Chapter 7

Society, Religion, and Culture, 1240–1533

Russian economic and cultural life suffered from the Mongol impact well into the fourteenth century. Then, like spring after a harsh winter, it began reviving. Despite many woes—Mongol raids, civil wars, famines, and plagues—cities and monasteries grew. From the monastic movement came some of the finest exemplars of Russia's medieval culture, including St. Sergius and the icon painter Andrei Rublev.

Moscow's grand princes helped stimulate and sponsor the economic and cultural revival, and under them their capital became an impressive city and the Kremlin an architectural showpiece. These rulers, however, also tried to shape the revival to their own purposes, thereby keeping it within narrow bounds. They were primarily interested in their own political-military successes and economic gain, and partly for this reason they imposed increasing restrictions on all classes and ideas.

MONGOL'S ECONOMIC IMPACT

The immediate Mongol impact on the economic life of the Rus people was devastating. Cities were especially hard hit, many of them shattered, plundered, and strewn with corpses. Some of the survivors of this carnage, including many skilled craftsmen, were carried off as Mongol captives.

After the initial destruction, heavy Mongol tribute, tax, and labor demands merged with punitive expeditions and slave-gathering raids to keep the common people impoverished. Brick and masonry construction records and other evidence indicate that little improvement occurred in the fifty years following the Mongol invasion.

By the early fourteenth century, however, economic conditions began to improve in Russia and, despite some temporary downturns, continued improving until the second half of the sixteenth century. Although evidence is scanty, it is varied: construction records, archaeological finds, the observations of foreigners, gradually increasing urbanization, and the eventual decrease in tribute payments to the Mongols.

Just as all areas and classes were not equally impoverished in the thirteenth century, so too all did not equally partake of the fourteenth-century upturn. Two regions that did benefit were Novgorod and Pskov, and they continued to sustain healthy economies thereafter. Although Moscow lagged behind the two more affluent northwest territories, at least in the heyday of their independence, it also grew more prosperous. How the upturn affected the average commoner is unclear. The success of the Moscow princes in reducing and eventually eliminating payments to the Golden Horde did not mean that the money they saved trickled down to Muscovite peasants or poor urban dwellers.

Although the Mongols were the chief cause of the initial depression, they also helped stimulate the recovery that followed. Many cities that grew in the fourteenth century benefited from the Mongols' furthering of international trade, especially via the Volga River. These included not only Volga cities such as Nizhnii Novgorod, but also others such as Novgorod, which was linked to the Volga trade and continued under the Mongols to be a center for east-west trade.

As important as Mongol actions and policies were, they do not alone account for Russia's long economic depression and then revival and growth. Many wars—dynastic, between principalities, and against foreign enemies—and the policies of the Moscow princes also influenced the economy. Moreover, there is still much that remains unclear. One of the mysteries of the fourteenth-century economy is the impact of the Black Death. It struck Russia in 1352–1353 and reappeared periodically into the fifteenth century. It killed perhaps as much as a third of the population and hit the people in towns especially hard. Yet, despite the economic damage it must have done, it left few economic footprints for historians to analyze and did not prevent overall economic growth in the late fourteenth century.

Population, Urban Life, and Foreign Trade

Although population estimates vary widely, it seems likely that by 1533 there were no more than 5 to 6 million Muscovites. Considering that the territory under the rule of Moscow was about five times the size of modern France, even 6 million was not many. The most economically advanced areas of Western Europe had five to ten times as many people per acre of land. Especially sparsely populated were the huge, but infertile, Novgorodian lands.

Despite increased urbanization after 1300, the number of town-dwellers by 1533 was also small compared to Western Europe. Even by a generous definition of what constituted a town, the number of urban dwellers was not more than 5 percent of the population. By the late fifteenth century, Pskov had perhaps 15,000 to 20,000 people. The two largest Russian cities were Novgorod (about 30,000 by 1400) and Moscow, which gradually surpassed it. By 1533, Moscow was a huge city. Although it still probably had less than 100,000 inhabitants, some contemporary estimates suggest it had even more. By comparison, several Italian cities had reached 100,000 by about 1300 and London reached the same figure by about 1570. Constantinople dwarfed them all, probably reaching a half million before the end of the sixteenth century.

