

C. The Baptism of Rus

1. Whether or not Russia is a nation is a difficult question to answer. It is so large that it contains many different kinds of people who speak different languages and are not closely connected to one another to this day. When the country was founded, however, the goal of its rulers was to create a nation, and to have the people all follow the same religion.
2. In **988 AD**, therefore, Vladimir “the Great” decided to adopt Christianity as his personal religion, and by the rules of the time, his people had to follow him in this conversion.
3. Because Russia had more contact with eastern Europe at the time, especially the city of Constantinople in the Eastern Roman Empire (today Istanbul), the form of Christianity adopted in Russia was different than in France and Germany. It is known as “Orthodox Christianity,” as opposed to the kind that was mostly practiced in western Europe, which is called “Roman Catholic Christianity.”

D. Isolated Russia and the Mongol Occupation (1240-1480)

1. In the year **1240**, invaders known as the Mongols swept across Asia into Europe as far as Poland. They conquered Kyiv and made the area that we call “Ukraine” today a part of their empire.
2. Russia’s leaders moved north, and adopted Moscow as their new capital, which was still a city of wooden cabins, but over the centuries grew into the center of Russian culture.
3. The Mongol occupation of eastern Europe continued until **1480**, when the prince of Moscow Ivan “the Great” refused to pay tribute (taxes) and assembled his army to defy the Mongols at the Ugra river near Moscow. The Mongols came to attack, but saw the Russian defenders and decided not to bother! Their retreat from Europe began after that. This “Great Standing at the Ugra River” was the decisive moment in the rise of a newly independent Russia.

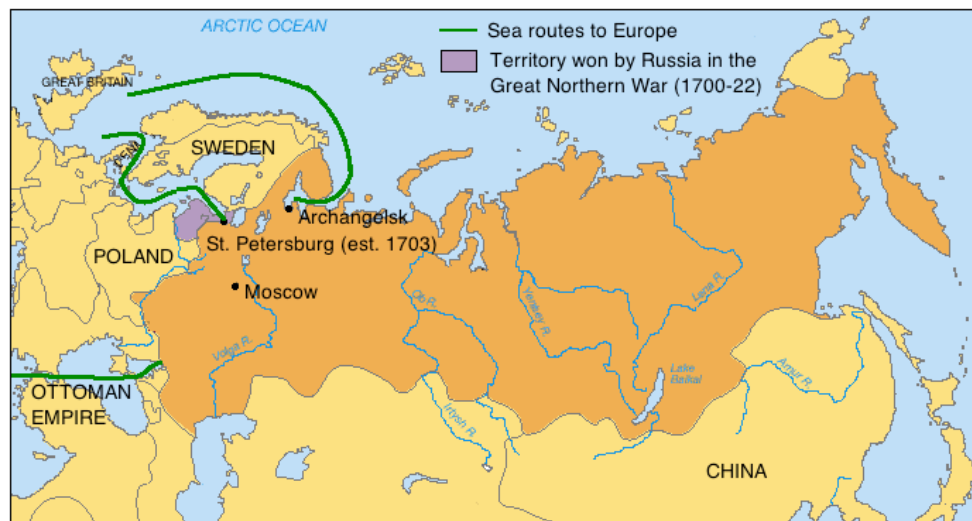
E. Moscow: the “Third Rome”

1. Part of the idea of a Russian nation to this day is a common belief in Orthodox Christianity. Communism is explicitly atheist, which means it denies the existence of God, so the long period of communism hurt Russia’s Christians, who could not openly “practice” their religion, but it has returned to prominence since **1991**.
2. For most of Russian history since **988** Orthodox Christianity has been central to Russian culture, and even became a part of Russia’s desire for cardinality.
3. In **1453**, in particular, an important event occurred that changed Russia’s status. The Muslim Ottoman Empire conquered Constantinople. When this happened, the home of Orthodox Christianity was turned into a Muslim capital.
4. The other most important city for Orthodox Christians, Kyiv, was under Mongol occupation, so Moscow became the most important city with a leader (called a “patriarch”) of the Orthodox church.

5. The Russians began to think of Moscow as the “third Rome,” which means that in the Russian view, Christianity had become important in the city of Rome itself (the *first* Rome), transferred to Constantinople after the **Fall of Rome (476AD)** and then transferred its home to Moscow.
6. In keeping with this view, the “grand princes” of Moscow also began to call themselves “tsars.” “Tsar” (or “Czar”) is the Russianized version of “caesar,” like “kaiser” is the Germanized version. All these words serve as the title of *emperors*.

F. Russia Joins Europe

1. Russia’s isolation began to break down during the European period known as the “Age of Discovery” (known for the voyages of Christopher Columbus and others). English Explorers seeking a “northern passage” over Asia to China arrived on the Arctic coast of Russia, and made their way to the city of Moscow, which had become the capital.
2. Trade between Europe and Russia remained limited after that, as the Arctic route was impassable much of the year due to ice. (Strangely, despite its large initial size, and despite expanding eastward, Russia was essentially “landlocked” with regard to Europe, because the enemy kingdoms of Sweden, Poland, and the Islamic Ottoman Empire had come to occupy the regions between Russia and Europe where passage to Europe by sea was possible.)
3. Russia’s isolation was eventually broken by its king (known in Russia as a “tsar”), Peter “the Great.” Peter admired European culture and wanted to make Russia into a European country. Seeking a sea route to Asia, Peter believed that Sweden was Russia’s most vulnerable rival, and attacked that country in the **Great Northern War of 1700-22**.



4. Russia’s victory in the **Great Northern War** allowed the country to claim a stretch of coastline along the Baltic Sea. The new capital city of St. Petersburg was built there as a monument to Russia’s new ambitions as a European country.

5. Being a part of Europe was desirable for the purpose of expanding trade and in order to partake in the cultural and technological advancement of Europe, which was surpassing all other cultures, but it also meant that Russia was entangled in the “balance of power” of Europe’s nations. This meant that Russia would have to pick sides whenever Europe’s nations would fight one another. By doing so, Russia would eventually become a target of European aggression itself, as in the World Wars, the terrible cost of which drove Russia to supernationalism.

G. Russia in the “Balance of Power”

1. At first, since it was so far to the east, Western Europe did not take much notice of Russia. Most countries were interested in the fate of Spain and Austria instead, because both of those countries saw the end of hereditary dynasties and other countries trying to take advantage of the weakness of those countries to gain land and power for themselves in the *War of the Spanish Succession* and the *War of the Austrian Succession*.
2. Meanwhile, Russia’s goal was to expand to the south at the expense of the Muslim Ottoman Empire. During the reign of Catherine “the Great,” Russia defeated the Ottoman Turks in the *Russo-Turkish War (1768-74)* which re-united Ukraine and Russia and which brought Crimea under Russian control for the first time in Russia’s history. This meant that Russia now had access to the Black Sea, which nearly gave them access to the Mediterranean Sea (their real goal).
3. Poland has also experienced the crisis of a failing monarchy and the loss of its independence because of Russian interference in the *War of the Polish Succession*. This drew the attention of Austria and Prussia (northern Germany), however, who did not want Russia to get too strong and to get nothing for themselves. Russia, Prussia, and Austria thus agreed to devour Poland in three great partitions from 1772 to 1795, where each of them would get their “fair share.” By the end of this process Poland no longer existed and Russia was truly recognized as a major power in the European “balance of power.”
4. Thus, when the kings of Europe became alarmed by the French Revolution, starting in 1789, where the French people began the process of overthrowing their king and adopting a modern democracy, Russia decided to participate in the wars to prevent the revolution from succeeding. This would have tremendous unintended consequences...