Muscovy

The development of the Russian state can be traced from Vladimir-Suzdal' through Muscovy to the Russian Empire. Muscovy drew people and wealth to the northeastern periphery of Kievan Rus'; established trade links to the Baltic Sea, the White Sea, and the Caspian Sea and to Siberia; and created a highly centralized and autocratic political system. Muscovite political traditions, therefore, exerted a powerful influence on Russian society.

The Rise of Muscovy

When the Mongols invaded the lands of Kievan Rus', Moscow was an insignificant trading outpost in the principality of Vladimir-Suzdal'. The outpost's remote, forested location offered some security from Mongol attack and occupation, and a number of rivers provided access to the Baltic and Black seas and to the Caucasus region. More important to Moscow's development in what became the state of Muscovy, however, was its rule by a series of princes who were ambitious, determined, and lucky. The first ruler of the principality of Muscovy, Daniil Aleksandrovič (d. 1303), secured the principality for his branch of the Rurik Dynasty. His son, Ivan I (r. 1325-40), known as Ivan Kalita ("Money Bags"), obtained the title "Grand Prince of Vladimir" from his Mongol overlords. He cooperated closely with the Mongols and collected tribute from other Russian principalities on their behalf. This relationship enabled Ivan to gain regional ascendancy, particularly over Muscovy's chief rival, the northern city of Tver'. In 1327 the Orthodox metropolitan transferred his residency from Vladimir to Moscow, further enhancing the prestige of the new principality.

In the fourteenth century, the grand princes of Muscovy began gathering Russian lands to increase the population and wealth under their rule (see table 2, Appendix). The most successful practitioner of this process was Ivan III (the Great; r. 1462-1505), who conquered Novgorod in 1478 and Tver' in 1485. Muscovy gained full sovereignty over the ethnically Russian lands in 1480 when Mongol overlordship ended officially, and by the beginning of the sixteenth century virtually all those lands were united. Through inheritance, Ivan obtained part of the province of Ryazan', and the princes of Rostov and Yaroslavl' voluntarily subordinated themselves to him. The northwestern city of Pskov remained independent in this period, but Ivan's son, Vasiliy III (r. 1505-33), later conquered it.

Ivan III was the first Muscovite ruler to use the titles of tsar and "Ruler of all Rus'." Ivan competed with his powerful northwestern rival Lithuania for control over some of the semi-independent former principalities of Kievan Rus' in the upper Dnepr and Donets river basins. Through the defections of some princes, border skirmishes, and a long, inconclusive war with Lithuania that ended only in 1503, Ivan III was able to push westward, and Muscovy tripled in size under his rule.
The Evolution of the Russian Aristocracy

Internal consolidation accompanied outward expansion of the state. By the fifteenth century, the rulers of Muscovy considered the entire Russian territory their collective property. Various semi-independent princes still claimed specific territories, but Ivan III forced the lesser princes to acknowledge the grand prince of Muscovy and his descendants as unquestioned rulers with control over military, judicial, and foreign affairs.

Gradually, the Muscovite ruler emerged as a powerful, autocratic ruler, a tsar. By assuming that title, the Muscovite prince underscored that he was a major ruler or emperor on a par with the emperor of the Byzantine Empire or the Mongol khan. Indeed, after Ivan III's marriage to Sophia Paleologue, the niece of the last Byzantine emperor, the Muscovite court adopted Byzantine terms, rituals, titles, and emblems such as the double-headed eagle. At first, the term autocrat connoted only the literal meaning of an independent ruler, but in the reign of Ivan IV (r. 1533-84) it came to mean unlimited rule. Ivan IV was crowned tsar and thus was recognized, at least by the Orthodox Church, as emperor. An Orthodox monk had claimed that, once Constantinople had fallen to the Ottoman Empire in 1453, the Muscovite tsar was the only legitimate Orthodox ruler and that Moscow was the Third Rome because it was the final successor to Rome and Constantinople, the centers of Christianity in earlier periods. That concept was to resonate in the self-image of Russians in future centuries.

