CHAPTER 11

Byzantines, Russians, and Turks Interact, 500-1500

Previewing Themes

**RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL SYSTEMS** Two world religions, Islam and Christianity, met head-to-head as Arabs and Turks battled Byzantines and then Crusaders. At the same time, disputes over doctrine split Christianity into competing branches.

**Geography** What land did the Seljuk Turks occupy?

**CULTURAL INTERACTION** Byzantine influence inspired the growth of a unique Russian culture. The Turks meanwhile adopted Islam and sponsored a rebirth of Persian ways to create a dynamic cultural blend.

**Geography** Why might the Dnieper River have been important to Kievan Russia?

**EMPIRE BUILDING** The Byzantines, Slavs, Arabs, Turks, and Mongols waged bloody wars to expand their territories. However, each empire also brought together people of diverse traditions.

**Geography** How does the map indicate that there was probably conflict between the Byzantine and Seljuk empires?

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**Essential Question**

What characterized the rise and interaction of Byzantine, Russian, and Turkish civilizations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia?

**What You Will Learn**

In this chapter you will follow the individual achievements and shared histories of three great empires that existed on the margin between Europe and Asia.

**SECTION 1 The Byzantine Empire**

Main Idea After Rome split, the Eastern Empire, known as Byzantium, flourished for a thousand years.

**SECTION 2 The Russian Empire**

Main Idea Russia grew out of a blending of Slavic and Byzantine cultures and adopted Eastern Orthodox traditions.

**SECTION 3 Turkish Empires Rise in Anatolia**

Main Idea Turkish people converted to Islam and founded new empires that would renew Muslim civilization.

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**CENTRAL ASIA**

- 527: Justinian becomes ruler of Byzantine Empire.
- 690: Empress Wu Zhao assumes throne in China.
- 771: Charlemagne becomes ruler of Frankish Kingdom in Europe.
- 850s: Byzantine culture spreads to Russia.
How will you expand your empire?

You are the new ruler of the Byzantine Empire. Through expansion, you hope to make the empire even greater. Military conquest is an option, as shown here in a painting of a Turkish invasion of India. Your diplomats might persuade other groups to join you. You also know that rulers of several countries outside your empire would like to see their sons or daughters marry into your family. Now you must consider the best way to enlarge your empire.

EXAMINING the ISSUES

- What are the benefits and drawbacks of a military conquest?
- Why might you choose diplomacy, or intermarriage with an outside ruling family?

As a class, discuss the various ways to expand an empire. What option or options will you choose? Explain your decision. As you read the chapter, think about how empires expand.
TAKING NOTES

A glittering cross from the 11th century, Byzantine Empire

The Byzantine Empire

MAIN IDEA

RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL SYSTEMS After Rome split, the Eastern Empire, known as Byzantium, flourished for a thousand years.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Byzantine culture deeply influenced Orthodox Christianity, a major branch of modern Christianity.

TERMS & NAMES

• Justinian
• Justinian Code
• Hagia Sophia

• patriarch
• icon
• excommunication
• Cyrillic alphabet

SETTING THE STAGE

As you learned in Chapter 6, the Western Roman Empire crumbled in the fifth century as it was overrun by invading Germanic tribes. By this time, however, the once great empire had already undergone significant changes. It had been divided into western and eastern empires, and its capital had moved east from Rome to the Greek city of Byzantium. The city would become known as Constantinople after the emperor Constantine, who made it the new capital in A.D. 330. (Byzantium would remain as the name of the entire Eastern Empire.) For nearly a thousand years after the collapse of the Western Empire, Byzantium and its flourishing capital would carry on the glory of Rome.

A New Rome in a New Setting

Roman leaders had divided the empire in 395, largely due to difficulties in communications between the eastern and the troubled western parts of the empire. Still, rulers in the East continued to see themselves as emperors for all of Rome.

In 527, a high-ranking Byzantine nobleman named Justinian succeeded his uncle to the throne of the Eastern Empire. In an effort to regain Rome’s fading glory, Justinian in 533 sent his best general, Belisarius (beh•uh•SAIR•ee•uhs), to recover North Africa from the invading Germanic tribes. Belisarius and his forces quickly succeeded.

