Chapter 8

Ivan the Terrible: Autocrat

Ivan IV was among Russia's most striking rulers. Some historians think he was mentally unbalanced, at least for part of his reign. His centralizing, autocratic, and tyrannical policies influenced Russian politics long after his death. His conquest of Kazan and Astrakhan brought the Volga River under Russian control and opened up new opportunities for further eastward expansion and empire building. But his expensive and extended Livonian War (1558–1583), plus his terroristic domestic policies, left a more immediate legacy—impoverishment.

IVAN IV: SOURCES AND PERSONALITY

A central problem in dealing with Ivan IV is the reliability of sources. Until 1971, historians relied heavily on Prince Andrei Kurbsky's *History of Ivan IV* and on a series of letters supposedly exchanged between Kurbsky and Ivan. In that year, however, Edward Keenan's *The Kurbsky-Groznyi Apocrypha* appeared and argued that none of these works were written by Kurbsky or Ivan but were probably seventeenth-century forgeries. Keenan's work ignited a hot debate that still smolders.[1]

One upshot of it has been to befog Ivan's biography. The *History of Ivan IV* charges that when Ivan was twelve or so, he began throwing animals down from the tops of houses and that in his mid-teens he galloped around the squares and markets with his followers beating and robbing the common people. Both actions as well as some passages from the alleged correspondence between Ivan and Kurbsky contribute vivid, but not completely reliable, biographical detail.

Eight years before Keenan's 1971 work, an earlier source affecting knowledge of Ivan IV was unearthed—his corpse. Soviet experts discovered bony outgrowths (osteophytes) and a high level of mercury in Ivan's bones. Keenan has argued that this belated postmortem indicates that Ivan was chronically sick as an adult and that he took large doses of medicines containing mercury as well as abundant

[1]For a good recent overview of the decades-long debate, see Charles Halperin, "Edward Keenan and the Kurbskii-Groznyi Correspondence in Hindsight," JGO 46 (1998): 376–403.

alcohol to relieve his pain. Moreover, such a combination of pain and painkillers would make it unlikely that Ivan was quite the forceful, all-powerful autocrat sometimes depicted. Other historians, however, have not read quite so much into these postmortem results.

What primarily remains available to shed light on Ivan's life is the evidence of the policies he approved and enacted. Foreigners have also left accounts of what they witnessed, including some of Ivan's actions. Russian folklore tells both something about Ivan and about the "folk." Of course, all this material, and that in Muscovite chronicles, must be examined with care.

The first thing that strikes us about Ivan IV is the sobriquet "Terrible." It is a somewhat misleading translation of the Russian "*groznyi*," which might better be translated as awe-inspiring, formidable, or menacing. Some English works have referred to Ivan IV as "the Dread," which also comes close to expressing the original Russian meaning. Certainly, those who linked Ivan IV with "*groznyi*" in Russian folklore usually meant it as a compliment, as an American student might when referring to a football linebacker as "awesome."

The folklore image of Ivan as "awesome," however exaggerated in detail, was based on some solid facts: his victories over Kazan and Astrakhan and his harsh destruction of many of his enemies and presumed enemies. Not only was folklore usually not revolted by Ivan's violence, but also, as Maureen Perrie has written, it is hard to differ with those who describe the commonfolk's attitude in folklore as one of "malicious glee" toward boyar executions.[2]

Granted Ivan was "*groznyi*," but was he so for sound reasons—as depicted, for example, in Sergei Eisenstein's classic film *Ivan the Terrible*? Or were many of his violent activities motivated by suspicions bordering on paranoia? Or were they not so much a reflection of mental derangement but extreme examples of a ruler's more typical quest for greater power? As often in history, there is no simple answer.

CHILDHOOD, CORONATION, AND EARLY DOMESTIC POLICIES

Ivan IV was born in 1530. He was the long-awaited son that Vasili III had married a second time to obtain. Ivan's mother, Elena, was from the Glinsky clan, part of which had emigrated from Lithuania early in Vasili III's reign. Ironically, this mother of the future conqueror of two Mongol khanates claimed descent from the Mongol Mamai, who was defeated by Dmitri Donskoi in 1380. According to a chronicle account, which we are free to doubt, the wife of the khan of Kazan stated to Russian envoys soon after Ivan's birth that a tsar with two teeth had been born and that "with one he will devour us, and with the other you."

Ivan was only three when his father died—like many princes before him, Vasili was tonsured and became a monk on his deathbed, hoping no doubt it would ease his path to heaven. What followed over the next decade and a half, especially after the death of Ivan's mother in 1538, was an insecure childhood for the boy prince. As he looked on while others ruled in his name, various important boyar clan

[2]*The Image of Ivan the Terrible in Russian Folklore* (Cambridge, Eng. 1987), p.60.

families and their supporters engaged in a chaotic, almost Mafia-like, power struggle. Even before his mother's death, two of Ivan's paternal uncles had died in prison. They were not alone. Both before and after them, others were imprisoned or executed, or both. Between 1539 and 1542, two metropolitans were also successively removed by court factions.