Ivan IV

The development of the tsar's autocratic powers reached a peak during the reign of Ivan IV, and he became known as the Terrible (his Russian epithet, groznyy, means threatening or dreaded). Ivan strengthened the position of the tsar to an unprecedented degree, demonstrating the risks of unbridled power in the hands of a mentally unstable individual. Although apparently intelligent and energetic, Ivan suffered from bouts of paranoia and depression, and his rule was punctuated by acts of extreme violence.

Ivan IV became grand prince of Muscovy in 1533 at the age of three. Various factions of the boyars (see Glossary) competed for control of the regency until Ivan assumed the throne in 1547. Reflecting Muscovy's new imperial claims, Ivan's coronation as tsar was an elaborate ritual modeled after those of the Byzantine emperors. With the continuing assistance of a group of boyars, Ivan began his reign with a series of useful reforms. In the 1550s, he promulgated a new law code, revamped the military, and reorganized local government. These reforms undoubtedly were intended to strengthen the state in the face of continuous warfare.

During the late 1550s, Ivan developed a hostility toward his advisers, the government, and the boyars. Historians have not determined whether policy differences, personal animosities, or mental imbalance cause his wrath. In 1565 he divided Muscovy into two parts: his private domain and the public realm. For his private domain, Ivan chose some of the most prosperous and important districts of Muscovy. In these areas, Ivan's agents attacked boyars, merchants, and even common people, summarily executing some and
confiscating land and possessions. Thus began a decade of terror in Muscovy. As a result of this policy, called the oprichnina, Ivan broke the economic and political power of the leading boyar families, thereby destroying precisely those persons who had built up Muscovy and were the most capable of administering it. Trade diminished, and peasants, faced with mounting taxes and threats of violence, began to leave Muscovy. Efforts to curtail the mobility of the peasants by tying them to their land brought Muscovy closer to legal serfdom. In 1572 Ivan finally abandoned the practices of the oprichnina.

Despite the domestic turmoil of Ivan's late period, Muscovy continued to wage wars and to expand. Ivan defeated and annexed the Kazan' Khanate on the middle Volga in 1552 and later the Astrakhan' Khanate, where the Volga meets the Caspian Sea. These victories gave Muscovy access to the entire Volga River and to Central Asia. Muscovy's eastward expansion encountered relatively little resistance. In 1581 the Stroganov merchant family, interested in fur trade, hired a Cossack (see Glossary) leader, Yermak, to lead an expedition into western Siberia. Yermak defeated the Siberian Khanate and claimed the territories west of the Ob' and Irtysh rivers for Muscovy (see fig. 3).

Expanding to the northwest toward the Baltic Sea proved to be much more difficult. In 1558 Ivan invaded Livonia, eventually embroiling him in a twenty-five-year war against Poland, Lithuania, Sweden, and Denmark. Despite occasional successes, Ivan's army was pushed back, and Muscovy failed to secure a coveted position on the Baltic Sea. The war drained Muscovy. Some historians believe that Ivan initiated the oprichnina to mobilize resources for the war and to quell opposition to it. Regardless of the reason, Ivan's domestic and foreign policies had a devastating effect on Muscovy, and they led to a period of social struggle and civil war, the so-called Time of Troubles (Smutnoye vremya, 1598-1613).

The Time of Troubles

Ivan IV was succeeded by his son Fedor, who was mentally deficient. Actual power went to Fedor's brother-in-law, the boyar Boris Godunov. Perhaps the most important event of Fedor's reign was the proclamation of the patriarchate of Moscow in 1589. The creation of the patriarchate climaxed the evolution of a separate and totally independent Russian Orthodox Church.