Two years later, Belisarius attacked Rome and seized it from a group known as the Ostrogoths. But the city faced repeated attacks by other Germanic tribes. Over the next 16 years, Rome changed hands six times. After numerous campaigns, Justinian’s armies won nearly all of Italy and parts of Spain. Justinian now ruled almost all the territory that Rome had ever ruled. He could honestly call himself a new Caesar.

Like the last of the old Caesars, the Byzantine emperors ruled with absolute power. They headed not just the state but the church as well. They appointed and dismissed bishops at will. Their politics were brutal—and often deadly. Emperors lived under constant risk of assassination. Of the 88 Byzantine emperors, 29 died violently, and 13 abandoned the throne to live in monasteries.
Life in the New Rome

A separate government and difficult communications with the West gave the Byzantine Empire its own character, different from that of the Western Empire. The citizens thought of themselves as sharing in the Roman tradition, but few spoke Latin anymore. Most Byzantines spoke Greek.

Having unified the two empires, Justinian set up a panel of legal experts to regulate Byzantium’s increasingly complex society. The panel combed through 400 years of Roman law. It found a number of laws that were outdated and contradictory. The panel created a single, uniform code known as the Justinian Code. After its completion, the code consisted of four works.

1. The Code contained nearly 5,000 Roman laws that were still considered useful for the Byzantine Empire.
2. The Digest quoted and summarized the opinions of Rome’s greatest legal thinkers about the laws. This massive work ran to a total of 50 volumes.
3. The Institutes was a textbook that told law students how to use the laws.
4. The Novellae (New Laws) presented legislation passed after 534.

The Justinian Code decided legal questions that regulated whole areas of Byzantine life. Marriage, slavery, property, inheritance, women’s rights, and criminal justice were just some of those areas. Although Justinian himself died in 565, his code served the Byzantine Empire for 900 years.

Creating the Imperial Capital

While his scholars were creating the legal code, Justinian launched the most ambitious public building program ever seen in the Roman world. He rebuilt the crumbling fortifications of Constantinople, as workers constructed a 14-mile stone wall along the city’s coastline and repaired the massive fortifications along its western land border.

Vocabulary

A code is a general system of laws, and it stems from the Latin word codex, meaning “book.”

GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

Human-Environment Interaction What aspects of Constantinople might slow an invasion from the west?

The Ortakoy Mosque towers above modern-day Constantinople, now called Istanbul.
Analyzing Motives

Why do you think governments so often build magnificent buildings like Hagia Sophia?

Church building, however, was the emperor’s greatest passion. Justinian viewed churches as the most visible sign of the close connection between church and state in his empire. The crowning glory of his reign was Hagia Sophia (HAY•ee•uh-soh•FEE•uh), which means “Holy Wisdom” in Greek. A church of the same name had been destroyed in riots that swept Constantinople in 532. When Justinian rebuilt Hagia Sophia, many visitors hailed it as the most splendid church in the Christian world.

As part of his building program, Justinian enlarged his palace into a vast complex. He also built baths, aqueducts, law courts, schools, and hospitals. By the time the emperor was finished, the city teemed with an almost visible excitement.

Beneath such excitement, a less obvious but vitally important activity took place: the preservation of Greco-Roman culture. Byzantine families valued education—specifically classical learning. Basic courses for Byzantine students focused on Greek and Latin grammar, and philosophy. The classics of Greek and Roman literature served as textbooks. Students memorized Homer. They learned geometry from Euclid, history from Herodotus, and medicine from Galen. The modern world owes Byzantine scholars a huge debt for preserving many of the great works of Greece and Rome.

Constantinople’s Hectic Pace The main street running through Constantinople was the Mese (MEHS•ee), or “Middle Way.” Merchant stalls lined the main street and filled the side streets. Products from the most distant corners of Asia, Africa, and Europe passed through these stalls. Everywhere, food stands filled the air with the smell of their delicacies, while acrobats and street musicians performed.

