



**Elizabeth,
Empress of Russia**

1709 – 1761

- Early life
- The coup
- Foreign affairs
- Domestic affairs
- Court life
- The search for an heir

- Born 1709 near Moscow.
- Father Peter the Great,
- Mother Catherine Skowronski, daughter of a Lithuanian peasant farmer and initially one of Peter's domestic staff

Early life

Elizabeth was one of 12 children from this marriage (although only she and Anna her elder sister survived)

She wasn't expected to inherit the throne as Peter had a heirs by his first marriage so her education was in the hands of a French governess. She had a grounding in maths, the arts, languages and sport.

Apparently bright, but not brilliant.



She was described as vivacious, beautiful and statuesque.

By the time Elizabeth was 17 (1727) , both her parents were dead and Charles Augustus of Holstein-Gottorp, to whom she had been engaged, had also died - just before their marriage.

- Catherine I, ruled 1725–1727
- Peter II, ruled 1727–1730
- Anna of Russia, ruled 1730–1740
- Ivan VI, ruled 1740–1741 infant, mother Anna Leopoldovna regent
- Elizabeth of Russia, ruled 1741–1762

After the death of her mother Catherine I, her half nephew Peter II was briefly on the throne to be followed by Elizabeth's cousin Anna, daughter of Ivan V. There was no love lost there as Elizabeth was perceived as a rival to the Russian throne.



Anna was certainly not inclined to find a suitable husband for Elizabeth, so Elizabeth she consoled herself with a number of lovers, mainly from the household staff...

She eventually found a long term companion in Alexis Razumovsky, a Ukrainian peasant whose excellent singing voice had brought him to St Petersburg to sing in the church choir. He never showed any interest in state affairs over the many years of the relationship but he was given a number of honours, including being made a Count of the Holy Roman Empire, a Prince and a Field Marshall. Not bad for a serf.

There is a suggestion that she married him in a private ceremony. Also a rumour of two daughters.



Imperial Coup

Empress Anna died in 1740 and was succeeded by the infant Ivan VI under the regency of Anna Leopoldovna. Elizabeth had been biding her time during the 10 years of Anna's reign and had cultivated the support of her father's guard regiments and when the French and Swedish Ambassadors in St Petersburg united to plan a coup to depose the Regent Anna, Elizabeth was ready

On the night of 25 November 1741 Elizabeth seized power with the help of the Preobrazhensky Regiment. The Regiment marched to the Winter Palace and arrested the infant Emperor, his parents and their own lieutenant colonel Count von Munnich

The coup succeeded without bloodshed. Fearing a counter coup Elizabeth eventually imprisoned Ivan VI and his mother in the Shlisselburg Fortress and gave orders that if he tried to escape he should be eliminated.

Elizabeth crowned herself Empress in the Dormition Cathedral on the 25 April 1742.

At the age of 33 with little political experience she was head of a great empire.

Dormition Cathedral



Aleksey Bestuzhev

Very early on in her reign she exiled the most unpopular German advisors. She abolished the cabinet council system that had been in place under Anna and reconstituted the Senate as it had been under her father with the chiefs of the departments of state as senators

She abolished the death penalty

Elizabeth summoned Aleksey Bestuzhev to court as vice chancellor and then head of foreign affairs. He was an excellent diplomat

For the next 17 years, during a period of exceptional difficulty, Bestuzhev practically controlled the foreign policy of Russia.

Bestuzhev felt that both France and Prussia represented the most danger to Russia and consequently sought alliances with their enemies.

Both Frederick the Great and Louis XV attempted to get rid of him, but failed.



