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Review of The Cult of Ivan the Terrible in Stalin's Russia, by Maureen Perrie.

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Maureen Perrie. *The Cult of Ivan the Terrible in Stalin's Russia*. Houndmills, NY: Palgrave, 2001. xv, 255 pp. \$65.00.

Maureen Perrie is the ideal author for this engaging work, having devoted an earlier monograph to representations of Ivan the Terrible in Russian folklore (1987). She first explored the subject of this volume, which might be considered a companion piece, in an article for an anthology on Russian nationalism edited by Geoffrey Hosking and Robert Service (1998).

Perrie provides useful context in a prologue that surveys the depiction of Ivan Groznyi during the pre-Stalinist Soviet era, when his reputation among historians and popular writers was less than distinguished. The book proper is divided into three parts. The first deals with Stalin's impact on the writing of Russian history, starting with the onset of the "great retreat" in Soviet historiography in 1934 and extending through the Second World War. A separate chapter examines three case studies – Peter I, Aleksandr Nevskii, and Minin and Pozharskii – to demonstrate how Stalinist historical revisionism affected the official presentation of pre-Soviet Russian heroes. The second part of the book takes up the Stalinization of Ivan in particular. The process began with Mikhail Bulgakov's play *Ivan Vasil'evich*. On its heels came S. V. Bakhrushin's positive assessment of the tsar in the new higher-education textbooks for the teaching of history and then B. G. Verkhoven's similarly laudatory pamphlet, based on lectures he had delivered at Moscow University. By 1939, favorable judgments of Ivan had begun to appear in propagandistic and journalistic works.

Perrie contends, among other things, that the process of rehabilitating Ivan developed "slowly and haltingly." In fact, the official campaign got under way only in the winter of 1940-41. In the third, and principal, part of her book, the author scrutinizes the three major works of art focusing on Ivan IV that this campaign produced within the space of the next few years: V. I. Kostylev's novelistic trilogy, Aleksei Tolstoi's play, and Sergei Eisenstein's film. Of these three, only the latter two were created on commission. Kostylev earlier had written a work on Kuz'ma Minin, in which Ivan had received positive treatment. Thus, a full-blown novel depicting the tsar in a favorable light represented a logical progression for the author. In addition to stressing the multinational character of Muscovy (a clear foreshadowing of the Soviet Union), Kostylev's work emphasized the quest for a Baltic port, which Ivan tried to realize through the Livonian War. Here Kostylev likely was responding to the recent Soviet acquisition of the three Baltic republics. Moreover, the Baltic theme was to prove a common one in the official hagiography of Ivan, stemming, as Perrie sees it, from concern over the international situation, which, more than anything else, had helped bring about the historiographical "great retreat" in the first place. While Kostylev's work failed to garner unanimous praise from the critics, his books were more favorably received than either Tolstoi's play or certainly the second part of Eisenstein's planned cinematic trilogy. Eisenstein, too, stressed Ivan's Baltic policy (although it emerges more clearly in the original screenplay than in the film as seen); furthermore, in his treatment, Ivan's suspicions of the boyars prove to be well founded, thereby justifying his subsequent actions, in particular the *oprichnina*. The resonance with Stalin's terror was obvious (a little too obvious, perhaps, for Eisenstein's good). Perrie, however, takes issue with Robert Tucker, finding no evidence to support his claim that Stalin consciously followed Ivan's bloody path.

An epilogue examines the representation of Ivan in the Soviet Union since 1953.

Not surprisingly, Ivan's cult began to diminish with Stalin's, especially following Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" in 1956. In the 1960s a new crop of historical works effectively dismantled Ivan's halo. The dread tsar, however, had not entirely exited the scene. As Gorbachev set about reforming Soviet society in the late 1980s, Ivan once again came to the fore, both in literature (Anatolii Rybakov's *Children of the Arbat*) and historiography (the work of V. B. Kobrin), serving as a cautionary reminder of the abuse of political power. And by the late 1990s Ivan's power was being extolled by some commentators as precisely the cure for a country where regional oligarchs had sapped the strength of a weak president. Ivan, it seemed, continued to serve as a touchstone on the state of *vlast'* in Russia.

Perrie's work is based on solid research, both in the archives and secondary sources. It is also crisply written and clearly organized. Best of all, it lends depth and nuance to a topic previously treated in black-and-white terms. As Perrie shows, the rehabilitation of Ivan under Stalin was not the result of dictatorial decree but instead of interaction from below as well as above. Even during the height of Ivan's cult in the 1940s some Soviet historians openly challenged the praise being heaped on the tsar. Stalin himself approached Ivan with what Perrie calls a fundamental dualism, criticizing the historical figure for irresoluteness in dealing with his opponents while insisting that the tsar's recreated persona reflect his own self-image as 'a steadfast and visionary leader. In short, this is a thoughtful and fascinating investigation that enriches our understanding of the Stalin era and its peculiar relationship to the pre-Soviet Russian past.

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