

A History of Russia

SECOND EDITION

Volume I: To 1917

Walter G. Moss

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Anthem Press

Anthem Press
An imprint of Wimbledon Publishing Company
75-76 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8HA
or
PO Box 9779, London SW19 7ZG
www.anthempress.com

This edition published by Anthem Press 2005

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Acknowledgments

Chapter 3, page 34: Thomas S. Noonam, *"The Flourishing of Kiev's International and Domestic Trade, ca. 1100–ca. 1240."* In I. S. Koropeckyi (ed.), *Ukrainian Economic History: Interpretive Essays* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1991). © 1991, President and Fellows of Harvard College. Reprinted by permission;
Chapter 9, page 150: Jacques Margeret, *The Russian Empire and Grand Duchy of Muscovy: A 17th-Century French Account*, trans. And ed. By Chester S. L. Dunning, © 1983. Reprinted by permission of the University of Pittsburgh Press; Chapter 14, page 255: Christian Hermann von Manstein, *Contemporary Memoirs of Russia: From the Year 1727 to 1744, No. 7 in Russia through European Eyes*. London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968.

Maps by David Lindroth, Inc.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested.

ISBN 1 84331 023 6 (Pbk)

3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

To Nancy, with more love and appreciation than ever

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Preface to the Second Edition

This revised and expanded edition of *A History of Russia, Vol. 1: To 1917* retains the essential format of the first edition published by McGraw-Hill in late 1996. Positive feedback from my own students and from colleagues indicate that this volume has worked well in a wide variety of college and university settings, both in the United States and in other English-speaking countries. This new edition, however, also reflects many of the new scholarly findings of the past six years, and I am indebted to the many scholars who have shared their insights and research in a wide variety of ways: in scholarly journals and books, in presentations at conferences, in online discussion groups, and through private correspondence. I would especially like to thank Chester Dunning and Don Ostrowski, both of whom read over a substantial number of revisions and shared their expertise with me. Daniel Stone was also kind enough to read and provide feedback on some text concerning Lithuania. I also benefited considerably from a series of papers written for a Workshop on “Orthodoxy in the Russian Historical Experience,” at the University of Michigan, February 12–13, 1999, and I appreciate the permissions granted to cite their papers given to me by the following scholars: Jennifer Hedda, Daniel Kaiser, Eve Levin, Gary Marker, Isolde Thyrêt, and William Wagner. Many of the papers from the conference will be published in *Orthodox Russia: Studies in Belief and Practice 1492–1936*, eds. Valerie Kivelson, and Robert H. Greene (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003). I am also indebted to Marshall Poe for placing *The Military and Society in Russia, 1450–1917* (which he and Eric Lohr edited) online before it was published.

A major challenge in writing a broad survey such as this is to balance scholarship with readability. Without cluttering up the text with too many footnotes, I have attempted to indicate scholarly sources and disputes, usually by references to authors indicated in the Suggested Sources at the end of each chapter. My students, and I hope others, have found the references useful in pursuing further research on a wide variety of topics.

As before, I continue to feel grateful to my former professors at Georgetown University, especially Cyril Toumanoff, Olgerd Sherbowitz-Wetzor, Frank Fadner, and John Songster, who helped prepare me to teach Russian history and

contributed to my enthusiasm for it. In numerous trips to Russia and the former Soviet Union, I learned much from the many Russians and other Soviet citizens with whom I spoke. The reviewers of the first edition of this history also contributed to making it a better work than it might have been without their suggestions. Therefore, thanks are once again due to Alan Ball, Marquette University; Charles E. Clark, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point; Patricia Herlihy, Brown University; Hugh D. Hudson, Jr., Georgia State University; Robert E. Jones, University of Massachusetts, Amherst; Richard D. Lewis, St. Cloud State University; Gary Marker, State University of New York at Stony Brook; the recently departed Thomas S. Noonan, University of Minnesota; and Ted Uldricks, University of North Carolina-Asheville.

At Eastern Michigan University, my colleague Leonas Sabaliunas was kind enough to read and comment on many chapters of the first edition, and his special concern with Lithuania stimulated my own interest in nationalities that were once part of the Russian Empire or Soviet Union. Another colleague, James McDonald, shared his knowledge of Russian geography with me, and David Geherin his expertise on the correct use of the English language; Dick Goff and James Waltz were also helpful in various ways. Ira Wheatley, Margot Duley, and Gersham Nelson have provided administrative support over many years, and Nancy Snyder and her secretarial staff constantly provided any secretarial assistance which I requested. Brandon Laird and Charles Zwinak read many chapters and offered me the perspective of intelligent students of Russian history. Other students who assisted me with bibliographical and other help were Rick Czarnota, Judy Hannah, Andy Rowland, Julie Thomas, Lance Bowley, and Tani Bellestri.

At other universities, Mauricio Borrero, Susan Costanzo, Helen Graves, William Husband, Paulis Lazda, Eve Levin, Russell Martin, Hugh Phillips, Karl Qualls, Mark Tauger, Rex Wade, Sally West, and Elvira Wilbur (and probably others I am overlooking) have offered encouragement, support, and/or suggestions. At McGraw-Hill, Chris Rogers first suggested that I write a Russian history text, and subsequently Niels Aaboe, David Follmer, Pamela Gordon, Leslye Jackson, Amy Mack provided additional editorial support. Lyn Uhl has been most helpful in easing the transition from one publisher to another. At Anthem Press, Kamaljit Sood initiated the publication of this edition, and Caroline Broughton performed the difficult editorial task of overseeing a manuscript containing many revisions. Noel McPherson and Isobel Rorison also helped oversee the publication of this Anthem Press edition. An independent cartographer, David Lindroth, produced the maps for the first edition, and he and McGraw-Hill have kindly allowed us to reproduce them for this edition.

My greatest debt, I owe to my wife, Nancy. Not only has she shared many trips to Russia with me and proofread countless pages, but her own interest in Russian women and healthcare has helped broaden my knowledge of these subjects. Likewise, my understanding of law and architecture has been broadened by the interests of our daughter, Jenny, and our sons, Tom and Dan, in one or another of these subjects.

The spellings of Russian names used in this text are based on the Library of Congress system, though I have made a few alterations in the interest of making Russian names more accessible to U.S. students. I use "i" instead of "ii" for

appropriate first name endings (thus Dmitri not Dmitrii), “y” instead of “ii” for appropriate last name endings (Kandinsky not Kandinskii), and “Yu” and “Ya” instead of “Iu” and “Ia” at the beginning of appropriate words (Yuri not Iuri). Familiar names like Tchaikovsky and Yeltsin are rendered in keeping with the spellings we have become accustomed to, and the names of émigré writers are generally spelled as they spell them in their Western publications (thus Aksyonov not Aksenov). For the spelling of non-Russian individual names or geographical areas while subject to or within the boundaries of Rus, Muscovy, the Russian Empire, or the USSR, I generally render them according to their Russian spelling prior to the breakup of the USSR in 1991. Thus, Belorussia and Belorussians, not Belarus and Belarusians until after 1991. When dating internal Russian events prior to March 1917, I use the “Old Style” (O.S.) dates of the Julian calendar (by 1917, it was thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar used in the West). International events, such as the diplomatic developments leading to World War I, are rendered according to the Gregorian calendar.

A Note to Students

Over a century ago, the Russian socialist Alexander Herzen wrote that his father once picked up Karamzin's *History of the Russian State*, but then contemptuously put it down saying: "All these Iziaslaviches and Olgoviches, to whom can that be of interest?" To prevent a similar reaction and help you make some sense of all the "Iziaslaviches and Olgoviches," this text clusters many names around several main topics: (1) the struggle for and against political authority, including autocracy and dictatorship; (2) the expansion and contraction of Russia and its dealings with other nationalities and foreign powers; and (3) the life and culture of the Russian people.

While keeping these topics in the forefront, the text also reflects the realization of what Marc Raeff has referred to as the "messiness of history." Although we need generalizations to make sense of history, not all important historical facts fit into neat categories.

Archaeological and documentary evidence provide a sufficient enough foundation for us to begin our study of Russia in the late ninth century A.D. We begin, however, not with a Russia centered around Moscow, but with Rus (sometimes called Kievans Rus), a unique state that was the common starting point for the history of all three of the East Slavic nations: Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.

From the very beginnings of Rus, we will be dealing with a complex ethnic mosaic made up primarily of Slavs, Scandinavian Vikings (the Varangians), Finno-Ugrians, and Balts. Later on, after the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century and the eventual rise of Moscow, we will see the expansion of a Russian state that at its height encompassed well over a hundred different nationalities. The story of that expansion—and later contraction—and Russia's dealings with these nationalities is an important part of Russian history. But this book's primary focus is on Russia; it barely touches on any distinct aspects of the social and cultural lives of Ukrainians, Georgians, Armenians, or other nationalities that were once a part of the Russian Empire or Soviet Union. Students desiring to know more about these nationalities and nations should turn to some of the excellent histories about them that are available. (See the section on nationalities and peoples in the General Bibliography at the end of this volume.)

The great Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy once criticized the historian Sergei Soloviev for concentrating too much on just the Russian government and neglecting those who “made the brocades, broadcloth, clothes, and damask cloth which the tsars and nobles flaunted, who trapped the black foxes and sables that were given to ambassadors, who mined the gold and iron, who raised the horses, cattle, and sheep, who constructed the houses, palaces, and churches, and who transported goods.” In this history text, such everyday life is not ignored. Special attention is paid to the lives of women, children, and families; the material culture of the people (their food and drink, their health and housing); and their legal and illegal dealings with the state, including their crimes and the punishments they suffered.

Chapter 1

Land and Peoples: From Ancient Times to the Present

As German troops discovered in late 1941, when fierce winter weather hindered them from taking Moscow, geography affects history. Although Russia's geography helped defeat the forces of Hitler, for centuries it had made life more difficult for Russians than for people located in less harsh lands.

Until the modern era, Rus and then Russians as well as other peoples were much more immediately affected than we are today, in our world of electricity and automobiles, by fields and rivers, crops and animals, heat and cold, rain and drought, and lightness and darkness. Thus, the physical world that surrounded them, their geography, was of utmost importance in determining their existence. Most Russians produced the majority of their own food and clothes. In their huts and log cabins, they had no more illumination than the weak light of a slowly burning wood splinter (*luchina*). Even the candlesticks and clay lamps of those who could afford them gave off little light. If people traveled, it was by foot, horse, or boat.

THE LAND: PHYSICAL FEATURES, CLIMATE, AND RESOURCES

The amount of territory controlled by Rus, Russian, and Soviet governments has varied considerably throughout Russia's long history (see Map 1.1), but the enormous size of Russia throughout most of its history has made centralized rule more difficult than in smaller countries. Prior to his death in 1015, the Rus prince Vladimir I ruled over about 800,000 square kilometers. In 1533, after substantial expansion but before moving into Siberia, the Russian government ruled over 2.8 million square kilometers. At the height of the Russian Empire, under the last Emperor, Nicholas II, the empire contained eight times as much territory (22.4 million square kilometers). Although the new Soviet government ruled over slightly less land in the period between the two world wars, victory in World War II enabled the U.S.S.R. to become as large as the Russian Empire had once been. Following the collapse of the U.S.S.R. at the end of 1991, Russia was left with 17.1 million square kilometers, or 76 percent of the former Soviet Union.



Growth of Russia 1533–1900

■ Russia (Muscovy) in 1533 ▨ Russian Empire in 1900



Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1930

▨ Russian Empire in 1900 ▩ Soviet Union in 1930

MAP 1.1A,B



Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1950

Soviet Union in 1930
 Soviet Union in 1950
 Republic boundaries



Russia in 1993

Boundary of the Soviet Union in 1950
 Capitals of U.S.S.R. successor states

Although smaller than the former U.S.S.R., Russia remains the largest country in the world and is about 1.8 times the size of the United States. From east to west, it extends about 10,000 kilometers (over 6,000 miles) and traverses eleven time zones. From north to south, it spans more than 4,000 kilometers (or about 2,500 miles). Alaska, which once belonged to Russia, and today is separated from Siberia only by the narrow Bering Strait, is closer to much of eastern Siberia than is Moscow.

Russia is part of the vast Eurasian land mass, and in recent centuries the Ural Mountains have been considered the dividing line between European and Asiatic Russia. But Europe is more of a cultural concept than a geographic one, and scholars such as Christian, who believes the above division is artificial, have chosen to emphasize more Russia's Eurasian character. Christian stresses the significance of Russia being part of what he calls Inner Eurasia, which includes most of the former Soviet Union, Mongolia, and China's Central Asian territory. Without ignoring his insights, however, we will continue to use the Urals as a convenient dividing line. In so doing we may note that the Russian Empire and the U.S.S.R. contained Asiatic territories besides Siberia, but Asiatic Russia today can be thought of as synonymous with it (this definition of Siberia includes Russia's Far Eastern Provinces, which are sometimes dealt with separately).

