



Catherine the Great: the  
“usurper”

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The 18<sup>th</sup> century: the century of  
empresses

## Peter the Great's reform of the law of succession

The assassination of his heir Alexei (1718)

1722: Peter's decision **to choose** his successor

The principle of hereditary monarchy abandoned

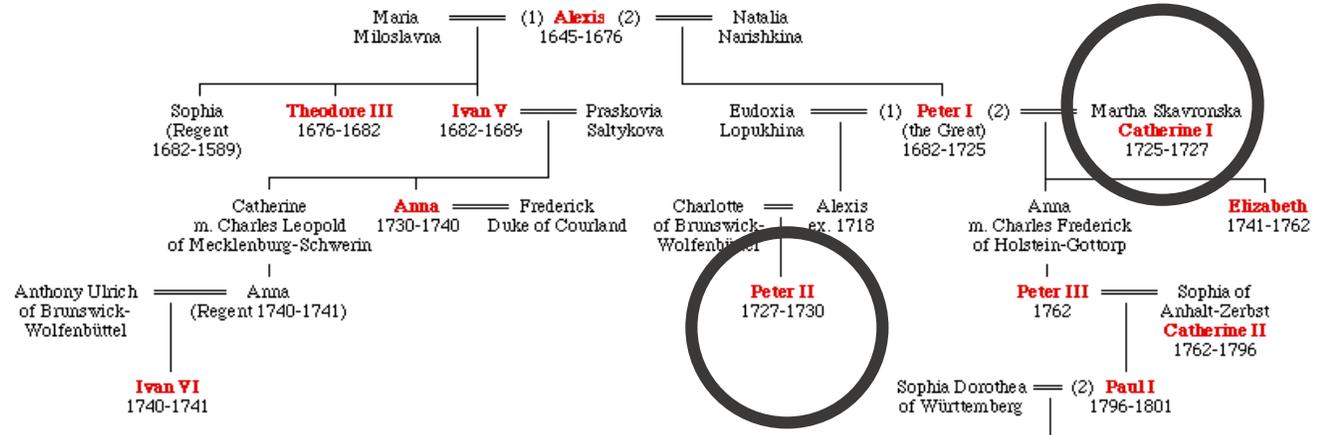
The reign of women in Russia – Catherine crowned empress (1724)





# The Romanov Dynasty

by Ed Stephan



1725: the death of Peter the Great

His succession: a complex choice

NO to a regency: Catherine prevailed

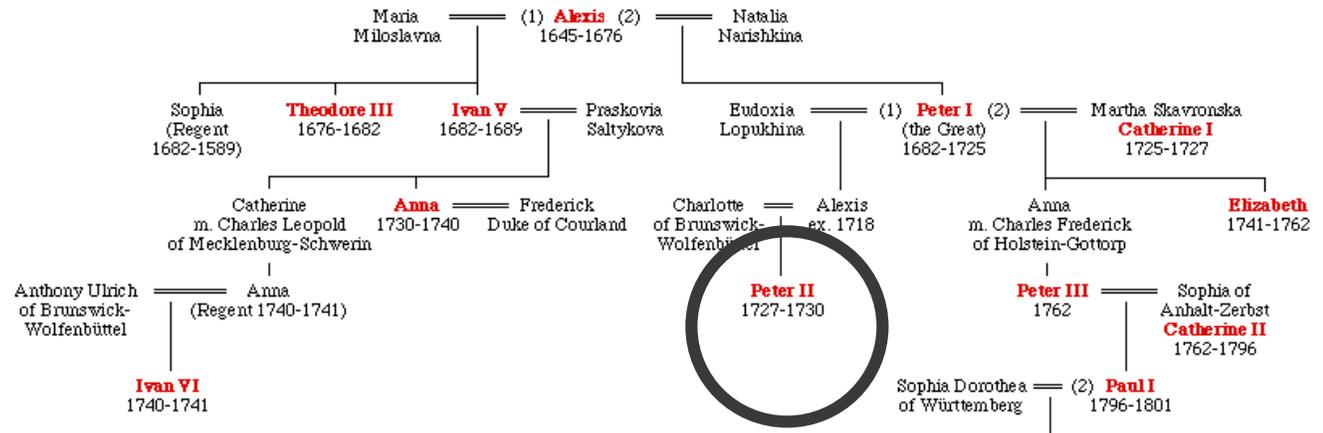
1726: a Supreme Privy Council

A **consultative body** – To advise the sovereign



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1727: Catherine chose Peter's grandson as her successor

