

Chapter 15

The Reign of Catherine the Great

Following in the reforming-tsar tradition of Peter I, Catherine II was more a reformer than a reactionary during her thirty-four-year reign (1762–1796). While maintaining autocracy, she increased the number of individuals, especially nobles, included in the political process. Her charters to the nobility and towns (both in 1785) increased the rights of nobles and townspeople. Influenced by the European Enlightenment, she ruled less arbitrarily than most of her predecessors, including Peter I, and fostered respect for law. She encouraged learning and culture and attempted to improve both the economy and the public welfare.

Yet concessions to the nobles were partly at the expense of most of Russia's population—the peasants. And Catherine's wars and territorial gains were paid



FIGURE 15.1 Catherine Palace, Tsarskoe Selo (Pushkin), near St. Petersburg. Completed by B. F. Rastrelli in the 1750s and later slightly modified. Catherine II often lived and worked here during part of the spring and summer.

for primarily by the blood, sweat, and increasing revenues taken from the common people. Their voices and protests were heard only occasionally, for example, in 1767 through some petitions to delegates of a Legislative Commission, and again in 1773–1774 during the Pugachev rebellion. Although Catherine's final years (1789–1796) brought extensive territorial gains of the last two partitions of Poland, they also ushered in a tightening of government restraints over intellectuals.

In foreign affairs and in greatly expanding her empire, she believed that her policies were akin to those of other European powers. In 1767, she insisted that "Russia is a European State." In 1780, while urging her to annex Crimea, her leading adviser, Grigori Potemkin, reminded her: "Look at what others have acquired without opposition: France took Corsica, the Austrians, without war, took more from the Turks in Moldavia than we did. There are no powers in Europe that would not divide Asia, Africa, and America among themselves."¹ Within the empire, Catherine systematized government operations and, like other European expansionists, she maintained that in some areas she was bringing civilization to uncivilized peoples.²

CATHERINE II: BACKGROUND AND THE 1762 COUP

Catherine II was born Sophia Augusta Fredericka in the Baltic city of Stettin on May 2, 1729 (N.S.). She was the daughter of a minor German prince and princess, Christian August of Anhalt-Zerbst and Johanna Elizabeth of Holstein-Gottorp. Johanna was first cousin to the father of Catherine's future husband, Peter III.

In the eighteen years she spent in Russia prior to her husband's reign, Catherine blossomed into an intelligent and well-read woman. Works of French Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire and Montesquieu, which helped cultivate her humane sentiments, were among her favorites.

Catherine was hard-working, vigorous, and optimistic, but also strongwilled, ambitious, and calculating. She realized the importance of not offending Russian sensibilities and learned the Russian language and customs. In preparation for her marriage to Grand Duke Peter, she converted to Orthodoxy from Lutheranism and adopted the name Catherine. She loved to ride horses, shoot wildfowl, and dance, all of which she did well.

In her *Memoirs* Catherine states she was an attractive young wife, but when she was a child she had considered herself ugly, and her mother had not showered affection on her. Throughout her life, she wished to be loved and admired. For reasons that remain unclear, her unloving husband, Peter III, seemed incapable of sexual relations with her, at least in the early years of their marriage.

¹George Vernadsky, et al., *A Source Book for Russian History from Early Times to 1917*. (New Haven, 1972), Vol. 2, p. 411.

²Although Catherine believed ethnic Russians to be more civilized than the Asiatic peoples brought into the empire, she also thought that the Russians themselves could become more civilized. See Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (Oxford, 2001), pp. xvi, 8–13, on the importance Catherine placed upon making her subjects in general, whether ethnic Russians or otherwise, more civilized, primarily in a European manner.

Eventually, Catherine took up with other men. One of them, Sergei Saltykov, may have been (in 1754) the father of her son—and later emperor—Paul. In her *Memoirs*, she suggests this was so, but Peter III might also have finally consummated his marriage and been the father. She also had a daughter in 1757, and the suspected father was her Polish lover, Stanislas Poniatowski. When Peter III became emperor, she was pregnant with the child of her latest lover, the gigantic Guards officer Grigori Orlov, and a few months later gave birth to a boy later known as Count Alexei Bobrinskoi.

At the time of her accession to the throne in June 1762, Catherine was of average height, not yet stout, and was described as having a noble figure. Although her appearance created a generally favorable impression, at least two foreign observers of the early 1760s noted in her a certain lack of spontaneity. One spoke of her affected walk and smile, and another thought that her projection of goodness and gentleness flowed only from a desire to please. She was especially eager to please in the weeks that followed her coup against her husband because her position was still insecure.

The coup itself was prompted by her fear that Peter III, then residing at his Oranienbaum estate near the capital, was preparing to get rid of her. On the morning of June 28, 1762, she set off by coach from Peterhof to St. Petersburg, where, among others, Grigori Orlov and his brothers had prepared the coup. There she received the allegiance of most of the capital's dignitaries and Guards regiments. At the Winter Palace she appeared on the balcony with her young son Paul, delighting the crowd below. Soldiers and civilians celebrated by helping themselves to beer and vodka from the capital's taverns.

That same morning Catherine issued a manifesto. It justified the coup on three grounds: (1) that Orthodoxy had been under siege and was in danger of being replaced by foreign beliefs; (2) that Russia's glory, won by blood and arms, had been desecrated by Peter's dishonorable peace with Frederick the Great, and (3) that the country's internal order had been wrecked. As mentioned earlier, these charges were exaggerated and biased.

That evening Catherine donned the green uniform of the Preobrazhenskii Guards, mounted her white horse, Brilliant, and rode off with her troops back to Peterhof. She ordered Peter III put under guard on a nearby estate, Ropsha, and a week later, on July 6, he was killed.

Although Alexei Orlov (sometimes called Scarface) confessed his guilt for the killing, he may have believed he was acting in Catherine's interest and would not be punished. Indeed, Catherine covered up the crime by declaring her husband had died of colic. She also covered up his throat and part of his face when she had him publicly laid out in his Holstein uniform at the Alexander Nevsky Monastery. Within weeks, she bestowed estates, serfs, and rubles upon her coup supporters, including Alexei and Grigori Orlov.

DOMESTIC POLICIES

Because most of her husband's officials had supported her coup, Catherine began her reign by maintaining most of them in their offices. At the same time, she

advanced the careers of new favorites like the Orlovs. She restored some disgraced officials, especially Bestuzhev-Riumin, who had directed foreign policy for almost two decades under Elizabeth. Among the rewarded coup supporters were members of important noble families, such as Cyril Razumovsky and Nikita Panin (1718–1783), the tutor of her son Paul. She was also careful not to offend other leading noble clans, such as the Golitsyns, Naryshkins, Saltykovs, and Trubetskoi.