European Russia is primarily a large plain, as is western Siberia, which extends from the Urals to the Enisei River. The Urals are not very high, reaching only a little over 6,000 feet at their highest point. East of the Enisei River, the Siberian terrain becomes more hilly, and east of the Lena River stretching to the Pacific Ocean are various mountain ranges. Other mountain ranges exist in south-central and eastern Siberia, and the Caucasus Mountains are along Russia's southern border between the Black and Caspian seas.

Russia possesses many large rivers and lakes. The longest rivers are three Siberian ones, the Lena, the Irtysh and the Ob. The Enisei is fifth in size, behind the Volga River, European Russia's (and Europe's) largest river and almost as long as the American Mississippi. Most of the main Siberian rivers flow south to north and empty into the Arctic Ocean. The Irtysh flows through Kazakhstan before entering Siberia and empties into the Ob. The Amur River, which forms part of the Chinese-Russian border before turning northward and entering into the Pacific Ocean, is an exception and flows mainly west to east.

Although not as long as the greatest Siberian rivers, several of Russia's European rivers, such as the Dnieper and Volga, have played a greater historical role. In European Russia, most of the major rivers also flow northward, such as the Northern Dvina and Pechora, or southward, such as the Volga and Don. As in Siberia, many tributaries are located on an east-west axis. Several important rivers have their headwaters southeast of the city of Novgorod in the Valdai Hills. Here in heights of only about 1,000 feet above sea level, lakes and marshes give birth to the Volga, the Western Dvina, and the Dnieper. West of these Valdai Hills, some fifty to a hundred miles, are the Lovat and Volkhov rivers, divided by Lake Ilmen. Via connecting rivers, portages, and later in history, canals, the Lovat-Volkhov waterway and the three bigger rivers (the Volga, the Western Dvina, and the Dnieper) have provided water routes between the Baltic and the Black and Caspian seas.

Often, however, Russia was cut off from access to these seas. Its desire to obtain access, especially to the Baltic and Black seas, and then play a larger maritime role became significant in Russian foreign policy. Despite the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia still has coastline on both seas, although not as much as earlier. The Western Dvina and Dnieper rivers, for example, now empty into sea waters outside Russian borders. Although its vast Arctic and Pacific ocean coastlines (the latter first reached in the seventeenth century) have been less significant in Russia's historical development, they have become more important in recent centuries.

Although lakes are especially numerous in the European northwestern part of the country, the greatest lake (in Russia or the world) in terms of water volume is Siberia's wondrous Lake Baikal. Despite being called a "sea," the Caspian, which Russia shares with several other former Soviet republics and Iran, is actually the world's largest lake if measured by surface area.

Russia's extreme northern location, comparable to Alaska's and Canada's, has combined with other factors to make Russia's climate harsh. Average January temperatures in some parts of northeastern Siberia are between -50°F and -60°F , although these areas can also experience very hot, but short, summers. Further south and west, temperatures are less extreme, but winters are still long and summers short. Average January temperatures in Novosibirsk hover around 0°F and in Moscow are about 14°F , only about 7° below Chicago's.

Russia's rainfall pattern is also less than ideal. Precipitation is heaviest in the northwest and diminishes as one moves southeast. In many parts of the country, including the Moscow area, rain tends to be less plentiful in the spring and early summer, when it would most help crops, and instead falls more heavily in the late



FIGURE 1.1. Lake Baikal and a small settlement on its western shore.

summer. Taken together, Russia's northern location and unfavorable rainfall patterns have adversely affected Russian agriculture, which, in turn, has affected many other aspects of Russian life from the people's diet to population density and state revenues. Some scholars, such as the contemporary Russian historian L. V. Milov, claim that these unfavorable agricultural conditions are one of the chief explanations for why both Russian serfdom and autocracy developed and continued for so long.

Not counting transitional areas, Russia can be divided into four main vegetation zones: From north to south, they are the tundra, taiga, mixed forest, and steppe (see Map 1.2). The tundra region is a treeless one where much of the ground beneath the surface remains permanently frozen year-round. Permafrost also extends south into much of the taiga forest zone. This is an area primarily of coniferous trees like the pine. Next comes the smaller mixed forest belt of both coniferous and leaf-bearing trees. This area is much more densely populated than the taiga and contains many of Russia's larger cities including Moscow. Taken together, Russia's two forest areas equal almost one-quarter of the world's total forest lands. South of the mixed forest is a steppe or prairie zone that originally contained few trees. A Central Asian desert zone that existed in the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire at its height is no longer under Russian control.

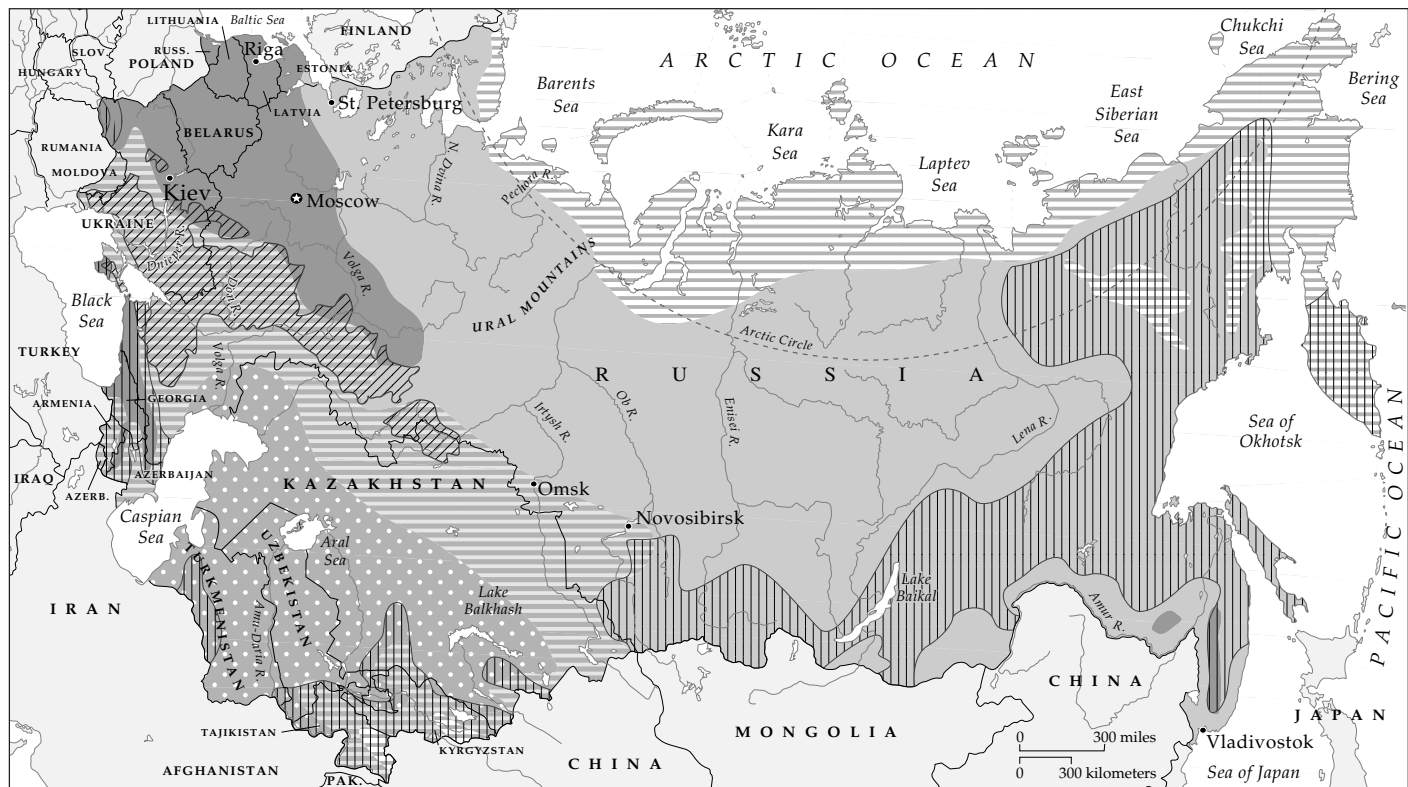
Russia's most fertile soils lie in a black-earth belt that can be found in the transitional area between the mixed forest and steppe and in the steppe itself. Because the transitional area receives more rain during appropriate times, it is the most productive agricultural area.

Further north, the soils of the mixed forest zone are not as favorable but have been farmed throughout much of Russian history. In early Russian history, peasants used the "slash-and-burn" technique of clearing lands by cutting trees and burning the stumps (the ashes making good fertilizer) before farming.

Literally from the cradle (made of wood) to the grave (in a wooden coffin), the forest and its products surrounded most Russians. The peasants often lived in pine or oak cabins amidst forest clearings. They and the town-dwellers used the wood of the forest not only for most houses, churches, and other buildings, but also for firewood, bast shoes, boats, icons, fortresses, city walls, plows, tools, and utensils. The forest provided furs and foods, such as meat, mushrooms, berries, and honey. Finally, it provided some protection, whether from steppe warriors in earlier times or from German invaders during World War II. But, as the great Russian historian Vasili Kliuchevsky (1841–1911) noted, the people's attitude toward the forest was ambivalent. With its darkness and denseness, its bears and brigands, it was like a harsh parent who both provided and punished.

The Rus and Russians had a different type of ambivalence toward the steppes, which were not only fertile, but also fearsome. Steppe plunderers often attacked Rus border regions, devastating towns and townspeople and carrying away slaves. Rus would finally come tumbling down when the last of the great steppe nomads, the Mongols, attacked not only borderlands, but also far into the interior of Rus.

If the people had ambivalent attitudes toward the forest and the steppes, Kliuchevsky thought that toward their rivers they had only unequivocal love, for these waterways provided fish and nourishing waters for humans and fields.



Natural Regions of Russia and the Former USSR

MAP 1.2

Whether in summer or winter, the rivers were the best highways in the country and acted as the arteries of trade and contact with those beyond one's village or town.

Ancient folklore, however, suggests at least some Rus ambivalence toward the rivers. This folklore often perceived water spirits as being as dangerous and malicious as those of the forest. The female *rusalki* (nymphs), for example, lured and tickled young men to death in both river and forest.

Whereas nature has been harsh to Russia in some regards, it has been generous in others. Besides its great timber resources, Russia has possessed abundant wildlife, including many valuable fur-bearing animals. And it is a world leader in the possession of mineral resources, including mineral fuels. Among its abundant resources are coal, petroleum, natural gas, iron and iron alloys, copper, diamonds, gold, silver, lead, zinc, mercury, asbestos, potassium, magnesium, salt deposits, phosphate ores, sulfur, and limestone. Aluminum is about the only major mineral resource that Russia lacks. Of course, large quantities of many of these materials are in areas of Russia, especially Siberia, that have not always been part of the Russian state, and harsh climactic conditions have often made extraction costly and difficult.

GEOGRAPHY'S IMPACT ON COLONIZATION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Kliuchevsky believed that the history of his country was one of colonization, and there is little doubt that Russia's geographical conditions helped stimulate its colonization and expansion. Among other reasons, the Russians expanded to acquire better agricultural lands, Siberian furs, and access to warm-water ports.

This colonization was also encouraged by few natural barriers; an excellent artery of rivers; and fluid, poorly defined frontiers. Such porous frontiers, however, could be a danger and a source of contention as well as an opportunity. They contributed to the heavy emphasis on the military throughout most of Russian history. Russia today, like the U.S.S.R. before it, borders on more nations than any other country in the world.

Colonization led to the absorption of many non-Russian peoples and the creation of a multinational empire. Ruling over so many non-Russians affected both Russian domestic and foreign policies. In 1991, the difficulties of ruling over so many differing peoples helped lead to the collapse of the U.S.S.R.

The Eurasian location of Russia—part European, part Asian—was another geographical factor that had a significant impact on Russian history and culture. During the nineteenth century, Russian Slavophiles and Westernizers debated whether Russia was culturally part of Europe or not. Later on, the émigrés from the Russian Empire who founded "Eurasianism" in 1920 emphasized the importance of a Eurasian location. Just a few years earlier, the great Russian poet Alexander Blok had foreshadowed their doctrine in his poem "The Scythians." There he depicted Russians as between Europe and Asia, but also wrote: "Yes, we are Scythians! Yes, we are Asians."

Today, more than a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russians are still debating their national identity and relationship to the West.

THE PEOPLES: FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO THE PRESENT

Long before there was any recorded history in the area known as Rus, a succession of nomadic warriors dominated the southern steppes of modern-day European Russia and Ukraine. This region was near the western end of a vast steppe area stretching almost uninterrupted from Manchuria to Hungary. From about 1000 B.C. to about 200 B.C., it was briefly the Cimmerians and then the Iranian-speaking Scythians who controlled the high grassy area north of the Black Sea. Although historians know little of the first group, much more is known of the Scythians, thanks largely to ancient Greek sources and some fascinating archaeological finds displayed in museums such as St. Petersburg's Hermitage.

