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EXPLORING THE PAST SERIES

General Editor: E. Royston Pike

Finding Out About
**THE EARLY
RUSSIANS**

by

TAMARA TALBOT RICE

Illustrated by

MARGARET SCOTT

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I

THE GLORIES OF OLD RUSSIA

MOST OF us love to listen to stories about ourselves when we were quite small, and many of us are equally fond of listening to stories about our country at a time when it too was very young. Indeed, there are few people whose imaginations are not stirred by contact with the past, whether this contact takes the form of stories or of objects connected with far distant ages and far distant lands.

It is because practically each one of us has within himself a feeling for history that the past interests us, but this interest, or historical sense as it may be called, is inclined to remain in us unawakened until some outer event brings it to life. In young nations the historical sense is generally aroused by feelings of patriotism, which are themselves the result of political growth; among individuals, interest either in the past or in a foreign country is often awakened by some ancient tale or beautiful object.

The very young are least likely to share this interest because they are concerned with the present, but those with wider experience begin by enquiring into the immediate past, then into remoter ages and less familiar civilizations.

There were three periods in her history when the Russian state was in a position to take an interest in her past. The first time this happened was in the 11th century A.D.; it happened again at the turn of the 15th century; and again under Peter the Great (1682-1725) at the turn of the 17th century. But it was only under Peter and his successors on the Russian throne that this interest was able to take root, to flourish and expand, first into a delight in antiquarianism, then into a lasting, keen, and scholarly pursuit of history and archaeology.

Peter the Great, Tsar (the Russian rendering of the Latin word Caesar), that is to say sovereign, of Russia, did much towards introducing the customs of western Europe into Russia. He was the founder, and to some extent also builder, of St. Petersburg (known to us today as Leningrad), one of Europe's loveliest cities, and he was also largely responsible for turning the thoughts of his countrymen towards the past as well as to the future.

When still a young man he travelled in western Europe, visiting great palaces filled with splendid works of art of various origins and dates, and he also worked as a ship-builder both in Holland and in England. Whilst in England he rented John Evelyn's lovely house, Sayes Court, at Deptford, and like many a tenant before and since, he left his landlord furious at the damage which had been done during the tenancy to Evelyn's garden and furniture.

Indeed, Peter had been more concerned in noting all the military, naval, scientific, and industrial achievements of the English than in bothering about his landlord's possessions; and he returned to Moscow, which was then

as now the capital of Russia, determined to make his country as efficient and as up to date as the most advanced European states.

Peter was also anxious to make his people take an interest in their country's past, and to provide Russia with buildings and collections of works of art as splendid as those which he had taken delight in when he visited the great European capitals of his day.

Whilst he was travelling in western Europe, he had begun collecting beautiful and curious objects as well as lovely paintings, and in 1703 he decided to build a new town having an outlet to the sea to replace land-locked Moscow as his capital. He chose for it a site on the banks of the River Neva, and called it St. Pieterborck (St. Peter's town) after his patron saint. Abandoning Moscow, he installed himself there, often joining the thousands of workmen toiling in the swampy soil to help them build the new town.

As soon as the essential government offices had been finished, Peter started improving the house which the German architect Schlüter had built for him, carving his own panelling for it; he also began arranging the objects and pictures which he had bought during his travels abroad. He set many of his Dutch pictures into the paneling of the hall in the enchanting little villa of *Mon Plaisir*, which he reserved for his own use on the shore of the Gulf of Finland, in a wooded area some fifteen miles to the west of his new capital, where his great palace of Peterhof with its magnificent garden of fountains was being built. He also gave orders for a building which he

was to call his Cabinet of Curios, and which became part of the Russian Academy of Sciences, to be built in St. Petersburg on the left bank of the Neva; he intended to keep his geological and anatomical collections in it, but he soon used it also for the various antiquities which he acquired.

In quite a short time Peter's Cabinet of Curios began to attract considerable attention, largely because of some fine but curious objects in gold, silver, and bronze which were being discovered in various parts of Russia either by peasants who had begun to plough their fields more deeply than their forebears had been in the habit of doing or by people who had begun cultivating what had until then been forest land.

Soon the collection was increased by the activities of enterprising looters who succeeded in tunnelling into some of the ancient burial-mounds which exist in considerable numbers in Siberia and in the great plain which stretches across the whole of southern Russia and which is known as the Eurasian plain—"Eurasia" being formed by blending the names of Europe and Asia into one word. In addition to objects found in Russia, Peter also began collecting good examples of early metal work, whether Achaemenid—that is to say, ancient Persian—or Graeco-Bactrian. He was also very fond of Oriental armour, and he acquired fine specimens of Turkish, Persian, Italian, and even Indonesian workmanship. All these objects were later to serve as the kernel round which were formed the fantastically rich collections on view today in the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad, then as now pride of

place being given to a remarkable Syrian horn made of glass and decorated with Arabic inscriptions and the pictures of Christian saints.

Peter's delight in beautiful objects made collecting a fashionable hobby among his courtiers, but they pursued it in a rather magpie-like manner, acquiring objects which appealed to them without pausing to consider them in their archaeological or historical setting—that is to say, without attempting to learn from each object something about the way of life and the outlook of the people who had been responsible for creating it. It was not till long after Peter's death, in fact not until the reign of Catherine the Great of Russia (1762–1796), that the discovery of Pompeii, and the scientific excavations carried out on that long-buried city, came as a revelation not only to western Europe but also to Russia, suddenly showing the educated Russians the fascination and the value of historical studies.

Carried away in her turn by the general enthusiasm, Catherine the Great also began collecting European paintings, her purchases including some of the finest pictures that had formed part of the superb collection of Charles I of England. Following Peter's example, she likewise set about acquiring Oriental works of art so as to fill some of the gaps Peter had left. She concentrated on Egyptian objects, but she also bought Mesopotamian and Persian antiquities ranging from the Parthian to the post-Sassanian periods, as well as Byzantine and Chinese ones.

Many well-to-do Russians also now became keen and well-informed collectors, and some of the great families

of merchant princes—families whose cultural activities can to some extent be compared to those of the Medici of medieval Italy—concentrated on acquiring Russian antiquities. They were encouraged in this by the Russian Academy of Sciences which, though founded by Peter the Great in 1724, greatly extended its scope under Catherine. It is still the institution which, with its modern regional branches, remains responsible for all the archaeological work carried out today in Soviet Russia. The many-sided activities of the Academy had acted as a spur to literary as well as to historical research, and it was as a result that, in 1775, the oldest Russian epic, the lovely 12th-century poem known as *The Lay of Igor's Campaign*, was discovered in one of the state archives, and that many early chronicles and similar records were brought to light.

Though Catherine did so much to encourage historical and literary studies, and to develop an understanding of great painting, it is surprising to find that the real incentive to archaeological work in Russia was provided by Napoleon—the very man who, in 1812, overran much of western Russia and was responsible for the destruction of most of Moscow by fire. However, in 1798 thoughts of war between Russia and France were dulled in Russia by the respect which was felt there for a general who had embarked on a difficult military campaign in Egypt, taking with him not only his troops, equipment, and provisions but also a band of scholars and scientists whom he had engaged in order that they might make a survey of Egypt's monuments and antiquities.

The publication of their work prompted Russians to

follow Napoleon's lead and examine their native antiquities. Archaeology became with them a recognized science and a rewarding occupation. Numerous archaeological societies sprang up in Russia; and excavations were undertaken which, with the passing years, shed their resemblance to glorified treasure-hunts and became serious expeditions. Their number grew throughout the 19th century; and chance finds, either of single objects or graves or of great hordes of considerable monetary value as well as of outstanding historical and artistic interest, continued to be made, each adding to our knowledge of the past and also to the array of precious and beautiful objects in Russia's museums.

Since the Revolution of 1917 the number of excavations undertaken in the USSR, that is to say the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics—the name by which post-revolutionary Russia is known—has greatly increased, for the whole of that vast country is immensely rich both in ancient sites and in burial grounds, some of which date as far back as the 3rd millennium B.C., though others are as recent as the 9th century or so A.D.

The excavations which are being carried out today in Russia are conducted with great skill and efficiency. They have produced a vast amount of new material, some of which, as for example that recovered from the frozen burials of the northern Altai in western Siberia or from Armenia, have revealed the existence of entirely new, wholly unsuspected, immensely fascinating cultures. Furthermore, whereas in the 19th century Russian archaeologists were largely concerned in obtaining works of art

and in establishing the broad historical outlines of the civilizations which had grown up on Russia's soil at one time or another, modern archaeologists are equally interested in the social and economic conditions which affected the lives of the people living at those periods.

Because of the change in outlook, archacology has developed into an exact science; and as a result, every object, however small and however coarsely made it may be, remains as important as the most beautiful and valuable find because it may well be able to throw more light on general conditions of its own day than might a supremely lovely object which had been made for a single, often highly privileged person. The attention with which the artistically valueless finds are examined today has produced a great deal of detailed information, and the picture of the past which has emerged as a result is sufficiently complete to enable us to form a fairly clear idea of the way in which the various groups of people who succeeded each other from prehistoric times onwards lived, at least in some of the more fertile areas of what is known to us today as Russia.

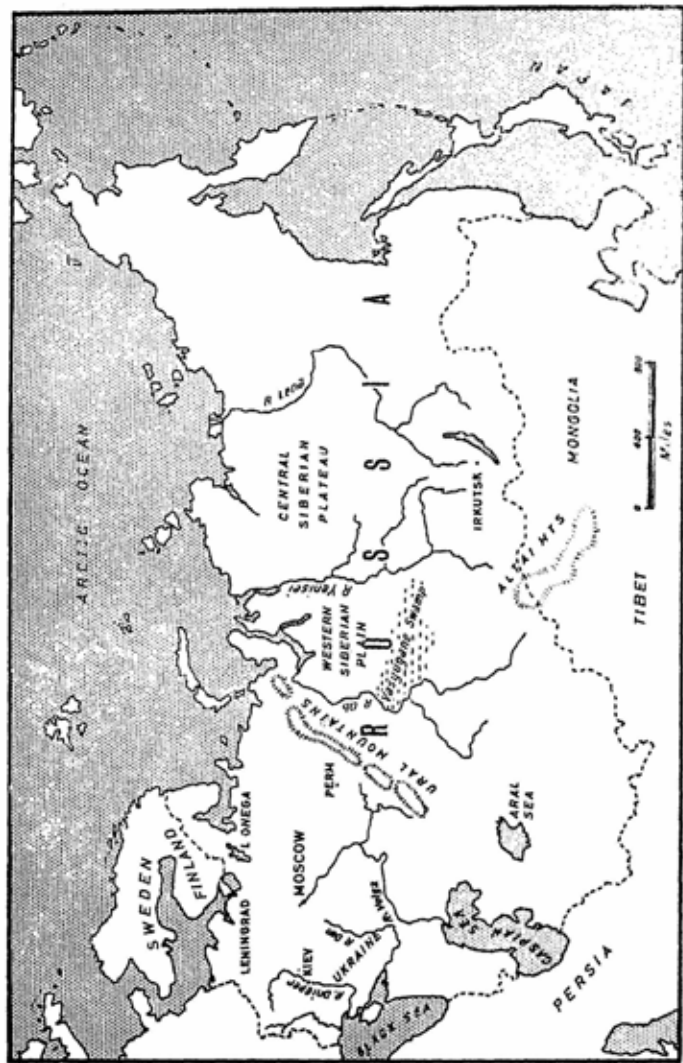
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THE ANCIENT PAST

GEOGRAPHICALLY, THE whole of the territory known to us as the USSR can be divided into a series of horizontal bands or belts. The northernmost of these, that bordering the Arctic Ocean, is known as the tundra belt because of the moss which grows on its vast swamps. In ancient times it was inhabited by Lapp, Samoyed, and Tungus nomads living off reindeer flesh and fish.

Moving southward, the tundra gives way to a forest belt in which much of the woodland has been cut down throughout the centuries; this is in its turn succeeded by a narrow strip of parkland, to the south of which stretches the great plain or steppe known as the Eurasian plain because it extends virtually unbroken from present-day Hungary to the borders of China. In its Asiatic section, its fertile grasslands give way in places to barren salt deserts. In western Asia its northern section abuts on the mountains of the Altai.

In antiquity it was far easier for people to obtain the basic foodstuffs essential to life in the Eurasian plain than in the other belts, and this was even truer of its European section because numerous rivers flow through it. Some are



Geographical map of the U.S.S.R.

vast ones such as the Volga, which is the longest river in Europe, and the Don, Dnieper, and Dniester; others, such as the Bug or the Kama, though smaller, were important as main waterways; and there were, too, a great many quite small rivers, all of them rich in fish and also extremely useful as a means of swift, and on the whole comfortable, transport.

Because of these advantages, the south Russian plain, as the European section of this vast grazing ground is often called, has attracted inhabitants from very early times, and many of those who followed each other in it have left their mark in the form of the mounds which they raised above the burials of their dead.

The number of these mounds is very considerable; they vary not only in date but also in their shapes and sizes. Some of the largest and most interesting have been found in southern Russia, mainly in the basins of the rivers Don and Dnieper, in the Crimea, and in the strip of land lying between the eastern shore of the Black Sea and the Caucasus, which is known as the Kuban. It was in these areas, as well as in Transcaucasia, that several thousand years before the birth of Christ small communities of people created the oldest civilizations which are known to have flourished on what is now Russian soil.

Although researches which are at present being made by archaeologists in Europe and America seem to suggest that prehistorians may eventually have to study material dating as far back as some thirty thousand years before the birth of Christ, the third millennium B.C. is the oldest of which we at present have any knowledge in so far as

Russia is concerned. The country must assuredly have been inhabited for far longer than that by people who depended for their livelihood on hunting and fishing, but these early families of hunters were so primitive that they do not appear to have left any trace of their passage through life on the soil they inhabited. It was only in the course of the third millennium B.C. that some of the people living in the forest belt, even though they continued to depend upon their skill as hunters and fishermen for most of their food, began to live in small mud huts grouped in what are known as settlements.

None of these communities had as yet learned to mine or shape metals, whether bronze, iron, or the more precious kinds, so that they were obliged to make their tools out of stone or flint. However, they already knew how to produce some simple pottery vessels, and the artistic instinct which distinguishes man from even the most intelligent of animals had begun to waken in them, prompting them to carve pieces of bone, wood, and even stone into human, animal, and bird shapes.

Not content with this, a group of settlers inhabiting the eastern shores of Lake Onega, and others living on the shores of the White Sea, began covering the faces of the rocks in these districts with carvings of hunters pursuing their game and with pictures of the local varieties of wild animals, that is to say, of elks, stags, bears, swan, geese, and ducks—one artist even including the figure of a huge demon, which he may perhaps have fancied that he saw one murky night!

These pictures—it would perhaps be better to call them

petroglyphs, since the majority were carved on the rocks and only some were actually painted on them—must assuredly have had a magical or religious meaning for the people who produced them, though their original purpose remains unknown to us today. However, certain symbols which later played an important part among early sun-worshippers—a form of religion which was popular in various parts of Russia over a long period—already appear in them.

More interesting than these sun symbols are scenes throwing some light on the habits of these people by showing them in their narrow boats, intent on harpooning fish, or, aided by their dogs, pursuing animals with spears or shooting at them with bows and arrows. Very similar scenes—this time, however, carried out in red paint—have also been found recently in Siberia, notably in Tadjikistan, the Urals, and Central Asia, where they were produced from the third millennium B.C. onwards into very early Christian times.

The skill which these various groups of people acquired in hunting their quarry, and their ability to represent the creatures they pursued successfully not only in paint but also in wood and stone, is to be clearly seen in the figure of a decoy duck of the third millennium B.C., which was discovered during the recent excavations of the bogland settlement of Gorbunovo in the Central Urals.

At a time when the settled inhabitants of the European forest belt and the Ural foothills were still mainly dependent on hunting and fishing, that is to say in the 3rd millennium B.C., some of the people in the more fertile belt to the

south of them had begun to lead an agricultural way of life.

Settling in small groups of tiny mud huts, they worked the land with extremely primitive implements. As still occurs today in certain backward countries, much of this exhausting work was done by the women, who toiled at the sides of their men-folk whenever the latter were at hand and carried on alone when the men were away hunting or raiding their weaker neighbours. Under conditions such as these, women came to be regarded as the equals of men, often even as superior to them, so that their word became accepted as law. Societies such as these are called matriarchal, in contrast to the patriarchal in which women lived in servility, whilst men ruled.

One of the agricultural communities living from about 3000 to 1500 B.C. some forty miles south of Kiev must have been far more advanced than the others, for they produced



A vase of the Tripolie culture decorated with a painted scroll design

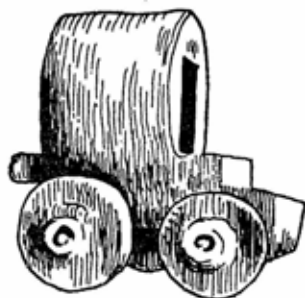
a culture known today as the Tripolie, which is remarkable for the varied and elaborate shapes of the pottery vessels, some of which have bell-shaped lips and side handles which enabled a rope to be passed through them. Most of these pots were covered with polychrome, that is to say, many-coloured painted decorations formed of spiral or geometric designs, which bear a surprising resemblance to those which were used for a time in ancient Egypt and Crete, whilst others include the figures of women, dogs, goats, and other animals.

But agriculture in its primitive form could not of itself suffice to meet the growing needs of a developing people, and gradually the more enterprising communities began to think that cattle-breeding might provide a more satisfactory form of livelihood. Cattle-breeding was, however, far more difficult for a primitive people to practise successfully than the superficial cultivation of small plots of land. In order to rear cattle it was necessary to start by taming the animals concerned; these, depending on the nature of the land, varied from reindeer in the tundra zone, to cattle, that is to say sheep, goats, pigs, or horses, in the more southern ones. Next it was necessary for the breeders to provide pastures for their flocks, doing so at a time when the storing of foodstuffs for winter feeding was unknown.

As a result breeders had to adapt themselves to a nomadic way of life, moving with their families, all their belongings, and their flocks from one piece of pasture land to another. In summer this was easy enough to accomplish in the European section of the plain, for the

nomads could generally camp comfortably by a river whilst their herds roamed the neighbouring grasslands. But in winter, when grazing became scarce, many tribes had to travel far afield in search of fodder; and gradually, certain winter grazing grounds came to be recognized as the property of particular groups of people or tribes. When this happened, any attempt by one tribe to trespass on a neighbour's grass became a cause for fierce fighting.

This new way of life was also a more difficult one for women to share in, for it was one in which the men could combine hunting and fishing with the care of their herds; men were also better fitted to defend their cattle and grazing-grounds from raiders, and more adept at raiding their weaker neighbours than were women. Nor, even had the women wished to share in these pursuits, could they easily have found the time in which to do so. Living as they did either in tents or in waggons mounted on to solid wheels and covered by skin or felt rugs, there was constant packing for them to attend to, in addition to the normal duties of cooking, cleaning, caring for the children and the young



A Scythian clay model of a nomad's covered wagon

and sick animals, milking their beasts, and turning the milk of their herds into a drink called kumis.

In addition, women were also expected to make and repair the family's clothes; to produce most of the felt hangings, cushions, and satchels needed; and probably also to make and decorate the leather reins and many other items of the household's essential equipment. Useful, indeed invaluable, though they were, the women's authority both in the family and in the tribe began to decrease, and by the end of the 2nd millennium B.C. the husband's wish had come to prevail in the family, and the patriarchal system of government to replace the matriarchal in the tribe.

