



# The Russian Empire

### MAIN IDEA

**EMPIRE BUILDING** Russia grew out of a blending of Slavic and Byzantine cultures and adopted Eastern Orthodox traditions.

### WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Early Russia was separated from the West, leading to a difference in culture that still exists today.

### TERMS & NAMES

- Slavs
- Vladimir
- Yaroslav the Wise
- Alexander Nevsky
- Ivan III
- czar

**SETTING THE STAGE** In addition to sending its missionaries to the land of the **Slavs** during the ninth century, Byzantium actively traded with its neighbors to the north. Because of this increased interaction, the Slavs began absorbing many Greek Byzantine ways. It was this blending of Slavic and Greek traditions that eventually produced Russian culture.

## Russia's Birth

Russia's first unified territory originated west of the Ural Mountains in the region that runs from the Black Sea to the Baltic Sea. Hilly grasslands are found in the extreme south of that area. The north, however, is densely forested, flat, and swampy. Slow-moving, interconnecting rivers allow boat travel across these plains in almost any direction. Three great rivers, the Dnieper (NEE•puhr), the Don, and the Volga, run from the heart of the forests to the Black Sea or the Caspian Sea. (See the map on page 308.)

In the early days of the Byzantine Empire, these forests were inhabited by tribes of Slavic farmers and traders. They spoke similar languages but had no political unity. Sometime in the 800s, small bands of adventurers came down among them from the north. These Varangians, or Rus as they were also called, were most likely Vikings. (The name "Russia" is taken from this group.) Eventually, these Vikings built forts along the rivers and settled among the Slavs.

**Slavs and Vikings** Russian legends say the Slavs invited the Viking chief Rurik to be their king. So in 862, he founded Novgorod (NAHV•guh•rahd), Russia's first important city. That account is given in *The Primary Chronicle*, a history of Russia written by monks in the early 1100s. Around 880, a nobleman from Novgorod named Oleg moved south to Kiev (KEE•ehf), a city on the Dnieper River. From Kiev, the Vikings could sail by river and sea to Constantinople. There they could trade for products from distant lands.

Kiev grew into a principality, a small state ruled by a prince. As it did, the Viking nobles intermarried with their Slavic subjects and adopted many aspects of Slavic culture. Gradually, the line between Slavs and Vikings vanished.

**Kiev Becomes Orthodox** In 957, a member of the Kievan nobility, Princess Olga, paid a visit to Constantinople and publicly converted to Christianity. From 945 to 964, she governed Kiev until her son was old enough to rule. Her son

### TAKING NOTES

**Recognizing Effects** Use a chart to show how Mongol rule affected different parts of Russian society.

Nobles	Church
People	Moscow Princes

## The Viking Invasions of Eastern Europe, 820-941



### GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

- Human-Environment Interaction** Which geographical feature of Russia did Vikings use to further their invasions?
- Human-Environment Interaction** Besides east, what was the other basic direction taken by Vikings in their Eastern European invasions? Why do you think they chose to invade in that direction?

resisted Christianity. However, soon after Olga's grandson **Vladimir** (VLAD•uh•meer) came to the throne about 980, he considered conversion to Christianity. *The Primary Chronicle* reports that Vladimir sent out teams to observe the major religions of the times. Three of the teams returned with lukewarm accounts of Islam, Judaism, and Western Christianity. But the team from Byzantium told quite a different story:

### PRIMARY SOURCE

The Greeks led us to the [buildings] where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendor or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We only know that God dwells there among men, and . . . we cannot forget that beauty.

from *The Primary Chronicle*

This report convinced Vladimir to convert to Byzantine Christianity and to make all his subjects convert, too. In 989, a baptism of all the citizens of Kiev was held in the Dnieper River. Kiev, already linked to Byzantium by trade, now looked to the empire for religious guidance. Vladimir imported teachers to instruct the people in the new faith. All the beliefs and traditions of Orthodox Christianity flourished in Kiev. Vladimir appreciated the Byzantine idea of the

emperor as supreme ruler of the Church. So the close link between Church and state took root in Russia as well. **A**

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Motives

**A** Why might Vladimir think it important that all his subjects become Christian?

## Kiev's Power and Decline

Thanks to its Byzantine ties, Kiev grew from a cluster of crude wooden forts to the glittering capital of a prosperous and educated people. The rise of Kiev marked the appearance of Russia's first important unified territory.

**Kievan Russia** Vladimir led the way in establishing Kiev's power. He expanded his state west into Poland and north almost to the Baltic Sea. He also fought off troublesome nomads from the steppes to the south.

In 1019, Vladimir's son **Yaroslav the Wise** came to the throne and led Kiev to even greater glory. Like the rulers of Byzantium, Yaroslav skillfully married off his daughters and sisters to the kings and princes of Western Europe. Those marriages helped him to forge important trading alliances. At the same time, he created a legal code tailored to Kiev's commercial culture. Many of its rules dealt with crimes against property. Yaroslav also built the first library in Kiev. Under his rule, Christianity prospered. By the 12th century, Kiev was home to some 400 churches.



