

# Catherine the great: life and legend

Business, Strategy



Catherine the Great: Life and Legend Name: Institution: Lecturer: Course:  
Date: Catherine the Great: Life and Legend John T. Alexander, the author of the book Catherine the Great: life and legend spent twenty years of research gathering information necessary to complete this book.

Alexander aims at bridging the gap between popular accounts and specialized studies, but short on context and facts when presenting life behind Catherine as both a woman and a ruler. When attempting to reconstruct her life, Alexander stressed issues related to physical and mental health, as well as the soberly issue lying behind Catherine's sexuality. In this book, the reader manages to grasp three main issues: Catherine's approach to medicine and her health, reforms in the medical sector, and the inoculation of small pox[1]. Alexander further portrays Catherine's attitude towards sickness and health, her physical and emotional crises, while at the same time considering her scepticism of theories in medicine and the dearth of documentary material. The author gives us a succinct account of Catherine's fundamental role in reforming the medical sector in November 1763, as well the radical changes she implemented in the collegiums' jurisdiction[2].

Alexander also handles dexterously the inoculation of small pox between Catherine and her son Paul in 1768 St. Petersburg. The possibly greatest medical interests of Catherine as depicted by Alexander are her fights against the Moscow plague. This is depicted through the "The plague riot" and 'The pestilential distemper" that emanated from imposition of compulsory quarantines and the Muscovite dissatisfaction, a subject that Alexander graphically describes along with Catherine's reactions. Perhaps <https://assignbuster.com/catherine-the-great-life-and-legend/>

among the most important and recognized leaders in the Russian empire, Catherine the great is depicted by Alexander as one that set the westernization foundation in Russia between the nineteenth and twentieth century[3]. Alexander's book asserts that through her ambitions and intelligence, Catherine managed to challenge the social norms in her time as well as setting the precedent for women holding powerful positions in society.

Catherine asserted her authority in Russia through scandals, corruption, land expansion, and political reforms. She achieved this through the consolidation of power from feudal lords and surfs through the continuation of political reforms established by Peter the Great. Land expansion in particular was on the rise in the course of the civil war in 1768 when victory over the Ottoman Empire resulted to stretching new territories into the black sea[4].

In addition to this, Alexander informs his audience that law and education codes were under developed in the course of Catherine's rule through the importation of art, literature, and printed works from European nations. Born a minor German princess, Catherine was betrothed to the Russian Grand Duke at the age of fifteen through her mother and Empress Elizabeth. Catherine faced many challenges in her early years in a society that emphasized the subjugation of the woman population at the time. Despite society's primitive view towards her, her father recognized with regard to her high learning ability and remembering ideas and concepts. Only after did she prove her capabilities was she allowed access to formal education. By thirty-three, Catherine overthrew her husband in a coup and established herself as

the ruler of the Russian Empire, the largest political territorial unit in modern history. Catherine the Great, the first modern based scholastic biography of the empress provides us with a clear picture of Catherine as a perceptive ruler, lover, and a mother.

Concentrating on her period of reign (1762 - 1796), Alexander sheds light on Catherine's aspects in life and career, and the exceptional political strategies through which she was accepted as national elite, her foreign policy on expansion, political structure, infamous love life, and political reforms she used to revamp the Russian military[5]. Alexander hands us with an account of Catherine's early childhood, marriage, and a chronological description of her thirty-four years of her reign. He does so in a compelling narrative fashion by accurately describing events such as the incursion of the bubonic plague in Moscow, the Ural peasants uprising, and the six political murders Catherine sanctioned. In this book, Catherine is described in more human terms compared to her other biographies through numerous quotations acquired from her notes and reminiscences[6].