Although cautious, Catherine wished to be vigorous and enlightened. Like Peter the Great, she had little tolerance for lazy government officials. Working from a plan submitted by Nikita Panin, in December 1763, she reorganized the Senate to increase senators' knowledge over specific areas of government. She increased the number and pay of provincial officials and more specifically outlined their duties. The following year, she appointed Prince Alexander Viazemsky (whose wife was a Trubetskoi) as procurator general of the Senate. From then until sickness forced him to retire in 1792, he proved indispensable.

Although leading families controlled most important government and military positions, Catherine was careful not to let them obtain too much power. She rejected part of Panin's plan that would have created a small imperial council of lifetime members that would countersign imperial decrees. In appointing Viazemsky, she instructed him not to let the Senate overstep its bounds, and she stated that the size of the Russian Empire necessitated an autocratic ruler. Later, in 1768, when Catherine formed some leading advisers into a small Council of State, she again insisted that it stick to a limited role—advising her when requested.

The Legislative Commission

To create a more efficient absolutistic government, Catherine wished to codify Russia's laws, a task that had not been undertaken since 1649. For that purpose, on July 30, 1767, she convened a Legislative Commission in Moscow and presented them with her *Instruction* (*Nakaz*) containing 655 articles.

In laboring over this document for almost two years, she borrowed heavily from foreign works, especially Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* and Beccaria's *Crime and Punishment*. By the time the commission met, she was already corresponding with enlightened thinkers, including the Frenchmen Voltaire, Diderot, and Jean d'Alembert.

Indeed, there was much in her *Instruction* that would please them—Voltaire called it the "finest monument of the age." She declared, for example, that laws should be made only to procure the good of the people, that the use of torture was contrary to Nature and Reason, and that severe censorship led to ignorance. She went beyond Peter the Great by maintaining that government should be constrained by certain fundamental principles.

Although Catherine's *Instruction* was "enlightened" in many ways, it still advocated absolutism ("The Sovereign is absolute.") and the recognition of Russian realities. One such reality was that serfdom (in LeDonne's words) "was the social creed of the ruling class and the cement of its unity."³ After being advised to

³John P. LeDonne, *Ruling Russia: Politics and Administration in the Age of Absolutism, 1762–1796* (Princeton, 1984), p. 8.

The Abdication and Murder of Peter III

Catherine's skewed version of Peter III's death can clearly be seen in the letter she wrote a few weeks later to her former lover Stanislas Poniatowski. The source of the letter is R. Nisbet Bain, *Peter III, Emperor of Russia: the Story of a Crisis and a Crime* (New York, 1902), pp. 195–196. Bracketed material is Bain's except for [Fortress]; ellipses are mine.

Peter III abdicated at Oranienbaum, in full liberty, surrounded by 5000 Holsteiners, and came . . . to Peterhof. . . . Thereupon I sent the deposed Emperor to a remote and very agreeable place called Ropsha, 25 versts from Peterhof, under the command of Alexius Orlov, with four officers and a detachment of picked, good-natured men, whilst decent and convenient rooms were being prepared for him at Schlusselburg [Fortress]. But God disposed otherwise. Fear had given him a diarrhoea which lasted three days and passed away on the fourth; in this [fourth] day he drank excessively, for he had all he wanted except liberty. Nevertheless, the only things he asked me for were his mistress, his dog, his negro and his violin, but for fear of scandal [sic] and increasing the agitation of the persons who guarded him I only sent him the last three things.

The hemorrhoidal colic which seized him affected his brain; two days he was delirious and the delirium was followed by very great exhaustion, and despite all the assistance of the doctors, he expired whilst demanding a Lutheran priest. I feared that the officers might have poisoned him, so I had him opened, but it is an absolute fact that not the slightest trace of poison was found inside him. The stomach was quite sound, but inflammation of the bowels and a stroke of apoplexy had carried him off. His heart was extraordinarily small and quite decayed.

remove some articles from an early draft that suggested improvements in serf conditions, Catherine did so.

The commission was selected according to principles laid down by Catherine. In its more than 200 meetings in a year and a half, its membership fluctuated from a little over 500 members to almost 600. Town corporations, noble assemblies, and government departments provided about 400 delegates. Between 150 and 200 others represented state peasants, Cossacks, and non-Russian nationalities. The serfs were unrepresented, and the clergy had only one representative—from the Holy Synod.

Despite all the time and effort, a new law code was not produced. Catherine's noble-sounding *Instruction* offered little practical guidance, delegates had little practical experience in making laws, and Catherine had little patience with the delegates' divisiveness and inefficiency. The Russo-Turkish War of 1768–1774 made it difficult to continue the Commission's deliberations, and a frustrated Catherine, probably happy to bring their plenary sessions to an end, did so in late 1768.

Yet the whole effort was not in vain, at least for Catherine. She learned much from the process, including how passionately serfowners were ready to resist even the slightest tampering with their serfowning privileges. The instructions that electors presented to their delegates told her (and us) a great deal about how the nonserf population felt about their conditions. Although different social groups

expressed different feelings, there were also common dissatisfactions and desires. Among all groups, there were complaints of excessive government demands, corruption, and the poor administration of justice. Also widespread was the call for more autonomy and local control. Catherine's later reforms of 1775 and 1785 were a partial response to what she had learned in 1767–1768.

Government Reorganization and the Reforms of 1775 and 1785

After 1768, Catherine's domestic policies were also influenced by her "passion for uniformity" (to use Madariaga's term). In seeking a stronger Russia, however, she differed somewhat from Peter I by relying on a more decentralized structure based on clearly defined social orders (or estates), especially the nobility. (Of course, as absolute monarch she was to remain firmly in overall charge.) Accordingly, she abolished some centralized administrative colleges created by Peter the Great. By the end of her reign, only those of foreign affairs, war, navy, and commerce still existed.

In 1775, Catherine decreed a Statute for the Administration of the Provinces of the Russian Empire. In the two decades that followed, most of its many provisions were enacted. To bring more efficient government to the provinces, the statute recommended increasing their number and redividing the country so that each province contained between 300,000 and 400,000 people. Each province was then to be further subdivided into districts. By the end of Catherine's reign in 1796, there were fifty provinces and almost 500 districts, government officials had more than doubled, and the government was spending about six times as much as previously on local government.

