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IVAN IV IN BALTIC
GERMAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

A scholarly study of the reign of Ivan IV comparable to Reinhard Wittram's *Peter I Czar und Kaiser* or to Isabel de Madariaga's *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* has yet to be written. Wittram devotes about half of his *Peter I* and Madariaga a third of her *Catherine* to the discussion of foreign policy or of the interaction of Russians with Cossack, German, Moslem, and Polish elites in the borderlands of the Russian Empire. Without such discussion no period of Muscovite or imperial Russian history is fully comprehensible, for the history of Russia has been shaped to a large extent by pressures and problems arising out of the conquest of areas populated by peoples different in many respects from Great Russians. Russian historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries underestimated the importance of borderland problems and pressures partly because of their Russocentric view of history and partly because of the influence of the statist or juridical school, which tended to view all of Ivan's acts as rational, in the Hegelian sense, and as aiming at building a strong and centralized Russian state.

Soviet historians, to be sure, do not subscribe to all the views held by historians of the nineteenth-century juridical school, but they have tended to share with their predecessors, especially at the time of Stalin, a belief in the historical mission of the Russian national state. In recent years, Soviet historians not only have corrected certain distortions of history made during Stalin's time concerning the reign of Ivan IV but they have also deepened our understanding of Ivan's internal policy. His foreign policy, however, has not been studied with equal thoroughness, and the only work on Russia in the Livonian War is one of scholarly popularization published in 1954. ¹ A book on the reign of Ivan IV published by the Soviet Academy of Sciences as recently as 1982 could even sound the following note in concluding its discussion of the Livonian War:

The Livonian War was lost. The historical task of obtaining free access to the Baltic Sea was not a success. Many objective causes brought this about. The complicated internal situation of the country as well as difficulties in the conduct of foreign policy. Russia had to wage a strenuous war against

opponents in the West, and in the East. And nonetheless, the Livonian War was an event of world significance. During this war the Livonian Order was destroyed, this cruel enemy of the Estonian and Latvian peoples. The preconditions were created for the inclusion of the Baltic region within the framework of the Russian Empire at the beginning of the eighteenth century.²

Who would deny that Russia had a historical task in obtaining free access to the Baltic, or, for that matter, that Sweden and Poland had an equally valid right to the dominium maris baltici? The real question would seem to be, however, how realistically did each of these powers proceed in taking advantage of opportunities as they presented themselves in the second part of the sixteenth century to realize its respective "historical task"? With regard to the Muscovy of Ivan IV, the collapse of the Livonian Order and the Polish interregnum of the 1570s offered a unique opportunity to extend and consolidate Russian control over at least part and maybe all of Livonia. Yet, in last analysis, Russian policy failed. Why did it?

The answer to this question would seem to be that none of the powers interested in the Livonian legacy—Denmark, Poland-Lithuania, Russia, and Sweden—was powerful enough to establish itself permanently on Livonian soil without obtaining the support of significant elements among the local German Ritterschaften and town patricians. Ivan IV was not able to obtain such support and consequently had to fight simultaneously not only against the Livonians and the interested European powers but also against the Crimean Tatars, who were the friends of Moscow's enemies.

In this essay I will undertake to view Ivan IV's Livonian policy through the eyes of seven Baltic German³ writers, four of whom were sixteenth-century chroniclers and three nineteenth- and twentieth-century professional historians. The four sixteenth-century chroniclers whom I have selected were contemporaries of Ivan IV and wrote on the basis of both their own personal observations and of documentary evidence available to them as members of the political or cultural leadership of the Livonian Order, Kurland, Reval, and Riga. Their testimony is of special interest because it reflects views and attitudes of Livonians whom Ivan IV tried to court but failed to win for Russia.

3. The term "Baltic German" came into general use in the latter part of the nineteenth century. It is not, strictly speaking, an accurate designation for the Livonian Germans of the sixteenth century or the Estland, Kurland, and Livland Germans of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries. In this essay, for the sake of simplicity and convenience, I will occasionally use the word "Baltic German" in the generic sense of someone who lived and worked in Livonia or the Baltic provinces and who identified himself with the German language and culture.