a historical figure, Catherine the Great earned legendary status for three centuries. Her political ambition prompted the overthrow and subsequent murder of her husband, Emperor Peter III (1728–1762). Whatever her actual complicity, his death branded her an accessory after the fact. Thus she labored to build legitimacy as autocratrix (independent ruler) of the expansive Russian Empire. When her reign proved long, extravagant praise of her character and im-

pact overshadowed accusation. An outsider adept at charming Russian society, she projects a powerful presence in history. Most associate her with all significant events and trends in Russia's expanding world role. Though she always rejected the appellation "the Great," it endured.

Catherine fostered positive concepts of her life by composing multiple autobiographical portrayals over five decades. None of the different drafts treated her reign directly, but all implicitly justified her fitness to rule. Various versions have been translated and often reissued to reach audiences worldwide. Ironically, the first published version was issued in 1859 by Russian radicals in London to embarrass the Romanov dynasty. Trilingual in German, French, and Russian, Catherine spelled badly but read, wrote, spoke, and dictated easily and voluminously. Keen intelligence, prodigious memory, broad knowledge, and wit enlivened her conversational skill.

Born on April 21, 1729, in Stettin, Prussia, of Germanic parentage, the first daughter of Prince Christian August of Anhalt-Zerbst (1690–1747) and Princess Johanna Elizabeth of Holstein-Gottorp (1712–1760), Sophia Augusta Fredericka combined precocious physical, social, and intellectual traits with great energy and inquisitiveness. A home education through governesses and tutors enabled her by age ten to read voraciously and to converse incessantly with relatives and acquaintances at home and at other German courts that her assertive mother visited. At the court of Holstein-Gottorp in 1739 she met a second cousin, Prince Karl Peter Ulrich, the orphaned grandson of Peter the Great who was brought to Russia in 1742 by his childless aunt, Empress Elizabeth; renamed Peter Fedorovich; and proclaimed heir apparent. Backed by Frederick the Great of Prussia, Sophia followed Peter to Russia in 1744, where she was converted to Orthodoxy and renamed Catherine. Their marriage in 1745 granted her access to the Russian throne. She was to supply a male heir—a daunting task in view of Peter's unstable personality, weak health, probable sterility, and impotence. When five years brought no pregnancy, Catherine was advised to beget an heir with a married Russian courtier, Sergei Saltykov (1726–1785). After two miscarriages she gave birth to Paul Petrovich on October 1, 1754. Presumably fathered by Saltykov, the baby was raised by Empress Elizabeth. Thenceforth Catherine enjoyed greater freedom to engage in court politics and romantic intrigue. In 1757 she bore a daughter by Polish aristocrat Stanislaus



**Empress Catherine II in Russian costume.** THE ART ARCHIVE/RUSSIAN HISTORICAL MUSEUM MOSCOW/DAGLI ORTI (A)

Poniatowski that only lived sixteen months. During her husband's short-lived reign in 1762 she gave birth to another son, Alexei Bobrinskoy, by Russian aristocrat Grigory Orlov.

Catherine quickly absorbed Russian culture. She mastered the language, customs, and history of the empire. An instinctive politician, she cultivated friendships among the court elite and select foreigners such as Sir Charles Hanbury Williams (who lent her money and political advice). Her certainty that factional alignments would change abruptly upon Elizabeth's death (as foretold by the exile of Chancellor Alexei Bestuzhev-Ryumin in 1758, the banishment abroad of Stanislaus Poniatowski, and her husband's hostility) fueled her motivation to form new alliances. When Elizabeth died suddenly on January 5, 1762, Catherine was pregnant by Orlov. Their partisans were unprepared to contest the throne with the new emperor, Peter III, who undermined his own authority, alienating the Guards regiments, the Orthodox Church, and Russian patriots, through inept policies such as his withdrawal from war against Prussia and declara-

tion of war on Denmark. Peter rarely saw Catherine or Paul, whose succession rights as wife and son were jeopardized as Peter delayed his coronation and flaunted his mistress, Yelizaveta Vorontsova, older sister of Catherine's young married friend, Princess Yekaterina Dashkova.