At the top of the provincial leadership were governor-generals, who normally oversaw a few provinces and their governors. Underneath the provincial governors, various officials and boards were responsible for such areas as law and order, taxes and dues collection, and social welfare. Each provincial district had a capital town staffed with officials subordinate to its provincial government. A complex and hierarchical system of law courts was also established in each province, which provided different courts for nobles, townspeople, and state peasants.

Provisions were also made for electing some officials, such as a rural land captain in each district, who was elected by district nobles. His tasks included maintaining public safety and health, law and order, and roads and bridges as well as fostering good agricultural practices.

In 1785, Catherine broadened opportunities for nobles' political participation and heightened their corporate status. According to the 1785 Charter of the Nobility, noble assemblies were to meet every three years to elect officials on both the district and the provincial level. Such officials included a marshall of the nobility for each district and province, judges, land captains, and assessors. Only landowning nobles who had reached officer rank could vote and be elected to such posts. Provincial assemblies were required to keep noble genealogical and service records and were allowed to petition the empress directly.

In the charter, Catherine also praised the nobles for their past service and confirmed various gains made by them in recent decades. She recognized their rights to full legal ownership of their properties; to travel freely or serve friendly governments abroad; and to be free from compulsory state service, corporal

punishment, paying the poll tax, and billeting troops. Further, the Charter acknowledged that only a court of peers could deprive a noble of his life, nobility, rank, or property.

In 1785, the empress also issued a Charter of the Towns. It reorganized townspeople into six groups. Although all these groups received some rights, for example, that of trial by their peers and voting for a town council (duma), other rights were restricted to the more privileged town-dwellers. Among the latter's rights were freedom from corporal punishment and from paying the poll tax; they were, however, subject to a tax on capital.

Catherine had earlier stated that Russia possessed no real middle estate and that she wished to help bring one about. The town charter reflected this wish. For various reasons, however, ranging from the small size of some towns to Catherine's reluctance to allow elected town officials much real power, the charter proved less significant than the one for nobles.

The nobles gained the most in 1785. The elected noble officials joined the appointed ones, such as the governors, to make the nobles and their interests dominant in the Russian provinces.

Yet, because Catherine never succeeded in codifying Russia's laws and because none of her legislation created a judiciary independent of state control, even noble rights were precarious and could be violated with impunity. Later, the brief reign of Catherine's son Paul made this all too clear.

Officials, Favorites, and Additional Domestic Policies

In St. Petersburg, Catherine continued relying heavily on her procurator general, A. Viazemsky. After 1775, he issued orders to the provinces dealing with a host of matters relating to finances and law and order. She also depended on her own personal secretariat, especially its leading member, Alexander Bezborodko, and on Grigori Potemkin.

By 1774, Potemkin had become her latest lover; and according to Potemkin's recent English biographer, Sebag Montefiore, the couple almost certainly married in a secret ceremony, probably that same year. She had split from Grigori Orlov in 1772, compensating him with a palace, a 150,000 ruble annual pension, 10,000 peasants, and other presents. Like Orlov, Potemkin was younger than Catherine by ten years—and was a military man of noble background. Catherine had promoted him to lieutenant for his faithful service in "guarding" Peter III after the 1762 coup. About a year later, he was blinded in one eye and it remained half closed thereafter, prompting the Orlov brothers to call him "Cyclops" after the one-eyed giants of Greek mythology. Like Peter the Great, his character seemed to match his giant physique in being oversized regarding ambition, confidence, courage, mood swings, and appetites, both of the body and mind. In contrast to Peter, however, it was Potemkin's sexual appetite, more than for food and drink, that seemed more prodigious, and yet he was also attracted to religion and mysticism. His biographer, paraphrasing a contemporary of Potemkin, notes: "He staggered from church to orgy and back."⁴ He was a man of many such contrasts. He combined

⁴Sebag Montefiore, *Prince of Princes: The Life of Potemkin* (New York, 2000), p. 345.

impulsiveness with shrewdness, and a love of gambling and jewels with a love of ideas, books, music, and art. Very intelligent and possessing an excellent memory, he was familiar with both Western ideas and Holy Scriptures and fluent in Greek. A hero in the Russo-Turkish War, already a general in 1773, by the end of 1774 Catherine had placed him in charge of the army.

Potemkin may have remained Catherine's lover for only a few years, but they remained personally close for the rest of his life, sometimes arguing and then reconciling like an old married couple. And she continued to rely heavily on his advice, especially regarding foreign and military policy. He also helped vitalize provincial government. Sebag Montefiore goes so far as to refer to him as Catherine's "co-Tsar." After annexing the Crimea in 1783, she placed him in charge of the southern region called "New Russia," and he contributed much to its growth and development.

Although Catherine had many lovers after Potemkin, none exercised much influence until after his death in 1791. His loss, along with Viazemsky's declining health at about the same time, brought Catherine near to despair. She began relying more on the last of her lovers, Platon Zubov (a protégé of one of the Saltykovs). When she first took up with him in 1789, he was a Guards lieutenant of twenty-two. Although she made him a general, listened to his advice on foreign policy, and gave him some of Potemkin's old positions, including that of governor-general of New Russia, his abilities paled in comparison to those of the one-eyed giant.

In the economic sphere, Catherine attempted to increase agricultural production by sponsoring a Free Economic Society for the Encouragement of Agriculture and Husbandry and by encouraging foreign colonization of government-granted lands. Many of the approximately 75,000 colonists were Germans who settled along the Volga and in the southern lands of New Russia. Catherine opposed monopolies; fostered the growth of towns and economic enterprises, especially in the provinces; and greatly increased foreign trade. Richard Pipes has argued, however, that by opening trade and industry more to nobles and peasants, Catherine greatly weakened—contrary to her announced intention—the development of the middle class.

Her taxation and revenue policies also seemed to act contrary to her announced intention to improve the common good. Increasing government officials in the provinces, lavishing gifts upon her favorites, fighting wars and rebellions, and developing new parts of the empire all cost money. Just as under Peter the Great, increased revenue came primarily from the peasants. Although the poll tax was not increased until 1794, the rent payments of state peasants to the government were tripled by 1783; the state argued it was just keeping up with similar increases that serfowners imposed upon their peasants. The empress also raised more money by the inflationary method of printing more and borrowing abroad. Although it is true that Catherine bequeathed to her successors more rational and effective government accounting methods, she also left them with a large national debt. From 1785 until her death in 1796, every annual budget was in the red.

Of course, the common good cannot be measured just in immediate economic terms. Catherine thought of herself as a reforming monarch uplifting the cultural level of her subjects. As we shall see, her educational and cultural policies

contributed significantly to the growth of learning in Russia. And with mixed results, she enacted measures to improve public health and to provide for such unfortunates as orphans and the insane. In both these spheres, she displayed more concern than most European monarchs of her day.