A compromise: Peter as czar – Regency exercised by her 2 daughters

A short, peaceful reign



The imperial capital moved  
back to Moscow

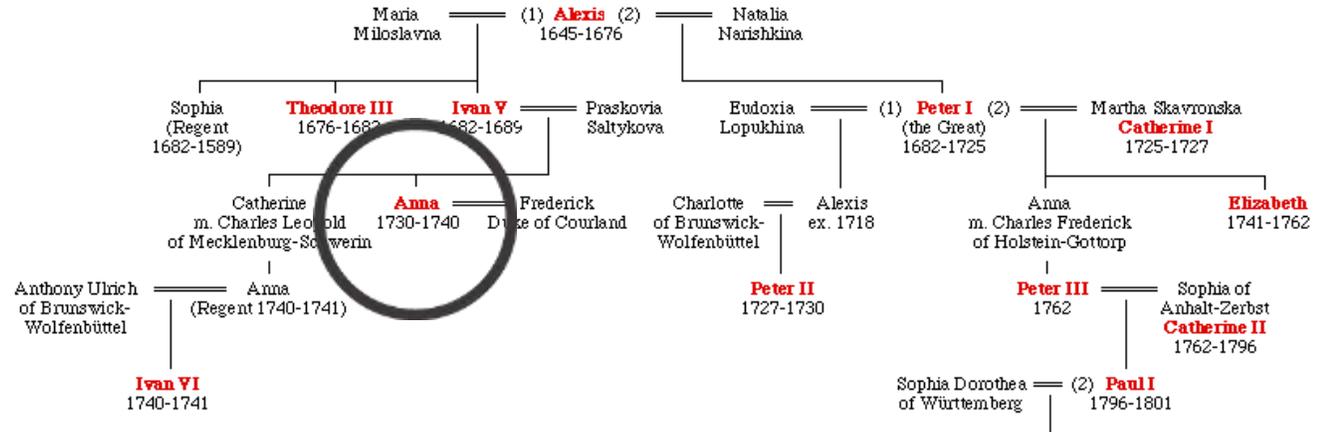
The Supreme Privy Council  
wielded power equal to the  
Emperor's





# The Romanov Dynasty

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1730: the Supreme Privy Council chooses Anna Ivanovna to succeed Peter II

A childless widow – Reputation of weakness  
The Privy Council to wield the supreme power

Anna's first decision as empress: to dissolve the Supreme Privy Council

Anna's reign nicknamed *Bironovchtchina*



Ernest Johann Biron

The influence of Germans  
at Court

Key ministerial positions  
occupied by Biron's friends



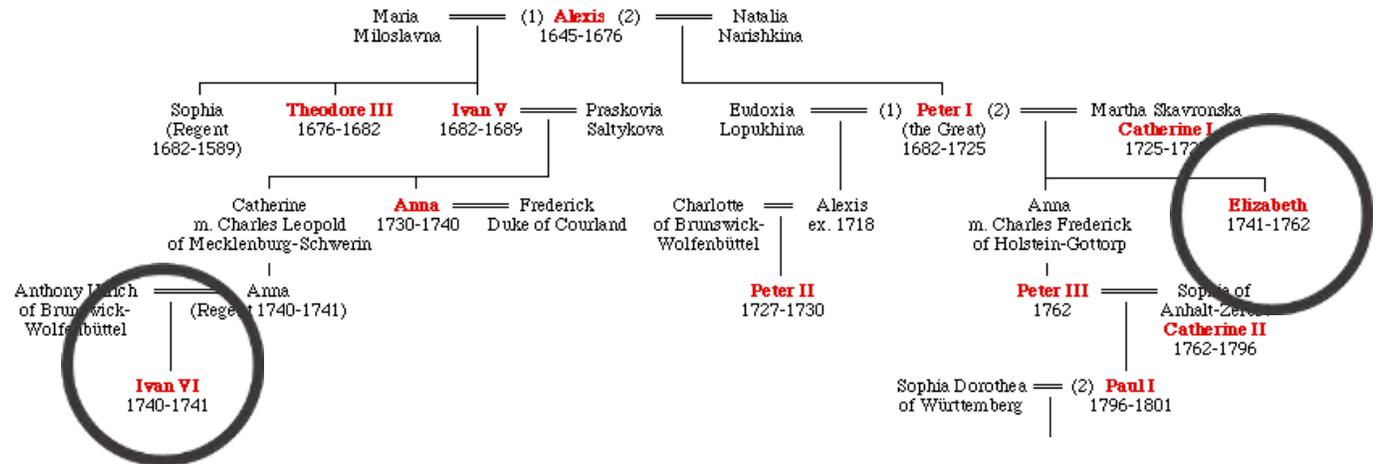
The nobles responsible for  
the « document of  
conditions » persecuted





