

Dnieper River, flowing from Russia, Belarus, and the Ukraine to the Black Sea. By the end of the ninth century, the Vikings had taken control of the area and ruled over the Eastern Slavs. Viking rulers were called *Rus*, a word that later became the source of the name *Russia*. In the early 900s, under the Viking ruler *Oleg*, a settlement on the Dnieper River became the Principality of Kiev (see the map), also called *Kievan Rus*.

Kievan Rus was essentially a collection of city-states, which were allowed to govern themselves as long as they paid tribute to the main ruler, the Grand Prince of Kiev. Ruling Kievan Rus was a council of *boyars*, or nobles. The boyars elected the prince of Kievan Rus when a vacancy occurred and served as a war council during times of conflict. Since the boyars represented the people they governed, the system is sometimes considered an early form of democracy. However, membership in this council was limited to Viking military leaders.

KIEVAN RUS, 750 TO 1130



Kiev Converts to Christianity As discussed above, the Byzantine Empire sent missionaries to convert the people of Kievan Rus to Orthodox Christianity. These conversion attempts were motivated not only by the basic desire to spread the religion, but also by worries that an organized, pagan Kievan Rus would present a potential political threat to the empire.

Conversion formally succeeded in 989, when Prince Vladimir I ("the Great," ruled 980–1015) of Kievan Rus married the sister of the Byzantine emperor. As part of the agreement, Vladimir had to convert to Orthodox Christianity, as did all of his subjects. With Eastern Orthodox Christianity thus

Imports	Exports
Wool, silk, steel, horses, jewels	Furs, honey, wax, wool, linens, slaves
Textiles, horses	Salt, gold, slaves
Porcelain, jewelry, glass, textiles	Ivory, exotic animals, gold, slaves, cotton, glass beads
Cotton, wool, ivory, gold, silver	Silk, rice, spices, porcelain, tea, paper
Spices, glassware, porcelain, tin	Spices, jewels, gold, cotton, silk
Textiles, slaves, porcelain	Textiles, leather, paper, books
Porcelain, paper, textiles, sugar, tin	Rice, pepper, spices, tin, aromatic woods
Spices, silk, jewels	Metals, salt, wheat, wines, oils

Arts, literature, and education flourished during the Byzantine Empire. Nearly all religious in nature. Literature of the period focused on seeking salvation by obeying God's will. Books and songs celebrating the lives of Jesus and Mary, as well as a large number of fine artists were likewise focused on devotional work, such as icons depicting Christian themes and *illuminated manuscripts* that were elaborately decorated with colored illustrations and gold. Byzantine art proved highly influential on later art in Europe and in Islamic cultures.

Education during the Byzantine Empire was likewise dominated by the Eastern Orthodox Church taught a wide variety of subjects including philosophy, math, medicine, and law—all with a religious focus. The *University of Constantinople* was founded in 850; many of its students served in the vast Byzantine bureaucracy, while others studied the classical writings from Ancient Greece and Rome.

The city of Constantinople, wealthy from its position as a major center of trade, was known for the lavish homes of its aristocrats, its beautiful and impressive imperial palace. Like Rome, even the common people had public baths. Other gathering spots were restaurants, taverns, and theaters, a large stadium like the Coliseum in the Rome. The city was the heart of the Byzantine Empire, such as Antioch, Thessalonica, and other major attractions, but none had an imperial palace and none could rival Constantinople in grandeur.

Byzantine Empire. The declining strength can be seen in a series of military defeats spread out over four centuries. In 1071, a group that originated in the steppes of central Asia known as the Seljuk Turks defeated Byzantine forces in the *Battle of Manzikert*. After this defeat, the Turks gradually took more and more territory in Asia Minor.

Around that same time, Byzantine forces clashed with a new power in the Mediterranean—the Normans from northern France. The Normans took control of Sicily and southern Italy from the Byzantines in 1071. (For more about the Normans and their invasion of England in 1066, see Chapter 12.)

Another major setback for the Byzantines came in the early 1200s. As you will read later, in 1095, the Byzantine Emperor Alexius I asked the pope to call upon Roman Catholics in Western Europe to help fight against the Turks in the region of the Middle East called the Levant, an area many Christians called the "Holy Land." The result was a series of military expeditions, called the *Crusades*, in which knights and commoners from Western Europe traveled to the Levant with hopes of seizing control for Christianity. During the Fourth Crusade (1202–1204), soldiers from Western Europe gathered in the Italian city of Venice to prepare to sail to the Levant. However, the Venetians persuaded, or possibly coerced, crusading European knights to sack their trading rivals in Constantinople first.

The Byzantine Empire continued to shrink. By the fifteenth century, the remnant of the empire was concentrated solely in Europe. In 1453, the Ottoman Turks, who had replaced the Seljuk Turks in western Asia Minor, conquered Constantinople, marking the end of the Byzantine Empire.

Slavic Peoples and the Origins of Russia

Historians know little about the earliest history of the Slavs. They originally populated the steppes to the northeast of the Black Sea. By about 500 B.C.E., three identifiable Slavic-language groups began to emerge:

- East Slavic, which evolved into Ukrainian and Russian
- West Slavic, which evolved into Polish, Slovak, and Czech
- South Slavic, which evolved into Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian

At first, the Slavs lived a hunter-forager lifestyle, which was dictated by their environment. In the forested north, the soil in the area was fertile, but the growing season was short. By contrast, the steppes to the south enjoyed a longer growing season but the land was too tough to plow with existing technology.

