

SIMON SEBAG MONTEFIORE

‘A master storyteller’

JANE SHILLING, *Evening Standard*

TITANS *of* HISTORY

‘One of our finest popular historians’

DOMINIC SANDBROOK, *Sunday Times*

John Bew is Harris Fellow in Modern British History and Director of Studies at Peterhouse, Cambridge. His biography of Lord Castlereagh, *Enlightenment, War and Tyranny*, was published in 2011.

Martyn Frampton is Lecturer in Modern/Contemporary History at Queen Mary, University of London. His publications include *The Long March* (2009) and *Legion of the Rearguard* (2010)

Dan Jones is a journalist and historian. He is the author of *Summer of Blood* (2009) and *The Plantagenets* (2012).

Claudia Renton is a writer and actress who has appeared on stage with the RSC and at the Royal National Theatre, and on television for the BBC and ITV.

Much of the material in *Titans of History* is new and original; some material was originally published in two volumes, *Heroes* and *Monsters*, published in 2008 and 2009 respectively and then in paperback in 2009.

This revised edition published in 2012 by

Quercus
55 Baker Street
Seventh Floor, South Block
London
W1U 8EW

Copyright © 2012 Quercus Editions Ltd

The moral right of Simon Sebag Montefiore to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 78087 026 7

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Text and plates designed and typeset by Ellipsis Digital Ltd

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd. St Ives plc

TITANS OF HISTORY

SIMON SEBAG MONTEFIORE

With John Bew, Martyn Frampton,
Dan Jones and Claudia Renton

Quercus

TO MY DARLING CHILDREN LILY AND SASHA

Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
RAMESES THE GREAT	5
DAVID & SOLOMON	8
NEBUCHADNEZZAR II	13
CYRUS THE GREAT	15
THE BUDDHA	19
CONFUCIUS	22
SUN TZU	25
LEONIDAS	27
HERODOTUS	31
ALCIBIADES	34
PLATO	37
ARISTOTLE	38
ALEXANDER THE GREAT	41
QIN SHI HUANGDI	44
HANNIBAL	49
JUDAH THE MACCABEE AND HIS BROTHERS	52
CICERO	55
CAESAR	58
HEROD THE GREAT	60
CLEOPATRA	63
AUGUSTUS & LIVIA	66
JESUS	71
CALIGULA	75
NERO	78
MARCUS AURELIUS	82
COMMODOUS	85
CONSTANTINE THE GREAT	88

TITANS OF HISTORY

ATTILA THE HUN	91
MUHAMMAD	94
MUAWIYA & ABD AL-MALIK	97
ZHAO WU	101
CHARLEMAGNE	104
HAROUN AL-RASHID	107
MAROZIA AND THE PAPAL PORNOCRACY	111
BASIL THE BULGAR SLAYER	116
HASSAN AL-SABBAH AND THE ASSASSINS	119
GODFREY OF BOUILLON & THE CRUSADER KINGS OF JERUSALEM	123
ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE	127
SALADIN	131
RICHARD THE LIONHEART & JOHN SOFTSWORD	134
GENGHIS KHAN	139
FREDERICK II OF HOHENSTAUFEN	143
ISABELLA & ROGER MORTIMER	146
EDWARD III & THE BLACK PRINCE	150
TAMERLANE	154
RICHARD II	158
HENRY V	161
GILLES DE RAIS	164
JOAN OF ARC	167
TORQUEMADA	170
VLAD THE IMPALER	174
RICHARD III	177
SAVONAROLA	181
ISABELLA & FERDINAND	184
COLUMBUS	187
SELIM THE GRIM	189
PIZARRO	191

BARBAROSSA & SILVER ARM	195
THE BORGHIAS: POPE ALEXANDER VI AND HIS CHILDREN CESARE AND LUCREZIA	198
MAGELLAN	202
BABUR	205
CORTÉS	208
HENRY VIII	212
SULEIMAN THE MAGNIFICENT	216
IVAN THE TERRIBLE	220
ELIZABETH I	224
AKBAR THE GREAT	227
TOKUGAWA IEYASU	229
GALILEO	232
SHAKESPEARE	235
ABBAS THE GREAT	239
WALLENSTEIN	242
CROMWELL	245
AURANGZEB	250
PEPYS	253
LOUIS XIV	256
NEWTON	259
MARLBOROUGH	262
PETER THE GREAT	266
NADER SHAH	270
VOLTAIRE	273
SAMUEL JOHNSON	277
FREDERICK THE GREAT	280
CASANOVA	283
CAPTAIN COOK	286
CATHERINE THE GREAT	289
POTEMKIN	292
WASHINGTON	294
JEFFERSON	297

