



Peter the Great & Catherine the Great: Russia's Greatest Tsar and Tsarina

Charles River Editors

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*Discusses the myths and legends surrounding the two rulers.

*Includes passages from Catherine's memoirs and letters she wrote to contemporaries like Voltaire and Diderot.

*Includes pictures depicting Peter, Catherine and important people, places and events in their lives.

*Includes a Bibliography of both leaders for further reading.

For anyone trying to understand the origins of modern Russia, the search should begin with Tsar Peter I (1672-1725), who titled himself Peter the Great during his lifetime. The moniker is fitting, considering the manner in which Peter brought Russia out of the Middle Ages and into the 18th century. Through a series of campaigns, Peter turned Russia into a formidable empire that would subsequently become a major force on the European continent, while also emulating Western Europe and turning Russia into an international state that interacted with the other continental powers. By revolutionizing and modernizing Russian arms, including the creation of Russia's first naval force, Peter was able to pursue an aggressive and expansionist foreign policy that set the stage for the way the European map would be redrawn again and again over the coming centuries.

Perhaps more remarkably, as Peter was stretching Russia's borders, he was transforming Russia from the inside as well. Fond of the cultures to the west, Peter embraced technology, science and the arts, developing a new educational system for his people and supporting a number of institutions of higher learning in Russia. He built a European-style capital at St. Petersburg and also established new ports and access to the Baltic Sea for the purposes of opening up trade with the west.

As one of the most famous women rulers in history, Russian Empress Catherine the Great has long been remembered not only as one of the most powerful women of her time, but she was also one of the most powerful and capable rulers in all of Europe. And her path to the throne was just as remarkable as her reign. In a story that sounds like it could have been a precursor to Cinderella, Catherine the Great was born into a family of minor nobility, but she managed to forge her own destiny through her own cunning use of diplomacy and intrigue, gradually gaining allies and power. By 1762, she was confident enough to conspire against her own husband, Peter III, whose reign as Tsar lasted just six months before his arrest at the hands of his wife. Upon his arrest and death, Catherine took power as the regent for their son, Grand Duke Paul. Despite the strong-arm tactics, Catherine came to power in the midst of the Enlightenment, which was flourishing in France and Britain, and she would rule as an Enlightened ruler. A known correspondent of Voltaire's, Catherine sought to modernize Russia and turn it into a force in its own right, creating a rich and cultured court at the same time. Over the course of nearly 35 years in power, Catherine ushered in the Russian Enlightenment and presided over a period of time known as the Golden Age of the Russian Empire. Given her length of reign, forceful character, and lasting legacy, it was inevitable that legends about Catherine the Great would also pop up in the wake of her death. To an extent, certain legends have overshadowed her actual accomplishments, even as they continue to be circulated.

Peter the Great & Catherine the Great addresses the lives and legends of the two rulers, explaining how they turned Russia into a major player on the European scene. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Peter the Great and Catherine the Great like you never have before.

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