Throughout the vast expanse of the Eurasian plain the nomads and settlers appear to have lived separate lives, and as waves of different nomadic groups followed each other, so, in the plain's European section, did a variety of settled agriculturalists succeed each other. Each of the agricultural communities cannot have greatly differed in their habits, for today each is distinguished only by some slight differences which appear either in the decoration of their equally primitive pottery vessels, or in the construction of their modest mud huts and of the graves which they made for their dead.

Modern archaeologists have grouped them according to these differences, calling some the pitted, comb ware, or Tripolie people because of their pottery; or again naming some Copper Age people after their pit graves, and some Bronze Age communities after their under-cut graves and catacomb-like burial chambers, whilst associating

others with graves of the timber frame type. Yet in all three the bodies of the dead were generally laid in their graves in a contracted position; that is to say, with their legs bent so that their knees were raised close to their chins. The bodies were smeared before burial in a red ochre paint which was thought to have the cleansing effect of fire, and which penetrated to and discoloured their bones. A burial of the pit-grave type known as the Storozhevaya barrow, situated on the right bank of the Dnieper, close to the great dam which was built there by the Soviet authorities, contained the oldest cart to have been discovered in Europe. It dates from the 3rd millennium B.C. and was mounted on two immense solid wheels.

The nomadic form of existence was more varied and exciting than the monotonous life of the agriculturalists, who spent exhausting hours raising indifferent crops with the aid of simple stone, or in rather later times, scarcely less primitive bronze or iron implements. As a result the nomads were the more enterprising and daring, so that they often behaved aggressively, frightening the settled people. At normal times they would visit the settlements at regular intervals to exchange for grain their meat and fish and animal skins, but when they were short of food they thought nothing of raiding the agriculturalists, plundering their villages, kidnapping their children in order to sell them as slaves, and reducing the survivors to a state of absolute obedience. The nomads in this way sometimes gained control over vast agricultural areas, and then they ruthlessly imposed heavy taxes on the terrified farmers in the shape of goods, for money was still unknown to them.

By such means as these many of their tribal chieftains became rich and powerful. Their wealth is clearly reflected in the variety and splendour of the objects which were placed in their graves, because (like the ancient Egyptians before them) most of the prehistoric inhabitants of the Eurasian plain firmly believed that their dead would continue to need in their life beyond the grave all the things which they had found necessary to their earthly existence. Thus, whereas the poor settlers of the pit-burial group were generally able to take with them in their graves only several coarsely made pottery vessels and one or two primitive stone or flint implements, the wealthier people of the Bronze Age (which began earlier in the Caucasus than in other parts of Russia, dawning there in the 3rd millennium B.C.) were far better provided for.

On the lower Volga, where many of the dead were buried lying on their right sides in flat pits, flat round hollows were dug beside their bodies to hold food composed largely of grain. The dead were buried wearing their jewellery, which consisted mostly of rings, necklaces, bracelets, and various pins and buckles. The arms they had used in battle, that is to say knives and spears, their tools and the stone axes which often served as emblems of authority in much the same way as did crowns and coronets in medieval Europe, were also buried beside them. As the years rolled by and people as a whole became better off, even the ordinary graves became better equipped and the tombs themselves were more carefully made.

The graves of the ruling nomadic princes were infinitely more richly furnished than those belonging to the

agriculturalists. The dead chieftains were buried in their finest clothes, many of which were trimmed with literally dozens of tiny gold plaques decorated with animal or geometric patterns in chased or filigree work. Their war arms were laid within reach of their hands; great quantities of food were provided for them; and, most interesting of all to us today, their gold cups and other precious vessels, together with their finest objects in silver and bronze, were also buried with them. Little votive ornaments, that is to say figures connected with the dead man's religion, consisting for the most part of small bronze models of bulls or stags, were also placed in their graves.

The richest, and as yet the earliest known royal burial



The engraved design on a silver bowl from the royal burials of
Maikop

of this type, was that of Maikop in the Kuban; it is dated by present-day Russian scholars to the 3rd millennium B.C. A great many precious objects, many of them of great artistic quality, were found in it, including several superb figures of bulls, some modelled in solid gold and others in bronze, and many tiny gold plaques stamped with figures of lions. Each of these plaques had a small hole in it by means of which it could be stitched to a garment as trimming.

The Maikop grave also contained some beautiful silver and bronze vessels. The most interesting of these is a silver bowl bearing an engraved scene consisting of a mountain range and two rivers with two groups of grazing animals. The outline of the mountain range closely resembles that of the Caucasian mountains when seen from the north, and the peaks appear in the same positions as do in reality those of Elbruz, Ushba, and Kazbek. If the row of hills does indeed represent the Caucasian mountains, then the two rivers on the cup must stand for the Kuban and the Terek; and in this case the design on the Maikop bowl is the earliest attempt at a landscape in art that is known to us.

Another group of rather later but scarcely less important princely burials was discovered at Trialeti in Georgia in 1936. Trialeti lies some seventy miles to the south-west of Tbilisi, the capital of the Republic of Georgia, in the area which the Georgians regard as the cradle of their culture. The tombs belonged to a group of Bronze Age people living there from about 1800 to 1700 B.C., who provided their chieftains with quite elaborate graves. They were

entered by a shaft which was generally filled in with stones after the burial had taken place. The burial chamber was at the far end of the shaft, and contained at its centre a heavy four-wheeled cart bearing the ashes of the chieftain's cremated body. The carcasses of the goats and other animals which had been killed to provide him with food in his after-life were piled round the cart. Numerous pottery vessels, in some cases as many as two dozen, were included; some of these were coloured red or yellow and were decorated with brown or black painted designs; others were black, and had incised designs which had been filled in with a red substance.

The people of the Trialeti burials had reached a transitional phase in man's development, for although they were sufficiently advanced to possess some bronze tools they were still at the stage of using flint arrowheads instead of metal ones. Their wealth was reflected in the chieftain's personal possessions, which consisted of numerous objects in gold and silver, including a silver dagger. Of exceptional artistic quality is a large gold cup decorated with filigree work and set with turquoises, agates, and semi-precious red stones.

A particularly fine silver beaker has a handle adorned with a hunting scene; but most interesting of all is a goblet decorated with two scenes fitted into two horizontal bands and carried out in chased work. The lower scene shows a procession of stags solemnly advancing in single file; the upper presents a series of human beings with animal heads and tails, advancing in single file in the opposite direction to that of the stags to present offerings to a chieftain or

some deity seated in front of a sacrificial tree. Both scenes are probably connected with a religious ceremony in which the masks and tails worn by the human beings had very much the same meaning in their day as do similar masks when used in the semi-religious ceremonies which still continue to be held in certain very remote parts of Africa.

The discovery of objects such as these in western Siberia, the Caucasus, or the Kuban valley prove both by their numbers and their technical excellence that, at any rate by the 3rd millennium B.C., people living in these areas had learnt to use metals. Their ability to do so naturally depended upon available supplies, but these cannot have been difficult to obtain, for the regions in which they lived are still today rich in mineral deposits. Since they appear to have had adequate supplies of the metals they needed, it is reasonable to suppose that they had discovered how to mine them, and this in turn makes it possible for us to assert that it was these people who took the first step towards establishing what has grown into the science of metallurgy. Nevertheless, the knowledge they had acquired did not become generally known throughout Siberia and the Caucasus till the 2nd millennium B.C. and it was not fully mastered by the inhabitants of the south-western, western, and northern areas of what is now European Russia till the 1st millennium B.C.

The finds from Maikop and Trialeti also serve to show that the animal style in art (the home of which lies in the Ancient Orient, that is to say in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Persia) had already established itself in the Caucasian and west-Siberian areas by the 3rd millennium B.C.; and it may

well be that certain elements in the style had originated in the latter areas, doing so at a time so remote that we as yet know very little about it. In the far-distant past Eskimoes living in the tundra belt were fond of carving whale-bone into fish and other animal shapes; they may well have taught their neighbours in the forest belt to do likewise, and these in their turn may have introduced some elements of the animal style into ancient Persia. But whatever its origins, the animal style in decorative art was to reach to superb heights in the hands of the nomadic horse-breeders of Scythian and related origins who roamed the Eurasian plain in the 1st millennium B.C.

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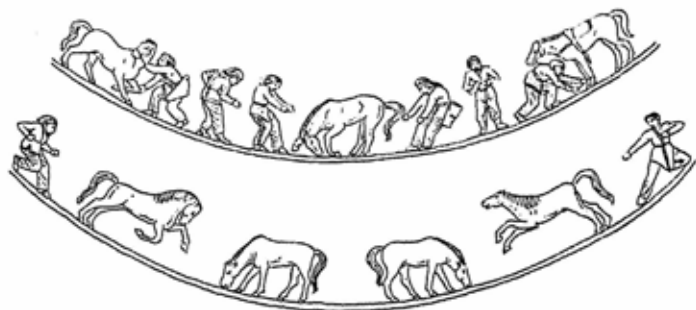
THE AGE OF THE NOMADS

IT WAS in the Late Bronze Age that the first important group of nomads crossed into Europe from Asia to settle in what is now southern Russia. Their cultured contemporaries in Persia called them Cimmerians, and it may well be they who gave the Crimea its present name, for the ancient Greeks called the Straits of Kerch the Cimmerian Bosphorus.

The newcomers lived by breeding cattle and horses, eating the flesh and drinking the milk of their beasts, and they travelled on foot or in carts: they had not as yet discovered how to ride the horse. Very few of their graves have so far been examined, and those which have been opened have for the most part contained objects which are not valuable in themselves. But although the Cimmerians do not appear to have been wealthy, they nevertheless succeeded in gaining control of most of the south Russian plain, retaining it for several centuries.

History, the study of written documents, as distinct from pre-history, when our knowledge depends on the archaeological information obtained from studying objects, begins in so far as Russia is concerned about 800 B.C., for then Persian chroniclers started to record the appearance

on Persia's northern borders of a new group of nomads. Instead of *driving* horses, as all had done before them, these adventurous newcomers actually *rode* them. They are known to us today as the Scythians; and, together with groups of other Asiatic tribesmen who were perhaps related to them and who in any case resembled them, they concentrated on breeding horses in preference to, rather than to the exclusion of, other animals.



Frieze on the Chertomlyk Vase showing Scythians breaking and saddling their horses.

The Egyptians and the ancient Persians, as well as the early Greeks, had all made use of the horse for years before the Scythians appeared on the northern borders of Persia, but they had used them only in harness, to pull carts in peace time and chariots in time of war. Most of their horses they obtained from nomadic breeders similar to the Scythians who had raised horses as much for their meat, milk, and hides as for transport; but it was the Scythians who, having first lassoed their horses, were among the first people (possibly even the very first) to learn

to lunge them on a long rein just as we do today. Then, they began to use a snaffle bit which scarcely differs from the modern one, and taught the horse to respond to the rein and finally to carry, first a saddle and then a man.

The process is shown in all its detail, even to the inclusion of the fabric footrest suspended from one of the saddles, for metal stirrups had not been invented yet, on the frieze decorating the splendid electrum vessel found in a royal burial of the 4th century B.C. at Chertomlyk in southern Russia; it is known today as the Chertomlyk Vase. Though the vase is unlikely to have been made by a Scythian—it is probably the work of a Greek jeweller—it must have been commissioned by a Scythian, for only a Scythian would have been sufficiently interested in the training of horses to wish to see the process rendered on a vase, and only a Scythian could have furnished all the information and details of style in dress and saddling that was essential to the artist.

The Scythians were an Iranian people who had for centuries lived at the eastern end of the Eurasian plain. Sometime in the 9th century B.C. their eastern neighbours, tribesmen who were later to appear in western Europe as the Huns, had begun to raid the peaceful peasants of western China, causing them so much worry that eventually the Chinese emperor Suan (827–781 B.C.) decided to send an army to punish them.

The well-disciplined Chinese troops did not content themselves with evicting the Huns from Chinese territory, but proceeded to push them quite far back into the plain. By doing so they upset the balance of power in the area,



Electrum vase of the 4th century B.C. from the Chertomlyk burial in southern Russia

for the retreating Huns seized the grazing grounds of the tribes living to the west of them, and these in their turn took up arms against their immediate neighbours to their west, who did likewise until the whole Asiatic section of the plain was in a turmoil. As a result, the Scythians found themselves being pushed westward by tribesmen in search of new pastures. Packing their belongings, they mounted their horses and moved south-westward, till they eventually overflowed into northern Persia.

The ability to ride gave the Scythians the great advantage of speed in attack, and they made the most of it, using mounted archers who showered their enemies with arrows whilst attacking them from several directions. They were proud, obedient, and altogether fearless fighters; and they succeeded in completely routing the Cimmerians, making them flee from southern Russia into Persia and pushing them back across what is today eastern Turkey till they had completely destroyed them.

For some twenty-eight years they retained control over the sections of north-eastern Persia and Turkey through which the Cimmerians had retreated. Then the novelty of dealing with mounted horsemen wore off; the people of the occupied countries had quickly learnt to ride and the commanders of the Parthians who were settled in southern Asia Minor and northern Mesopotamia had by now been able to add some cavalry units to their regiments so that they were strong enough to challenge the Scythians. In a series of well-conducted campaigns around the middle of the 8th century B.C. they succeeded fairly quickly in evicting them from Persian territory, allowing them to

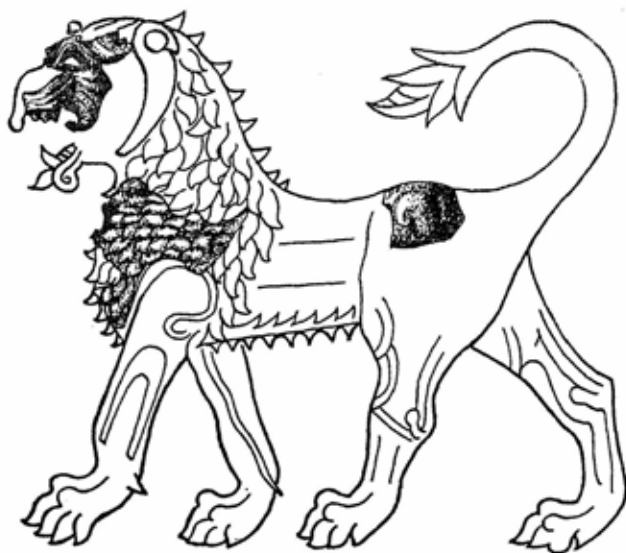
depart on the promise of a payment of an annual tribute. That the promise was kept, at any rate for a time, is shown by a frieze in the great Persian palace of Persepolis where Scythians appear beside the tribute bearers from other vanquished people.

Some of the Scythians who were evicted by the Persians found themselves pushed back into Urartu—a kingdom which extended over what is known today as Armenia, with the addition of the district in and around Lake Van in present-day eastern Turkey. Urartu had been a flourishing and prosperous kingdom from at any rate the 9th century B.C. It was also a civilized country, one in which the learned used a cuneiform (wedge-shaped) script to write in, where the wealthy slave-owners lived in comfortable, well-furnished houses, and where agricultural workers raised good crops of barley, wheat, millet, beans, and lentils, and also made wines from the grapes in their vineyards.

The excavations which have been carried out within the last few years on the great citadel of Karmir Blur, situated quite close to Erevan, Armenia's modern capital, make it clear that the Urtians also had a highly organized army. The citadel consisted of a hundred and twenty rooms enclosed within stout defensive walls. Among many other things the excavators found there the helmet of their king Argistis. It is made of bronze and is magnificently decorated with a design consisting of eleven sacred trees with, at its centre, the figure of a winged god wearing a horned headdress and guarded on either side by lion-headed dragons. A chariot and horsemen armed with round shields and spears complete the decoration; the

horsemen prove that the Urartians had wasted little time in learning to ride, but their ability to do so was not to save them from the Scythians who were soon to devastate Karmir Blur.

Amidst the ruins of the fortress the excavators found the superb bronze shield which Argistis's son, Sanduris, had carried into battle. It likewise was decorated with the figures of protective lions and ritualistic oxen, but some of the pottery vessels which were found in the fortress's store rooms were adorned with fascinating pictures of citadels of the same type as Karmir Blur itself.



Gold casing from a wooden carving of a lion of the 9th century B.C. from Karmir Blur. (Courtesy B. B. Piotrowski)

The Scythians who were retreating across Urartu attacked the garrison of Karmir Blur. The fighting was so fierce, and it was carried on at such close range, that some of the Scythian trefoil arrowheads remain embedded to this day in the ruined walls of the fortress. No written account of the battle survives, but the excavations have shown that the Scythians conquered it by throwing lighted firebrands on its roofing of wood and twigs, and once these had caught fire nothing could save the citadel.

Before its walls collapsed into ruin the Scythians were able to enter and loot many of its rooms; however, they overlooked some Assyrian seals and Egyptian amulets as well as a certain amount of jewellery of Mediterranean character and a good deal of locally made pottery which remained for the excavators to discover more than 2,000 years later.

The fall of Karmir Blur proved disastrous to Urartu; the kingdom never recovered from it, and in 585 B.C. the Medes had little difficulty in putting an end to its existence. However, surviving Urartians continued to cling to their homes and their native land till they eventually reappeared in history as the Georgian and Armenian kingdoms of early Christian times.

Having passed through Urartu, the Scythians dallied for a time in the Kuban valley, where they were probably joined by other groups of Scythians who had crossed into Europe by different routes. Some of the earliest and richest royal Scythian burials have been found in the Kuban. They are as remarkable for the artistic quality as for the valuable nature of the numerous gold, silver, and bronze



Map of European Russia showing some of the more important early burials and mediaeval towns

objects found in them. Many of these are decorated with designs in which the influence of Persian art of the Achaemenid period is clearly to be seen.

The bulk of the Scythians did not settle in the Kuban. Many of them, including the tribe which Herodotus defined as royal, pushed on into southern Russia, where they established themselves as the rulers of the section of the plain which lies between the rivers Don and Bug. There, though living as nomads, they became so powerful that, in the 6th century B.C., they were able to defy the mighty Darius when he penetrated into Scythia in an attempt to advance to the Volga; indeed, they forced him to retreat to the Danube's basin. They were still so powerful in the 4th century B.C. that they caused considerable concern to Alexander the Great. In fact, from the 6th to about the 3rd century B.C., their international importance was so impressive that Herodotus, the 5th century B.C. Greek scholar who has been aptly called the "Father of History", considered it essential to devote a whole chapter in his history to giving an account of them. To be able to do so satisfactorily, Herodotus crossed the Black Sea to spend several months in the Greek coastal city of Olbia to study the Scythians at first hand. Present-day excavations have confirmed the correctness of much of what he wrote about them.

Though the bulk of the Royal Scyths lived on the grasslands bordering the lower Dnieper, others spread further afield, some spilling southward into the Crimea and the hinterland of the Sea of Azov—without, however, occupying any of the coastline. Subsidiary tribes, whose names

were recorded by Herodotus, settled in neighbouring areas; and all of them, as well as groups of nomads living in western Siberia, and more particularly in the Altaian foothills, followed the Scythian way of life and practised the Scythian type of decorative art.

Although the number of Royal Scyths was probably considerably smaller than that of the settlers living in the European section of the plain, it was the Scythians who were masters of the area. They roamed it in their covered waggons, occasionally perhaps sleeping in tents, breeding and breaking in their horses, fishing and hunting, trading their surplus wares for the agricultural products offered by the settlers, bartering all they could spare with their neighbours.

A little of their trade was with China; more of it with Persia, and both direct and through Persian middlemen, with Mesopotamia, Greece, Asia Minor, Thrace, and Pannonia (between the Danube and the Alps). Most of it, however, was conducted with the Greek colonials living in self-governing towns situated along the northern shores of the Black Sea, in what is today known as southern Russia, but which the ancient Greeks called the Euxine Pontus, *Pontus Euxinus*, Latin for "sea" and "black", to distinguish it from the Pontus kingdom across the sea, in what is today north-eastern Turkey.

