

CHAPTER 18 - *The Rise of Russia*

CHAPTER SUMMARY - The rise of the Russian Empire, unlike the rise of Western colonial empires, although altering power balances through Eurasia, involved only limited commercial exchange. After freeing themselves from Mongol domination by 1480, the Russians pushed eastward. Some extension of territory also occurred in eastern Europe. Regional states, many differing from Russia, were present, with Lithuania and Poland rivaling Russia into the 17th century. Russia, with its Byzantine-influenced culture, had been unimportant in world affairs before the 15th century. Russia then entered into new contacts with the West without losing its distinct identity. Between 1450 and 1750, many lasting characteristics of the eastern European world were formed.

Russia's Expansionist Politics under the Tsars. During the 14th century, the duchy of Moscow took the lead in liberating Russia from the Mongols. Ivan III gave his government a military focus and used a blend of nationalism and the Orthodox Christian religion to succeed by 1480, in creating a large independent state.

The Need for Revival. The Mongols, content to leave local administration in indigenous hands, had not reshaped basic Russian culture. The occupation did, however, reduce the vigor of cultural and economic life. Literacy declined and the economy became purely agricultural and dependent on peasant labor. Ivan III restored the tradition of centralized rule, added a sense of imperial mission, and claimed supervision of all Orthodox churches. Russia, asserted Ivan, had succeeded Byzantium as the Third Rome. Ivan IV continued the policy of expansion. He increased the power of the tsar by killing many of the nobility (boyars)—earning the name of Ivan the Terrible—on the charge of conspiracy.

Patterns of Expansion. Territorial expansion focused on central Asia. Russians moved across their region's vast plains to the Caspian Sea and the Ural Mountains. By the 16th century, they moved into western Siberia. Peasant adventurers (cossacks) were recruited to occupy the new lands. Loyal nobles and bureaucrats received land grants in the territories. The conquests gave Russia increased agricultural regions and labor sources. Slavery existed into the 18th century. Important trading connections opened with Asian neighbors. The Russian advance, along with that of the Ottomans to the south, eliminated independent central Asia as a source of nomadic invasions. Russia became a multicultural state. The large Muslim population was not forced to assimilate to Russian culture.

Western Contact and Romanov Policy. The tsars, mindful of the cultural and economic lag occurring under Mongol rule, also began a policy of carefully managed contacts with the West. Ivan III dispatched diplomatic missions to leading Western states; under Ivan IV, British merchants established trading contacts. Italian artists brought in by the tsars built churches and the Kremlin, creating a distinct style of architecture. When Ivan IV died without an heir early in the 17th century, the Time of Troubles commenced. The boyars tried to control government, while Sweden and Poland seized territory. In 1613, the boyars chose a member of the Romanov family, Michael, as tsar. The Time of Troubles ended without placing lasting constraints on the tsar's power. Michael restored internal order, drove out the foreign invaders, and recommenced imperial expansion. Russia secured part of Ukraine and pushed its southern border to Ottoman lands. Alexis Romanov increased the tsar's authority by abolishing the assemblies of nobles and restoring state control over the church. His desire to cleanse the church of changes occurring during the Mongol era created tensions because conservative believers resisted changes to their established rituals. The government exiled these "Old Believers" to Siberia or southern Russia.

Russia's First Westernization, 1690-1790. By the end of the 17th century, Russia, although remaining more of an agricultural state than most leading civilizations, was a great land empire. Peter I, the Great, continued past policies but added a new interest in changing the economy and culture

through imitation of Western forms. It was the first Westernization effort in history. Peter traveled incognito to the West and gained an interest in science and technology. Many Western artisans returned with him to Russia.

Tsarist Autocracy of Peter the Great. Peter was an autocratic ruler; revolts were brutally suppressed. Reforms were initiated through state decrees. Peter increased the power of the state through recruitment of bureaucrats from outside the aristocracy and by forming a Westerntype military force. A secret police was created to prevent dissent and watch over the bureaucracy. Foreign policy followed existing patterns. Hostilities with the Ottomans went on without gain. A successful war with Sweden gave Russia a window on the Baltic Sea, allowing it to be a major factor in European diplomatic and military affairs. Peter's capital, reflecting the shift of interests, moved to the Baltic city of St. Petersburg.

