Between 1450 and 1800 many women gained power as rulers, some as reigning queens, others as regents. Identify two such powerful women and discuss how issues of gender, such as marriage and reproduction, influenced their ability to gain and exercise power.” (Question #3, 1994)

Between the years 1450 and 1800 there were several powerful women who ruled countries, including Queen Elizabeth I of England and Catherine the Great of Russia. Elizabeth I was known as the “Virgin Queen” because of her refusal to marry. She was mostly concerned with losing her power and throne. She also believed that she was capable of being the ruler of England by herself. There were times that she was pressured into marrying to produce an heir, but she never did marry. On the other hand Catherine the Great of Russia, unlike Elizabeth, did marry. However Catherine’s marriage to Peter did not work out and led to his assassination. After being declared Empress of Russia she became one of the most successful rulers of Russia and used her gender and sexuality to get her way.

I. Background Information
   A. Queen Elizabeth I (1533 – 1603)
      1. Queen of England and Ireland (r. 1558 – 1603)
      2. Parents were Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn
      3. House of Tudor
      4. Nicknames: Virgin Queen, Gloriana, and Good Queen Bess
      5. Last monarch of the Tudor Dynasty
   B. Catherine II (1729 – 1796)
      1. Catherine the Great of Russia
      2. Ruler of Russia (1762 – 1796)
      3. Married Peter III of Russia
      4. Parents were Christian Augustus and Johanna Elisabeth of Prussia
      5. Russian Orthodox

II. Queen Elizabeth I of England
   A. Marriage Issues
      1. Refused to marry because she was concerned that marrying would result in a loss of control over foreign affairs
      2. Given the nickname the “Virgin Queen” because she refused to marry and she accepted the title because…
         - Declared herself married to England
         - Enjoyed male suitors
         - Created a sort of personal myth, associating herself with mythological virgins like Diana, the Virgin Huntress, and Mary, the mother of Christ.
- By becoming the Virgin Queen she separated herself from other women, which made it easier for her to command respect in a patriarchal society

3. Didn’t want to be known as the Queen of Consort (a woman who marries a king and loses all political power and the throne after the husband’s death)

4. She also didn’t marry because of the traditional Patriarchal Society that existed at the time (where men are the decision makers and hold positions of power and prestige, and have the power to define reality and common situations) The traditional role for women at the time was to be housewives and mothers.

5. Another reason for refusal of marriage was because the examples given by her father. He married multiple women, which ended in executions. This made her fear losing her authority and her life.

B. Political Issues

1. She didn’t want foreign interferences if she married a foreign man, which included Phillip II of Spain who proposed marriage

2. John Stubbs: Criticized the proposal of Duke of Anjou to Elizabeth
   - Wrote a pamphlet that criticized the proposal
   - Objected that Duke of Anjou was Catholic
   - Argued that Elizabeth was 46 years old at the time and was too late to have children
   - Elizabeth was upset because she was willing to marry Anjou but she couldn’t because he was a French Catholic and she couldn’t marry him without causing a serious problem so when she saw this she ordered John Stubbs to be hung.
   - Instead she had his right arm cut off

3. Parliament petitioned her to marry
   - After she was diagnosed with smallpox they rushed her to find a suitor
   - Wanted her to produce an heir to continue the Tudor dynasty
   - Parliament was afraid she would die with no children and Mary Stuart, who was a Catholic, would ascend to the throne and threaten the Protestant Church in England

4. The force of Parliament
   - Parliament discussed the issue of House of Lords and House of Commons, which made Elizabeth extremely angry
   - Elizabeth Ordered 30 members from each house to attend a meeting at Whitehall Palace and said it was her decision to marry or not.

5. Privy Council
   - Feared that France would rekindle their relationship with Scotland and that England would face threats on two fronts
   - This wouldn’t be an issue if England and Spain were connected by marriage so they thought of the best candidate, who was Phillip of Spain after Elizabeth’s half sister Mary died
   - However the idea of marrying a Roman Catholic was not acceptable to many people because religious upset was a major problem in England when Elizabeth ascended to the throne and many historians regard religion as Elizabeth’s major obstacle – more than her being a woman.
III. Catherine the Great of Russia

A. Marriage Issues
1. Her marriage to Peter III was not a happy union, but a tactical move
   - Showed little to no affection towards each other
   - Peter and Catherine were different in such ways
     - Peter didn’t particularly like Russia. He idolized Frederick the Great of Prussia and ended a war Russia had been fighting with Prussia by conceding all of Russia’s gains to Prussia
     - Catherine, born in Germany, wanted to become more Russian. She had become more accustomed to Russia.
2. She enjoyed many male suitors, including Count Grigorii Orlov who later helps her in being titled Empress of Russia

B. Rise to power
1. Tried to win over the support of the Russians by her dedication to Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church
2. After coming to the throne Peter created many enemies within the government, the military, and the church
3. Soon after, Catherine became involved in the assassination of Peter
   - The imperial guard supported Catherine overthrow of Peter
   - Placed his son Paul on the throne
   - Named Catherine as regent until he was old enough to rule on his own
   - Those who were involved in the assassination of Peter underestimated Catherine’s ambitions but she aimed for a more powerful role
4. Declared herself Catherine II ruler of Russia with the help of one of her suitors, Count Grigorii Orlov

C. Catherine’s reign of Russia
1. Goal was to rationalize and reform the administration of the Russian Empire
2. She accomplished many impressive things during her reign
   - She further increased central control over the provinces
   - Built schools and hospitals
   - Introduced small pox vaccination
   - Promoted education of women
   - Extended religious tolerance
   - Expanded Russia’s borders to the black sea and into central Europe
To sum up, Elizabeth I of England and Catherine the Great of Russia were fine examples of the powerful woman during the years of 1450-1800. Elizabeth the “Virgin Queen” was determined to not marry but stated that she was married to England. She had many suitors and proposals during her time but did not accept because of her beliefs. On the other hand, Catherine the Great had an unsuccessful marriage. She used her many suitors and her wittiness to gain power. After she rose to her title she became well known because of her great accomplishments through out the many long years.

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