These Greek colonials quickly came to depend upon the Scythians for the bulk of their food supplies, and more especially for the grain which the Scythians levied from the settlers and bartered to the Greeks for such luxuries as jewellery and finely painted pottery. The grain trade was

an especially important one, because Attica, which could no longer feed itself, looked to the Greeks of the Euxine Pontus for the bulk of their needs.

The Scythians had no alphabet, and so they could neither read nor write; nor, at any rate till the end of their history, had they a coinage. They were not deeply religious, though they believed in a number of gods, and more particularly in a Great Goddess. They occasionally offered sacrifices to one or another of these divinities, but they never built any temples and they preferred to put their faith in their own magicians rather than in their gods. One advantage of this was that they could punish any sorcerer who had been proved wrong by having him put to death, whereas a god would have got away with his error.

Instead of worshipping deities the Scythians venerated the graves of their notables, sparing neither trouble nor expense to provide their leaders with sumptuous burials. A chieftain's funeral was an extremely elaborate and astonishingly costly affair—costly not only in material objects but in human and animal lives.

The tombs were so elaborate in construction that they took several weeks to build. While part of the tribe were employed in making the grave, the rest placed the body of their dead master on a cart and—some carrying his standard and spear, others wailing and tearing their clothes and their hair—marched in procession through the dead man's territory, daily collecting ever more of his people till all his subjects had been assembled for the funeral. (See Plate 1)

Meanwhile the grave-diggers had begun by constructing a shaft or ramp, looking rather like a roofed-in corridor, leading to the spot chosen for the burial chamber. According to its geographical situation, the burial consisted of either a single chamber or of a central one with as many as four compartments radiating from it. The burial chambers were generally lined with logs and, dependent on the locality, either hung with wicker or rush matting. They were roofed either with birch bark or thatch or, sometimes, as in the rather later Crimean tombs, the structure was made of great stone slabs, on some of which traces of mural paintings still survive.

All the Scythian burials were horse burials, that is to say, some of the horses which had belonged to the dead man were killed at his funeral and buried in their finest trappings beside their master. Their harness consisted of snaffle bits, cheek pieces and head bands, all of which were elaborately decorated with animal designs carried out in gold leaf, bronze, or wood, and although the saddles had perished, their gold leaf decorations survived. Although the poorest graves contained only one horse, the richest sometimes held as many as several hundred, though twelve to fifty was a more usual number. The chieftain's body always occupied the central position in the main burial chamber. He was placed in it wearing his finest clothes, many of which were trimmed with innumerable little gold plaques of the same type, though decorated with different designs, as those belonging to the Maikop ruler. Often a spare set of clothing was hung on a peg fixed to one of the walls. All the man's jewels, that is to say his

necklaces, arm and ankle rings, bracelets, finger rings, pins and buckles, and often a gold skull cap, were placed in position on his body.

The arms which he had used in battle were also laid within his reach. These consisted of a sword of the Scythian type which was often provided with a sheath of chased gold, a bow of the compounded Asiatic sort, which was designed for the use of horsemen and which was kept in a beautifully ornamented case specially arranged to hold both the bow and arrows; it was known as a gorytus. Daggers of the Persian type often mounted into ornate handles were usual, as were knives, many of which were curved like Chinese ones, helmets of Greek or local make, and jerkins of chain or scale armour. Gold goblets and cups to which the Scyths attached particular importance were also placed in the graves, and often also ceremonial axes made of semi-precious materials were included.

Quantities of food and wine were provided; and essential to every burial was the inclusion of a huge bronze cauldron, mounted on a tripod foot or base for standing over a fire, instead of being slung above it by its handle as do gypsies in western Europe.

The Scythians and their kindred tribesmen were so firmly convinced that their dead would lead exactly the same sort of life in the world beyond the grave as they had done in this, that they never hesitated to kill one of the dead man's wives in order that she should accompany him to the world beyond. The Royal Scyths killed in addition the head servants of their notables, that is to say,

their head grooms, their cup-bearers, and their chief cooks. Like their masters, all these dead were buried in their best clothes, wearing their finest jewellery, and surrounded by their essential possessions which, in the case of women, included a bronze mirror. When everything necessary had been placed in the tomb, the grave was sealed and the bodies of the dead horses piled round it. Then the solid wheeled carts which had been used in the funeral procession were broken up and the pieces placed in the grave's entrance shaft. Only when this had been done was a great mound of earth raised over the tomb. Then all those who had attended the funeral gathered on the mound to partake of the great feast which was held there to commemorate the dead.

The first important Scythian burial in southern Russia, the Melgunov barrow in the Dnieper area, was discovered as far back as 1763. Its contents astonished antiquarians; in particular they were amazed by the splendour of the gold sword sheath decorated in the Assyrian style and the magnificence of a gold diadem adorned with onyx and the gold figures of birds and animals. Some of the richest barrows were excavated in the course of the 19th century. Many were in the Kuban, and in these the profusion of gold and silver objects was so great that it served to explain why the Greeks believed that Jason had set out to seek the Golden Fleece in the Kuban, which was known to them as Colchis. Among the loveliest objects which have been recovered from the royal burials are the figures of gold stags which originally formed the central decorations on the round shields carried by some Scyths.

Three of these stags, including the splendid 7th to 6th century B.C. example found in the Kostromskaya barrow in the Kuban, are outstanding. In all of them the stag is shown in such a way that it appears to be both lying down resting, and also galloping at great speed; this double impression is achieved by showing the animal with its legs tucked under it, whilst its head, and occasionally also its forelegs, are raised as if in rapid motion. Although no animal could in life assume such a position, the Scythian plaques are so carefully thought out, and the modelling is so true to life, that the finished work is thoroughly convincing. (See Plate 2)

Scarcely less fine are the figures of gold leopards and of other animals, some of the bronze versions of which show the beast turned into a circle. Hundreds of the little gold plaques used as dress trimmings were decorated with



A decoration from the Melgunov gold sword sheath illustrating a zoomorphic juncture. 7th to 6th century B.C.

Plate 1, right A cast bronze Scythian standard in the form of a large beaked bird's head; note the tiny figure of a stag inserted in a characteristically Scythian manner on its neck. About 11 inches high. 7th to 6th century B.C., from Mound 2 at Ulsky, in the Kuban.



Plate 2, below A chased gold figure of a stag, probably the central ornament of a Scythian shield. About 12 inches high. 7th to 6th century B.C., from the Kostromskaya barrow in the Kuban.



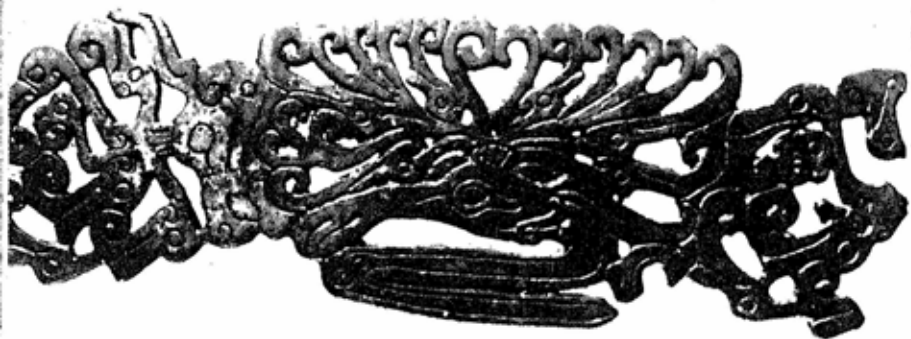


Plate 3, above A cast bronze horse's frontlet in the form of a stag's head whose antlers terminate in birds' heads formed by means of zoomorphic junctures. About 6 inches wide. 4th century B.C., from the Kuban.

Plate 4, below Section of a quilted and appliqué worked woven carpet of Siberian workmanship showing a griffin attacking an elk. End of the 1st century B.C., from the grave of a Hunnic chieftain buried at Noin Ula, Mongolia.





Plate 5 Cast silver amulet of a horse from the pagan Slav burial at Malinovka, near Kiev. 6th century A.D.



Plate 6 An enamel bowl of Moscovite workmanship from the second half of the 17th century.



Plate 7, above The Cathedral of St. Sophia, Novgorod, 1045-52. The three protruding apses and the stressing by means of pilaster strips of the building's height are characteristics of the style. Already the Byzantine dome has begun evolving into the Russian, onion-shaped one.



Plate 8, left The Cathedral of St. Dimitri, Vladimir, late 12th century. Built of Kama sandstone and elaborately decorated with low relief sculptures of biblical, floral and animal forms, it is also adorned with pilasters of a somewhat Romanesque character.

chased or embossed animal designs, in which griffins and members of the cat family frequently recur. On other objects animals are often shown in what is known as the flying gallop—a position which the Scythians were particularly fond of representing.

The Scythians' ability and their delight in re-creating the animal form in all its numerous and varied aspects produced certain other peculiarities in their art. Foremost among these is the habit of placing the figure of one animal on the body of another or of developing part of one creature, such as its tail or a stag's antlers, either into the head of another, when it is called a *zoomorphic juncture*, or of developing it into a series of extremely complicated shapes, often of an animal character. The resulting picture is, of course, always untrue to life, yet, in Scythian hands, it seems so real that it does not look like an imaginary creation but rather the picture of some extinct prehistoric beast or some real creature of which we as yet know nothing. (See Plate 3)

The Scythians were particularly fond of showing animals, both real and imaginary, locked in fight in such a way that the shapes formed by their bodies produced curved outlines; in addition, they were in the habit of indicating the muscles on an animal's body by dot and comma markings, and of giving most of their birds the great beaks which belong to eagles and hawks. Indeed, their animal art, with its blend of realism and abstraction, is one which is particularly suited to our taste today, moulded as it has been by the works of such contemporary artists as Picasso.

It was at the turn of the 17th century, in the reign of Peter the Great, that a considerable number of people from western Russia started moving to Siberia to earn their living there. Many of them were surprised by the large number of burial mounds which they noticed; and some of the more daring of the newcomers could not resist tunnelling into an occasional barrow, and so penetrating into the rich burials which lay concealed within. Among the objects which these treasure-hunters discovered were some gold and bronze belt buckles formed of animals, often shown intertwined and decorated with semi-precious stones and enamel inlays.

The finds were reported to Peter the Great, who gave orders for all the metal plaques to be bought and sent to him, and all further looting forbidden. When the collection, consisting of some two hundred and seventy objects, reached the Tsar he displayed it in his Cabinet of Curios, whence it later passed to the Hermitage Museum. There it aroused the interest of visitors, many of whom noticed a close resemblance between the Siberian plaques and similar objects recovered from the Scythian burials of southern Russia. Curiously enough, however, no archaeologists came forward to study the Siberian burials till 1865, when a scholar called Radlov started excavating at Katanda, a burial ground situated on the southern slopes of the western Altai.

Unlike southern Russia, where the mounds which were raised above the Scythian burials were made of earth, those at Katanda had been topped with a layer of boulders so that there the size of a mound depended upon its cir-

cumference and not its height. Radlov removed the boulders from the mound he had decided to examine, and his men had been digging for only a short time when they were astonished to find their progress stopped by a layer of ice. Its appearance there was inexplicable, because Katanda is situated well outside the zone of perpetual ice. Radlov was at a loss to account for it below the level of the boulders, and he was never to know that he had stumbled upon the first of what are now known as the frozen tombs of the Altai. In these tombs the ice was produced by the rain water which had filtered through the boulders and loose earth covering a newly made grave, freezing during the bitterly cold winter months; it never melted again because, even during the short though hot summers, the boulders insulated it from the sun's rays. As a result, everything within these tombs has remained preserved as if in a modern "deep freeze".

Radlov was so unprepared for the ice that he failed to prevent some of it melting before it could be properly dealt with; as a result, water penetrated into the tomb, and spoilt part of its contents; Radlov was, nevertheless, able to recover many objects of the kind which usually survive only in the dry climate and sandy soil of Egypt, and which have generally perished in Russian burials. Among his discoveries were several articles of clothing. One garment, though some two thousand years old, was cut on exactly the same lines as a Regency tail-coat. For some inexplicable reason, however, none of Radlov's finds, for all their exciting novelty, succeeded in arousing the curiosity of his contemporaries, and no one came

forward to continue the work he had begun in Siberia.

It was not till 1924 that interest in that distant region revived as a result of an archaeological survey undertaken there on behalf of the USSR State Ethnographical Society by the scholars Rudenko and Griasnov. In the course of their travels their attention was drawn to the burial-ground of Pazyryk, situated in a valley of the western Altai, somewhat to the north of Katanda. In 1929 they were able to start excavating one of the largest mounds, and found that it, too, was sealed off from the outer world by a layer of ice similar to that which Radlov had encountered at Katanda. Indeed, it was Rudenko who discovered that the ice is peculiar to the boulder-covered burials of the Altaian region.

Rudenko has so far been able to open six of the Pazyryk burials, and has dealt with them so skilfully that he has succeeded in preserving all the innumerable and varied objects which he found in them in the exact condition in which he first saw them when he peered through a chink in the ice covering Mound 1. As he gazed through this gap he saw, as in a Victorian peep-show, a microcosm or tiny replica of a nomad's world some two thousand years old. All his finds are now exhibited in the Hermitage Museum at Leningrad; and his discovery has not only revealed a civilization, the very existence of which was unknown to us, but it has also supplied us with much detailed information about it.

The Pazyryk burials belonged to a nomadic people who lived in the area from the 5th to the 2nd century B.C. and whose way of life and culture is so very similar to that of

the Scythians of southern Russia that they may well be regarded as kindred tribesmen. They were, however, far less advanced than the Royal Scyths, and they were a poorer people, even though they also lived by raising herds of horses and cattle.

Their tombs do not contain nearly as many objects made in valuable materials as the Royal Scythian tombs, though the scarcity of precious articles may partly be due to the fact that all the burials so far uncovered by Rudenko had been looted long ago, probably soon after the funerals had taken place. Nevertheless, quite a number of gold leaf decorations have been recovered from them.

The great fascination of the Pazyryk burials is due to the discovery in them of the precise types of perishable objects which failed to survive in the climatic and soil conditions of southern Russia. Since the metal and bone objects found at Pazyryk are very similar to objects of the same sort discovered in southern Russia, it can safely be assumed that the objects of a perishable nature recovered from the Pazyryk burials also resembled articles of a similar kind in use among the Royal Scyths. Thus the knowledge derived from the Altaian burials not only throws light on conditions in that area but fills gaps in what had previously been known about the Scyths of Russia.

The Pazyryk tombs were reached by a shaft, opening into two adjoining chambers similarly lined with logs which had been smoothed on the inner sides to look like walls and hung with textiles. Their earth floors were similarly either paved with wood or beaten flat and sometimes covered with gravel, and their ceilings were



The repeat motif in appliqué felt from a large felt wall hanging of the 5th century B.C. from Mound 5, Pazyryk

generally made of birch bark laid on wooden rafters. All contained horse burials of the Scythian type; but whereas in southern Russia the carcasses of the horses were piled round the outside of the human tomb, at Pazyryk they were all laid in the northernmost and slightly smaller of the two chambers, though this was decorated in exactly the same way as the human burial chamber.

At Pazyryk the bodies both of people and horses were

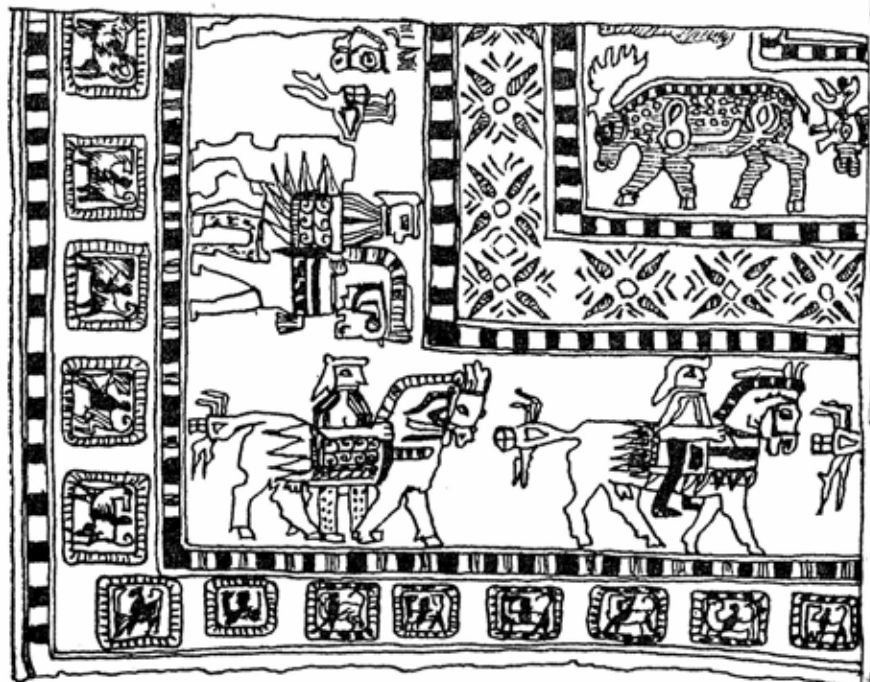
admirably preserved by the frozen condition of their tombs. The dead men and women were buried in individual log coffins, some of which were decorated on the outside with splendid animal carvings; they included the body of a man who had been tattooed all over with a magnificent series of fantastic, superbly drawn animal designs executed in the Scythian style. Some of the beasts appearing on his body were entirely imaginary, some real; most are shown interlocked in fierce combats of very graceful outlines. Amongst the dead horses were found the bodies of some thoroughbred Ferghanas, which were so much valued that they had been wintered under cover and fed by hand, whereas the others, rough Mongolian ponies, had had to fend for themselves during the cold, well-nigh fodderless season.

The clothes were of the tight-fitting sort suited to people living an out-of-door life in a harsh climate. They included thick cloaks worn over jerkins, hoods, thick stockings and bootees, and a variety of satchels and purses. All were made of fur, leather, or felt, and each object was profusely trimmed with vividly coloured, amazingly complicated designs carried out in appliqué felts. They comprised figural scenes, animal designs, and geometric patterns which included symbols of the Sun cult.

Each of the Pazyryk burials contained a tripod-legged cauldron of the Scythian type and a hemp inhaling outfit of the sort Herodotus saw in use among the Scythians. The household furniture consisted of wooden blocks which served both as stools and as head rests, small tables with detachable tray-like tops mounted on turned

legs, often finished off with carvings of lions' heads, and a mass of cooking utensils. Felt hangings were widely used; one immensely large one was decorated with a repeat scene of a seated goddess granting an audience to a mounted warrior, whilst a smaller one shows a rather frightening semi-human, semi-animal creature.

However, perhaps the most interesting discovery of all was made in Mound 5, where the world's oldest, virtually



Section of the Persian woolen pile carpet of the 5th century B.C. found in Mound 5, Pazyryk

complete carpet was found. It is a Persian woollen pile rug made in the same knotted technique that is in use in Persia today, but its design is characteristic of its own time; it consists of stars, figures of griffins, a procession of elks, and another in which riders and grooms leading splendidly caparisoned horses alternate.