# The Romanov Dynasty

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1740: Anna Ivanovna chose her sister's grandson Ivan (a German prince) as her successor

Biron appointed regent

1641: a bloodless coup to remove Biron & replace Ivan VI by Elizabeth





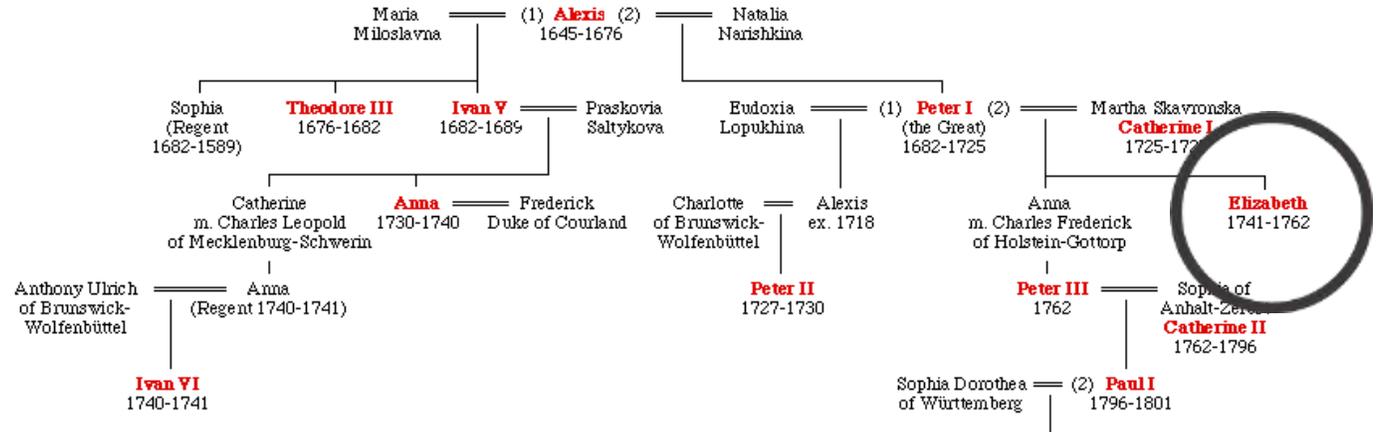
Ivan VI sent to the fortress of  
Schlüsselburg

Anonymous prisoner known as “prisoner  
number 1”