Besides Pskov, Novgorod, and Moscow, other cities were small. At the

Moscow in the Early Sixteenth Century

The following description of Moscow and its Kremlin (fortress) is from Sigismund von Herberstein, *Notes Upon Russia: Being a Translation of the Earliest Account of that Country, Entitled Rerum Moscoviticarum Commentarii*, trans. and ed. by R. H. Major (London, 1851), Vol. II, pp. 4–5. [Ellipses are mine.] Herberstein was in Russia in 1517 and again in 1526 as an ambassador from the Holy Roman Emperor. He was perhaps the most accurate foreign observer ever to visit Muscovite Russia.

The city itself is built of wood, and tolerably large, and at a distance appears larger than it really is, for the gardens and spacious court-yards in every house make a great addition to the size of the city, which is again greatly increased by the houses of smiths and other artificers who employ fires. These houses extend in a long row at the end of the city, interspersed with fields and meadows. Moreover, not far from the city, are some small houses, and the other side of the river some villas, where, a few years ago, the Prince Vasiley built a new city for his courtiers, called Nali (which in their language means "pour in"), because other Russians were forbidden to drink mead and beer, except on a few days in the year, and the privilege of drinking was granted by the prince to these alone; and for this reason they separated themselves from intercourse with the rest of the inhabitants to prevent their being corrupted by their mode of living. Not far from the city are some monasteries, which alone appear like a great city to persons looking from a distance. . . .

. . . There is a fortress in it built of burnt tiles, which on one side is washed by the Mosqwa and on the other by the River Neglima [Neglinaia]. The Neglima flows from certain marshes, but is so blocked up before the city around the upper part of the fortress, that it comes out like stagnant water, and running down thence, it fills the moats of the fortress, in which are some mills, and at length, as I have said, is joined by the Mosqwa under the fortress itself. The fortress is so large, that it not only contains the very extensive and magnificently built stone palace of the prince, but the metropolitan bishop, the brothers of the prince, the peers, and a great many others, have spacious houses of wood within it. Besides these, it contains many churches, so that from its size it might itself almost be taken for a city.

beginning of the sixteenth century, there were anywhere from about 30 to 160 other towns, depending on one's definition of a town. A narrow definition limits the term to administrative centers that also contained a significant number of craftsmen; a broader one includes almost any fortified site maintained by the government.

It was not size, however, as much as function that separated most Russian cities, by any definition, from those of Western Europe. As Fernand Braudel has pointed out, before 1500, 90 to 95 percent of the cities in the West had less than 2,000 people and most German cities less than 1,000. What distinguished almost all Russian cities from those in Western Europe was that their administrative-military functions so outweighed any independent business transactions and that compared to Western towns they had such little freedom or autonomy. Only Novgorod and Pskov, before their incorporation into the Muscovite state, were noticeable

exceptions to these generalizations. By 1533, the old Western European proverb, "city air makes one free," could not be applied to any Russian city.

Like Novgorod and Pskov, some other towns were capitals of separate principalities—until they were taken over by Moscow. Then they usually became regional administrative-military centers. But even before this, free urban workers, artisans, shopkeepers, and merchants were a minority, easily outnumbered by those working for, or directly dependent on, the prince, his servitors, or the clergy. The Mongol expropriation of skilled craftsmen, which continued long after the initial conquest, also contributed to this disproportion.

The great majority of cities had already existed in the Rus era, and the newly created ones took on many characteristics of the older towns. Thus, most were still located on a river bank, usually on the higher of the two sides for more protection. The main part of the town, sometimes all of it, was surrounded by fortress walls, usually of wood—although Moscow, Novgorod, and Pskov built stronger stone or brick walls during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. With the exception of one or more stone churches, most of the buildings were still wooden. Log houses, scattered among wide dirt (or mud) roads, vegetable gardens, and meadows gave Russian towns a more countrified look than those of Western Europe.

In larger towns, some of the craftsmen and their families lived outside the main fortress. Many worked with leather, metal, textiles, or wood, producing primarily for others in town and the surrounding countryside. Some goods, however, had a wider market. By the fifteenth century, Moscow-produced armaments and armor were sold throughout Muscovy—but Herberstein reported that in his day government permission was required before any could be exported from the country.