TITANS OF HISTORY

TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE	302
TALLEYRAND	305
MOZART	309
ROBESPIERRE	312
NELSON	316
WELLINGTON	318
NAPOLEON I	322
BEETHOVEN	326
JANE AUSTEN	331
SHAKA	336
BYRON	340
BALZAC	343
PUSHKIN	346
ALEXANDRE DUMAS <i>PÈRE</i> & FILS	350
DISRAELI	355
GARIBALDI	359
NAPOLEON III	362
LINCOLN	365
JACK THE RIPPER	368
DARWIN	372
DICKENS	376
BISMARCK	381
FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE	384
PASTEUR	387
FRANCISCO LÓPEZ & ELIZA LYNCH	390
TOLSTOY	394
CIXI	397
LEOPOLD II	401
TCHAIKOVSKY	404
CLEMENCEAU	407
SARAH BERNHARDT	409
MAUPASSANT	412
OSCAR WILDE	415

WILHELM II	419
LLOYD GEORGE	423
TOULOUSE-LAUTREC	426
RASPUTIN	429
GANDHI	431
TRUJILLO	434
LENIN	435
UNGERN VON STERNBERG	440
PROUST	443
SHACKLETON, SCOTT & AMUNSDEN	446
CHURCHILL	450
IBN SAUD	455
VILLA & ZAPATA	459
STALIN	463
EINSTEIN	468
ENVER, TALAT & JEMAL: THE THREE PASHAS	472
ATATÜRK	476
PICASSO	480
ROOSEVELT	483
MUSSOLINI	486
TOJO	491
BEN-GURION	495
HITLER	498
NEHRU	503
BULGAKOV	507
FRANCO	510
MAO ZEDONG	514
ISAAC BABEL	519
YEZHOV	521
ZHUKOV	526
CAPONE	529
BERIA	532
HEMINGWAY	536

TITANS OF HISTORY

HIMMLER & HEYDRICH	539
KHOMEINI	545
ORWELL	550
DENG XIAOPING	553
DUVALIER	557
SCHINDLER	560
HOXHA OF ALBANIA	563
KIM IL SUNG & KIM JONG IL	567
ODETTE SANSOM	571
JFK	575
NASSER, SADAT, MUBARAK	580
THE CEAUȘESCU OF ROMANIA	586
MANDELA	589
THE SHAH OF IRAN	592
JOHN PAUL II	597
SAKHAROV	601
NGUEMA	604
POL POT	607
IDI AMIN	611
THATCHER	616
ANNE FRANK	619
GORBACHEV & YELTSIN	622
ELVIS	627
SADDAM HUSSEIN	630
KADAFFI	634
MUHAMMAD ALI	638
AUNG SAN SUU KYI	641
ESCOBAR	646
OSAMA BIN LADEN	649
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	655

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to David North, Mark Smith, Patrick Carpenter and my editor, Josh Ireland, at Quercus; to my fellow contributors Dan Jones, Claudia Renton, John Bew and Martyn Frampton, all gifted historians; my agent Georgina Capel, Anthony Cheetham, Slav Todorov, Richard Milbank, Mark Hawkins-Dady; Professor F. M. Eloischari; Robert Hardman, Jonathan Foreman. And, above all, my darling children Lily and Sasha and my wife Santa.

INTRODUCTION

When I was a child, I read a short article – like one of those contained in this book – about the sinister world of Josef Stalin. It fascinated me enough to make me read more on the subject. Many years later, I found myself working in the Russian archives to research my first book on Stalin. My aim is that these short biographies will encourage and inspire readers to find out more about these extraordinary individuals – the men and women who created the world we live in today.

But history is not just the drama of the terrible and thrilling events of times gone by: we must understand our past to understand our present and future. ‘Who controls the past controls the future,’ wrote George Orwell, author of *1984*, and, ‘Who controls the present controls the past.’ Karl Marx joked about Napoleon and his nephew Napoleon III that ‘all historical facts and personages appear twice – the first time as a tragedy, the second time as farce.’ Marx was wrong about this – as he was about much else: history does not repeat itself but it contains many warnings and lessons. Great men and women have rightly studied history to help them steer the present. For example three of the 20th century’s most homicidal monsters, Hitler, Stalin and Mao – all of whom appear in this book – were history buffs who spent much of both their misspent youths and their years in power reading about their own historical heroes.