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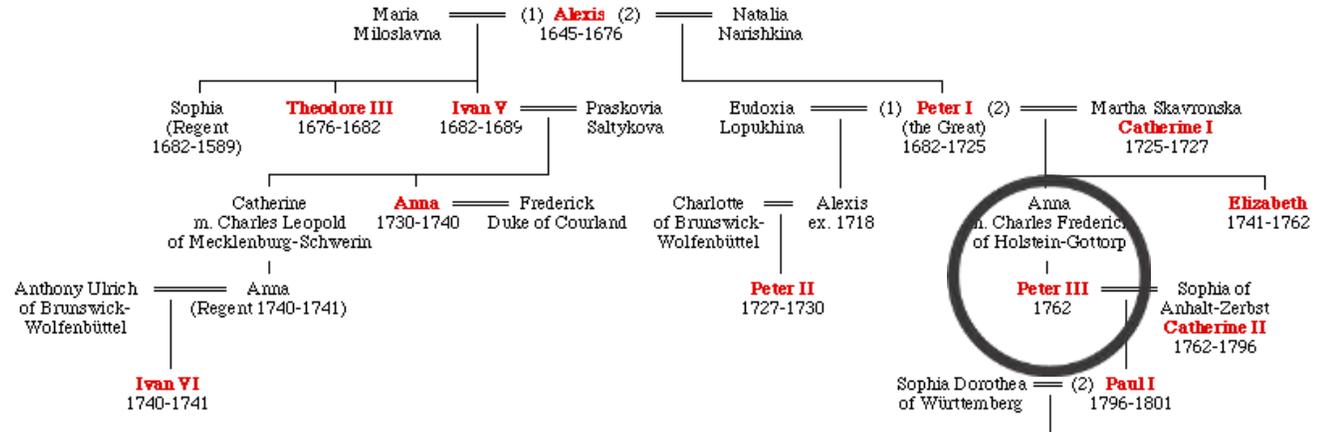
1741: the (peaceful) return to hereditary succession (primogeniture)

The victory of traditional Russia over German influence  
Growing French influence



# The Romanov Dynasty

by Ed Stephan



1741: Elizabeth (not married & childless) proclaims her nephew Peter as her successor

Peter: a German prince educated in Germany





Elizabeth married Peter to an obscure German princess: Sophie of Anhalt-Zerbst (the future Catherine II)

1761: Peter III succeeded Elizabeth

Peter: a German prince on the Russian throne

A great admirer of Frederick II of Prussia

The German model (army & Court etiquette)



Peter the Great's reform of the nobility: the **obligation of service**

Service to start at age 10  
(military or government)

Mandatory schools for young nobles

The result: an excellent military  
and administrative elite



1762: the obligation of  
service **abolished**

The nobility no longer obligated  
to serve the State

No emancipation of Russian  
peasantry (serfdom)

Hostility towards the Orthodox  
Church





Peter III & Catherine: a disastrous marriage – From mutual indifference to hatred

Grand Duke Paul: Peter's son?

Peter III: to repudiate Catherine & designate Ivan VI as his successor

Conspiracy to remove Peter III from the throne

« Regicide » from the top

Catherine to be empress, not regent

To preserve her son's rights to the throne



## Nikita Panine & the Orlov brothers

Peter III arrested and forced to abdicate (28 June 1762) – Likely murdered a week later





Catherine proclaimed empress – Immediate coronation  
Promise to protect the rights of the Orthodox Church

