

Ivan the Terrible - THE BAD REIGN



Ivan IV was a dichotomy. Often cruel, he was an effective leader who strengthened Russia's stature at home and abroad.

Primitive at times, he thrust Russia into the "modern" world. Bringing order out of chaos, he personally caused great despair with his senseless terror.

Very religious, he committed all kinds of atrocities. From boiling people in oil to cutting out their tongues, impaling their bodies, and executing entire families, Ivan Grozny lived up to his name.

As his paranoia increased, the Tsar appeared to go completely mad. Kurbsky, the great general who led Ivan to victory over Kazan, defected to Poland. Perceiving he needed a cadre of troops completely loyal to him, Ivan created the first secret police (the Oprichnina) in Russia.

Dedicated to the Tsar, and devoted to do his bidding only, members of this elite group (called *Oprichniki*) gave their total allegiance to Ivan. He handpicked each one.

Dressed as monks, they wore black garments and rode black horses (whose saddles were adorned with symbols of a broom and a dog's head). Their job was to sniff-out terror.

Many (but not all) were criminals who became marauding thugs. (Notable exceptions were the future Tsar, Boris Godunov and Anastasia's brother, Nikita Romanov.) Committing crimes, under the apparent authority of the Tsar, *Oprichniki* swept across the countryside, confiscating boyars' lands and estates.

Contributing to the terror which gripped the country, Ivan sentenced thousands to internal exile in remote areas of the country. When he ordered executions, families and servants were often condemned as well.

On one of the Tsar-led marches, in 1570, Ivan's generals were unsure of their destination. It was Novogrod, a former Moscow rival, where Ivan sacked the city and had thousands of people butchered. Novgorod, it is said, never fully recovered.

The carnage did not escape the attention of foreigners like Sir Jerome Horsay, who carried and delivered letters which Queen Elizabeth I and Ivan IV exchanged. Sir Thomas Randolph noted (in *The Account of Sir Thomas Randolph*) that he "will leave" the country.

George Turbervile, Randolph's secretary on that 1568 British diplomatic visit to Muscovy, put his observations into scathing lyrics (quoted in *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom: Russia in the Accounts of Sixteenth Century English Voyagers*, Lloyd E. Berry and Robert O. Crummey [editors], pages 75-84):

*In such a savage soil
where laws do bear no sway
But all is at the king his will
to save or else to slay.*

As the Tsar descended into madness, he saw enemies both real and imagined. He retreated inward, into churches and palaces, into safe places surrounded by walls. Secrecy was important to him while nobles lost heads (with their bodies cut into pieces).

It is said that Ivan planned torture sessions while he attended mass. Although he cared deeply for his family, even they did not escape his explosive personality.

His son Ivan, the Tsarevich, was one of his victims.

More information about Ivan the Terrible can be gleaned on Wikipedia website: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan_the_Terrible