What Westernization Meant. Peter's reforms influenced politics, economics, and cultural change. The bureaucracy and military were reorganized on Western principles. The first Russian navy was created. The councils of nobles were eliminated and replaced by advisors under his control. Provincial governors were appointed from the center, while elected town councils were under royal authority. Law codes were systematized and the tax system reformed to increase burdens on the peasantry. In economic affairs, metallurgical and mining industries were expanded. Landlords were rewarded for using serfs in manufacturing operations. The changes ended the need to import for military purposes. Cultural reforms aimed at bringing in Western patterns to change old customs. Nobles had to shave their beards and dress in Western style. Peter attempted to provide increased education in mathematics and technical subjects.

He succeeded in bringing the elite into the Western cultural zone. The condition of upper-class women improved. The first effort in Westernization embodied features present in later ventures in other lands. The changes were selective; they did not involve ordinary people. No attempt was made to form an exporting industrial economy. Westernization meant to Peter the encouragement of autocratic rule. These changes brought resistance from all classes.

Consolidation under Catherine the Great. Several decades of weak rule followed Peter's death in 1724. Significant change resumed during the reign of Catherine (1762-1796). She used the Pugachev peasant rebellion as an excuse to extend central government authority. Catherine was also a Westernizer and brought Enlightenment ideas to Russia, but centralization and strong royal authority were more important to her than Western reform was. She gave new power over serfs to the nobles in return for their service in the bureaucracy and military. Catherine continued patronage of Western art and architecture, but the French Revolution caused her to ban foreign and domestic political writings. Russian expansionist policies continued. Territories, including the Crimea on the Black Sea, were gained in central Asia from the Ottomans. Catherine pushed colonization in Siberia and claimed Alaska. Russian explorers went down the North American coast into northern California. In Europe, Catherine joined Prussia and Austria to partition Poland and end its independence. By the time of her death, Russia had completed an important transformation. Over three centuries, the tsars created a strong central state ruling over the world's greatest land empire. New elements from the West had entered and altered Russia's economy and culture.

Themes in Early Modern Russian History. Russian society was very different from that of the West. Serfdom and a deep-rooted peasant culture did not mesh with Westernization efforts. The Russian nobility, through state service, maintained a vital position. A minority of great landholders lived in major cities and provided important cultural patronage. Smaller, incompletely Westernized landowners lived less opulent lives.

Serfdom: The Life of East Europe's Masses. Before the Mongol conquest, Russia's peasantry had been relatively free. The government from the 16th century encouraged serfdom as a means of conciliating the

nobility and of extending state control over peasants. A 1649 act made serfdom hereditary; other 17th- and 18th-century laws tied serfs to the land and augmented the legal rights of landlords. Serfs were almost slaves; they were bought, sold, and punished by owners. Peasant conditions were similar in eastern Europe. Peasants labored on large estates to produce grain for sale to the West. Western merchants in return bought the serfs' owners manufactured and luxury items. Peasants did have some rights; village governments regulated many aspects of life. Most peasants remained poor and illiterate; they paid high taxes and performed extensive labor services in agriculture, mining, and manufacturing. Their condition deteriorated throughout the 18th century.

Trade and Economic Dependence. There were few large cities in Russia; 95 percent of the population was rural. Artisans also were few, since most manufacturing was rurally based. Small merchant groups existed, but most trade was handled by Westerners. Peter the Great's reforms increased trade, yet the nobility managed to prevent the emergence of a strong commercial class. Russia's social and economic system had strengths. It produced adequate revenue for the expanding empire, supported the aristocracy, and allowed significant population growth. Commerce was carried on with independent central Asian regions. There were important limitations. Agricultural methods remained traditional, and peasants lacked incentives to increase production for the benefit of landlords. Manufacturing suffered from similar constraints.