Muscovite princes took a proprietary attitude toward commerce, thereby restricting the rights of city-dwellers and business. The will drawn up by Ivan III reflects this. In stipulating what he is leaving to his chief heir, Vasili III, he mentions Moscow, along with "its *tamga* [a city tax paid by artisans and merchants], and with the tax on weighing, and with the tax on measuring dry-measure goods, and with the tax on trading in the market place, and with the tax on trading stands, and with the tax on merchants' courts, and with all its customs."[1]

Herberstein noted several examples of Vasili III's possessiveness. Gifts bestowed upon Russian ambassadors abroad had to be handed over to him. Merchants bringing goods into Moscow had to have them appraised by government agents and offered to Vasili at appraised prices. Only if the ruler had no interest in them could a merchant then freely price his goods and sell them to others. Herberstein also believed that Vasili ordered his subjects to pay foreign merchants in fur skins, or some other form of barter, so as to reduce the gold or silver—the main money metal—leaving the county.

Before turning away from Herberstein's observations, a few more merit mention. He contrasted disreputable business practices in Moscow, such as overcharging foreigners, with more honorable ones that had prevailed, so he heard, in independent Pskov (before 1510). Perhaps, like many foreigners, he was a bit biased against the more Eastern trading and business practices of Moscow;

[1]Robert Craig Howes, ed., *The Testaments of the Grand Princes of Moscow* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1967), p. 269; bracketed material is mine.

Pskov, like Novgorod, had been part of the Germanic Hanseatic League's trading network and reflected more Western ways. Yet many of Herberstein's observations are corroborated by other sources. Such is the case regarding the usurious interest rates charged in Moscow. Partly because of the difficulty of repaying such loans, indebtedness was common; even princes sometimes were indebted to merchants or monasteries.

Herberstein also mentions some main articles of foreign trade: imports such as jewels, silk, cloths, silver, and gold; exports such as skins, wax, and walrus tusks. He is especially detailed about skins, which included sable, marten, ermine, fox, squirrel, lynx, wolf, and beaver—the export of these fur pelts, mainly from Novgorod and later Moscow, was the chief way of obtaining silver and paying for other imports. Among craft products exported to the Mongols were saddles and bridles.

Along with jewels and silk from the East, the Russians also imported spices, incense, soap, carpets, taffeta, brocade, and horses. From the West, along with cloth, gold, and silver, they imported such goods as metal products, salt, beer, and wine. To both East and West, the Russians exported honey and timber. While many imports were luxury items, used primarily by the upper classes or church, exports were mainly raw materials and semifinished products, along with some finished goods, often bought from the West and then sent East.

Before the Golden Horde's breakup, much Russian trade with the East went through Bulgar on the Volga and from there to Sarai—from Sarai goods moved in various directions, including along the famed silk road through Central Asia to China. After the Horde's breakup, Russian trade with khanates in Kazan and the Crimea (and the Crimean Italian merchants) increased significantly. The Russians imported many horses from another Golden Horde successor group, the Nogai Horde. Most Western trade went through Novgorod, although Pskov and Smolensk also had their share.

EATING AND DRINKING; FAMINES AND OTHER CALAMITIES

The common people's main food was rye bread. Oats, barley, millet, and wheat were less common than rye. Besides being used for bread, grains were the basis for a variety of other dishes and drinks, such as gruels, kvas (an early "near beer"), beers, porridges, pottages, and pancakes. To supplement bread and other grain-based products, commoners sometimes had lesser amounts of cabbage and other vegetables, dairy products, and fish. Meats and fruits were even less common. Bread, however, and more basically grain, was the basis of life. Lacking grain, most people starved.

The only basic food that most peasants needed to purchase was salt. Otherwise, eating little meat, they would not have enough. It was also a necessary preservative for storing foods like cabbage over the long earth-barren months. Not only was salt imported from abroad, but extracting it—whether from ground-level deposits, seas, salt lakes, or underground salt mines— was the largest single industrial enterprise of Muscovite Russia. All sorts of individuals and groups, from peasants to princes, profited from extracting it. By the sixteenth century,

monasteries were especially involved in its production and trade. At Sol (salt) Vyehegda before 1533, the Stroganov family, of peasant background, had already become active in the business. By 1550, the Stroganovs owned ten works there. They would later become the most famous merchant family of Russia, and Sol Vychegda, like several other centers for salt extraction, became a sizable town (see Map 10.1).

