



2

Russians Adapt Byzantine Culture

TERMS & NAMES

- Slavs
- boyars
- Olga
- Vladimir
- Yaroslav the Wise
- Alexander Nevsky
- czar

MAIN IDEA

Russia grew out of a blending of Slavic and Byzantine cultures with Eastern Orthodox traditions.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The early history of Russia separated it from the West, causing mutual misunderstandings that still exist today.

SETTING THE STAGE At the beginning of the 9th century, the Byzantines regarded the forests north of the Black Sea as a wilderness. In their minds, those forests were inhabited only by “barbarians,” who sometimes made trouble along their borders. They would soon consider these Slavic peoples as fellow Byzantine Christians.

Both Slavic and Greek

Midway through the 9th century, the **Slavs**—the people from the forests north of the Black Sea—began trading with Constantinople. As they traded, they began absorbing Greek Byzantine ideas. Russian culture grew out of this blending of Slavic and Greek traditions.

The Land of 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. 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.

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. Eventually, the 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

Background

Like the Greeks, the Byzantines labeled anyone who did not speak Greek as a “barbarian.”

THINK THROUGH HISTORY**A. Making**

Inferences Why might a territory with plains and rivers be difficult to defend against invaders?

Many rivers in Russia are full of rocks and dangerous rapids. Vikings like the ones in this woodcut would lift up their boats and carry them past those dangers. Even so, many Vikings died in Russian rivers.





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 the products from distant lands.

The merchandise they brought to Constantinople included timber, fur, wax, honey, and their Slavic subjects whom they sold as slaves. In fact, the word *slave* originates from *Slav*.

Background

Vikings could dominate the Slavs partly because of superior weaponry. They used two-edged swords and battle axes.

Kiev grew into a principality, a small state ruled by a prince. As it did, the Viking nobles intermarried with their Slavic subjects. They also adopted Slavic culture. The society remained strictly divided between peasant masses and the nobles, or **boyars**. Gradually, however, the line between Slavs and Vikings vanished.

Kiev Becomes Orthodox In 957, a member of the Kievan nobility paid a visit to Constantinople and publicly converted to Christianity. Her name was Princess **Olga**. From 945 to 955, she governed Kiev until her son was old enough to rule. Her son 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:

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

. . . 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 Constantinople 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.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

B. Analyzing

Motives Why do you think Vladimir thought it was 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 prosperous and educated people. The rise of Kiev marks the appearance of Russia's first important unified territory.

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 is the other basic direction taken by Vikings in their Eastern European invasions? Why do you think they chose to attack in that direction?



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. For example, Yaroslav's code called for a fine of three *grivnas* for cutting off a person's finger, but 12 *grivnas* for plowing over a property line. Yaroslav also built the first library in Kiev. Under his rule, Christianity prospered. By the 12th century, Kiev could even boast of having 400 churches. However, the wooden churches proved to be as temporary as Kiev's glory.

Power Struggles Bring on Kiev's Decline The decline of the Kievan state started with the death of Yaroslav in 1054. Yaroslav had made a crucial error. Yaroslav divided his realm among his sons—instead of following the custom of passing on the throne to the eldest son. His sons tore the state apart fighting for the choicest territories. And because this system of dividing among sons continued, each generation saw new struggles. The Crusades added to Kiev's troubles by disrupting trade. Then, just when it seemed that things could not get worse, they got far worse.

Background

Under Yaroslav's system, younger brothers were supposed to move up to better properties as their elders died. However, the brothers didn't always die in the right order!

Mongol Invasions Favor the Rise of Moscow

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.

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, Mongols rode their swift horses across the steppes of Asia and on into

HISTORY THROUGH ART: Fine Art



Madonna with Child and Angels (about 1463),
Fra Filippo Lippi (Italy)

Christian religious art in the West strives to show the holy in realistic situations. Eastern Orthodox icons depict a spiritual world that is far removed from what some consider the "real" world. In Western art, the divine seems near and familiar. In the East, the divine looks far from our human level, but like windows, icons can help believers glimpse heaven.

Connect to History

Contrast What are the differences between the styles of these two paintings? Consider the mother, the child, and the background.

 [SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R20](#)

Connect to Today

Analyzing Go to a house of worship near you. See if and how the spiritual is portrayed there.



The Mother of God of Vladimir (12th century), icon commissioned by the grand duke of Kiev

**Background**

The Mongols may have been related to the Huns, who had helped topple the Roman Empire. (See Chapter 6, page 161.)

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 over 200 years, the Mongol Empire in Russia held power. 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; *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 sign of rebellion. As fierce as they were, the Mongols tolerated all the religions in their realms. The Church acted as a mediator between the people and the Mongols. It also pacified the oppressors by praying for them. Church leaders found a religious meaning in the Mongol occupation of the country. They explained it as a punishment for the people's sins. Icons gained importance at this time, and Russians used the images to help escape their painful political realities.

The Mongols demanded just two things from Russians: slavish obedience and massive amounts of tribute. The Mongols themselves made sure Russians remained obedient. However, they made local nobles collect the tribute. As long as the money was delivered, the nobles could keep their titles. Novgorod's prince and military hero **Alexander Nevsky**, for example, advised his fellow princes to cooperate with the Mongols. The Russian nobles crushed revolts against the Mongols and collected oppressive taxes for the foreign rulers. At his death, Nevsky willed the principality of Moscow to his son Daniel. Daniel founded a line of princes there that in 200 years would rise to great prominence.

Mongol rule isolated the Russians more than ever from their neighbors in Western Europe, cutting them off from many new ideas and inventions. However, during this period, forces were at work that would eventually lead to Russia's liberation and to the rise of a new center of power: Moscow.

