

A History of Russia – Part One

Compiled from "The Making of the West: Peoples and Cultures" (Second Edition) by Lynn Hunt, Thomas Martin, Barbara Rosenwein, R. Po-chia Hsia and Bonnie Smith.

- While western Europe established monarchies that could endure many generations, eastern Europe did not. In eastern Europe the pattern was for states to form under the leadership of one great ruler and then to fragment under his successor.



- What would become modern Russia began in with the settlement at Kiev (inhabited by the Rus people). 12th century Kiev was a politically fragmented region. In the 13th century the region was invaded by the Mongols (killing half the Rus population).

- Autocratic Rus rulers and their peoples emigrated north to found, among others, a settlement that would eventually be called Moscow. The Duchy of Moscow had clearly defined borders where well-to-do Rus towns prospered. The surrounding dukes soon referred to the ruler of Moscow as the "grand duke," highlighting his power.¹

- In the 15th century the Eastern Orthodox Church established a seat at Moscow – beginning a close relationship between the Church and the identity of the Rus.

- By the 16th century, the Grand Duke of Moscow not only claimed sovereignty over all the lands of the Rus, but also that those lands (and peoples) were his collective property. Grand Duke Ivan III (reigned 1505-33) began using the title "tsar" and "Ruler of all Rus." The modern state of "Russia" was born.

- Under Ivan III, the Moscow state tripled in size – defeating Lithuania and expanding south toward Kiev. Ivan III's son became Grand Duke of Moscow at the age of 3, eventually being proclaimed Tsar in 1547. Ivan IV was the first to be crown "Tsar of all the Russias," signaling to the world his new status. Ivan's title was a divine one, underscoring his religious role as tsar – placed there by God (highlighting the very close relationship between the concept of the Russian state and religion).



- Ivan IV was known as "Ivan the Terrible."
 - Ivan IV stopped at nothing to make Moscow the centre of a mighty Russian empire. Given to unpredictable fits of rage, Ivan tortured priests, killed numerous nobles, and murdered his own son with an iron rod during a fight.
 - Ivan brought the entire Volga valley, as well as Siberia, under Russian control. Ivan's western expansion was thwarted by the united of Poland and Lithuania into a single Commonwealth (a country that elected a king with severely curtailed powers).
 - Ivan died in 1584, leading to a period of instability (the king of Lithuania-Poland tried to put his son on the throne). In 1613 an army of nobles and peasants installed Michael Romanov on the throne – establishing a dynasty that would last until the First World War.
- Tsar Alexi (1645-1676) tried to extend state authority by imposing new administrative structures and taxes in 1648. Alexi created a strict social hierarchy that re-classed slaves and free-peasants as serfs (people tied tightly to the soil and their noble masters – they were not permitted to change occupations).
- The power of the tsars continued to grow – they expanded the army from 35,000 to 220,000 by 1700. The tsar never conveyed any sort of assembly after 1653. In 1666, the Russian Orthodox church reaffirmed the Tsar's role as God's direct representative on earth. Alexi brought in some modernizing actions, including regulating tobacco, alcohol and so forth. Alexi even brought in a western-style theatre, and nobles began to dress like their German counterparts.
- In 1647 Ukrainian Cossack warriors revolted against the king of Poland-Lithuania. Cossacks had formed from runaway peasants and poor nobles in a no-man's-land of southern Russia and Ukraine. The Poles saw them as trouble makers, but the Ukrainian peasants saw them as liberators. The revolt ended when Tsar Alexi annexed eastern Ukraine, including Kiev.