



Peter the Great

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Background info.

- Peter's reign was from May 7th, 1682 to November 2nd, 1721. He co-reined with his half-brother Ivan V from 1682-1696 when Ivan died.
- Peter's titles were Emperor of all Russia, Sovereign, the Great, Father of his Country, Emperor of all Russians, Grand Prince of all Russia, Emperor of the East, and Tsar by the Archbishop of Pskov in 1721
- When Feodor III died, he didn't have any children so conflict arose between the Naryshkin and Miloslavsky families over who would inherit the throne. Peter's half-brother was next in line but the Boyar Duma (a council of Russian nobles) chose the 10-year-old Peter to become Tsar with his mother as a regent.
- Peter could not acquire actual control over Russian affairs. Power was instead exercised by his mother, Nataliya Naryshkina. It was only when Nataliya died in 1694 that Peter became an independent sovereign. Ivan V remained a co-ruler with Peter, although he was ineffective. Peter became the sole ruler when Ivan died in 1696.
- Peter's mother arranged his marriage to Eudoxia Lopukhina in 1689. The marriage was a failure, and ten years later Peter forced his wife to become a nun and this freed himself from the marriage.

Background info. continued

- Peter had 2 wives, with whom he had fourteen children; three of them survived to adulthood. In 1724, Peter had his second wife, Catherine, crowned as Empress, although he remained Russia's actual ruler. All of Peter's male children had died. His eldest son, Alexei, had been tortured and killed on Peter's orders in 1718 because he had disobeyed his father and opposed official policies.
- Peter was 6 feet 7 inches tall. Which was a giant for the time. It is also said the he may have suffered from petit mal, which is a form of epilepsy.
- On February 8, 1725. He was fifty-two years, seven months old when he died, having reigned forty-two years.
- Peter's imperial title was recognized by Augustus II of Poland, Frederick William I of Prussia, and Frederick I of Sweden, but not by the other European monarchs. To the others, the word *emperor* noted superiority over kings. Several rulers feared that Peter would claim authority over them, just as the Holy Roman Emperor had claimed authority over all Christian nations.

Early Reign

- Peter wanted to modernize Russia and also make it a military power. Peter made his military power known by brutally suppressing any and all rebellions against his authority: Streltsy, Bashkirs, Astrakhan, and the greatest civil uprising of his reign, the Bulavin Rebellion.
- He also wanted to improve Russia's positions on the seas. Peter attempted to acquire control of the Black Sea; to do so he would have to expel the Tatars from the surrounding areas.
- As part of an agreement with Poland which ceded Kiev to Russia, Peter was forced to wage war against the Crimean Khan and against the Ottoman Sultan. Peter's primary objective became the capture of the Ottoman fortress of Azov, near the Don River.
- In 1695 Peter organized the Azov campaigns to take the fortress, but his attempts failed. Peter returned to Moscow in November of that year and began building a large navy.
- He launched about thirty ships against the Ottomans in 1696, capturing Azov in July of that year. On September 12, 1698, Peter officially founded the first Russian Navy base, Taganrog.

- Peter knew that Russia could not face the Ottoman Empire alone. In 1697 he traveled to Europe on an 18-month journey with a large Russian delegation called "Grand Embassy" to seek the aid of the European monarchs.
- Peter's hopes were crushed; France was a traditional ally of the Ottoman Sultan, and Austria was eager to maintain peace in the east while conducting its own wars in the west.
- Peter had chosen the most inopportune moment; the Europeans at the time were more concerned about who would succeed the childless Spanish King Charles II than about fighting the Ottoman Sultan.
- Peter's visit was cut short in 1698, when he was forced to rush home by a rebellion of the Streltsy led by Sophia, Peter's half-sister.
- The rebellion was easily crushed before Peter returned home from England; of Peter's troops, only one was killed. Peter acted ruthlessly towards the rebels. Over 1,200 of the rebels were tortured and executed, and Peter ordered that their bodies be publicly exhibited as a warning to future rebels. The Streltsy were disbanded, and the individual they sought to put on the Throne-Sophia was forced to become a nun.

The Great Northern War

- Peter made a temporary peace with the Ottoman Empire that allowed him to keep the captured fort of Azov, and turned his attention to Russian sea/port supremacy. He sought to acquire control of the Baltic Sea, which had been taken by the Swedish Empire. Peter declared war on Sweden, which was at the time led by King Charles XII.
- Russia was ill-prepared to fight the Swedes, and their first attempt at seizing the Baltic coast ended in disaster at the Battle of Narva in 1700. In the conflict, the forces of Charles XII used a blinding snowstorm to their advantage. After the battle, Charles XII decided to concentrate his forces against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which gave Peter time to reorganize the Russian army.
- Charles XII invaded Russia in 1708. After crossing into Russia, Charles defeated Peter at Golovchin. In the Battle of Lesnaya, Charles suffered his first loss after Peter crushed a group of Swedish reinforcements marching from Riga. Deprived of this aid, Charles was forced to abandon his proposed march on Moscow.