Mongol Rule Serves Moscow's Interests In some ways, the Mongols actually helped to unite Russia. Kievan Russia had been a collection of small independent principalities. Mongol rulers looked upon Russia as their unified empire, and all Russian principalities had to pay tribute to the Mongol Khan.

The rise of Moscow also began under the Mongols. The city was first founded in the 1100s. By 1156, it was a crude village protected by a log wall. Nonetheless, Moscow was located near three rivers: the Volga, Dnieper, and Don. From that strategic position, a prince of Moscow who could gain control of the three rivers could eventually control nearly all of European Russia.

That opportunity for expansion would not arise until the 14th century. In 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 "Great Prince." Ivan had now become without any

THINK THROUGH HISTORY**C. Analyzing**

Motives Do you approve of Nevsky's cooperation with the Mongols? Was his policy practical or cowardly?

Vocabulary

Khan: the Mongol word for "ruler."

HISTORY MAKERS

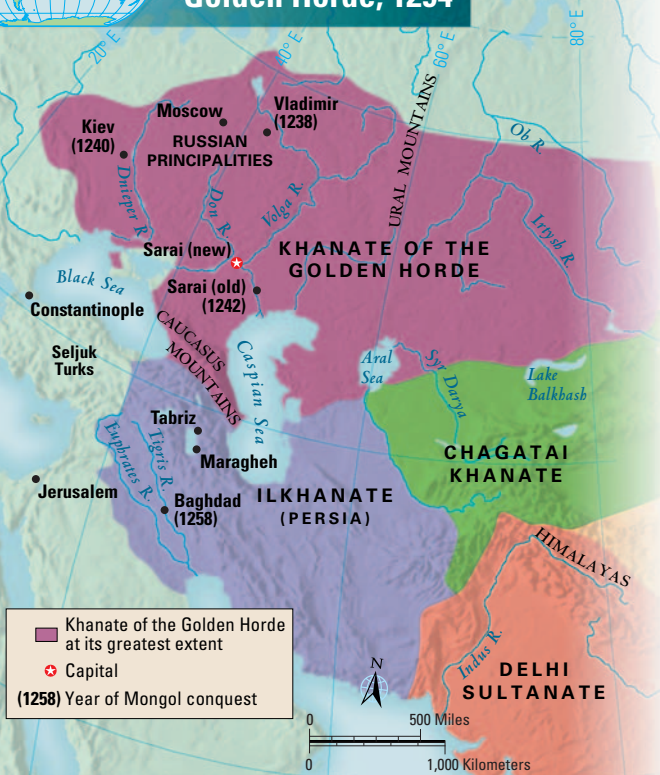
Alexander Nevsky
1220?–1263

Alexander of Novgorod was about 20 when he carved his name on Russian history. In 1240, the Swedes attacked the principality of Novgorod to stop its expansion. Alexander soundly defeated the invading Swedes at the Neva River. Grateful Russians called him Nevsky ("of the Neva") in honor of his victory.

In 1242, his fame grew even greater. In that year, the Teutonic Knights, a brotherhood of Germanic warriors, invaded the Baltics and Russia to convert them to Catholicism. Alexander cut the German armies to pieces on a frozen channel between two lakes—his famous "Battle on the Ice." For this victory and for his long protection of the Russian church, Alexander was declared a saint of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1547.



The Khanate of the Golden Horde, 1294



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

1. About how many miles did the Khanate of the Golden Horde stretch from east to west?
2. What people controlled most of the kingdoms surrounding Mongol Russia?

In 1480, Ivan made the final break with the Mongols. He refused to pay their tribute. Following his refusal, Russian and Mongol armies faced each other on either side of the Ugra River, about 150 miles southwest of Moscow. However, neither side wanted to fight. So, after a time, both armies turned around and marched home. Russians have traditionally considered this bloodless standoff as marking Russia's liberation from Mongol rule. After that liberation, the czars could openly pursue an empire.

The Mongols were not the only conquering people to emerge from central Asia. As you will learn in Section 3, Turks would begin establishing an empire in Southwest Asia. In one form or another, their empire would last from the 11th century to the 20th century.

doubt the most powerful of all Russian princes. He also became the wealthiest and was known as "Ivan Moneybags."

Ivan was also able to convince the Patriarch of Kiev, the leading bishop of Eastern Europe, to move to Moscow. The move enhanced 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, shrewd marriages. From generation to generation, they schemed to gain 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 (1462–1505). This prince was only a boy of 13 when Constantinople fell to the Turkish Empire in 1453. In 1472, Ivan III managed to marry the niece of the last Byzantine emperor. He then began calling himself **czar** (zahr), the Russian version of Caesar. (The title became official only during the reign of Ivan IV.) By calling himself czar, however, Ivan III openly claimed to make Russia the "Third Rome."

Vocabulary

enhanced: improved

Background

Rome itself was first; Constantinople was the Second Rome; the third was Russia, according to Ivan.

Section 2 Assessment

1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- Slavs
- boyars
- Olga
- Vladimir
- Yaroslav the Wise
- Alexander Nevsky
- czar

2. TAKING NOTES

Make a chart like the one below to show the effects of Mongol rule in Russia.

Nobles	Church	People	Moscow Princes

3. RECOGNIZING EFFECTS

How did Vladimir's conversion to Christianity affect the citizens, society, and government of Kiev?

THINK ABOUT

- the laws he passed
- the customs he encouraged
- the policies he followed

4. ANALYZING THEMES

Empire Building The Mongols were fierce conquerors, and their rule cut Russia off from the rest of the world. Even so, their policies helped to pull Russia together as a territory. How? Give reasons and examples from the text to support your opinion.

THINK ABOUT

- Mongol policies in Russia
- the Church's attitude toward the Mongols
- the role and power of the nobility