At the time that Hitler came to order the slaughter of European Jewry in the Holocaust, he was encouraged by the Ottoman massacres of the Armenians during the First World War: ‘Who now remembers the Armenians?’ he mused. The Armenian massacres feature in this

book. When Stalin ordered the Great Terror, he looked back to the atrocities of his hero, Ivan the Terrible: ‘Who now remembers the nobles killed by Ivan the Terrible?’ he asked his henchmen. Ivan the Terrible too is in this book. And Mao Zedong, as he unleashed waves of mass killings on China, was inspired by the First Emperor, another character who can be found in this book’s pages.

This is a collection of biographies of individuals who have each somehow changed the course of world events. This list can never be either complete or quite satisfactory: I have chosen the names; thus the list is totally subjective. There may be names you think are missing and others whose very inclusion you question: that is the fun and frustration of lists. You will find familiar names here – Elvis Presley, Jack Kennedy, Jesus Christ, Bismarck and Winston Churchill for example – but also many you may not know. Our modern world is dominated by the Near and Far East so that in this book you will not just find ‘traditional’ leaders such as Henry VIII or George Washington but also the creators of the rising powers of today: Ayatollah Khomeini, Supreme Leader of Islamic Iran, Deng, who forged modern China, King Ibn Saud, founder of Saudi Arabia.

When I started this project, I tried to divide these characters into good and bad, but I realized that this was futile because many of the greatest – Napoleon, Cromwell, Genghis Khan, Peter the Great, to name just a few – combined the heroic with the monstrous. In this book, I leave it to you to make such judgements. We can go further still: the political and artistic genius of even the most admirable of these characters requires ambition, insensitivity, egocentricity, ruthlessness, even madness, as much it demands decency and heroism. ‘Reasonable people,’ said George Bernard Shaw, ‘adapt themselves to the world. Unreasonable people adapt the world to themselves. Therefore change is only possible through unreasonable people.’ Greatness needs courage (above all) and willpower, charisma, intelligence and creativity but it also demands characteristics that we often associate

with the least admirable people: reckless risk-taking, brutal determination, sexual thrill-seeking, brazen showmanship, obsession close to fixation and something approaching insanity. In other words, the qualities required for greatness and wickedness, for heroism and monstrosity, for brilliant, decent philanthropy and brutal dystopian murderousness are not too far distant from each other. The Norwegians alone have a word for this: *stormannsgalskap* – the madness of great men.

In the last half-century, many history teachers seemed to enjoy making history as boring as possible, reducing it to the dreariness of mortality rates, tons of coal consumed per household and other economic statistics, but the study of any period in detail shows that the influence of character on events is paramount, whether we are looking at the autocrats of the ancient world or the modern democratic politicians of our own day. In the 21st century, no one who looks at world history after 9/11 would now claim that the character of US President George W Bush was not decisive in its contribution to the momentous decisions that were taken during this period. Plutarch, the inventor of biographical history, puts this best in his introduction to his portraits of Alexander and Caesar: ‘It is not histories I am writing, but lives; and in the most glorious deeds, there is not always an indication of virtue, of vice; indeed a small thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of a character than battles where thousands die.’

PETER THE GREAT

1672–1725

I have conquered an empire but I have not been able to conquer myself.

Peter I of Russia was a physical giant – 6 feet 8 inches tall – and dynamic ruler whose astonishing political acumen, colossal ambitions, ruthless methods and eccentric energy, transformed Russia into a European great power, vastly expanded his empire and founded the city of St Petersburg. He is often described as a pro-Western reformer but that is simplistic: he was certainly a reformer and advocate of Western technology but at heart he was a brutal autocrat, the ultimate personification of the hero-monster.