**Kiev's Decline** The decline of the Kievan state started with the death of Yaroslav in 1054. During his reign, Yaroslav had made what turned out to be a crucial error. He had divided his realm among his sons, instead of following the custom of passing on the throne to the eldest son. Upon their father's death, the sons tore the state apart fighting for the choicest territories. And because this system of dividing the kingdom among sons continued, each generation saw new struggles. The Crusades—the numerous clashes between Christians and Muslims for control of the Holy Lands of the Middle East that began in 1095—added to Kiev's troubles by disrupting trade. Then, just when it seemed that things could not get worse, a new threat emerged.

## The Mongol Invasions

### Vocabulary

*Khan* is the Mongol word for "ruler."

In the middle 1200s, a ferocious group of horsemen from central Asia slashed their way into Russia. These nomads were the Mongols. (See Chapter 12.) They had exploded onto the world scene at the beginning of the 1200s under Genghis Khan (JEHNG•gihs KAHN), one of the most feared warriors of all time.

The Mongols may have been forced to move out by economic or military pressures. They may have been lured by the wealth of cities to the west. Whatever their reasons for leaving, they rode their swift horses across the steppes of Asia and on into Europe. Their savage killing and burning won them a reputation for ruthless brutality. When Genghis Khan died in 1227, his successors continued the conquering that he had begun. At its fullest extent, the Mongol Empire stretched from the Yellow Sea to the Baltic Sea and from the Himalayas to northern Russia.

In 1240, the Mongols attacked and demolished Kiev. They rode under the leadership of Batu Khan, Genghis's grandson. So many inhabitants were slaughtered, a Russian historian reported, that "no eye remained to weep." A Roman Catholic bishop traveling through Kiev five years later wrote, "When we passed through that land, we found lying in the field countless heads and bones of dead people." After the fall of Kiev, Mongols ruled all of southern Russia for 200 years. The empire's official name was the "Khanate of the Golden Horde": *Khanate*, from the Mongol word for "kingdom"; *Golden*, because gold was the royal color of the Mongols; and *Horde*, from the Mongol word for "camp."

**Mongol Rule in Russia** Under Mongol rule, the Russians could follow all their usual customs, as long as they made no attempts to rebel. As fierce as they were, the Mongols tolerated all the religions in their realms. The Church, in fact, often acted as a mediator between the Russian people and their Mongol rulers.



## > Analyzing Primary Sources

### Resisting Mongol Rule

Although Russians by and large obeyed their Mongol rulers, pockets of resistance existed, shown by this 1259 diary entry of a resident of Novgorod.

#### PRIMARY SOURCE

The same winter the accursed raw-eating Tartars [Mongols], Berkai and Kasachik, came with their wives, and many others, and there was great tumult in Novgorod, and they did much evil in the province, taking contribution for the accursed Tartars. And the accursed ones began to fear death; they said to [Prince] Alexander: 'Give us guards, lest they kill us.' And the Knayz ordered the son of Posadnik and all the sons of the Boyars to protect them by night. The Tartars said: 'Give us your numbers for tribute or we will run away and return in greater strength.' And the common people would not give their numbers for tribute but said: 'Let us die honourably for St. Sophia and for the angelic houses.'

Resident of Novgorod, from *Medieval Russia*

### Rebelling Against the Mongols

Resistance against Mongol rule occasionally broke out into open rebellion, as this account from an anti-Mongol uprising in Tver in 1327 indicates.

#### PRIMARY SOURCE

The lawless Shevkal, the destroyer of Christianity, . . . came to Tver, drove the Grand Prince from his court and entrenched himself there with great haughtiness and violence. . . . The entire city assembled and the uprising was in the making. The Tverians cried out and began to kill the Tartars wherever they found them until they killed Shevkal and the rest [of his men]. They missed killing the messengers who were with the horses that grazed in the meadow [outside the city]. They [the messengers] saddled their best horses and swiftly galloped to Moscow and from there to the [Golden] Horde, where they brought the news of the death of Shevkal.

Tver Eyewitness Account, from *Medieval Russia*

#### DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS

1. **Comparing** *In what way did the reasons for the uprisings in Novgorod and Tver differ?*
2. **Making Predictions** *Based on what you have read about the Mongols, what do you think their response was to the above events of resistance and rebellion?*

The Mongols demanded just two things from Russians: absolute obedience and massive amounts of tribute, or payments. By and large, the Russian nobles agreed. Novgorod's prince and military hero **Alexander Nevsky**, for example, advised his fellow princes to cooperate with the Mongols. The Russian nobles often crushed revolts against the Mongols and collected oppressive taxes for the foreign rulers.

Mongol rule isolated the Russians more than ever from their neighbors in Western Europe. This meant that among other things, the Russians had little access to many new ideas and inventions. During this period, however, forces were at work that eventually would lead to the rise of a new center of power in the country, and to Russia's liberation.

