

Ivan the Great was a very interesting guy



How did he create Russia out of a bunch of small city states?

In researching 15th century Russia for my new novel, I originally wasn't going to make Ivan a major character. But the man was so fascinating that I had to be careful he didn't take over the book altogether. He came to the throne of Muscovy at the tender age of 22, a vassal to the khan of the Great Horde and surrounded by neighbours who were nervous about the power Ivan's father, Vasily II, had been able to acquire.

Ivan turned out to be cautious and well versed in how a prince's power was held in the 1460's (ruled at the pleasure of the Russian nobles, called boyars). And he was patient. He never seemed to do anything in a hurry or in absolute terms. He never outright conquered a city state. In many cases, he never even showed up with his army. By getting a prince's boyars to support him, he was able to coerce and/or buy city states like Yaroslavl, Rostov and Tver. In the case of Novgorod, he had to invade it twice (1471 and 1478), but by only slowly taking away their freedom, he was able separate friend from foe with the city. When he fully annexed it in 1478, any resistance to Muscovy's rule was pretty much discovered and removed.

One would think Ivan was very good a diplomacy in order to keep western powers like Lithuania and Poland at bay. But from my research, he never really did much diplomacy until well into the 1480's. For the first 20 years of his reign, he either was extremely lucky (and no one is that lucky for 20 years) or he had knowledge of the ways the enemies on his western frontiers thought. This is the historical anomaly I worked with in my new novel, *The Great Celt*.

Muscovy (present day Moscow) is not exactly on the beaten path. Information about the west, which was a long way away, needed to come from somewhere. In my book, I created two sources for Ivan. One, of course, is Connor Rainey, the main character following the tradition of the Asian sword. The second is a Teutonic knight who has left the order and become Muscovy's chancellor. From these two characters, western battle tactics, weaponry and politics are available to Ivan as he slowly works towards "gathering the lands of the Rus."

The Great Celt is due out in late September/early October. I have been preparing the research for Book 3, which will be a sequel to *The Locket*.