Social Unrest. By the end of the 18th century, Russian reformers were criticizing their nation's backwardness and urging the abolition of serfdom. Peasant discontent was more significant. Peasants remained loyal to the tsar, but blamed landlords for the harshness of their lives. Periodic rebellions occurred from the 17th century, peaking with the Pugachev rising of the 1770s. The tsar and nobility triumphed, but peasant discontent remained a problem.

Russia and Eastern Europe. Regions west of Russia formed a fluctuating borderland between western and eastern European interests. In the Ottoman Balkans, trade with the West spread Enlightenment concepts. Poland and the Czech and Slovak areas were a part of the Western cultural orbit. Copernicus participated in the Western Scientific Revolution. Some eastern regions were participants in the Protestant Reformation. Many of the smaller states lost political autonomy. Hungary and Bohemia were incorporated into the Habsburg Empire. The largest state, Poland, was linked to the West by shared Roman Catholicism. By 1600, Polish aristocrats weakened the central government and exploited peasants. Urban centers and a merchant class were lacking. The kingdom was partitioned by Russia, Prussia, and Austria.

In Depth: Multinational Empires. During the early modern period, Russia created the longest-lasting multinational empire. The Mughal Empire ended during the 19th century; the empires of the Ottomans and Habsburgs disappeared early in the next century. Special characteristics of the Russian Empire were the presence of a large core of ethnic groups prepared to spread widely and establish new settlements, and Russian ability to adopt Western techniques. During the period of new empire creation, the importance of the western European, culturally more cohesive, nation-state was confirmed. Such states included minority ethnicities but developed methods to achieve national unity. From the 19th century onward, there have been serious clashes between national loyalties and multinational empires. Most of the latter have collapsed.

Global Connections: Russia and the World. Russia's emergence as a key player in both Europe and Asia was a crucial development in the early modern era. The Russian Empire was different from those in the West, but its effect was enormous on two continents in this era.

KEY TERMS

Ivan III (the Great): Prince of the duchy of Moscow; responsible for freeing Russia from the

Mongols; took the title of tsar.

Third Rome: Russia, with Moscow as its capital, claimed to be the successor of the Roman and Byzantine empires.

Ivan IV (the Terrible): Confirmed power of tsarist autocracy by attacking the authority of the boyars; continued policy of expansion; established contacts with western European commerce and culture.

Boyars: The Russian nobles.

Cossacks: Peasant adventurers with agricultural and military skills recruited to conquer and settle in newly seized lands in southern Russia and Siberia.

Time of Troubles: Early 17th-century period of boyar efforts to regain power and foreign invasion after the death of Ivan IV without an heir; ended with the selection of Michael Romanov as tsar in 1613.

Romanov dynasty: Ruled Russia from 1613 to 1917.

Alexis Romanov: Second ruler of the dynasty; abolished assemblies of nobles; gained new powers over the Orthodox church.

Old Believers: Russians who refused to accept the ecclesiastical reforms of Alexis Romanov; many were exiled to southern Russia or Siberia.

Peter I (the Great): Tsar from 1689 to 1725; continued growth of absolutism and conquest; sought to change selected aspects of the economy and culture through imitation of western

St. Petersburg: Baltic city that was made the new capital of Russia by Peter I.

Catherine the Great: German-born Russian tsarina; combined selective Enlightenment ideas with strong centralizing policies; converted the nobility to a service aristocracy by granting them new power over the peasantry.

Partition of Poland: Three separate divisions of Polish territory among Russia, Prussia, and Austria in 1772, 1793, and 1795; eliminated Poland as an independent state.

Obrok: Labor obligations of Russian peasants owed either to their landlords or to the state; part of the increased burdens placed on the peasantry during the 18th century.

Pugachev rebellion: Unsuccessful peasant rising led by Cossack Pugachev during the 1770s; typical of peasant unrest during the 18th century and thereafter.

Westernization: Process in which traditional cultures come under the influence of Western culture.