He grew up in a rough school: like other practitioners of political autocracy such as Tsar Ivan the Terrible and King Louis XIV, his early years were dangerous and uncertain, overshadowed by terrifying coups and intrigues. Peter was the son of the second tsar of a new dynasty – the Romanovs – and when his father Alexei died, his weak and sickly eldest brother Fyodor succeeded to the throne for a few years, but powerful boyar (noble) families effectively ruled in his stead. On Fyodor's death in 1682, the next two brothers in the family, Ivan V and Peter I succeeded jointly – Ivan too was unfit to rule and both were very young so Russia was ruled by their mother as regent. The revolt of Moscow's old court guardsmen, the *streltsy*, enabled Peter's formidable sister Sophia to seize power and rule in the boys' name.

Peter developed into an extraordinary figure – amazingly tall though with a somewhat small head, highly intelligent and indefatigable though sometimes affected by twitches and

strange illnesses – he may have been epileptic. From an early age he was fascinated with all matters military, naval and technological, creating his own mini-army with regiments made up of his friends and cronies.

In 1689, Peter removed his sister and started to rule in his own right. He also married and had children. One of his first actions was attack the Ottomans and the Crimean Tartars to the south, hoping to capture Azov, but this enterprise failed and it was not until 1696 that he managed to take the city.

In 1697, he set off on his fact-finding adventure – the Grand Embassy – around western Europe, where he visited Holland and England amongst many other places and studied shipbuilding. The trip was bizarre – part technological research, part political investigation, part road trip and part hooliganish stagnight.

Peter was already a law unto himself: such was his supremacy as tsar in Russia that he often dressed as an ordinary sailor or soldier and liked in his inner circle to appoint other courtiers as ‘mock-tsar’ so that he could relax while his henchmen indulged in the wild orgies of drunkenness and debauch that literally killed some less energetic participants.

After eighteen months away in western Europe, the streltsy, the overmighty Kremlin guards, rebelled and Peter rushed home to organize their destruction – here was an opportunity to create his own army. Never shy of shedding blood with his own hands, he personally executed and tortured many in a public orgy of violence. But he also embarked on the famous reforms that were designed to update and empower Russia to take its place amongst the great powers of Europe: beards were banned, new army regiments trained, government reorganized and Peter probed northwards towards the Baltic, controlled by Sweden, southwards toward the Black Sea, under Ottoman rule, to find a port for Russia.

His Great Northern War, designed to win an outlet on the

Baltic, and fought all around that sea and in Ukraine and Poland, was a mammoth, destructive and long struggle with the Swedish empire, in particular its brilliant warrior-king Charles XII. It began with a defeat at Narva, but Peter went ahead anyway and founded St Petersburg. Ultimately his sheer will and vision would make it Russia's capital city. The war raged for many years and culminated in Charles XII's invasion of Russia – a project that ranks with the invasions of Napoleon and Hitler in its scale, ambition and hubris. In one of the decisive battles of European history, Peter defeated the Swedes at Poltava in 1709. St Petersburg was safe but the war continued for another decade even after the death of Charles XII.

In 1710, Peter, always impatient and overambitious, attacked the Ottoman empire in the south, but his campaign very nearly ended in disaster when he and his army were surrounded by the Ottoman grand vizier and his army: he was lucky to escape.

Nonetheless his armies had conquered much of the Baltic shores and he concentrated on his reforms and new capital. His allies in these enterprises were often his own creations whom he raised to the highest wealth and aristocracy, such as his crony and friend, a former soldier and pie seller, Alexander Menshikov, whom he made into a prince and field marshal.

His great love was one of Menshikov's former mistresses, a young Livonian girl named Martha Scavronskaya – renamed Catherine by the tsar – who became Peter's most trusted ally, consolation and mother of more children including his daughter, the future empress Elizaveta. Much earlier, he had divorced his first wife Eudoxia with whom he had fathered his heir, Tsarevich Alexei. The boy represented the old Muscovite interests that Peter loathed and tensions between them represented political as well as personal rifts. Terrified, the prince took refuge with the Habsburg emperor in Vienna.

Furious, humiliated and threatened, Peter had him hunted

down and lured home with promises of safety. Meanwhile, in Russia, anyone implicated in Alexei's escape was impaled, tortured and executed, often by the tsar himself. When Alexei arrived home, he was instantly arrested and tortured to death by his own father.

Peter remained a dangerous and paranoid tyrant: when the brother of one of his former mistresses Anna Mons became too close to his wife Catherine, he was beheaded and his pickled head presented to her.

