

Module 6: The Byzantine Empire and Eastern Europe

Topic 3 Content: The Emergence of Russia



Introduction

The Emergence of Russia

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Use the timeline or the NEXT button to view events about Russia's history.

Image: The Russian Prince Vladimir discussing Christianity with a Greek philosopher



Early ... Kievan Rus and Influence of Byzantine C... Mongol Co... Emergence o...

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400 A.D. (C.E.): The Arrival of Slavic Tribes

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Around 400 A.D. (C.E.), people from Slavic tribes migrated from central Europe and settled midway between the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea. These Slavic people assimilated with the nomadic populations that were already present in this area, and established some of the first early states in the region.

Image: Daily life of Slavs



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Late 700s A.D. (C.E.): The Viking Invasions

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In the late 700s, Vikings from Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea began to move into the areas inhabited by the Slavs. They conquered the Slavs, who referred to the invaders as the Rus, which is the foundation for the name Russia.

Image: Green denotes areas subject to frequent Viking raids

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860 A.D. (C.E.): Rurik Establishes the First State in Russia

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In 860 A.D. (C.E.), a Rus leader named Rurik was elected the ruler of the Novgorod, which is one of the oldest cities in Russia. He and his successors established the first Russian state. Rurik was the first ruler in the Rurik Dynasty which lasted from the late 9th century through the early 17th century in Russia.

Image: Rurik



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863 A.D. (C.E.): The Cyrillic Alphabet Is Created

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In 863 A.D. (C.E.), two Greek missionaries, St. Cyril and his brother Methodius, worked to bring Christianity to the Slavs. Cyril adapted the Greek alphabet to the Slavic language. By creating the Cyrillic alphabet, St. Cyril made it easier for Slavs to read the Bible.

Image: Saints Cyril and Methodius holding the Cyrillic alphabet



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882 A.D. (C.E.): The Rise of Kiev

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In 882 A.D. (C.E.), Rurik's successor, Oleg of Novgorod, conquered Kiev and made the city the new capital. Kiev was located at the center of trade among the Vikings, Slavs, and Byzantines. Constantinople and other Byzantine centers became major trading partners with those from Kiev.

Image: Oleg of Novgorod

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988 A.D. (C.E.): Russians Convert to Orthodox Christianity

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In 988 A.D. (C.E.), Prince Vladimir of Kiev formally adopted Orthodox Christianity as the official religion in Russia. Along with much of the Byzantine culture, Christianity came to Russia, and from there, it spread through much of Eastern Europe. Because of the large Byzantine influence, the Russians built churches with domes, but modified the Byzantine style and made onion-shaped domes. Similarly, the Christian Russians used religious icons and mosaics to decorate their buildings.

Image: Postcard of St. Basil's Cathedral that exemplifies the Russian architecture



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Eventually problems arose in Russia that were caused by infighting among Russian leaders. The political instability ultimately paved the way for foreign invaders to attack Russia. The invaders were a fierce group of nomadic herdsmen from central Asia, called the Mongols, and they were led by Genghis Khan - one of the most feared warriors of all time. For over two hundred years, the Mongols held power in Russia. The Russians were cut off from Western Europe, and became part of the Mongol Empire, known as the Golden Horde.

Image: Genghis Khan



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1340 A.D. (C.E.): The Rise of Moscow

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Despite being under Mongol control, Russian princes living in Moscow gradually sought to increase their power. Their success was in part due the location of Moscow along important trade routes. As wealth from trade poured into Moscow, the Russian princes offered a deal to the Mongols. The deal was that in exchange for collecting taxes for the Mongols the princes would be allowed to manage Moscow and neighboring towns. The Mongols agreed and Moscow emerged as a wealthy center of influence. When the head of the Russian Orthodox Church made Moscow its capital, the city became not just Russia's political center, but its religious center as well.

Image: Modern day map of the West Russian region highlighting the location of Kiev and Moscow



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Image: Battle of Kulikovo



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No longer under Mongol control, one Russian prince named Ivan III, also known as Ivan the Great, began to consolidate and centralize his power. Ivan the Great recovered lost Russian lands, reasserted Moscow as the capital of Russia, and took the title tsar, which was the Russian version of Caesar. Ivan the Great vowed to carry on traditions of Rome and Constantinople, and after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, Russia became known as the "Third Rome."

Image: Ivan III tears the khans letter in front his ambassadors

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