By about 200 B.C., various groups lumped together by Greek writers under the name Sarmatians had defeated the Scythians and then dominated the steppe until the Germanic Goths defeated them about 400 years later. In the 370s A.D., the Asiatic Huns displaced the Goths, who fled westward. Between Hun domination of the southern steppe and the beginnings of the Rus confederation in the late ninth century, other Asiatic groups, such as the Avars, Turks, Bulgars, and Khazars, succeeded each other in prominence in the region.

Both before and after the establishment of Rus, the nomadic peoples of the southern steppe tended to display similar characteristics. They generally were loose tribal federations. At first, they survived by breeding their horses and other animals on vast pastures, moving constantly to prevent overgrazing. Although the nomads could survive on their own, they almost always sought to enrich their lives through raiding or trading with more sedentary peoples. In both types of activities, their hardy horses were their most valuable asset, either as cavalry mounts or as trading commodities. More sedentary peoples needed to purchase the nomads' surplus horses for both domestic and military purposes—for more than 2,000 years (until the gunpowder revolution at the end of medieval times), horse-mounted warriors dominated warfare.

As time passed, at least some of the nomadic peoples became seminomadic, establishing permanent winter camps and becoming involved, at least for part of the year, in more sedentary occupations. Among both the Scythians and the Khazars, for example, the pure nomadic life became increasingly a privilege available to only elite elements within their tribal confederations.

Prior to the beginning of Rus recorded history, the Turkic Khazars were gathering tribute from many peoples, including some of the East Slavic tribes, who often paid it in furs. The Khazars forged an important commercial state centered around the city of Itil, near the mouth of the Volga River. From there they directed a tribute-gathering and trading empire ideally situated to do business with Byzantines, Arabs, Persians and other Asians, Volga Bulgars, Slavs, and Varangians (Scandinavian Vikings in the East Slavic lands). Although by the late ninth century many upper-class Khazars and their ruler had converted to Judaism, they were tolerant of other religions.

In the centuries that followed, the Rus, Russians, and other peoples of the forest traded, competed for steppe land, paid or collected tribute, warred, and sometimes allied with the peoples of the steppe (who included the Mongols). The impact of the steppe peoples on Russian history has been hotly debated, but most recent

research indicates it was greater than the majority of past Russian and Soviet historians acknowledged.

No one knows for sure when the East Slavs first moved into the European lands they dominate today, primarily into the forest zone or the transitional belt between forest and steppe. The closeness of various Slavic languages has led some historians to suggest a common homeland for all Slavs—north of the Carpathian Mountains—and then a split, by the seventh century A.D., into southern, western, and eastern Slavic groups. From the first came the Slavs of Bulgaria and the Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes of what was once Yugoslavia. From the second came the Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Moravians, and other smaller groups. From the last would eventually emerge the Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians.

In the Rus era, however, the three East Slavic nations were not yet distinct, and they and the state they formed, along with other peoples, became known simply as Rus. The Rus chronicles divide the East Slavs only by tribes—about a dozen of them at the dawn of the Rus era (see Map 2.1). Overwhelmingly these Slavs were a farming people.

Prior to the extensive Slavic colonization of northern Rus, a process that continued throughout the Rus period, the area was settled primarily by many Finno-Ugric and Baltic peoples. By the ninth century, another group was present in future Rus territories—Scandinavian Vikings similar to those who burst upon other parts of Europe in this era. They already had sailed into the rivers and lakes leading from the Baltic to the Black and Caspian seas and begun to exploit the area—indeed the name “Rus” appears to have been first applied to these Vikings (or Varangians) before finally being used in its wider sense. Like many southern steppe peoples, these “nomads of the sea” were raiders and traders. They eventually played an important role in organizing the multiethnic trading and tribute-gathering elite that founded and furnished the political leadership for the Rus state. In the multiethnic lands that would become part of Rus, there were still other peoples, including descendants of those who had earlier inhabited the southern steppes.

By the time the Rus state collapsed in the thirteenth century, a Great Russian ethnic type was emerging from the East Slavic intermingling with the Finnish peoples of northern Russia. Some Finnish tribes, however, such as the Komi, the Mordvins, and the Mari, although subject to various pressures throughout Russian history, maintained their separate identities. (Komi, Mari El, and Mordovian Republics exist in present-day Russia, although the native peoples are outnumbered in each by Great Russians).

As the Russian state expanded in medieval and modern times, over one hundred other nationalities were brought under Russian control. Among them were the peoples of modern-day Ukraine and Belarus, Siberia, part of the Baltic area, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. By 1795, Russians were perhaps already less than half of the Russian Empire’s population. In the census of 1897 (which excluded Finland), those who listed their native language as Russian composed only 44.3 percent of the population. Using language as a rough guide to ethnicity, Ukrainians made up 17.8 percent; Poles, 6.3 percent; and Belorussians, 4.7 percent. Among the non-Slavic population, the many Turkic peoples, primarily in Central Asia and the Caucasus, together composed 10.8 percent. Jews were 4 percent, and

FIGURE 1.2. Peoples of the Russian Empire from an early nineteenth-century engraving. (From Robert Wallace and the Editors of Time-Life Books, *Rise of Russia*. Time Inc., New York, 1967, p. 132.)



other nationalities (such as Armenians, Georgians, Latvians, Lithuanians, and Finnish peoples) each composed a smaller percentage.

At the time of the breakup of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the Russians were just a bare majority in the U.S.S.R. In the new post-Soviet Russia, however, the Great Russians in 1992 made up greater than 80 percent of the total population of almost 150 million people. Although Tatars and Ukrainians were the only other nationalities possessing more than 1 percent of the total, more than one hundred national groups still existed within Russian borders. Conversely, the 25 million Russians residing in other former Soviet republics almost equaled the number of non-Russians still inside Russian borders.

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PART ONE

The Rus Era

At the eastern end of Europe a new political entity arose by the end of the ninth century. Both it and its people came to be known as Rus. Even though it continued in existence for almost four centuries, there is much that remains murky about it, especially its early years: Good primary sources are insufficient in number and reliability, and archeological evidence, valuable though it is, still leaves large gaps in our knowledge.

Rus was a multiethnic entity with most of its people, at least by its latter days, being East Slavs, though Balts and Finno-Ugrians were plentiful in the north. Scandinavian Vikings called Varangians also played a key role in the new state and founded its political dynasty—the House of Riurik. These Varangians were part of the great Viking raiding and trading outburst of the ninth century, which propelled their excellent ships all over the seas and rivers of Europe and even far into the Atlantic.

Even before the ninth century, however, Scandinavians more involved in trade than in plundering had made their way into lands that would later be part of Rus. Although they raided as well as traded, the Varangians eventually formed a Rus state in which fines, taxes, and tribute (the latter two terms almost can be used interchangeably for this period) became more important than booty. The Varangians also intermarried with native peoples.

At first, the Riurikid leaders controlled little more than the country's chief waterways and the cities along them, but gradually their tribute-gathering arms extended into more remote areas. Yet Riurikid leaders were never able to achieve the degree of political power later realized by grand princes and tsars in Muscovite Russia. Rus political authority was much more divided and fragmented.

In the course of several centuries, the Rus battled and made treaties with various states and peoples. Among the most prominent were the Byzantine Empire, the Poles, the Bulgars of Bulgaria and the Volga, and several nomadic warrior peoples of the southern steppe or prairie. It was the Mongols, the last of the steppe peoples confronting Rus, who struck it a death blow between 1237 and 1241.

Just as autocracy did not exist in Rus, neither did another characteristic of late Muscovite Russia—serfdom. In ancient Rus, peasants were freer, not yet ensnared by noble masters. Yet as the period went on, princes rewarded more and more of their followers with lands, including some that peasant groups had formerly considered their own. Moreover, from the beginning of the tribute-collecting Riurikid dynasty, the Riurikids and the elite who supported them exploited the common people, thus beginning a long tradition of government and elite exploitation.

Partly as a result of the early princes' interest in trade, urban life was dynamic in Rus, and many towns existed. Yet, characteristic of medieval times, most of the population lived in the countryside and were peasants.

At the end of the tenth century, Rus's Prince Vladimir, ruling from Kiev, mandated Christianity for the Rus. It presented a means for unifying the beliefs of a diverse group of peoples and giving the Rus state greater cohesiveness. From the beginning, the princes, with the cooperation of early churchmen, made use of the new faith to underscore the sanctity of princely power. Although Christianity gained ground only slowly in the countryside, it quickly began to transform urban life and urban culture. The Christianization of Rus became the first of several attempts in Rus-Russian history whereby a governing urban elite attempted (always with mixed success) to impose major cultural changes on its mostly rural subjects. The buttressing of princely power by identifying princes (or later tsars) with Christ and Christian goals also continued long into the future.

Of course, Christianity was much more than just a political tool, and the reasons for its acceptance and its effects extended into personal, economic, social, and cultural spheres. For example, Christianity and the Byzantine and South Slavic influences that accompanied it stimulated the creation of a Rus high culture which produced literary and artistic works of considerable merit.

Although leading churchmen attempted to further the Christian unity of Rus, certain political factors worked against them. During the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, increasing centrifugal tendencies manifested themselves, as princes and principalities increasingly warred against each other. New centers arose to challenge Kiev's leadership. Three of these were the principalities of Vladimir-Suzdal in the northeast, Volhynia-Galicia in the southwest, and Novgorod in the north. At the same time, local princes were increasingly subdividing their principalities among their sons, who often engaged in fratricidal conflicts with one another and refused to unite against foreign foes.

Yet, despite this lack of political unity, the princes of various principalities continued to be unified not only by religion, but also by their common Riurikid dynasty, language, and culture. And before the Mongol invasion, no outside political force was strong enough to seriously disrupt the growing religious and cultural ties. The Mongols, however, proved to be an unprecedented shattering force that even the most unified of states were unable to resist.

Chapter 2

Rus Politics

The history of Rus's leading princes and an examination of its political structure revolve around five main domestic issues: (1) the role of the Varangians (Rus Vikings), (2) the tribute and trading emphasis of governing princes and their elite supporters, (3) the significance and impact of the acceptance of Christianity, (4) clan rule and succession questions, and (5) the complex and fragmented nature of political power. Some of these issues are also relevant to Rus's expansion and foreign policy, treated later in this chapter, and to economic, social, religious, and cultural questions, which are mainly dealt with in the next chapter.

VARANGIANS AND THE PRINCES

Most of what we know of the Rus princes comes from chronicles of the time, especially from *The Primary Chronicle*. This important book was compiled and revised, primarily by monks, between about 1040 and 1118. Although it is an invaluable source, sometimes corroborated by other materials, it must be used cautiously. Its compilers were not as faithful to historical accuracy as are most modern historians and sometimes compromised it for other considerations, such as upholding Christianity, the ruling Riurikid dynasty, and the unity of Rus.

The problem of accuracy is almost immediately evident if we look at the entries for the years 860–862. First, Slavic and Finnish tribes refused to pay further tribute to the Varangians and drove them “back beyond the sea.” But then almost immediately “tribe rose against tribe.” Soon tired of such discord, the tribes got together and sent a delegation to ask a group of Varangians called Russes to “come to rule and reign” over them.¹ The chronicle tells us that the leader of the group was Riurik, and he set himself up in Novgorod.

Historians have debated the believability of the invitation, its date, and the

¹Samuel Hazard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, eds., *The Primary Chronicle* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 59.

connection of the name “Russes” to the term “Rus,” which eventually became the name of the emerging state and its people. Riurik himself remains a semi-legendary figure. And the Rus in the Novgorod region were actually centered in Gorodishche, which was several kilometers upstream on the Volkhov River from Novgorod (meaning new city), which only later became prominent. Exactly how far the rule of these Rus in Gorodishche reached is also unclear.

Many of these controversies are part of the “Normanist Controversy,” which has been going on for several centuries. It revolves around the role of the Varangians (or Normans or Vikings) in founding and running the Rus state. Many native Russian and other East Slavic historians have been critical of the “Normanist theory” for overemphasizing the Norman role, and they have emphasized that Rus tribal society was already fairly complex and developed by the mid-ninth century.

