

## Maria Theresa

Maria Theresa was the archduchess of Austria, queen of Bohemia and Hungary, and eventually became the sovereign of the Holy Roman Empire in 1740. Renowned for her beauty, her warmth, and her courage, she claimed the affection of her people and the respect of her enemies. Frederick II of Prussia, her constant foe, stated that she was "a credit to her throne and her sex." Virtually without experience when she became empress at the age of 23, she developed into one of the great rulers in the European power politics of the 18th century.

Maria Theresa was born on May 13, 1717 in Vienna to the Holy Roman emperor Charles VI, a Habsburg, and his wife, Elizabeth-Christina of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel. Because Charles was the last Habsburg prince, the dynastic rule seemed headed for disruption. In the Pragmatic Sanction, however, a special agreement made with several surrounding countries in 1713, Charles was permitted to pass his crown to a female heir. In 1736, Maria Theresa married Francis Stephen of Lorraine, who fathered her 16 children. In 1740, Charles VI died, and Maria Theresa asserted her right to the throne.



Maria Theresa's claims, however, conflicted with the ambitions of Prussia's Frederick the Great. His family, the Hohenzollerns, had long claimed Silesia, a rich territory ruled by the Habsburgs, which lay between Austria and Prussia. Upon Charles' death, Frederick invaded the province and thereby opened exactly the kind of contest that Charles had hoped to avoid through the Pragmatic Sanction. Frederick's invasion sparked the War of the Austrian Succession, which lasted from 1740 to 1748. At first, the Austrian Army seemed doomed, but Maria Theresa rallied it to victories over France (a Prussian ally), and the war ended with the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle. Amidst this complicated settlement that reapportioned territory between the Habsburgs, the Prussians, and the Prussian allies (Bavaria, Saxony, France, and Spain), all parties agreed to the confirmation of Maria Theresa as the rightful ruler of the Habsburg lands. Silesia remained in Prussian hands, however, a loss that was very painful for Maria Theresa.

Maria Theresa came to believe that internal reforms would be necessary to strengthen her realm, and in cooperation with her councilors and such advisers as William von Haugwitz and Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz, she undertook to reorganize both central and provincial administration. She was able to achieve the greatest reform in the Habsburg hereditary kingdoms of Austria and Bohemia. She did not attempt to significantly change the systems of government in the other imperial holdings of the Netherlands, Italy, or Hungary. She instated a measure of centralism, however, that unified her domain. At the highest levels, she separated the executive from judicial functions and reorganized the offices of defense, commerce, the interior, foreign affairs, and justice. She tried to restrict government expense and regulate taxes. Her domestic reforms included a new penal code and humanitarian laws to help the poor. She also began a compulsory primary education system.

Though Maria Theresa was a devout Catholic, she worked to bring the Catholic Church under the control of the government and reduced certain religious practices and the number of religious holidays. She began the process of separating the education system from the Church. As she built up the Austrian Empire, however, she stressed the importance of religious unity and was not tolerant of other religions, and especially intolerant of Jews. Maria Theresa, in the same cause, restrained the power of the nobles and created a standing army.

Before she deployed her armies, however, Maria Theresa reassessed the diplomatic situation of Europe. Though Austria had for many decades been allied with Britain against France, the empress

and her adviser von Kaunitz decided in the 1750s that Prussia was the real enemy. They took steps to deal with the growing power of Prussia by abandoning Britain and allying with France, thus shocking Europe and initiating what contemporaries called the diplomatic revolution in 1756. During the ensuing Seven Years' War, Maria Theresa sent her armies into the field to regain Silesia, expanding her allies to include Russia and Saxony. She was forced to sue for peace, however, when Russia's Empress Elizabeth Petrovna died and her successor, Peter III, withdrew the Russian forces.

The Habsburg dynasties in Spain and in Austria had maintained their 650-year rule in part through astute marriage diplomacy. Aware of the problems that had been caused by her father's few heirs, Maria Theresa's sense of duty extended to the production of many children. She gave birth to five boys and 11 girls, resenting the discomfort of pregnancy only when it prevented her from riding on horseback at the head of her troops during war. She encouraged her children to marry for the sake of the dynasty, matching her daughter Marie Antoinette, for example, with the French dauphin to consolidate Austria's relations with France.

