

Early Russia

*Russia and
Eastern Europe*



Russia and Eastern Europe

Thematic Icons



Economics



Geography



Historical concepts



Government

Icons



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page

For more instructions, see the *User Guide*.



Where was Kievan Rus?



Kievan Rus, a political state made up of East Slavic tribes, was located between the Black and Baltic Seas.

Kievan Rus benefited from a mild climate and high number of rivers. Rivers provided an ideal location for agriculture as large areas of land could be **irrigated** to grow crops.

Rivers were also useful in providing trade routes to the Byzantines, Western Europe and Asia.



Why was agriculture important to Kievan Rus?



The first records of Russian society show that by 800 AD, East Slavic tribes had settled in Eastern Europe. They inhabited modern-day Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

The tribes communicated without a written language. Information about them comes from:

- archaeological evidence
- accounts from Roman and Middle Eastern scholars
- the **Primary Chronicle**.

These sources all suggest that the Eastern Slavic tribes shared a common language and religion.



The *Primary Chronicle* is the earliest written record of Russian history. It records events from 950–1110 AD.

The *Chronicle* is dated to 1113 AD, 200 years after the first event it describes. A monk called **Nestor** is traditionally credited with having written it, but some modern historians believe it was written by several different authors.

The *Chronicle* was made under **Vangarian** (Viking) rule, and emphasized the key role the Vangarians played in the creation and early successes of Kievan Rus.

Do you think that the *Primary Chronicle* is a reliable source?



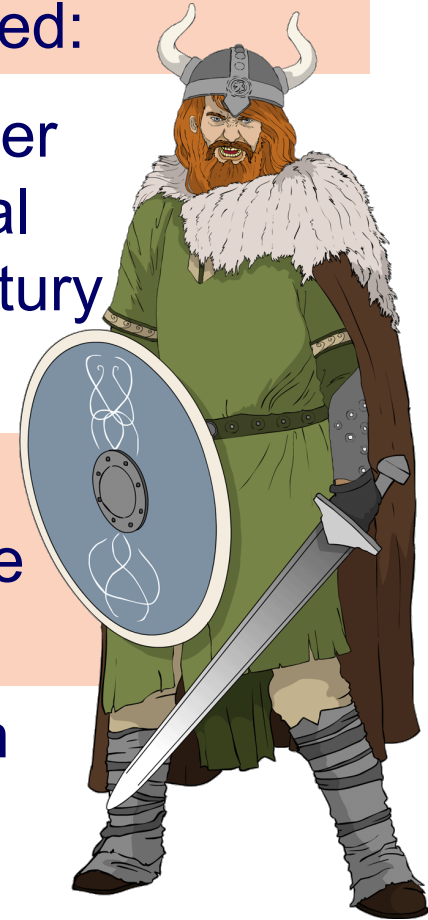


In the 800s AD, tribes in Eastern Europe united to form a political state called **Rus**. Their ethnicity is debated:

Some historians believe that Rus was formed after the Vangarians settled in the area. Archaeological evidence suggests they were present in 10th century Rus, and the *Primary Chronicle* supports this.

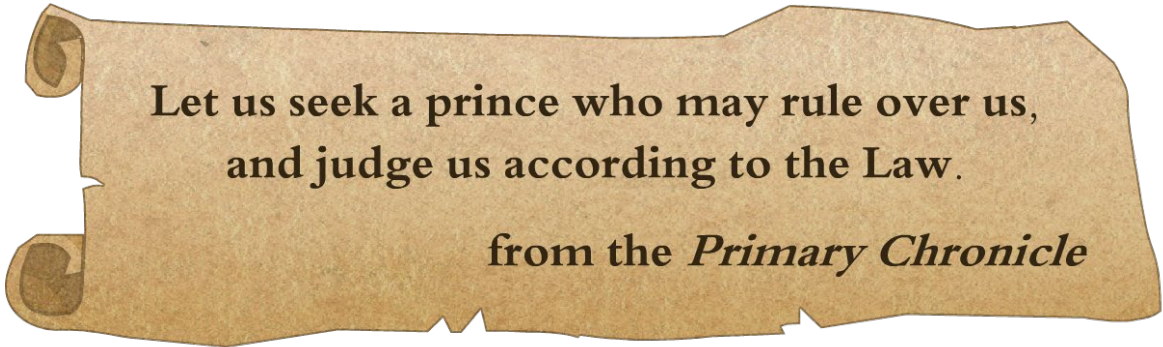
However, the *Chronicle* aims to justify Vangarian rule by highlighting their importance. It is possible that they were actually a minority in Rus.