What is not open to doubt, however, is that the Varangians had been present on some Finno-Ugric and East Slavic waterways and lands, primarily as traders, for many decades prior to the 860s. Although most of these northerners came from Sweden, some also arrived from Denmark and Norway. Archeological finds reveal a Scandinavian presence in Staraia Ladoga (on the Volkhov River, about thirteen kilometers south of Lake Ladoga) from the mid-eighth century, near the Upper Volga from around 800, and at numerous other Rus sites during the ninth and tenth centuries. The Scandinavians seemed primarily interested in obtaining goods, and furs were one of the most valuable commodities available from the local Finno-Ugric and Slavic peoples. To obtain them the Vikings traded such goods as beads, but also at times resorted to raiding and requiring furs as tribute. But the latest comprehensive study of the Rus emphasizes even more the Scandinavian Rus’s quest as “seekers of silver,” and it notes that silver coins minted in the Middle East were already present in Staraia Ladoga by the late eighth century.² This assessment is in keeping with the findings of Thomas Noonan, a leading scholar of Rus studies for many years. In one of his final essays, he stated that “the primary aim of Viking penetration into European Russia was apparently to obtain silver in the form of Islamic dirhams,”³ which the Vikings did by providing such goods as furs, slaves, and amber to Islamic and other merchants. By 800 the Vikings were already trading in the Middle East after reaching it by way of the Caspian and Black seas. During the ninth and tenth centuries, trade in the Khazar capital of Itil, near the mouth of the Volga, and further north with the Volga Bulgars also became a means of obtaining silver, and increasingly this silver originated in mints not from the Middle East but from Central Asian cities such as Bukhara and Samarkand.

Besides archeological evidence, contemporary foreign observations mention the Varangians and reinforce the belief that Varangian princes and warriors played a key role in organizing and running the Rus government as a tribute-gathering and trade-pursuing entity.

²Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus, 750–1200* (London, 1996), Chapter 1.

³“European Russia, c. 500–c. 1050,” in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*. Vol. 3, c. 900–c. 1024, ed. Timothy Reuter (Cambridge, Eng., 1999), p. 506.

From Igor to Sviatoslav

Many of the early Rus princes and their followers had Scandinavian names. According to the chronicle, Riurik on his deathbed entrusted his kinsman Oleg with both his realm and the guardianship of his young son, Igor. And Oleg supposedly moved the Rus capital to Kiev in 882 and ruled there until 912. Franklin and Shepard, however, doubt the accuracy of the chronicle account concerning Oleg or that Kiev became prominent before the early tenth century.

Concerning Igor, however, there is solid evidence that he presided in Kiev by the late 930s. He ruled until about 945, when he was killed by the Derevlans. This Slavic tribe residing northwest of Kiev does not fare well at the hands of the chronicle writers, who early on noted that they “existed in bestial fashion, and lived like cattle. They killed one another, ate every impure thing, and there was no marriage among them, but instead they seized upon maidens by capture.”⁴ Yet it was not their evil ways that led to Igor’s death. The chronicle states that he was killed only after he returned to collect more tribute from them after he and his followers had already violently done so before and departed.

Following his death, political power passed to his wife, Olga, who ruled as a regent for their young son Sviatoslav. She was the first woman ruler in Kiev and its first Christian ruler—after her baptism in Constantinople sometime in the middle of the century. In one of its most colorful, but no doubt embellished, stories, the chronicle relates how she began her reign by revenging her husband’s death. By various stratagems, including getting some of the Derevlans drunk, she buried alive, burned to death, and had her followers “cut down” varying numbers of them. After burning down one of their cities and giving some of them away as slaves, she imposed a heavy tribute on them. To prevent tribal rebellions in the future, she attempted—at least in some areas—to replace tribute-gathering expeditions with a regular system of tax collecting. After her death in 969, the chronicle states: “She was the first from Rus to enter the kingdom of God.”⁵ She was later canonized a saint by the Russian church.

Olga’s son Sviatoslav, who ruled from 962 to 972, was one of Kiev’s greatest warrior-princes and expansionists and the first with a Slavic name. In 971, he was described by a Byzantine source as broad-shouldered, with a gloomy and savage look, a long bushy mustache, a shaven head except for a lock of hair on one side, and a golden earring in one of his ears. On his various campaigns, this hardy warrior led by example, disdaining special comforts. Even though his mother had become a Christian, he did not follow her example. Nor did he wish, like her, to remain in Kiev. Several years after capturing Pereiaslavets on the Danube from the Bulgarians, he announced that he wished to reside there, at the center of his riches. After his mother’s death, he appointed his three sons to rule in Kiev, Gorodishche-Novgorod, and among the Derevlans, and he set off for Pereiaslavets. But a Byzantine-Bulgarian coalition defeated him and forced his retreat back to the land of Rus. Before he could reach Kiev, the nomadic Pechenegs attacked him and his men at the dangerous Dnieper cataracts in the steppe, a few hundred miles south

⁴Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, p. 56.

⁵Ibid., p. 87.

of Kiev. They killed Sviatoslav and then took his skull—so the chronicle tells us—and made a drinking cup out of it.

Vladimir I and Yaroslav the Wise

In 980, after eight years of strife between the three sons of Sviatoslav, the youngest and lone survivor, Vladimir, emerged victorious in Kiev. In 988, after earlier attempting to strengthen paganism, he took the most momentous step of his regime: He accepted Christianity and began imposing it on his subjects.

If only half the chronicle account of Vladimir is true, he was indeed a remarkable figure. He warred against Poles and Pechenegs, against Byzantines and Bulgars. No doubt exaggerating the contrast between his life before and after converting to Christianity, the chronicle notes that the pagan Vladimir was “insatiable in vice.”⁶ It credits him with 800 concubines and five wives, including the daughter of a defeated Polotsk prince, two Czech women, a Bulgarian woman, and his oldest brother’s widow. The last was a former nun, brought back because of her beauty by Vladimir’s father from one of his many campaigns. In the colorful and embellished chronicle account of Vladimir’s survey of religious options for himself and his realm, he rejects Islam because “circumcision and abstinence from pork and wine were disagreeable to him. ‘Drinking,’ said he, ‘is the joy of the Russes. We cannot exist without that pleasure.’”⁷

The chronicle has Vladimir accepting Christianity after a careful examination of other options, including dispatching envoys to other countries to investigate their religions. Services in Constantinople’s beautiful St. Sophia Cathedral especially moved Vladimir’s men (see Chapter 3). Other advisers to Vladimir added that his wise grandmother Olga would not have chosen such a faith if it were evil. The chronicle also mentions another reason for the conversion: The Byzantine Emperor, Basil II, required it before he would allow the marriage of his sister Anna to Vladimir.

Of all the reasons stated in the chronicle, this last one seems most likely to have been true and significant. Basil II had requested, and subsequently received, Rus help in putting down rebellious subjects, and in exchange Vladimir wanted to marry Anna. His desire for such a wedding was not surprising. Among Rus’s neighbors, the Byzantine Empire was the strongest political, trading, and cultural magnet. Accepting Christianity from the Byzantines offered many advantages. It was not just a religion, but, in present-day terms, an ideology.

In the Byzantine Empire, Christianity helped unite a multiethnic empire under an emperor, whom Byzantine churchmen taught was God’s representative on earth. Although we can only guess what weight Vladimir and his advisers gave to various personal and political considerations, it is logical to conclude that Vladimir believed that Christianity would offer similar unifying advantages for Kievan Rus and himself. Christianizing Rus offered the promise of helping to overcome such divisions as that between the tribute-tax collectors (the princes and their followers) and those who paid, between different tribes and ethnic groups, and between

⁶Ibid., p. 94.

⁷Ibid., p. 97.



FIGURE 2.1. The Dnieper River from a Kiev hill overlooking part of the Kievan Crypt (*Pecherskaia*) Monastery.

political factions. Furthermore, nearby Bulgaria had already accepted Christianity a century earlier from the Byzantines. This meant that Slavic clergy and Christian materials and rituals in a Slavic language understandable to the Rus could quickly be imported.

Byzantine religious and cultural influences, many via Bulgaria, soon flooded Rus. After the great schism of 1054, between Orthodox Byzantium and Western Christendom, the Rus followed the Byzantine lead. They became part of an Eastern Orthodox sphere, different in many ways from Western Christendom, to which the Poles recently had adhered.

After Vladimir's conversion, he vigorously set out to destroy paganism and implant Christianity and a Christian culture among his people. Such efforts were not unusual for medieval monarchs. Although works about his life no doubt exaggerate his new saintliness, they do contain some truth. He apparently became more charitable to the poor and championed church building and education for the children of the elite. He warred less against fellow Christians and concentrated more on defeating the pagan Pechenegs.

But if Christian teachings were able to modify some princely behavior, they were unable to transform it completely. Many princes continued to struggle for larger shares of lands, tribute, and trade revenues. Just as Vladimir came to power only after a fratricidal struggle, so too some of his many sons battled against each other. For about a decade after his death in 1015, the strife continued.

At first, his oldest surviving son, Sviatopolk, seemed the victor. He took over in Kiev and became infamous in Russian history for killing several of his younger brothers, especially Boris and Gleb.

The murder of Boris and Gleb and the religious cult that developed around them and proclaimed them saints indicate better than any other evidence the extent of Christianity's influence on Rus political culture. On the one hand, the acceptance of Christianity did not prevent Sviatopolk or many other Rus princes from killing their brothers and other relatives; on the other hand, the cult that made Boris and Gleb the most honored saints in Rus revered the brothers because the stories about them insisted that they had refused to take up arms against their older brother and died like martyrs. Not only did the clergy hold up these two brothers as models for the Rus princes, but also many of the Rus princes themselves furthered the cult. The princes participated in services and ceremonies honoring the two saints and built numerous churches throughout Rus lands in their honor. The brotherly love attributed to Boris and Gleb became at least an ideal, if not often a reality.

The cult of Boris and Gleb was associated with a sanctification of princely power that extended beyond them to many other princes. The historian Michael Cherniavsky once calculated that one-third of about 180 Rus saints were rulers. The writers and artists of the time, most of them churchmen and often dependent on princely good will, generally depicted Rus rulers as doing God's work by furthering Christianity in Rus lands and fighting against non-Christians. If killed in the course of performing such duties, the princes were often considered saintly martyrs.



FIGURE 2.2. Saints Boris and Gleb from an early fourteenth-century icon. (*Sovfoto*.)

Like many other systems of belief, Rus Christianity was furthered by an elite partly for self-serving reasons, but this did not prevent it from exercising some positive transforming influences.

Although Sviatopolk was successful in eliminating Boris, Gleb, and still another brother as potential rivals for the power and wealth he desired, he was not so fortunate in his dealings with a fourth brother, Yaroslav. At the time of Vladimir's death, Yaroslav was the prince of Novgorod and was expecting his father to attack him because Novgorod had refused to pay its tribute. Instead, he and the Novgorodians now warred against Sviatopolk and Kiev. Sviatopolk turned to Poles and nomad Pechenegs for help but was defeated by Yaroslav in 1019 and died in retreat.

Yaroslav, however, still had another brother to contend with—Mstislav. Only in 1024 did they fight their last battle and then divide many Rus lands between them, with the Dnieper as a boundary: Yaroslav obtained Kiev and the area west of the river as well as the Novgorodian lands, and Mstislav ruled east of the Dnieper with his capital at Chernigov, which he intended to transform into the greatest of Rus cities.

In 1036, however, Mstislav died without heirs, and Yaroslav reunited most of the lands of Rus and ruled until 1054. For his intelligent leadership and love of wisdom, he became known as Yaroslav the Wise. Although he battled against foreign foes, his main achievements were domestic ones. He ordered the translation, production, and collection of many books, especially religious ones. He also oversaw the construction of the magnificent St. Sophia Cathedral in Kiev and furthered the development of the Russian church. Many historians believe that he mandated the compilation of the first written code of laws, *Russkaia Pravda* (Rus Justice). In a final testament to his five remaining sons, Yaroslav apparently apportioned various cities to them and admonished them to love one another and to live in peace without quarreling.

Sviatopolk and Vladimir Monomakh

Although the descendants of Yaroslav, as well as other Riurikid princes, alternated between peace and civil war, neither circumstance produced another prince worthy of note until the Kievan reigns of two grandsons of Yaroslav. The first was Sviatopolk, who ruled from 1093 to 1113, and the second was Vladimir Monomakh, who reigned from 1113 to 1125. Although often passed over by historians, Sviatopolk was clearly the senior prince participating in many princely conferences that hammered out some principles of cooperation, both among the princes themselves and against the common threat of the Polovtsy steppe warriors. Upon his death, riots occurred in Kiev and its people asked his cousin Vladimir Monomakh, prince of Pereiaslavl, to become their ruler. Vladimir soon restored order and reduced the economic exploitation of the lower classes, which had helped lead to the uprising. Like his grandfather, Yaroslav the Wise, he left a testament to his sons, which gives us some idea of his character.

Following the death of Vladimir Monomakh in 1125, his son Mstislav ruled until his own death in 1132. Although Rus would continue for another century after 1132, it would become increasingly fragmented (see Chapter 4).

DOMESTIC POLITICS OF RUS

Although it is safe to say that in the Rus territory autocracy (legally unlimited power exercised by a single ruler) never existed, it is more difficult to decipher exactly what did exist. Ingredients in the Rus political pot included the relationship of Varangians to Slavs, of princes of different cities to one another, of political institutions within any one city to each other, and of chief cities with smaller towns and the surrounding countryside. Finally, political rebellions spiced up the pot's contents.