In 1721, he finally won his peace with Sweden and with it more territories around the Baltic. Peter was declared emperor of Russia, the first Russian monarch to add this title alongside the traditional honorific of tsar. Yet his murder of his son and his failure to appoint a male heir left an uncertain legacy. He was first succeeded by his peasant-born empress, who ruled as Catherine I, backed by Peter's friend Prince Menshikov. But her death brought Peter's young grandson, a child controlled by Muscovite conservatives, to the throne as Peter II. The unstable succession led to decades of palace coups and female rulers such as his daughter Elizaveta and, later, the wife of his grandson, Catherine the Great.

Probably Russia's greatest tsar, and the prototype of the ruthless yet revolutionary Russian ruler whose divergent characteristics could inspire figures as diverse as Catherine the Great, Stalin and Vladimir Putin, this remarkable life force died in 1725, aged only fifty-two.

NAPOLEON III

1808–1873

Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historical facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first

time as tragedy, the second time as farce.

Karl Marx on Napoleon III

Napoleon III's reign ended in disaster but for twenty years he enjoyed astonishing success, restoring order in France and then restoring France's position in Europe, winning the Crimean War in alliance with Britain, defeating Austria, helping to unite Italy, rebuilding Paris. Described by Bismarck as a 'sphinx without a riddle' and by Victor Hugo as 'Napoleon the Little' in comparison to his uncle Napoleon the Great, he was nonetheless a statesman of talent, and along with his nemesis Bismarck, one of the pioneers of modern politics and electioneering – the quest for the support of the middle classes and the centre.

His career was based on the fame of his uncle, Napoleon I.

Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte was the son of Louis Bonaparte and Hortense de Beauharnais, king and queen of Holland, his father being a younger brother of the emperor, his mother a daughter of the Empress Josephine. On the death of the emperor in 1821, his heir was his son, the king of Rome, known as Napoleon II to Bonapartists or the duke of Reichstadt to everyone else, but he died young and never reigned. During the 1820s, Louis-Napoleon became the Bonapartist pretender, a romantic drifting figure whose quixotic attempts to seize power in France, invariably funded by his mistresses and backed by a crew of desperate and inept adventurers, ended in comical disaster. It was probably the comedy that saved his life, for he avoided severe penalties and was instead imprisoned for a while in the fortress of Ham – from which he famously escaped. Even early in his career, the young man showed drive and courage however unsuccessful he may have been.

His prospects remained hopeless until 1848 when the revolutions that shook Europe overthrew the July Monarchy of King Louis Philippe of France. Suddenly Louis-Napoleon

Bonaparte, a romantic if inscrutable figure and bearer of the magical name, was on everyone's lips. When presidential elections were held, Louis-Napoleon, who was still relatively unknown in France, was able to appear to be all things to all people and played the election campaign with considerable skill and shrewdness, winning a landslide to become the first president of France. But he wanted more, calling himself the Princepresident.

In a coup d'état in December 1851, he ruthlessly seized power, arresting his enemies and shooting down opposition, to become effective dictator of France. A year later, promising that the empire meant peace, he was crowned Emperor Napoleon III.

For his first decade in power, he ruled with authoritarian flamboyance, crushing any dissent but enjoying considerable success in his plans to restore France to a position of pre-eminence amongst the powers of Europe and to secure his own empire. He used tensions over the holy sites in Jerusalem to push the Ottoman sultan for more French influence in competition with Nicholas I of Russia. When the tsar used military force to invade Ottoman territory with a view to overthrowing the Sultanate, Napoleon allied with Britain to declare war: the Crimean War revealed both French and British military incompetence on a vast scale but ended in victory for the allies – and the acceptance of Napoleon III as a legitimate monarch by Queen Victoria, who hosted the emperor at Windsor and found him charming.

Napoleon married a Spanish aristocrat named Eugenie de Montejo who gave him a legitimate heir, the prince imperial. He backed Italian independence and unity, defeating Austria at the Battle of Solferino, thereby helping to expel the Habsburgs from Italy. During the 1860s, he changed his policies at home, fostering the liberal empire, a more constitutional monarchy that allowed greater parliamentary debate. France enjoyed a raging stock market boom, an orgy of new consumerism and

ostentatious spending while Napoleon ordered the rebuilding of a glorious new Paris by Baron Haussman.

But the urban poor were discontented by rising prices, and the difference between rich and poor as well as uninhibited corruption, personified by the new property millionaires and the rise of sexual celebrities, the *grande horizontales*, courtesans. In many ways, the modern world – stock market and property boom and bust, consumerism, celebrity, electioneering, tycoons – started with Napoleon III.