Though she was devoted to her children, Maria Theresa did not get along very well with her son Joseph, who became ruler upon the death of her husband Francis in 1765. She did not approve of Joseph's enthusiasm for the Enlightenment, and his admiration for Frederick offended her deeply. Under pressure from Joseph and von Kaunitz, however, she cooperated with Frederick in partitioning Poland, an action of which she disapproved on moral grounds. She eventually assented in order to keep Austrian gains more or less even with those of Prussia and Russia; in 1772, Austria thus obtained Galicia. In her later years, she had increasing differences with Joseph. When Maria Theresa died on November 29, 1780, she left behind a unified Habsburg monarchy that Joseph II further reformed, although he never enjoyed the popularity of his mother nor the success of her reign.

## Philip II

Philip II, king of Spain from 1556 to 1598, reigned for 40 years over the largest European kingdom of the time. The wealthy Spanish territory included the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Portugal, and much of Latin America. Philip was a consistent defender of Catholic territory against the advance of Protestantism. Although a talented strategist, he is most remembered for the stunning defeat of his Spanish Armada by the English.



Philip was born on May 21, 1527 in Valladolid, Spain, the son of Holy Roman emperor Charles V and Isabella of Portugal. As the son and crown prince of the most powerful king in Europe, Philip was surrounded by wealth, privilege, and education. He was raised in his mother's court in Spain until he was eight years old. Although Charles was gone from home administering his kingdom and fighting wars, he took an active interest in his son's life. He was worried when Philip could not read or write by age seven. Philip soon caught up and became a passionate reader, collecting a vast library of more than 14,000 books. When Philip was 12 years old, his mother died. By that time, he had already been living in his own court for three years, attended by 190 nobles and staff. He spent his time learning French, Italian, and Portuguese as well as history, science, music, and such knightly arts as jousting. When he was 16 years old, he was married

to Maria of Portugal.

When Philip was 21, Charles sent him on a three-year tour of their Spanish, Italian, Dutch, and German empire. When Philip returned, Charles began to mentor him in managing the affairs of state. They often consulted together, discussed issues, and made decisions. In 1556, when Philip was 29, Charles retired to a monastery in Spain and entrusted the administration of much of the empire to Philip. Philip had learned his lessons of administration well and had taken to heart his father's words to "transact business with many . . . never trust anyone." Throughout his reign, Philip insisted on being briefed on every state matter and spent hours studying documents before signing them. Thus, the massive bureaucracy of Philip's empire had a reputation of being extremely slow. On Charles' death in 1558, Philip became king of the most powerful and extensive kingdom in Europe, financed by its wealthy territories in Latin America.

During the 1560s, Philip's attention was taken by a rebellion in his territories in the Spanish Netherlands. Forty years after Martin Luther had started the Reformation, the northern European kingdoms were becoming Protestant and agitating against their Catholic rulers. Philip had appointed William the Silent to administer this territory. William had been raised a Protestant, but Charles had forced him to be educated as a Catholic. William and other nobles were angered by their Catholic rulers' suppression of Protestants in the Netherlands and rebelled. The Duke of Alva was sent by Philip to end the Dutch Revolt in 1567. He did so brutally, executing up to 12,000 people, and Philip had to replace him with another minister. William fled to Germany but eventually returned to the Netherlands to start its independence movement. Battles continued between William's Protestant forces, who were supported by England, and Philip's Catholic army in the mid-1570s, with William controlling the northern half of the country.

Life at home was also difficult. Philip's first wife, Maria, had died in 1545 after giving birth to a son, Don Carlos. Philip next married Queen Mary I of England, a marriage arranged by his father in an attempt to turn Protestant England back to Catholicism. After Mary died in 1558, Philip married Elizabeth of Valois, the daughter of Henry II of France. She died in childbirth in 1568. Added to

this misfortune was the insanity of Don Carlos, whom Philip eventually had to confine after he tried to knife his father's ministers.

Philip is most remembered as the king who organized the massive Spanish Armada. He realized that he could not subdue the rebellious Netherlands without confronting England, which was aiding the Netherlands by the late 1580s. Philip decided to invade England with a fleet of 130 ships and 30,000 men. The Armada was engaged by the English in July 1588. The British had fewer ships, but they were smaller and faster. They set several of their ships on fire and rammed the Spanish fleet, sending it into chaos. Only 67 ships returned home, and the economic damage to Philip's treasury was profound.

Philip spent his last years intervening in the French Wars of Religion and sending a second Armada against the English in 1597, which was again defeated. To the end, he fervently defended Catholic territory and oversaw the most minute details of his administration. Philip was 71 when he died at his palace on September 13, 1598.