POLITICAL OPPOSITION AND CRITICISM

Although opposition to Catherine II was important and will be analyzed in some detail, it is also important to note that most Russians supported what they understood as autocratic government. In her analysis of the political ideas of eighteenth-century historians, Whittaker notes the overwhelming support they gave to autocracy even as their concept of it changed during the course of the century. Moreover, she believes that their thinking on the subject was generally in keeping with that of educated society as a whole. In regard to the masses, Perrie and others have emphasized the peasants' support for autocracy even though they sometimes opposed specific policies or even rulers.

Opposition to Catherine II can be summarized under three categories: (1) a small number of officers who conspired at different times, especially early in Catherine's reign, to bring about a palace coup; (2) frontier groups who opposed the tightening grip of St. Petersburg; and (3) cultured men who voiced criticism of Catherine's policies but did not conspire to overthrow her.

Among the most memorable opposition of the first type was a 1762 plot involving Moscow officers, including a certain Peter Khrushchev, and another conspiracy two years later involving principally Lt. Vasili Mirovich. Both plots involved replacing Catherine II with the imprisoned (and former infant ruler) Ivan VI. The first got no further than talk, which also involved insuring the rights of Catherine's son Paul. The second actually led to the storming of Schlusselburg Fortress, where the unfortunate Ivan VI was held under orders that he should be killed rather than allowed to escape. Thus, it was that the Mirovich-led attack, amidst fog and darkness, inadvertently led to the killing of the man he wished to make emperor.

While Lt. Khrushchev and some of his co-conspirators were exiled to Siberia, Lt. Mirovich was publicly beheaded in the capital, an event not previously witnessed there for more than two decades. Following the death of Ivan VI, military conspirators usually championed Grand Duke Paul, but the second category of opposition, border rebels, usually claimed to be serving emperors who were actually dead—either Peter III or Ivan VI. By the end of Catherine's reign, at least two dozen such pretenders had appeared.

Pugachev Rebellion

By far the most important border rebel was Emelian Pugachev, an illiterate Don Cossack and army deserter who claimed he was Peter III. He began his revolt in September 1773, and it lasted a year before Pugachev was betrayed by some of his own followers and handed over to government authorities in the city of Yaitsk.

The revolt began in Yaitsk, in a steppe area, at a bend in the Yaitsk River, which flowed from the Ural Mountains to the Caspian Sea. The city was the capital of the

Yaik Cossacks. (The names of the city, river, and Cossacks were later changed to Uralsk for the city and Ural for the river and Cossacks.) The revolt soon spread beyond these Cossacks, especially among non-Russian nationalities, including the Tatars, Kalmyks, Kazakhs, and, most importantly, Bashkirs. As it progressed, it was joined by many other discontented elements, including army deserters, exiles, Ural factory peasants, and private serfs.

The followers of Pugachev were attracted by his message of opposition to growing government demands. They wished to hack away at the tentacles of the state and its upper-class supporters, tentacles that seemed to be reaching further and further and squeezing harder and harder. This seemed especially true since the beginning of the war with Turkey in 1768, a war in which Pugachev himself had participated.

To the Cossacks, the pretender promised to restore older, freer conditions of military service and fishing rights. To Old Believers, including many Cossacks, he promised tolerance, including the right to maintain their beards, which some had recently lost after being conscripted as regular troops. To all he promised an end to conscription, taxes, officials, serfowners, and other exploiters. He not only held up a vision of earlier, freer days in the border areas, but also pointed toward a golden future. In it, common people would possess the land and elect, as Cossack communities and peasant communes traditionally did, their own local leaders.

Pugachev's promises, petitions to him as the supposed Peter III, and the actions of those who joined him in rebelling against Catherine's government and local nobles all testify to the discontentment and desires of Russia's nonprivileged population in the Ural and Volga areas.

Better-disciplined and armed government troops, however, overcame Pugachev's followers. The latter had little in common except their hatred of the government and privileged classes. Even among the Yaik Cossacks and Bashkirs, from whom, along with the Ural factory peasants, Pugachev's most prominent early support came, class divisions prevented unified support.

The cost of the revolt in blood and suffering was heavy on both sides. Pugachev encouraged the "extermination" of serfowners, and many of them, especially among the less affluent, lost their lives. The toll was particularly heavy in the Volga valley area from Kazan southward almost to Astrakhan and in districts west of the Volga, such as Tambov. Often emboldened by both alcohol and past grievances, serfs and others seized and plundered estates, captured and raped noblewomen, and killed estate owners, sometimes with their wives and children.

The cities were not spared either. Volga cities such as Kazan and Saratov and ones further west such as Penza fell to him. In Kazan, which still possessed many Tatars, beardless or Western-attired upper-class men were killed and their wives and daughters captured. Churches were looted, especially by the Muslim Bashkirs and other tribesmen, and most of the city set ablaze. Altogether in the summer of 1774, the rebels probably killed more than 3,000 serfowners, officials, priests, and merchants.

Even more rebel blood flowed, especially in pitched battles against government troops. In March 1774, near Orenburg, the government ended a six month siege of the city and killed approximately 2,500 in the battle and subsequent pursuit of fleeing rebels. Once rebel areas and prisoners were captured, the government and

revengeful nobles shed more blood. Pugachev was brought to Moscow in an iron cage; after being publicly displayed, in January 1775 he was publicly beheaded and quartered. Parts of his body were then displayed in various areas of Moscow. This gruesome ending would have been even worse if Catherine had not overrode the court's sentence that Pugachev first be quartered and then beheaded.

Hundreds of other rebels were executed, while still others suffered knoutings and beatings, mutilations (such as the loss of an ear), brandings, and exile. Despite these measures, Catherine II was no Ivan the Terrible. For humane reasons and concern over European public opinion, she prevented the even more severe retribution desired by many of her officials and nobles.

The Panin Party, Radishchev, and Novikov

By the 1760s, the Western Enlightenment had stimulated new political ideas. A few men theorized about the positive aspects of a limited monarchy or even a republic, while still placing hopes in Catherine. Following the failure of the Legislative Commission and the beginning of the Russo-Turkish War in 1768, however, a gap developed between Catherine and some enlightened thinkers.

Some writers, such as Denis Fonvizin (1745–1792), the most gifted playwright of his generation, pinned their hopes on Catherine's son Paul, who turned eighteen in 1772. They also relied on his *oberhofmeister* (governor), Nikita Panin, who supported their careers and was one of the most cultured men of his day.

