

## HOW DID CATHERINE THE GREAT MANAGE TO BECOME THE EMPRESS AND RULE THE EMPIRE FOR SUCH A LONG PERIOD OF TIME?

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Starting from Catherine I there was the Era of Empresses in the Russian Empire which lasted for more than 60 years. Some empresses were the direct heirs of Russian tsars such as Anna Ioanovna and Elizabeth while the other two were not from the monarch family. Born and raised in Prussia, Sophia Augusta also known as Catherine The Great married the Grand Duke of Russia and was the second empress who did not belong to the Romanov's dynasty. Out of all the female autocrats Catherine II had the weakest rights to the throne not only because she was not a direct heir, but also because her husband and her son were alive. Theoretically, her maximum was becoming a regent empress in case of Peter III's death. Yet, after the successful coup d'état, she sentenced Peter III to Ropsha, and became the autocratic Empress of the Empire with the help of the guards and army. She was truly the most outstanding empress ever ruling the Empire who introduced numerous effective reforms, promoted the Enlightenment and returned some territories to Russia. Even though Catherine II was a woman who did not belong to Romanov's dynasty, her authority was unquestionable as she managed to become the autocratic Empress of Russia and rule the Empire for 34 years due to her extraordinary personality, Peter III's pro-Prussian policy as well as her reforms after the revolts.

To begin with, Catherine's personality had won the hearts and minds of people surrounding her which helped her on her way to become an autocratic ruler. The other The Great had contributed to it. During his reign, Peter the Great had set up the stage for the system where people's success was determined by their personalities rather than by their background, family status, material well-being and even nationality or gender. So, ever since Catherine arrived to Russia and married Peter III, she started gaining profound respect and sincere sympathy. In her memoirs she writes:

Otherwise, I treated everyone as best I could and made it my task to earn the friendship or at least lessen the enmity of those whom I suspected of being evilly despised toward me. I showed no preference for any side, did not meddle in anything, always had a serene air, much kindness, attentiveness, and politeness for everyone, and because I was naturally quite cheerful, I saw with pleasure that from day to day I gained the affections of the public [2, p. 56].

Thanks to such an attitude to others, the number of Catherine's admirers and loyal people was getting bigger and bigger. For instance, Chamberlain Ovtsyn was ordered by Her Imperial Majesty to spy over Catherine because of her debts; "with tears in his eyes" confessed to her, even though, it could have been dangerous for him. This shows that courtiers had great affection towards young princess. Though, her main admirer was Grigoriy Orlov, with whose help she succeeded in the takeover of the reign. With her assistance, he became the treasurer of The Chancellery of the Chief Artillery and fortification which helped him in properly organizing the coup d'état [1, c. 428-433]. In fact, Catherine was not truly involved in the arrangement of the takeover but rather skillfully found and used people who would accomplish it for her. Besides surrounding herself with loyal admirers, the future Empress was also smart enough to accept Russian culture. She used to spend her days learning Russian language [2, p. 21] Also, Catherine showed a great respect towards the Orthodox church and its rituals which was also beneficial for her to strengthen her image among Church representatives and common people. She says in her memoirs that she asked the Empress Elisabeth to let her fast before the Easter for 7 weeks, even though, one week of fasting was enough for her [2, p. 36]. Summing all up, the fact that Catherine was not from the monarch family had not impede her taking the crown as her outstanding personality evoked loyalty, respect and

affection from people around her.