People's eating habits were affected by the Orthodox Church, which mandated many periods of fasting throughout the year, plus every Wednesday and Friday. Altogether there were on average slightly more than 200 fast days a year. Fasting from meat on these days probably did not affect many common people, who could not afford it anyway, but on most of these fast days, they were also forbidden to eat dairy products. Fish was also sometimes prohibited. Herberstein states that during Lent some people ate only bread and water on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

The most common drink was probably the hardly alcoholic kvas. Mead, made from honey, and beer were the most available real alcoholic drinks, whereas wine was less common. Of the three, beer seems to have been the most available to poorer classes. Vodka probably started to be distilled by the end of the fifteenth century, but not much mention is made of it in this period.

In Herberstein's extract describing Moscow, we have already seen that most Russians were forbidden to drink alcohol except for a few days a year. Up until the late fifteenth century, drinking was more common, especially on feasts, festivals, and important occasions like weddings. Then, according to foreign testimony, successive Muscovite grand princes forbade it except on special days. One Italian stated that a prohibition on producing alcohol stemmed partly from the prince's fear that it interfered with people's work. Beyond these prohibitions, however, the state seems to have done little to interfere in people's private drinking practices.

The elite, of course, ate and drank in ways commoners could only dream about. Herberstein attended princely banquets, sometimes lasting three or four hours, where tables groaned with the likes of roasted swans, brandy, and Greek wines, served on or in silver and gold dishes and goblets. He also described what many a subsequent foreign visitor to Russia has bemoaned—with varing degrees of sincerity. "They do not think that their guests are well received, or hospitably treated, unless they are sent home drunk."

But it was not overindulgence that worried the common people, it was hunger and famine. Between 1270 and 1470, famine occurred in one Russian area or another about once every six years and throughout almost the entire country about once every twelve years. When this occurred, many people died, some perhaps after they first "ate lime tree leaves, birch bark, pounded wood pulp mixed with husks and straw; . . . ate buttercups, moss, horse flesh."[2] Although these words are from a twelfth-century chronicle account, the situation did not change much over the centuries.

Besides famine, and often along with it, came plagues like the terrifying Black Death—a symptom of one strain was black swellings in the groin and armpits. After the appearance of such swellings or after spitting blood, symptomatic of another strain, death came within several days. Spreading from India to Greenland,

[2]Robert Michell and Nevill Forbes, eds., *The Chronicle of Novgorod, 1016–1471* (London, 1914), p. 11.

the plague killed about a third of Western Europe's population and perhaps as high a percentage in Russia. Although epidemics in general were fairly rare in the Rus era, Lawrence Langer has estimated that between 1350 and 1450 most of Russia averaged about one every six years, more often than not the Black Death.

RURAL LIFE AND THE MILITARY

Although nature and custom continued to determine much of rural life and most peasants had little contact with any government officials, their lives became increasingly entwined with the military needs of the expanding Muscovite state. Put simply, the state needed money and nobles to fight, and to serve adequately the nobles needed a dependable peasantry on their estates. These combined needs, plus the growth of Russian monastic lands, became the main sources of the increasing demands on the peasants.

During this period, about 85 to 90 percent of Russians were peasant toilers. Most lived in wooden huts in scattered settlements containing only a few nuclear families. Many still cleared their plots in the forests using the old "slash-and-burn" technique and repeated it on new lands when the old became exhausted. By the late fifteenth century, however, peasants, especially in more fertile areas, increasingly used some form of crop rotation.

In northwestern Europe by this time, a three-field system was common, by which one field was planted in the fall, another in the spring, and a third left fallow. The following year the fields were rotated. In Russia, rotation was not as systematic, but a popular method was to rotate fields with rye, planted in the late summer, oats, planted in the spring, and then a fallow period.