Meanwhile, citizens could enjoy free entertainment at the Hippodrome, which offered wild chariot races and performance acts. The Hippodrome (from Greek words meaning “horse” and “racecourse”) held 60,000 spectators. Fans of the different teams formed rowdy gangs named for the colors worn by their heroes.

In 532, two such fan groups sparked citywide riots called the Nika Rebellion (because the mob cried “Nika!” or “Victory!”). Both sides were angry with the government. They felt that city officials had been too severe in putting down a previous riot of Hippodrome fans. They packed the Hippodrome and demanded the overthrow of Justinian. Belisarius, however, broke in with his troops and slaughtered about 30,000 rebels.

Justinian had considered fleeing during the Nika Rebellion, but his wife, Theodora, urged him to stay. As her husband’s steely adviser, Theodora had immense power. She rallied Justinian to remain in the capital with a fiery speech:

PRIMARY SOURCE

My opinion is that now is a poor time for flight, even though it bring safety. For any man who has seen the light of day will also die, but one who has been an emperor cannot endure to be a fugitive. If now you wish to go, Emperor, nothing prevents you. There is the sea, there are the steps to the boats. But take care that after you are safe, you do not find that you would gladly exchange that safety for death.

THEODORA, quoted by Procopius in History of the Wars

Empress Theodora 500–548

The most powerful woman in Byzantine history rose from deep poverty. Early in life, Theodora was an actress. Eventually, she met Justinian, and in 525, they married.

As empress, Theodora met with foreign envoys, wrote to foreign leaders, passed laws, and built churches. During one political crisis, Theodora even confiscated the property of the general Belisarius. After she died in 548, Justinian was so depressed that he passed no major laws for the rest of his reign.

RESEARCH WEB LINKS Go online for more on Empress Theodora.
The Empire Falls

After Justinian’s death in 565, the empire suffered countless setbacks. There were street riots, religious quarrels, palace intrigues, and foreign dangers. Each time the empire moved to the edge of collapse, it found some way to revive—only to face another crisis.

The Plague of Justinian The first crisis actually began before Justinian’s death. It was a disease that resembled what we now know as the bubonic plague. This horrifying illness hit Constantinople in the later years of Justinian’s reign. The plague probably arrived from India on ships infested with rats. Historians estimate that in 542, the worst year of the plague, 10,000 people were dying every day. The illness broke out repeatedly until around 700, when it finally faded. By that time, it had destroyed a huge percentage of the Byzantine population.

Attacks from East and West From the very start of its rise to power, Byzantium faced constant challenges from foreign enemies. Lombards overran Justinian’s conquests in the west. Avars, Slavs, and Bulgars made frequent raids on the northern borders. The powerful Sassanid Persians attacked relentlessly in the east. The Persians and Avars struck against Constantinople itself in 626. With the rise of Islam, Arab armies attacked the city in 674 and once again in 717. Russians attempted invasions of the city three times between 860 and 1043. In the 11th century, the Turks took over the Muslim world and fought their way slowly into Byzantine territory.

The Byzantines used bribes, diplomacy, political marriages, and military power to keep their enemies at bay. In the seventh century, Emperor Heraclius reorganized the empire along military lines. Provinces became themes, or military districts. Each theme was run by a general who reported directly to the emperor. These strategies, however, could not work forever. Slowly, the Byzantine Empire shrank under the impact of foreign attacks. By 1350, it was reduced to the tip of Anatolia and a strip of the Balkans. Yet thanks to its walls, its fleet, and its strategic location, Constantinople held out for another 100 years. Finally, the city fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

The Church Divides

During the Byzantine Empire, Christianity underwent a dramatic development. Christianity had begun to develop differently in the Western and Eastern Roman Empires, due largely to the distance and lack of contact between the two regions. As the Eastern Empire became Byzantium and flourished, those differences grew and ultimately split apart the Church.