Varangians, Slavs, and Interprincely Relations

Even though some of the Slavic tribes rebelled against paying tribute to Varangian princes and their followers, Varangian-Slavic intermarriage soon diluted any possible ethnic shading to the resentment. Besides, today's concern with ethnicity and nationality was not part of the mentality of the time, and other ethnic groups such as Balts, Finno-Ugrians, and peoples from the steppes also often intermingled with Slavs and Varangians.

More significant is the question of interprincely relations. Were there any agreed-upon principles stipulating what the relationship should be? Apparently some feeling of clan solidarity existed among the Riurikid descendants of Prince Igor, and they seemed to view Rus as a large area to exploit collectively for their own gain. During the rule of Vladimir and his son Yaroslav, each of these princes of Kiev was recognised as the most powerful of Rus princes. Both men appointed others, including their sons, to govern and exact tribute and taxes from other cities and surrounding territories. Furthermore, from Vladimir's time until the late twelfth century, when Prince Andrei Bogoliubsky of Suzdal broke the precedent, no senior prince provided the opportunity to rule in Kiev had declined. But how much power any Kievan prince exercised over other city-states varied depending upon his strength and leadership and on the willingness of other princes to cooperate with him. As we have seen, even the strong Vladimir was defied by his son Yaroslav in Novgorod, who refused to pass on to his father some of the tribute he had collected.

Another aspect of princely relations is the question of succession to the throne in Kiev. Some historians contend that in theory and with some exceptions the right to rule in Kiev was to pass collaterally, that is from oldest brother to next oldest brother and even to cousins before moving on to the next generation. But even if princes recognized such a principal, they often ignored it in practice or violated its spirit. Vladimir and his son Yaroslav, for example, were both next in line to become princes of Kiev by succeeding an older brother on the throne, but neither waited for the natural death of the older brother, but overthrew him.

The last testament of Yaroslav to his five sons apparently attempted to prevent such conflicts. He bequeathed to each a large territory and admonished the four younger brothers to obey their oldest brother, Iziaslav, who was to be prince of Kiev and was to intercede for any brother wronged by one of the others.

Yaroslav no doubt wished his younger sons to maintain the ideal relations of lesser princes to the Kievan prince. Most specifically, these included answering his

Vladimir Monomakh's Instructions To His Sons

In the material excerpted—from Leo Wiener, *Anthology of Russian Literature: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (New York, 1902), Vol. I, pp. 53–54—we see the type of prince that Vladimir desired each of his sons to be. John Fennell and Antony Stokes, *Early Russian Literature* (Berkeley, 1974), pp. 64–79, provide a good analysis of the whole testament and correctly warn us not to assume too much about Vladimir's own behavior from it. Nevertheless, the advice given here does at least tell us something of Vladimir's view of ideal princely behavior. Ellipses are mine.

When you are riding and have no engagement with anyone, and you know no other prayer, keep on repeating secretly: "Lord, have mercy upon me!" for it is better to say this prayer than to think idle things. Above all, forget not the destitute, but feed them according to your means, and give to the orphan, and protect the widow, and allow not the strong to oppress the people. Slay neither the righteous, nor the wrongdoer, nor order him to be slain who is guilty of death, and do not ruin a Christian soul.

Whenever you speak, whether it be a bad or a good word, swear not by the Lord, nor make the sign of the cross, for there is no need. If you have occasion to kiss the cross with your brothers or with anyone else, first inquire your heart whether you will keep the promise, then kiss it; and having kissed it, see to it that you do not transgress, and your soul perish. As for the bishops, priests and abbots, receive their benediction in love, and do not keep away from them, but love them with all your might, and provide for them, that you may receive their prayers to God. Above all, have no pride in your hearts and minds, but say: "We are mortal, alive today, and tomorrow in the grave. All that Thou hast given us, is not ours, but Thine, and Thou hast entrusted it to us for but a few days." Put away no treasure in the earth, for that is a great sin.

Honour the elders as your father, and the younger ones as your brothers . . . If you start out to a war, be not slack, depend not upon your generals, nor abandon yourselves to drinking and eating and sleeping. Put out the guards yourselves, and lie down to sleep only after you have placed the guards all around the army, and rise early. Do not take off your armour in haste, without examination, for man perishes suddenly through his negligence. Avoid lying and drunkenness and debauchery, for body and soul perish from them.

Whenever you travel over your lands, permit not the servants, neither your own, nor a stranger's, to do any damage in the villages, or in the fields, that they may not curse you. Wheresoever you go, and wherever you stay, give the destitute to eat and to drink . . . Call on the sick, go to funerals, for we are all mortal, and pass not by a man without greeting him with kind words. Love your wives, but let them not rule you.

call for military assistance against Rus foes—he, in turn, was to assist them if so threatened. Although Yaroslav did not spell all this out, he did tell his sons that if they loved one another and cooperated, they would vanquish their enemies. And if they did not, they would perish and bring destruction upon the Rus lands.

Some scholars also think that Yaroslav bequeathed a more troubling legacy: the so-called rota system, by which he linked princely succession to certain territories.

According to this theory when the oldest brother ruling in Kiev died, he was to be succeeded by his next oldest brother, ruling in the next most important city, Chernigov. Then the next oldest brother would move up one slot to Chernigov and so on up the ladder.

Again, however, even if some such system was recognized in theory, it did not work well in practice, for princely sons often wished to keep the lands ruled by their fathers and not see them pass to one of his brothers or cousins. The forty years following the death of Yaroslav in 1054 were full of princely strife.

In 1097, apparently recognizing that their recurring conflicts were more helpful to their pagan Polovtsy foe than to themselves, the grandsons of Yaroslav the Wise gathered for a conference at Liubech. At this Chernigov city they recognized each other's right to rule over the principalities Yaroslav had granted to their now deceased fathers. Although lessening conflict, this conference and others that followed did not put an end to it. Before the year was out, an agent of Prince Sviatopolk attacked a less prominent prince named Vasilko with a knife and put out both his eyes.

The Boyar Duma and the Veche

In addition to princely power being limited by the appetites of competing princes, it was restricted in various principalities by two other institutions of government: the boyar duma (council) and the *veche* (town assembly).

The composition and procedures of boyar dumas were flexible and based on custom, rather than written law, and princes seem to have regularly consulted them about important decisions. The boyars included the prince's *druzhina* (a military retinue of perhaps several hundred men, originally living in or around his household) as well as other prominent citizens. Whereas normally a prince perhaps consulted only with a handful of his *druzhina*, he often called together a larger group of boyars when he felt more broad-based support was required. High-ranking clergymen also sometimes participated in these larger meetings.

Although the *veche* may have had its roots in older tribal practices, little mention of this more democratic institution is made in the chronicles until the eleventh century. The principal assemblies were in the capital cities of each principality. By ringing a special *veche* bell or using a town crier, a prince, official, or any other citizen could call together a meeting. All freemen were eligible to take part, but only male heads of household could vote.

Participants discussed and voted on local political issues and on major matters such as war or peace, especially if the prince wished to use the town militia to supplement his *druzhina*. Some assemblies even decided who should, or should not, be the ruler of a principality. The *veche* of Novgorod—often manipulated by powerful boyars—was especially notorious for showing an unwanted prince “the way out.” Town meetings were often stormy affairs, and blows were sometimes exchanged before townsmen reached a consensus—decisions were supposed to be unanimous. Occasionally, Novgorod majorities even tossed unbending opponents off the Great Bridge, crossing the Volkhov, or expelled them from the city.

The legal system of Rus also makes it clear that princes' powers were limited,

especially in Novgorod. If invited to rule by a *veche*, a prince might have to sign an agreement restricting the amount of money he could extract from the populace.

The relationship between the three main political institutions—the office of the prince, the boyar дума, and the *veche*—varied considerably depending on time and place. Until the end of Yaroslav the Wise's reign (1054), the princes were dominant. But with the escalating princely conflict after his death, the town assemblies became more prominent in many areas. If in the latter Rus period Novgorod was famous for its *veche*, Galicia was more notable for the undisguised strength of its boyars and Suzdal for its ruling princes.

Dominance of the Capital Cities and Rebellions

All three political institutions operated chiefly in each principality's capital city, which dominated the rest of the principality. In the eleventh century, for example, the prince of Polotsk ruled not only that city, but also over rural areas and other towns such as Minsk. By the early thirteenth century, the city of Novgorod presided over an empire that stretched east to the Ural Mountains and north to the White Sea.

The prince of a capital city usually appointed boyars or minor princes to administer and to collect taxes in outlying smaller cities and rural areas of his realm. Sometimes, like in the vast Novgorodian region, this involved a less direct rule over non-Slavic tribes and the occasional use of force to keep the taxes (or tribute) flowing. Under the jurisdiction of the prince's administrators, locally elected officials also participated in running local affairs. Although residents of smaller towns had the right to take part in meetings of the capital's *veche*, practical considerations prevented this from often occurring.

Some of the rebellions that occurred in Rus, such as that of the Derevlans against Prince Igor in 945, were due to the excessive financial demands of the Riurikid princes. *Veche*-princely strife and Christian-pagan conflicts were other leading causes of revolts.

A major uprising occurred in Kiev in 1068–69. It was precipitated by Prince Iziaslav's refusal of a *veche* request for arms and horses to continue a struggle against ravaging Polovtsy tribesmen. The anger of the townspeople led to the temporary flight of Iziaslav and the appointment of another prince. Several years later in the frequently rebellious city of Novgorod, a magician turned many of the people against their prince and Christianity before the prince "smote" him with an axe.⁹

Although there were other rebellions, just one more deserves consideration here: It occurred in Kiev in 1113. It began after the death of Prince Sviatopolk and after Vladimir Monomakh apparently had at first refused a *veche* invitation to become the prince of Kiev. Mobs attacked the palace of a government official and the property of other government officials and some Jews. Upper-class elements now became alarmed and also implored Vladimir to take the throne, warning that if he did not, the property of boyars and the monasteries would be attacked and plundered. The legislation that Vladimir enacted after heeding their call

⁹Ibid., p. 154.

clarifies the situation that led to the revolt. Sviatopolk and some upper-class elements had been exploiting the lower classes, in both city and countryside, by such means as a salt monopoly and high interest rates.

The specific chronicle mention of mobs attacking and robbing Jews merits a pause to consider any possible antisemitism. The historian Vernadsky believes the rebellion was not antisemitic and suggests that Jewish financiers and wealthy merchants were attacked only because of their connection with Sviatopolk's financial policies. Even though it is true that modern racist views did not then exist in Kiev and the city usually displayed an admirable cosmopolitan spirit, it is difficult to rule out at least a tinge of anti-Jewish hostility in such circumstances. Christians in Kiev certainly believed their religion superior to Judaism, and violence had been perpetrated on Jews in other parts of Europe less than two decades earlier, at the time of the first Crusade. Kievan Christians might have been less prejudiced than some of their Western counterparts, but we cannot be sure.

Despite the likelihood that the chronicles of the times underreported and downplayed rebellions, it is clear that both the rural and the urban lower classes rebelled occasionally against what they considered excessive princely and upper-class financial demands. According to the clerical chroniclers, commoners, egged on by pagan magicians or soothsayers, also sometimes resisted the new Christian teachings.

SLAVIC-VARANGIAN EXPANSION AND FOREIGN POWERS

On the borders of Rus and beyond, the new state dealt with numerous non-East Slavic groups and powers. The frontiers were fluid, and attacks originated from both sides of the borders. This latter fact and the scant sources available make it unwise to pin labels like "imperialist" on combatants, whether they be Rus or Rus neighbors.

Usual reasons for Rus attacks included the desire to collect tribute and to facilitate and protect trade, communication, and frontier defenses. Rus's acceptance of Christianity and Vladimir I's marriage to the Byzantine princess Anna certainly upgraded Rus's international prestige and affected its dealings with other peoples and countries. Subsequently, Rus sources sometimes depicted attacks on pagan peoples like the Pechenegs and Polovtsy of the southern steppe regions as battles against "godless" or "infidel" foes. Yet during the Rus era, economic considerations rather than religious ones continued to be more significant in determining Rus relations with neighboring peoples.

The Rus were most successful in imposing tribute upon some of the pagan Baltic and Finnish tribes that extended from their northwestern to their northeastern boundaries. Starting in the northwest and moving along the periphery in a clockwise direction, let us now examine the situation more closely.

Tribes of the North

Vladimir I, Yaroslav the Wise, and Roman of Volhynia (d. 1205) all temporarily subjugated Lithuanian Yatvigiens. Princes of Novgorod and Polotsk also dominated Baltic tribes, at least sporadically, such as the Estonian Chud. *The Primary*



MAP 2.1

Chronicle mentions that the Varangians imposed tribute upon the Chud already in the middle of the ninth century, and Chud tribesmen often served on the side of Varangian princes such as Igor and Vladimir I. In 1030, Yaroslav the Wise conquered the Chud and founded the city of Yuriev, modern-day Tartu.

