

PETER THE GREAT BIOGRAPHY (Source: <www. <http://www.saint-petersburg.com/royal-family/peter-the-great/>>)



Born: Moscow - 30 May (9 June) 1672

Died: St. Petersburg - 28 January (8 February) 1725

Reigned: 1682-1725 (1682-1696 as co-regent with his half-brother Ivan)

Peter the Great's significance in Russian history is difficult to overestimate. Books about the "Tsar Reformer" continue to be written to this day, and we will hardly be able to describe here all of his many accomplishments and achievements. Peter the Great (whom the Russians generally call Peter I - Pyotr Pervy) is beloved in Russia, and all the more so in St. Petersburg, where he is rightfully lauded as the Founder of the City, and honored with numerous memorials.

Peter the Great was the youngest son of Alexey I and his second wife, Natalya Naryshkina. Alexey was succeeded by the invalid Fyodor III, Peter's eldest half-brother, who lasted on the throne only six years and died without surviving issue. Although only ten years old, Peter was chosen by the Boyar Duma as heir over his other half-brother, Ivan, as the latter suffered chronic physical and mental disabilities. Ivan's sister, Sofia Alekseyevna, and her relatives in the Miloslavsky family were dissatisfied with the arrangement, however, and with the support of the elite Streltsy Guard fomented the Moscow Uprising. In the subsequent rioting and violence, Peter witnessed the slaughter of several members of his family, including two of his uncles at the hand of the Streltsy. The result of the uprising was that Sofia became regent and Ivan was crowned Ivan V, sharing the throne as a senior partner with Peter.



Peter never forgot these bloody events and many historians believe that his complex, brusque but also energetic and decisive character was shaped by these childhood experiences. Peter spent his childhood and early youth in the village of Preobrazhenskoe, not far from Moscow, where he lived with his mother, organized "mock" regiments, learned to sail on sailboats, and only rarely traveled to Moscow for official ceremonies. In 1689, at the age of seventeen, Peter successfully removed Sofia from power, and at the urging of his mother married Eudoxia Lopykhina. The marriage was not a happy one: neither Eudoxia nor their son Alexey shared Peter's interests. Many years later, Alexey was arrested, charged with treason, and died in the Peter and Paul Fortress under mysterious circumstances, while Eudoxia was divorced by Peter in 1712 and then forced to enter a convent. In the same year, Peter married Marta Skavronskaya, the future Empress Catherine I.



Peter was the first Russian monarch to receive an education both in Russia and abroad. Even as a boy, the youngest son of Tsar Alexey was naturally curious and drawn to learning, and he received his education not only from palace tutors, but also in German Town, a district of Moscow where many enlightened foreigners lived. There young Peter became interested in the latest developments in science and technology as well as natural science, which until this point had never caught the attention of Russian Tsars.

Setting off to Europe in 1696 on the so-called Grand Embassy (a large Russian delegation whose purpose was to find allies for the war with Turkey), Peter travelled incognito under the pseudonym of Pyotr Mikhailov. In Prussia, the Tsar studied artillery and received a certificate as a firearms master, and in Holland he learned the craft of shipbuilding by working at the bustling Dutch docks. Then he set off to England to study the latest advances in shipbuilding and industry. In London, the young Tsar visited the Houses of Parliament, and was quite displeased with what he heard as he listened to a session of the House of Commons through an "auditory window": this autocratic Russian monarch could not understand how the common folk could dare to publicly discuss and criticize the policies of their sovereign. As he travelled about Europe, Peter visited factories and libraries, listened to lectures at universities, and caroused with comrades, but this educational and entertaining voyage was cut short after 18 months by news of a Streltsy revolt in Moscow. For the rest of his life, Peter the Great retained his love of knowledge, new technology, and of learned people, as is evidenced by his personal belongings, library and the interiors of his palaces.



