

Kiev

The Rise of the First Russian Empire

The birth of the Russian Empire falls in the period when the Scandinavian Vikings were at the zenith of their power. Just as these hardy rovers sailed over the Baltic, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, until they reached Iceland and North America, and in their small forty oared galleys went up from the mouths of the Elbe, the Weser, the Rhine, the Maas and the Seine far into the interior, striking terror into the inhabitants, so, too, in the east of Europe they followed the course of the rivers and discovered the way to the Black Sea and Constantinople. The route which led up the Dwina and then down the Dnieper to Byzantium was called the Varagian way; even the rapids of the Dnieper bore, so it is said, Scandinavian names. The Norsemen, who had founded here and there independent empires in the west of Europe, could do so still more easily in the east.

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Generation One

Rurik, Grand Prince of Kiev

Born circa 800

Died in 879

Rurik, the Viking leader who is traditionally credited with founding the Russian state, was born in Friesland, a region in present-day Holland, which his father controlled. After leading raids in France, England, and Germany, Rurik gained control of a large tract of land in Jutland. However, he soon abandoned his claim under pressure from rival chieftains.

In the 850's, Rurik and his brothers Sineus and Truvor led a band of Vikings into northwestern Russia where they established a settlement near Lake Ladoga in what is now northeastern Russia very near the border with Finland. Rurik soon moved part of the settlement to nearby Novgorod, according to legend, at the invitation of the local Slavs. There he established the seat of his power and built a fortress from which he could rule the Russian lands. His rule extended as far south as Kiev where his successors founded the powerful Kievan state, which lasted until the 1200s. From Rurik came the house of Rurikovitch which ruled Russia until the end of the 16th century.

Rurik had a son:

- **Igor**, mentioned next.

Generation Two

Igor, Grand Prince of Kiev

Born circa 875 at Novgorod, Kiev

Died in 945, murdered by the Drevlanes from the town of Korosten while collecting taxes.

Although said to be less capable than leaders before and after him, Igor nonetheless carried the conquests of Kievan Rus further. He undertook campaigns against Persia, Constantinople and Bulgaria.

Igor married in 903 to St. Olga (born circa 890 and died in 969) who acted as Regent of Kiev after the murder of her husband. Igor and Olga had a son:

- **Svyatoslav I**, mentioned next.

Generation Three

Svyatoslav I, Grand Prince of Kiev

Born circa 942

Died in 972, ambushed and killed by Kurya, the Khan or ruler of the nomadic Pecheneg Tribe.

Svyatoslav was only about three years old when his father Igor was murdered in 945, hence his mother St. Olga acted as Regent of Kiev until 964. Olga's first official act was to wreak vengeance on the Drevlanes who had murdered her husband by besieging and burning their town of Korosten. In 957 St. Olga went with a large retinue to Constantinople, accepted Christianity, and received baptism.

In 964, Svyatoslav took over the government, although his mother continued to administer home affairs until her death in 970. Svyatoslav led Kievan Rus's military conquest of the Bulgars, responding to attacks by the Khazar tribe. He in turn was ambushed and killed by Byzantines from Pecheneg in the south, who, according to legend, converted Svyatoslav's skull into a drinking vessel.

Svyatoslav married Malousha and they had a son:

- **St. Vladimir the Great**, mentioned next.

Svyatoslav married to Predeslava of Hungary and they had the following children:

- Yaropolk I, Grand Prince of Kiev 972 – 978, before St. Vladimir the Great; his son,
 - Svyatopolk I, Grand Prince of Kiev 1015 – 1019, after St. Vladimir the Great.

Generation Four

St. Vladimir the Great, Grand Prince of Kiev

Born in 960

Acceded as Grand Prince of Kiev in 978

Died on July 15 1015 at Kiev

Vladimir was a pagan at the beginning of his reign, which was at first devoted to consolidating his territories into a unified Russian state. By the early 10th century, however, Kievan Rus had established close commercial and cultural ties with the Byzantine Empire, an Orthodox Christian state. He converted in 988 to Orthodox Christianity and made Orthodoxy the official religion of Kievan Rus. Vladimir's choice of Orthodox Christianity, rather than the Latin church (Roman Catholicism) or Islam, had an important influence on the future of Russia.

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Vladimir's choice between the Christian and Islamic faiths was said to have been heavily influenced by the fact that he enjoyed the consumption of alcoholic beverages. The Christian faith allowed for this and the Islamic faith did not. Hence, Vladimir chose Christianity.

St. Vladimir married in 980 to Rogneda von Polotzk, a Nun and a daughter of Rognald of Polotzk. Rogneda died in 1002. St. Vladimir and Rogneda the Nun had a son:

- **Jaroslav I the Wise**, mentioned next.

St. Vladimir married after 1011 to Malfreda of Bohemia, a daughter of Kuno, Count of Ohningen, by Richilde who was a daughter of Otto I the Great, King of Germany.

St. Vladimir and Malfreda had a daughter:

- Dobroniega who married in 1038 to King Casimir I, King of Poland.

Generation Five

Jaroslav I the Wise, Grand Prince of Kiev

Born in 978

Acceded as Grand Prince of Kiev in 1019

Died on February 20, 1054 at Kiev

Kievan Rus achieved its greatest power and splendor under Yaroslav the Wise in the 11th century. Yaroslav made Kiev a great city and built magnificent buildings, including the notable Cathedral of Saint Sophia or Hagia Sophia of Kiev. Jaroslav did much to develop Kievan Rus education and culture. He also revised the first Russian law code, the so-called *Russkaya Pravda* or Russian Justice. After his death in 1054, Kievan Rus declined. Jaroslav's grandson, Vladimir II Monomachus, made the final attempt to unite Kievan Rus, but after his death in 1125 the fragmentation continued as other Kievan Rus principalities challenged Kiev's supremacy.

By the 13th century, the East Slavic lands became a loose federation of city-states, held together by common language, religion, traditions, and customs. Although ruled by members of the house of Rurik, these city-states were often at war with one another. The area became an easy target for bands of invading Asiatic Mongols.

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Jaroslav married 1019 to Ingeborg, a daughter of Olaf Skötkonung, King of Sweden, and they had the following children:

- **Anne of Kiev**, who was born in 1024 and died after 1075. Anne married Henry I Capet, King of France. (See *Capet*, Generation Thirteen)
- Isiaslav I (1025 – 1078), Prince of Kiev, married a daughter of King Mieszko of Poland.
- Wsevolod I (1030 – 1093), Prince of Kiev
- Anastasia of Kiev, married circa 1046 to Andrew I, King of Hungary.

See *Capet*, Generation Thirteen for the continuation of this line

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