The Great Northern War Continued

- Charles XII refused to retreat to Poland or back to Sweden, instead he invaded Ukraine. Peter withdrew his army southward, destroying along the way any property that could assist the Swedes.
- Deprived of local supplies, the Swedish army was forced to halt its advance in the winter of 1708–1709. In the summer of 1709, they resumed their efforts to capture Ukraine, which ended in the Battle of Poltava on June 27, 1709. The battle was a decisive defeat for the Swedish forces, ending Charles' campaign in Ukraine and forcing him into exile in the Ottoman Empire.
- Peter's northern armies took the Swedish province of Livonia driving the Swedes into Finland. In 1714 the Russian fleet won the Battle of Gangut. Most of Finland was occupied by the Russians.
- Peter's navy was so powerful that the Russians could penetrate Sweden. Peter also obtained the assistance of the Electorate of Hanover and the Kingdom of Prussia.
- Still, Charles XII refused to yield, and not until his death in battle in 1718 did peace come. After the battle near Åland, Sweden made peace with all powers but Russia by 1720. In 1721 the Treaty of Nystad ended the Great Northern War. Russia acquired Ingria, Estonia, Livonia, and a substantial portion of Karelia. In turn, Russia paid two million Riksdaler and surrendered most of Finland.

Saint Petersburg

- After the Great Northern War, Peter retained some Finnish lands close to Saint Petersburg, which he had made his capital in 1712.
- All building had to conform strictly to detailed architectural regulations set down by the government. Each social group was also to live in a certain section of the town.
- Peasants were drafted just like the army to build the city. Every 10 to 15 peasant household families had to provide 1 worker every summer. And they had to pay a special tax in order to feed that worker.
- Nobles were also drafted. They lived in St. Petersburg most of the year. The more serfs that noble possessed, the bigger their house had to be.
- These nobles and merchants were then required to pay for the city's avenues, parks, canals, embankments, pilings, and bridges.
- The building of the city was a direct levied tax on the wealthy, which in turn forced the peasantry to do most of the work.
- In 1725 construction of Peterhof, a palace near Saint Petersburg, was completed. Peterhof was a grand residence, becoming known as the "Russian Versailles".

Reforms in Russia

- During Peter's reign the Russian Orthodox Church was reformed. The traditional leader of the Church was the Patriarch of Moscow.
- In 1700, when the office fell vacant, Peter refused to name a replacement, allowing the Patriarch's deputy to discharge the duties of the office.
- In 1721 Peter created the Holy Synod, a council of ten clergymen, to take the place of the Patriarch and deputy.
- Peter implemented a law that said that no Russian man could join a monastery before the age of 50. He felt that too many able Russian men were being wasted on clerical work when they could be joining his new and improved army. There were very few men who became monks during Peter's reign, much to the dismay of the Russian Church.
- In 1722 Peter created a new order of precedence known as the Table of Ranks. Formerly, precedence had been determined by birth. To deprive the Boyars of their high positions, Peter directed that precedence should be determined by merit and service to the Emperor. The Table of Ranks continued to remain in effect until the Russian monarchy was overthrown in 1917.

Reforms Continued

- In 1714, he issued a decree calling for compulsory education, which dictated that all Russian 10- to 15-year-old children of the nobility, government clerks, and lesser-ranked officials, must learn basic mathematics and geometry, and should be tested on it at the end of their studies.
- Peter introduced new taxes to fund improvements in Saint Petersburg. He abolished the land tax and household tax, and replaced them with a poll tax. The taxes on land and on households were payable only by individuals who owned property or maintained families.
- Peter implemented social modernization in an absolute manner by requiring courtiers, state officials, and the military to shave their beards and adopt modern clothing styles. One means of achieving this end was the introduction of taxes for long beards and robes in September 1698.
- He also sought to end arranged marriages, which were the normal tradition among the Russian nobility, because he thought the practice was barbaric and led to domestic violence.

More Reforms

- Every nobleman, great or small, was once again required to serve in the army or in the civil administration for life.
- He established an interlocking military-civilian bureaucracy with 14 ranks, and he decreed that all had to start at the bottom and work toward the top.
- Peter greatly increased the service requirements of the commoners.
- Serfs were assigned to work in the growing number of factories and mines. Most of these were either directly or indirectly owned by the state and most of them were for military purposes.

Effects of Peter's Reforms

- Many westerners and western ideas flowed into Russia because of Peter's desire to use modern technology to strengthen the army.
- A new class of educated Russians began to emerge.
- The split between the enserfed peasantry and the educated nobility widened.
- His developments paved the way for Russia to move closer to the European mainstream in its thought and institutions during the Enlightenment, especially under Catherine the Great.