Although the competition of boyar clans was normally kept within stable boundaries, the absence of an adult on the throne upset the political equilibrium. As one faction of clans after another vied for dominant influence at court, the violence escalated, both as means of weakening rival factions and as retribution against such means. These struggles were power struggles, motivated primarily by self-interest, not any ideological or class interests. Whatever their source, the violence they bred probably influenced the young Ivan, permanently scarring him.

In January 1547, after the most important boyar families had apparently reached some sort of settlement, the sixteen-year-old Ivan was crowned tsar. In the four-hour ceremony inside the Assumption Cathedral, this tall young prince was the first Russian monarch to be crowned with this imposing title, which by now implied superiority to all other monarchs. The Metropolitan Makari presided over the ceremony, symbolizing church support for such a powerful God-appointed monarchy. (See Chapter 10 for an analysis of autocratic developments in Muscovy up to 1689.) As before, various religious rituals and images continued throughout Ivan's reign and beyond to symbolize the spiritual role of the Muscovite ruler. He was not only to rule over his subjects, but to do so in such a way as to help them gain eternal salvation.

Three weeks after the coronation, Ivan married Anastasia Romanova of the powerful Zakharin-Yurev clan. But the happy events that began the year gradually gave way to some joyless June days. After a deadly fire leaped from one wooden building to another in central areas of the capital, riots broke out. Rumors circulated that the Glinskys had used witchcraft to start the fire—fears of sorcery were common in this era. Enraged townspeople began a witch-hunt for these powerful relatives of the tsar. The mobs were possibly encouraged by some of the Glinsky clan's rivals at court. One of the Glinskys, Ivan's uncle Yuri, was pulled out of the Assumption Cathedral and executed.

After the government had restored order and punished the riots' ringleaders, Ivan began decreeing various measures. They are usually referred to as reforms and were certainly aimed at increasing government and church efficiency and decreasing corruption and other causes. Yet they were also designed to strengthen the power of the central government. In devising and carrying them out, Ivan was no doubt assisted by advisers. Exactly who these advisers were and what collective name should be given to them, either at this point or later in his regime, remains a subject of dispute.

Like any good politician, Ivan started out by garnering support for his intended initiatives. In 1549, he met with selected church leaders and nobles to inform them of his plans. The nobles included both service gentry and boyars—the number of boyar clans had increased significantly since 1533, and by 1555 about forty individuals held boyar rank. During the next several decades, Ivan sporadically met with such groups and perhaps even added some Moscow townsmen. These gatherings referred to individually as *zemskii sobor* (assembly of the land), were later

idealized by nineteenth-century Slavophiles like Constantine Aksakov. Under Ivan, however, it was not the representative body of all classes that Aksakov often depicted it as being but an unrepresentative one, called together by Ivan primarily to obtain support for already-made decisions. Although these *zemskii sobory* had no legal rights or powers, Ivan and his advisers were shrewd enough to realize that even an autocratic government needs a certain amount of willing cooperation.

In 1550 Ivan's government issued a new law code (or *Sudebnik*), designed to curb judicial corruption as well as strengthen the central government. The following year, Ivan called together a church council (the Council of a Hundred Chapters) for similar reasons. He wished to strengthen the bishops' and Moscow's control over local churches and to curb church abuses and the moral shortcomings of both clergy and lay Orthodox. Steps toward church centralization were also taken in this early period by recognizing and incorporating many local saints into one Russian church calendar. In the middle of 1551, Ivan forbade monasteries and church leaders to buy nobles' estates and placed restrictions upon the nobles' rights to will property to monasteries. Despite these prohibitions, however, the church continued to obtain new lands.

In 1550, Ivan began creating a permanent force of musketeers (*streltsy*). At about this time, he ordered his officials to provide more lands in the Moscow area for about 1,000 noble military servitors. In 1556, he spelled out the exact military obligation of each landowner, which increased with the size of one's holdings.

During the 1550s, Ivan improved the organization of his central government bureaucracy by establishing a number of chanceries—later called *prikazy*. Each, like that of Foreign Affairs, dealt with a single area of government concern. During this same decade, Ivan's government greatly expanded a local government initiative first introduced in 1539. To deal more effectively with widespread banditry, Ivan substantially increased the number of elected district judicial officials. He also created a group of new tax collectors, apparently convinced that the local merchants, well-to-do peasants, and other who received this task would perform it more efficiently and honestly than the governors had. Yet even these apparent decentralizing steps seem to have been designed to strengthen central government control, for the new local officials were made directly responsible to Moscow.