All the horse trappings found at Pazyryk are as highly decorated as the belongings of their human masters. A well-turned-out horse carried an ornamented felt saddle cloth, over which rested a soft saddle made of two flat felt cushions mounted on a wooden frame. This was sometimes decorated with embossed gold plaques. The bridles, snaffles, and head and check pieces were of the Scythian types, and were similarly decorated with either embossed, cut out, or carved animal and geometric forms, including



On the left, a cock from a 5th-century B.C. leather flagon from Mound 2, Pazyryk; on the right, a cock in drawn thread work and embroidery from an 18th-century bed curtain from Nizhni Novgorod

figures of cocks very similar to those which recur in Russian folk art from early times down to our own day. In addition, however, several of the best bred horses were provided with extraordinary masks; one was in the form of a ram's head and was surmounted with the figure of a falcon, whilst another was made out of a reindeer's skull and antlers. Indeed, elks, stags, and reindeer appear



The saddle, trappings, and harness belonging to a horse buried in Mound 1, Pazyryk. 5th to 3rd century B.C.

so frequently in both Altaian and Scythian art that it seems more than likely that (at any rate to begin with) they possessed some sort of religious meaning for the tribesmen. At one stage of their history these nomads in fact believed that animals of the reindeer family were able to carry the dead to the world beyond the grave far more quickly than could any other creature.

In the later Scythian period griffins, leopards, and other

members of the cat family, as well as lions, rams, bulls, and wolves, figure in their art as often as do stags. On the other hand, the horse, the very animal on which the nomads depended for their well being, scarcely ever appears in it—a most surprising omission, which cannot as yet be satisfactorily explained.

Like prehistoric man, the Eurasian nomads lived in such close touch with the animal world on which they depended for their very existence that they knew as much about it as they did about their fellow men; and since they also lived at a time when craftsmanship was so highly developed that it attained to true art, the Scythian and kindred tribes of the Eurasian plain produced not merely a characteristic type of decoration, not even a personal style, but a veritable school in art. It is one the beauty of which is only now beginning to be widely appreciated.

4

GREEK CITIES ON THE BLACK SEA

WHILST THE Scythians were fighting their way across Urartu to the western section of the Eurasian plain, lack of grain, together with certain other economic and political needs, induced some of the independent city states of ancient Greece to found colonies in western Europe, mainly in the Mediterranean area.

The ancient Greeks were an adventurous and sea-faring people, and in the 8th century B.C. some of their sailors, perhaps encouraged by the story of Jason's adventures in Colchis, whilst searching for cheap slaves for the Greek markets found their way into the Black Sea. They eventually reached its eastern and northern shores, and were soon after followed by Greek merchants who founded offices which came to be called factories along what is today the south Russian coast. By the 7th century B.C. some of their factories had grown into veritable colonial outposts, and by the 5th century B.C. practically the whole of the northern shore of the Black Sea, especially the ports which had grown up at the mouths of the great rivers which flow into it, together with the coast of the Sea of Azov, had been fully colonized by the Greeks.

These colonials carried on a lively trade with their homeland, but they remained content to develop only the coastal areas of Russia, and to draw the barbarians—as they called the nomads and settlers living in the plain behind them—to their markets. As a result, the Greeks never penetrated into the plain, though they came to depend almost entirely on it for their supplies of grain, fish, meat, honey, and furs—goods which the Scythians either produced or obtained from their settled subjects.

The most prosperous of these colonial cities were Olbia, situated on the Bug and Dnieper estuaries, Tanais on the estuary of the Don, and Phanagoria on the Taman peninsula. The Crimea, where in the course of the 3rd century B.C. the Scythians were to found a kingdom with its capital, Scythian Neapolis, on the site of present-day Simferopol, was also widely colonized by the Greeks; while the flourishing city of Chersonesus, springing up close to present-day Sebastopol, played under the name of Korsun a leading part in the history of early Christian Russia. Close to it, on the site of modern Kerch, rose the city of Panticapaeum; Kekinites grew up where Evpatoria stands today; and the modern Theodosia occupies the site of the original colony. Indeed, the whole of the Black Sea coastline of southern and eastern Russia consisted of a narrow belt of semi-independent Greek city states.

It was in Olbia that Herodotus spent several months when he crossed the Black Sea to learn at close quarters all that he could about the Scythians. Although the majority of the Greek colonial cities have been examined by Russian archaeologists, it is Olbia, together with

Chersonesus, Scythian Neapolis, and Panticapaeum, which have been most extensively excavated. Olbia was the oldest of these cities, having been founded in the 7th century B.C. as a colony of Miletus. It quickly became a self-governing republic based on a system of slavery. It was first excavated in 1801; but it was not until a hundred years later, when the eminent archaeologist Farmakovsky became interested in its ruins, that work started on a large scale. Excavations were conducted there annually till the outbreak of World War I; they were resumed in 1928 and continued till 1936, and as a result a great deal is now known both about Olbia itself and also about the sort of life which was led in the other colonial cities.

Olbia was at its most prosperous during the 5th and much of the 4th century B.C. when it covered a triangular area bordered on the one side by the River Bug and on the other by a sort of natural moat. A great wall surrounded it to afford additional protection; in the more dangerous places this was as much as twelve feet thick. A very wide main street ran down the centre of the town, cutting it into two, the side streets joining it at right angles. Open canals ran down the sides of the streets, bringing water to the inhabitants. As was usual in ancient times, the upper town was more important than the lower, and the agora or market-place was therefore situated in it. The main temple stood at its centre, and round it were the best buildings in the town. In these the ground floors were turned into shops, their owners using the basements as store rooms, but the upper floors contained government offices.

The most important houses were built of dressed stone set in alternate layers of clay and earth, and were roofed with tiles. Many were adorned with sculptured or plastered decorations, and it may have been the sight of these which so enchanted Scyles, one of the earlier kings of the Royal Scyths, that he could not resist acquiring a similar house for himself, even though he knew that by doing so he would rouse the fierce resentment of his people.

Scyles thus became the first Scythian to live in a house instead of a tent; he tried to keep this a secret, but he was eventually killed by his own bodyguard, who were angered by his fondness for Greek customs.

Olbia's less grand houses were given stone foundations, but their walls were built of baked bricks. The town's cemetery was a large one; it was situated outside the walls, and its later graves include Scythian burials among the Greek ones—a sign that some of the nomads had, like Scyles before them, been won over by the Greek way of life. Links between the Greeks and the Scythians appear to have been close from the start, for although the type of art practised at Olbia remained basically Greek with a touch of Egyptian influence, strong Scythian elements also appear in it.

Olbia was from the start a commercial city. In addition to sending Scythian grain to Miletus it imported from Rhodes great amphorae, or jugs, filled with wine, which it traded with Pharos, Pergamon, Alexandria, and towns in Asia Minor, more particularly with Sinop, situated on the opposite shore of the Black Sea in what is now Turkey. Olbia minted its own coinage, using it for its trade with

Greece, but it exchanged superb Greek vases, jewellery, and other luxuries imported for the purpose from Greece with the Scythians, who still did not use money.

The city's eastern trade was as important as her trade with Greece, and, until late into the 4th century B.C., the town served as the starting-point for caravans heading for the Volga and the Urals. Many of these caravans carried goods which had been made in Olbia's own workshops; chief amongst them were textiles, rather coarse pottery vessels, and jewellery of fine quality which was produced in great quantities there. Some of the better of the local pottery was made on the wheel, and was decorated with Scythian designs very similar to those which appear on the metal objects which have been recovered from the town's Scythian burials.

Chersonesus appears to have been a richer town than Olbia; it was certainly larger, and was probably the biggest of them all. It was founded in 421 B.C. by emigrants from Heraclea-Pontica, a town on the southern shore of the Black Sea, who established themselves on land which belonged to the Tauri tribe, a branch of the Cimmerians, who had survived in the Crimea and given the region the name of Tauride.

Like Olbia, Chersonesus was also a slave-owning, self-governing, republican city—a fact which is known to us because of the discovery in its ruins of the oath which its freemen had to swear to. Like Olbia, it was laid out on rectangular lines; like Olbia, it struck its own coinage, which it used for carrying on trade of a similar type. However, in distinction from Olbia, Chersonesus gradually

succeeded in extending its hold over much of the neighbouring coastline, even conquering the far older city of Kerkinites, and it eventually became the capital of the western Crimea. Its Greek population mingled with the Tauri inhabitants, with the result that local traditions came to blend with the imported Greek ones; thus, whereas the Greek god Heraclius was the one most widely worshipped, some Scythian and Tauri deities were also venerated there.

Many of the Tauri were by now farming the land lying outside the city's walls, providing the town dwellers with a steady flow of fresh food supplies. Many of the city people became rich enough to decorate their houses with fine mosaic floors, mural paintings and sculptures, as well as to buy for themselves much lovely jewellery. They were fond of wearing ear and finger rings as well as gold torques (that is to say, collars made of twisted gold wires), gold anklets, fibulae or pins, and buckles of various sorts. Much of their jewellery came from Attica and Thrace, and much more from Asia Minor, but a good deal was also made locally. Many of the objects were decorated with chased or filigree work as well as with inset jewels and enamel fillings, and some of the locally made pieces were adorned with scenes from Scythian life similar to those which appear on the Chertomlyk vase. Nor were the children forgotten; excavators have found toys among the ruins, including balls, knuckle bones and even dolls' tea sets.

Panticapaeum was also essentially a commercial town, but conditions there differed slightly from those at Olbia

and Chersonesus, for Panticapaeum chose to become a monarchy instead of a republic. Founded sometime in the 6th century B.C., it was at its most prosperous from the 4th to the 3rd century B.C. Then the bulk of the people were traders, and many of them lived as veritable merchant princes. However, they also devoted some of their time to managing the farms they acquired in the country and to military duties. To regular soldiers the army offered considerable scope for promotion, for there were always either raiding Asiatic nomads, wild Scythian chieftains, or neighbouring colonial cities to fight against. Panticapaeum eventually succeeded in conquering so many of these that it became the capital of the Taman area; but although it sometimes fought the Scythians, it was on the whole on good terms with many of them.

Both profited from their trading agreements, and the Scythian burials in the Crimea are among the richest and most splendid of all the later ones. The tombs which were built near Panticapaeum from the 4th century B.C. onwards are extremely elaborate and impressive. Quite the most remarkable is the Tsarsky (meaning Royal) burial in the district of Kerch, which is so high a building that its outlines are visible from a great distance. It was built of huge blocks of stone; and its vast size, superb proportions, and excellent masonry work produce such an overwhelming effect on visitors that, as late as the mid-19th century, many a traveller assumed it to be the burial place of the Pontic emperor, Mithridates Eupator. It consisted of a tall, narrow hall leading to a rectangular burial chamber roofed with a barrel vaulted ceiling.

Burials of the same type, though of smaller dimensions, continued to be built in the Taman peninsula till about the 2nd century A.D. Their walls and ceilings were often covered with very attractive wall paintings. The most interesting to us today are those which include the figures of mounted horsemen, especially when they are shown fighting with nomadic raiders.

5

THE STRUGGLE OVER SOUTHERN RUSSIA

IN ABOUT the 4th century B.C., at a time when the Greek colonial cities were thriving and the Scythians were contentedly spending their days in the western section of the Eurasian plain, another upheaval among the tribes living in its Asiatic section disrupted the peace of the inhabitants of southern Russia. The Huns who, as we have seen, had already been responsible for the Scythian invasion of Europe, had once again been disturbed by the Chinese and had begun to move towards Mongolia.

Excavations undertaken in 1925 by the Russian scholar Kozlov at Noin Ula, a burial ground in Mongolia well to the south of the Siberian town of Irkutsk, revealed the grave of a Hunnic chieftain of the 2nd century B.C. Though the burial was not a frozen one, the soil in which it had been made was so dry that many of the normally perishable objects placed in graves were found there in good condition. A shaft led to the burial chamber, where the chieftain's body was found lying in a wooden coffin which had been placed on a superb textile—a sort of carpet bearing in appliqué work and embroidery a design showing a griffin, an Altaian type of elk, and a fierce imaginary

beast locked in combat amidst a setting of flowers and plants. The chieftain's clothes, his personal possessions, and the trappings of his horse had all been buried with him. Many of the clothes were of Oriental cut; and among the personal possessions Kozlov found a Chinese ceremonial umbrella and a Chinese lacquer cup bearing an inscription dating from the 1st century B.C. This Hunnic chieftain must have been an ancestor of those who were later to invade Europe, striking terror wherever they went. (See Plate 4)

At first the Huns who had been dislodged by the Chinese headed towards Ferghana, but later the majority turned westward towards Europe; by doing so they displaced a tribe known as the Sarmatians, which had been living for centuries on the western fringe of the Asian plain, grazing their cattle north of Lake Ural. The Sarmatians were an Indo-Iranian people, who did not greatly differ either in race or language from the Scythians, though they were not related to them. When first evicted by the Huns they were able to settle in the Caucasus, for the Hunnic pressure, though steady, was to begin with unhurried. In the course of the 3rd century B.C. they were evicted from the Caucasian lowlands by other invaders, but those of them who had established themselves in the highlands survived there into modern times. They were called the Ossetians, and were amongst the best-loved of all Caucasian people.

As pressure from the east increased on the lowland Sarmatians, so did they in their turn round on the Scythians living on their western borders, and at each encounter they scored a victory over these experienced warriors.

Probably much of the Sarmatians' success was owing to their use of the metal stirrup—an invention for which they themselves may well have been responsible. The metal stirrup made it possible for the Sarmatians to use in their army heavy cavalry units—that is to say, men wearing pointed helmets and coats of mail and who attacked with heavy spears and lances—as well as light cavalry of the Scythian type, that is to say, mounted archers trained also to use the sword. Furthermore, although the Sarmatians followed a patriarchal way of life, they expected their unmarried women to swell the ranks of the army by fighting in it beside their men folk; indeed, no Sarmatian girl was allowed to marry until she had killed at least one enemy in battle, and it may well be the exploits of these hardy young women, who, once married, were to devote themselves wholeheartedly to the care of their homes and families, that furnished the material for the Greek tales about the Amazons. Their help in battle must assuredly have contributed to the Sarmatians' victory over the Scythians. It enabled them to evict the Scythians from the south Russian plain by the beginning of the Christian era, forcing them into the Crimea on the one side and into central Europe on the other.

Like the Scythians before them, the Sarmatians provided the culture followed by a number of related tribes, the Alans and the Roxalans in particular. All these, and foremost among them the Sarmatians themselves, continued to lead much the same sort of life as the Scythians had done, even to the extent of practising much the same sort of animal art. However, they were a less imaginative and,

artistically, a less gifted people than the Scythians, with the result that they had to look further afield for their artists and meet some of their needs by means of imports.

Owing to this some of their jewellery came from Persia and Mesopotamia as well as from the Greek colonial cities of the Black Sea. Much of it was decorated with geometric patterns, but much also with animal designs of Scythian character, though these are generally less spirited and exciting in appearance than those which the Scythians produced; to make up for this the Sarmatians introduced as much colour as possible into their jewellery, arms and horse trappings, producing what are known as polychrome effects in their metal decorations by means of various types of semi-precious stones and enamel inlays in a wide range of colours. To judge by the number of gold vessels and jewelled objects found in their graves, the Sarmatians must have been just as wealthy as the Scythians.

When the Sarmatians invaded and took control of the grasslands lying west of the Don, many of the Royal Scyths crossed into the Crimea. For a time they remained powerful, continuing to rule over this new kingdom, and providing it with a capital which is now known as Scythian Neapolis. Their might was still sufficient to enable them to become the protectors of Olbia after that flourishing city had been reduced to a ruinous condition by a raid carried out on it by a tribe of Asiatic nomads. Their Crimean kingdom was founded for them by their king, Skylurus, and his son Palakus, stone sculptures of whom have been discovered within recent years in the ruins of

their capital. In the second half of the 1st century B.C., Skylurus began to mint his own coins at Neapolis, using both gold and electrum for the purpose, although both these metals were so precious that even in her heyday Olbia does not appear to have been able to afford them for a similar use.

Scythian Neapolis was defended from attack by stout walls some 25 feet high and made of rough stone set in coarse mortar, with defence towers protecting its gateways. The town itself covered an area of some 40 acres. Its better houses resembled those of the Greek colonial cities, being built of stone and roofed with tiles; some of the grander ones had rooms, the walls of which were decorated with mural paintings. Even so, most of the Scythians still preferred to live in tents as their forebears had done, and they continued to bury their dead kings and warriors in



A felt and leather horse's head-dress mask of the 5th century B.C. from Mound 2, Pazyryk

magnificent tombs, still surrounding them with their best possessions and their favourite horses.

King Palakus cannot have been as wise a ruler as his father, for he became obsessed with the desire to annex Chersonesus. As he advanced to attack the city, its terrified inhabitants appealed for help to Mithridates Eupator (123-63 B.C.), the powerful ruler of the Pontus, a kingdom formed in 148 B.C. which stretched from the southern shores of the Black Sea across north-east Asia Minor, over much of present-day Turkey. Mithridates was a remarkable and fascinating man, as clever a military commander as he was an administrator, wise enough to take the trouble to learn the languages of all the people over whom he ruled. He quickly went to the aid of the besieged townsmen, and inflicted so severe a defeat on the Scythians that they never recovered from it.

But Mithridates then in his turn began to want to conquer the northern shores of the Black Sea, and in order to do so he proceeded to establish military bases at strategic points from which to attack Rome, a power which he detested and which was rapidly gaining control of the civilized world of its day. Some Roman legions commanded by Pompey had indeed already entered Asia Minor and penetrated north-eastward into Armenia. Pompey was now recalled and put in charge of an army which set out across the Balkans to forestall Mithridates by settling garrisons in southern Russia.

The Romans chose Chersonesus, which, in Christian times, was to become Byzantium's most northerly frontier town, as their headquarters. They were able to build a

chain of forts along the Crimean peninsula and, feeling themselves secure, they then launched an attack against Mithridates. The fighting which followed was extremely fierce; Mithridates' son deserted to the enemy and, perhaps partly as a result of this, the Romans were able to defeat the Pontic army completely. Broken-hearted, Mithridates fled to Panticapaeum, where, having tried to commit suicide by drinking poison which failed to take effect, he ordered a slave to kill him. His body was handed to Pompey, who arranged for it to be taken to Sinop that it might be buried beside those of the earlier Pontic kings.

The kingdom which Mithridates had established in what is now southern Russia did not end with his death; it continued to be governed by his descendants as vassals of Rome, with Roman temples rising in the market squares of the towns in which the Greek colonials had centuries before them built temples to the predecessors of the Roman gods. However, towards the end of the 2nd century A.D. a number of Teutonic and German tribes, known to us today as the Goths, started moving southward from the mouth of the Vistula where they had been living. Entering the Russian forest belt, they conquered all whom they met; crossing into the parklands and continuing their advance into the plain they destroyed the villages and killed the Sarmatians who ruled there.

By the 3rd century A.D. they had become masters of southern Russia. But their power was not to endure, for the Huns suddenly increased the speed of their migration westward and poured into southern Russia, killing the

inhabitants and devastating the countryside. At sight of them such Goths as could escape death in battle hurriedly invaded western Europe, where they met with so little resistance that, in A.D. 410, they were able to enter and sack Rome. The Huns did not settle in Russia; early in the 5th century A.D., their chieftain Attila (A.D. 406-453), who was in the habit of boasting that no grass would grow where his horse had once trod, led them out of devastated Russia into Hungary. His successor, Alaric, proved equally warlike. He, too, attacked Rome, and he was able to impose a huge tribute on the emperors of Rome and Byzantium. But when he invaded Gaul, he was in his turn defeated by Charlemagne.

Though the Goths and the Huns had been merciless to the Sarmatian and other tribes whom they encountered in southern Russia, they spared the Greek inhabitants of the coastal towns because of their industrial skill. They greatly appreciated the work of the Greek jewellers, more especially of those of Panticapaeum, and just as these jewellers had formerly worked willingly for the Scythians, learning thereby to produce animal designs of Scythian character, and had continued to furnish the Sarmatians with the jewellery they wanted, so they now showed themselves ready to satisfy their new masters, disregarding their rough manners and cruel ways. The Goths took a particular pleasure in the Scythian animal style and also the polychrome decorations which the Sarmatians had been so fond of. The Greek jewellers were skilled in both styles, and willingly provided the Goths with objects in which animals of the Scythian type were prominent, especially

large beaked birds. The Goths also demanded geometric patterns combined with polychrome effects.