## Louis XIV

Believing in his divine right to rule, Louis XIV broke French precedent to establish himself as an absolute monarch. Appropriately deemed the Sun King, he radiated power and magnificence. During his reign, he not only expanded France's borders but also cultivated theater, fashion, refined manners, and art. While he reigned primarily during the 17th century, Louis XIV set the stage for France's political and cultural primacy in the 18th century.

Louis was born on September 5, 1638. His father, Louis XIII, detested his wife and had avoided her as much as possible, so the birth of an heir after an unfruitful 23 years of marriage was hailed as a miracle. Four years later, Louis XIII died, and Louis XIV became king of France on May 14, 1643. Anne of Austria, a Spanish Habsburg, assumed the regency for her small son, and for the next several years, she ruled with the help of her prime minister, Cardinal Jules Mazarin. When Louis was nine years old, the nobility and the Parlement of Paris (the law court responsible for recording royal edicts) instigated a rebellion against the king that would last until 1653. During this civil war known as the Fronde Revolts, the queen mother and her two sons were forced to flee Paris. Exiled from the capital, the royal family suffered fear, poverty, and hunger until Mazarin's forces defeated the rebels. The young king would never forget the humiliation, nor would he ever forgive the nobles.

When Louis turned 13, the age of majority, he officially began his rule, although he granted the prime minister full authority. He then set off to join his army, currently engaged in the Franco-Spanish War. When he returned from the war, Louis showed little interest in politics, and Mazarin continued to exercise great power. Louis was formally crowned in a ceremony at Reims on June 7, 1654. In 1658, Louis fell in love with Mazarin's niece, Marie Mancini, but a lasting relationship between the king and a commoner was of course impossible. On June 6, 1660, Louis submitted to his duty and married Marie-Thérèse of Austria, the daughter of King Philip IV of Spain. Their marriage sealed the peace treaty between France and Spain; it also made Louis the most powerful monarch in Europe.

After Cardinal Mazarin died the next year, Louis assembled his ministers and made an astonishing declaration. "Messieurs," he announced, "I have gathered you here to tell you that henceforth I intend to rule my state alone." No longer would officials sign decrees, authorize spending, or make any decisions without the king's consent. In grasping the reins of power himself, Louis drastically broke with tradition. Prime ministers had ruled France since the death of Henry IV in 1610. Louis set another precedent when he barred the nobility from his council; instead, only the king's most trusted allies were allowed to advise him. Forgoing the entertainments of his youth, Louis set for himself a strict schedule of conferences and meetings with his ministers. The young king possessed a majestic demeanor that caused fear and respect, and the court soon discovered that its obedience was imperative.

During the first 20 years of his personal reign, Louis made reforms, oversaw the blossoming of French art, and elevated the grandeur of the monarchy. With the help of Jean-Baptiste Colbert, he reorganized the administration of his kingdom and assumed control of the national budget. Far from being a wild spendthrift, Louis carefully kept track of the state of his treasury. He even managed to reduce taxes. Assisted by the Marquis de Louvois, the king reorganized the French Army and invaded the Spanish Netherlands, beginning a long series of wars in Flanders. Louis also established himself as a protector of the arts. He favored the drama of Molière and Jean Racine and encouraged music, architecture, painting, and sculpture. Furthermore, the king added glamour to his court by wearing the latest fashions. He gave magnificent equestrian parties that the nobles attended in costumes embroidered with gold, silver, and jewels.

Louis had lived in the Louvre and the Palace of the Tuileries in Paris, but he soon demanded a home splendid enough for God's representative on earth. The palace at Versailles, located outside Paris, took more than 20 years to build and cost more than 25 million *livres*; it became the official residence of the king and his court on May 6, 1682. Provided with enough space to house all his courtiers, Louis ordered the nobility to Versailles to live under his watchful eye. There, courtiers attended the king from the time he awoke until he retired to bed. As Louis accorded favors to only those who pleased him, it was imperative to be in the presence of the king, where rules of etiquette constrained every action. By domesticating the nobles—keeping them virtual prisoners in his "golden hive"—Louis took his revenge for their insurrection during the Fronde.

