

# Catherine the Great: A Marital Battle

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*“Power without a nation's confidence is nothing”*

Catherine (see Appendix A) had undergone enough of her husband's actions. He had destroyed the country that she loved. She needed to act. On the 9th of July, 1762 the tyrant ruler Peter III was forced to compromise by his wife; this marked the turn of Russia's greatness in the world.[1]

Catherine II (known by birth as Sophie Friederike Auguste) was born May 2, 1729, in Szczecin, Poland. Her mother, Princess Johanna Elisabeth of Holstein-Gottorp had dismissed Catherine for the ultimate crime of being female. She had wanted a son because of their current poverty, and because of her son's recent death. Johanna had wanted to auction off Catherine's hand in marriage to get through the shortage of money they currently had. She found the younger man Tsar Peter of Holstein-Gottorp. They were married almost immediately. The marriage was arranged mostly by Peter's aunt, and reigning ruler, Ekaterina Alekseyevna. The conflict began immediately when the two were introduced, Catherine was one of high intellect while Peter was a child trapped in a man's body. [2]

Peter III was raised extremely poorly. In a wealthy family, one would expect to have extreme diplomatic thoughts and abilities, but this was not the case for young Peter. His parents had died when he was young and he was raised by officials in Sweden to prepare him for the German throne. This semi-adoption was horribly cruel, as he was

constantly punished for his lackluster education experience. He had an interest in the arts but had failed in nearly every academic subject. He had always dreamed of being in the military but was denied this opportunity when his aunt became the Empress of Russia, and Peter was proclaimed Heir to the throne. [3][4]

Catherine had shown her dedication to Russia early. She immediately changed her previous German name to a more acceptable Russian title. Weeks after her move to the palace Peter and her lived in, servants would find Catherine in the cold dark hallways studying Russian literature and getting accustomed to the actions of Russian royalty. This lead Catherine to become horribly ill and was later bedridden. Her mother had ordered a Lutheran priest to bless her but Catherine had turned him out, opting for a more traditional Russian Orthodox priest. [2]

Peter had begun to make a mess of himself by the time he and Catherine were married. He had not spent much time with his wife, at their wedding Catherine had gone to their chambers to prepare for the night, she had made the bed, spruced up the room, and waited patiently for her husband. Peter came two hours later, stumbling drunk. Ignoring his wife he fumbled into bed and went to sleep. Peters childish nature was shown all through his life and this showed prominently in his daily actions. His main time was spent with his mistress, or dressing and ordering around the guards, pretending to fight his childish war. [1]

Catherine and Peter only became worse as time went on. Both Peter and Catherine had acquired a secret lover and were seeing each other less and less. Catherine had developed her own pastimes, such as her avid reading, which lead to the

construction of many various art centers, such as music hall and theaters spread across Russia. Catherine also wrote to such authors as Voltaire. Catherine had made herself to be very cultured in the eyes of the public. She was beginning to make herself seem like the rightful ruler of Russia.[2][5]

The current empress at the time was Peter's aunt Elizabeth, Elizabeth had just died, making the petulant child the leader of one of the greatest superpowers of the world. Russia had previously been busy fighting the Seven Years War. This battle had almost emptied the royal treasury and emptied even more of the Russian populace. Peter had immediately pulled all resources out of the diminishing war that they had practically won. Peter had also struck an alliance with Prussia (one of Russia's greatest enemies) and he had started a war with Denmark to reclaim his previously owned land of Holstein. Peter had almost completely lost his standing as a great ruler.[1][4]

Catherine had been plotting against her husband with her lover, Gregory Orlov a Russian lieutenant and many others that had a considerable distaste for the current Tsar. Catherine had taken soldiers and marched to St Petersburg. Catherine Dressed in an informal dress and donned a regular military uniform. When Catherine arrived at St. Petersburg she found that Peter had retreated to an island off of the coast and later caught him at Peter's residence at Oranienbaum, near St. Petersburg, and made Peter formally abdicate on July 10. Catherine, with the approval of the guard, the Senate, and the church, became Catherine II of Russia. Peter was then arrested and taken to the village of Ropsha.[2][6]

Seven days later he died in the same village of Ropsha. It is unknown how he died, most guess assassination but some evidence suggests suicide is the cause of death. Later, Catherine's son, Paul, who disliked his mother's behavior, arranged for Peter's remains to be exhumed and reburied with full honors in the Peter and Paul Cathedral, where other Tsars were buried. [1]

Catherine immediately took action when she entered tsardom. She called back the forces sent to Denmark and gave back the land Peter had taken from the church. Catherine had also abolished torture and capital punishment. She had declared every man equal, to the distaste of the serf owners. Serfs were debt slaves owned by rich landowners, these owners could decide the fate of their serfs. This led to the Pugachev's Rebellion, a bump in Catherine's rule where Emelian Pugachev posed as Peter III and declared that his wife Catherine killed him to protect the right to own serfs.[2][6]