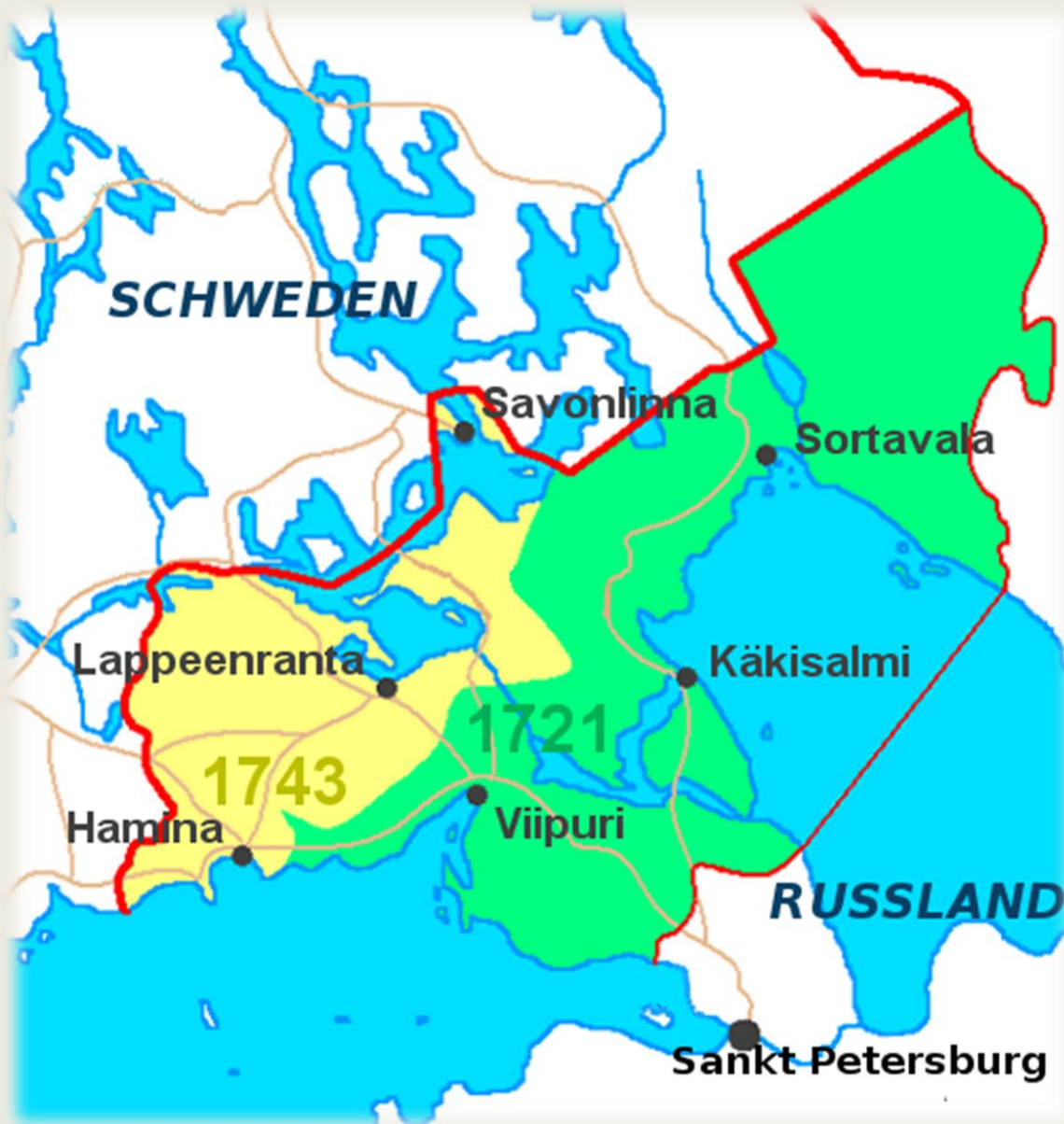
Aleksey Bestuzhev

Foreign Affairs

On 23 January 1743 direct negotiations between Russia and Sweden at Abo (in Sweden) were instigated to bring a conclusion to the Russo-Swedish war of 1741-43.

The Treaty of Abo was signed on 7 August 1743. Sweden ceded to Russia all of southern Finland east of the Kymmene River which became the border between the two states.

By acquiring Finland, Russian politicians were able to move the Swedish border considerably to the north, thus reducing the danger of Swedish attack on the Russian capital, St Petersburg.



Area in green. 1721 - Russia acquired territory of modern Estonia and Latvia after decades of war with Sweden, establishing naval presence in Baltic Sea and 'window on Europe'

TREATY OF ABO 1743.