Early in his career, Panin had spent twelve years (1748–1760) as Russia's ambassador to Sweden, and up to the Russo-Turkish War of 1768–1774, he was the dominant influence on Catherine's foreign policy. Less militaristic than other advisers, such as Grigori Orlov, his influence declined in these war years. During this same period, concerned over growing sympathy for her son Paul, Catherine used the occasion of Paul's marriage to a German princess in 1773 to end Panin's distrusted tutelage of him. Despite these setbacks, however, Panin remained the senior foreign policy official until 1781.

After his enforced retirement that year and before his death in 1783, Panin, along with his brother Peter and Denis Fonvizin, outlined a project for constitutional reform. They hoped Paul would make use of it when he finally came to power.

In their papers relating to the project, they implicitly criticized Catherine for relying on favorites and flatterers and for ruling by ever-changing decrees, sometimes mutually contradictory. Instead, they favored a constitutional order based on fundamental natural laws, in keeping with reason and the will of God. They stated their belief in the social contract theory that power originally rested in the nation, not the ruler. More specifically, their project called for some separation of powers, at least beneath the monarch. A separate judiciary was to help insure that the administrative branch complied with the constitution. A regular legislative system, including a State Council and Senate, was also to be maintained. Although all legislation would have to be discussed in the State Council, the ruler would maintain the decisive vote. Finally, the Panin group called for clearly defined rights for each estate, the inviolability of freedom and property, a clear law of royal succession, and religious toleration. Although the constitutional ideas of the Panin group could not be published and had no immediate impact, decades later their

project influenced the constitutional ideas of the Decembrist conspiracy of 1825.

Another thinker who was dissatisfied with Catherine's reign was the historian and government official Prince Mikhail Shcherbatov (1733–1790). In his "On the Corruption of Morals in Russia," unpublished until long after his death, he contrasted pre-Petrine days, when he thought boyars had more power, with his own century, when careerists polluted the nobility and moral order. Catherine's 1785 Charter of the Nobility left him far from satisfied, and he believed it necessary to go much further in restoring and strengthening the rights and powers of the old aristocracy.

Despite his criticism of Catherine, Shcherbatov was typical of most eighteenth-century Russian thinkers in supporting Russian autocracy, however differently they interpreted it. In a survey of the views of eighteenth-century Russian historians, Cynthia Whittaker places him in the category of those who stressed that the autocrat should be nondespotic. Shcherbatov, however, was the only one of that group to insist that the key to nondespotic rule was for the autocrat to heed the advice of wise aristocrats.

Toward the end of Catherine's reign and following the French Revolution of 1789, her treatment of two leading intellectuals bore witness to the shrinking limits of her tolerance. But then the first of the two, Alexander Radishchev (1749–1802), was more radical than any of his intellectual predecessors, and his criticism appeared in book form.

As a young man, Radishchev spent five years imbibing Western philosophy and political ideas at the University of Leipzig, where the future great German writer Goethe was also then a student. After returning to Russia in 1771, he entered government service and in 1790 became chief of the St. Petersburg Custom House.

That same year, he printed his inflammatory book, *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, which somehow slipped past authorities until remaining copies were snatched up by the government. Catherine declared him worse than Pugachev and believed he was inflicted with "the French madness." He was arrested and condemned to death, but Catherine commuted his sentence to ten years of Siberian exile.

Even a quick glance at the *Journey* indicates why Catherine was alarmed. It criticizes government corruption and injustice, costly wars (Radishchev was not alone in this complaint), censorship, and cruel serfowners. It goes even further by lashing out at the very institution of serfdom. Commenting on enslaved serfs sold to crown peasants so they could fulfill the latter's military recruitment quota, Radishchev writes:

Oh, if the slaves weighted down with fetters, raging in their despair . . . crush our heads, the heads of their inhuman masters, and reddens their fields with our blood! What would the country lose by that?⁵

He included in the work part of his "Ode to Liberty," in which he praised Oliver Cromwell for legally executing Charles I of England and thereby teaching people how nations can avenge themselves on unjust monarchs.

⁵*A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), p. 209.



FIGURE 15.2. The Savior Tower entrance to Fort Ilimsk, where Radishchev spent five years of Siberian exile before his sentence was commuted by Paul I. The tower, with some restored planks, is now located in the outdoor Museum of Wooden Architecture near Irkutsk.

Two years after the arrest of Radishchev, it was the turn of the publicist Nikolai Novikov (1744–1818). As a young man, he had been a secretary to Catherine's Legislative Commission and had also served in a Guards regiment. Like Fonvizin, he was influenced by the theory of natural law and shared some views of both Fonvizin and Nikita Panin. In the late 1760s and 1770s, he edited several satirical journals and eventually became an ardent Freemason, but he remained more a political reformer than a radical.

Novikov's Masonic and publishing activities in Moscow, where he had moved in 1779, led to Catherine's distrust of him. By 1790, Catherine was highly suspicious of Moscow Masons and ordered them watched carefully. She believed Freemasonry had helped bring about the French revolution, and by 1792 she also came to suspect Moscow Masons of being involved in a conspiracy against her. Fueled by suspicious papers found in a search of Novikov's estate, she feared these Masons were conspiring with more senior Rosicrucian Masons in Berlin and with the Prussian court. She suspected they were attempting to recruit Grand Duke Paul and possibly put him on the Russian throne.

Although an investigation failed to unearth enough evidence to substantiate her worst fears, she believed it sufficient to sentence Novikov to fifteen years' incarceration in the Schlusselburg Fortress. He received no trial but was released four years later, after Paul succeeded Catherine.

Radishchev and Novikov were not alone among intellectuals arrested for political opposition in the last years of Catherine's reign. At least a handful of others also suffered. Catherine herself became more conservative—the events in France culminating in the execution of Louis XVI in January 1793 certainly helped propel her in that direction. In 1793–1794, she approved the burning of the works of Voltaire, with whom she had once corresponded. The conflict between monarch and intellectual social critics (later dubbed the intelligentsia), which was to be such a prominent aspect of later imperial history, had begun.

FOREIGN POLICY

If foreign policy success is measured in conquests and territorial expansion, Catherine was very successful. Largely at the expense of Poland and Turkey, she added far more western and southern lands to the empire than Peter the Great had done. And she matched Peter's Baltic conquests, by making Russia a Black Sea power. If her conquests are weighed against their immediate costs, however, in lives and money, and their future costs in suffering, the scales seem less heavily tipped in Catherine's favor. Although the exact effect of Catherine's policies on future events is difficult to discern, there is little doubt that her Polish policies helped strengthen Prussia and eliminate a buffer between it and Russia.

