

On This Day Ivan the Terrible Was Born

Ivan IV, more commonly known as Ivan the Terrible, was born on Aug. 25, 1530.

August 25, 2019

Ivan IV
("the Terrible")

Aug. 25, 1530 – March 28, 1584



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Ivan Vasilevich, more commonly known as Ivan the Terrible or Ivan IV, was born on Aug. 25, 1530 in Kolomenskoye, Moscow. The grandson of Ivan the Great, he acquired huge amounts of land during his reign, transforming a Grand Duchy into a Tsardom. Through this, however, he imposed a reign of terror and exhibited uncontrollable rage. Many believed him to be mentally unwell.

Not much is known about his early life, but Ivan was born into the Grand Duchy of Moscow to his father Basil III who died when Ivan was three, and his mother Elena Glinskaya who ruled as regent in her late husband's wake.

In 1547 when Ivan was just 17, he was crowned and married Anastasia Romanovna. What followed is considered the most constructive era of his reign: he gathered a council of advisors, and a consensus-building assembly who helped institute his new reforms. Among

his reforms were self-governance, tax collection and statutory law. His main goal: to create a larger, more centralized Russia.

By 1552, Ivan's armies had gained control of Kazan and Astrakhan, which extended his control to the Urals and the Caspian sea. He was less successful in conquering Lithuania and the Baltics, however, with one of his advisers ultimately defecting to Lithuania and leading the army against Ivan.

As his power grew, his methods became more disruptive to society. Seizing private land and redistributing them to his supporters with a police force called the oprichniki who dressed in black and riding black horses, he sought to crush dissent rather than ensure safety. When his first wife died in 1560, deep depression, paranoia and increasingly erratic behavior followed. Over the next three decades some of his worst atrocities were committed, including within his family. He beat his pregnant daughter-in-law resulting in a miscarriage and killed his son in a fit of rage - an image captured by painter Ilya Repin.

By 1584, Ivan's health was failing and his madness only grew: he became obsessed with death, witchcraft and soothsayers, but nothing brought him calm.

On March 18, 1584, he died of a stroke. His second son, Fyodor became tsar for a mere four years and died without an heir to the throne. Thus began the Time of Troubles that would end only when a new royal family was chosen in 1613 and Mikhail Romanov took the Russian throne.

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