

FYODOR IVANOVICH

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Fyodor Ivanovich (1557-1598) was the second son of Ivan IV ("The Terrible" or *Ivan Groznyi*). Ascending the throne in 1584, three years after his father killed his older brother Ivan in a fit of rage, Fyodor Ivanovich was nevertheless too mentally deficient to govern. His brother-in-law, Boris Godunov (the brother of his wife Irene) ruled instead as regent. Fyodor did not have children and thus was the last descendant of Rurik to occupy the Russian throne.

Fyodor's father Ivan IV had the longest reign in Russian history, from 1533 to 1584, and in the first half achieved construction things in both foreign and domestic policy. His defeat of the Tartars of Kazan' (1552) and Astrakhan' (1556) opened the way southwards and eastwards to Russian expansion. He also welcomed the British explorer Richard Chancellor in 1553-4 and established commercial relations with England. By 1560, Ivan IV had established the power and legitimacy of the tsar. He authorized reforms in the army and even established a consultative body known as the *zemsky sobor* to debate issues and provide advice (although only when he solicited it).

After the death in 1560 of his first wife Anastasia – whom he suspected had been poisoned – Ivan IV became moody and violent. Withdrawing from the boyars and the church, he insistence on personal control, exercised through the establishment of

the *oprichina*—the private police force he could order to kill his personal enemies. In 1591, just seven years after he killed his oldest son, Ivan's youngest son Dmitri died under mysterious circumstances, possibly by the hand of Boris Godunov, a member of the lesser nobility who had become Ivan's protégé. In 1584 when his second son Fyodor Ivanovich became tsar, Godunov shrewdly exploited the man's feeble-mindedness to assume *de facto* power as regent. When Fyodor died in 1598, the *zemsky sobor* elected Godunov as tsar.

Godunov was an effective regent and tsar. Although he did nothing to ease the burden on the peasants (issuing a decree in 1601 limiting their rights to move from one estate to another), Godunov made strides in economic development and colonization of Siberia. He also established the patriarchate in 1589. Before then the Russian church recognized the patriarch of Constantinople (now Istanbul). Under Godunov's tutelage, Russia waged successful wars against the Tatars (1591) and Sweden (1595).

Plots, intrigues, and natural disasters soon undermined Godunov's power, however. A stranger appeared, claiming to be Ivan's youngest son, Dmitry (the first of three "False Dmitrys"). A famine in 1601-1603 stimulated rural unrest and opposition to Godunov's rule. Godunov was killed in 1605 while suppressing a revolt during the advance on Moscow of one of the False Dmitrys. His death ushered in a "Time of Troubles" (*Smutnoe vremya*), which lasted until the establishment of the Romanov dynasty in 1613. Upon his father's death, Fyodor Godunov ascended the throne, but his mother's dominating ways infuriated the boyars, who murdered both Fyodor and his mother. The Russian poet Alexander Pushkin immortalized

Boris Godunov in his play of that title, completed in 1825, which the composer Modest Mussorgsky later transformed into an opera.

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