A Religious Split Eastern Christianity built its heritage on the works of early Church fathers. One was Saint Basil, who, around 357, wrote rules for the life of monks. Here, Saint Basil describes how monks and Christians should behave:

Primary Source

The Christian should not be ostentatious [showy] in clothing or sandals, for all this is idle boasting. He should wear cheap clothes according to the need of the body. He should consume nothing beyond what is necessary or which tends to extravagance, for all this is abuse. He should not strive for honour nor always seek the first place. Each one should hold all men above himself. He should not be disobedient . . . He should not be desirous of money, nor treasure up unnecessary things to no avail. He who approaches God ought to embrace poverty in all things, and be pierced with the fear of God.

SAINT BASIL, quoted in The Letters
Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy

Originally, Christianity had one church. Because of political conflicts and differences in belief, the western and eastern parts of the Christian Church split apart in 1054. The western church became the Roman Catholic Church, and the eastern church became the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Both churches believe in the gospel of Jesus and in the Bible as interpreted by their church. They also believe that God uses sacraments to convey his love to humans. Sacraments are visible signs of something sacred; for instance, the water used in baptism is a sign of God’s power to cleanse people of sin. The Venn diagram below shows other similarities and differences.

### The 11th Century: Comparing Two Churches

#### Roman Catholic
- Services are conducted in Latin.
- The pope has authority over all other bishops.
- The pope claims authority over all kings and emperors.
- Priests may not marry.
- Divorce is not permitted.

#### Eastern Orthodox
- Services are conducted in Greek or local languages.
- They base their faith on the gospel of Jesus and the Bible.
- They use sacraments such as baptism.
- Their religious leaders are priests and bishops.
- They seek to convert people.

#### Similarities
- They base their faith on the gospel of Jesus and the Bible.
- They use sacraments such as baptism.

### Leaders of the Two Churches

Pope Benedict XVI (right) is the supreme head of the Roman Catholic Church. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (left) holds a slightly different position in the Orthodox Church. Eastern Orthodox churches pay him their highest honors because he heads the ancient Church of Constantinople, but they do not consider him their supreme authority.

### Connect to Today

1. **Forming and Supporting Opinions**
   What do you think was the most important issue dividing the two churches? Explain your answer.

   ![Skillbuilder Handbook, page R20](https://www.adherents.com)

2. **Making Predictions**
   Do you think the schism between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church will ever be healed and the two churches reunited? Why or why not?
Another significant figure was Saint John Chrysostom (KRIHS•uh•stuhm). As bishop of Constantinople from 398 to 404, Chrysostom was the patriarch (PAY•tree•ah•reek), or leading bishop of the East. But even the patriarch bowed to the emperor.

A controversy that tested the emperor’s authority over religious matters broke out in the eighth century. In 730, Emperor Leo III banned the use of icons, religious images used by Eastern Christians to aid their devotions. The emperor viewed the use of icons as idol worship. People responded with riots, and the clergy rebelled.

In the West, the pope became involved in this eastern dispute and supported the use of icons. One pope even ordered the excommunication of a Byzantine emperor—that is, he declared the emperor to be an outcast from the Church. In 843, more than 100 years after the controversy began, Empress Theodora restored icons to Eastern churches.

Differences between the Eastern and Western churches continued to grow. In 1054, matters came to a head when the pope and the patriarch excommunicated each other in a dispute over religious doctrine. Shortly afterward, Christianity officially split between the Roman Catholic Church in the West and the Orthodox Church in the East.

**Byzantine Missionaries Convert the Slavs** As West and East grew apart, the two traditions of Christianity competed for converts. Missionaries from the Orthodox Church, for example, took their form of Christianity to the Slavs, groups that inhabited the forests north of the Black Sea. Two of the most successful Eastern missionaries, Saint Methodius and Saint Cyril (SEER•uhl), worked among the Slavs in the ninth century. Cyril and Methodius invented an alphabet for the Slavic languages. With an alphabet, Slavs would be able to read the Bible in their own tongues. Many Slavic languages, including Russian, are now written in what is called the Cyrillic (suh•RIHL•ihk) alphabet.