The area in yellow was ceded to the Russian Empire

After the treaty, Russia came to control the southern part of Karelia.

Elizabeth guaranteed religion, properties, laws and privileges of the inhabitants of ceded territories.

Treaty of Aix la Chappelle 1748 (War of Austrian Succession 1740-1748)

The really brief version

Bestuzhev's diplomacy plus 30,000 Russian men sent to the Rhine accelerated the Treaty of Aix-la-Chappelle, 18 October 1748. His diplomacy extricated Russia from yet another Swedish 'predicament', reconciled Elizabeth with the courts of Vienna and London and enabled Russia to assert herself in Poland, the Ottoman Empire and Sweden and isolated the King of Prussia by forcing him into hostile alliances.

The Seven Years War 1756-1763

Another really brief version

Elizabeth's government also were concerned to maintain the alliance between Russia, Austria and France against Prussia during the Seven Years' War. Russian troops enjoyed victories against Prussia and briefly occupied Berlin, but when Frederick the Great was finally considering surrender in January 1762, Elizabeth died a month earlier, much to his relief

Internal Affairs.

Education

Although Elizabeth's education as sketchy she did realise that education was important. She made education freely available to all social classes, except for the serfs, financed **Ivan Shuvalov** who founded the Moscow university in Russia in 1755, and helped to finance the establishment of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in St Petersburg 1757

Architecture

Elizabeth had long had an interest in architecture and oversaw and financed many construction projects during her reign.

Her main architect was **Bartolomeo Rastrelli**.

In 1716, Bartolomeo had moved to Saint Petersburg. His ambition was to combine the latest Italian architectural fashion with traditions of the Muscovite Baroque style. He was appointed to the post of senior court architect in 1730. He retained this post throughout the reign of Elizabeth. Rastrelli's last and most ambitious project was the Smolny Convent in St. Petersburg. The projected bell tower was to become the tallest building in St Petersburg and all of Russia. Elizabeth's death in 1762 prevented Rastrelli from completing this grand design.

He did complete the reconstruction of the Peterhof Palace, 1747-1756. This is a series of palaces and gardens originally commissioned by Peter the Great as a direct response to the Palace of Versailles by Louis XIV of France.



The Winter Palace (version 4)

During the reign of Elizabeth, Rastrelli, still working on his previous plan, devised an entirely new scheme in 1753, on a colossal scale—the present Winter Palace. The completion of the palace was important to the Empress, who regarded the palace as a symbol of national prestige.

Work on the building continued throughout the year, even in the severest months of the winter. The deprivation to both the Russian people and the army caused by the ongoing Seven Years War didn't stop the project.

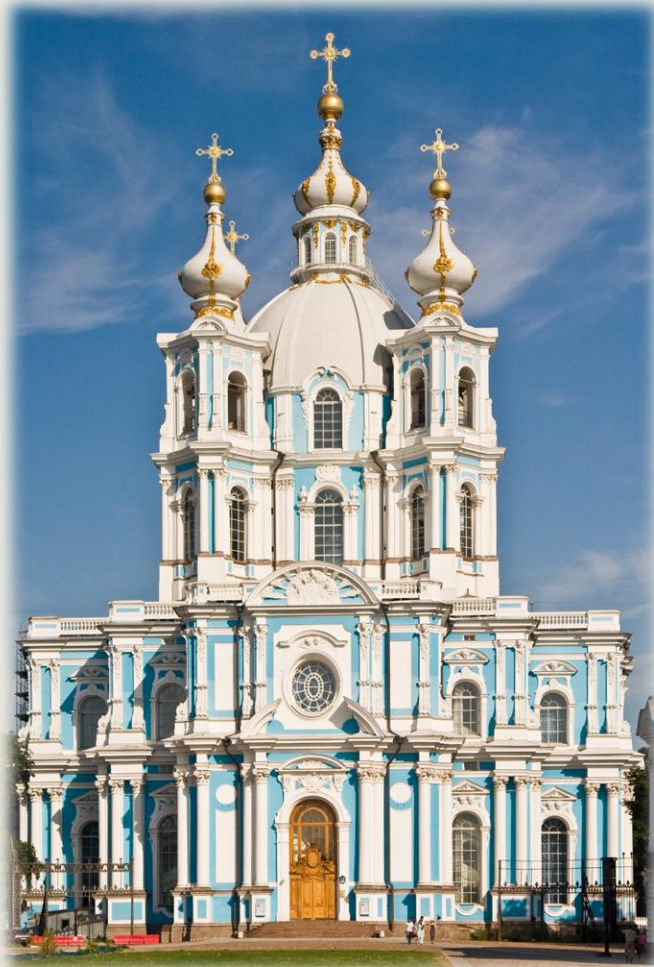
859,555 rubles had been allocated to the project, a sum raised by a tax on state-owned taverns. Though the labourers earned a monthly wage of just one ruble, the cost of the project exceeded the budget, so much so that work ceased due to lack of resources despite the Empress' obsessive desire for rapid completion.