Despite all these Moscow initiatives, however, the central government's control over the country still did not penetrate deeply, especially as compared to more modern governments. It was able to collect taxes, field an army, dispense some justice, and strengthen the powers of landowning nobles and bishops—in exchange for their military or other services to the state. Many people, among both the elite and more common folk, evaded some government impositions and often resisted and frustrated its new initiatives. The issuing of decrees did not always mean that they were carried out the way Moscow intended.

MUSCOVY EXPANSION: SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

In his efforts to expand Muscovy, Ivan the Terrible went beyond his predecessors by concentrating on the conquest of non-Russian areas. In the east, he was successful; in the west, he was not.

Eastward Expansion

In 1552, after several earlier failed campaigns, Ivan captured Kazan. This city was just east of the Volga, about 500 miles from Moscow, and it was the capital of the khanate of Kazan. Political, economic, and religious reasons intertwined to influence Ivan's decision to take it.

Frequent raids from the khanate had resulted in numerous captive Russians in Kazan, most of whom had been, or soon would be, sold in slave markets. Historians differ on the number of Russian captives in Kazan. Vernadsky says more than 100,000 by 1551; Pelenski places the number between 15,000 and 30,000. Russian diplomatic pressure led to the release of many of them in the late summer of 1551, but Ivan insisted on the release of the rest.

Another political consideration was that Russia had exercised sporadic hegemony over Kazan from 1516 to 1546 and continued to compete with the Crimean khanate for influence in the area. Moreover, internal dissension, both among the Kazan Tatars themselves and between the Kazan government and some of the other subjugated peoples of their khanate, provided opportunities too good to pass up. Especially noteworthy was the appeal for Muscovite protection by a large group of the Cheremis (Mari), a Finno-Ugric people northwest of Kazan. Ivan accepted their appeal. His subsequent refusal to recognize Kazan's claims on their territory further worsened relations. In 1550, Ivan founded the fortress of Sviiazhsk on Cheremis territory and used it as a staging ground for his attack on Kazan.

Because the Volga was important for Russia's foreign trade and the khanate was not reliable enough to assist it always, economics also propelled Ivan to take Kazan. The possibility of obtaining new farm lands was another inducement.

One of the biggest supporters of the Kazan campaigns was Metropolitan Makari, who thought of the Russian troops as "soldiers of Christ" and the Kazan Tatars as "infidels and enemies of Christ . . . who had always spilled Christian blood and destroyed holy churches."[3] Religious support was rewarded by Ivan's religious policies once he took Kazan. The day after he entered the city, Ivan looked on as the site of a former Muslim mosque was consecrated for a new cathedral. He also ordered the destruction of other mosques, had Kazan's streets blessed with holy water, and granted monasteries and churches land within the city and beyond. In 1555, he, Metropolitan Makari, and other leading churchmen were on hand for the investiture of the first archbishop of Kazan. Ivan strongly encouraged and aided the new archbishop's attempts to win converts from Islam to Christianity but by peaceful means. These proselytizing efforts, however, enjoyed only mixed results.

Meanwhile, the victory of 1552 was followed up by another in 1556, this time over Astrakhan, near the mouth of the Volga. The campaign was motivated largely by economics and rebellions against Russian control by some of the Volga tribes. In 1553, English merchants searching for a northern sea route to the Far East were

[3]Quoted in Michael Khodarkovsky, "Ignoble Savages and Unfaithful Subjects: Constructing Non-Christian Identities in Early Modern Russia," in *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples*. 1700–1917, eds. Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini (Bloomington, 1997), p. 17.

FIGURE 8.1. Cathedral of St. Basil the Blessed, Red Square, Moscow. Constructed in 1555–1561 to celebrate Ivan IV's victory over Kazan.

forced by bad weather to land on Russia's White Sea coast. They soon took advantage of their situation to come to Moscow and negotiate a trade agreement with Ivan IV. As a result of England's interest in Central Asian and Persian trade, Ivan was further encouraged to control the whole length of the Volga so as to insure Russian control over, and participation in, any such trade via this mighty river.

Ivan's victories over Kazan and Astrakhan were of enormous significance and not only for trading reasons. As Russian peasants moved into the fertile Volga and Kama river basins, they began a steady advance over steppelands that had once been ruled by mighty nomads. Perhaps even more importantly, the victories paved the way for further eastward expansion and the development of an increasingly multinational, multicultured empire. The conquered peoples were non-Christian and non-Slavic. Just to their east lie vast, but sparsely populated, Siberia, stretching thousands of miles to the Pacific.

Already in 1581, a small band of Cossacks, hired by the rich Stroganov family, invaded the khanate of Siberia, a Tatar state ruling over various indigenous peoples. Following Ivan's earlier Volga victories, the Stroganovs had developed salt and iron mines from the upper Kama River area to the Urals. Now they used the Cossacks to establish themselves in western Siberia and take full advantage of the rich furs covering its animals. Perrie has speculated that Ermak, the Cossack leader, may have agreed to attack in an attempt to obtain a government pardon for

previous "outlaw" acts along the Volga. By Ivan's death in 1584, Ermak and his colorful Cossacks had captured Sibir, the capital of the Siberian khanate on the Irtysh River near latter-day Tobolsk (see Map 8.1).