When the Goths moved to western Europe they thus carried with them many Scythian animal motifs and elements of the polychrome style developed by the Sarmatians. These they introduced amongst others to Avar tribesmen living in what is now Germany. The latter in their turn took a fancy to some of these designs, and began blending them with patterns they had adopted from the Roman world. In this way, even though the Scythians themselves had died out, something of their art survived in western Europe, where its influence continued to make itself felt till the Middle Ages, when a new outlook and attitude to life led to the development of an entirely new phase in art and learning.

6

THE PAGAN SLAVS

THE USSR is so vast a country that in antiquity events which occurred in one part of it did not necessarily affect the rest. Whilst the affairs which were described in the last chapter were taking place in the south, a completely different situation had developed in the north. From quite early times the northernmost sections of western Russia had been inhabited by Finno-Ugrian tribes, who may perhaps have been of Mongolian origin. Not only were they the oldest inhabitants of the area, but they were also the most primitive.

During the opening centuries of the Christian era many of them began moving southward into the forest belt, settling in what is today Finland and the Leningrad area of Russia. They had avoided coming into contact with the Scythians, Sarmatians, Goths, and Huns, and they wished to do the same with regard to their new neighbours. The more important of their eastern neighbours lived between the Volga and the Urals, in what is now known as the district of Perm, and consisted of some settlers of Slav origin and Turki nomads, and, at a rather later date, of Asiatic Bulgars. Those to their west were Slavs and Lithuanians, living in the area stretching from the Baltic Sea to the

River Dnieper. The Finns were a hunting folk, and neither the Slavs nor the Lithuanians showed any desire to interfere with their customs or occupations; the pleasant relationships which were established among these various groups resulted in the Finns gradually beginning to blend with the Slavs.

Very little is known about the Slavs, who were also at this time a primitive people. They practised polygamy, indulged in blood feuds, and believed in magic and witchcraft, but they were industrious and brave. There were several groups of them. When the Goths were penetrating into southern Russia, a large number of Slavs who had been living in the foothills of the Carpathians began to migrate. Some advanced into what are known today as the Balkans, whilst others moved westward, to settle in what today are Czechoslovakia and Poland, and others travelled eastward to become the Russians of modern times. By the 7th century A.D. many of these had settled along the Dnieper, around Lake Ilmen, along the Oka, the upper Volga and the western Dvina—the very regions which had become the homelands of the Finns.

The lives of both the Finns and the Slavs living in these areas were controlled by the geographical character of the land. Its chief features were its rivers, both large and small, forming a veritable network across it. These rivers were rich in fish, and they provided an easy and quick means of communication between one group of settlers and another, for each group had established itself on a river bank on a clearing made in the dense forests of the region. The majority of the settlers chose to live on one

of the great waterways which linked the Baltic either to the Caspian Sea and the Asiatic people beyond, or on that leading to the Black Sea and the vast and mighty Byzantine Empire which stretched over much of Asia and Europe. Trappers and traders were able to earn quite a good living by sending their furs and goods to distant lands by either of these routes; but for the agriculturalists living at some distance from any waterway, life was both hard and dangerous.

When the Goths had been evicted from the southern part of the country by the Huns, and the Huns had themselves turned their backs on all but the most westerly section of the plain, the rest of it had been left open to yet another wave of Asiatic raiders. These new invaders were of Mongol origin, and in the 6th century A.D. a group of them known as Avars penetrated to the coast of the Black Sea and gained control over much of the hinterland, even overflowing into the Hungarian plain; there they remained till some time in the 8th century A.D., when they were in their turn overrun and destroyed by some allied Germanic and Slav tribes. But before these Slavs were able to install themselves in what had been Avar territory, another Mongolian tribe, that of the Ugrians, advanced from central Asia.

Like the Huns before them, the Ugrians did not remain in Russia but pushed on into central Europe to become the Hungarians of our day. As they advanced westward the Ugrians were followed into Russia by another tribe, that of the Khazars, and this group liked it so well there that they decided to remain in the south-eastern part of

the country. The Khazars must have been both numerous and efficient for they appear to have had little difficulty in founding a kingdom which endured until the 10th century A.D., and which stretched, when at its most powerful and prosperous, from the Caucasian mountains to the Dnieper on one side, and across the Volga on the other.

To begin with, the Khazars ruled over the local Slavs, but as the years passed they found it increasingly difficult to prevent tribesmen of Turco-Tartar blood coming from central Asia crossing into southern Russia in a constant series of fierce and devastating raids. These tribesmen included the Petchenegs, a Turkish people, whose descendants continue to the present day to live as nomads in the remoter districts of northern Persia, and the Polovtsians, whose spirited dances form such an exciting interlude in Borodin's opera *Prince Igor*. These raiders feared to enter the forest zone, the density and darkness of which terrified them after the vast, open expanses of the Eurasian plain to which they were accustomed.

Nevertheless, the Slavs living in clearings along the river banks remained in constant terror of these tribesmen and whenever rumours of a nomadic raid reached them they at once abandoned their villages, even though these were protected by a vallum or earth wall. Taking their valuables with them, they hurried into the forest, often in their fear burying their treasures beneath a tree, at times never to find them again. It is only with the disappearance of some forest land in modern times and the cultivation of the cleared areas that some of these buried



Plate 9 The icon of the Virgin of Vladimir. This painting was commissioned from a Byzantine artist working in the 12th century. It served as a source of inspiration to countless Russian painters.



Plate 10 A 15th-century Novgorodian icon of the Nativity showing, in the centre, the Virgin lying in the mouth of the cave with the Child beside her, with the ox and the ass in the background, and a group of angels guarding Him, whilst shepherds take note of the miracle. Above, the three kings approach guided by angels; and below, a shepherd brings news of the birth to Joseph, and attendants bath the newly born Babe.



Plate 11 A late 15th-century Novgorodian icon of St. Florus and St. Laurus, the twin brothers who are the patron saints of grooms and horses. They appear above, standing on either side of St. Michael, who holds the reins of their horses, and they are seen again below, riding with their brother Seth to guard a herd of horses.



Plate 12 Icon of The Old Testament Trinity painted in about 1411 by Andrew Rublev to commemorate St. Cyril of Radonezh, the founder of the monastery at Zagorsk in which Rublev was a monk.

hoards have been recovered from their hiding-places.

The Khazars became a semi-nomadic people, content to live in town during the winter months, but, like many a Turk of later times, anxious to spend the summers in the country, tending their vines, fishing their great rivers, and selling their goods at a profit to any purchaser who might turn up. The trade routes connecting Europe to Asia ran through their land; and gradually, trading centres grew up, such as the citadel of Satchel on the Don, the town of Itil on the lower Volga, and that of Semeden in the Caucasus. Similar centres were also created on the central reaches of the Volga by the eastern Bulgars, a people who had succeeded in establishing themselves in that area in the 8th century B.C., where they spent their days harassing their Finnish neighbours and expanding their foreign trade.

To all these towns came merchants, whether Pagan, Jewish, Christian, or Mohammedan; the Jews were in a majority, and their influence was so great that they eventually persuaded the Khazar rulers to adopt Judaism, though the bulk of the Khazar people remained either Pagans or Muslims whilst a few became Christians.

The Slavs began coming to these important trading centres from as early as the 8th century A.D., and possibly even earlier, and an idea of the volume of the business which they transacted can to some extent be gained from considering the great number of superb Sassanian and Byzantine silver dishes and other objects of value which entered Russia between the 4th and the end of the 7th centuries A.D., and are now to be seen in many of the

country's leading museums. Then, in the 8th century A.D., Arabian merchants, following in the steps of the Arab soldiers who had conquered Persia, overrun the Caucasus and penetrated into central Asia, also appeared in these markets; and their dealings with the Slavs account for the vast hoards of Arabian coins dating from the 8th to the 10th century A.D. which have been discovered in various parts of Russia in modern times.

The Slavs were not satisfied in establishing commercial relations only with their eastern and southern neighbours, and they gradually began to turn their attention to the north-west where, separated from them by only a narrow strip of water, lived in what is known today as Scandinavia the Varangian or Swedish people. In the 9th century—at the very time that their neighbours, the Norwegian Vikings, were raiding England—the Slavs living on their two international river routes began to employ some of the Swedes, who had probably come to their land as traders, as mercenaries in the garrisons they had begun to form to protect their more important towns from the fierce raiding parties of covetous Petchenegs and Polovtsians.

Some of these Nordic mercenaries stayed on in the Slav towns when their contracts had expired and set themselves up in them as merchants, for they had quickly realized that great profits could be derived from trading with Byzantium. Soon the volume of goods travelling by river to the Black Sea and onwards to Constantinople became so great that the route was spoken of as "the road leading from the Varangians to the Greeks". Towns such as Novgorod, Polotsk, Smolensk, Lubech, Chernigov, and Kiev, to name but a

few, grew to a considerable size, and in them the patriarchal way of life began to give way to a community rule. An increasing number of Varangians settled in them, intermarrying and mixing with the Slavs—without, however, leaving any deep or lasting mark on their art or culture.

The more important a town became, the stronger the garrison it needed; the Varangians had proved splendid fighters, and their services were, therefore, always welcomed in the defence force organized by each town. The ablest of these mercenaries often succeeded in becoming, first, officers, then commanders, whose powers sometimes came to equal that of the local Slav princes and chieftains. Among the first Varangians to establish themselves in positions of complete authority were Askold and Dire, co-rulers of Kiev, in the mid-9th century, and Rurik, ruler of Novgorod, who was to become the founder of Russia's first reigning house. Some of his descendants are still living today.

Askold and Dire must have had a very strong army at their command, for in A.D. 860 they ventured to go to war with Byzantium—the strongest empire of the time. Their daring was not groundless, for they emerged from the contest unvanquished and with their reputation enhanced. However, their achievement brought no results with it, and Kiev's real period of greatness did not begin till twenty years later. It followed upon Rurik's death in Novgorod in 879 when Oleg (to give him the Russianized form of the Norse name of Helgi), as guardian of Rurik's young son Igor (or Ingvarr in Scandinavian), assumed

control of Novgorodian affairs and set about enlarging the young chieftain's domain.

Annexing Smolensk and Lubech, he won Kiev by a trick and put Askold and Dire to death. He found Kiev so attractive a city that he decided to settle there rather than in Novgorod; and in order that the other princes in the land should realize that he intended to become their ruler, he proclaimed Kiev his capital and the mother of all Slav towns. Kiev thus became the kernel of the country which was soon to become known to the world as Rus, the medieval term for Russia.

Oleg did not live long enough to unite the Russian principalities under Kiev's authority. Indeed, much of his time had to be spent in strengthening his frontiers. He began by establishing a chain of fortified towns along his northern boundary. Next he set out to destroy the power of the Khazars; and when he had succeeded in this, he built a network of forts along his eastern frontiers so as to protect the agriculturalists living in the open country from raiding nomads. He completed these tasks by A.D. 907, and he then assembled a mighty army and a large number of boats which he arranged to have mounted on wheels so that they could be transported overland from one waterway to another with ease and speed. When all was ready, he led his forces against Byzantium, commanding his men with such skill that he was able to besiege Constantinople and eventually to force the Greeks to open peace negotiations.

Oleg's death occurred in a strange manner. Like most of his contemporaries, he was a superstitious man, so

that when a fortune-teller told him that his favourite charger would cause his death Oleg sadly gave orders for the horse to be put to grass and never used again. Many years later, Oleg was standing on a hillock when he noticed a horse's skull lying at his feet. On wondering about it he was told that it was the skeleton of his once-loved charger. Bitterly distressed, Oleg approached the heap of bones, upbraiding the fortune-teller for his error. So concerned was he that he failed to notice a poisonous snake creep out of the dead animal's skull; it attacked Oleg without warning, and he died as a result of its bite.

Igor followed Oleg as ruler of Kiev. He was a far less able man than Oleg, and although he tried to pursue Oleg's policy of uniting the princes under his authority and although he led two campaigns against Byzantium, he achieved little success in either direction. He met his death ingloriously, being murdered with his small body-guard when bent on obtaining a second, unowed, payment of tribute money from one of the tribes subjected to him. Although the cause of his death was dishonourable, he and his men died bravely.

His widow Olga took control of Kievian affairs after Igor's death. She proved a wise and efficient ruler. The first task which she set herself was to establish peaceful relations with Byzantium. Accordingly, in A.D. 957 she set out on a state visit to Constantinople, the most renowned capital of its date, a city famed for its magnificent churches and fabulous palaces. Its splendour and beauty exceeded even Olga's expectations. She was deeply impressed by its magnificence. The Byzantine emperor

thought it expedient to accord her the honours due to a queen, and Olga was greatly stirred and gratified by her reception.

But she was even more deeply affected by her first contacts there with Christianity. Its creed won her heart, and the beauty of the services held in the great cathedral of St. Sophia made so strong an impression upon her that she decided to become a Christian. She was accordingly baptized in St. Sophia, still today perhaps the world's finest cathedral, in a ceremony of great pomp jointly conducted by the Byzantine emperor and the Patriarch, the head of the Greek Orthodox Church.

On Olga's return to Kiev, her son Sviatoslav, though the first member of the ruling Kievan house to bear a Slav instead of a Norse name, refused to follow her example. He was a typical Varangian, preferring soldiering to all else, and he remained a confirmed pagan to his death. He was succeeded on the throne by his younger son Vladimir (ruling from 980 to 1015), who assumed for himself the title of hereditary Grand Duke of Kiev, it being agreed that the office should pass, not as was customary in the Western world, from father to the elder surviving son, but from the holder to the elder surviving male in the royal family, a system which was later to result in much confusion and distress.

Vladimir had to deal with many important military and constitutional problems throughout his life, but the most far-reaching of his decisions concerned the religion of his people. He had himself become a Christian quite early in his life, choosing to join the Greek Orthodox Church of

Byzantium in preference to the Catholic Church of Rome. His preference was probably dictated by his desire to marry a princess of the Byzantine royal house; but legend relates that before making up his mind as to which branch of Christianity to adopt, he sent ambassadors to examine the religious observances of his neighbours. When the envoys he had sent to Byzantium returned saying that on entering the great cathedral of St. Sophia at Constantinople they thought that they had been to heaven, his choice was made. In A.D. 988 Vladimir's subjects were given mass baptism. This step brought Kievan Russia into the Christian world of its day, but the choice of the Greek Orthodox in preference to the Roman Catholic ritual linked Russia with Byzantium instead of with the Western world, thus affecting the whole future of her political outlook.

7

KIEV AND NOVGOROD

THE PAGAN Slavs worshipped various gods whom they represented by tall, rough-looking carvings shaped something like a totem pole, which they erected in their market squares and public places. Christianity made it necessary for these idols to be replaced by churches.

The Russian towns of the pagan period undoubtedly contained some impressive buildings amidst the humbler cottages, but even these were built of wood, which was the local building material, the Greek ability to build in stone having been forgotten even by the coastal inhabitants during the grim years of the Gothic and Hunnic invasions. Some Russians had become converted to Christianity in the days of Askold and Dire, and a tiny church had been built in Kiev in Igor's day, but it cannot have been more than a wooden chapel, and it may well have been built by Greeks.

When Vladimir found it necessary to provide his people with churches, church furnishings, and priests, no Russians could meet his needs, and he was obliged to turn to Byzantium—whence he had acquired his chosen form of Christianity—and probably also to the Greeks of



A four-faced idol
capable of watch-
ing the four cor-
ners of the earth

Byzantine Chersonesus, now called Korsun by the Russians. It was from these places that the architects, masons, and artists whom he needed came, as well as some of the clergy. In this way the Russian Church became from the very start a side shoot of the Greek Orthodox Church of Constantinople, and the architectural and

artistic styles which the early Russians took over were those that had been fully developed in the Byzantine world.

But although the Byzantines were a highly cultivated people, who had for centuries helped to produce and had delighted in an extremely complicated and very advanced culture, whilst the newly converted Russians had only recently stepped out of a condition bordering on barbarism, the latter were, nevertheless, able from the start to understand the foreign art which was being introduced to them, and to appreciate its beauty. They quickly came to love it, and having done so they were able within a very short time to master its techniques.

At first the Russian builders and artists began by working beside the visiting Greeks in the capacity of pupils, but they were quickly promoted to becoming their assistants, and before very much longer some of them began working independently. The churches which were first built in Russia followed Byzantine lines, retaining a cruciform plan, with three or five aisles and the domed roofs of the Greek models—features which remain characteristic of all Greek Orthodox Church architecture to this day, whether practised in Greece, Russia, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, or Slovakia. The introduction of these buildings into Kievan Russia altered the face of the land by the new outlines which they introduced, whilst the arts necessary for adorning the interiors of these churches opened the door to the magic world of visual creativeness, a world which entranced the Russians. Innumerable churches sprang up throughout Russia within a very short time

after the country's conversion. Some were no more than tiny wooden chapels; others, like the great thirteen-domed wooden cathedral of St. Sophia of Novgorod, were impressive structures of brick or wood. Novgorod's St. Sophia was destroyed by fire, to be replaced in 1052 by the superb stone building which still survives. The finest churches were those built in stone under the guidance of Greek architects. When Dittmar, bishop of Megibur, visited Kiev in the year 1018, he was astonished to count four hundred churches standing within the walls of what was then a very small town. (See Plate 7)

The most magnificent of all Kiev's churches had not by then even been begun—the great Cathedral of St. Sophia, called after the world-renowned church of the same name built in the 6th century in Constantinople by the Emperor Justinian. The foundation stone of Kiev's St. Sophia was laid by the Grand Duke of Kiev, Yaroslav the Wise, in 1037; and within another thirty years the magnificent mosaics and paintings in its interior had been completed. The finished work is of the greatest beauty, one able to hold its own today beside the finest cathedrals of western Europe of a similar date.

The wall paintings and mosaics in the body of Kiev's St. Sophia are concerned with telling the story of the Scriptures, but one group displays the portraits of Yaroslav the Wise and his family, whilst the walls of the staircase to the Grand Duke's private pew are decorated with scenes from the games which were held in the hippodrome at Constantinople on festive occasions; they are unique in their choice of subject and the only pictorial record to

survive of the entertainments which delighted alike the court circles and the humblest inhabitants of Constantinople in the years of its great glory.

Another of Kiev's treasures was an icon of the Virgin and Child which was specially commissioned in Constantinople by a Kievan prince in about 1125; it reached the Russian capital well before the middle of the same century, but was later moved to various other cities. It is known today as the *Virgin of Vladimir*, and is to be numbered with the world's greatest religious paintings. In the Orthodox world religious paintings are known as *icons*; the majority are painted on panels and are used in the church services in much the same way as the religious pictures produced by the Primitive painters of Italy were used in Roman Catholic churches. (See Plate 9)

Christianity did not only introduce to the Russians a new form of religion; it brought with it literacy, and the ability to read led to a new understanding of charity, kindness, and righteousness. "Ignorance is darkness, learning is light" is a saying which expressed the general opinion of the people, and it is one which continues to prevail in the USSR today. The alphabet used by the Russians was one which two scholars called Cyril and Methodius had produced for the use of the Slavonic-speaking people of Bulgaria; it is called Cyrillic after its inventor Cyril. With his assistant Methodius, Cyril ranks as a saint of the Greek Orthodox Church. Schools run by priests were established throughout Russia, often as part of a monastery. Scholars, many of them priests, were produced in them; and the pursuit of knowledge helped

to arouse in the educated an interest in history which, in its turn, served to develop a sense of nationality among the diverse groups of people forming Kievan Russia. In 1074 Nestor, a monk of Kiev's great Monastery of the Caves, began to take note of all that he was able to discover about the past, from the creation of the world down to the happenings of his own day. He entered all he learnt into



A capital letter in the form of a musician from the Khlu-dov Gospel, 1323

what has become Russia's first chronicle. Early in the 12th century Sylvester, a monk of Kiev's Vydbetski monastery, brought the chronicle down to his own time, and from then onwards historians, many of them living in such important towns as Novgorod, Pskov, or Suzdal, produced similar records.