As these missionaries carried out their work, the Slavs themselves were creating a culture that would form one of history’s most influential countries: Russia.
The Russian Empire

MAIN IDEA

EMPIRE BUILDING Russia grew out of a blending of Slavic and Byzantine cultures and adopted Eastern Orthodox traditions.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Early Russia was separated from the West, leading to a difference in culture that still exists today.

TERMS & NAMES

- Slavs
- Vladimir
- Yaroslav the Wise
- Alexander Nevsky
- Ivan III
- czar

SETTING THE STAGE In addition to sending its missionaries to the land of the Slavs during the ninth century, Byzantium actively traded with its neighbors to the north. Because of this increased interaction, the Slavs began absorbing many Greek Byzantine ways. It was this blending of Slavic and Greek traditions that eventually produced Russian culture.

Russia’s Birth

Russia’s first unified territory originated west of the Ural Mountains in the region that runs from the Black Sea to the Baltic Sea. Hilly grasslands are found in the extreme south of that area. The north, however, is densely forested, flat, and swampy. Slow-moving, interconnecting rivers allow boat travel across these plains in almost any direction. Three great rivers, the Dnieper (NEE•puhr), the Don, and the Volga, run from the heart of the forests to the Black Sea or the Caspian Sea. (See the map on page 308.)

In the early days of the Byzantine Empire, these forests were inhabited by tribes of Slavic farmers and traders. They spoke similar languages but had no political unity. Sometime in the 800s, small bands of adventurers came down among them from the north. These Varangians, or Rus as they were also called, were most likely Vikings. (The name “Russia” is taken from this group.) Eventually, these Vikings built forts along the rivers and settled among the Slavs.

Slavs and Vikings Russian legends say the Slavs invited the Viking chief Rurik to be their king. So in 862, he founded Novgorod (NAHV•guh•rahd), Russia’s first important city. That account is given in The Primary Chronicle, a history of Russia written by monks in the early 1100s. Around 880, a nobleman from Novgorod named Oleg moved south to Kiev (KEE•ehf), a city on the Dnieper River. From Kiev, the Vikings could sail by river and sea to Constantinople. There they could trade for products from distant lands.

Kiev grew into a principality, a small state ruled by a prince. As it did, the Viking nobles intermarried with their Slavic subjects and adopted many aspects of Slavic culture. Gradually, the line between Slavs and Vikings vanished.

Kiev Becomes Orthodox In 957, a member of the Kievan nobility, Princess Olga, paid a visit to Constantinople and publicly converted to Christianity. From 945 to 964, she governed Kiev until her son was old enough to rule. Her son

Use the graphic organizer online to take notes on how Mongol rule affected different parts of Russian society.
resisted Christianity. However, soon after Olga’s grandson Vladimir (VLAD•uh•meer) came to the throne about 980, he considered conversion to Christianity. The Primary Chronicle reports that Vladimir sent out teams to observe the major religions of the times. Three of the teams returned with lukewarm accounts of Islam, Judaism, and Western Christianity. But the team from Byzantium told quite a different story:

**PRIMARY SOURCE**
The Greeks led us to the [buildings] where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendor or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We only know that God dwells there among men, and . . . we cannot forget that beauty.

—from The Primary Chronicle

This report convinced Vladimir to convert to Byzantine Christianity and to make all his subjects convert, too. In 989, a baptism of all the citizens of Kiev was held in the Dnieper River. Kiev, already linked to Byzantium by trade, now looked to the empire for religious guidance. Vladimir imported teachers to instruct the people in the new faith. All the beliefs and traditions of Orthodox Christianity flourished in Kiev. Vladimir appreciated the Byzantine idea of the emperor as supreme ruler of the Church. So the close link between Church and state took root in Russia as well.

### Kiev’s Power and Decline

Thanks to its Byzantine ties, Kiev grew from a cluster of crude wooden forts to the glittering capital of a prosperous and educated people. The rise of Kiev marked the appearance of Russia’s first important unified territory.