For plowing, the peasant most often used a *sokha*, a little plow that cut only a few inches into the ground. It was generally pulled by a horse, although oxen or humans were other possibilities. The peasants made little systematic use of manure except when required to do so, as, for example, on large well-run monastic estates. Besides a workhorse, peasants generally possessed a few other animals such as chickens and one or two each of cows, pigs, and goats or sheep.

Although not much is known about their form, peasant communes, generally small, existed. So too did confiscation of peasant lands by nobles and monasteries. When this occurred, peasants had to pay—by various combinations of money, produce, or service—to continue farming land from which they could keep the produce, or at least most of it. If they did not like the demands of their new landlord, they could still move somewhere else. Their labor was valuable and much in demand. But obstacles to movement were increasing. By a Muscovite law code of 1497, their freedom to move was restricted to the week before and after St. George's day (November 26th), and even then they had to pay an "exit fee."

Although sometimes evaded, these restrictions were typical of Moscow's increasing demands. The Muscovite grand princes helped remove the "Tatar yoke," only to fashion their own made-in-Moscow one more firmly on the necks of the peasants. Besides restricting their movements, the new yoke imposed more Muscovite taxes, fees, and service requirements and held each commune responsible collectively for paying the total tax levied on commune members.

Peasants' contacts beyond their villages were probably limited. The growth of cities, however, beginning in the fourteenth century, meant increasing urban food needs and a limited number of job opportunities. Archaeological evidence found in villages tells us that some peasants were able to buy such oriental goods as beads and boxwood combs. Thus some ties, however slight or indirect, existed between some villagers and city buyers and sellers.

Just as the nobles backed by Moscow intensified demands on the peasants, so Moscow also demanded more from the nobles. Before Ivan III's reign the dominant type of noble estate was the *votchina* estate, hereditary property that could be sold by its owner. Ivan III and Vasili III greatly increased another type of landholding called *pomestie*. When Ivan III confiscated three million acres in Novgorod and turned it over to his "service men," these two thousand men held these lands conditionally, in exchange for satisfactory service. From then on, the Muscovite princes used other available opportunities, such as additional land seizures, to gradually increase such conditional (*pomestie*) holdings and thereby gradually strengthen their powers over the nobles' landholdings.

Regardless of what kind of land they held, the nobles' primary obligation, as in many other medieval countries, was to fight as cavalrymen. At first, they fought for the princes of the various principalities recognized by the Mongols and, later, for the Muscovite prince. With all the warfare going on in these centuries, many nobles served each spring through fall (the fighting season), until age or death put an end to their annual call-ups.

Each such cavalryman had to arrive with his own horse, weapons, and supplies. His estate was supposed to provide him the means to do so, but some lands were too poor. One reason for intensifying restrictions upon peasant mobility was to provide such service-class warriors with a stable work-force, freeing them to fight for the Muscovite rulers.

When not fighting, or at least in the field with other troops, many of the nobles lived on estates that were far from opulent. Some even worked in the fields themselves and lived in log cabins not much bigger than those of their peasants. Many nobles were hardly more cultured than the illiterate peasants. Only a small number had more than one estate. Thus, a noble's possessions and lifestyle were often much less grand than we today associate with the term *noble*.

The core of Russia's military during this era remained the cavalry. Influenced by Mongol tactics, cavalrymen attempted to be mobile and fast, relying mainly on their bows, arrows, and swords. To supplement the mostly noble cavalry, Russian princes by the end of the fifteenth century also used, on different occasions, friendly Mongols, artillery, infantry townsmen, and Cossacks (see Chapter 9). As Ivan III and Vasili III expanded Muscovy and tied more nobles to Muscovite service, their armies became stronger and the expansion of the military became one of their chief goals.

CLASS STRUCTURE AND SLAVERY

The seizure of land and turning it over to new men provided some social mobility in the expanding Muscovite state. Some who received the new lands in Novgorod,

for example, had actually been elite slaves before becoming noble landowners. As Moscow centralized its control, however, there was also a gradual tendency toward more social rigidity.