Many volumes have been written about the reforms undertaken in Russia on the initiative of Peter the Great, and discussion about them continues to this day. Some believe that these reforms allowed Russia (and thereafter the Russian Empire) to attain status as one of the leading powers in Europe. Others lament the loss of the unique cultural and spiritual traditions that had existed in Russia in the pre-Petrine period. Peter the Great introduced the Julian calendar in Russia with its celebration of the New Year on 1 January, and the tradition of decorating Christmas trees. He also forced the upper classes to dress in a European style and to shave their mustaches and beards. In order to create his own pool of broadly educated experts, Peter sent young noblemen to study abroad at the state's expense and personally kept track of their progress.

Peter the Great founded the Russian navy and formed a regular army based on compulsory military service for all nobles and on recruitments from the peasantry and regular citizens (communities delegated a specific number of young men to army service). Foreigners familiar with the newest developments in military science were actively sought for positions as senior officers and generals, and the Tsar diligently recruited Russian experts in all fields, including shipbuilding, military affairs, the sciences, and the arts. Starting with Peter, for the next two centuries, one of the duties of Russian ambassadors serving abroad was to recruit foreign specialists to work in Russia.

Peter the Great created a system of civil service in Russia by introducing the Table of Ranks: a document defining the classification of all military, naval, court and civilian officials into fourteen classes, from fourteen as the lowest up to the first. The Table of Ranks was designed to create a "social elevator" for hardworking military and government officials and to reduce the abuse of appointments and promotions in service.

The Northern War with Sweden (1700-1721) finally brought Peter access to the Baltic Sea and the trading possibilities in the region, and in 1703, the city of St. Petersburg was founded. In 1712, Petersburg was made the capital of Russia, and in 1721 Russia was declared an Empire, with Peter assuming the title of the Emperor of All Russia.

Peter the Great died in St. Petersburg in early 1724 in his small Winter Palace on the banks of the Winter Canal. He was the first Tsar to be buried in the Imperial crypt in the Peter and Paul Cathedral.

Advisor to Peter's Mother

You were an advisor to Peter's mother, Nataliya Naryshkina, who ruled behind the scenes until her death in 1694. You have watched Peter since he was named co-Tsar with his brother at age 10. Over the years Peter has spent most of his time playing army with his friends. A few years ago Peter toured Holland to apprentice as a shipbuilder and later to study European military organization. When he returned he began a series of sweeping reforms that threatened to change Russia into a carbon-copy of the west. You expressed misgivings and urged Peter to make slow changes. You were fired and replaced with advisors that agree with Peter's rapid westernization program. As a final insult you have to pay a "beard tax" just to keep your beard and must don the short coat, culottes (pants ending at the calf) and hose fashionable in Western Europe. You have been replaced with foreign (western) advisors – men who aren't even Russian!

Russian Boyar (Lord)

You are the equivalent of a Lord from the Feudal period of Europe. After much turmoil including rule by several fill-ins (regents), Peter has become Tsar. Some of the circumstances of Peter's rule, in your opinion, violated the traditions of Russian politics including the right of the Boyars, as representatives of the people, to influence political decisions. He took away your hereditary right to having influence at the court and replaced it with his "Table of Ranks", which allows him to appoint members of the nobility to powerful jobs based on his own opinion of them. You are worried that Peter will try to act like other absolutist rulers in Western Europe, particularly Louis XIV of France. Peter's building of a new capital on the Baltic instead of using the Kremlin in Moscow as his court seems a lot like Louis XIV's creating of the artificial world of Versailles to keep the French nobility busy and ineffective. He has already begun forcing members of the nobility who want to have influence to shave their traditional beards and dress like the French! He has also forbidden arranged marriages, long used by Boyars to make power-deals, based on the claim that they lead to domestic violence.

