

The Russian State

The Beginnings of the Russian State

The early origins of the Russian state, or Rus (the medieval territory that encompassed parts of modern day Russia, Belarus, and Poland), can be traced to the arrival of the Vikings in the ninth century. The first major city-state was founded in Kiev, as the Vikings and local Slavic peoples began to intermarry—through this process, these two peoples created a hybrid Russian culture and population based in Kiev. By the end of the tenth century, Kiev formally adopted Orthodox Christianity as its official religion. Throughout the first half of the eleventh century, the Kievan city-state enjoyed a period of wealth and prosperity, and boasted the largest population of any European city at the time. Kiev's dominance deteriorated over the next several decades, and in the twelfth century (1169) it was sacked by princes out of northern Rus.

The Mongol Invasion

The invasion of Eurasia by Genghis Khan began in the twelfth century. From the thirteenth through the fifteenth century, the Mongols, of central-eastern Asia, subjugated and dominated Russia. The interval of Mongol rule prevented Russia from participating in some of the key phases in Western European history, such as the Renaissance and the Reformation. During the Mongol period, the territory, or duchy, of Moscow emerged as one of the most prominent Mongol-occupied regions. The nobility of Moscow played a pivotal role as tax collectors for the Mongols during their period of rule. One such figure was Alexander Nevsky, a tax collector for the Mongols who was later awarded the title of Grand Prince.

The next major phase of Russian history came with Ivan III (1462–1505)—or Ivan the Great, as he came to be known. Ivan was also a Grand Prince of Moscow, and today he is considered to be the first national leader and Tsar of Russia, who laid the groundwork for a national Russian state. Ivan vanquished the Mongols in 1480 and successfully brought their rule to an end. He was the first ruler from the Rurik dynasty, Russia's first dynastic family, which ruled Russia from the fifteenth through the early seventeenth century.

The Final Russian Dynasty

The second, and last, imperial dynasty in Russia was the House of Romanov. The Romanov dynasty spanned from the early seventeenth century through the early twentieth century. The family's rule ended with the Russian Revolution in 1917, during World War I. During this period, Russia saw the rule of illustrious leaders such as Peter the Great (1689–1725), Catherine the Great (1762–1796), and finally, the last Romanov ruler, Nicholas II (1894–1917). The termination of dynastic rule in Russia met with a violent end in 1918, when Tsar Nicholas II, his immediate family, and members of the extended royal family were executed. The fall of the Romanovs symbolized Russia's

break from an older and more traditional way of life and signaled the beginning of a more secular, centralized, and bureaucratic Russian government.