Moreover, her husband Peter III as well contributed to his own coup d'état by staying a foreigner in his own country letting his wife gain more authority. Unlike Catherine who was born in quite poor family, Peter lived in sufficiency. As he was born in Germany and spent most of his childhood dreaming of becoming a Swedish king, it seems that he was not quite happy with the fact that he was about to rule Russia. This can be seen in many of his actions. According to Catherine's Memoirs he was always drunk since childhood [2, p. 5]. The heir to the throne whose passion was to drink and have fun all the time could not gain the authority among people surrounding him. Moreover, after being baptized, Peter showed no respect to Russian Orthodoxy as "it was always difficult to make him go to church on Sundays and perform devotional acts, which were forced upon him" [2, p. 6]. It is a common knowledge that the state and the Church were quite inseparable at that time; therefore, not following the traditions and not performing the rituals was derogatory from the monarch. In contrast with her husband, as it has been mentioned above, Catherine did everything possible from her side to demonstrate reverence to the Church. Beside learning Russian, she spent time learning Staro-Tserkovniy language, which also strengthened her position to the throne, whereas Peter was not willing to learn Russian at all [2, p. 6]. In addition, while being the Grand Duke, Peter did not bother himself with working for the government with a secretary. Indeed, he was entertaining thanks to Catherine whom he made responsible for answering the questions of the secretary. So, it is clear from his behavior, that he was reluctant about becoming a part of it. He often let everybody know that he would rather leave Russia for Sweden [2, p. 6]. Obviously, such a behavior was pushing him further from the image of the beloved Emperor. Nevertheless, he became the leader of the country after the death of Elizabeth, which even worsen his position. Even though he implemented several progressive reforms for that time such as tolerance to all religions, especially Islam, it was not well received by that time society. One more of his ukazy that turned the Church against him was taking land away from the monasteries [1, c. 421]. But it was not only ecclesiastical community that was dissatisfied with his actions, signing the Armistice agreement with Prussia and returning the conquered land back to King Fredrich turned the army and the navy against him as well [2, p. 21]. The reason is that the Empire was too exhausted after the war economically and physically; so, ceding Russia's gains to Prussia was too Prussophile of him [3, p. 52]. Another important thing to mention was the fact that a lot of Holsteins came to the Empire which was discouraged by the Russian folk as during Anna Ioanovna's reign foreigners used to profit from Russian land and citizens. Later, Catherine used all this "to justify her coup" [2, p. 28-29]. It is no wonder that all the estates, including army, navy, senate, nobility and the Church, supported the Empress in her right to the throne. She was way more powerful than her husband and used all his deeds against his figure to claim her reign so as "her seizure of was extolled as an act of heroic deliverance" [3, p. 53]. Thus, thanks to Peter's Pro-Prussian politics and unwillingness to accept Russian identity, the Empress managed to justify the takeover as being the saver of the empire.

What also helped Catherine in gaining and keeping her power for such a long period of time was the way she presented herself on the throne. To begin with, during the coup, Catherine "used the love of the people as a sign of popular support that enabled her to depart from the norms of succession" [3, p. 53]. Though, the word "love" was also used to describe her reign, emphasizing her desire to rule for the prosperity of the country and her subjects. Not without a reason, her subjects were willing to add to her name honorific titles such as "The Great" and "Мать Отечества" [2, p. 30]. Moreover, the Empress unlike her predecessors used to spend time actually working for the benefits of the country [2, p. 28-29] This shows how much she cared about the empire and her desire to advance it among other major states. Furthermore, when the territory of Crimea was annexed to the Russian Empire, Catherine decided to arrange the tour in order to greet her new subjects [4]. The arrangement of the tour implies that she wanted to make sure that the territories were joined to Russia not only geographically, but the new subjects who inhabited these lands truly became a part of the empire. To conclude, Catherine, presenting herself as a loving mother of the Empire, managed not only to seize power, but also keep it for a long time.

Despite her reign was sought to challenge numerous times by False Peter IIIs, she managed to suppress the rebellions and maintain the power by reorganizing the state and implementing new reforms. One of the most famous uprisings was led by Emelyan Pugachev in 1773 which encouraged all the unsatisfied servants to rise against the serfdom and absolute permissiveness of nobles towards their peasants [1, c. 470]. As soon as the revolt was quelled, Catherine understood

that she had to reorganize the state in order to improve the governance. So, under her ukaz, the Empire was divided into 50 guberniyas, each one of which consisted of 10-15 counties [4]. As a result of such a fragmentation of the land, she managed to enhance the effectiveness of the local administration. Hence, all the emerging situations were controlled and regulated by the government and such rebellions did not happen again under her rule. Summing up, Catherine's reaction to the revolts leading to reorganization of Russian territory allowed her to strengthen the power of administrative system and, as a result, her position of the autocrat.

Analyzing all the arguments presented above, Catherine the Great justified her coup and managed to retain power without legal rights to the throne due to the number of reasons. Firstly, she possessed a great personality which helped her to win the hearts and minds of people surrounding her and, hence, get their support. Their assistance contributed a lot to her coup d'état. Secondly, Peter III behavior also played a great role in justifications of Catherine's claim to the throne. The reason is that he remained a foreigner in the state which he ruled due to his pro-Prussian politics, irresponsibility and unwillingness to integrate into Russian culture. Thirdly, the way the Empress positioned herself as a Mother and Protector of the Empire while ruling the country was helpful in gaining the support and love of her subjects. And the last but not least, Catherine's reforms after Pugachev's rebellion strengthened the administrative system and improved her control over the vast country which as well contributed to her long-term reign. All these points were superior over the factors, such as being a woman not belonging to Romanov's dynasty, which were meant to impede her reign.

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