The Rise of Kievan Rus The East Slavs made contact with people of Northern Europe known as *Vikings* around 800. As you will read in Chapter 12, the Vikings expanded from their homeland in Scandinavia west into England, south into Western Europe, and east into Slavic territory. They moved south and east along river routes, including Europe's fourth longest river, the extensive

Ukraine to the Black Sea control of the area called Rus, a word that by 900s, under the Viking the Principality of Kiev was, which were allowed to be the main ruler, the Grand Prince, or nobles. The Grand Prince represented the power and decided an early form of government to Viking military



the Byzantine Empire, the Orthodox Christianity, by the basic desire to be a pagan Kievan Rus. Prince Vladimir I ("the Great") converted the Byzantine Empire to Orthodox Christianity thus

established as its official religion, Kievan Rus became increasingly linked to the empire, both culturally and politically. Byzantine advisers, priests, and teachers were sent to Kiev. Hundreds of wooden onion-dome churches were built, in imitation of the style of Byzantine churches, and the monastic tradition came to Kievan Rus. In terms of politics, the imperial control of the church became widely accepted in Russia. Despite the conversion of the ruling elite in Kievan Rus, pagan traditions survived among the peasants for centuries.

The Golden Age of Kievan Rus The "golden age" of Kievan Rus took place during the tenth and eleventh centuries, when the civilization enjoyed both a strong government and a cohesive society. The first great leader of the Golden Age was Vladimir I, the ruler who oversaw the conversion of Kievan Rus to Christianity. He also expanded the western border of his kingdom. The second great leader was Vladimir's son, Yaroslav I (ruled 1019–1054). He is known as Yaroslav the Wise because he promoted education, and he codified the legal system, *Rus'koye Pravo* ("Russian Justice").

The Slave Trade The rulers of Kievan Rus engaged in some trade with Baghdad to the southeast and Baltic ports to the northwest. The major trading partner, however, was the Byzantine Empire. The Kievan princes organized annual expeditions to Constantinople to sell honey, hides, furs, and timber, but mostly to sell slaves. Kievan Rus had no agricultural surplus; indeed, they had more people than they could support. So each fall, the princes would demand tribute from various Kievan towns and agricultural areas, calling for a certain number of peasants from each community to be sent to Kiev as slaves. The slaves were then transported to Constantinople by boats on the annual trade expedition. (For a map, see page 171.)

In return for slaves, the Kievan princes received gold coins and other riches of the Byzantine Empire. When the princes were not satisfied with these exchanges (as in 860, 907, and 1043), they sent naval expeditions to raid Constantinople.

The Decline of Kiev The increasing dependence of Kievan Rus on the Byzantine Empire proved to be its undoing. Kievan trade delegations found it hard to reach Constantinople due to the invasion of nomadic groups from central Asia, such as the Pechenegs of the steppe south of Kiev. As Byzantium's economic fortunes declined, so too did Kiev's. In 1169, northern Russian princes took advantage of Kiev's weakness by sacking the city. They did so again in 1204.

Less than forty years later, in 1240, Kiev was invaded by the largest and most powerful group from Central Asia, the Mongols, who took over and stayed for almost 250 years. During this period, the so-called Khanate of the Golden Horde occupied the steppe and exacted tribute from those Russian princes living in the forests to the north. The Mongols were not interested in occupying the forests, preferring the grassy steppe for their grazing herds of horses. By the time the Mongols were finally defeated by Russian forces, the Byzantine Empire had fallen. (The Mongols are discussed in more detail on page 241.)

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Novgorod One of the largest city-states in northern Kievan Rus was Novgorod. According to legend, Novgorod was founded by a Scandinavian, Rurik, in the tenth century. An influx of German merchants, Finns, Swedes, and Slavs over four centuries created a multicultural city with a population of around 400,000. Novgorod prospered through trade, connecting the Baltic Sea and Black Sea regions along the Volga and Dnieper river routes. Products traded included furs, honey, and tar produced in the north; cloth and metals from farther west in Europe; and grains from farther east in Russia. Novgorod's growth was representative of the growth of many cities between 800 and 1300. During this period, a warming climate caused agricultural productivity to increase, which resulted in greater surplus goods for trade. Novgorod became independent from Kievan Rus in the twelfth century. However, like many cities in this era, it was eventually absorbed by a growing empire. In the fifteenth century, a newly organized Russian empire would seize control of Novgorod.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: WAS JUSTINIAN NOBLE OR RUTHLESS?

One of the first writers to evaluate Justinian was Procopius, who was a top advisor to Justinian's top military leader, Belisarius. In his extensive public writings, Procopius praised Justinian as a capable and honorable leader. However, he also wrote *Secret History*, a scathing account of Justinian and his rule. This account remained hidden until long after the death of Procopius. It was finally published in 1623. The disparity between the public and private writings of Procopius leaves many questions. Was the *Secret History* the truth that Procopius was unwilling to publish because he knew it would destroy his career? Was it a work of jealousy that should not be taken seriously? Was it simply an example of how leaders appears flawed to those who know them best?

For the next several hundred years, European historians generally praised Justinian. Like him, they were living in a world in which leaders were praised for expanding their borders, especially to spread Christianity. Otto of Freising, a twelfth-century German bishop writing during the Crusades called Justinian a "most zealous and Christian monarch" who "triumphed gloriously."

As historians focused more on non-religious forces in history, they praised him less for expanding Christian territory and more for his reforms, such as his law code that standardized legal practice in the empire. Some historians have become more critical. For example, Peter Heather, in *The Restoration of Rome: Barbarian Popes and Imperial Pretenders*, attacks Justinian's style of rule as "authoritarianly chaotic," and his actions as brutal. "By Roman or indeed any standards, Justinian was an autocratic [ruler] of the worst kind. It worried him not a jot to slaughter his own citizens in huge numbers to keep himself in power, not to launch speculative attacks on neighboring states with much the same end in mind, no matter what the collateral damage."