For instance, we learn that not only number and names of her lovers as well as her understanding of what many deemed licentiousness. As she wrote, "The trouble is that my heart would not willingly remain one hour without love." [7] In accordance with Alexander in Catherine the Great, tremendous amounts of lies have been spread on one of the greatest leaders in Russia. The historical record indeed has had an implication that Catherine was responsible for the completion of Russia as a European nation with a somewhat similar setting to those in Western Europe. Through this book,

Alexander bears the intent of restoring this image as well as dispelling the false myths about Catherine. According to Alexander, his description of Catherine is one that portrays her as a reluctant individual. She only involved herself in overthrowing her husband once she got wind of his plan to divorce her. Ironically, according to Alexander, Catherine was more successful than her husband Peter in leading the Russian nation.

Her marriage is jeopardized by Peter's incompetence in leadership in running the Russian empire. Peter could not alienate the Russian court, and as Alexander explains, he compounded his mistakes through his primitive action of withdrawing from war with Prussia[8]. Alexander explains that Catherine's great achievements are not based on neither her ideas nor her originality, but the fact that she managed to succeed where previous Russian leaders failed, and did so miserably. Alexander also attempts to show the Catherine's character through her cause of death. The author does not hide the fact that Catherine was very much obsessed with sexual endeavors, and goes on to prove that her cause of death was no mere accident or through any natural means. According to Alexander, there is a popular myth about Catherine died when a horse that was being lowered on her suddenly dropped and crushing her in the event. However, Alexander in this case goes on to point out other sources that proclaim Catherine's cause of death as an apoplexy attack when she was aged sixty-seven. Alexander's conclusion is that many accounts of Catherine's life are primarily focused on attacking her personal life, thus casting shadows on her achievements in developing Russia.

It is true that Catherine had many lovers and Alexander goes on to include some of her sent love letters between 1776 and 1777[9]. However, he endeavors to assure his readers that Catherine did not practice bestiality, and dismisses rumors that she died attempting to have intercourse with a stallion. Catherine the Great is a brilliant book that includes explicit descriptions of Catherine's struggles when leading Russia to prosperity.

She managed to accomplish many achievements her predecessors could not. Nevertheless, she was the subject many false rumors in the course of her life and afterwards altogether. According to Alexander, it was rather unfortunate that biographies would depict such a great leader from a sex life point of view, rather than focusing on her great achievements[10]. Catherine was a leader that Alexander feels finished what Peter the Great originally started. She officially delivered the Russian nation from the primitive ages and into the developed era of the Western Europe ideology.

Alexander attempts in his books to shift as much focus on the reforms Catherine spearheaded, but he notably spends much time highlighting on palace innuendo and intrigue, thereby contradicting his own view that other male biographers of Catherine were biased, may be because she was a successful female leader. Nevertheless, Alexander's book is an authoritative anecdote with a well-researched statistics, well paced, organized, and written. Overall, Alexander succeeds with his goal of bringing Catherine to life through a judicious blend of commentary and narrative. In his own right, Alexander did commendable job with Catherine the Great. She continued her husband's great plans of reforming the Russia state, and further increased

control over the states provinces[11]. Her aim was based on rationalizing and reforming the Russian administration.

Her ambitions played a fundamental role in developing Russia into a modern state through both political and cultural senses. Commissioning building throughout Russia, Catherine founded libraries, academies, journals, and directed the construction of the Hermitage Museum. Even after her death, Catherine's achievements were the foundation that went on to propel Russia as being deemed a major world power. Therefore, Alexander is justified in his view to defend Catherine against other biographies that depicted a negative view. In my opinion, the reason why I chose this book is that I felt the author allies a formal writing strategy than other autobiographers on Catherine's subject, and attempts to include military and political details as well. Yet, he does not lose sight of Catherine as a normal human being with normal fascinations and desires. He informs us what she does and how she views it. However, I find it somehow surprising as to how much energy and thought she put into plot, family, war, her health, assassination threats, international relationships, and marriages.

Alexander notes that Catherine exhibited a fear towards "the French infection" which was a democracy growth challenging monarchies of her kind[12]. In my opinion, I was impressed by Alexander's work and appreciated his non-biased point of view. Bibliography Thaden, Edward C. 2001. "Book Review: Catherine the Great: Life and Legend. John T. Alexander".

The Journal of Modern History. 63 (3). [1] Thaden, Edward C. 2001.

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