There is no conclusive evidence of Scandinavian languages being used at this time, which has led other historians to conclude that the population was actually **Slavic** (native to eastern Europe.)



According to the *Primary Chronicle*, the Vangarians were driven out of Rus by Slavic and Finnish tribes.

However, these tribes fought among themselves. To end the chaos, it is said that they invited the Vangarians to return with a leader.



Let us seek a prince who may rule over us,
and judge us according to the Law.

from the *Primary Chronicle*

Rurik, a Vangarian prince, arrived with his brothers and an entourage around 860 AD. He established his seat of power in **Novgorod**, a city based near the Volga River, and ruled there until his death in 869 AD.

Why might some historians doubt the accuracy of this account?



Beginning of Kievan Rus

Before he died, Rurik chose a family member, **Prince Oleg**, to rule until his son Igor was old enough.

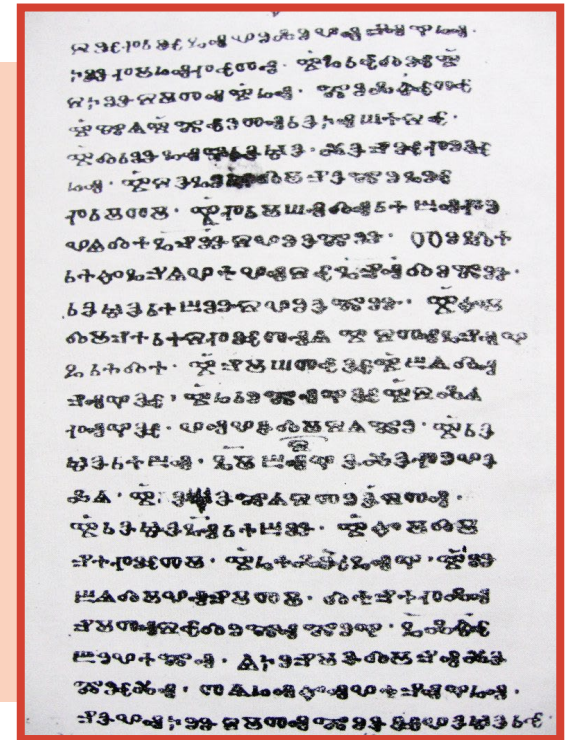
In 880 AD, Prince Oleg captured the city of Kiev, among other territories, when leading his military forces past the **Dnieper River**.

He pronounced Kiev to be 'the mother of Rus' and unified his territories to form the state **Kievan Rus**. Kiev would continue to be the center of this state for the next two centuries. Kievan Rus became the trade and cultural hub of eastern Europe.



In 860 AD, the Emperor of the Byzantine Empire sent his brothers **Cyril** and **Methodius** on a **missionary** journey to convert the Rus from paganism to Christianity.

A written language was developed for the Slavs, who up until this point had only communicated orally. The gospels were then translated so that they could be understood by the Rus. This language would later form the writing system **Cyrillic**, which was a modified version of the Greek alphabet.



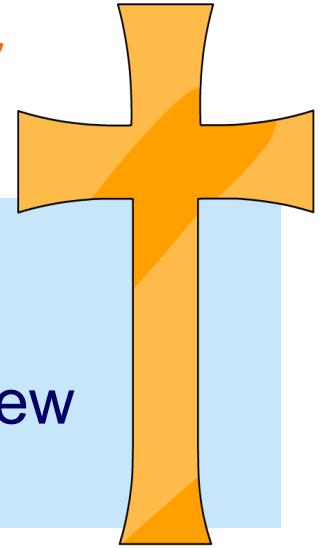
The image shows the Gospel of Luke written in Old Church Slavonic in the 10th/11th century AD.



Religion under Vladimir the Great

Kievan Rus was officially Christianized by **Vladimir the Great**, who reigned from 980–1015 AD.

Vladimir was a pagan before he converted to Christianity. According to the *Primary Chronicle*, he grew tired of paganism and wanted to introduce a new religion to Kievan Rus.



The legend goes that Vladimir sent envoys to different parts of Europe to decide which religion was best. **Islam** was discounted on the grounds that it banned alcohol, and **Roman Catholicism** was rejected because he thought its services were dull. He interpreted the Jews' loss of Jerusalem as a sign that God had abandoned them, so he dismissed **Judaism** as well.