Livonian War

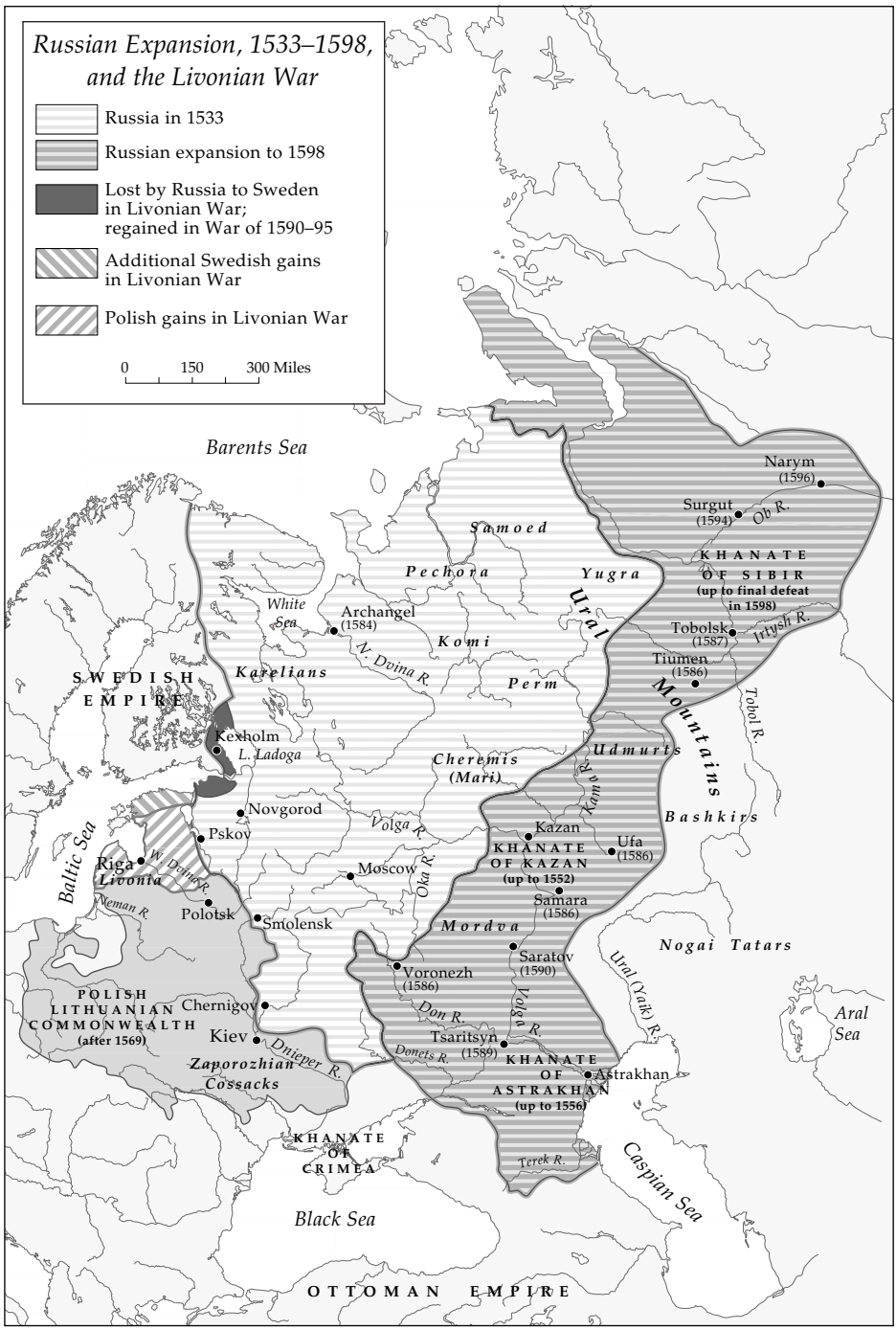
Fueling the Stroganovs' quest for furs were the heightened trading possibilities opened by both Ivan's conquests and his contact with the English. A Western Europe now glutted with gold from the New World provided ample inducement to expand the fur supply to meet the growing European market. Yet if increased Western trading possibilities helped fuel Russia's successful eastern expansion, it also helped stimulate Ivan to attempt a western expansion in Livonia that ultimately turned out unsuccessful.