The Early Years, 1762–1774

The major foreign policies of Catherine's first twelve years can be examined under the headings of five "P's": peace, Prussia, Panin, Poland, and the Porte.

Catherine began her reign by pulling back from Peter III's plan for a joint Russo-Prussian offensive against Denmark, but she also reaffirmed his peace treaty with Frederick the Great of Prussia. The Seven Years' War (1756–1763) was a big drain on the Russian budget, and Catherine needed peace for Russia to recover and for her to solidify her rule.

Russia's main ally in the first half of Catherine's reign was not Austria (as usual) but Prussia. The death of King Augustus III of Poland in 1763 and the desire to determine his successor helped bring these two Polish neighbors together. In 1764, Russia and Prussia concluded a treaty promising mutual assistance if attacked and cooperation in the handling of Poland and Sweden.

Nikita Panin, then her main foreign policy adviser, hoped to create a "Northern System" of friendly powers that would include Prussia, Great Britain, Sweden, Poland, and Denmark. Although Prussia was willing enough, and Denmark also signed a defensive alliance with Russia in 1765, Panin was less successful with the other countries. Despite agreeing to a commercial treaty in 1766, Britain was unwilling to meet Russian conditions for an alliance, especially if it meant granting assistance to Russia in the event of a Russo-Turkish war.

Although needing peace, Catherine wished for further gains at the expense of Poland. The nobles of Poland, or more precisely of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, elected their own king, but they were susceptible to foreign influences. After the death of Augustus III in October 1763, Russo-Prussian pressure

and bribes won out over those of Austria and France, both of whom supported a son of Augustus III. Instead, it was Catherine's former Polish lover, Stanislas Poniatowski, who was elected in 1764.

Poniatowski proved less a puppet than Catherine hoped. He attempted to improve relations with France and Austria and to strengthen Poland through a series of reforms. Catherine II and Frederick II of Prussia opposed him on both counts and insisted on equal rights for Orthodox and Protestant minorities in Catholic Poland.

Many Poles, although not their king, revolted against such foreign pressures. Led by prominent nobles, on February 29, 1768, they formed a rebellious confederation at Bar, in southern Polish Ukraine. For the next four years, the Confederation of Bar waged a civil war against their king and his Russian supporters. Finally, in 1772, after diplomatic events had complicated matters, Russia, Prussia, and Austria imposed a treaty on Poland. It sanctioned the first partition of Poland, by which it lost territories to its three neighbors. Russia's share was primarily in Belorussian lands, but included all previous Polish territory east of the Western Dvina and Dnieper rivers.

Although many historians have suggested that Russia's role in this and Catherine's subsequent partitions of Poland flowed from Russia's expansionist tendencies, Robert Jones has argued that it resulted more from Russia's porous border with Poland. More specifically, he has indicated that Catherine, pressured by serfowning nobles in frontier provinces, wished to prevent serfs from fleeing to Poland, where taxes and other obligations were less than in Russia.

Complicating affairs in Poland from 1768 to 1772 were Russia's relations with the Porte (more formally the Sublime Porte), as the Ottoman Turkish government was then labeled. From the fall of 1768 until the summer of 1774, Russia found itself at war with Turkey.

The main reason for the war was the Porte's dislike of Russian diplomatic and military activity in Poland, their mutual neighbor, and the fear it would further strengthen Russia in its southern expansion toward the Black Sea. Also unwilling to tolerate Russian gains at Poland's expense was France, which encouraged the Turks to fight. After Russian troops poured into Poland and hostilities flowed over the Polish-Turkish border, the Porte declared war on Russia. Although Turkey began the war, Catherine enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to push Russia's borders southward and add her own name to the list of Russian tsars who led the country to military glory.

During the war, the Russian Baltic fleet sailed to the Mediterranean, and its commander, Alexei Orlov, attempted to incite the Orthodox Greeks against their Turkish Muslim overlords. His brother Grigori, still Catherine's lover and a leading adviser, encouraged Catherine to believe that not only the Greeks, but also other Balkan Orthodox might rebel. Although Orlov's hopes proved overblown, Alexei's fleet did win some Aegean battles, most notably one in 1770 at Chesme, near the Turkish coast. More telling were land victories by the Russian army, which brought them control over areas such as Moldavia, Wallachia, and the Crimea.

By 1774, with the Pugachev revolt still blazing, Catherine wanted peace. She received it with the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji. By its terms, Russia received a

small Black Sea coastal area between the Bug and Dnieper rivers; Azov and control over the Strait of Kerch, which joined the Sea of Azov to the Black Sea; and the Terek and Kuban regions east of these seas. The khanate of Crimea, long a Turkish vassal, was to become independent. For the first time, the Turks agreed to allow Russian merchant ships to enter the Black Sea and to pass through the Straits (the Bosphorus and Dardanelles) en route to the Mediterranean. The Porte paid a secret indemnity of 4.5 million rubles, and in articles that had serious implications three-quarters of a century later, Turkey also granted Russia the right to build an Orthodox Church in Constantinople and to intercede in behalf of those it served (see Map 15.1).

The Latter Years, 1775–1796

Of the five "P's" discussed previously, two continued to be important during Catherine's last two decades, Poland and the Porte. She also maintained peace from late 1774 to 1787 and an alliance with Prussia until 1788. A new "P," Potemkin, soon overshadowed an old one, Panin, in influencing foreign policy.

Even before Potemkin became Catherine's lover and began assuming important posts in 1774, Panin's plan for a Northern System had proved deficient. Besides other problems, Sweden's King Gustavus III, fearful of a fate like Poland's, had managed to strengthen his powers and move closer to France than Russia.

After 1774, despite Britain's desire for Russian assistance in its war against America, France, and Spain, Anglo-Russian relations showed signs of strain. The war led to Catherine's Declaration of Armed Neutrality (1780), which flew in the face of traditional British policy of interfering with neutral merchant ships doing business with Britain's wartime enemies.

The influence of Potemkin contributed not only to Panin's forced retirement in 1781, but also to the final jettisoning of the Northern System. The key element was Catherine's reversion, despite the Russo-Prussian alliance still in effect, to Austria as Russia's main ally. Indeed the negotiating of a secret 1781 Austro-Russian agreement to cooperate against Turkey, despite Panin's advice, coincided with Potemkin's final victory over him.

The main reason for this new agreement was Catherine's sweeping ambitions directed against the Sublime Porte. Austria was in a much better position to help her realize them than was Prussia. The extent of her ambitions, greatly encouraged by Potemkin, are best manifested in her "Greek Project."

