

**Modern History Sourcebook:  
Documents on the Division of Poland, 1772, 1793, 1795**

**From:** <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1795Poland-division.html>

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*Poland, once one of the largest European states, had had a very weak central administration. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (1772, 1793, 1795) it was gradually divided among three more modern centralized states- Prussia, Austria, and Russia.*

**Frederick II of Prussia: *Memoirs***

The new claims [of Catherine II] aroused all Poland. The nobles of the kingdom appealed to the Turks for help. Soon a war broke out in which the Russians had only to show themselves to vanquish the Turks at every encounter. This war changed the whole political system of Europe. A new arena opened up and one would have had to be inept or stupidly dull not to have profited by such an advantageous chance.... I seized opportunity by the forelock and, by dint of negotiating and intriguing, I succeeded in indemnifying our monarchy for its past losses by incorporating Polish Prussia into my old provinces. This acquisition was one of the most important we could make because it joined Pomerania to East Prussia and, by making us masters of the Vistula, gained us the double advantage of being able to defend that kingdom [East Prussia] and of drawing considerable tolls from the Vistula, since all the trade of Poland goes by that river. This acquisition, which appears to me to mark an epoch in the annals of Prussia, seems remarkable enough for me to transmit the details of it to posterity, the more so as I was both witness and actor in the affair.

From *Oeuvres de Frederic le Grand* (Berlin: Rodolphe Decker), Vol. 6, pp. 6-7.

**Maria Theresa of Austria: *Letter***

... Firmian will receive a lengthy document with instructions in regard to our present situation, our engagements toward Russia, Prussia, and the Turks, but particularly in regard to this unfortunate partition of Poland, which is costing me ten years of my life. It will make plain the whole unhappy history of that affair. How many times have I refused to agree to it! But disaster after disaster heaped upon us by the Turks; misery, famine, and pestilence at home; no hope of assistance either from France or England, and the prospect of being left isolated and threatened with a war both with Russia and Prussia,-it was all these considerations that finally forced me to accede to that unhappy proposal, which will remain a blot on my whole reign. God grant that I be not held responsible for it in the other world! I confess that I cannot keep from talking about this affair. I have taken it so to heart that it poisons and imbitters all my days, which even without that are sad enough. I must stop writing about it at once, or I shall worry myself into the blackest melancholy....

From *Readings in European History*, J. H. Robinson, trans. (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1906), Vol. 2.

### **Catherine II of Russia: *Letter***

That dolt Hertzberg [a Prussian statesman] deserves a thorough thrashing all by himself; he has no more knowledge of history than my parrot. He has had the impudence to say that Russia, in taking possession of Polotsk, could produce no title to it; he should have said that Russia did not attach any importance to outdated titles. For Polotsk was given by Vladimir I to his eldest son Iziaslav.... The fifth son of Olgerd, Jagailo or Jacob, in 1386 became king of Poland and a convert to the Latin faith under the name of Wladyslaw, when he married Jadwiga, queen and heiress of Poland. Thus it was he who joined Lithuania to Poland, but the stupid, ignorant minister of state [Hertzberg] does not know this: arrogance makes him ignorant, stupid, and coarse like a Pomeranian ox. The under-fed creature (the late king starved him, by his own admission) does not know that not only in Polotsk but in all of Lithuania up to the seventeenth century all governmental affairs were transacted in the Russian language; that all the Lithuanian archives are written in Russian; that all state documents were written with Russian characters in the Russian language; that all events since the creation of the world were dated according to the usage of our Greek church and that in this matter even the Greek ecclesiastical indictions were used as the authority—all this being proof that up to the seventeenth century the Greek religion was dominant not only in Polotsk but in all of Lithuania and had been the faith of the princes and grand dukes; that all the churches there, notably the cathedrals, have the altars placed eastward, according to the custom of the Eastern church. If you need still more evidence you have only to ask for it; it is not difficult to prove what is true. Moreover, Polotsk and Lithuania have been taken and retaken about twenty times, and no treaty was ever concluded without one side or the other claiming part or all of it, depending on circumstances. That fool of a minister of state deserves an even sounder thrashing for his ignorance regarding the peoples he lays claim to on behalf of his stupid master state [*Herresstaat*]. The silly ass!

From *A Source Book for Russian History*, G. Vernadsky, trans. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), Vol. 2, pp. 409-410.

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