Peter III was deposed on July 9, 1762, when Catherine "fled" from suburban Peterhof to St. Petersburg to be proclaimed empress by the Guards and the Senate. While under house arrest at Ropsha, he was later strangled to death by noblemen conspiring to ensure Catherine's sovereign power. This "revolution" was justified as a defense of Russian civil and ecclesiastical institutions, prevention of war, and redemption of national honor. Catherine never admitted complicity in the death of Peter III which was officially blamed on "hemorrhoidal colic" a cover-up ridiculed abroad by British writer Horace Walpole. Walpole scorned "this Fury of the North," predicting Paul's assassination, and referring to Catherine as "Simiramis, murderess-queen of ancient times"—charges that incited other scurrilous attacks.

Catherine quickly consolidated the new regime by rewarding partisans, recalling Bestuzhev-Ryumin and other friends from exile, and ordering coronation preparations in Moscow, where she was crowned on October 3, 1762 amid ceremonies that lasted months. Determined to rule by herself, Catherine declined to name a chancellor, refused to marry Grigory Orlov, and ignored Paul's rights as he was underage. Her style of governance was cautiously consultative, pragmatic, and "hands-on," with a Germanic sense of duty and strong aversion to wasting time. Aware of the fragility of her allegedly absolute authority, she avoided acting like a despot. She perused the whole spectrum of state policies, reviewed policies of immigration and reorganization of church estates, established a new central administration of public health, and set up a new commission to rebuild St. Petersburg and Moscow. Count Nikita Panin, a former diplomat and Paul's "governor," assumed the supervision of foreign affairs, and in 1764 Prince Alexander Vyazemsky became procurator-general of the Senate, with broad jurisdiction over domestic affairs, particularly finances and the secret political police.

Catherine's reign may be variously subdivided, depending on the sphere of activity considered. One simplistic scheme breaks it into halves: reform before 1775, and reaction afterward. But this overlooks continuities spanning the entire era and ig-

nores the varying periodizations for foreign affairs, education, and culture. Another approach conceives of her reign as a series of crises. A ruler of wide interests, she dealt simultaneously with diverse matters. The first decade witnessed her mania for legislation and pursuit of an active foreign policy that, in alliance with Prussia from 1764, led to intervention in Poland-Lithuania. This alliance led to pressures on Poland and spilled over into war with the Ottoman Empire which in turn yielded unforeseen complications in the great plague of 1770–1771 and the Pugachev Revolt of 1773–1774. The latter focused public attention on serfdom, which Catherine privately despised while recognizing that it could not be easily changed.

Catherine's government followed a general policy of cultivating public confidence in aspirations to lead Russia toward full and equal membership in Europe. Drawing on the published advice of German cameralist thinkers and corresponding regularly with Voltaire, Diderot, Grimm, and other philosophers, she promoted administrative efficiency and uniformity, economic advance and fiscal growth, and "enlightenment" through expanded educational facilities, cultural activities, and religious tolerance. She expanded the Senate in 1762 and 1763, bolstered the office of procurator-general in 1763 and 1764, and incorporated Ukraine into the empire by abolishing the hetmanate in 1764. The Legislative Commission of 1767–1768 assembled several hundred delegates from all free social groups to assist in recodification of the laws on the basis of recent European social theory as borrowed from Montesquieu and others and outlined in Catherine's *Great Instruction* of 1767—enlightened guidelines translated into many other languages. To stimulate the economy, foreign immigrants were invited in 1763, grain exports were sanctioned in 1764, the Free Economic Society was established in 1765, and a commission on commerce formulated a new tariff in 1766. She also secularized ecclesiastical estates in 1764, founded the Smolny Institute for the education of young women, and eased restrictions on religious schismatics. New public health policies were championed as she underwent inoculation against smallpox in 1768 by Dr. Thomas Dimsdale and then provided the procedure free to the public. Yet her attempts to contain the horrific plague of 1770–1771 could not prevent some 100,000 deaths, triggering bloody riots in Moscow.

