

## THE CONTRADICTION POTEMKIN TAVRICHESKIY

Rendered by *Yana Datchenko*, April 2018

*Self-edited*

*"He plays chess with one hand. With the other hand he conquers peoples. With one foot he defeats enemies, and with the other he tramples the shores of the universe."*

*(the poet G. Derzhavin wrote about Potemkin in his collection of works "Choirs")*

Grigory Potemkin had a many-sided personality, undoubtedly interesting and contradictory. While speaking of Grigory Alexandrovich, some people immediately recall "Potemkin's villages" (Potemkin villages are from the historical myth about the sham villages that were allegedly built by the order of Prince Potemkin along the route of Catherine II during her trip to the Northern Black Sea region in 1787 – the territories of modern Ukraine and Crimea that were conquered from the Ottoman Empire). Others notice the importance of his role in politics and public life in Catherine's age. There were also negative references concerning Prince Tavrishesky's character and pride. In any case, there were no indifferent people among his contemporaries. The Empress highly appreciated Prince Grigory and spoke of him extremely flatteringly, both during his lifetime and after his death.

This is how Catherine II wrote to the German publicist Grimm about the death of Prince Tavrishesky, *"He did not fulfil even half of what he was able to do."* In the same letter, the Russian Empress spoke of Potemkin as a responsible and consistent person, *"He was angry when he thought that the matter was not done as it should have been."*

Prince Grigory was passionately devoted to the Empress. He was to her not only a favourite, an adviser and a student, but also a friend. Catherine wrote that Potemkin was important to her and had rare qualities, *"He had courage in his heart, courage in his mind, courage in his soul. Therefore, we always understood each other and did not pay attention to those who understood less than we did."*

The glory of Grigory Potemkin Tavrishesky spread all over the world: the

monarchs of such states as Austria, Denmark, Prussia, and Sweden treated the Prince with great respect.

In his student years, while studying in the private school, and then at Moscow University, Potemkin showed his unique talents and abilities. A sharp mind, phenomenal memory, and natural curiosity provided Grigory the fame of almost "a prodigy of science." Potemkin "lit up" quickly, but just as quickly his interest faded. After a year of studying at the university, in 1755, young Grisha was awarded a gold medal for his successful studies. In a year Potemkin was introduced to Empress Elizabeth as one of the 12 most promising students. And a year later he was expelled from the university for "laziness and non-attendance". The reason for such behavior was his loss of interest in sciences: the absence of authoritative personalities able to discern Potyomkin's talents and develop them within the walls of the university led to apathy and laziness. Disappointed in science, Grigory decided to enter on a military career.

Potemkin and Catherine II had known each other long before Grigory became her favorite. Having the title of Sergeant of the Horse Guards, the former student stayed in St. Petersburg in 1761. The young man entered the disposal of His Highness Prince George Ludwig, Duke of Schleswig-Holstein, Colonel of the Horse Guards and General Field Marshal. The Prince did not make an impression on Potemkin, after which the young man from the regiment joined the conspiracy against Peter III together with his comrades.

On the day of the palace coup, June 28, 1762, Grigory Potemkin and Catherine II saw each other for the first time. The new Empress liked young Grigory, for his support he received 10 thousand rubles, 400 serfs and the rank of the second lieutenant, which was more than his friends and fellow sergeants got.

Catherine II and Grigory Potemkin's love story began in 1774. That year was crucial for Grigory: the former favorite Orlov lost his influence over the sovereign, and Catherine II brought Potemkin closer to her, awarding him the rank of General-in-Chief, appointing him Vice-President of the Military Collegium and

granting the title of Count. The new favorite made a lot of noise – all the ambassadors and the representatives of other powers began to scribble letters and reports to their monarchs about the new "case" of Catherine the Great. The German representative Solms noted in his correspondence that, in his opinion, Count Potemkin, thanks to his intelligence and shrewdness, was able to win the heart of the Empress and completely replace the former favourite Orlov. The Englishman Gunning described Grigory as follows: "His figure is huge and disproportionate, and appearance is by no means attractive. *At the same time, he knows people well and is more perceptive than his compatriots.*"

Potemkin founded several cities including Kherson, which took a special place in his life. September 6, 1775 Vice-President of the Military Collegium and Governor-General of Novorossia Potemkin presented a report to Catherine II on the construction of a fortress on the border with Turkey and the Crimean Khanate called Kherson. In the next three years the idea of a simple fortress was transformed into the idea of a shipbuilding center and a port under the protection of a fortress. In June 18, 1778, Catherine II issued a decree on the foundation of Kherson. That same year she approved the project of the city, developed by the architect M.N.Vetoshnikov from St. Petersburg.

For the first time, Potemkin arrived in Kherson in May 1780 with a sum of several million rubles for the construction and improvement of the city. He summoned 2,000 craftsmen, carpenters, blacksmiths and bricklayers from the whole Russian Empire for shipbuilding and urban construction, he also transferred 10 infantry regiments from his fourth division to Kherson to build a fortress and a settlement.

Based on:

1. [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Потёмкинские\\_деревни](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Потёмкинские_деревни)
2. <https://екатерина2.рф/связи/фавориты/григорий-потёмкин/>
3. <http://mycity.kherson.ua/people-kherson/people-ru/potemkin-g-a.html>
4. <https://khersondaily.com/news/chto-potemkin-delal-v-hersone>

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