



# Ivan the Terrible: Russia's Most Insane Tsar

*Charles River Editors*

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\*Includes pictures of Ivan the Terrible and important people and places in his life.

\*Includes historical accounts that describe Ivan the Terrible and his notorious rule and discusses the authenticity of these accounts.

\*Includes footnotes and a bibliography for further reading.

16th century Russia remains, for most Western audiences, a dark and terrifying space, wrapped in mystery and myth and isolated from states such as England or France, whose heroes are well-known throughout Europe. The traditional dichotomy between East and West is most apparent in the discussion of the remarkable political figures that defined this century. While Western rulers, such as Elizabeth I, Francis I or Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, have been endlessly and almost exhaustively treated in historical works, their Eastern counterparts have rarely attracted the attention of professional historians outside their respective regions.

As a result, readers in search of reliable information on Ivan IV's personality and reign is faced with a rather bleak situation. They can either resort to the extremely biased image conveyed by Russian historiography, or to the often superficial and sensationalist histories written by Western authors, who, perhaps unintentionally, crafted a narrative that fit the stereotypes regarding what the West thought of the East at the time. While certain factual aspects regarding Ivan IV's reign can certainly be deduced from the primary sources that have withstood the test of time, the majority of accounts dating from the 16th century and after must be evaluated critically, and read in light of certain traditions and ideas that circulated in the region regarding the model ruler and the tyrant. Naturally, this makes it hard for contemporary audiences to determine whether Ivan IV was worthy of the epithet "Groznyi" ("the Terrible").

As if to demonstrate the cultural disconnect between East and West, "Groznyi" in the original Russian was a term mostly used to designate an "awful" or "awe-inspiring" personality, especially in a political context. That a Renaissance ruler would inspire a feeling of reverence mixed with fear was neither surprising, nor should it necessarily be seen in a negative light. Many of Ivan IV's contemporaries held a similar unofficial title, including Richard III of England, Louis IX of France, Christian II of Denmark, Sigismondo Malatesta in Rimini and Cesare Borgia. It was thus not extraordinary for a ruler to be regarded and designated as "terrible" in the context of 16th century Europe, as long as he maintained the unity and prosperity of his kingdom and succeeded in keeping the reins of power.

Nevertheless, the term "Groznyi" appealed to popular imagination throughout the centuries, and, similarly to Vlad Dracula's descriptive epithet of "Tepes" ("the Impaler"), it also stimulated the creation and transmission of a varied and often contradictory tradition of folk tales and songs that featured the nation's heroes. At the same time, there were many common motifs within this tradition that circulated in Western Europe as well, and that heavily influenced the way in which Ivan IV was perceived and subsequently depicted in historiography.

Ivan the Terrible: Russia's Most Insane Tsar explores the life and legacy of the notorious tsar's life, as well as the debate over his personality and actions. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Ivan the Terrible like you never have before, in no time at all.

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