By the 1680s, Louis had significantly added to France's territory, including part of the Spanish Netherlands, the eastern

province of Franche-Comté, and the duchy of Lorraine. France had defeated Spain, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Netherlands to become the greatest power in Europe. The Paris municipality recognized those victories by awarding to the king the title of "*Grand*"; Louis XIV officially became Louis the Great. The king's public glory was at its peak. His private life, however, was becoming more austere. His mistress, the Marquise de Montespan, had been implicated in a witchcraft scandal, so Louis turned his attentions to the pious governess Françoise d'Aubigné de Maintenon (often referred to as Madame de Maintenon). After the queen died in 1683, Louis and Maintenon secretly married, and the king increasingly devoted himself to religion.

Desiring religious unity for his kingdom, Louis objected to the existence of a Protestant minority in France. Encouraged by the Marquis de Louvois, the king concluded that he could eradicate Protestantism only by force. On October 18, 1685, Louis revoked the Edict of Nantes, which had guaranteed Protestants' right to worship since 1598. The revocation was popular with the court and the Catholic Church, but its enforcement resulted in disaster. Churches were razed, soldiers committed torture and murder, Protestants caught worshipping were executed, and 300,000 people fled the country. Since a large number of those who fled were artisans and merchants, the mass emigration crippled the French economy, as well.

In 1688, France faced another war, this time against the English, the Dutch, and the Holy Roman Empire. Known as the War of the Grand Alliance, the conflict lasted until 1697, when Louis finally agreed to relinquish Lorraine, Catalonia, parts of Flanders, and the principality of Orange. The public mourned the loss of territory, but France nevertheless remained the richest, most powerful nation in Europe. Louis also retained his full power, despite being the oldest king of France in two centuries.

The 18th century dawned with the death of Carlos II, the last Habsburg king of Spain, who settled on Louis' grandson, Philippe d'Anjou, as his heir. The young duke was crowned King Philip V of Spain, and Louis XIV took on the government of the Spanish kingdom until Philip was able to rule. England and the Holy Roman Empire opposed the arrangement, however, and the War of the Spanish Succession ensued. The war, which ended in 1714, cost France little land but ended its European hegemony.

By 1714, the grand dauphin had died, along with two of Louis' grandsons and a great-grandson. Since Philip V could not accede to the French throne, Louis' remaining heir was his last great-grandson, the future Louis XV. In his will, Louis specified his nephew, the Duc d'Orléans, as regent, but the king limited his nephew's power by a council of regency to be controlled by the Duc du Maine. In August 1715, the king began to suffer from gangrene in his leg; he fell into a coma and died on September 1, 1715.

The death of the Sun King was greeted with relief. Crowds jeered at Louis' funeral carriage on its way to the basilica, and the Parlement revoked the king's will within days, giving the Duc d'Orléans full regency. However, it was not long before Louis XIV's reign came to symbolize a golden age in France. Indeed, Louis XIV remains the ultimate image of the *ancien régime*.

# Peter I

In 1703, there arose in Russia a new city, Western in appearance, grand in its architecture, the epitome of czarist absolutism. Peter I, known as Peter the Great, a tall dominating figure who once traveled Europe incognito, ordered the city be built. Nothing so clearly symbolized his grandeur and his renascent vision than that massive feat, the construction of St. Petersburg. In contrast to that, Peter dispensed cruelties on those around him—the loyal and disloyal—subjecting them to his drunken excesses, his infatuation with freakish behavior, and his torture chambers, where death by flogging and burning awaited unfortunate victims.

At first, Peter showed little inclination for serious rule. He formed the "Drunken Council of Fools" that consumed vodka in enormous quantities and entertained itself by engaging in impaling, flogging, and beard burning. He went sailing on the White Sea, and although he captured Azov from the Turks in 1696, he left most affairs of state to relatives who governed incompetently and robbed the treasury.

In 1697, Peter developed a wild scheme to launch a crusade against the Turks. To broaden his knowledge and gain the help of other nations, he decided to tour Europe. During part of that journey he traveled incognito. His disguises—which he intended his hosts to see through—proved ludicrous. Peter was a huge man—nearly seven feet tall—and thus easily recognizable. Furthermore, he traveled with a large entourage, including jesters and dwarfs, whom he considered amusing.



The tour displayed Peter's wild excesses as well as his seriousness. He visited with monarchs and worked on the docks, where he learned navigation and shipbuilding. In Amsterdam, during a four-month stay, he studied mathematics, astronomy, architecture, and fortification. He asked questions constantly, inquiring as to what things were used for and how they worked. Attracted by Amsterdam's museums, he decided to start one in Russia and toward that end, learned how to mount swordfish and embalm human freaks.