The ability to read also made it possible for the Russians

to make use of Byzantine books on law, administration, land tenure, and agriculture. Literature in the form of Biblical tales, lives of saints, epics, and *byliny* or heroic poems also came into being. The earliest and loveliest of the epics, *The Lay of Igor's Campaign*, dates from about 1185. It commemorates the bravery in battle of the grandson of Oleg, Prince Igor, when campaigning against the Polovtsian nomads. It tells how Igor put his foot in his golden stirrup to mount his horse and led his men into battle for his country's sake; as he neared the Don, "the birds in the oak trees lay in wait for his misfortune; the wolves stirred up a storm in the ravines; the eagles by their screeching called the beasts to (a feast of) bones; the foxes yelped at the scarlet shields. O land of Russia, you are already beyond the hill".¹

Under the grand duke, Yaroslav the Wise (1015-1054), the young country's future seemed rich in promise. Learning and the arts had taken a firm hold on its productive soil, and Christian standards of conduct and uprightness as understood by the Byzantines of the period had begun to regulate people's behaviour. Indeed, the country was beginning to play a part in European affairs. Yaroslav's marriage to the Swedish princess Ingigerd—who, on coming to Russia, assumed the Slavonic name of Irene—made it easier for him to send ambassadors to Germany, Hungary, Poland, Scandinavia, or even as far away as France. As a result, he was able to marry three sons to the daughters of German princes, and a fourth to a Byzantine princess, and also to give one daughter in

¹ I. Obolensky: *The Penguin Book of Russian Verse*.

marriage to the king of France, another to the king of Hungary, and a third to the king of Norway.

Commercial relations between these countries and Russia resulted from these unions, but Yaroslav devoted most of his own leisure to codifying and amending existing laws in the light of the Christian outlook, so that at his death he left his people with a sound legal system. Yet for all his wisdom, Yaroslav proved an overindulgent father; he could not bring himself to bequeath the whole of his grand duchy to only one of his sons. Instead, he divided it into principalities which he distributed amongst them, though leaving Kiev, and with it the powers of supreme authority and the rank of grand duke, to his eldest son. At his death this arrangement led to jealousy amongst his sons, and their quarrels lasted for a good many years. The author of *The Lay of Igor's Campaign* tells that Kiev "groaned with sorrow, and Chernigov with affliction. Anguish flowed over the land of Russia, sorrow in abundance spread across the Russian land. And the princes forged strife each against the other, while the infidels, victoriously invading the land of Russia, took tribute of a squirrel-skin from every homestead".

Novgorod tired of the situation and broke away, to set itself up under its own prince as a republican city-state. The poor throughout Russia suffered acutely from the unrest; many were reduced to such dire poverty that, abandoning their homes, they fled eastward with their families to settle on the Don and Dnieper, where they formed the Kozak communities of later times. Others fled to the Oka and the Volga, areas which were sparsely

inhabited by a few Finns. Settling for preference along the river edges, they gradually intermarried with the Finns, forming the group of people known today as the Great Russians to distinguish them ethnically from the Little or Small Russians of the Kievian region.

Some of the emigrants soon became prosperous, and towns such as Suzdal and Rostov sprang up and attracted so many inhabitants that by the latter half of the 12th century the district in which they were situated was thriving. The Grand Duke of Kiev decided to establish his youngest son Yuri, nicknamed Dolgoruki or "Long-armed", as prince of the area. On leaving Kiev, Yuri took with him the icon of the Virgin of Vladimir, and when his son set up his capital at Vladimir he began building a cathedral for his city which could serve also as a shrine for the icon. It is because of this that this particular painting has always been known as *The Virgin of Vladimir*.

Under the reign of Yuri, as well as under those of his son and nephew, the city of Vladimir competed with Kiev as Russia's capital, but Vladimir was only one of the many new towns which the three rulers established. Moscow, which had till then been no more than an insignificant village, received its first mention in a chronicle in 1147.

During the century covered by the reigns of these three princes, that is to say from 1100–1216, the artistic achievements of what had become known as the Vladimir-Suzdalian principality became particularly remarkable. Exquisitely proportioned churches built of sparkling Kama sandstone rose in considerable numbers, often in settings

of great natural beauty. For the first time in the history of Russian architecture, their exteriors were adorned with numerous sculptures. Not all of these were of a religious character; many consisted of floral or animal designs, but although none had any real connection with its neighbour, all were so cleverly and harmoniously placed that they produced very pleasing and decorative effects. (See Plate 8)

In style these sculptures are quite different from anything that had as yet been seen in Russia, and today some people try to account for their unusual appearance by ascribing them to the influence of artists from western Europe, whilst others attribute them to the principality's links with the Caucasus which led to the marriage of Yuri's grandson with the Georgian queen Tamara. It is, however, not without interest to note that some of the animals which appear in these sculptures bear quite a clear resemblance to the beasts which figure in Scythian art, and this suggests that the Russian peasants may have continued to amuse themselves throughout the centuries by decorating their own possessions with some of the designs which had survived from Scythian times.

The interiors of Russia's churches were covered with mural paintings illustrating the Scriptures. The scenes shown were the same as those which the earliest Christians had depicted on the walls of the first churches to have been built in the Byzantine empire, and which the later Byzantines had continued to present unaltered in the churches which they in their turn built and decorated. Throughout the centuries, the Byzantines had firmly avoided any change either in the appearance of these

scenes or even in their disposition, in order that anyone entering a church situated in any part of the empire would know exactly where to find his favourite scene and would be able to recognize it instantly. Limited by conditions such as these, the test of an artist lay in his ability to express deep feeling in spite of such restrictions, and so to invest his paintings with new life.

In addition to the wall paintings, it had been the custom in Byzantium to place small versions of the Biblical scenes and the figures of the holy or saintly personages appearing in the mural decorations, in various parts of their churches, more particularly on their altar screens. Copying the method which the Egyptians of the Fayum had used when painting portraits which, at the sitters' deaths, served to form the faces of their mummies, the early Christians painted these small versions of the mural scenes on wooden panels which had been coated on one side with a layer of gesso which provided much the same sort of surface as the layer of plaster on a wall. They were known as icons, as mentioned earlier. (See Plates 9 to 12)

When the gesso had hardened it was polished till it became absolutely smooth; the artist then generally drew the outline of his picture in cinnaber, a form of bright red paint; after this he painted the background; but instead of giving the scene a blue sky, he had a gold one because gold, being a precious material, was the most fitting of all colours for representing the glories of heaven. Russians also quite often used silver, and eventually even came to prefer white, red, or even green backgrounds. When the background had dried, the artist turned his attention to

his chosen scene, using tempera paint diluted in yolk of egg. Most of the artists were monks, and there seems to have been some degree of specializing, for some painted only the faces, whilst others painted the figures and others again filled in the detail. Some of the finest artists, however, preferred to do the entire work themselves.

Many of Russia's earlier icons were imported from Byzantium; the icon of the Virgin of Vladimir was one of these, and a number of other examples of very high artistic quality survive, though many more perished in wars or the fires which occurred frequently in the wooden towns of medieval Russia. A considerable number of icons by Russian artists also exist, the earliest dating from the 12th and 13th centuries. Icons of this date are extremely rare, so that those that have survived are numbered amongst Russia's chief treasures. (See Plate 9)

The Russians of medieval times seem on the whole to have been fonder of icons than of wall paintings, and the number of those which were placed in their churches became so great that it led to the invention, sometime in the course of the 14th century, of a sort of altar screen known as an *iconostasis*, or "stand for icons".

This structure was erected between the body of the church and the sanctuary, stretching across the whole width of the building. It was made of wood which was carved and painted and covered with gold leaf in the richer churches; icons were placed on it according to a carefully prescribed order. Even modest iconostases contained three rows, or tiers as they are generally called, while larger ones had as many as five. All had at their

centre a low, double door decorated with paintings opening on to the altar, known as the Royal Door, and a single door was set at either side of the iconostasis to open into the side apses of the church.

Whilst the principality of Vladimir-Suzdal prospered and the cultural life of much of the rest of Russia was fast developing, quarrels broke out anew among the princes over the vexed question of supreme authority. Kiev's military strength was greatly diminished as a result of them, and her army was further weakened by the desertion of men who preferred to serve one or other of the princes rather than the Grand Duke. This loss in efficiency occurred at a disastrous moment, for just when events were dividing Russians at home, Asia entered upon another period of unrest.

This time the Mongols and Tartars were on the move. Led by Jenghis Khan, a cruel and formidable commander, they started to advance westward. On reaching the Caucasus some of them turned to invade Persia, spreading terror and misery wherever they went; they eventually captured Baghdad and overran much of western Turkey. Other groups headed towards Russia. In an effort to halt them the princes patched up their quarrels, assembled what forces they could, and marched eastward to resist the enemy.

The two armies met in battle on the banks of the River Kalka in the Dnieper country in the year 1223. It quickly became evident that the hurriedly assembled and insufficiently trained Russian troops were no match for the all-conquering Asiatics. The Russians were forced to retreat

and were then pursued almost to the walls of Kiev, where the Asiatics plundered the towns and villages they overran, killing or kidnapping the inhabitants. Then, with Kiev in sight, the invaders suddenly withdrew.

But this was not for long. In 1237 they reappeared, led by Batai, as fierce and formidable a commander as Jenghis Khan had been before him. This time the Mongols seized Riasan, and captured and devastated lovely Vladimir, though its famous icon was spared. As they advanced deep into Russian territory the princes again hurriedly mustered their men, and once again set out in a vain attempt to stop the advance. On this occasion the armies met in battle close to the River Sit, and once again the Russians were completely defeated.

After subjugating Kiev, looting its treasures, and destroying many of its finest churches, the Mongols then turned towards Novgorod. Fortunately, winter was at hand, and in that harsh climate its approach put an end to further fighting, at any rate for the time being. The Novgorodians took advantage of the lull to prepare themselves for the spring offensive. When fighting resumed, the Mongols had lost interest; and by the end of the summer, though they established a firm hold over the whole of eastern and central Russia, Novgorod was saved. Leaving only a small occupying force and some senior officials in control of the key towns, the bulk of the Mongols withdrew to the Volga, where they founded the Tartar Kingdom of the Golden Horde, with its capital at Saray on the lower Volga.

From there they dominated the conquered regions of Russia, but they forced the Russian princes, whom they permitted to govern their hereditary lands, to act as their representatives, levying the large sums of money which had to be paid to the Mongols each year from every Russian household.

The Mongol occupation of Russia was to last for over two hundred years, well-nigh until A.D. 1480, and for the first hundred and forty years life in the occupied districts could do no more than mark time. Schools were closed down, cultural and artistic activities were at a standstill. Russia was never to make good the loss that this represented to her intellectual growth. The inhabitants in the occupied areas had to direct all their efforts, first at ensuring their survival by meeting their daily needs, then to doing everything within their power to preserve unfaded and unaltered the religious, cultural, and artistic traditions which had been developed by their parents and grandparents between the time of Russia's conversion to Christianity and the Mongol invasion of their country. Only in Novgorod, which was never occupied, was life able to flow along normal lines, but even this was achieved under the threat of another war.

This time danger threatened from the west, where covetous German and Lithuanian commanders, seeking to draw advantage from the disorganization resulting from the Mongol invasion, attempted to capture Novgorod and gain control of her territory. The peril became so acute that the republican, self-governing Novgorodians hastened to appeal to their hereditary prince, whose name was

Alexander, to take command of their troops and confront the enemy.

Alexander was a very remarkable man; his bravery was outstanding and he proved himself to be a notable military commander. Supported by the stalwart Novgorodian soldiery, he gave battle to the enemy on the banks of the River Neva. The magnificent story of his stand, which ended in the complete defeat of the enemy, is the subject of a thrilling film which was made some thirty years ago by the Soviet film producer Eisenstein, and which is now universally recognized as a classic. It is called *Alexander Nevski*, meaning Alexander of the Neva, for the Novgorodians unanimously awarded this title to their heroic commander in honour of his victory. As impressive as this victory, though less widely appreciated, was the skill with which Alexander used the victory in the diplomatic talks which he held with the Mongol Khan of the Golden Horde at Saray in order to ensure the independence of his Novgorodians in exchange for an annual payment of ready money.

The security which Alexander won for his Novgorodians left them free to consider their future. They had always depended upon foreign trade for much of their wealth, and they now applied themselves to renewing their commercial contacts with the outer world. The Mongol occupation of Kiev and much of southern Russia had had the effect of reducing and slowing up their trade with Byzantium, so that they now turned to western Europe to fill the gap.

By a sustained effort they succeeded fairly quickly in establishing a flourishing trade with their Baltic and

German neighbours. In addition to wealth, this trade brought them many intellectual advantages, for it kept them in touch with western Europe, where a more liberal and advanced way of life had been evolved, and it enabled them to develop their talents in a way which was impossible to the Russians living in the occupied zone. And because an artist can produce of his best only when he feels himself to be completely free, and when the people who surround him are able to share his interests and outlook, thereby providing the stimulating atmosphere which is necessary to a creative artist, the future of Russian art and culture came to rest in Novgorodian hands. As a result, there dawned in Novgorod what is now regarded as the classical period in the history of Russian medieval art.

By this time medieval Novgorod had grown into a handsome town. Its streets were paved with oak planks, and were pleasanter and easier to walk along than those of many a western town of equal importance. It was divided into two sections by the River Volkhov which runs through it. The western part contained the Kremlin or citadel, the cathedral of St. Sophia, and the prince's palace; in the eastern was the square in which the Novgorodians assembled to decide by a majority vote on all matters of national importance. Most of the houses in both parts of the town were two-storeyed buildings constructed of wood; the lower floors were used as storerooms, whilst the upper contained the owner's living quarters. The standard of living was a high one, and practically the entire population could read and write—although in the

schools and also for all forms of public and private business, birch bark was used to write on instead of paper.

Used as they were to handling goods of the finest quality coming from various parts of Europe and Asia, which comprised the work of the finest artists of Byzantium, the Novgorodians developed a keen appreciation of beauty and quality; and the tastes they had formed dictated the art and architecture which grew up at this period within Novgorodian lands. It expressed itself first and foremost in the tall and severe proportions of their churches, so that these took on an entirely different appearance from that of the churches produced in Byzantium or in western Europe. The domes with which the churches were roofed also acquired a new look, for the



The west front of the
Church of the Saviour,
Nereditza, near Nov-
gorod. A.D. 1198-99

lower Byzantine outline was discarded in favour of the essentially Russian onion-shaped form.

By the side of these churches the Novgorodians raised elegant free-standing bell towers, the inspiration for which may well have come to them from Italy, though the shapes were entirely novel and essentially Russian. They fitted numerous bells into these towers and their chimes could be heard far afield, penetrating the winter



A somewhat later example of Novgorodian architecture—the Cathedral of the Trinity, Pskov, A.D. 1365-67, as shown in a 17th-century manuscript illumination

stillness and the summer's heat haze, to bring messages of hope and encouragement to many an anxious heart.

Painting kept pace with architecture, and the interiors of the new churches became covered with superb frescoes and their iconostases filled with icons of astonishing beauty. In all their works the artists continued to present the Biblical scenes in exactly the same way as they had always been shown. For this reason anyone who is not used to looking at icons, and who is shown for the first time several versions of a single scene, whether it be a Nativity, an Entry to Jerusalem, or any other, even when painted by different artists at different periods, may be inclined to find these panels uninteresting. (See Plate 10)

Yet a very little time spent in getting to know and understand them will soon change this first impression. Artists of today are trying to prove that it is not the outward form of a picture that counts, but rather its underlying idea, its inner meaning. In icon painting, even though no two icons are ever completely identical, the outward form of a given subject always remains much the same, so that even someone who cannot read will instantly recognize the scene which is represented. Nor does the meaning underlying the scene change as it does with every painting of our own day, but in an icon it is the intensity of this meaning, the degree of faith which inspired the artist, his sense and use of colour, his feeling for line, which distinguish a good icon from a less accomplished one.

A young monk called Andrew Rublev, working between 1380 and 1420, produced some of the most beautiful, most delicate and flowing, vivid yet harmoniously coloured of

all Russian icons. They rank with Russia's greatest artistic achievements, yet Rublev was not the only outstanding religious artist of his day. There were many others who also created superb paintings which occupy places of honour in Russia's museums. However, the names of the men who painted these pictures remain unknown for, like Rublev and the artists of Byzantium, none of the earlier painters of the Greek Orthodox Church signed their works, because they believed in producing them for the glory of God rather than for their own fame.

Rublev never signed his paintings; and his name, together with those of two or three others, has been saved from forgetfulness only because some contemporary chronicler, filled with intense admiration for his work, felt moved to mention the name in connection with some supremely successful paintings. One such entry in a chronicle refers to the lovely icon of the so-called Old Testament Trinity, the scene where three angels are entertained by Abraham and Sarah, which Andrew Rublev painted in about the year 1411 in honour of Cyril of Radonezh, abbot of the Monastery of the Trinity at Zagorsk, near Moscow, in which Rublev was a monk. It is a painting of supreme beauty. (See Plate 12)

8

THE RISE OF MOSCOW

IN A country in which the quarrels of the princes had destroyed all sense of national unity, it never occurred to the Novgorodians, so well satisfied were they with the conditions and culture they had created for themselves, to spare much thought for the wider political issues.

Yet in the 14th century the general situation in Russia was of a thoroughly depressing character: most of the princes, though figureheads in their own lands, were little more than puppets of the Mongols who remained firmly established on the banks of the Volga. Nor were the Mongols the only invaders of Kievian Russia; the whole of the Crimea was likewise occupied by dangerous and restless Nogay and Crimean Tartar tribes, whilst Russia's north-western frontiers were constantly being threatened by neighbouring Poles, Lithuanians, and Germans.

Fortunately, the tiny principality of Moscow was in good hands. At Alexander Nevski's death it had fallen to his youngest son, Prince Daniel, who in his turn left it to his son Ivan—or John, to call him by the English version of his name. At the time the town of Moscow was still so tiny that it occupied no more than a third of the present-day Kremlin enclosure and boasted only two churches.

The majority of the houses were mere cottages which clustered round the only slightly larger wooden house built on the highest point to serve as the prince's palace. All these houses were equipped with a stove, for efficient heating is essential in Moscow's climate; but in many of the houses its smoke still escaped from a hole in the roof, and only the better ones were provided with chimneys. The town was fortified against invasion by stout wooden walls; and on one side of it the River Moscow provided additional protection, whilst the River Neglinnaya did so on another.

Prince John was never crowned, but he is now generally described as John I. He ruled his principality from 1328 to 1341, and was soon nicknamed by his people Kalita, meaning "Money-Bags", or "the Gatherer". The name was an apt one, for John was the first Russian to realize that his country's future as a great power depended upon its ability to regain its political independence; he realized, too, that the only way in which this could be achieved was by the union of all the principalities into one nation.

Finding that he could not persuade any of the princes to recognize him as supreme ruler, he set about buying up the poorer ones; and as many of them had been reduced to a condition of extreme poverty, the sight of ready money quickly decided them to sell out. By enlarging his territory by means of a number of quite small purchases John was able to increase his capital quite considerably, and he used the money he was able to save to buy out more important princes till at last his principality became so large that it was able to compete in importance with

such units as self-governing Novgorod, Riasan, Rostov, and Yaroslavl.