Catherine: NO to a regency

Paul's growing resentment towards his mother

The throne stolen from him

Fear his mother might choose another successor

No women on the throne after Catherine II



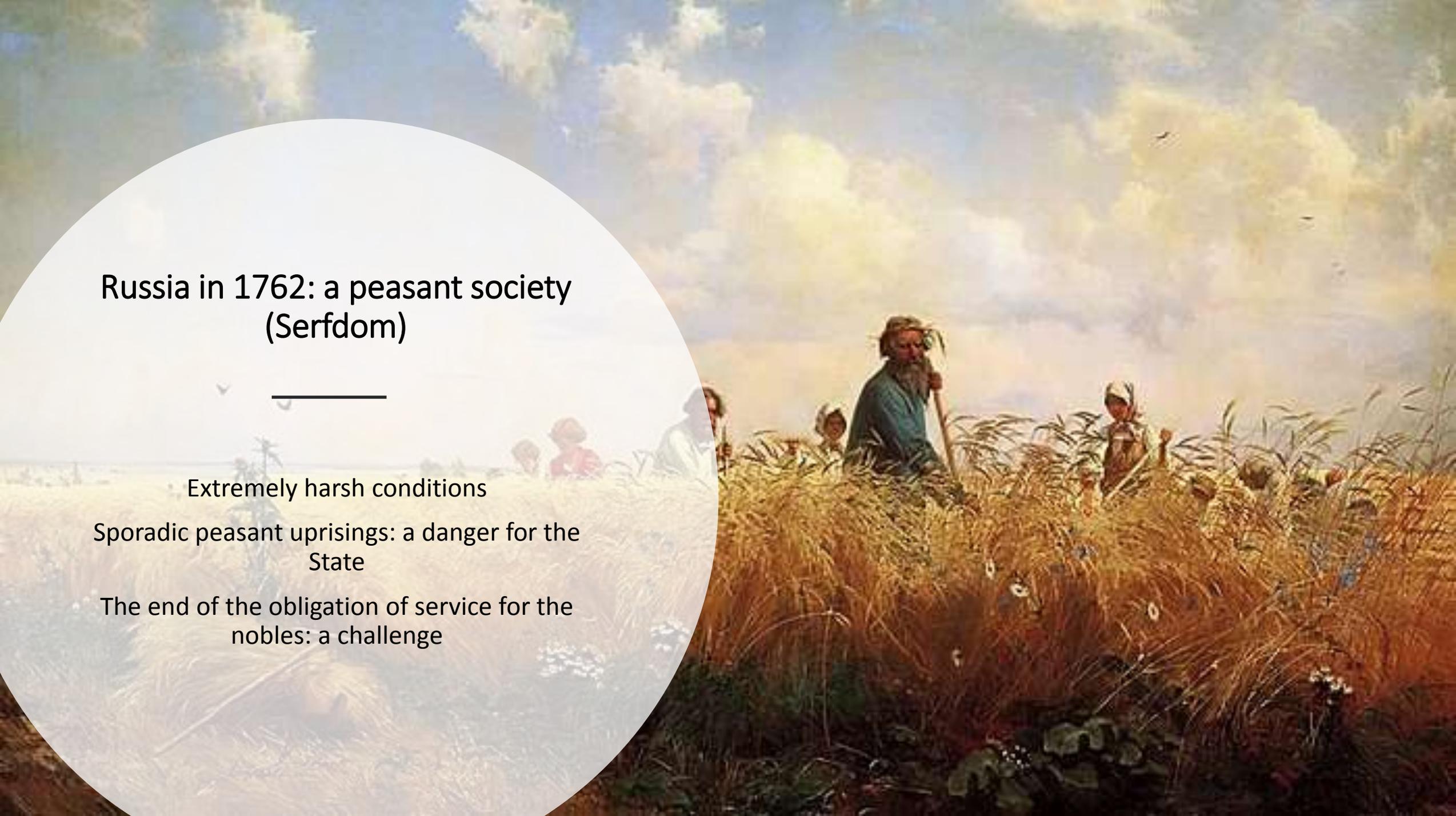
Catherine II's fundamental problem as empress of Russia: a **lack of legitimacy**

Not a drop of Russian blood – A Romanov by marriage only

European monarchs dismissive towards the new empress

Catherine II: how to establish her legitimacy



A painting of a Russian peasant field with a large white circular overlay containing text. The scene shows several peasants working in a field of tall, golden-brown grasses under a bright, cloudy sky. A man with a long beard and a green coat is prominent in the center, holding a wooden staff. Other figures are visible in the background, some wearing traditional head coverings. The overall atmosphere is one of labor and rural life.

## Russia in 1762: a peasant society (Serfdom)

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- Extremely harsh conditions

- Sporadic peasant uprisings: a danger for the State

- The end of the obligation of service for the nobles: a challenge

Russian peasantry free until  
1581-1582

Peasants “temporarily”  
forbidden to leave estates

1649: measure made permanent (half of the Russian peasantry lost its  
freedom)

1861: 27 million serfs (55 million peasants)



A majority of serfs in Central  
Russia

Northern/Southern Russia & Siberia: fewer landlords

A majority of free peasants



The serf: NO legal existence

Forbidden to own anything

Subject to punishment

A serf can only (in theory) be sold with the land he lives on

Practice of selling serfs common



SUPPLICE DU GRAND ESQUY.