In 1698, Peter arrived in London, where he visited Parliament, viewed the shipyards, and learned various crafts. He also wrecked the ornate house in which he stayed, his drunken revelries destroying everything. Much to Peter's dismay, none of the European nations agreed to support his crusade against the Turks.

The journey had an important ramification for Russia: Peter determined that Western societal practices must shape his nation. Soon he imported European experts in large numbers, sent Russians abroad for schooling, and promoted European clothing—even wielding a barber's razor, grabbing boyars to shave off their beards, and levying a tax on any nobleman who wore one. Sometimes his reforms were trivial, but in all, Peter believed that his nation was backward and that if it did not Westernize it would fall victim to European expansion. Importantly, he supported those aspects of Western society that expanded his power and complemented Russian political practices; most notably, he liked Prussian absolutism, with its central government direction of the economy, because it contained the masses, a time-honored approach in Russia.

Although often haphazard in action, Peter did most everything with a central goal in mind: expanding Russia. That is why he wanted internal reform and why he involved himself in European diplomacy. In 1699, he arranged a secret treaty with Poland and Denmark to attack Sweden. Four years later, amid the ensuing war, Peter began building St. Petersburg (which he named after his patron saint) on marshy territory still claimed by the Swedes. In 1707, Peter, whose armies had not been impressive against Sweden, tried to arrange a peace, but the enemy refused. Reinforced by additional men and new techniques, Peter attacked the Swedes in 1709 at Poltava and scored an enormous victory. By 1710, the Russians controlled the Baltic shoreline from Riga to Vyborg, and for the first time, Peter's success stimulated modern nationalism in his country.

Meanwhile, Peter pursued greater internal reform, trying to advance Westernization. Among other political measures, he restructured the government, dividing Russia into eight provinces, each with its own governor appointed by him. To stifle and crush dissent, he developed a secret police. In the military area, Peter modernized and enlarged the Russian forces. He required that all landowners serve some time in the army and stipulated that peasants conscripted complete a 25-year term. He imported weapons from Europe and by 1725 had a standing army of 200,000. True to his infatuation with the sea, he founded the Russian Navy and developed a Baltic fleet, built largely at the St. Petersburg shipyards.

While expanding the military, which consumed some 80% of the national budget, Peter sought additional taxes. At first, he increased the tax on each household. In 1718, after that proved insufficient, he initiated the "soul tax"—a levy on each adult male. Since the gentry, clergy, and merchants were excluded from the tax, its burden fell almost exclusively on the peasants. Their condition worsened in 1722, when Peter solidified serfdom by forbidding any serf from leaving the estate on which he worked, unless he had his master's permission.

In an attempt to modernize Russia, Peter tried to improve Russian education but obtained mixed results. An elementary school system began in 1714; soon after Peter's death, however, it collapsed. He founded the Russian Academy of Sciences that offered courses to students from the gentry, but it did not achieve respectability until the 19th century. In another modernization effort, Peter diluted the power of the nobility by opening it to newcomers. Persons who served in the civil service and obtained high rank, or sailors and soldiers who became officers, automatically gained the standing and privileges of a hereditary noble.

Peter closely supervised the construction of St. Petersburg, determined to make it different from Moscow in both form and function. He ordered that many buildings be constructed of stone to avoid the crude appearance of Moscow and its frequent fires, and European architects designed baroque buildings surrounded by Western-style gardens. With its architecture, its great Winter Palace, and its imposing fortress, the city did not look "Russian," and the emerging beauty led many to call it the Venice of the North. Peter loved St. Petersburg for its Western modernity. In 1712, he began transferring the government to his new city, which became the capital.

Many Russians disliked Peter and his policies. Traditionalists opposed his Westernization efforts, and peasants buckled under his oppressive taxes. There appeared widespread discontent with Peter's violence, a cruelty that seemed epitomized by the treatment of his eldest son by Eudoxia and heir to the throne, Alexis.

In 1724, his health deteriorated rapidly from a urinary-tract infection, and on February 8, 1725, suffering complications from a cold, Peter died.