John's greater wealth also made it possible for him to give the Khan of the Golden Horde better presents than the other princes could; and since there is a good deal of truth in the French remark that "gifts help to keep a friendship alive", John won the affection of Russia's Mongol overlord. As a result, the Khan appointed John collector of taxes throughout the whole of occupied Russia, and also raised him to the position of Grand Duke, that is to say, supreme prince throughout the land.

John's head was not turned by these honours, and he never forgot his plan to unify Russia as a first step towards regaining her freedom. Nor did he forget the miseries which had resulted in Kievian Russia from the arrangement by which supreme authority over the princes passed, not to the dead Grand Duke's son, but to the senior male member of his family. To avoid a repetition of similar difficulties, John arranged for the title to pass for ever onwards from father to son, in the manner which was customary both in Byzantium and in western Europe. This law, together with some other wise measures, brought peace and wealth to his subjects.

Conditions in Moscow became so much better than anywhere else in the land, with the possible exception of Novgorod, that many people were tempted to settle in Moscow. Eventually even the Metropolitan, as the head of the Russian Church was called, decided to move from Vladimir to Moscow. His presence there automatically conferred upon Moscow the character of a capital city,

though at first it was in fact no more than the chief town in a large principality.

John's son continued his father's policy of unification, though he did so with less energy and ability. In 1359 he was in his turn succeeded by his son Dimitri, who showed throughout his life much of the energy and ability which had distinguished his grandfather, John Kalita. In addition Dimitri was also a military commander of genius. His first success was the annexation of the powerful principality of Tver.

Moscow had by then spread out far beyond the original Kremlin walls, and whole districts now lay outside the walls, unprotected from the enemy. Dimitri determined to remedy this by building new walls round the larger city; and, instead of building them of oak as had been customary, he set about constructing them of stone. When they were completed he felt justified in testing the strength of his Mongol overlords; and when the next payment of Russia's tribute money fell due, Dimitri refused to hand it over. His behaviour enraged the Khan of the Golden Horde, who lost no time in mustering his men; not content with this, he sent envoys to the Lithuanians to persuade the latter to attack Russia from the north-west, and so to start a war on two fronts. News of this move reached Dimitri as he neared the Don at the head of his army.

Anxious to deal with his enemies singly, he decided to attack the Mongols forthwith. On the morning of September 8, 1380, having first commended their souls to God, the Russians crossed the Don, screened from the

Plate 13, right The wooden church of the Transfiguration at Kizhi dating from the turn of the 17th century. Note the "kokoshnik" gables, the profusion of domes, and the covered outer staircase.

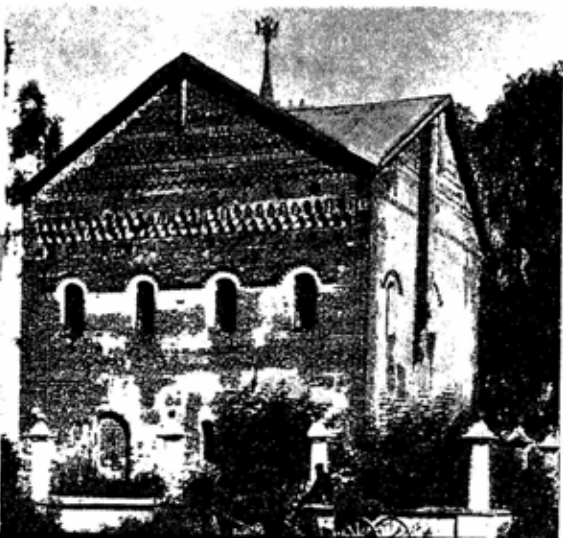


Plate 14, left The palace of Prince Dimitri, the murdered son of John the Terrible, at Uglich, built in about 1480. Note the decorative brickwork.

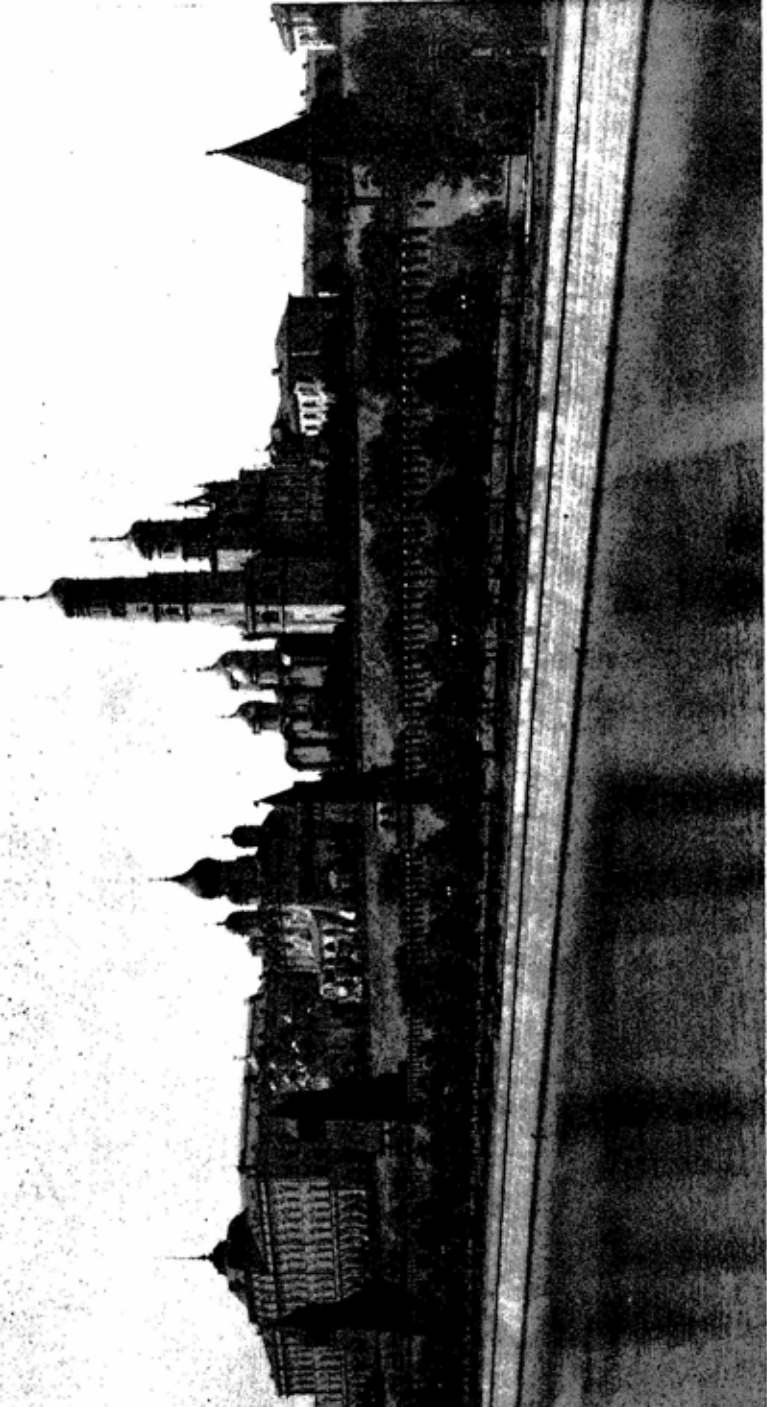


Plate 15 A view of the Kremlin, Moscow, showing the brick walls dating from the end of the 15th century, the bell tower of John the Great, the Kremlin's cathedrals, and, on the extreme left, one of the palaces.



Plate 16, above A section of the Terem Palace built by the first tsars of the Romanov dynasty in the Kremlin at Moscow in the first half of the 17th century.

Plate 17, below A late 17th century. print showing a procession leading into the wooden palace of Kolomenskoe, near Moscow, built in the course of the 16th century. by the tsars of the Kalita dynasty.





Plate 18, left The Three Churches of The Redeemer, behind the Golden Lattice built in the Kremlin at Moscow between 1678-81 by Russian architects. Note the delicacy of the typically Moscovite iron crosses surmounting each of the domes.

Plate 19, right The stone church of Kolomenskoe built close to the palace in 1532 in brick and stone following the style of the wooden churches of northern and central Russia.



enemy by a heavy mist. An early morning breeze soon blew away the haze to reveal a vast Tartar force mustered in brilliant sunshine on the field of Kulikovo. As the sun broke through, the figure of a huge horseman detached itself from the enemy's ranks and rode towards the Russians to issue a fiery challenge. A young monk riding near Dimitri instantly spurred his horse forward and galloped to answer the call. He had been a gallant soldier in the days before he had taken his vows, and as their spears met, the force of their impact was so great that both riders were thrown from their horses, and fell dead on the ground.

Then the trumpets of both armies sounded the attack and the battle began. It raged all day, extending over an area of some seven miles. The bitter fighting brought advantages first to one side then to the other, but eventually the horsemen of the Golden Horde managed to make a gap in the Russian lines. Convinced that the victory was theirs, the entire Mongol force poured through the opening, but Dimitri had been holding some of his men back for just such an eventuality, and he now led them into the fray.

Striking the Mongols in the rear, Dimitri's troops were able to change the course of the battle and to secure a decisive victory for Russia. It was not itself sufficient to end the Mongol hold on the country, but it was enough to unnerve the invaders and to convince the Russians that the complete overthrow of their enemy was no longer a mere dream, but a definite possibility.

In spite of their heavy casualties, the victory put such heart into the Russians that the creative spirit which had lain dormant in them for so long stirred again. The arts and letters began to revive and the wave of optimism which swept through the country is clearly reflected in the serene happiness of Rublev's paintings, for Rublev was quite a young man at the time of the battle of Kulikovo. As a result, all Rublev's works belong to the period when the Russians had begun to realize that their liberation was in sight. Dimitri became the country's hero, and the people expressed their admiration and gratitude by calling him Dimitri Donskoj, that is to say, "of the Don", in honour of his achievement. He well deserved the title, for it was the victory of Kulikovo which started the transformation of what had been the Grand Duchy of Moscow into what was soon to become the Moscovite kingdom.

After their victory at Kulikovo the Russians never again paid the Mongols the tribute money till the latter had compelled them to hand it over. To obtain it the Mongols were often obliged to send troops into Moscovy, and on several occasions these expeditions were on such a large scale that the invaders were able to besiege Moscow, and on one or two occasions even to break into it, sacking and destroying parts of the town. Nevertheless, each raid gradually became rather less serious than the one before it, and it was obvious that the Mongol hold on the country was beginning to weaken. However, it was Tamerlane, himself a Mongol, and not the Russians themselves, who was eventually to break its grip.

Tamerlane attacked the Kingdom of the Golden Horde twice, first in 1390 and then four years later. On the second occasion it became obvious that this dreaded man, one who was responsible for more widespread misery than any other figure in history with the exception of Hitler of Nazi Germany, was planning to invade Russian-controlled territory. By this time Basil I had succeeded his father Dimitri Donskoj as Grand Duke of Moscovy. Appalled at the prospect of entering into a war with Tamerlane, he nevertheless mustered his army and rallied the princes to his aid. He felt, however, that he desperately needed God's aid during the coming ordeal; and he therefore sent to Vladimir asking for the loan of the city's miraculous Byzantine icon of the Virgin of Vladimir, that the prayers directed to the Virgin in heaven might with the icon's participation result in obtaining Divine protection for his country. Only then did Basil set out with his army to face Tamerlane.

But on the very day on which the icon reached Moscow and was set up in the Cathedral of the Assumption, within the Kremlin walls, suddenly, and for no apparent reason, Tamerlane started withdrawing from Russian territory, and Basil was able to return to Moscow without having had to give battle. The entire population of Moscow ascribed the miracle to the icon, and would not agree to allow its return to Vladimir. The icon, therefore, stayed permanently in Moscow remaining in the Cathedral of the Assumption till the outbreak of the Revolution in 1917, when it was moved to the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, where it continues to draw large crowds of

visitors. But a copy of the icon was commissioned from the leading Russian artist of the day, none other than Andrew Rublev, which was despatched to Vladimir to replace the original icon.

Whatever the regret that the inhabitants of that town may at first have felt at the loss of their original icon, Rublev's painting was of such high quality that they soon ceased to retain any ill feelings about the matter.

Both John I Kalita and Dimitri of the Don had been so much engaged in the business of unifying north-eastern Russia that they had been unable to spare any attention for the situation which had arisen on their south-western border. Lithuania had taken advantage of this to try to seize the Kievan territory which is known today as the Ukraine, meaning the border country.

The Lithuanians of the period were still pagans, and as they penetrated into Kiev's former possessions (which, notwithstanding the lowering of standards which had resulted from the Mongol occupation, yet remained more cultured than Lithuania), the western invaders started to adopt some of the customs and beliefs with which they came in contact there. Some even acquired a smattering of Russian.

But this Russianization of the Lithuanians did not last long. The sudden death of the king of Poland had left that country without a ruler, and the Lithuanian chieftain took advantage of the situation to propose marriage to the widowed queen. As the queen was a Roman Catholic, the Lithuanian ruler had to become one in order to marry

her. The marriage united Poland and Lithuania, and the new sovereign accepted the culture, outlook, and political views of the far more cultured Poles. Poland was a traditional enemy of Russia; and when, somewhat later, Poland and Lithuania split into two kingdoms again, the Lithuanians retained the anti-Russian feelings which they had acquired from the Poles. It was then that they annexed Smolensk and determined to seize Kiev, thereby arousing the anger not only of Basil I and his subjects, who were powerless effectively to deal with them, but also of countless generations of Russians to come.

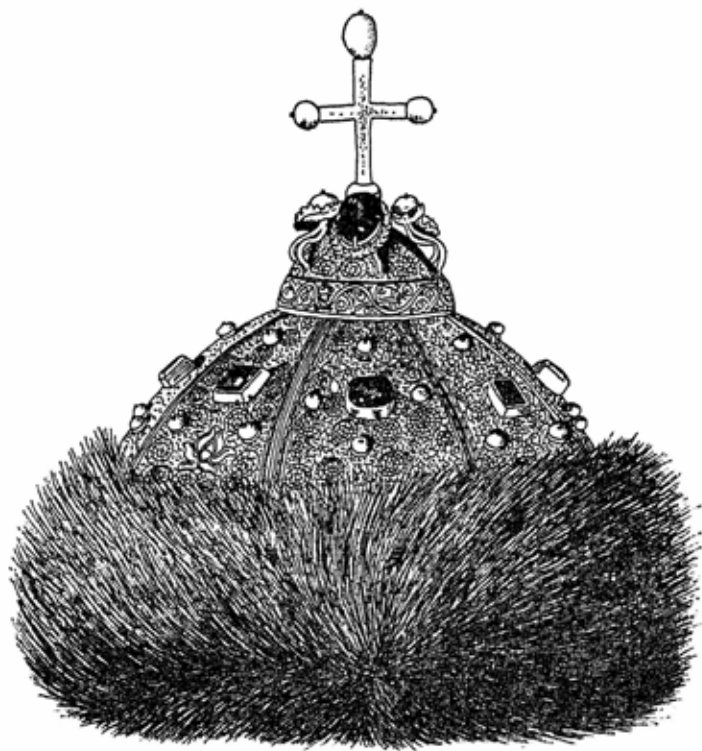
In 1453 the Turks succeeded in capturing Constantinople, thereby putting an end to the existence of the once all-powerful Byzantine empire. The event did not create as much of a stir in distant England as it perhaps should have done if one considers the many English who had taken part in the Crusades in order to defend Christendom from the Moslems. In south-eastern Europe, however, the news was regarded as disastrous. The collapse of Byzantium left Russia as the only Orthodox country in a position to govern itself. Many Greeks, for the word Byzantine is used to describe the Greeks living anywhere in the vast Byzantine Empire from the 3rd to the 15th century A.D., fled for safety from the Turks to Italy and Russia. The last Byzantine emperor had died gallantly fighting on the ramparts to defend his capital against the Turks, but other members of his family had escaped the general massacre which followed Constantinople's fall. Some of these settled in Italy as refugees, amongst them a young



The Royal Arms of Moscovite Russia.

princess of the royal house, Sophia Palaeologos. At the death of the wife of John III of Moscow, the Pope conceived the idea of effecting a marriage between the widowed Grand Duke and the young princess. The idea appealed to John, and a Russian embassy set out for Rome to settle the matter and to bring Sophia back to Russia. She reached Moscow, on November 12, 1472 and was married to John on the same day. She brought with her the Byzantine royal arms, consisting of the double-headed eagle; it was added to the mounted figure of St. George used by the Grand Dukes of Moscow as their crest, and from then onwards the combined form was used as the arms of imperial Russia until the outbreak of the Revolution. From then onwards, largely as a result of this marriage, Moscow began to be regarded by Orthodox Christians as the third Rome, that is to say, as the successor of Constantinople, which had often been called the "Second Rome", and John III began to think of himself less as a Grand Duke than as a royal sovereign. Even though he had not been crowned, he began calling himself Tsar when receiving foreign guests. On such occasions he often appeared wearing royal robes and the Cap of Monomachus, which is Russia's equivalent of a coronation crown.

In domestic affairs the most important task which John III had to settle concerned the future of Novgorod, which still remained independent. Fearing Moscovite domination, certain Novgorodians had secretly begun negotiations of a political character with the Lithuanians,



The Cap of Monomachus

which rendered the union of Novgorod to Moscow politically necessary. On failing to persuade Novgorod to merge voluntarily with Moscow, John laid siege to the town. When it eventually capitulated he tried both to break Novgorodian might and also to reconcile the people to the loss of their independence, and to persuade some of the town's leading icon painters to move their workshops to the capital. The Novgorodians who did so found conditions in Moscow congenial; and as a result other artists came to Moscow of their own accord. The icons painted in Moscow at the time belong to what is known as the transitional period of Moscovite painting.

John was anxious to beautify Moscow and—perhaps encouraged by his wife, who had been educated in Florence when that city was teeming with the artists and intellectuals responsible for the Italian Renaissance—he sent to Italy for architects. At the same time he instructed his ambassadors to persuade foreign artists to seek employment in Moscow and also to purchase foreign works of art. Those foreigners who accepted his invitations were given many privileges and rewards, but the unfortunate fact that no western power had come to the aid of Christian Russia when that country found herself attacked by the Mongols had had the effect of making Russians distrust their western neighbours, even though they were Christians, quite as much as they mistrusted their Moslem and pagan ones.

This distrust developed into deep suspicion at the sight of foreigners, whose different customs and whose habit of portraying holy personages naturalistically in their art

shocked the Russians who were accustomed to the severe Byzantine traditions. Because of this, the foreigners who came to Moscow were all obliged to live in a particular quarter of the town, which came to be known as the German village, for the word "German" was applied by the Russians to all Westerners. In this way contacts between west-Europeans and Russians were of the slightest.

Nevertheless, the artists of both groups met on many occasions, and those who were employed in the royal workshops situated in the Palace of Arms within the Kremlin did so regularly. As a result, Russian silversmiths and also Russian painters began to get to know something about artistic trends abroad, and many of the painters began to feel dissatisfied with the strict laws imposed upon them by their Church. They wished especially to experiment in naturalistic painting and portraiture, new developments which the Church viewed with suspicion and which it forbade its artists to follow. Because of this ban the western style in art continued to remain virtually unknown in Russia.