Europe's perception of Russia: a barbaric country outside of Europe

Russia not considered as a major European power

## Catherine's advantages

A keen awareness of her lack of legitimacy: the need to lay out a grand vision

Her supporters (the Orlov brothers & Nikita Panine)

Her education: a passion for books



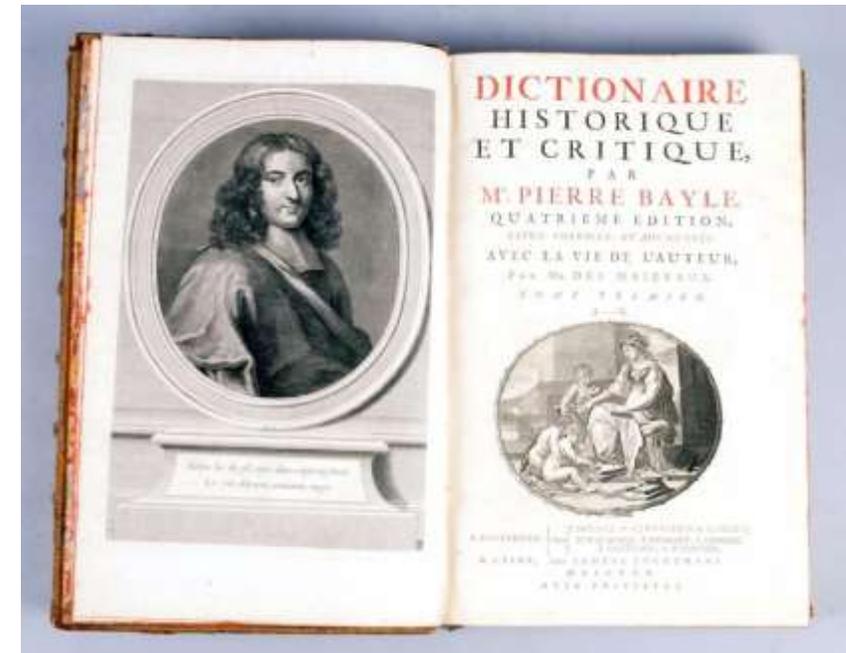
Catherine II: an enlightened empress



Voltaire, Diderot and the Encyclopedia

Russia MUST be modernized

Her goal: to follow Peter the Great's footsteps



Catherine as champion of  
Russia's independence

To defend Russia's national  
interest

No change to the nature of the  
regime (autocracy)