Russian Orthodox Priest

You are a priest in the Russian Orthodox Church. You started your career while Peter's father, Alexis I, was ruling. Alexis valued the Orthodox Church and maintained a role for Church rituals as part of his rule. You were shocked when Peter Romanov and his friends acted out a mock religious ceremony at a royal event instead of allowing the Church to preside. There was even nudity involved in the farce, something you find deeply offensive. You also object to Peter's attempts to make Russians wear the clothing and hair-styles of Western Europeans, particularly his tax on beards since traditionally Orthodox priests and Monks wear long beards. You are suspicious of science and non-religious philosophy because it denies the role of God and the supernatural in Russia's future. When the highest position in the church, the Patriarch of Moscow, came open, Peter refused to appoint anyone to the position creating instead of council of 10 Orthodox Priests called a synod. Most irritating of all perhaps, Peter made the minimum age for becoming a monk 50 years, claiming that being a monk was a waste of a man's time and energy and bad for Russia.

Craftsman in St. Petersburg

As a craftsman working in the new capital of St. Petersburg you have prospered. So many new construction projects have occurred to create this new capital on swampland that you haven't been without work for ten years. Now Peter is talking about creating a palace on the Baltic Sea that would rival Versailles itself! The only drawback is that the chief architects are all foreigners brought in to duplicate or at least imitate buildings from Western Europe. You are fond of the traditional Russian onion-dome structures and hate to see Russia become just like the west. You, like your father and grandfather before you, once had a long beard and wore the traditional Russian tunic. You had to shave your beard and start wearing western clothes to work in St. Petersburg. Perhaps due to your exposure to Peter's foreign advisors in St. Petersburg you have come to appreciate the clean-shaven and short-coated look of the west. Traditional Russian garb, so out of sync with Europe, seems unsophisticated and provincial now. Peter's insistence on math and science education for the Nobles seems like a good idea – too bad your own children probably won't be likewise educated.

Trader

You are a third-generation Russian trader whose family has navigated the Volga river system for decades, bringing trade goods from as far North as the Baltic Sea down south as far as the Black Sea along the Amber Route. Your trade in the Baltic Sea depends on the cooperation with Swedish and Norwegian traders. You also trade with Ottoman Turks in the Black sea. You don't do much direct trade with Western Europe because there are too many physical obstacles to trade. Trade to the East with Cathay (China) has been cut off for a long time by the remains of the Golden Horde, who dominated Russia for over two-hundred years in the time of your ancestors. Peter's plan to open up the Baltic Sea and Black Sea for maritime trade is intriguing to you, but you are worried that the Ottoman Navy and the Swedish monarch may close down trade entirely if threatened. The prospect of having year-round open water ports that are protected by a Russian navy is tempting since you would have direct access to western European goods and markets. You have little sympathy for the Boyars (nobles) plight under Peter: most nobles have all of their power and status because their ancestors chose to cooperate with the Mongol Golden Horde, and then stepped in to drive the Mongols out when they were weakened. During the Mongol reign the Boyars acted as tax collectors and did nothing to resist being more interested in protecting their own interests.

Naval officer

You are a naval officer in Tsar Peter's new fleet. You share command of a state-of-the-art warship designed by the nautical engineers and shipbuilders Peter recruited during his travels in Europe. You believe that Russia adopting the latest European maritime technology is a foregone conclusion: why wouldn't Russia want a navy capable of competing with the west? You approve of Peter's plans to consolidate power over the Balkan and Black Seas. You wonder which naval base – Balkan or Black Sea – you will be stationed at. It seems increasingly obvious to you that maritime power is essential for an empire: the English, French, and Dutch all have sizeable maritime influence. As a military man you follow dress and grooming regulations – the idea that citizens need to keep dressing and wearing their hair like barbarians is incomprehensible to you. You like the fact that your nobility is recognized by your status as an officer. Since your family doesn't own a significant portion of land, it never had say in the Duma (council of lords), so complaints about Peter don't move you. Since Peter required noble children to be educated in math and science, you feel intellectually superior to the backwater peasants and even your ancestors.