At the top of the secular class structure were the Riurikid princes and their families. Yet as Moscow slowly achieved dominance, some princes of the formerly independent principalities tumbled into the noble class. By 1500, this class consisted of several layers from the prince's aristocratic Moscow boyar advisers down to the poorest provincial nobles. Beneath the nobles were the various urban classes, which we examine in more detail in the next era, when they become more differentiated. Of lower status were the vast mass of peasants. A final category was that of slaves, who composed perhaps 10 percent of the population by 1533.[3]

By then Russian slavery had much in common with that practiced in other times and places, but it differed in two key ways from later North American slavery. The great majority of slaves were of the same nationality (Russian) as their owners, and most became slaves because they sold themselves into slavery. This late circumstance greatly surprised Herberstein, who noted that the Russians "enjoy slavery more than freedom."

Why did these "self-sellers" outnumber others, such as those who inherited slave status and some war captives who also became slaves? Most of those who sold themselves were at the bottom of society and saw no better option available. By the fifteenth century, the Orthodox Church could not, or would not, provide all the relief necessary. And there was no other agency to serve society's "down-and-outs." Slavery was thus a form of welfare, providing food, shelter, and security in exchange for a loss of freedom.

As might be expected, more people put themselves up for sale during hard or catastrophic times such as winters, famines, or when widowed or abandoned by a husband. Although most of these self-sellers seem to have been lower-class people without available skills—for example, beggars, urban day workers, and landless peasants—this was not always the case. Occasionally, others who could not find or accept their niche in "free" society also sold themselves into slavery.

Most slaves, perhaps two-thirds, were males. Primarily this was because women were much less valued as slaves. Many slaveowners owned only a handful of slaves, often only one, and men could provide more of the functions they wished slaves to perform than could women. In contrast to some other slave societies, slave women in Russia were not often purchased for sexual purposes, and their owners seem not to have been especially licentious in their dealings with them. Second, because girls were less valued than boys, poor parents who sold themselves into slavery were more likely to practice female (rather than male) infanticide. Many slaveowners had no desire to buy slaves with children, especially girls, because they were often seen as more of a liability than an asset.

The slaveowners themselves were primarily nobles in government service. Because owning slaves was a status symbol, the higher one climbed in Moscow

[3]For most of what follows on slavery, I am indebted to Richard Hellic, *Slavery in Russia, 1450–1725* (Chicago, 1982).

society, the more slaves one wanted. Much more rarely, merchants, members of the clergy, peasants, and even elite slaves themselves sometimes owned slaves.

Slaves were used for purposes ranging from working in the fields to serving as musicians or buffoons. Most often, they performed routine jobs in a slaveowner's household, such as being cooks, wet nurses, manservants, and all-purpose lackeys. Male slaves also sometimes went to battle with their masters, either to guard their supplies or to join in the fighting. A small class of elite male slaves acted as stewards, advocates in court trials, treasurers, state secretaries, and in a variety of other important, often supervisory, positions for princes and important nobles. Before the reign of Ivan III, most Russian princes relied chiefly on such slaves to help them administer their principalities.

The price paid for a slave, whether to him or her or to a previous owner, varied according to supply and demand and the sex, age, and skills of the slave. The average price was about what one would pay for a horse. Although this might not seem like much, it was more than many other societies paid, at least in comparison to horses. In Sudan, for example, around 1500, one could buy twelve slaves for the price of a horse. In the United States during the nineteenth century, slave prices varied greatly, but a price of several hundred dollars was common.

As in the Rus era, there were different types of arrangements made between a slave and a slaveowner. Some slaves were held only temporarily, for example, until a debt was paid. After leaving one slaveowner, either as a result of fulfilling one's temporary obligation or by fleeing, many former slaves sold themselves back into some form of new slavery. Once one got on the slavery treadmill, it was often habit-forming, breeding dependence.

Children could be sold apart from their parents, and when sold, or willed to an heir, children from the same family were often separated. Yet Muscovite slavery was "milder" than many other slave systems. Most slaveowners did not sell their slaves, and husbands and wives were not separated when sold or willed. The relative mildness of Russian slavery was due primarily to (1) most of the slaves working in the home, occasionally in important positions; (2) the desire of slaveowners to keep them contented enough not to flee; and (3) the Orthodox and Russian status of most slaves—even though the Orthodox Church did not condemn slavery, it encouraged humane treatment.