By the early thirteenth century, Novgorod and Polotsk were having trouble maintaining control over Baltic tribesmen south of the Gulf of Finland. This was due mainly to increasing competition from Germans, including crusading German knights, who moved eastward into the Baltic lands. The Novgorodian chronicle from 1190 to 1240 relates many battles against the Lithuanians and Chud, the latter especially being subjected to plunder, burnt villages, slaughtered cattle, and Novgorodian demands for tribute. After 1240, Novgorodians would be forced to contend directly with the more threatening Germanic knights, who dominated the Chud lands and Livonia (see Map. 4.1).

On the northern shore of the Gulf of Finland, the Rus sporadically imposed tribute on the Finnish Yam. In the early thirteenth century, Novgorodian forces also subjugated Karelians to their east and, on orders from the Novgorodian prince, converted many of them to Christianity. Southeast of the Karelians, in the White Lake area, the Rus from the beginning collected tribute from the Finnish Ves and soon integrated them into the expanding Rus state.

From east of the Northern Dvina to the Urals, the Novgorodians attempted to gain tribute, especially furs, from three additional Finnish tribes: the Perm, Pechora, and Yugra. Although sometimes successful, they also faced rebellions. In 1193, for example, the Yugra cut down most of the troops sent to impose Novgorodian demands. Besides native rebellions, Novgorod faced twelfth- and thirteenth-century competition from Suzdalia (Vladimir-Suzdal), whose Rus princes also had their eyes on the lucrative furs.

Suzdalia was the chief Slavic antagonist of still another Finnish tribe, the Mordva, located to the east of Suzdalia. In 1221, the Suzdalian prince Yuri II began building the fortress town of Nizhnii Novgorod in Mordva territory at the Volga and Oka rivers junction. During the next decade and a half, he coordinated numerous campaigns against the Mordva, burning their lands; slaughtering their cattle; and killing, capturing, or scattering many of their people.

The Volga Bulgars and the Peoples of the Steppe

Before his successes against the Mordva, Yuri had first attacked the Volga Bulgars, who for generations had been collecting tribute from the Mordva. Competition for tribute and control of the furs in the forest lands of the Volga Finnish peoples had long been the chief source of contention between the Volga Bulgars and Rus.

The former had come to the Volga lands after the Khazars had defeated a Bulgar steppe confederation in the late seventh century—another Bulgar group moved westward into modern-day Bulgaria, where they subjugated the local Slavs. Originally Asiatic nomads, the Bulgars on the Volga, while continuing some nomadic grazing practices, gradually developed a more settled existence. They became major grain producers, Bulgar cities and crafts developed, and the Bulgars collected large quantities of furs from the northeastern Finnish peoples. They became adept traders; their location on the middle Volga put them at the center of

north-south, east-west trade connecting Europe and Asia, Christian and Muslim civilizations. In the early tenth century, they converted to Islam.

The Rus both traded and fought numerous wars with them as the two rivals clashed over territory and tribute-gathering from Finnish peoples in northeastern lands. Around 966, Sviatoslav attacked the Volga Bulgars. Vladimir I followed his father's example and assaulted them again in 985 and after battling them, made peace. According to *The Primary Chronicle*, the Bulgars stated: "May peace prevail between us till stone floats and straw sinks." Of course, peace did not last quite that long. Yet for the next hundred years Rus-Bulgar relations were characterized much more by trade than by war.

In 1088, the Bulgars captured the Rus city of Murom (originally the home of the Finnic Murom people) and in succeeding decades became an increasing threat to the eastern borders of Murom-Riazan and Suzdalia. During the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, however, Suzdalia became significantly stronger and gradually gained the upper hand over the Bulgars.

In 1220, Yuri II's large army captured and devastated much Bulgar territory. The vanquished sought and agreed to terms, including the loss of some territory, and peaceful relations were restored. Unbeknownst to either side, they were soon to encounter a much greater danger than each other—the Mongols.

Southwest of the Bulgar territory, the Rus faced successive Asiatic peoples who roamed the southern steppes north of the Black Sea and Caucasus. Three major groups followed each other in dominating the region: the Khazars, the Pechenegs, and the Polovtsy.

Dominant in the area after defeating the Bulgars in the late seventh century, the Khazars constructed a major empire centered on the lower Volga. In the beginning of the tenth century, this empire still included the Volga Bulgars and some Eastern Slavs among its tributaries. Most of Rus's early Asiatic trade passed through Khazar lands.

By the mid-tenth century, however, the Khazars had begun to weaken. By then the Volga Bulgars no longer paid tribute to them, and Byzantium, which before 900 had often supported them, now more frequently allied with another Turkish people, the Pechenegs, who had moved across Khazar lands and into the steppe region west of the Khazars. In the 960s, the forces of the mighty Sviatoslav inflicted a shattering series of defeats on the Khazars, capturing and plundering some of their lands. In this same period, Sviatoslav subjugated the Slavic Viatichians, who resided along the Oka River and had been paying tribute to the Khazars. They now became his tributaries.

No doubt worried about Rus successes so close to its Black Sea possessions, the Byzantine Empire soon bribed Sviatoslav to divert his attention and forces westward against the Bulgars of Bulgaria. For this and other reasons, Rus influence on the lower Volga failed to develop. The death of Sviatoslav at the hands of the Pechenegs in 972, less than a decade after his great victory over the Khazars, foreshadowed more conflict ahead with these formidable nomads.

Prior to the defeat of the Khazars, the Pechenegs had not been especially threatening to the Rus. In fact, Pecheneg mercenaries had assisted Igor in a campaign of 944 against the Byzantines. From 968 to 972, however, they allied with the Byzantines against Sviatoslav, who by then was threatening Byzantine interests in

Bulgaria. From this period until Yaroslav the Wise drove them back from attacking Kiev around 1036, the Rus fought numerous battles with these nomads. This was especially true under Vladimir I, who fostered colonization along the Rus southern borderlands and built a series of forts there. Conflict over these border territories and the desire for booty and other economic gains—perhaps emanating from the Rus as well as the Pechenegs—seem to have been the main reasons for the warfare. Some historians have suggested that Vladimir was further motivated by a desire to unify Rus, and attacking the pagan Pechenegs was a means to this end.

As we have seen earlier, however, these conflicts did not prevent Sviatopolk, Vladimir's son, from using some Pecheneg mercenaries in his civil war against his brother Yaroslav. And if the entire history of Rus-Pecheneg relations is taken as a whole, it was characterized much more by mutually beneficial trading relations than by warfare.

In the 1060s, a new group of Turkish nomads, the Polovtsy (or Cumans) began dominating the southern steppe. Like Rus-Pecheneg relations, Rus-Polovtsy dealings included countless raids and wars. Vladimir Monomakh's claim that he signed nineteen peace treaties with the Polovtsy, either on his own or acting for his father, indicates how frequent the wars preceding the peaces must have been. A great classic of Rus literature, *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*, deals with a battle against the Polovtsy in 1185.

Yet Rus princes also traded with them, sometimes married their princesses, and often engaged bands of them to help fight against other Rus princes, especially in the early thirteenth century. At times Polovtsy even fought against each other in the service of contending Rus princes.

Although Rus's relations to the southeast were primarily with the Khazars, Pechenegs, and Polovtsy, the Rus state also dealt with some of the many peoples of the Caucasus. This was especially true when Mstislav, the brother of Yaroslav the Wise, ruled over Tmutarakan on the Black Sea and over Ossetians and Circassians further inland—our knowledge of Rus rule over the remote Tmutarakan during the tenth and eleventh centuries is sketchy, but it certainly was an exception to the steppe peoples' general dominance of the zone north of the Black Sea.

Byzantium and Bulgaria

Mention of the Black Sea now brings us to one of Rus's most important neighbors, Byzantium. Although in decline from its earlier heyday, this empire, with its capital at Constantinople, was still a great center of civilization. It controlled most of the Balkan Peninsula. And it won not only the Rus, but also most of the Balkan Slavs over to Christianity, radiating its religious-cultural influence over their lands.

At first, the Rus chiefly sought favorable trade with Byzantium, but a Byzantine chronicle also noted a Rus attack outside Constantinople's walls in 860. *The Primary Chronicle* of the Rus relates another major attack on Constantinople in 907, but corroborating evidence for such an attack is lacking, though a new trade agreement between the Rus and Byzantines was reached about that time, followed by a more conclusive trade treaty in 911.

In the decades that followed the Rus continued trading and occasionally warring with the Byzantines. By the 940s, the Dnieper River, with Kiev along its middle portion and the important city of Gnëzdovo (old Smolensk) along its upper course, had become the chief Rus approach to the Black Sea and across it to Constantinople. The Rus princes, warriors, and merchants, thanks largely to the tribute goods they collected, sailed down to the Byzantine capital, where they traded furs, wax, honey, and slaves with the Byzantines, primarily for luxury goods.

The Primary Chronicle and other sources recount numerous bloody details of campaigns against Byzantium. In 941, for example, Prince Igor's forces used some captives as targets for their arrows and drove iron nails through the heads of others. On this occasion, however, they were eventually bested and scattered by the Byzantines, who used "Greek fire," pipes through which they directed mysterious flames, on the Rus ships.

Despite such sporadic conflicts, Byzantium desired good relations with Rus. Winning the Rus over to Christianity could help achieve that goal. When Olga was baptized in Constantinople, apparently between 954 and 957, the Byzantine Emperor and Empress acted as her godparents. In the years after Vladimir's conversion in 988, Rus-Byzantine trade flourished, only occasionally marred by differences. Byzantine religious-cultural influences and church leaders began flowing into Rus. Other friendly contacts also increased. Following Vladimir I's example, some Rus princes and princesses married Byzantine royalty, and Rus princes and soldiers on occasion aided the Byzantine Emperor in military campaigns.

To the southeast of Rus stood Bulgaria, where the Asiatic Bulgars had played a role among native Slavic peoples analogous to that of the Varangians in Rus. Despite Bulgaria's adoption of Christianity and significant Byzantine Christian influences on it, the Bulgars often warred against the Byzantines. The Byzantines, however, had no desire to see Bulgaria fall under Sviatoslav's control. Following his successful campaigns against the Bulgars, the Byzantine Emperor sent troops to help defeat him. After Sviatoslav's departure, the Byzantines gradually subjugated Bulgaria to themselves, and Bulgarian-Rus relations were then mainly limited to the cultural-religious domain.

Hungary, Poland, and Other Western Contacts

North of Bulgaria and just across the Carpathian Mountains from the Rus principality of Galicia stood Hungary. Four Hungarian kings in this era had Rus wives. In the interprincipely wars of the twelfth century, the Hungarians often allied with Rus Volhynia or Kiev against Galicia. In the late 1180s, the King of Hungary (Bela III) even succeeded in briefly placing his son Andrew on the Galician throne. In the three decades following the death of Prince Roman of Volhynia-Galicia in 1205, the Hungarians were almost constantly involved in Galician squabbles. But they were hardly alone. Other Rus principalities and Hungary's northern neighbor, Poland, also intervened in conflicts involving various Galician factions.

Despite such Polish interventions, the first reported major clash between the Poles and Rus was initiated by Vladimir I. According to *The Primary Chronicle*

entry for 981, "he marched upon the Lyakhs [Poles] and took their cities: Peremýshl', Cherven, and other towns"⁸—many Russian historians maintain, however, that they were more properly Rus towns and were primarily populated not by Poles, but by East Slavs. Following his conversion to Christianity, according to the chronicle, Vladimir lived in peace with Poland, also recently Christianized, albeit from Rome.

After the death of Vladimir, Poland temporarily regained the cities lost to Vladimir. In 1031, however, Yaroslav the Wise and his brother Mstislav marched into Poland with a large army and ravaged the countryside. They not only captured the disputed cities, but also many Poles, some of whom Yaroslav settled as colonists along the Pecheneg frontier.

During the next 200 years, trade and numerous Rus-Polish dynastic marriages coexisted with interventions in each other's affairs. This was especially true after both countries became more politically fragmented during the early twelfth century. In fact, sometimes the interventions were to help out an in-law—at least eighteen Rus princes or princesses in the Rus period had Polish spouses. During the 1040s, for example, Yaroslav aided his brother-in-law Casimir the Restorer to put down the Polish Mazovians. Of course, princes from both countries also sought gains for themselves, such as disputed border territories.

Although Rus relations with border peoples and states were often punctuated with conflict, dealings with more distant European powers were more peaceful. The Rus traded with Scandinavians and Germans and sometimes married their royalty. A daughter of Vsevolod I of Kiev married the German Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV in 1089. Although Rus relations with France and England were not close, Anna, a daughter of Yaroslav the Wise, married Henry I, King of France; and Vladimir Monomakh married Gyda of England, daughter of King Harold II, who had been killed in the battle of Hastings by William the Conqueror.

As a result of such foreign marriages, the blood of many races ran through the veins of later Rus princes. Vladimir Monomakh, for example, was the son of a Byzantine princess and the grandson of a Swedish princess. Thus, late Rus princes and princesses, who continued such marriage practices, were walking symbols of a society still very much in touch with the larger world around them.