The most literate ruler in Russian history, Catherine constantly patronized cultural pursuits,

especially a flurry of satirical journals and comedies published anonymously with her significant participation. Later comedies attacked Freemasonry. In 1768 she founded the Society for the Translation of Foreign Books into Russian, superseded in 1782 by the Russian Academy, which sponsored a comprehensive dictionary between 1788 and 1796. Most strikingly, she founded the Hermitage, a museum annex to the Winter Palace, to house burgeoning collections of European paintings and other kinds of art. To lighten the burdens of rule, Catherine attended frequent social gatherings, including regular "Court Days" (receptions for a diverse public), visits to the theater, huge festivals like St. Petersburg's Grand Carousel of 1766, and select informal gatherings where titles and ranks were ignored.

To embrace the great Petrine legacy, Catherine sponsored a gigantic neoclassical equestrian statue of Peter the Great on Senate Square, "The Bronze Horseman" as the poet Pushkin dubbed it, publicly unveiled in 1782. Dismayed by Peter's brutal militarism and coercive cultural innovations, she saw herself as perfecting his achievements with a lighter touch. Thus Ivan Betskoy, a prominent dignitary of the period, lauded them both in 1767 by stating that Peter the Great created people in Russia but Catherine endowed them with souls. In neoclassical imagery Catherine was often depicted as Minerva. Her "building mania" involved neo-Gothic palaces and gardens, and with Scottish architect Charles Cameron she added a neoclassical wing to the Catherine Palace at Tsarskoye Selo and the nearby Pavlovsk Palace for Paul and his second wife, Maria Fyodorovna, who provided many grandchildren, the males raised directly by the empress.

Through travel Catherine demonstrated vigor in exploring the empire. In June 1763 she returned from Moscow to St. Petersburg, then traveled the next summer to Estland and Livland. She rushed back because of an attempted coup by a disgruntled Ukrainian officer, Vasily Mirovich, to free the imprisoned Ivan VI (1740–1764). Acting on secret orders, guards killed the prisoner before he could be freed. After a speedy trial Mirovich was beheaded on September 26, 1764, and his supporters were beaten and exiled.

While Catherine quickly quashed such inept plots, she worried more about rumors that Peter III was alive and eager to regain power. Some dozen impostors cropped up in remote locales, but all



**Empress Catherine II.** © HULTON ARCHIVE

were apprehended, imprisoned, or exiled. In 1772 and 1773, amid war with the Ottoman Empire, did fugitive cossack Emelian Pugachev rally the Yaik cossacks under Peter III's banner in a regional rebellion that attracted thousands of motley followers. When Pugachev burned Kazan in 1774, Catherine contemplated defending Moscow in person, but the victorious end of the Russo-Turkish War soon dissuaded her. Upon capture Pugachev underwent repeated interrogation before execution in Moscow on January 21, 1775, in Catherine's demonstrative absence. This embarrassment was overshadowed by elaborate celebrations in Moscow of victory over Pugachev and the Turks, the Peace of Kuchuk-Kainardji of 1774.

Russia's soaring international prestige was further affirmed by the month-long visit of King Gustavus III of Sweden in the summer of 1777 and by Russia's joint mediation of the war of the Bavarian Succession in the Peace of Teschen of May 1779, which made Russia a guarantor of the Holy Roman Empire. Catherine's meeting with Emperor-King Joseph II of Austria at Mogilev in May 1780 led one year later to a secret Russo-Austrian alliance against the Ottoman Empire, the notorious "Greek Project" that foresaw Catherine's grandson

Konstantin on the throne of a reconstituted Byzantine Empire. In 1781 Catherine engineered the Armed Neutrality of 1781, a league of northern naval powers to oppose British infringement of the commercial rights of neutrals amid the conflicts ending the American revolution.

In 1774 Catherine rearranged her personal life and the imperial leadership by promoting the flamboyant Grigory Potemkin, a well-educated noble and supporter of her coup. Installed as official favorite, he dominated St. Petersburg politics as political partner and probable husband until his death in 1791. He assisted with legislation that spawned the Provincial Reform beginning in 1775, the Police Code for towns in 1782, and charters to the nobility and the towns in 1785. A charter for the state peasantry remained in draft form, as did reforms of the Senate.