Peter left a stunning legacy. He had consolidated the Russian state and greatly expanded it, making it a powerful nation founded on absolutism. Historians dispute the extent to which Peter revolutionized Russia, with most agreeing he did not invent the nation's Westernization; rather, the process had begun years before under previous czars, particularly Ivan III. Nevertheless, he reshaped Russia—hastening the developments that accelerated under Catherine II—and in the end created a paradox: a European power on the one hand, internal tensions on the other—tensions so substantial that years later, they pulled the nation apart in a great upheaval, the Russian Revolution of 1917, itself undone in the 1980s under Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin.





## Frederick II (Frederick the Great)

Frederick II was one of the most influential rulers in German history. Remembered as Frederick the Great, he ruled Prussia as an enlightened despot for nearly five decades, firmly establishing his kingdom as one of the great powers of Europe.

Frederick was born in Berlin on January 24, 1712. He was the son of the Prussian king Frederick William I and Queen Sophia Dorothea. Frederick's father was an absolute monarch who made Prussia a state to be reckoned with in European affairs. He was also a bullying tyrant who frequently abused his family, particularly his son and heir Frederick. Frederick William disliked the arts and courtly life in general and tried to educate his son exclusively in the areas that would aid him in ruling Prussia. However, the younger Frederick had an artistic temperament and rebelled against his father's domineering ways. For example, Frederick became an accomplished musician, but he could only practice when his servants assured him that his father was not nearby. Later in life, Frederick intensified his study of music, science, philosophy, history, and the other arts forbidden by his father.

Frederick was forced to marry Elizabeth Christine of Brunswick-Bevern. The marriage was an affair of state; Frederick never developed any affection for his bride, and the couple had no children. Despite the stormy relationship between father and son, the two were reconciled in the later years of Frederick William's reign. Frederick was then allowed to serve in the Prussian Army and took part in campaigns against the forces of the French king Louis XV.

Frederick became king in 1740 after his father's death. He soon established himself as the absolute ruler of the country. His first major act as king was the invasion of the Habsburg province of Silesia in 1740. He was inspired by the recent death of the Habsburg emperor Charles VI, basing his claim to Silesia on his family's ancient connection to the territory. His attack shocked the other powers of Europe, particularly because Frederick's father had never precipitated a war and was reluctant to use his armies in the field. Frederick's army soon won several decisive victories, however, allowing Frederick to add the strategically and economically valuable region to the Prussian kingdom. The Treaty of Dresden, signed in 1745, confirmed Frederick's rights to Silesia, though it left the new Austrian Habsburg empress, Maria Theresa, eager for revenge.

The other great powers of Europe also came to oppose Frederick's evident desire to extend Prussian influence and territory. The Russian czarina, Elizabeth Petrovna, developed a deep personal hatred for Frederick, while the French monarch Louis XV recognized the threat posed by a powerful state rising in the hitherto disunited German lands. Thus, Frederick increasingly faced the possibility that he would be attacked by a coalition of the three most powerful states in Europe. In desperation, he decided to strike first, invading the German state of Saxony and the Habsburg territory of Bohemia in 1756. His attack began the Seven Years' War, which eventually involved all of the great states of Europe.

Frederick's armies won several victories during the early stages of the war. The forces arrayed against Prussia were formidable, however, and Frederick's armies could not hope to defeat them all. Moreover, the demands of the war put tremendous pressure on his treasury and his subjects. By 1762, the situation in Prussia was desperate, with the treasury empty and Frederick contemplating suicide. Then, miraculously from Frederick's point of view, Prussia was saved when Frederick's most bitter adversary, Russia's Elizabeth, suddenly died and was replaced by Peter III, an ardent admirer of the Prussian king. Peter quickly withdrew Russia from the conflict, and the war soon ended, leaving Prussia stronger than ever.

The tremendous devastation wrought by the war left Frederick chastened, and for the rest of his reign, he followed a conservative and defensive foreign policy. He fostered better diplomatic relations with the other continental powers, especially Russia, and was intent on avoiding diplomatic isolation. He remained opposed

to Habsburg expansion, however, and even sent troops to thwart Habsburg influence in Bavaria in 1778. The other great foreign policy episode of his reign was the first partition of Poland in 1772, which Frederick helped orchestrate and which brought the territory of West Prussia into his kingdom.

Frederick ruled as an enlightened despot. Like his father, he was convinced that the army was the key to the strength of the Prussian state. He therefore continued his father's support of the state industries that supplied and equipped the army. Furthermore, by imposing onerous taxes on merchants and town dwellers, he raised ample funds with which to recruit foreign mercenaries. He also sought to strengthen Prussia economically. His policy was to foster national economic self reliance. In order to increase agricultural production, for example, the state introduced new crops, brought marsh lands under cultivation, and settled peasants in sparsely populated regions. Though these measures had the desired effect, they brought little benefit to the Prussian peasantry, who continued to bear a heavy tax burden.