Although the practical effects of this grandiose dream are debatable, it involved ending Muslim Turkish rule over European Christians and having Russia and Austria move into the vacuum. Besides allowing the new allies to expand their frontiers at the Porte's expense, the project envisioned creating two new kingdoms. In one, with its capital in Constantinople, Catherine's second grandson, grandiosely named Constantine, would be the monarch. As ruler of a Kingdom of Dacia, encompassing Bessarabia, Moldavia, and Wallachia, Catherine seemed to have Potemkin in mind.

Although Emperor Joseph II of Austria had his doubts about her project, he did not oppose Catherine's first step in realizing it—Potemkin's annexation of the





FIGURE 15.3. "Imperialistic Catherine," as viewed by an English caricaturist in 1791. (From Ian Grey, *The Horizon History of Russia*, American Heritage Publishing Company, New York, 1970, p. 208.)

Crimea in 1783. In 1787, Joseph II joined Catherine in a visit to the Black Sea coast, where Potemkin proudly displayed new buildings and the ships of his new Black Sea fleet. It was from this trip south and Potemkin's efforts to impress his Empress that the legend of "Potemkin's villages" arose. These were alleged to be fake villages that looked great as Catherine's galleys passed down the Dnieper, but whose huts were rumored to have been nothing more than painted facades. Sebag Montefiore, however, denies that Potemkin was guilty of such fakery.

In 1783, Potemkin also had expanded Russian influence in the Caucasus. This was done by establishing a Russian protectorate over the Christian kingdom of Georgia. Russia's 1783 gains, the building of a Black Sea fleet, and the 1787 trip of Catherine and Joseph II all increased tensions between Russia and the Porte. Encouraged by Prussia and Great Britain, Turkey waited until Catherine returned to her capital and declared war in August 1787.

Although Joseph II was far from enthusiastic about supporting Catherine, he lived up to his 1781 commitment and declared war on the Turks in early 1788. That same year, Sweden, wishing to recover lands lost to Peter I and Elizabeth, attacked Russia. The northern fighting had little consequence, however, and two years later Russia and Sweden agreed to a treaty with no gains for either side.

The war against Turkey lasted more than four years for Russia; Austria, faced with more serious troubles elsewhere, signed an armistice with the Porte in 1790. After some impressive Russian victories, especially by General Suvorov, Turkey agreed to the Treaty of Jassy in January 1792 (December 1791 O.S.). By it, the Porte recognized Russia's annexation of the Crimea and handed over an additional chunk of territory north of the Black Sea, between the Bug and Dniester rivers.

Although these gains fell far short of Catherine's Greek Project, she never completely abandoned it. In her final year, 1796, it overlapped an "Oriental Project" associated with the last of her lovers, Platon Zubov. His plan called for conquering the Caucasus and beyond. After a Persian attack on Georgia, Catherine sent Russian troops under Zubov's younger brother down the Caspian coast, where they seized Derbent and Baku. After 1791, however, Catherine's attention turned mainly westward. While Russia was preoccupied with Turkey, the Poles, strengthened by an alliance with Prussia in 1790, had completed fundamental political and social reforms. These reforms were symbolized by a constitution of 1791. Because the reforms would have strengthened Poland, Catherine opposed them and invaded Poland in May 1792, ostensibly in support of a confederation of Polish nobles opposed to the reforms. By then, Prussia and Austria were at war with revolutionary France, and Catherine was able to impose a second Polish partition (January 1793) in which Russia gained the major portion, with a lesser part going to Prussia.

A third partition, which brought an end to the Polish state, occurred in 1795. It followed a 1794 Polish rebellion, led by Thaddeus Kosciuszko, against foreign domination. This time Austria as well as Russia and Prussia once again received a share of Poland.

Overall, in the three partitions of Poland (1772, 1793, and 1795), Russia gained a little over three-fifths of the lands of the pre-partition Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and a little under half of its population. These Russian-annexed lands (in size measuring between Texas and modern-day Spain) were peopled by some seven and a half million people, mainly Belorussians, Ukrainians (together about 40 percent of the total), Poles (about 26 percent) Lithuanians (about 20 percent), and Jews (about 10 percent). At the time of annexation almost 80 percent of the people were Catholics, almost evenly divided between Roman Catholics and Uniates.

THE EMPIRE: UNIFORMITY, INTEGRATION, AND COLONIZATION

By 1796, Russia's continental empire measured almost 7,000 miles from east to west and contained scores of nationalities. Although Catherine's approach to ruling her lands and peoples displayed some variations, her desire for economic growth and her "passion for uniformity" were the two forces that most propelled her.

Her quest for uniformity was partly prompted by the "enlightened" ideas of the eighteenth century, which emphasized reason and order and valued "civilization," not civilizations or local cultures. In the Caucasus, for example, Catherine thought

that Russia offered the advantages of civilization to peoples still swimming in the stagnant waters of Asiatic barbarism. Her stress on uniformity also owed something to tsarist tradition.

This period predated the development of modern nationalism, and Catherine's imperial policies were thus not a manifestation of the latter. This fact, plus her pragmatism and relative religious tolerance, made her less of a "Russifier" than some of her successors.

Catherine's desire for uniformity led her to apply her 1775 and 1785 reorganization plans to as many areas of the empire as possible. Thus, despite major differences between Siberia and European Russia, especially the virtual absence of Siberian serfs and landowning nobles, Catherine applied her 1775 Provincial Reform statute to Siberia in the early 1780s. In 1780, the government mandated it for Sloboda Ukraine; in 1783, for the Baltic Provinces; and after the Polish partitions, for the newly annexed Polish lands. The government also applied the Charter of the Nobility and the Charter of the Towns in some areas such as the Baltic provinces of Estland and Livland. The result of all these steps was to increase fiscal and judicial uniformity.

In other parts of the empire, although sometimes moving more slowly, the government had the same goal. In the large province of Orenburg, essentially old Bashkiria, St. Petersburg reduced Bashkirian autonomy, especially after Bashkirian involvement in the Pugachev rebellion. In "New Russia" and other southern lands that came under Potemkin's control, he attempted to integrate them more closely with the rest of the empire. In the process, the Don Cossacks fared better than did the Zaporozhian Cossacks. The former were allowed to maintain some autonomy, although Potemkin insisted on certain Russian governmental rights, such as naming the chief Don Cossack leader (the ataman). But the Zaporozhians saw Russian troops destroy their Sech (camp) in 1775. This followed Russia's war against Turkey and the rebellion of Pugachev and his Yaik Cossack followers. New lands gained south of the Zaporozhian territory and the end of Turkish control over the Crimea meant that the Zaporozhian Host lost its *raison d'être* as a frontier military force. Some Zaporozhians fled to Turkish lands, some were exiled to Siberia, and others remained, but the Host's separate existence came to an end.