The impact which the Italian architects whom John III imported to Moscow made was greater than that of the foreign artists employed in the Palace of Arms workshops, but it was not as profound as might have been expected. Though these architects were responsible for building the walls of the Kremlin—they designed those which still exist today—as well as for re-building the Cathedral of the Assumption and also a new royal palace, the finished buildings were far more Russian in appearance than they

were Italian. This is even true of the palace, which was called the Palace of Facets, because the surface of the stones of which it was built was cut into facets in the way which was popular at the time in Bologna. This is to be explained by the influence exercised on artists by their surroundings, which was so deeply felt that it even altered the character of men's work while they lived in Russia. The same happened time and again throughout the 18th century; in the Moscow of the 15th and 16th centuries it was the order of the day. Not only the Italian architects, but artists working in the Palace of Arms, regardless of whether they came from western Europe, Persia, or Byzantium, acquired Russian characteristics, which are clearly reflected in their work. (See Plate 15)

Even the greatest of the foreign artists succumbed to Russian influence. Most notable among them was a painter who deserves to be numbered with the world's greatest religious artists. He came to Russia from Byzantium in about 1377, settling first in Novgorod and then moving to Moscow. He was known to his contemporaries as Theophanes the Greek, but for all his Greek blood he was as Russian a painter as was el Greco a Spanish one or Lely and Kneller English. His work was, however, more typical of Novgorod than of Moscow, where he spent the last years of his life. The paintings which are characteristic of Moscow's artists tend to contain more decorative details, more personages, more complicated outlines, and yet to be less vividly coloured than Novgorodian works. All the same, in their own way, icons of the early Moscovite school, though not on the whole as profoundly spiritual

as the finest panels of an earlier date, are nevertheless so lovely that many museums throughout the world now collect them. Many are just as beautiful as the better-known and more widely appreciated panel paintings of a religious character produced by the Primitive painters of Florence and Siena.

9

THE TSARS OF MOSCOVY

WHEN JOHN III died in 1505 he left to his baby son John a free and strong kingdom which had nothing to fear from its eastern neighbours, nor from the Tartars living in the Crimea, though it was still necessary to be wary of Poland and Lithuania and to guard against possible German attacks. It was also essential for Moscovy to extend her contacts with western Europe if she was to regain the regard which the Western world had formerly begun to feel for Kievan Rus.

The new ruler was only three years old at the time of his father's death, however, and could take no part in affairs of state; his mother was likewise unable to exert any authority, nor could she even prevent control of affairs falling into the hands of a group of noblemen who cared less about Russia's prosperity and their grand duke's welfare than their own interests. Indeed, they treated the young prince so harshly that his character became marked for life, and in his later years he often fell into a condition bordering on insanity, during which he committed acts of such appalling cruelty that, notwithstanding his numerous and often quite remarkable achievements, he is known to history as John the Terrible.

By the time he was sixteen John could endure no longer the misrule and insults of his nobles. With great courage and determination he informed them that he intended to assume full control of his country, and insisted on being crowned Tsar, thus becoming the first Russian ruler to reign as an anointed king.

John was by far the cleverest ruler of the House of Kalita, and for all his cruelty he proved himself to be an outstandingly able administrator. In the military field he took the offensive against the Tartars who were living on his eastern boundaries, and in 1552 conquered their stronghold of Kazan. The victory was largely due to John's gunners, who were the first Russian troops ever to carry firearms. Even so, the siege of the fortress of Kazan lasted for several months; and when it at last fell the victory was celebrated throughout Russia. In Moscow the church dedicated to St. Basil the Beatified, which still stands in the Red Square, was built to commemorate it. The work was entrusted to two Russian architects called Postnik and Barma, who devised a plan consisting of a main central church with seven chapels grouped around, each of which was dedicated to the saint on whose day the Russians had won a notable victory. Later, the number of these chapels was increased to eight, all of which were connected by passages and roofed by a many-coloured, onion-shaped dome.

The conquest of Kazan was followed seven years later by that of Astrakhan. Then in 1582, towards the end of John's life, Siberia—Russia's first Asiatic conquest—was added to his realm. Its annexation was not achieved by the

Tsar's army but as a result of a private venture undertaken by one of the families of great merchant princes, the Stroganovs, which had sprung up in Russia under John III. The Stroganov estates were situated in the district of Perm, which lies, roughly speaking, between the Volga and the Urals, in an area rich in salt and mineral deposits. Their land was being constantly raided by wild tribesmen, the subjects of Kuchuma, ruler of much of western Siberia. To protect themselves and their people the Stroganovs had been obliged to form a strong defensive force, and when five hundred tough Kozaks with their chieftain Ermak at their head appeared to join the Stroganov garrison, the family decided that the time had come to punish Kuchuma's men. The eight hundred fighters were equipped with firearms, and it was this advantage, coupled with Ermak's skill as a military leader, which transformed what had been intended as a purely private punitive expedition into a conquest of national importance.

John the Terrible was not only interested in warfare: he also showed concern for intellectual matters, and it was he who introduced the printing-press to Moscow. Though the town scribes, fearing to find themselves thrown out of work, broke up the first press, they were unable to prevent others being set up in its place. The introduction of the printed book had many important results. On the one hand it led to a revived interest in Russia's earlier history, but it also helped to make educated Russians realize how out of touch they were with the artistic and cultural advances which had taken place in western Europe.

Thus, although most Russians still continued to regard

the West with suspicion and dislike, and to cling more firmly than ever to their own often out-dated customs, a group of people grew up in Moscow who wished to see their country developing along more advanced lines and catching up with western Europe's achievements, not only in the fields of art and letters but also in the scientific ones. John himself, having acquired his ideas of a sovereign's rights and powers, and borrowed his system of taxation, from the Mongols, did not share these views, though he did recognize the need for establishing regular contacts with the leading powers of western Europe. His wars against Lithuania and Poland, though fought mainly to safeguard his frontiers, were also aimed at gaining a northern outlet to the sea—a far-seeing ambition which Peter the Great was to realize a century and a quarter later, thereby completing Russia's reinstatement as an influential power.

John the Terrible had to content himself with sending embassies abroad, and it was in his day that the first English reached Russia. Their appearance there was due to chance, for they had set out from the Thames in three ships in order to seek a northern sea-route to China. However, two of their ships foundered in the Arctic Sea, but the one commanded by Captain Richard Chancellor managed to reach the northern Dvina. The local Russians could make nothing of the new arrivals, and sent Chancellor to Moscow. He was so well received at court there that, on returning to England, he set about persuading Queen Elizabeth to enter into diplomatic and commercial relations with Russia.

Two years later he was back in Moscow as the Queen's official representative. This time he was received with even greater pomp than on his first visit, and his despatches home are full of amazement at the splendour of the Russian court. At one of the functions which he attended he was surprised to find that over two hundred guests were all "serve in gold vessells", and that, on another occasion, the plate on display there included "four marvellous great pottes or crudences as they call them of gold and silver. I think they were a good yarde and a half hie". He was equally impressed by the jewels, magnificent furs and stuffs, and fabulous horse-trappings belonging to the courtiers, but he was considerably shocked by the amount of make-up used by the women.

John's son and successor Fedor I was an excessively mild and weak man. His interests were wholly centred on Church affairs, and it was he who raised the head of the Russian Church from the status of a Metropolitan to that of Patriarch, the latter title having till then been reserved for the chief dignitaries of the Byzantine Church. Fedor left the government of his realm to his brother-in-law, Boris Godunov; and when Fedor died childless, it was Boris who eventually succeeded him on the Moscovite throne.

At first Boris ruled wisely and well, but later he became obsessed by the desire that his son, who was also called Fedor after the late Tsar, should succeed him on the throne—an ambition which led Boris to neglect affairs of state, and which also served to rouse the jealousy of many nobles, who thought that they had an equal right to the

throne. The tragic events of Boris Godunov's closing years form the subject of a stirring opera, the music for which was composed by Mussorgsky.

Boris's son did eventually succeed his father, but at a time when he was far too young and inexperienced to govern. His incompetence led to civil war, and Poland took advantage of the upheaval to attempt to put a usurper on the throne, and through him, to gain control of Russia. At this the whole country rose to Moscow's defence. In a fierce battle fought on the walls and in the very outskirts of the city the Poles were driven back. Russia's independence had once again been secured, but her throne still remained vacant because no male member of the House of Kalita remained alive to fill it.

The political crisis was eventually resolved in February 1613, when representatives drawn from all over Russia elected a young nobleman called Michael Romanov to become their Tsar. Though Michael too was only sixteen, the choice fell on him partly because he was personally popular, partly because he was related to John the Terrible's first wife, and partly too because his father, the Metropolitan Filaret, was a prisoner-of-war in Poland.

The skill with which this very young man dealt with the numerous problems confronting him as Tsar of Moscovy is often apt to pass unnoticed, perhaps as a result of the modesty with which he set about solving them. After the years of unrest and fighting, he found his Treasury empty, his country poverty-stricken and the prey of highwaymen, thieves, and all manner of thugs. Worse still, it was again being threatened by the Poles and the

Swedes, attacking on different fronts. Whilst trying to prevent any serious breakthrough of either enemy, Michael was obliged to work out a new system of taxation and to apply it to his people. As a result, funds gradually began to flow back into the Treasury's coffers, but not before the Swedes had managed to capture Novgorod, though they were held up at Pskov.

The money enabled Michael to assemble a considerable army; and when the Swedes learnt that it was ready to go into action they showed themselves willing to discuss peace terms. By these Novgorod was restored to Russia, but the Swedes retained the whole of the coastal area of the Gulf of Finland. Having secured peace in the north, Michael turned his attention to the Poles, who were advancing to besiege Moscow. After fierce fighting and heavy casualties on both sides, Michael was able to secure a truce of 14½ years and an exchange of prisoners. Amongst the Russians returned was the Tsar's father, Filaret; Michael lost no time in elevating him to the office of Patriarch and assigning to him the duties of a co-ruler.

Life at Michael's court was very similar to that led in any average Russian household of the day. Like everyone else in the country, the Tsar, his family, and his courtiers rose at about four every morning and spent several hours at prayer before attending to the day's business. At ten all went to church. Dinner followed at mid-day, after which practically the entire population went to bed, rising only when the church bells summoned them to evensong. The rest of the evening was again devoted to business, and the

day ended with supper followed by prayers. When all had retired to rest, the night watchmen appeared in the streets, breaking the night's silence at regular intervals with their patrol cries. (See Plate 16)

Like many Orientals, the Mongols who had occupied Russia kept their women in seclusion, and the Russians had also adopted this habit, though they did not carry it to the same lengths as the Mongols had done. Thus, Russian women never wore the Oriental veil, nor were they forbidden to appear before strange men, nor were they excluded from parts of their houses, though they were expected to spend most of their time in the women's quarters, and to be seen in the rest of the house only when invited to do so. A married woman had to obtain her husband's permission whenever she wanted to leave the house to visit friends, and unmarried girls could do so only to attend church. All women had to throw a scarf over their faces whenever they went out. But holidays were spent gaily by both men and women; and although much of every day had to be devoted to prayer, much of it was also spent watching wrestling matches, admiring the antics of dancing bears and performing dogs, and attending performances given by professional dancers, musicians, actors, and mummery. In winter-time tobogganing was popular, and chess and draughts were favourite indoor games. The Church often disapproved of these entertainments, but it was powerless to stop them, nor could it curb the passion for hunting and feasting, which was shared by rich and poor alike. When friends came to a house they were received by their host's wife, who welcomed them

warmly before sitting them down to an immense meal.

It was under Michael and his son Alexis I (1645-76) that the Russians really came to love Moscow as well as to admire her, regarding her both as the heart and also the capital of their country. They had come to realize that it was Moscow which had united the various Russian principalities into a nation, that the relics of many venerated saints were now assembled there, that the city had become the successor to Constantinople in so far as the Orthodox Church was concerned, and that it was in Moscow that the Tsar and the Patriarch resided, the two champions of the Orthodox Christians living under Moslem rule in the Ottoman Empire.

Once again people began to flock to Moscow, so that the town grew considerably larger, spreading out over the neighbouring hills into the forests beyond. A white stone outer defence wall had been built to protect the new districts, and from the heart of the town rose the tall tower of Ivan the Great, also built in white stone so that Russians began to refer to their capital as "the white-walled, golden-spired" city. Yet, apart from the outer walls, the bell tower, John III's Palace of Facets, and many of the churches, the bulk of the city remained a wooden town, from amidst which rose the red brick walls and towers of the Kremlin. The bridges spanning the rivers were all built of wood; and regardless of constant appeals from the authorities, who were anxious to reduce the danger caused by fire, people continued to live in wooden houses because they considered them the healthier. Even when the Tsar appealed to those who could afford to do so to build

in stone, people would do little more than construct the ground floors, which they used as storerooms, in stone, persisting in using wood for the construction of the upper storey, in which their living quarters were situated. In these the floors were covered with carpets and the walls with hangings, though in the all-too-rare stone houses mural decorations were popular. The women's and children's quarters were often situated in the high attics, many of which were provided with attractive, overhanging balconies.

Richer houses also possessed an external section known as a klet or cell, in which the wooden walls were not plastered, and the rooms were used as bedrooms during the hot summer months. The appearance of houses of this type was extremely picturesque and quite as decorative as any black-and-white manor house of Tudor England. The royal palace at Kolomenskoe and the stately home of the Stroganovs in the district of Perm were architectural marvels, with their varied rooflines and sprawling yet most captivating façades. (See Plate 17)

The Moscovites were so profoundly religious that although many of them were quite content to live in small wooden houses, they were anxious to build splendid stone and wooden churches and chapels to the greater glory of God. They were also extremely fond of decorative effects. In their homes they surrounded themselves with painted furniture, beautifully embroidered linens and silks, and splendidly worked gold, silver, and enamel vessels. In their churches they expressed themselves in sculpture, carvings, and paint. Windows and doors were

enclosed with stone surrounds carved with lace-like decorations, and the drums of the domes and the cornices set along the tops of the walls were adorned with sculptured patterns such as dog-tooth moulding. The churches were roofed with tiers of splendid gables whose curious shapes corresponded to those of the women's head-dresses, the *kokoshniks*. Over these they raised domes of onion shape, topped with slender crosses whose delicate outlines cut a tracery in the sky. Sometimes they replaced the dome with an equally picturesque tent-shaped tower. Inside, they covered the walls with superb religious paintings, and set up vast, elaborately carved, gilt and painted iconostases holding icons whose clear-cut lines and intense colours instantly drew the eye. Church vessels skilfully fashioned in silver and gold, and often decorated with jewels and enamels, admirably proportioned metal candlesticks and superb embroideries, many of them adorned with seed pearls, added the final touches of splendour. (See Plates 13, 18, and 19)

The fuller, more diverse way of life evolving in Moscow, though it failed to catch up with the advances made by western Europe during the centuries when Russia was stagnating under the Mongols, represented a great step forward, but it also led to the rise of a strongly marked class society. In it the Tsar and the Church held pride of place. Next came the nobles and courtiers, or *boyars* as they were called, who formed a highly privileged group owning vast country estates. The gentry were less fortunate; although they were expected to present themselves fully armed, mounted, and equipped to defend their



A 16th century boyar

country when called upon to do so, they were provided in return with land held on a system of life tenure only. However, it was the peasants who were by far the least lucky. They owned no land, though they worked it on behalf of the boyars and the gentry; they were expected to pay taxes just as the merchants and town dwellers had to do; and they also had to pay a rent to their masters for their smallholdings and to set aside certain days of the week on which to cultivate their masters' lands free of charge.

At first the peasants had been free to move on St.

George's Day of each year from one landlord to another, but the departure of several families of peasants caused difficulties in the village by raising the taxes of those who remained, since the assessment was levied on a village as a whole and not on the individual householders. Those who stayed on in a village had to make good the sums due by those who had left it, so that a peasant's departure was disapproved of as much by his fellow-peasants as by his landlord, who was often obliged, even when needed by his regiment, to stay on his farm to deal with the labour difficulties which had arisen.

A landlord's absence from his regiment endangered the state, and aroused the concern and disapproval of the government. To solve the difficulty, it became the custom to tie a peasant to a particular landlord and a specific village by writing his name in a book. By depriving the peasant of his right of free movement the new measure reduced him to a state of serfdom.

The evils which resulted from this cruel act are incalculable, and their ill-effect still continues to make itself felt. A peasant tied to a bad landlord could only hope to improve his condition by escaping. The number who succeeded in doing so under John the Terrible was so great that many fields throughout the country remained untilled, and John's son, the devout but hard-hearted Fedor, found himself obliged to agree to a law making it necessary for any man caught within five years of his escape to be returned to his original owner. Michael, the first Romanov, extended the period to fifteen years; but the landlords were not satisfied by this and demanded that

the period should be extended to life. Peter the Great, though so enlightened in some respects, agreed to this monstrous wish; and in the very century in which a period of so-called Enlightenment dawned, the peasants were reduced to a condition of complete slavery. The vile practice was only abolished in 1861, when the Tsar Alexander II insisted on their freedom being restored to the peasants.

The civil war which raged in Russia after the death of Boris Godunov's son Fedor, and the attacks launched against the country by Poland and Sweden, had the effect of again hindering Russia's intercourse with western Europe. Alexis, the second Romanov, was made keenly aware of this when, in his loneliness following the death of his first wife, he began visiting the house of the boyar Matveev, one of his closest friends. Matveev had married a Scots girl and his house was run on European lines; these greatly impressed the Tsar. So, too, did a young kinswoman of Matveev, who lived in his house, where she had been brought up on Western lines. In due course the Tsar married the young girl; and in 1672 a son was born to them. The boy was called Peter; he was the Tsar's seventeenth child, but his third surviving son, and his two half-brothers were extremely delicate. Peter was an exceptionally healthy baby, and his father adored him. Alexis died, however, when Peter was only four years old, long before anyone could tell that the child would go down in history as the Tsar Peter the Great of Russia.

Peter was the only child of royal birth to receive an excellent education. At the age of five he was given a tutor

who taught him to read, write, and count, but Peter had so great a thirst for knowledge that he soon outstripped his master. One day Prince Dolgoruki gave Peter an astrolabe which he had bought for him abroad, but neither the boy nor his tutor, nor for that matter anyone else in the royal circle, knew how to use it. Peter was determined to find out how to do so. At the first opportunity he asked the German court doctor to explain the instrument to him, but the doctor was no better informed than the rest. However, he introduced Peter to a Dutchman called Timmerman living in the German village in Moscow, and the latter was at last able to enlighten the prince. After that Peter took to haunting Timmerman's house, insisting on being introduced to foreigners of distinction, plying everyone with questions, learning all he could.

When he realized how backward Russia was, he determined to do everything in his power to transform his country into a modern state, to bring its army up to date, to give it a navy and to found schools, technical colleges and universities in which scholars and technicians could be trained. This was a magnificent ambition for a boy of sixteen. To accomplish it Peter soon after set out for western Europe, where he often travelled under an assumed name and even worked as a shipwright in Holland and England.

On his return to Moscow, Peter at first gave no indication of impending changes. But in 1703, whilst war with Charles XII of Sweden was still raging but when the newly conquered strip of land along the Gulf of Finland was securely in his hands, Peter (as we saw in our first chapter)

decided to abandon Moscow, to build a new town on the banks of the Neva, where it would be assured of an outlet to the sea. St. Petersburg, as it was called, was to be Russia's new capital, and serve as the country's "window on to Europe", as Peter himself termed it.

At the same time Tsar Peter introduced wide-sweeping reforms, some of which affected the appearance of the people by forcing them to adopt European dress and shave their beards as a first step to becoming integrated into western Europe. To begin with, Peter's laws met with violent opposition, but as the new town grew to become one of the loveliest cities in Europe, educated Russians came to welcome the changes.

By Peter's death in 1725 the transformation he had dreamt of and tirelessly worked for had been accomplished. Russian art, thought, and much of the country's way of life had been firmly established on a new road—one which turned completely away from the past, with its belief in isolationism, and enabled Russia to become a European power of world-wide importance. It was this which also made possible the great cultural achievements of the 18th century and following periods in Russia's long history.

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