Frederick took great pride in his reputation as an enlightened ruler and claimed to serve in the interest of his subjects. The social and legal reforms he implemented, however, were always subordinated to the needs of the army and the state. Though he personally disliked the institution of serfdom, he refrained from outlawing the practice because he feared that it would undermine the authority of the Prussian nobility. He nonetheless abolished judicial torture in 1763, and toward the end of his reign, he was working to create a codified common law for all of his territories.

Frederick's reputation as a model of enlightened despotism is based in large part on his artistic interests. He was an accomplished flautist and composed his own music. He also wrote extensively about history and politics. His most famous work was *Anti-Machiavelli*, in which he argued, disingenuously, that a monarch should not abandon Christian principles. Frederick also corresponded with many of the leading intellectuals of his era, including, most famously, the French philosopher Voltaire, who briefly lived with the Prussian king in his palace, Sans Souci.

Frederick left his successor, his nephew Frederick William II, a state more powerful than that which he had inherited. During his long reign, he doubled the size of the Prussian Army and almost tripled the revenues of the state. However, Frederick also left a legacy of autocracy that proved dangerous in less capable hands. Frederick died on August 17, 1786 at Potsdam, near Berlin, at the age of 74.

# Catherine II

For more than 30 years, Catherine II ruled Russia with such energy and flair that she stamped an entire epoch with her name. She is admired as Catherine the Great by most Russians because the country became strong enough under her rule to threaten the other great powers, and her brilliant court was conversant with the most interesting cultural developments in Europe. Her critics point to her unscrupulous methods, undisciplined private life, and lack of compassion for the poor. She identified her own interests with those of the Russian state and worked without respite for its glorification.



Catherine was born a princess on May 2, 1729, but not in Russia. She was named Sophie Freiderike Auguste at her birth in the German principality of Anhalt-Zerbst. Her father, Christian August, served as a general in the Prussian Army, and her mother was Princess Johanna Elizabeth of Holstein-Gottorp. This connection to Holstein brought additional power to the family. Catherine received her formal education from a tutor, who taught her religion, history, and French.

At age 15, Catherine traveled to Russia, where she met the youth whom her parents had arranged for her to marry. Karl Ulrich was the German duke of Holstein-Gottorp, but he was also the grandson of Peter I and was in line to inherit the Russian throne as Grand Duke Peter. Catherine assumed the title Grand Duchess Catherine Alekseyevna and married Peter the following year in 1745. Peter was a difficult man with personality disorders and a fondness for alcohol who brought Catherine a great deal of humiliation during the 18 years of their marriage. Her ambition to remain attached to the future ruler of Russia kept Catherine in the loveless marriage, though she deceived her husband with several lovers.

In January 1762, Empress Elizabeth died, and the throne passed to Peter, who became Peter III. Though he was unfit in many ways to rule an empire, Peter's most alarming drawback at the moment of his ascension was his devotion to Frederick II of Prussia, with whom Russia was at war. Peter made peace with Frederick and also made plans to thwart Catherine's ambitions and have her removed from the court, but Catherine too had plans. Moreover, Catherine had the support of the military and the Streltsy, or royal guard, who helped her to seize power. She also had the support of much of the aristocratic class, who admired her sophisticated nature. When Catherine had herself proclaimed empress in mid-1762, Peter abdicated and retired to his country estate, where he was killed one week later, undoubtedly by Catherine's supporters.

Though she had usurped the throne, Catherine was truly dedicated to the future of Russia and was determined to increase its strength and power. She was also excited by the idea of fomenting a national culture, one that shared the ideals of the Enlightenment but was more than just an imitation of intellectual movements in France. She threw herself into the duties of a ruler, moving on several fronts at once. Though Catherine admired the ideas of such Enlightenment theorists as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Baron de Montesquieu, she knew that the reforms they suggested would be difficult to implement in Russia.

Catherine nevertheless convened a commission in 1767 to compile a new code of laws and provided the delegates with a *Nakaz*, or set of instructions, so voluminous and liberal it surprised many. She had worked on the *Nakaz* for two years, writing much of it but borrowing heavily from Enlightenment authors. She asserted that all subjects should be equal before the law, torture should be abolished, capital punishment used only in extreme circumstances, and religious dissent should be tolerated. She did not advocate dismantling serfdom but did raise questions about its legitimacy. Yet the delegates to the commission, from all walks of life, could not agree among themselves on anything, and the commission eventually dissolved without producing anything.