## Russia Breaks Free

The city of Moscow was first founded in the 1100s. By 1156, it was a crude village protected by a log wall. Nonetheless, it was located near three major rivers: the Volga, Dnieper, and Don. From that strategic position, a prince of Moscow who could gain control of the three rivers could control nearly all of European Russia—and perhaps successfully challenge the Mongols. **B**

**Moscow's Powerful Princes** A line of Russian princes eventually emerged on the scene who would do just that. During the late 1320s, Moscow's Prince Ivan I had earned the gratitude of the Mongols by helping to crush a Russian revolt against Mongol rule. For his services, the Mongols appointed Ivan I as tax collector of all the Slavic lands they had conquered. They also gave him the title of "Grand Prince." Ivan had now become without any doubt the most powerful of all Russian princes. He also became the wealthiest and was known as "Ivan Moneybag."

#### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Issues

**B** What about Moscow's location was significant?



Ivan convinced the Patriarch of Kiev, the leading bishop of Eastern Europe, to move to Moscow. The move improved the city's prestige and gave Moscow's princes a powerful ally: the Church. Ivan I and his successors used numerous strategies to enlarge their territory: land purchases, wars, trickery, and shrewd marriages. From generation to generation, they schemed to gain greater control over the small states around Moscow.

**An Empire Emerges** The Russian state would become a genuine empire during the long, 43-year reign of **Ivan III**. Upon becoming the prince of Moscow, Ivan openly challenged Mongol rule. He took the name **czar** (zahr), the Russian version of Caesar, and publicly claimed his intent to make Russia the "Third Rome." (The title "czar" became official only during the reign of Ivan IV.)

In 1480, Ivan made a final break with the Mongols. After he refused to pay his rulers further tribute, Russian and Mongol armies faced each other at the Ugra River, about 150 miles southwest of Moscow. However, neither side advanced to fight. So, after a time, both armies turned around and marched home. Russians have traditionally marked this bloodless standoff as their liberation from Mongol rule. After this liberation, the czars could openly pursue an empire.

Such a defeat for the Mongols would have seemed impossible nearly two centuries earlier, as they pushed west from present-day China and crushed nearly everything in their path. One of the peoples whom they conquered back then was a new group that had risen to power in Central Asia—the Turks.

## History Makers



**Ivan III**  
**1440–1505**

Those around him often viewed Ivan as cold, calculating, and ruthless. This may have been due in part to a difficult upbringing. Ivan came of age during a time of great civil strife in Russia. His father, Grand Prince Vasali II, was at one point imprisoned and blinded by opposition forces.

Ivan's cautious and calculating style drew criticism from Russians eager for more bold and swift action against the Mongols. Even a close aide questioned his tactics. "Would you surrender Russia to fire and sword?" he asked the prince. After Russian forces won the standoff at the Ugra River, however, such criticism turned to praise.

2

SECTION
ASSESSMENT

**TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Slavs
- Vladimir
- Yaroslav the Wise
- Alexander Nevsky
- Ivan III
- czar

<p><b>USING YOUR NOTES</b></p> <p>2. Which group fared the worst under Mongol rule?</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; margin-top: 10px;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Nobles</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Church</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="height: 30px;"></td> <td style="height: 30px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">People</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Moscow Princes</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="height: 30px;"></td> <td style="height: 30px;"></td> </tr> </table>	Nobles	Church			People	Moscow Princes			<p><b>MAIN IDEAS</b></p> <p>3. How did Yaroslav's decision to divide his realm among his sons help cause Kiev's decline?</p> <p>4. What main demands did the Mongols make on their Russian subjects?</p> <p>5. How did Ivan III lead the Russians to their independence from the Mongols?</p>	<p><b>CRITICAL THINKING &amp; WRITING</b></p> <p>6. <b>RECOGNIZING EFFECTS</b> How did Vladimir's conversion to Christianity affect Kiev?</p> <p>7. <b>FORMING AND SUPPORTING OPINIONS</b> Do you approve of Nevsky's cooperation with the Mongols? Was his policy practical or cowardly? Explain.</p> <p>8. <b>ANALYZING ISSUES</b> How was Ivan I both friend and foe to the Mongol rulers?</p> <p>9. <b>WRITING ACTIVITY</b> <span style="background-color: #e69d00; color: white; padding: 2px;">EMPIRE BUILDING</span> Imagine you are a reporter for a major Russian newspaper. Write a <b>headline</b> and lead <b>paragraph</b> about Ivan III's standoff with Mongol forces at the Ugra River and its aftermath.</p>
Nobles	Church									
People	Moscow Princes									

**INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY** **INTERNET ACTIVITY**

Use the Internet to create a **photo gallery** of modern-day Moscow. Possible subjects include the city's architecture, street scenes, and people.

**INTERNET KEYWORD**  
*Moscow photos*