Napoleon himself was notorious for his womanizing: his early career had been funded by an English courtesan called Harriet Howard and he remained an enthusiastic keeper of mistresses: indeed members of his cabinet travelling on the imperial train were once treated to the sight of the emperor in flagrante when his apartment door slid open. His affair with the gorgeous Contessa di Castiglione, a spy-temptress-adventuress who was the cousin of the Italian leader Cavour, was said to have encouraged his embrace of Italian liberation. But he was already committed to Italian freedom – her perfect figure displayed beneath her notorious see-through dresses was irresistible in its own right. For all his fame and flamboyance, Napoleon remained strangely unknowable and mysterious. With his waxed moustaches and short legs he was hardly a heroic figure – power exhausted him and ill health undermined his decision-making. His lack of judgement in 1869 allowed him to be manipulated by Bismarck into a declaration of war that proved catastrophic. The ailing emperor was out of his depth as warlord or even war leader. Defeat at Sedan led to his abdication and exile in England: France's last monarch died abroad. His son the prince imperial was killed serving in British forces against the Zulus.

The downfall of his glittering, pleasure-loving, modern empire in the defeat, revolution and massacre of the Paris Commune, was best described by Emile Zola in his novel *Nana* in which

the empire is symbolized by a shallow, greedy, wanton courtesan who dies in her hotel room as the crowds overthrow the regime, her beautiful body consumed by worms. Marx described how history repeated itself in the Napoleons: Napoleon I as a 'tragedy', Napoleon III as a 'farce'.

BISMARCK

1815–1898

Anyone who has ever looked into the glazed eyes of a soldier dying on the battlefield will think hard before starting a war.

Otto von Bismarck

Otto von Bismarck, son of a Junker landowner, was the Iron Chancellor who united Germany, won three wars, created a hybrid authoritarian-democratic German empire and dominated European affairs for almost thirty years. A bundle of contradictions, he was both a militarist ultra-conservative and the bringer of a welfare state and universal suffrage to Germany, a modernizer whose German constitution left real power in the hands of emperor and army, a brutally ruthless and vindictive politician who was also a neurotic hypochondriac and near hysteric, an insomniac who could not stop eating, a Christian believer whose methods were utterly amoral. At home and abroad, he used the threat of democracy to force kings and princes to do his bidding and in the process he created a Germany that was the most dynamic power in Europe, but his creation was utterly flawed and unworkable, partly because he had designed it around himself as ruling chancellor.

As a flamboyantly ambitious and eccentric student, he paid court to two English girls but then fell in love with a graceful and fascinating girl called Marie von Thadden who had recently

married one of his friends. Under her influence he embraced the fashionable pietist evangelical Lutheranism, though this never restrained his political intrigues. Ultimately he married the plain, humourless and religious Joanna von Puttkamer with whom he had a successful but probably boring and unhappy marriage blessed with many children.

During the 1848 Revolutions, Bismarck was outraged at the liberal rebellion and planned to lead his peasants to Berlin to back the king. He projected himself as a diehard authoritarian praising the divine right of kings in a series of provocative speeches designed to win him attention. His regular memoranda of advice to the regent and later king of Prussia, the conservative Wilhelm I, a bluff if emotional Prussian soldier, made clear that he wanted to serve as chief minister but would demand total control over foreign affairs. Instead he was appointed ambassador to the diet of the German Confederation in Frankfurt, then to St Petersburg and lastly to Paris. During these postings and a visit to London, he met the statesmen of the time, including Napoleon III of France and Benjamin Disraeli. He openly and with astonishing foresight told Disraeli exactly how he would manipulate the German princes, France and Austria, using war and the threat of democracy to reunite Germany. Within a few years he had precisely fulfilled his promises.

In 1862, King Wilhelm's crisis over the Prussian military budget led him to appoint Bismarck minister-president and foreign minister of Prussia. Bismarck almost ruined his job at once with an unwise and notorious speech that threatened blood and iron – war – as the only way for Prussia to find its destiny in Europe.