Ultimately, taxes were increased on salt and alcohol to fund the extra costs, although the Russian people were already burdened by taxes to pay for the war. The final cost was 2,500,000 rubles. By 1759, shortly before Elizabeth's death, the Winter Palace was nearing completion.



Interior of the Winter Palace. Not contemporary

Smolny Convent



Imperial Academy of Arts

Court Life

Elizabeth's court was one of the most splendid in all Europe. Splendid clothes, lavish refreshments. It was common to order over a thousand bottles of French champagnes and wines to be served at one event and to serve pineapple at all receptions, despite the difficulty of procuring the fruit in such quantities.

She apparently held two balls a week, one of about 800 guests, including merchants, lower nobility and guards who were stationed around the city. The other smaller ball started off as costume balls and then turned into cross dressing events. Most courtiers thoroughly disliked these as most guests looked ridiculous, but Elizabeth adored them because she was tall and possessed a powerful body, and male clothing suited her.

In contrast Elizabeth often threw children's birthday parties and wedding receptions for those affiliated with her Court, going so far as to provide dowries for each of her ladies-in-waiting.

French plays quickly became very popular and often were performed twice a week. Music became very important. Many attribute its popularity to Elizabeth's supposed husband, the "Emperor of the Night", Alexei Razumovsky.

Elizabeth spared no expense in importing leading musical talents from Germany, France and Italy. She reportedly owned 15,000 dresses, several thousand pairs of shoes and a seemingly unlimited number of stockings. Attractive in her youth and vain as an adult, Elizabeth passed various decrees intended to make herself stand out such as forbidding anyone wearing the same hairstyle, dress, or accessory as the herself.

One woman accidentally wore the same item as the Empress and was lashed across the face for it.

Her aggressive vanity became part of the court throughout her reign, particularly as she grew older and her volatile and often violent reactions were notorious.

Elizabeth 's search for an heir

Elizabeth was childless so looked to select an heir.

She settled on Charles Peter Ulrich of Holstein-Gottorp, Peter was the grandson of Peter the Great. She brought him to court and then looked around for a suitable wife.

She chose Sophie von Anhalt-Zerbst who was related to the dukes of Holstein.

Sophie had her name changed to Catherine when she converted to the Orthodox church

Peter and Catherine were married in 1745 but Elizabeth had to wait impatiently until 1754 before a son, Paul, arrived.

As soon as he was born Elizabeth whisked him away and Catherine didn't see him for months. Elizabeth took charge of his upbringing.

There was, inevitably, speculation that Paul was not Peter's son, but the son of one of Catherine's many lovers.

Elizabeth died in 1761 of a stroke after suffering poor health was several years.

She was 52 years old and had reigned for 21 years

Everything that she left behind - the new architecture, victory against Prussia, new education institutions and institutions for the arts and sciences, an improved road system, as well as an improved government, were later built on during the reign of Catherine the Great.

But, Elizabeth had spent vast fortune on her hedonistic lifestyle, and taxed serfs heavily to help pay debts

She abolished the death sentence, but many of her subjects were cruelly tortured and exiled

Favourites could be her close ally, and then her worst enemy. The court was rife with intrigue

She is said to have procrastinated about signing documents. On one hand this showed a lack of political awareness, another that she made considered decisions

She had power and she used it and she survived