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Chapter 3

Rus Society, Religion, and Culture

Two phenomena that greatly affected political life also left a strong imprint on Rus's economy, society, and culture. The first was the tribute-and-trading emphasis of the Rus princes and their supporters, and the second was the Rus acceptance of Christianity. Noonan indicated the impact of both these developments in the Kievan principality in the following passage:

Kiev's trade began in the tenth century but at that time it functioned as a mafioso extortion operation run by the princes. Kiev's true trade only started in the eleventh century and was sparked by the growing local demand for a variety of expensive and sophisticated goods by an increasingly sedentarized ruling class and a new ecclesiastical market. In this process, the Rus' conversion to Orthodoxy seems to have acted as a powerful catalyst in refining tastes, introducing new crafts and advanced methods, and creating markets.¹

The relationship of the tribute extortioners (the princes and their followers) of the early Rus state with the ruling elite of late Rus is a complex question, but the latter certainly seem to have evolved primarily from the former. Payments extracted from the common people, whether in the form of tribute, taxes, customs duties, fines, or other means, continued to support the ruling elite throughout the Rus period. After the acceptance of Christianity, the church hierarchy became part of this elite, and it too received a share of the people's payments.

In exchange, however, the Rus elite provided some needed services, such as military protection from outside forces. And if Vladimir and the Rus elite supported the establishment of Christianity partly for their own interests, its spread in Rus still produced many positive consequences for the Rus people and their culture.

¹Thomas S. Noonan, "The Flourishing of Kiev's International and Domestic Trade, ca. 1100–ca. 1240," in *Ukrainian Economic History: Interpretive Essays*, ed. I. S. Koropecyk (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), p. 144.

THE TOWNS

It was in urban areas, where the elite mainly resided, that Rus Christianity developed first and only slowly spread into the countryside. The presence of the political, social, and religious elite in the towns, plus the towns' role as centers for tribute-gathering and trade, helped make urban life vigorous in Rus. By the end of the Rus era, almost 300 towns existed. Although many contained fewer than 1,000 people, others were large. According to the historian Tikhomirov's estimates, Novgorod had between 10,000 and 15,000 people in the early eleventh century, and between 20,000 and 30,000 during the early thirteenth century. Noonan estimated that Kiev grew from no more than a few hundred people before c. 880 to several thousand by the early tenth century. In 1200, Kiev had about 40,000 to 50,000 inhabitants. Other fairly large towns included Chernigov, Galich, Pereiaslavl (in the south), Vladimir (in the northeast), Polotsk, and Smolensk. In comparison, Paris had about 60,000 inhabitants in the early thirteenth century and London about half of that.

Although some cities were founded by Varangian princes, others predated their arrival. Even before the establishment of the Rus state, Slavs and other peoples had established fortresses. Usually overlooking a river, they often sat on high ground for defense purposes, and some of them eventually became pre-Rus towns.

During the Rus era, some old fortresses were enlarged or replaced with more secure citadels or kremlins. They were often surrounded by ditches or moats and ramparts made of the dug-up dirt. Topping the wooden fortress walls, there might be a platform surrounded by a wooden parapet with openings for archers to shoot at the enemy. The walls usually contained towers and at least one gate, sometimes made of stone. Although much bigger and stone-walled, Moscow's still-existing Kremlin gives some idea of Rus's citadels, as does the smaller one still standing in Novgorod (see Figure 6.1).

If the citadel symbolized a city's defense, its *posad* (suburb) embodied its trade. Only very small cities, such as frontier fortress towns, lacked a *posad*. Although no absolute segregation existed between those who lived in the citadel and those residing in the *posad*, elite elements were dominant in the citadel, which often sat up on a hill, and tradesmen and craftsmen generally settled and peddled their goods in the *posad*, which was frequently below the citadel and near a river. As a town's suburb grew, authorities also often fortified it but less extensively, for example, by putting earthen walls around it.

Most town buildings were wooden, partly for reasons of warmth. The chief exception was that of major churches. The most common wooden buildings resembled log cabins. Some houses were completely above ground; others, set up in hollowed-out pits, were partly subterranean. In larger cities, streets and walkways were made of logs. (Sergei Eisenstein's great film *Alexander Nevsky* transmits some idea of old Novgorod's look.)

Craftsmen in Rus cities included the following: blacksmiths, bootmakers, bow-makers, carpenters, coppersmiths, glassmakers, goldsmiths, iconographers, jewelry-makers, locksmiths, potters, scribes, saddle-makers, shield-makers, ship-builders, silversmiths, stonemasons, tanners, tinsmiths, and weavers. (This is only about half the number that could be listed.) In some large towns, craftsmen



FIGURE 3.1. The Golden Gate of Kiev, a reconstruction of the main entrance to the city of Kiev, built during the reign of Yaroslav the Wise.

practicing a similar craft often resided near each other, and chronicles mentioned such areas as tanners' streets or carpenters' quarters.

In most towns, the busiest area was the *posad* marketplace. Here town criers often issued orders and made announcements. Here, besides urban craft products, people could buy grain, bread, salt, fish, meat, furs, honey, wax, flax, lard, and peasant-made artifacts. Prices fluctuated according to supply and demand.

FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC TRADE

Even before the beginnings of Rus recorded history, foreign and domestic trade was important in the future Rus lands. The city of Staraia Ladoga, for example, was a multiethnic international trading center already in the late eighth century. Archeological findings here and elsewhere, including silver coins from the Middle East and amber from the Baltic area, indicate an active trade that linked Europe with the Muslim world. Besides the Volga River, traders used the Don and Donets rivers to bring silver northward from Muslim areas in the Caucasus and beyond.

After the early Varangian princes gained control over numerous trade routes and integrated their tribute gathering with international trade, the Dnieper route to Constantinople gradually gained more prominence. Rus trade with the Volga

Bulgars and peoples of the steppe remained important throughout the Rus era. In the north, Novgorod gradually emerged as an important Baltic trading area, with foreign Baltic merchants residing in the city.

Chief Rus exports were furs, honey, wax, and especially in the early Rus period, slaves. Other exports included flax, lard, hemp, hides, hops, sheepskin, walrus bones, and some handicraft items. Among the major imported goods were silver (for monetary and other uses), arms, fabrics, fruits and wine, glassware, expensive pottery, horses, amber and metal products, silver, silks, spices, and gems. The upper classes and the church were the primary buyers of such imports.

Demand for luxury items fostered their production, when possible, within Rus lands. Craftsmen in Kiev, for example, began producing increasing amounts of expensive jewelry. Some of it, along with other products such as religious wares and glass bracelets (which became commonplace), was sent to other cities, reflecting a growing intercity trade. Although not a great deal is known about Rus business practices, recent archeological discoveries of birchbark credit tallies and other financial information have led two scholars to refer to the Rus's "advanced system of credit and moneylending."²

RURAL LIFE

Although town life was vigorous, at least four-fifths of the Rus population probably lived in the countryside, many of them clustered around towns. The rural inhabitants were primarily responsible for paying tribute or direct taxes—small cities paid lesser amounts, large cities were exempt, and the upper classes were exempt regardless of where they lived.

Most peasants eked out an existence for themselves by supplementing their farming yields with what the forests, lakes, and rivers offered. Land near lakes and rivers was more fertile and thus generally preferred. The type of farming practiced depended largely on geographical location and soils available. In the south, in the transitional forest-steppe and steppe lands, two-field and later three-field crop rotation were common. While such rotation, with variations, also existed in the northern forest zone, the "slash-and-burn" technique of clearing new forest lands remained popular. When these lands became exhausted, peasants often moved to new areas and slashed and burnt again. This contributed to the colonization of Rus lands and the dispersion of the Rus peasantry.

In the early Rus era, peasants owned the overwhelming majority of rural lands—the St. Petersburg historian I. Froianov, among others, has argued that this was still true in the late Rus era. Insufficient evidence is available to determine whether most peasant families farmed independently or in some sort of commune.

During the eleventh century, princes, boyars, and the church became important landowners of country properties. Although many newly owned private lands might have been previously uninhabited, it seems likely that others were simply expropriated from the peasants farming them. The lands that princes gave to their

²Th. S. Noonan and R. K. Kovalev, "What Can Archeology Tell Us About How Debts Were Documented and Collected in Kievan Rus?" RH 27 (Summer 2000): 145.

boyar followers had no service strings attached. Thus, they were not like Western European fiefs, and feudalism in the sense that Western scholars use the word did not exist in Rus.

The peasants working on upper-class private landholdings were not serfs and thus were not permanently tied to the land of a private landowner. If they wished to farm land for their own use, they had to make payment (in money, produce, or labor) to the landowner. Some became indebted/indentured workers, not free to leave their master's service until they paid their debts. Others were simply hired hands.

If serfdom did not exist, however, slavery did, both in urban and rural areas. Some slaves worked on estates along with the peasants. People became slaves in a variety of ways, including capture in war, being born of slave parents, or running away before repaying a master his debt.

CLASS STRUCTURE AND THE MILITARY

The best evidence regarding the class structure of Rus comes from the era's law codes. Because we deal with the Christian clergy and the people under their jurisdiction later, here we are concerned only with the secular ladder. Beneath the princes and princesses at the top came the boyars and their families. By the late Rus period, the boyars included both the prince's *druzhina*, whose members served the prince in various military and governmental capacities, and other prominent upper-class citizens. Beneath the boyars were several classes of free citizens, which included most merchants and urban workers. Next came the largest class, the peasants, including those working for private landowners.

At the bottom of the ladder came the indentured workers and urban and rural slaves. Frequent law code references to slaves make it clear that slaveholding by the upper classes in Rus was widespread. Some slaves were held only temporarily. Prisoners-of-war who were eventually ransomed fell into this category. Of course, permanent slaves had no rights and could even be killed by their owners, although this made little economic sense and therefore did not occur often.

The Rus class structure was fairly fluid. The boyar class, for example, was open to newcomers who achieved prominence. The distinctions between classes were not as rigid as they might first seem. Despite being entrusted with important administrative and supervisory duties by their prince or boyar, some stewards were themselves slaves. (Partly because of the fluidity of Rus social groupings, some historians have abandoned the use of the term "class" in describing the Rus social structure, but used in a general sense it remains a useful term for this and later periods.)

For a prince and his *druzhina*, fighting was part of normal existence, as was death in battle. In his "Instruction to His Children", Vladimir Monomakh stated that he had participated in eighty-three military campaigns. Standard equipment for a *druzhina* warrior included a helmet, body armor, a shield, a sword, and a spear. When not fighting, a prince and his *druzhina* enjoyed hunting. Vladimir Monomakh related that he hunted a hundred times a year, and, among other

adventures, had been tossed by bison, gored by a stag and by an elk, had his sword torn from his thigh by a boar, and had his kneecap bitten by a bear.

For larger battles, the princes often used city militias and foreign mercenaries. If a prince called upon a militia, he generally provided some of its members with horses. He also provided some of their weapons. Mounted mercenaries from the steppe were especially skillful with bows and arrows and were an important supplement to a prince's own *druzhina* cavalry.

WOMEN

The position of women in Rus can be divided into two periods, the pre-Christian and Christian. Evidence for the first is murky, but it seems that among other deities, the native Slavs worshipped a Mother Earth fertility goddess and were in awe of other powerful female spirits such as the *rusalki* (water and tree nymphs). The early Rus also paid homage to fictional Amazon-like warrior heroines in some of their folk literature.

For this early period, *The Primary Chronicle* provides additional information. Although no doubt exaggerated in places, the accounts regarding women are generally believable. Although it states that the Polonian tribe respected peaceful marriage customs and monogamy, men in some other east Slavic tribes seized the women they wished by capture rather than by marrying properly, and they practiced polygamy. Princes such as Vladimir, before accepting Christianity, also took women against their will. The chronicle recounts that Princess Rogned refused to marry him, but that Vladimir attacked the forces of her father, the Prince of Polotsk, and, after killing her father and two brothers, took her for his bride. After speaking of his other wives and concubines, the chronicle later adds that he "seduced married women and violated young girls."³

In the chronicle account, Rogned's reply to her father's inquiry about marrying Vladimir is: "I will not draw off the boots of a slave's son."⁴ Besides alluding to the lowly social position of Vladimir's mother (his grandmother's stewardess), the comment refers to the marriage ceremony custom of the bride removing her groom's boots as a sign of her submission. Another ritual was for the bride's father to hand over a whip to the groom. Both customs leave little doubt that the husband was the intended head of the household.

Yet, there are indications that the position of women in pre-Christian Rus was stronger than in some Western European countries. The story of Rogned tells us that at least in this one case a father did not force his daughter to marry against her will. The rule of the forceful Princess Olga and the chronicle's admiration for her are also notable, as is the presence of a few envoys for Russian princesses among a large Rus peace delegation to Constantinople in 945.