Emelian Pugachev was a Cossack born in the village of Zimoveyskaya. Emelian joined the military at age 17 and fought in the Prussian and Russo-Turkish wars and had been promoted to the rank of khorunziy. But, soon after, He deserted the military and began wandering around riverbanks, recruiting old believers of the Russian Orthodox. These people encouraged him to pursue the Peter III legend and become the dead Tsar. Emelian's first battle was no battle at all, he felt no resistance as he and his small army crawled up the banks of the Yaik River, the townspeople met Pugachev and the rebels with hospitality as they came. But, in the beginning of 1733, Pugachev's army attacked Orenburg, the major population center on the Volga River in southern

Russia. In October 1773 when word of the rebellion reached Saint Petersburg, Catherine appointed Major General Vasily Kar to battle on behalf of Imperial Russia. However, Kar, primarily seeking to disperse the insurgents rather than engage them in battle, critically underestimated the size and tenacity of Pugachev's forces. As a result, Pugachev destroyed General Kar's expedition and anchored their place as a threat to Imperial Russia.[7]

By March of the next year, Catherine was ready to crush the rebels. She had assembled an army, and put General Alexander Bibikov in charge of the force. Bibikov had the opposing army down in hours, forcing them to lift the siege on Orenburg and retreat from the city. But the Russian military could not quell the rebellion so easily, as rebellious outbreaks were spreading to nearby towns and villages. Pugachev's army had recovered fast, and by July 1774 approached Kazan, a large town at the merging of the Volga and Kazanka rivers. Within six hours the rebels had the town, but with effort, the Russian government had pushed the rebels out. [7]

The constant defeats had Pugachev on the run, and with little men by his side, he was running out of options. It was late August 1774 when government troops cornered Pugachev's rebels near Tsaritsin in Ukraine, inflicting a decisive final defeat on the rebel insurrection. Even then Pugachev escaped capture, but was later arrested by Cossacks and turned over to the Russian authorities. The, on January 10, 1775, Emilian Pugachev was executed in front of an assembly of Russians. Following this event,

Catherine changed the name of Pugachev's hometown to Potemkinskaya, and the Yaik River henceforth was identified as the Ural River.[7]

By 1796, Catherine had enjoyed several decades as Russia's absolute ruler. She had a troubled relationship with her son and heir, Paul, over her tight grip on power, but she enjoyed her grandchildren, especially the oldest one: Alexander. In her later years, Catherine continued to possess an active mind and a strong spirit but was nearing the end of her life. On November 17, 1796, Catherine was found on her bathroom floor unconscious. She was rushed to her bed, and lingered later that night, but died in the early morning. Catherine had suffered a stroke and now Russia was in the hands of her son Paul, who Catherine witnessed become more and more like her husband. Catherine left her mark on the world with her overwhelming power and intelligence, and Peter fell behind as the weaker husband to Catherine the great.[6][2]

# Appendix A



Catherine the great riding a white horse

Erichsen, Virgilius. Equestrian Portrait of Catherine II. 1762, State Hermitage Museum,

Saint Petersburg, Russia. [8]



## Works Cited

### Primary

[8] Erichsen, Virgilius. *Equestrian Portrait of Catherine II*. 1762, State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia. I used this picture because it showcased further the valiant outfit she had used while chasing down Peter.

### Secondary

[1] Biography.com, Biography editors. "Peter III." *Biography.com*, A&E Networks Television, 8 July 2014, [www.biography.com/people/peter-iii-39106](http://www.biography.com/people/peter-iii-39106). I used this site because it had the very important beginning of Peter III's life. It explains his upbringing with the Swedish government at the time and his hatred for Russia. This also explains the childish acts and demeanor of the Tsar.

[6] "Catherine the Great." Edited by John K, *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 30 Aug. 2005, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine\\_the\\_Great](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catherine_the_Great). I used this source as a reference to later confirm or deny other facts. This was used in finding out the lovers and children of Catherine. I also found the easy dates of birth and marriage.

[3] The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. "Peter III." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 26 Feb. 2016, [www.britannica.com/biography/Peter-III-emperor-of-Russia](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Peter-III-emperor-of-Russia).

[5]Halsall, Paul. "Modern History Sourcebook: Catherine the Great." *Internet History*

*Sourcebooks*, 22 July 1997, [sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/18Catherine.asp](http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/18Catherine.asp). I used this site to further understand how others thought of Catherine. I have found that many, including Baron de Breteuil, think very highly of Catherine and expect her to carry out the title of "The Great."

[7]Ness, Immanuel. "Pugachev's Rebellion." *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and*

*Protest: 1500 to the Present*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 2775–2776. I used this source mainly to explain pugachev's motivation and history. I also used this to explain his battles and how Catherine dealt with him.

[2]Oldenbourg-Idalie, Zoé. "Catherine the Great." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia

Britannica, Inc., 27 Dec. 2017, [www.britannica.com/biography/Catherine-the-Great](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Catherine-the-Great). I used this site as a base to ping and confirm ideas off of. I usually backed up things like names, dates, and important events with this site.

[4]RusArtNet, Kenneth. "Peter III." *Biographies - - RusArtNet.com*, July 2016,

[www.rusartnet.com/biographies/russian-rulers/romanov/tsar/peter-iii](http://www.rusartnet.com/biographies/russian-rulers/romanov/tsar/peter-iii). I used this site to further investigate Peter's affairs. I discovered that his primary mistress was a woman named Countess Elizaveta Vorontsova.