

CHAPTER
11

Section 2

HISTORYMAKERS **Ivan III**
Builder of Russia

"[He was] a statesman of vision and above all of astounding single-mindedness. For Ivan III, more than any of his predecessors or followers on the princely throne of Moscow, knew precisely where he was going."—historian J. L. I. Fennell (1961)

Two wars, the capture and blinding of his father, and a proposed diplomatic marriage were the haunting memories of Ivan III's childhood. Ivan III was born in 1440 to a princely throne in Moscow, then a small state in a time of severe crisis. Surviving much conflict, Ivan III built the foundation of modern Russia.

Ivan's father Basil II, the grand duke of Moscow, was in the midst of a struggle for power with a cousin, Dmitri Shemyaka. At the same time, Basil was also fighting the Mongols who then ruled Russia. Basil lost a battle to the Mongols and was captured. When he was released, he was captured again by Shemyaka, who was now ruling Moscow. Ivan, only six years old, was captured as well. Shemyaka blinded Basil, but Ivan's father won release and soon retook his throne. In 1452, Basil's army finally defeated Shemyaka, who died after being poisoned. That army was said to be led by Ivan, though he was only 12 years old.

Ten years later, Ivan became grand duke when his father died. For the next 40 years, Ivan used diplomacy, alliances, war, and trickery to expand the size of Moscow and increase his own power. He forged treaties and then, when he had no use for them, abandoned them. When Ivan was finished, he had achieved his goals. The ruler of Moscow was powerful, and his state, which he was first to call "all Russia," had grown.

Upon becoming grand duke, Ivan first tried to weaken the Mongols in the east, but his attack failed. He then aimed to capture Novgorod. First, he used diplomacy to make sure that no other state would help Novgorod. Next, he attacked and defeated its army in battle. While some resistance remained for several years, Ivan was in full control by the late 1470s. He then proceeded to completely break the power of the nobles there. He seized their grounds and forced them to move to Moscow. He gave the property to his supporters, but terms of ownership had changed. The land was officially the grand duke's, only on loan to them as long as

they served the ruler. Novgorod's defeat increased both Moscow's size and Ivan's power.

About this time, Ivan took another important step. After long negotiations he agreed to marry Sophia, the niece of the last Byzantine ruler. After the marriage, Ivan began to use the title czar, the Russian term for emperor. He also began calling Moscow the "third Rome" (after Rome and Constantinople).

After the defeat of Novgorod, Ivan turned on the next most powerful Russian state, Tver. Once again, he used diplomacy to isolate Tver and then invaded it and took control.

Next, Ivan turned east, hoping to finally remove the Mongol threat. By now, the huge Mongol Empire had split into three smaller kingdoms. In 1480, Akhmed, the leader of the strongest one, marched his army against Ivan. They faced each other for two months without fighting, as Akhmed waited for promised reinforcements. When they never arrived, Akhmed led his army away. Later, rivals had him killed, and Mongol power was finally broken. Ivan secured his border with the Mongols in 1487, when he captured one of the remaining kingdoms.

Ivan now moved west. After marrying his daughter to the son of the king of Lithuania, he attacked that nation in 1500. He shattered the Lithuanian army, which led to further Russian expansion.

While enlarging Moscow, Ivan also took steps to increase the grand duke's power. He reformed the government, beginning a system of administration that remained in use for hundreds of years.

Questions

- Making Inferences** How might Ivan's early life have influenced his goals and the methods he used to achieve them once he became ruler?
- Clarifying** Give two examples of how Ivan used diplomacy effectively.
- Forming and Supporting Opinions** Ivan III is often called "the Great." Do you think that is an appropriate name? Why or why not?