A constitutional monarchy ill  
adapted to Russia

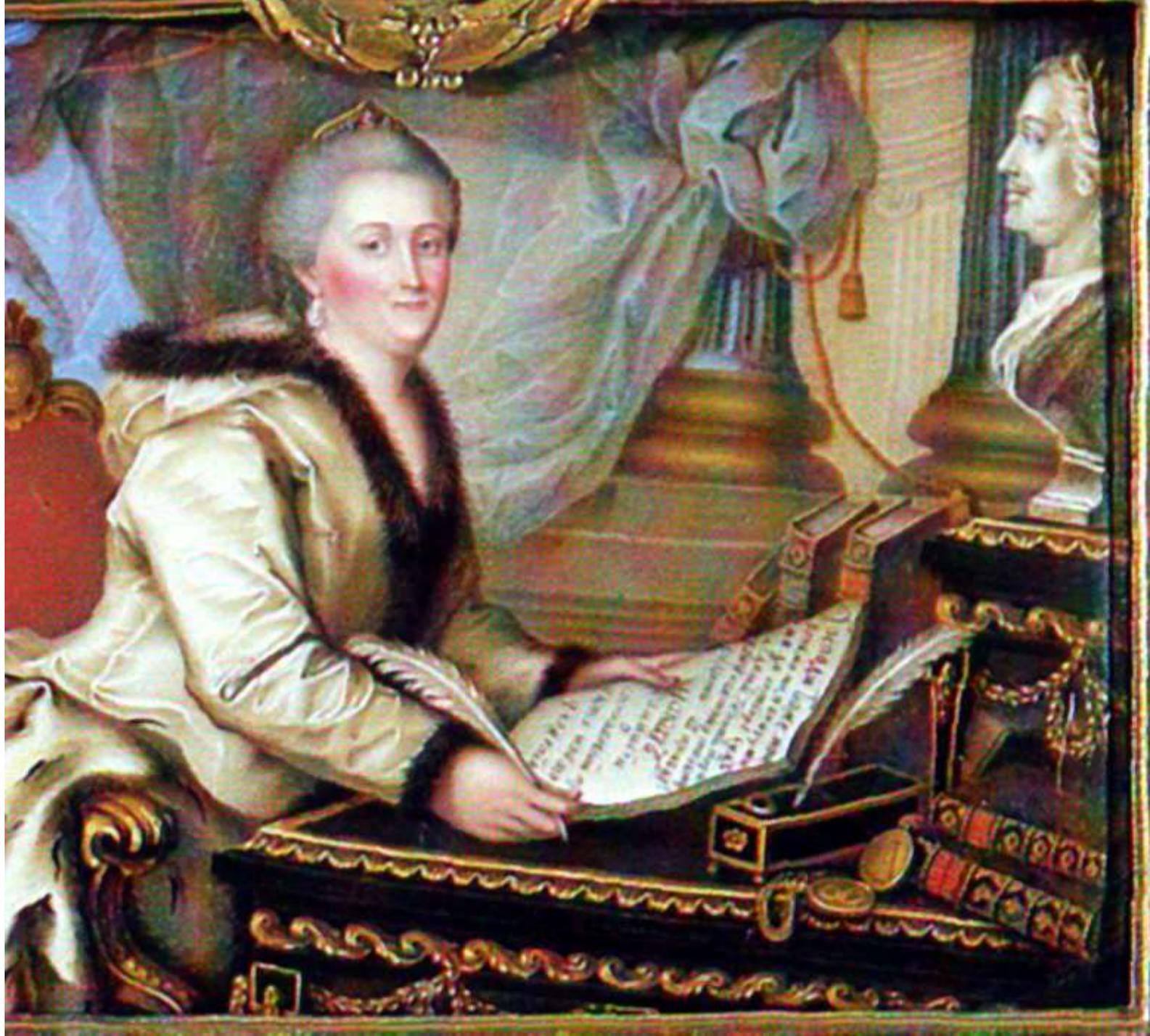


## Catherine II: the reformer

A unique legal system for the empire

The *Nakaz* (“Great instruction”)

A **Grand Commission (564 members of all classes)** to discuss the needs of Russia and the means to satisfy them



The Grand Commission: a  
turning point in Russia's  
political evolution

A better knowledge of Russian  
society, populations & diversity

A series of proposals

Debate over serfdom



The Pugachev's rebellion  
(1774)

The most dangerous in Russia's  
history

The epidemic of plague (1771)

The return of fake czars (the  
death of Peter III)

Pugachev: promises of freedom  
and land redistribution to the  
peasants



A new administrative system to better control the various Russian provinces (small units – 300 000 to 400 000 people – led by a governor appointed by St. Petersburg)



Smaller units = a level of local autonomy

## The role of education

Schools for abandoned children  
(Founding Schools/Orphanages)

*The Smolny Institute (1764)*

A Russian Statute for National  
Education (1786)





# The Russo-Turkish War (1768-1774)

An access to the Black Sea  
The annexation of Crimea (1783)





Russia: the protector of Orthodox Christians in the Balkans

Russia: a power to reckon with

Britain and France hostile to Russian expansionism

# EUROPE IN 1815

- Monaco Newly created or restored states after the Congress of Vienna
- Territorial acquisitions and reacquisitions in brighter colors
- Boundary of German Confederation
- German small states
- Military Frontier against the Ottomans



L'ENJAMBÉE IMPERIALE .