The *Chronicle* states that Vladimir chose to follow Eastern Orthodox Christianity after his envoys were overwhelmed by the beauty of the **Hagia Sophia** cathedral and its service.

After converting to Christianity, Vladimir married Anna Porphyrogenita, the sister of the Byzantine emperor.

This marriage forged a more secure relationship with the Byzantine Empire, on which the Kievan Rus economy depended for its trade.

After his conversion, Vladimir destroyed pagan statues and forced the people of Rus to be baptized as Christians.

Why do you think Vladimir chose the Eastern Orthodox Church?





Throughout the 800s AD, the Rus had been paying tribute to the **Khazars** (a wealthy Turkish Khanate between the Black and Caspian Seas).

Kievan Rus threatened the Khazars' control of trade in the area.

In retaliation for a treaty between the Rus and the Byzantine Empire, the Khazars banned the Rus from accessing the **Volga River** trade route in 913 AD.



The Rus launched many attempts to crush the Khazars but were unsuccessful until the 960s AD, when Oleg's grandson, **Sviatoslav I**, defeated their forces.





Foreign trade depended on river networks to transport products efficiently. Kievan Rus had access to the two main rivers in Eastern Europe.

The **Dnieper River** allowed trade between the Vikings in the Baltic region and Greek Byzantines.

The **Volga River** enabled trade between the Baltic Sea and Asia.



Smaller river networks linked western Europe and the Khazars.



The Kievan Rus economy was primarily based on trade.

The state's fertile land and control of key trade routes led Kievan Rus to become rich through selling:

- furs
- honey
- beeswax
- slaves.

In 907 AD, Prince Oleg's military attacked **Constantinople**, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. The raid pressured the Byzantines to agree to a favorable trade agreement with the Rus, treating them as an equal partner despite the Rus being smaller and less powerful.

Kievan princes ensured there were enough goods to trade by collecting tributes from tribes they had conquered.



Yaroslav the Wise ruled from 1019–1054 AD. His reign is considered the **golden age** of Kievan Rus.

Yaroslav married his relatives to influential neighbors to improve diplomatic relations. He organized the marriage of his granddaughter, Eupraxia, to the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry III, and secured the marriages of three of his daughters to royalty in France, Hungary and Norway.

Yaroslav was also a strong military leader. After a victory in 1036, he built the **Saint Sophia Cathedral**. In 1043, he attacked a Byzantine territory to gain a favorable trade agreement with the empire. This attack shows how trade issues were crucial to the Rus economy.

The first East Slavic legal code, ***Russkaya Pravda***, was written during Yaroslav's rule.

In Kievan Rus, the line of succession passed from the prince to his eldest male relative. Yaroslav became ruler in 1019 AD after a fierce succession dispute involving the deaths of his brothers.

To avoid a similar succession dispute between his own sons, Yaroslav split Rus into separate regions. He gave his eldest son **Iziaslav** control of Kiev and ordered his other sons to respect Iziaslav as the main leader.

However, Yaroslav's division of Kievan Rus into principalities removed central leadership.



What may have been the consequences of this?

Yaroslav's attempts to secure peace were unsuccessful. His division of land caused each of his sons to try and make their own regions the capital of Rus. This led to **civil wars**.

The princes fragmented the state by forming alliances with foreign powers. Iziaslav lost control of Kiev but used Polish and Germanic military forces to reclaim it in 1069.

The vast number of men related to the royal family meant that there were many claimants to the leadership of Kievan Rus.

Between 1054 and 1224, over eighty civil wars occurred in Kievan Rus.





Between 1000–1200 AD, the Byzantine Empire deteriorated due to a series of invasions by Turkish tribes.

The Byzantine trade supply became erratic. Kievan Rus relied on trade with the Byzantines as a key source of income, so when their supply stopped being reliable, its economy suffered greatly. Gradually, the Dnieper River became less important as a trade route.

Crusaders in the early 13th century further damaged Kievan Rus trade by using different trade routes in Europe. They conquered the Baltic region, which further decreased the economic value of the Dnieper River.



During the period of succession disputes, Kiev declined in status and power. Some of the reasons for this include:

- the waning use of the Dnieper River as a trade route, which caused Kiev's economy to weaken
- raids by nomadic groups, which destroyed buildings and crops, leading to food and labor shortages
- leadership disputes, which led to unstable and ineffective rulers who did not defend Kiev from invasions.

In 1169 AD, Kiev was invaded by a neighboring principality and lost much of its political power as well.