At first, Livonia, with its flourishing Baltic ports and fertile farmlands, seemed an inviting target. Its conquest would facilitate trade and appropriate contacts with the West, which the Muscovite government believed were being deliberately hampered by certain Baltic powers. Although the Germanic Knights still ruled over Livonia's Estonian and Latvian peasants, the Knights were no longer that formidable. They now acrimoniously had to share power with Catholic bishops and with Germanic Protestant merchants who dominated various parts of the country. Whether Catholic or Protestant, however, Ivan's government did not consider them true Christians, and Muscovite ideology depicted Ivan's future western campaigns, as it had earlier his eastern battles against Kazan, as a crusade in behalf of the true faith.

After a preliminary three-year war with Sweden, Ivan's forces invaded Livonia in 1558 and were at first successful. They captured Dorpat and Narva but then agreed to an armistice to prepare for a campaign against the Crimean Tatars. After the failed Crimean expedition of 1559, Ivan renewed his attack on Livonia. But despite some additional victories, the advances of the Russian army soon came to a halt. Poland-Lithuania, Denmark, and Sweden had no intention of allowing Russia to capture this vital region. Stimulated by Livonian appeals for help—and the chance to dominate areas of Livonia—Poland-Lithuania and Sweden threw themselves into the conflict and became the chief opponents of Russia for control of the region. The Livonian War continued ebbing and flowing until 1583, just a year before Ivan's death. Besides the war battles themselves, several other developments helped determine the final outcome.

In 1569, the loose union between Poland and Lithuania became tighter with the signing of the Union of Lublin. Whereas previously the two nations has been united primarily by their common king, the new agreement created a commonwealth with a common parliament, currency, and foreign policy. In addition, Poland took over Lithuania's Ukrainian lands. The most important effect the new union had on the Livonian War was to bring the dominant Polish part of it more actively into the struggle.

In 1571, the Crimean Tatars attacked Russia and penetrated to the capital itself. Backed by the Ottoman Turks, the Crimean Tatars had not reconciled themselves to the taking of Astrakhan and had made three separate attempts in the 1560s to



MAP 8.1

wrest it from Moscow. In 1571, with most of his military engaged in the Livonian conflict, Ivan's defenses were weak. The Tatars plundered part of Moscow and left much of it in flames and strewn with thousands of Russian corpses. The invaders returned to the Crimea with tremendous booty, including many Russian prisoners. Fearing further Tatar attacks, Ivan was forced to put the Livonian conflict on the back burner and send troops to shore up the southern defenses. Although this hindered his Livonian effort, it did enable him to defeat the Tatars in an important battle when they again invaded Russia in 1572.[4]

That same year offered Ivan additional hope when the Polish king, Sigismund II, died. Several chaotic years followed in which Russia and other foreign powers attempted to influence two different Polish elections. Unfortunately for Russia, however, the Hungarian prince Stephen Bathory emerged in 1575 as the new Polish king.

After a few years of consolidating power in his new commonwealth, Bathory won important victories over the Russians in 1578–1581, At the same time, the Swedes were also pushing Russian forces back in the area south of the Gulf of Finland, both in Livonia itself and in Russian fortress cities to its east. Finally in 1582, Ivan signed an armistice with Poland and in the following year with Sweden. By the first agreement, the prewar borders of the two signatories were reinstated, and Russia turned over its Livonia conquests to Poland. By the second agreement, Russia recognized, at least temporarily, the loss of such fortress-cities as Ivangorod and almost all of Russia's undeveloped coast on the Gulf of Finland and part of Karelia west and north of Lake Ladoga. Ivan was allowed to keep only a small bit of territory around the mouth of the River Neva. Sweden maintained its earlier gains in northern Livonia, including such cities as Reval (Tallinn) and Narva (see Maps 8.1 and 10.1)

Thus, twenty-five years of costly conflict had left the Russians with only losses—and not just territorial ones. To appreciate the war's impact fully, however, we must first examine Ivan's domestic actions during this prolonged war.

DOMESTIC POLICIES, 1558–1584

Most of the terrorist activities for which Ivan IV became infamous occurred after the Livonian War had begun in 1558. These actions were related to Ivan's changing state of mind.

Ivan's Growing Distrust

The boyars' reaction to a severe illness suffered by Ivan in 1553 kindled his progressively violent and suspicious behavior Although Eisenstein simplified this response in filming *Ivan the Terrible,* his depiction was basically correct. Ivan did ask his boyars to swear their support, should he die, to his infant son, Dmitri.

[4]Although the Crimean Tatars hindered Ivan's Livonian efforts, Janet Martin has indicated in some detail how other Tatars played an important part in the Livonian campaigns. See her essay, "Tatars in the Muscovite Army during the Livonian War," in MSR.

Some, perhaps recalling the bloody feuds of Ivan's youth and not wanting another child on the throne, hesitated and at first preferred Prince Vladimir of Staritsa, a cousin of Ivan's. Although the still sick Ivan was able to change their minds, he seems never to have forgotten this moment of "disloyalty." Yet for a while, his hurt smoldered without breaking into flames.