In charge of the armed forces, settlement, and fortification of New Russia (Ukraine), Potemkin masterminded annexation of the Crimea in 1783 and the Tauride Tour of 1787, an extravagant cavalcade that provoked renewed Russo-Turkish war in August 1787. In alliance with Austria, and despite unforeseen war with Sweden in 1788 and 1790 and troubles in revolutionary France in 1789, Potemkin coordinated campaigns that confirmed Russian triumph and territorial gains in the treaty of Jassy (1792). The last years of Catherine's life saw another triumph of Russian arms in the second and third partitions of Poland and the preparation of expeditionary forces against Persia and France. Internal repercussions of foreign pressures involved the arrest and exile of Alexander Radishchev in 1790 and Nikolay Novikov in 1792, both noblemen charged with publications violating censorship rules in propagating revolutionary and Freemason sentiments.

The death of Potemkin and Vyazemsky left voids in Catherine's government that a new young favorite, Platon Zubov, could not bridge. Her declining health and growing estrangement from Paul insistently raised succession concerns and rumors that she would prevent Paul's accession. Catherine's sudden death on November 16, 1796, from apoplexy inaugurated his reign. Paul's efforts at reversing Catherine's policies backfired, regenerating fond memories that inspired a bogus "Testament of Catherine the Great" later used by aristocratic conspirators to overthrow and murder Paul and replace him with Alexander, Catherine's beloved grandson.

See also: BESTUZHEV-RYUMIN, ALEXIS; INSTRUCTION TO THE LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION OF CATHERINE II; PETER III; ORLOV, GRIGORY; POTESKIN, GRIGORY; PUGACHEV, EMILIAN; RUSSO-TURKISH WARS

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#### CATHERINE THE GREAT See CATHERINE II.

### CATHOLICISM

The Roman Catholic Church established ties to the Russian lands from their earliest history but played only a marginal role. The first significant encounter came during the Time of Troubles, when the Catholic associations of pretenders and Polish interventionists triggered intense popular hostility toward the "Latins" and a hiatus in Russian-Catholic relations. Only in the last quarter of the seventeenth century did Muscovy, in pursuit of allies against the Turks, resume ties to Rome. Peter the Great went significantly further, permitting the construction of the first Catholic church in Moscow

(1691) and the presence of various Catholic orders (including Jesuits).

But a significant Catholic presence only commenced with the first Polish partition of 1772, when the Russian Empire acquired substantial numbers of Catholic subjects. Despite initial tensions (chiefly over claims by the Russian government to oversee Catholic administration), relations improved markedly under emperors Paul (r. 1796–1801) and Alexander I (r. 1801–1825), when Catholic—especially Jesuit—influences at court were extraordinarily strong.

Thereafter, however, relations proved extremely tempestuous. One factor was the coercive conversion of Uniates or Eastern Catholics (that is, Catholics practicing Eastern Rites), who were "re-united" with the Russian Orthodox Church (in 1839 and 1875) and forbidden to practice Catholic rites. The second factor was Catholic involvement in the Polish uprisings of 1830–1831 and 1863; subsequent government measures to Russify and repress the Poles served only to reinforce their Catholic identity and resolve. Hence Catholicism remained a force to be reckoned with: By the 1890s, it had 11.5 million adherents (9.13% of the population), making it the third largest religious group in the Russian Empire. It maintained some 4,400 churches (2,400 in seven Polish dioceses; 2,000 in five dioceses in the Russian Empire proper). The 1905 revolution forced the regime to declare religious tolerance (the manifesto of April 17, 1905); with conversion from Russian Orthodoxy decriminalized, huge numbers declared themselves Catholic (233,000 in 1905–1909 alone).

The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, however, brought decades of devastating repression. The Catholic Church refused to accept Bolshevik nationalization of its property and the requirement that the laity, not clergy, register and assume responsibility for churches. The conflict culminated in the Bolshevik campaign to confiscate church valuables in 1922 and 1923 and a famous show trial that ended with the execution of a leading prelate. That was but a prelude to the 1930s, when massive purges and repression eliminated all but two Catholic churches by 1939. Although World War II brought an increase in Catholic churches (mainly through the annexation of new territories), the regime remained highly suspicious of Catholicism, especially in a republic like Lithuania, where ethnicity and Catholicism coalesced into abiding dissent.