In 1598 Fedor died without an heir, ending the Rurik Dynasty. Boris Godunov then convened azemskiy sobor, a national assembly of boyars, church officials, and commoners, which proclaimed him tsar, although various boyar factions refused to recognize the decision. Widespread crop failures caused a famine between 1601 and 1603, and during the ensuing discontent, a man emerged who claimed to be Dmitriy, Ivan IV's son who had died in 1591. This pretender to the throne, who came to be known as the first False Dmitriy, gained support in Poland and marched to Moscow, gathering followers among the boyars and other elements as he went. Historians speculate that Godunov would have weathered this crisis, but he died in 1605. As a result, the first False Dmitriy entered Moscow and was crowned tsar that year, following the murder of Tsar Fedor II, Godunov's
Subsequently, Muscovy entered a period of continuous chaos. The Time of Troubles included a civil war in which a struggle over the throne was complicated by the machinations of rival boyar factions, the intervention of regional powers Poland and Sweden, and intense popular discontent. The first False Dmitriy and his Polish garrison were overthrown, and a boyar, Vasily Shuyskiy, was proclaimed tsar in 1606. In his attempt to retain the throne, Shuyskiy allied himself with the Swedes. A second False Dmitriy, allied with the Poles, appeared. In 1610 that heir apparent was proclaimed tsar, and the Poles occupied Moscow. The Polish presence led to a patriotic revival among the Russians, and a new army, financed by northern merchants and blessed by the Orthodox Church, drove the Poles out. In 1613 a new zemskiy sobor proclaimed the boyar Mikhail Romanov as tsar, beginning the 300-year reign of the Romanov family.

Muscovy was in chaos for more than a decade, but the institution of the autocracy remained intact. Despite the tsar's persecution of the boyars, the townspeople's dissatisfaction, and the gradual enserfment of the peasantry, efforts at restricting the power of the tsar were only halfhearted. Finding no institutional alternative to the autocracy, discontented Russians rallied behind various pretenders to the throne. During that period, the goal of political activity was to gain influence over the sitting autocrat or to place one's own candidate on the throne. The boyars fought among themselves, the lower classes revolted blindly, and foreign armies occupied the Kremlin (see Glossary) in Moscow, prompting many to accept tsarist absolutism as a necessary means to restoring order and unity in Muscovy.

**The Romanovs**

The immediate task of the new dynasty was to restore order. Fortunately for Muscovy, its major enemies, Poland and Sweden, were engaged in a bitter conflict with each other, which provided Muscovy the opportunity to make peace with Sweden in 1617 and to sign a truce with Poland in 1619. After an unsuccessful attempt to regain the city of Smolensk from Poland in 1632, Muscovy made peace with Poland in 1634. Polish king Wladyslaw IV, whose father and predecessor Sigismund III had manipulated his nominal selection as tsar of Muscovy during the Time of Troubles, renounced all claims to the title as a condition of the peace treaty.

The early Romanovs were weak rulers. Under Mikhail, state affairs were in the hands of the tsar's father, Filaret, who in 1619 became patriarch of the Orthodox Church. Later, Mikhail's son Aleksey (r. 1645-76) relied on a boyar, Boris Morozov, to run his government. Morozov abused his position by exploiting the populace, and in 1648 Aleksey dismissed him in the wake of a popular uprising in Moscow.

The autocracy survived the Time of Troubles and the rule of weak or corrupt tsars because of the strength of the government's central bureaucracy. Government functionaries continued to serve, regardless of the ruler's legitimacy or the boyar faction controlling the throne. In the seventeenth century, the bureaucracy expanded dramatically. The number of
government departments (*prikazy*; sing., *prikaz*) increased from twenty-two in 1613 to eighty by mid-century. Although the departments often had overlapping and conflicting jurisdictions, the central government, through provincial governors, was able to control and regulate all social groups, as well as trade, manufacturing, and even the Orthodox Church.

The comprehensive legal code introduced in 1649 illustrates the extent of state control over Russian society. By that time, the boyars had largely merged with the elite bureaucracy, who were obligatory servitors of the state, to form a new nobility, the *dvoryanstvo*. The state required service from both the old and the new nobility, primarily in the military. In return, they received land and peasants. In the preceding century, the state had gradually curtailed peasants' rights to move from one landlord to another; the 1649 code officially attached peasants to their domicile. The state fully sanctioned serfdom, and runaway peasants became state fugitives. Landlords had complete power over their peasants and bought, sold, traded, and mortgaged them. Peasants living on state-owned land, however, were not considered serfs. They were organized into communes, which were responsible for taxes and other obligations. Like serfs, however, state peasants were attached to the land they farmed. Middle-class urban tradesmen and craftsmen were assessed taxes, and, like the serfs, they were forbidden to change residence. All segments of the population were subject to military levy and to special taxes. By chaining much of Muscovite society to specific domiciles, the legal code of 1649 curtailed movement and subordinated the people to the interests of the state.