Foreign policy differences and military failures further contributed to Ivan's distrust. Before the Livonian War, some of his advisers had recommended concentrating instead on defeating the Crimean Tatars. After the start of the Livonian War, Ivan's anger and impatience increased. He blamed defeats on boyars and other officials he had once relied upon and punished them.

In 1560, Ivan's wife, Anastasia, died.[5] Although still under thirty, she had given birth to six children and seen four of them die—including the baby Dmitri, whose nurse dropped him in a river when a gangplank overturned under her. Unsupported rumors surfaced that Anastasia was the victim of foul play. (A recent re-examination of her remains has led to further speculation on this question.) The loss of his wife further destabilized Ivan. A chronicle account admits that he became wild and lustful.

A year and two weeks after Anastasia's death, he married his second wife, a Circassian princess, who at first knew little of Russia or its language. She and Ivan had a son, who soon died, and she herself died in 1569. Then, from 1571 to 1580, Ivan married five more times. Eisenstein once wrote that what stuck in Russians' memories about these wives of Ivan was their peculiar family names, such as Nagaia (naked) and Sobakina (canine).

Shortly after his second marriage in 1561, Ivan began taking harsher measures against those who angered him. From 1562 to 1564, he increasingly resorted to arrests, imprisonments, forced loyalty oaths, exile to monasteries and convents, and executions. Incidents of boyar desertions to Poland-Lithuania also increased. The defection of Prince Andrei Kurbsky in the spring of 1564 was especially significant. The death in late 1563 of Metropolitan Makari, a moderating influence, might also have been important.

In response to the heightened tension that Ivan himself had largely created, he took an unusual step in early December 1564. He loaded up his wife, two sons, and many valuable possessions and took off in a large convoy. After a brief stop at the St. Sergius Monastery, he traveled on to his nearby hunting lodge at the fortressed Alexandrovsk settlement. From there, in early January 1565, he informed the new metropolitan that he was abdicating his throne. For this decision, he blamed primarily the boyars, whom he accused of being disloyal and treasonous. He also had officials read out a proclamation to the common people, absolving them of any blame. His tactics were clearly a populist move designed to drum up support for future actions against his enemies.

As Ivan undoubtedly realized would happen, panic gripped the capital—without any designated or agreed-upon successor, abdication seemed like an invitation to chaos. Church leaders and boyars hastened to Ivan's retreat to plead that he

[5]For more on Anastasia, especially her spiritual role, positive image, and Ivan's high regard for her, even after her death, see Isolde Thyrêt, *Between God and Tsar: Religious Symbolism and the Royal Women of Muscovite Russia*. (DeKalb, 2001), pp. 48–64.

remain tsar. He agreed, apparently on the condition that everyone recognize his right to deal with "traitors" as he saw fit—church intercession for earlier "traitors" had especially annoyed him.

Oprichnina and Its Aftermath

Ivan's new method for dealing with his enemies was to create the most infamous institution of his regime—the *oprichnina*. The most remarkable of its functions was its terrorist one; it was no coincidence that Stalin's NKVD police were sometimes referred to as *oprichniki*. Ivan's *oprichniki* were assigned the job of sniffing out treason and sweeping it away. Although a broom was one of their symbols, an axe might have been more fitting. Not only did they confiscate estates of those charged with treason, but also they slaughtered thousands of innocent people. Kliuchevsky wrote that they rode around dressed completely in black and on black horses with black harnesses. Eventually, there were about 6,000 of these agents of terror.

The *oprichnina*, however, was more than just a group of state terrorists. Directly under Ivan and centered at the Alexandrovsk settlement, it was also a separate royal court and administration. It eventually ruled over about half the country, including part of Moscow and other important prosperous and strategic areas, mainly north of the capital. The rest of the country, now referred to as the *zemshchina*, was run by senior boyars and most of the old government machinery, with Ivan being consulted only on chief issues.

Although it was once believed that the *oprichnina* was a service-gentry bludgeon that Ivan created to beat an autocracy-resisting higher nobility into submission, recent research has swung away from some aspects of this interpretation. Building on the work of historians such as Kliuchevsky and S. Veselovsky, it indicates that both higher nobles and lower nobles (service gentry) were among the persecutors and the persecuted. Furthermore, it denies that the higher nobility was against the tsar's centralization of power.

Yet Ivan's actions do reflect his desire to free himself from too great a dependence on prominent boyar clans and from other constraints. Although neither he nor his predecessors had been legally limited in their powers, custom and tradition had dictated that the monarch rule along with his boyars and in keeping with certain religious principles. The creation and operations of the *oprichnina*, however, also suggest that Ivan had become paranoid, or at least overly suspicious, seeing conspiracies and treason where they did not really exist.

