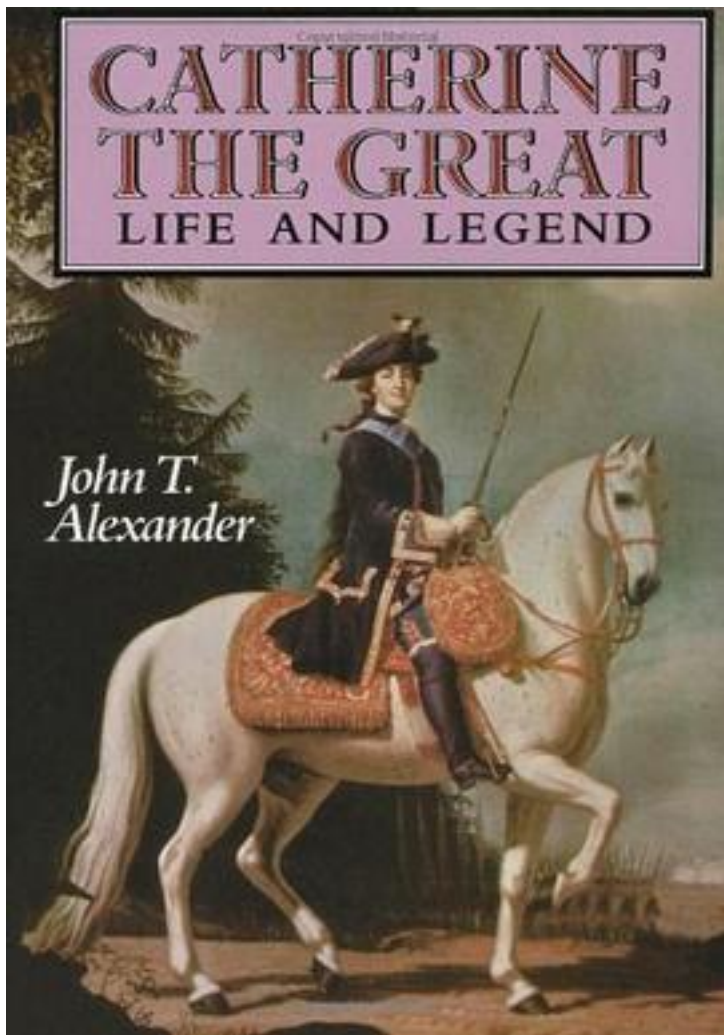


# Catherine the Great



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Admired for her achievements and satirized for her personal life, Catherine the Great

was one of the most celebrated monarchs in history, turning eighteenth-century Russia into arguably the largest and most powerful state since the fall of the Roman Empire. She promoted radical political ideas while emphasizing moderation in government. She could be ruthless when necessary, but she charmed everyone she met, joking at private dinner parties in the Hermitage, which she had built for her own use. Determined to endear herself to the Russians, she made religious devotions in which she never believed. Intimate and revealing, Catherine the Great examines the lifelong friendships that sustained the empress throughout her personal life and places her within the context of the royal court: its politics, its flourishing literature and the very culture that became central to her exercise of absolute power.

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