**Kievan Russia** Vladimir led the way in establishing Kiev’s power. He expanded his state west into Poland and north almost to the Baltic Sea. He also fought off troublesome nomads from the steppes to the south.

In 1019, Vladimir’s son Yaroslav the Wise came to the throne and led Kiev to even greater glory. Like the rulers of Byzantium, Yaroslav skillfully married off his daughters and sisters to the kings and princes of Western Europe. Those marriages helped him to forge important trading alliances. At the same time, he created a legal code tailored to Kiev’s commercial culture. Many of its rules dealt with crimes against property. Yaroslav also built the first library in Kiev. Under his rule, Christianity prospered. By the 12th century, Kiev was home to some 400 churches.
Kiev’s Decline  The decline of the Kievan state started with the death of Yaroslav in 1054. During his reign, Yaroslav had made what turned out to be a crucial error. He had divided his realm among his sons, instead of following the custom of passing on the throne to the eldest son. Upon their father’s death, the sons tore the state apart fighting for the choicest territories. And because this system of dividing the kingdom among sons continued, each generation saw new struggles. The Crusades—the numerous clashes between Christians and Muslims for control of the Holy Lands of the Middle East that began in 1095—added to Kiev’s troubles by disrupting trade. Then, just when it seemed that things could not get worse, a new threat emerged.

The Mongol Invasions
In the middle 1200s, a ferocious group of horsemen from central Asia slashed their way into Russia. These nomads were the Mongols. (See Chapter 12.) They had exploded onto the world scene at the beginning of the 1200s under Genghis Khan (JEHNG•ghis KAHN), one of the most feared warriors of all time.

The Mongols may have been forced to move out by economic or military pressures. They may have been lured by the wealth of cities to the west. Whatever their reasons for leaving, they rode their swift horses across the steppes of Asia and on into Europe. Their savage killing and burning won them a reputation for ruthless brutality. When Genghis Khan died in 1227, his successors continued the conquering that he had begun. At its fullest extent, the Mongol Empire stretched from the Yellow Sea to the Baltic Sea and from the Himalayas to northern Russia.

In 1240, the Mongols attacked and demolished Kiev. They rode under the leadership of Batu Khan, Genghis’s grandson. So many inhabitants were slaughtered, a Russian historian reported, that “no eye remained to weep.” A Roman Catholic bishop traveling through Kiev five years later wrote, “When we passed through that land, we found lying in the field countless heads and bones of dead people.” After the fall of Kiev, Mongols ruled all of southern Russia for 200 years. The empire’s official name was the “Khanate of the Golden Horde”: Khanate, from the Mongol word for “kingdom”; Golden, because gold was the royal color of the Mongols; and Horde, from the Mongol word for “camp.”

Mongol Rule in Russia  Under Mongol rule, the Russians could follow all their usual customs, as long as they made no attempts to rebel. As fierce as they were, the Mongols tolerated all the religions in their realms. The Church, in fact, often acted as a mediator between the Russian people and their Mongol rulers.
The Mongols demanded just two things from Russians: absolute obedience and massive amounts of tribute, or payments. By and large, the Russian nobles agreed. Novgorod’s prince and military hero Alexander Nevsky, for example, advised his fellow princes to cooperate with the Mongols. The Russian nobles often crushed revolts against the Mongols and collected oppressive taxes for the foreign rulers.

Mongol rule isolated the Russians more than ever from their neighbors in Western Europe. This meant that among other things, the Russians had little access to many new ideas and inventions. During this period, however, forces were at work that eventually would lead to the rise of a new center of power in the country, and to Russia’s liberation.

**Russia Breaks Free**

The city of Moscow was first founded in the 1100s. By 1156, it was a crude village protected by a log wall. Nonetheless, it was located near three major rivers: the Volga, Dnieper, and Don. From that strategic position, a prince of Moscow who could gain control of the three rivers could control nearly all of European Russia—and perhaps successfully challenge the Mongols.