Catherine also wasted little time in further integrating the Ukrainian Hetmanate. In 1764, after Cyril Razumovsky and Hetmanate nobles petitioned her for a restoration of lost rights—and Razumovsky even proposed a hereditary Razumovsky hetmancy—Catherine demanded his resignation. In his place, she named an illegitimate son of Peter the Great, General Peter Rumiantsev, to rule over this Left-Bank area as governor-general. He was to proceed cautiously but not tolerate movements aimed at restoring earlier autonomy.

In his three decades overseeing the Left-Bank, Rumiantsev gradually introduced more Russian fiscal, judicial, and administrative practices. In 1782, the area was subdivided into three Little Russian provinces, each receiving its own governor. In 1783, Left-Bank peasants were officially prohibited from leaving the lands of their landowners—thus giving final legal sanction to a serfdom that had gradually redeveloped after Polish serfdom had been ended in the region in 1648.

In integrating the empire, Catherine relied not only on military forces and officials, but also received support from other elements, both Russian and non-

Russian. At the Legislative Commission in 1767, for example, her quest for uniformity was shared by those deputies who spoke out against "Baltic privileges" and complained the region was not contributing its fair share of taxes. Coopted native elites also helped further her efforts in the empire.

Catherine's religious policies helped further integrate the empire. On the one hand, she backed Orthodox efforts to win Catholic Uniates to Orthodoxy in the lands won from Poland—by her death, many of them had converted to the Orthodoxy of their ancestors. On the other hand, she tolerated those who remained Catholic, including many Polish or Polonized nobles in the same region.

Catherine allowed Muslims to construct many new mosques; freed Muslim Tatars from previous trading and commercial restrictions; and, in 1789, established a Muslim Ecclesiastical Council. It was to control Muslim religious life (dogma, marriage, divorce, religious schools), thus legitimizing and further unifying Muslim practices. Centered in the town of Orenburg and later in Ufa, it remained central to Muslim religious life throughout the rest of the Imperial period.

No doubt the Pugachev revolt, involving Bashkirs and other Muslims, and the later annexation of the Crimean Tatar khanate helped stimulate Catherine's concessions to Islam. Her policies, however, fit with her overall goal of integrating native leaders into the empire's command structure. Thus, the government conferred noble status upon the leader (*mufti*) of the Ecclesiastical Council and other important Muslim officials.

Catherine also increasingly integrated Cossack and native peoples into the Russian military. In the Orenburg Province, they helped man some forty forts by the mid-1790s, three-fourths of them guarding the border with Kazakhstan. In the Caucasus, they helped defend and garrison the new Caucasian Line that stretched between the northern Caspian Sea and the Sea of Azov, guarding against mountaineers to the south and providing a solid line for further advances. This did not mean, however, that the Cossacks along the Russian borders shared Catherine's passion for uniformity. As Thomas Barrett's study of the Terek Cossacks in the North Caucasus region illustrates well, such Cossacks had their own interests to pursue. They were often of mixed ethnic stock, adopted some of the customs of the mountain peoples they interacted with, and were far from being as enthusiastic advocates of Russian "enlightenment" as Catherine desired.

Although Catherine's reforms sometimes forced local non-Russian elites to share influence with Russians and other new "outsiders" in their region, they also helped local elites in various ways. Throughout the empire, Catherine's reforms strengthened noble prerogatives. The reforms also provided new imperial opportunities, especially for Western elites. A more integrated empire required officials familiar with modern Western ways—one of Orenburg's most effective governors was the Baltic noble Osip Igelstrom.

Not only opportunities, but also fears enticed non-Russian elites to cooperate with the Russian government. For example, in the areas Russia took from Poland in 1793 and 1795, there was not only the scare of the French Revolution, but also Kosciuszko's 1794 manifesto freeing serfs who joined his rebellion.

Integrating the empire and encouraging economic development often led to increased colonization. In Siberia, production of precious metals became especially important, and the region was also the base for further explorations, such as to the

Alaskan mainland, where Russia had already established a foothold by 1766. Catherine encouraged colonization to Siberia especially to increase its agricultural base, which, in turn, was then better able to support the growing number of officials, military, and mine-workers. By 1796, it contained more than 1 million people.

By then, the Bashkirs made up only about one-fifth of approximately 700,000 people in the Orenburg Province. Besides Russians, who owned the majority of the large estates, other nationalities, especially from the mid-Volga region, continued to pour into this rich area. Among them were the Chuvash and Tatars; the Mari, Mordva, and Udmurts (all three Finnish-speaking); and some Central Asian peoples.

Following the breakup of the Zaporozhian Cossacks, much of their land was distributed to Russian nobles and even German and Serbian colonists. In Eastern Belorussia, after it was gained from Poland in 1772, Catherine made extensive land grants. By 1796, almost one-fifth of the Belorussian peasants were working on estates Catherine had granted to "outsiders."

CATHERINE'S DEATH AND SIGNIFICANCE

The influence of the mediocre Platon Zubov and the empire's growing financial problems marked a sad end to Catherine's reign. In November 1796, she died of a stroke.

Even before her death, some Russians and foreigners referred to her as "Catherine the Great." There can be little doubt she was one of Russia's most significant rulers. Her extensive territorial acquisitions alone merit that designation. But was she also one of Russia's "best" rulers? That is more debatable.

During the nineteenth century, her grandson Nicholas I downplayed her significance. The radical Herzen charged that she ignored the interests of the Russian masses, and the poet Pushkin thought her a hypocrite. Even the more objective historian Kliuchevsky faulted her for her treatment of the vast mass of her people, the peasants. Soviet historians also generally treated her harshly.

Most recent Western scholarship, such as that of Alexander, LeDonne, and especially Madariaga, has been more sympathetic. Although not denying some of Catherine's faults, they insist that Russian conditions often prevented some of her more enlightened goals from being realized. Despite the many roadblocks in Catherine's path, Madariaga maintains she created a more humane, just, and enlightened country.

After examining in subsequent chapters the economic, social, and cultural conditions, both inherited by Catherine II and passed on by her to her successors, we shall be better prepared to judge Catherine's legacy to her adopted country.

SUGGESTED SOURCES*

- AKSAKOV, SERGEI. *The Family Chronicle*. New York, 1961. A novel that provides good insights into the Russian colonization of Bashkiria.

*See also works cited in footnotes.