The *oprichnina* galloped on for close to eight years, until Ivan abolished it in 1572. Beset with increasing pathological fears and suspicions—in 1567 he even attempted to arrange asylum in England for himself should it prove necessary—Ivan terrorized all classes. From Prince Vladimir of Staritsa and his mother, so malevolently portrayed in Eisenstein's film, down to poor paupers in Novgorod, thousands perished.

Among other victims were petitioners from a 1566 *zemskii sobor*, who asked Ivan to end the *oprichnina*; many churchmen, including Metropolitan Philip; many leading *zemshchina* officials; and toward the end, even some of the *oprichnina* leaders themselves. Sometimes when princes or other nobles were killed,

other members of their families and even their servants also were executed. In 1570—about a century after it had been victimized by Ivan III—Novgorod once again felt a ruler's wrath. Accusing its leaders of treason and Polish sympathies, Ivan the Terrible let loose his *oprichniki* on the city. Although contemporary accounts no doubt overestimated the number executed, it was at least a few thousand.

As the case of Novgorod makes all too clear, Ivan's victims suffered in just about every way imaginable. In general, the more fortunate got off with just the confiscation of their estates and exile, or perhaps, as with some in Novgorod, they just had to endure *oprichniki* plundering and looting. Less fortunate individuals suffered beatings, torture, or rape but still escaped with their lives. Least fortunate of all were those who suffered gruesome deaths, sometimes after extensive torture. With Ivan sometimes looking on or participating himself, people were hanged, hacked up, beaten to death by clubs, impaled, boiled in hot water, roasted by fire, poisoned, or drowned. And this is only a partial list. It's no wonder Stalin admired Ivan IV so much.

After the *oprichnina* failed to help prevent the Crimean Tatar's successful attack of 1571, Ivan finally ended it the next year and even forbade mention of it. Its abolition meant only an easing of state violence, however, not its termination. In his final decade, still occupied with the Livonian War, Ivan continued to display some bizarre behavior. In 1575, he once again announced that he was abdicating, this time to turn Russia over to a Christianized Tatar khan, named Simeon. Ivan

FIGURE 8.2. A woodcut of Ivan the Terrible with a head on his lance. (From Ian Grey, *The Horizon History of Russia*, American Heritage Publishing Company, New York, 1970, p. 98, New York Public Library, Slavonic Division.)

himself then posed as a lesser prince to this new grand prince The charade lasted only about a year.[6]

About this same time, an Austrian ambassador described Ivan as tall, stout, and vigorous, with big darting eyes, a shaved head, and a thick red beard with black streaks. In his final years, however, Ivan displayed less vigor and increasing signs of ill health. But unfortunately for his son Ivan, the Tsar was still healthy enough to strike him a fatal blow, probably with a staff. This occurred in late 1581 and seems to have been occasioned by the son's defense of his pregnant wife, Elena. Apparently the tsar had berated her for being immodestly dressed and had struck her. Not only did the incident led to the death of Elena's husband, but also to the fetus she soon miscarried.

In the days that followed, the death of his son and the distasteful armistices with Poland and Sweden sucked more life out of Ivan's pained body. Yet he attempted to arrange a marriage with the English Princess Mary Hastings, especially when he became more convinced than ever that he might have to flee Russia. He assured Queen Elizabeth that his present wife could be put away. Even after the queen squelched the idea, he did not abandon hope for an English bride. But before his life could take any more bizarre turns, he died in March 1584. He was only fifty-three.

THE LEGACY OF IVAN IV

Although disasters such as famines and plagues played a part, Ivan the Terrible's policies were the most significant cause of Russia's late sixteenth-century miseries. The Livonian War, increased taxes to pay for it, and the ravages of the *oprichnina* helped impoverish and destabilize the country. So too did Crimean Tatar raids, which Ivan had failed to defend against adequately. Moreover, Ivan had given peasant lands and peasants to his growing service gentry, and his demands on the gentry had led them, in turn, to squeeze harder on their peasants. Many peasants responded to the intensifying demands and chaos of Ivan's reign by fleeing south.

At the beginning of the 1580s, Ivan reacted by declaring certain years "forbidden"; during such a year, peasants could not leave their masters, even during the two weeks bracketing St. George's Day (November 26).

By then the oppression and flight had already taken a heavy toll. In many northern areas, populated villages were like lonely islands in a sea of abandoned lands. Although written two centuries later in different circumstances, some lines of Oliver Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village" seem appropriate:

> Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey
> Far, far away, thy children leave the land
> Amidst thy bowers the tyrant's hand is seen

[6]In "Ivan IV's Mythology of Kingship," *SR* 52 (Winter 1993): 769–809, Priscilla Hunt has attempted to demonstrate a relationship between Ivan's behaviour and his twisted understanding of certain religious ideas then current in Moscow.