With the coming of Christianity, the position of women changed—no doubt gradually because pagan practices died out slowly in rural areas. In some ways,

³Samuel Hazard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, ed, *The Primary Chronicle* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 94.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 91.

the church view of women was positive, at least regarding pious women. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was greatly revered and in the popular mind took on some attributes of Mother Earth. *The Primary Chronicle* (written and compiled by monks) quoted Solomon in the Bible when he elaborated on how a good woman was more precious than jewels. The church encouraged the proper treatment of widows. It opposed such customs as bride capture and polygamy and encouraged parents not to force their daughters into unwanted marriages. Church legal jurisdiction over matters such as divorce, adultery, rape, and property disputes between husband and wife probably helped women more than it hurt them, but divorce laws reflect more concern with a wife's guilt than a husband's, and church laws sometimes allowed a husband to punish his wife, for example, for stealing from him.

Furthermore, the church displayed a fear of women's sexuality and power. The advice of Vladimir Monomakh to his sons—"Love your wives, but let them not rule you"⁵—reflects well his church's ambivalence toward women. He also warned his sons against conversing with shameless women.

The monastic authors of *The Primary Chronicle* exhibit other examples of wariness about women. After writing of Vladimir I's licentious behavior, they add: "The charm of woman is an evil thing." They go on to quote Solomon: "Listen not to an evil woman. Honey flows from the lips of a licentious woman . . . They who cleave to her shall die in hell."⁶ Later in the account of Vladimir's conversion, a Byzantine scholar tells Vladimir: "the human race first sinned through women,"⁷ and recounts the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. Further church attitudes toward women are indicated by the prohibition on women from attending church services during their menstrual periods or for forty days after the birth of a child.

The status of women was reflected in civil as well as church laws. By the end of the Rus era, an upper-class woman had the right to inherit and own moveable property, including the dowry she brought into her marriage. She could run the estate of a deceased husband, and her children could not dispose of her portion of her husband's will. Peasant and lower-class urban women's rights, however, were much more limited and generally ignored in legal documents.

Even upper-class women remained far from equal. Men had many economic and political rights women did not, especially regarding landed property and voting—only men could vote at *veche* meetings.

Although little is known about the economic roles of Rus urban women outside the household, there are legal references to handicraftswomen. One craft they were especially adept at was weaving. Out of hemp and flax yarn, they made both male and female garments. Birchbark letters and documents indicate that women could enter into financial contracts and that wealthy women were important purchasers of luxury goods. In addition, chronicles sometimes mention royal women who commissioned religious art works or gave to charitable causes.

Following Princess Olga's rule, no other Rus woman achieved such

⁵Leo Wiener, *Anthology of Russian Literature: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (New York, 1902), Vol. I, p. 54.

⁶Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, p. 94.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 109.

prominence, but Pushkareva has briefly treated some other Rus women known for their learning or participation in political affairs. There were, for example, the well-educated daughters of Yaroslav the Wise—one of whom, Anna, played an important political role in France after marrying King Henry I.

SECULAR AND CHURCH LAW

There were primarily three sources of Rus law: the community, the prince, and the church. In the early Rus period, the judicial functions of a person's community were still of great importance. But with the passage of time and the coming of Christianity, they decreased in comparison to the powers of the princely and church courts.

The first written law code, Yaroslav's *Russkaia Pravda*, was based primarily on the customary law of Rus communities. It detailed which relatives were allowed to avenge a murder and how much compensation had to be paid for various crimes. Cutting off another's arm, leg, mustache, or beard necessitated payment, as did the theft of various articles. Following the death of Yaroslav, his sons and later princes made additions and revisions to the original code. The final revision, completed by the early thirteenth century, is commonly known as the *Expanded Pravda*.

The total effect of the law codes was to replace much blood vengeance with monetary fines. In addition, the revisions added a new class of payments that went to the prince for such crimes as killing his estate workers or stealing from him. The codes reflected both an attempt to change certain types of customary behavior and to enrich princely coffers.

Where possible, restitution for an offense was arranged outside of court. In the courts, the presiding official was often a trusted servitor, sometimes a slave, of the ruling prince. He acted primarily as a referee between a plaintiff and a defendant. While he accepted such proof as eyewitness accounts and written deeds, he often made decisions based upon less reliable evidence.

In a society of few written documents, the presiding official often had to rely on the fallible memories of community members. As a last and frequent resort, he could appeal to Divine intervention to help him reach a decision. Such appeals to God included oaths and ordeals by water or iron. The logic behind oaths was that individuals would not risk Divine displeasure by lying under oath; therefore it was likely that they were telling the truth. The hot iron ordeal, in which Divine intervention would supposedly keep an innocent person from being burnt, was apparently more common than the water ordeal. In the latter, an individual was thrown into the water with a rope attached, and probably with a hand bound to each foot. If the person bobbed back up, he or she was guilty—the pure water rejecting such an “unclean” person. If the individual sank, he or she was innocent—the attached rope presumably enabling the sinking person to be pulled out before drowning.

Although fines were the usual punishment, the *Expanded Pravda* also provided for harsher penalties, such as confiscation of property. Unprovoked murderers, horse thieves, arsonists, and repeat offenders were all liable to such punishment—

and perhaps (the code's wording is unclear) to banishment. Imprisonment was uncommon, and the law did not provide for capital punishment, although it allowed the killing of a thief while caught in the act. This did not mean, however, that princes always refrained from killing other Rus they considered enemies.

An interesting aspect of the law was the collective responsibility for certain crimes. For example, according to late Rus law, a community was responsible collectively for paying a fine if it did not search for and turn over the murderer of one of the prince's men or dependents.

Regarding church legal rights, there is some dispute over the proper dating of statutes granting them. Yet it seems safe to assume that by the end of the Rus era the church possessed such authority as outlined in statutes ascribed to Vladimir I and Yaroslav the Wise, at least in some parts of Rus. By these statutes, the Orthodox bishops exercised legal jurisdiction over not only priests, nuns, and monks, but also over such church people as choir singers; wards of the church; and those who worked in church-run institutions, such as hospitals and asylums. Church courts had general jurisdiction not only over divorce, adultery, rape, and property disputes between husband and wife, but also over such matters as witchcraft, sorcery, soothsaying, kidnapping a girl, calling someone a whore or heretic, or beating one's mother or father. Finally, ecclesiastical courts dealt with various offenses against church property. One code prohibited leading cattle, fowl, or dogs into a church except during an emergency.

As unusual as many practices of Rus law might seem to modern students, many of them, including ordeals, were also once common to other societies. If Rus law in many ways was "behind" Western law, it was largely due to the late arrival of statehood and Christianity. Even during the late Rus period, government and church law still contended with tribal customary law. Perhaps partly because the government's judicial role was not yet as strong as in Byzantium or in many Western European countries, Rus governmental justice seems less harsh in many ways. Both capital and corporal punishment and the use of torture to obtain confessions were more common in the West and in Byzantium than in Rus.

RELIGION AND CULTURE

In both religion and culture, Rus was strongly influenced by the Byzantine Empire. These Byzantine influences, along with lesser foreign ones, mixed with native Slavic traditions to create a unique religious-cultural blend in the Rus lands.

Paganism and the Acceptance of Christianity

Prior to accepting Christianity, the Rus worshipped deities and spirits. Some had long been present among the Slavs, and others were brought by the Varangians. Much Rus worship was like that of other tribal religions around the world, yet it was especially characterized by a strong worship of earth and ancestor deities and spirits. Among those of the earth were the already mentioned Mother Earth and the *rusalki* (water and tree nymphs). Of the ancestral forces, *Rod* and *Rozhanitsy* were the most important. They were male and female fertility deities representing

the reproductive power of a person's clan—the word *rod* meaning clan. Veneration of the *domovoi* (house spirit), thought to be the founder of the *rod*, also reflected the ancestor cult. Although less “sky”-oriented than some pagans, the early Rus revered several deities of the heavens, most notably Perun, the god of thunder.

Although Vladimir had earlier constructed a pantheon dedicated to pagan gods, *The Primary Chronicle* tells us that after accepting Christianity, he ordered the pagan idols destroyed. Sources indicate, however, continued pagan manifestations and resistance, especially in rural areas. Moreover, vestiges of Rus paganism continued up to modern times in folklore and certain folk customs. For many generations of Rus descendants, a strong love and regard for their ancestors and for mother earth was especially characteristic. The East Slavic nations were among only a small number of European peoples who continued using patronymic names—for example, Ivanovich or Ivanovna, indicating a son or daughter of Ivan. And the awareness of being part of a larger clan continued to affect Rus descendants' attitudes about community and personal destiny.

As in other countries, with the coming of Christianity certain elements of pagan feasts and rituals lived on in new, but subordinate, guises. For example, painting eggs at Easter had been earlier associated with pagan rituals welcoming the coming of spring. And Christian saints sometimes took over roles of pagan deities. The prophet Elijah for instance was ascribed the thunder-making powers of Perun. Church leaders tolerated some minor mingling of pagan vestiges with Christianity, but they severely criticized the continuing influence of sorcerers, whom many Rus continued to value for their magical and healing powers. Ironically, as W. F. Ryan emphasizes, it was not only various types of pagan sorcerers who practiced magic, but lower clergy also sometimes used magic and divination. He notes that as late as the eighteenth century, clergy remained among the chief categories of those accused of witchcraft.

For a long time, scholars have written of *dvoeverie* (double-faith) to characterize Rus and Russian folk religion, which they believed remained basically pagan underneath its Christian surface. More recently, however, this approach has been criticized for failing to recognize that premodern believers of all social strata approached the world far differently than most modern Christians. Medieval Christianity and paganism shared many qualities that in today's more rationalized world are thought characteristic only of pagan beliefs. Scholars using the *dvoeverie* concept frequently drew too sharp a line between a Christian elite and pagan folk and failed to acknowledge that beliefs of commoners influenced the Christian elite and vice-versa.

Following Vladimir's baptism (see below) the chronicle reports that a great multitude went into the Dnieper the next day to be baptized. Vladimir also forced children from leading families to be instructed in the new faith. In other cities, the chronicle says that he began “to invite”⁸ the people to accept baptism, but undoubtedly Rus authorities—like those in many countries under similar circumstances—applied more pressure than that. Freedom of religion was not a characteristic of medieval life.

⁸Ibid., p. 117.

Vladimir Christianizes Rus

The following account is an excerpt from Leo Wiener, *Anthology of Russian Literature: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (New York, 1902), Vol. I, pp. 67, 70. It is a translation from *The Primary Chronicle* for the years 987–988. This story of the conversion is shrouded in myths but reflects two important truths: The Rus greatly valued the beauty of Byzantine liturgy and church art and architecture, and Vladimir imposed Christianity and attacked Rus paganism. Bracketed material and ellipses are mine.

Said Vladimir "The men we have sent away have come back. Let us hear what has happened!" And he said: "Speak before the družina!" and they spoke: . . . "We went to Greece [Byzantium], and they took us where they worship their God, and we do not know whether we were in heaven or upon earth, for there is not upon earth such sight or beauty. We were perplexed, but this much we know that there God lives among men, and their service is better than in any other country. We cannot forget that beauty, for every man that has partaken of sweetness will not afterwards accept bitterness, and thus we can no longer remain in our former condition". . . .

Upon his return [from the Crimean city of Kherson, where the chronicle says Vladimir was baptized], he ordered the idols to be cast down, and some to be cut to pieces, and others to be consumed by fire; but Perun he had tied to the tail of a horse, and dragged down the hill over the Borichev to the brook. . . . As he was dragged along the brook to the Dnieper, the unbelievers wept over him, for they had not yet received the holy baptism, and he was cast into the Dnieper. . . .

After that Vladimir proclaimed throughout the whole city: "Whosoever will not appear tomorrow at the river, whether he be rich or poor, or a beggar, or a working-man, will be in my disfavour"

Church Organization and Byzantine Influences

The Rus church was under the jurisdiction of the patriarch of Constantinople, who normally selected its head, the metropolitan of Kiev. The metropolitan, in turn, at least in theory, appointed the Rus bishops. Local princes also had a say, as, to a lesser extent, did the populace, especially in Novgorod. Partly as a result of the wishes of princes in lesser towns, the number of Rus bishops increased from about three or four under Vladimir I to fifteen by 1237. Many of the bishops during this more than 200 years came from Byzantium, as did all but two metropolitans.

Underneath the bishops were parish priests and deacons (white clergy), monks (black clergy), and nuns. As in Byzantium, only married men could become parish priests, whereas monks were not married, and only they could be ordained bishops. During the Rus period, the number of clergy, churches, and monasteries greatly increased. From 988 to 1240, records reveal the construction of 450 churches and monasteries, but Fennell is undoubtedly correct in assuming that these *known* constructions were only a small percentage of the total, especially of churches. The most famous monastery was the Kievan Crypt Monastery, founded in the middle of the eleventh century. Like some of the other monasteries, but even more so, it