The fragmentation and decreasing wealth of Kievan Rus left the state vulnerable to invasion.

In 1223 AD, The **Mongol Empire** advanced into Rus but retreated. Despite this attack, Rus leaders continued to focus on internal disputes.

They were not prepared for a second attack in 1237–1240 AD. **Batu Khan** invaded Kievan Rus with 35,000 mounted archers. In 1240, the Mongols conquered and destroyed Kiev.

After the Mongol conquest, all regions of Kievan Rus had to submit to Mongol rule and become part of the **Golden Horde** Empire.





The Mongols did not settle in Rus. Instead, they forced the Rus princes to accept their Khan as supreme leader and demanded **tribute** as a way to demonstrate this submission.

When tribute was not paid, the Mongols pillaged and burned entire cities in revenge. They also raided without provocation. Often, the Rus people were either slaughtered or taken as slaves.

However, the Mongols were tolerant regarding religion, even after their conversion to **Islam** in 1313 AD. Eastern Orthodox Christians could still practice their faith in relative peace.





While Kiev's influence declined, another power rose in the northeast. The territory known as **Muscovy** and its capital city, **Moscow**, gained prominence during Mongol rule.

The princes of Moscow had become responsible for collecting tribute from smaller states under Mongol control. By taking a share of the tribute, they became very wealthy while remaining on good terms with the Mongols.

As the Mongols spared Moscow from raids, nobles began to relocate there, boosting its economy and political power.

Moscow also became the seat of the Eastern Orthodox Church in 1325, when the Metropolitan (Bishop) Peter moved it there from nearby Vladimir. This established Moscow as an important religious city.

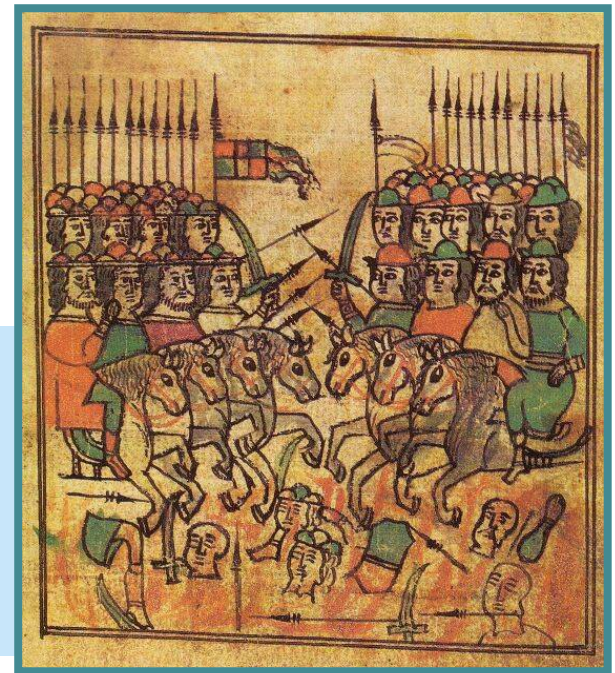


The Rus referred to Mongol Rule as the “Tatar yoke.”

From 1359 AD, the Golden Horde experienced two decades of succession disputes. This enabled other powers to seize their territories and in 1362, the Mongols lost control of Kiev.

In 1380 AD, the Muscovites defeated the Mongols for the first time at the **Battle of Kulikovo Field.**

By the early 1400s, the Golden Horde had fragmented into many smaller and weaker khanates and was no longer a single powerful force.



How did this affect the Muscovites?

Ivan III ruled from 1462–1505 AD. He conquered the independent principalities of Novgorod, Rostov, Yaroslavl and Tver and tripled the size of Muscovy during his reign.

He also married Sophia Palaiologina, a Byzantine princess, to increase his status and legitimacy as a ruler.

Ivan asserted Muscovite independence by refusing to pay tribute to the Mongols in 1476. This resulted in the **Great Stand on the Ugra River** in 1480, a standoff between the Mongols and Ivan's forces. It ended without bloodshed as the Mongols retreated, ending their influence in Moscow.

Ivan styled himself as the first **Tsar**, after the Russian word for Caesar, the great Roman Emperor.

He established the beginnings of Russian autocracy.



The first Russian state

Free from Mongol authority, Ivan III claimed sovereignty over all the territories conquered by the Duchy of Moscow. In 1480, Muscovy became the first Russian state.



This unified Russia would become the great power of Eastern Europe over the coming centuries.



Keywords