**Moscow’s Powerful Princes** A line of Russian princes eventually emerged on the scene who would do just that. During the late 1320s, Moscow’s Prince Ivan I had earned the gratitude of the Mongols by helping to crush a Russian revolt against Mongol rule. For his services, the Mongols appointed Ivan I as tax collector of all the Slavic lands they had conquered. They also gave him the title of “Grand Prince.” Ivan had now become without any doubt the most powerful of all Russian princes. He also became the wealthiest and was known as “Ivan Moneybag.”
Ivan convinced the Patriarch of Kiev, the leading bishop of Eastern Europe, to move to Moscow. The move improved the city’s prestige and gave Moscow’s princes a powerful ally: the Church. Ivan I and his successors used numerous strategies to enlarge their territory: land purchases, wars, trickery, and shrewd marriages. From generation to generation, they schemed to gain greater control over the small states around Moscow.

**An Empire Emerges** The Russian state would become a genuine empire during the long, 43-year reign of **Ivan III**. Upon becoming the prince of Moscow, Ivan openly challenged Mongol rule. He took the name **czar** (zahr), the Russian version of Caesar, and publicly claimed his intent to make Russia the “Third Rome.” (The title “czar” became official only during the reign of Ivan IV.)

In 1480, Ivan made a final break with the Mongols. After he refused to pay his rulers further tribute, Russian and Mongol armies faced each other at the Ugra River, about 150 miles southwest of Moscow. However, neither side advanced to fight. So, after a time, both armies turned around and marched home. Russians have traditionally marked this bloodless standoff as their liberation from Mongol rule. After this liberation, the czars could openly pursue an empire.

Such a defeat for the Mongols would have seemed impossible nearly two centuries earlier, as they pushed west from present-day China and crushed nearly everything in their path. One of the peoples whom they conquered back then was a new group that had risen to power in Central Asia—the Turks.
Russian Religious Art and Architecture

Russian religious art follows an ancient tradition dating back to the early Church. At first, Christians feared that artwork showing people might lead to idol worship. Gradually, however, the Church came to accept the use of icons, or depictions of holy people. In the West, other types of art eventually replaced the icon, but the Eastern Orthodox Church still uses icons today.

Icons are painted according to strict rules. This approach also shaped other religious art in Russia. To construct a church or create a religious artifact was a sacred task, performed according to rigid guidelines. Art was not a form of self-expression.

RESEARCH WEB LINKS Go online for more on religious art.

Icon ►
This 12th-century Russian icon is of the Archangel Gabriel. According to the Bible, Gabriel was the messenger who told the Virgin Mary that she would give birth to Jesus. In Orthodox churches, artists must follow certain rules when making icons. For example, icons are always two-dimensional because they are seen as windows through which worshipers can view heaven.

Cross and Illuminated Manuscript ►
The cross above was carved from ivory and shows the Archangel Michael. In Christian belief, Michael is the leader of the heavenly hosts and a spiritual warrior who helped the Israelites. That is why he is often shown with a sword, as he is here.

The illuminated manuscript was made during the 15th century and shows a scribe writing out the Gospel. Illuminated manuscripts were handwritten books decorated with gold or silver, vivid colors, elaborate designs, and small pictures. The word illumination originally referred to the gold or silver decoration, which made the pages seem as if light were shining on them.
**Wooden Churches**

Located in Varzuga, Russia, the Church of the Dormition was built in 1674. It is just one of many churches in Russia made out of wood. These churches were often built on a hilltop overlooking forests and villages. Roughly cut logs were used for the walls. However, the designs of the ceilings were complex and included the use of onion domes, as shown here. In the Russian Orthodox Church, onion domes represent heaven.

**Reliquary**

This elaborately decorated silver chest is a Russian cathedral reliquary. Reliquaries are containers that hold sacred relics, such as the bones of a saint. Most reliquaries are portable, allowing them to be carried in processions.

**Connect to Today**

1. **Making Inferences** Why do you think the archangels Michael and Gabriel were popular subjects for Russian religious art?
   
   ![See Skillbuilder Handbook, Page R10.](image)

2. **Comparing and Contrasting** What types of religious art are common in our society today? How are they similar to or different from the art on these two pages?