Under this code, increased state taxes and regulations exacerbated the social discontent that had been simmering since the Time of Troubles. In the 1650s and 1660s, the number of peasant escapes increased dramatically. A favorite refuge was the Don River region, domain of the Don Cossacks. A major uprising occurred in the Volga region in 1670 and 1671. Stenka Razin, a Cossack who was from the Don River region, led a revolt that drew together wealthy Cossacks who were well established in the region and escaped serfs seeking free land. The unexpected uprising swept up the Volga River valley and even threatened Moscow. Tsarist troops finally defeated the rebels after they had occupied major cities along the Volga in an operation whose panache captured the imaginations of later generations of Russians. Razin was publicly tortured and executed.

**Expansion and Westernization**

Muscovy continued its territorial growth through the seventeenth century. In the southwest, it acquired eastern Ukraine, which had been under Polish rule. The Ukrainian Cossacks, warriors organized in military formations, lived in the frontier areas bordering Poland, the Tatar lands, and Muscovy. Although they had served in the Polish army as mercenaries, the Ukrainian Cossacks remained fiercely independent and staged a number of uprisings against the Poles. In 1648 most of Ukrainian society joined the Cossacks in a revolt because of the political, social, religious, and ethnic oppression suffered under Polish rule. After the Ukrainians had thrown off Polish rule, they needed military help to maintain their position. In 1654 the Ukrainian leader, Bogdan Khmel'nitskiy (Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyy), offered to place Ukraine under the protection of the Muscovite tsar, Aleksey I, rather than under the Polish king. Aleksey's acceptance of this offer, which was ratified in the Treaty
of Pereyaslav', led to a protracted war between Poland and Muscovy. The Treaty of Andrusovo, which ended the war in 1667, split Ukraine along the Dnepr River, reuniting the western sector with Poland and leaving the eastern sector self-governing under the suzerainty of the tsar.

In the east, Muscovy had obtained western Siberia in the sixteenth century. From this base, merchants, traders, and explorers pushed eastward from the Ob' River to the Yenisey River, then to the Lena River. By the middle of the seventeenth century, Muscovites had reached the Amur River and the outskirts of the Chinese Empire. After a period of conflict with the Manchu Dynasty, Muscovy made peace with China in 1689. By the Treaty of Nerchinsk, Muscovy ceded its claims to the Amur Valley, but it gained access to the region east of Lake Baikal and the trade route to Beijing. Peace with China consolidated the initial breakthrough to the Pacific that had been made in the middle of the century.

Muscovy's southwestern expansion, particularly its incorporation of eastern Ukraine, had unintended consequences. Most Ukrainians were Orthodox, but their close contact with the Roman Catholic Polish Counter-Reformation also brought them Western intellectual currents. Through Kiev, Muscovy gained links to Polish and Central European influences and to the wider Orthodox world. Although the Ukrainian link stimulated creativity in many areas, it also undermined traditional Russian religious practices and culture. The Russian Orthodox Church discovered that its isolation from Constantinople had caused variations to creep into its liturgical books and practices. The Russian Orthodox patriarch, Nikon, was determined to bring the Russian texts back into conformity with the Greek originals. But Nikon encountered fierce opposition among the many Russians who viewed the corrections as improper foreign intrusions, or perhaps the work of the devil. When the Orthodox Church forced Nikon's reforms, a schism resulted in 1667. Those who did not accept the reforms came to be called the Old Believers (starovery); they were officially pronounced heretics and were persecuted by the church and the state. The chief opposition figure, the archpriest Avvakum, was burned at the stake. The split subsequently became permanent, and many merchants and peasants joined the Old Believers.

The tsar's court also felt the impact of Ukraine and the West. Kiev was a major transmitter of new ideas and insight through the famed scholarly academy that Metropolitan Mogila (Mohyla) founded there in 1631. Among the results of this infusion of ideas into Muscovy were baroque architecture, literature, and icon painting. Other more direct channels to the West opened as international trade increased and more foreigners came to Muscovy. The tsar's court was interested in the West's more advanced technology, particularly when military applications were involved. By the end of the seventeenth century, Ukrainian, Polish, and West European penetration had undermined the Muscovite cultural synthesis--at least among the elite--and had prepared the way for an even more radical transformation.

Source: U.S. Library of Congress