Frustrated by the obstacles to internal reform, Catherine turned to the arena of foreign affairs to build the prestige of the empire and her place within it. In 1768, war with Russia's traditional enemy, the Ottoman Empire, brought early victories and seemed quite popular. As the fighting dragged on, however, it caused certain hardships that were intensified by the outbreak of a plague in Moscow. It was under these conditions that a rebellion erupted in the Ural Mountains in 1773 and spread popular uprisings across a wide swath of the empire.

The rebellion was led by Emelyan Pugachev, a former leader of the Don Cossacks. It spread swiftly throughout southeast Russia as some 30,000 rebels captured towns and cities, burned the houses of noblemen, and tortured government officials. Pugachev readied his troops to invade Moscow in 1774, but fortunately for Catherine, the war

with Turkey was concluded at this time, and she was able to deploy her best troops against the peasant rebels. It did not take long for the veteran force to crush the rebellion, and Pugachev was executed in 1775.

The severity of the rebellion changed Catherine's attitude toward Russia's poor majority, however. Having once believed the condition of serfdom to be inhumane, Catherine now worked to better systematize the bondage of Russia's agricultural laborers. She imposed serfdom where it had not existed previously, as in the Ukraine, and used the forced labor of 95% of the population to help finance her other projects. Ten years later, in 1785, she would issue the Charter of the Nobility that ended the obligations of noblemen toward the government and exempted them from direct taxes and corporal punishment.

Catherine engaged in administrative reforms that made government more efficient and pursued the expansion of the education system. She began elementary schools in some districts, high schools appeared in the major cities, and she organized a college of medicine at the University of Moscow. In the field of health, she encouraged the use of inoculations and quarantines, effective against smallpox. The government also undertook a massive building campaign.

It was after the defeats of Pugachev and the Ottoman Turks that Grigori Potemkin began his career as a political adviser to Catherine, who did not, as a rule, delegate important matters to others. Although she had many lovers—her voracious sexual appetite caused scandalous talk—and on numerous occasions accepted their advice in the political realm, she maintained control. Potemkin, her chief minister from 1774 until 1791, and with whom she had an affair for two years, was the one man among her advisers who exerted great power. Potemkin was an experienced diplomat, and his audacious advice prompted Catherine in her expansion of the empire.

Catherine handled foreign relations realistically and aggressively and had already annexed territory along the Baltic coast and through the partition of Poland even before Potemkin came to power. It was Potemkin, however, who planned the acquisition of the Crimea from the Turks. Catherine wanted to obtain Bessarabia and control the Black Sea, Constantinople, and the Dardenelles Straits. In 1783, Potemkin arranged the annexation of Crimea from that principality's khan, a crucial acquisition that established Russian power on the Black Sea. Catherine soon established the city of Odessa, which fulfilled the Russian desire for an important warm-water port. Unsatisfied, Catherine was determined to end the Turkish presence in Europe. In 1787, Russia entered into an alliance with Austria and again went to war on the Ottomans. A treaty five years later resulted in the Turks finally withdrawing their troops from between the Bug and Dnieper rivers and confirmed Catherine's complete control of the Crimea.

In 1793, Catherine again sent Russian troops into Poland and in cooperation with Prussia, arranged a second partition. This time, Catherine obtained most of Lithuania and the western Ukraine. A third partition occurred in 1795 after an uprising led by Tadeusz Kosciuszko. The arrangement gave Catherine the rest of Lithuania and the Ukraine, along with Courland, while Prussia and Austria also received substantial territory. Poland was thus eliminated as an independent nation; all told, the partitions resulted in Russia gaining 190,000 square miles.

Catherine's "enlightened absolutism" never encompassed republicanism—indeed, she opposed the French Revolution as too extreme. For the most part, her Enlightenment reforms did not extend beyond society's upper levels, and tensions long present in Russia worsened. To monarchists, Catherine appeared highly successful, gaining territory and forging both a truly national state and a European power. However, the peasants suffered enormously, and the government often functioned chaotically. When Catherine died in St. Petersburg on November 17, 1796, she left behind a nation whose exterior appearance hid huge internal problems.