In the region of Novgorod, about 90 percent of the farming land was abandoned; in that of Pskov and Moscow combined, about 84 percent. Some northern cities, especially Novgorod, were also hard hit. The once great northern city lost about 80 percent of its population between the beginning and end of Ivan's reign.

This was not all of Ivan's damage. The unsatisfying armistices he signed with Poland and Sweden almost guaranteed renewed hostilities in the future. His actions against his son Ivan and his daughter-in-law Elena left his dynasty in the weak hands, and loins, of his son Fedor.

This array of deficits might lead students to think that Ivan was "terrible" in more than just the "awesome" sense of the word. Many historians and others, however, have praised Ivan IV for certain "positive" accomplishments. Alexander Yanov in his controversial book *The Origins of Autocracy: Ivan the Terrible in Russian History* (1981) catalogs such favorable assessments, along with more negative ones, throughout Russian history. We have already seen that in Russian folklore Ivan was generally regarded favorably. Even in works of fiction, such as Yuri Trifonov's 1980 novel, *The Old Man* (*Starik*), one sometimes comes across characters arguing the plusses and minuses of Ivan the Terrible.

One of the characters in Trifonov's book argues that Kazan and Asktrakhan are two plusses. Although the character he is arguing with disputes the value of extending boundaries, many, including historians and some of the "folk" of folklore, have implicitly or explicitly valued Ivan for his territorial gains. His other major service, according to many, was that he ultimately strengthened Russia by increasing both the powers of Moscow and the tsar at the expense of a "feudal" aristocracy. Conversely, its victory over Ivan would have doomed Russia to a more fragmented existence, which would have made the country easy prey for foreign enemies.

Most recent scholarship, however, denies that Ivan strengthened Russia by his victory over a "feudal" aristocracy attempting to prevent Moscow's centralization of power. First, despite increasing centralization on both a secular and a religious level, it is difficult to maintain that he left the country stronger. Second, there was no united aristocracy trying to prevent centralization. Although Ivan weakened the country's aristocracy, he did not crush it. Indeed, within a few decades after his death, his policies inadvertently helped lead to the collapse of his dynasty, with boyars and other political forces moving, at least temporarily, into the vacuum.

Yet if we look beyond this Time of Troubles (1598–1613), Ivan the Terrible's tyrannical practices left behind a dangerous and tragic precedent. Although Nancy Kollmann has downplayed the long-term significance of Ivan's reign, Yanov has written of the "historiographic nightmare," which led many historians from the eighteenth century into the twentieth to consider Ivan IV a force of progress who strengthened Russia. We have already seen that folk attitudes toward Ivan the Terrible, as depicted in folklore, were generally positive. Is it any wonder then that many subsequent rulers, such as Peter the Great and Stalin, also regarded him favorably? While none of these groups completely whitewashed Ivan's "excesses," they did justify many of his policies as necessary for strengthening Russia.

The damaging effects of Ivan IV's legacy have never been clearer than in the

Ivan the Autocrat Lectures Queen Elizabeth I

The following excerpt from a 1570 letter of Ivan IV to Queen Elizabeth I of England illustrates well Ivan's autocratic personality. Even Keenan has recognized this letter as almost surely a genuine correspondence, although not necessarily actually written by Ivan himself. But whether ghost-written or not, its ideas were Ivan's, and it was part of a large exchange of letters between the two monarchs, dealing primarily with trade. My translation here is indebted to observations made about the letter by Richard Pipes (in his *Russia under the Old Regime*) but is otherwise based mainly on that appearing in George Tolstoy, ed., *The First Forty Years of Intercourse between England and Russia*, 1553–1593 (St. Petersburg, 1875; reprint New York, 1963), pp. 111–114; Russian text on pp. 107–109.

And how many letters have been brought to us here [from England] . . . but every letter has had a contrary seal, which is inappropriate, and such letters in all places are not credited, but every prince in his realm has one proper seal; but we acknowledged these letters . . . .

And after that we had news that a subject of yours had come to Narva, by name Edward Goodman . . . and [we] commanded him to be searched for letters and we found many letters; and in those letters were written words not allowable against our princely state and empire, how that in our empire were many unlawful things done . . . .

. . . And we had thought that you are the sovereign in your domain, and rule alone, and seek your sovereign honor and your country's profit, and therefore we wished to deal with you. But now we perceive that beside you there are men who rule, and not men but low class traders, who look not to our sovereign heads, honor, and profits, but seek their own trading profits. And you abide in your maidenly state like a commoner.

twentieth century. The political culture that made Stalinism possible was not solely a result of foreign Marxist influences. At the beginning of the 1980's, Yanov still decried the continuing influence of Ivan's autocratic legacy in the country of his birth. After 1991, when nationality problems helped lead to the disintegration of the Soviet Union, even Ivan's pioneering empire-building seemed a tarnished legacy, as Hosking and others have noted.[7]

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[7]Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552–1917* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), pp. xix-xx.

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