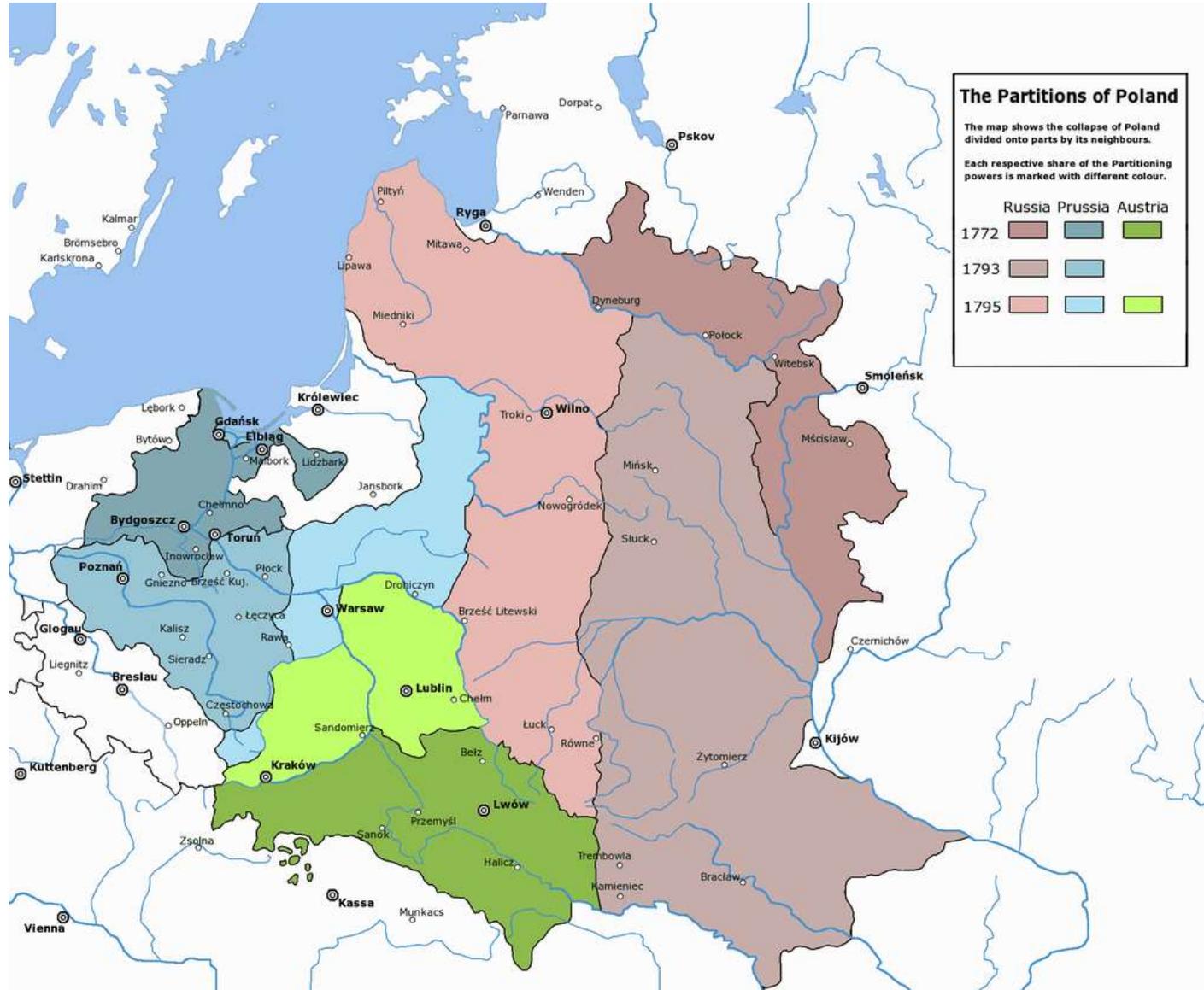


## The partitions of Poland

1764: Stanislas Poniatowski on the throne of Poland (elective)

Poland's political system paralyzed (*liberum veto*)





The Polish revolt of 1793-1794

Catherine II hostile to the ideas of the French  
Revolution

Tadeusz Kosciuszko

Monarchies vs. Revolution



An impressive legacy

The Russian State modernized

A successful foreign policy:  
Russia acknowledged as a great  
European power

An empress opened to the ideas  
of the Enlightenment





Catherine Palace (Tsarskoye Selo)