Nonetheless in partnership with War Minister Roon and Chief of Staff von Moltke, Bismarck set about doing exactly that. Prussia's rival for leadership of the many German kingdoms was the Habsburg empire of Austria–Hungary ruled by Emperor

Franz-Joseph. First Bismarck exploited the crisis of the succession of the duchies of Schleswig-Holstein to defeat the hapless king of Denmark and then exclude Austria from German affairs.

Then in 1866 he manipulated Austria into a war in which Emperor Franz-Josef was defeated at the Battle of Königgrätz, ending once and for all Austrian pretensions to a role in Germany.

Prussia was able to then annex several German kingdoms, including Hanover.

Bismarck was raised to count. Throughout all this, he depended solely on the king of Prussia for his power – in effect he had no party, but Wilhelm had in turn become dependent on Bismarck. Crises were solved by Bismarck's weeping, hypochondria or threats of resignation, but he took enormous trouble to retain royal support, despite being hated by Queen Augusta as well as Crown Prince Frederick and his wife Vicky, Queen Victoria's liberal daughter. 'It is not easy to be king under Bismarck,' said King Wilhelm.

In 1869, when Spain offered its throne to a Hohenzollern prince, a kinsman of the king of Prussia, Napoleon III insisted that the offer be refused – quite reasonably – since the French feared Prussian power on both sides of their borders. But French arrogance played into Bismarck's hands: he doctored the text of a French telegram to make it insulting to King Wilhelm, who was outraged. The French declared war but were totally defeated at the Battle of Sedan by the Prussians. Emperor Napoleon III abdicated, a prisoner.

Bismarck's victory allowed him to unite Germany into a new Empire with Wilhelm I as emperor (Kaiser in German) and himself as chancellor. He was made a prince. The Germany he combined a façade of universal suffrage, parliamentary democracy, and a modern industrial economy, with the reality of secretive authoritarian military rule by the kaiser, Junker-

aristocratic army officers and of course Bismarck himself. Real power remained with the kaiser, but it was a complex system that only Bismarck with his unique prestige and political genius could manage and control.

He ruled for almost two more decades after creating the German empire, running a cultural campaign to attack Catholic power, at times allying with socialists, at others pushing conservative policies, creating a welfare state, promoting foreign alliances with Austria and Russia while aiming to keep the balance of power in Europe.

Ultimately his power tottered as he aged and his patron Wilhelm died in 1888. Wilhelm was succeeded as kaiser by Crown Prince Frederick who was already tragically dying of cancer. After a short reign his place was taken on the throne by the young, impetuous and unbalanced Kaiser Wilhelm II, who in 1890 demanded the Chancellor's resignation. Bismarck was seventy-five but he was infuriated at his downfall. He had created Germany, and a new Europe but his successors – particularly Kaiser Wilhelm II – could not control his creation.



Simon Sebag Montefiore was born in 1965 and read history at Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge University. *Catherine the Great & Potemkin* was shortlisted for the Samuel Johnson, Duff Cooper, and Marsh Biography Prizes. *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* won the History Book of the Year Prize at the British Book Awards. *Young Stalin* won the Costa Biography Award (UK), the LA Times Book Prize for Biography (US), Le Grand Prix de la Biographie Politique (France) and the Kreisky Prize for Political Literature (Austria). He lives with his wife, the novelist Santa Montefiore, and their two children in London.

SIMON SEBAG MONTEFIORE

presents the lives of the giants who have made our world.
The cast varies from conquerors, poets, kings, empresses and
whores to psychopaths, prophets, composers and explorers.

Informative, entertaining, inspiring and sometimes
horrifying, this is a history of the world that contains
the characters everyone should know and the stories
no one should forget.

JERUSALEM

‘Spectacular . . . It’s a treasure. It’s a wonderful book’

BILL CLINTON, *The Today Show*, NBC

YOUNG STALIN

‘Gripping! Montefiore’s research is brilliant . . . a memorable
portrait of one of the 20th Century’s greatest monsters’

ANTONY BEEVOR, *Daily Telegraph*

STALIN: THE COURT OF THE RED TSAR

‘Horrific, revelatory and sobering . . . a triumph of
research [that] should be required reading’

JOHN LE CARRÉ, *Observer*

CATHERINE THE GREAT AND POTEMKIN

‘A rather wonderful book’

MICK JAGGER, *Sunday Times*

Quercus Non-Fiction/History

UK £9.99

ISBN 978-1-78087-026-7



9 781780 870267

www.quercusbooks.co.uk

Design: mecob.org