WOMEN AND FAMILY LIFE

Although no woman in this period achieved the prominence of Princess Olga who ruled in Kiev after the death of her husband Igor, many women in ruling families did exercise considerable political power and influence. The wills of many of the grand princes of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries demonstrate not only that they bequeathed the largest share of their realm to their oldest son (see Chapter 6), but that they also willed some portions to their widows and instructed their sons to obey them, especially regarding any redistribution of territorial holdings. On the territories bequeathed to them, the royal widows often possessed not only economic but judicial authority. A few passages from the second will of Dmitri Donskoi indicate the pattern.

> And in those volosts, *slobodas* [settlements], and villages that . . . I have given to my princess, now if any peasants should complain against the volost administrators, my princess shall decide the cases of these people . . . You, my children, heed your mother [Evdokia] in all things, and do not go against her will in anything.[4]

According to Pushkareva, Evdokia was a pious woman who, both before and after Dmitri's death, contributed much money for constructing churches. Her daughter-in-law Sophia was politically more ambitious than Evdokia. As Vasili I's wife and mother of Vasili II, only ten years old when he inherited the throne, this Lithuanian-born princess who lived into her eighties helped consolidate her family's power.

Occasionally medieval sources mention the actions of very forceful or influential non-royal women such as the fifteenth-century Novgorod widow Marfa Boretskaia. She became one of the largest landholders in the Novgorodian realm and the mother of a leading opponent of Ivan III's successful attempt to dominate Novgorod, an opposition that led to his execution. Marfa's role in opposing Ivan III is less clear, but one contemporary source, perhaps falsely, listed her as a chief conspirator. Regardless, however, Ivan's government exiled her and confiscated her property.

As the power of Orthodoxy grew in this era, so too did its influence on women. The most popular devotional readings for the laity were contained in the fourteenth-century collection *The Emerald*. Like earlier Rus writings, it reflected an Orthodox ambivalence toward women, although now more wary than ever. It advised wives to "obey your husbands in silence" and told husbands: "It is better to suffer from fever than to be mastered by a bad wife."[5]

Part of this wariness of women stemmed from their sexuality. The church acted vigorously to keep even married sex within narrow limits, prohibiting it on many fast days and at least discouraging it on others. It also forbade any sexual position but one—the man on top. Basically the church looked upon sexual activity, even within marriage, as impure. Even though giving birth to children was thought to be in keeping with God's will, the act of childbirth itself—usually carried out in a bathhouse, away from all men—was also regarded as impure. Little wonder that Russians, as Eve Levin points out, were among the medieval people that believed Jesus was delivered through Mary's ear and not her vagina.

To insure compliance to church views, priests relied on detailed and personal questions, which they asked in confessions; on penances, often of a public nature; and on ecclesiastical courts. As Levin has observed, however, we should not think that the church's sexual strictness was always resented in this pre-birth-control era, especially by women, who gained from it more than they lost.

The church's attitude toward sex also partly explains its willingness to allow a woman to seek a divorce because of certain sins of her husband. If he forced her to have sex or (after the mid-fifteenth century) if he was guilty of adultery, she was permitted to petition for divorce, a right not often granted to Russian women.

[4]Quoted in Howes, pp. 216–17.

[5]Quoted in G. P. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, Vol. II, *The Middle Ages, The Thirteenth to the Fifteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), pp. 76–77.

The biggest change in women's lives was only indirectly influenced by Orthodoxy. Herberstein noticed it in the early sixteenth century. The Muscovites, he said, "consider no woman virtuous unless she live shut up at home, and be so closely guarded, that she go out nowhere. They give a woman, I say, little credit for modesty, if she be seen by strangers or people out of doors." He goes on to say that women are "very seldom admitted into the churches, and still less frequently to friendly meetings, unless they be very old and free from all suspicion." These remarks apply specifically to upper-class Muscovite women, who now often lived in separate rooms, usually high up or in an isolated quarter. Historians have labeled their quarters the *terem*. These women also usually ate separately from the men, and their servants were female.

Exactly why and when these exclusionary practices began no one knows. Some historians have attributed it to the Mongols' influence, but Halperin, Ostrowski, and others deny that it was due to them. It does not seem to have been the practice in Novgorod before the loss of its independence, and, in fact, noble women there seem to have even gained a few rights. It was most likely due to an increased concern by Muscovite nobles with controlling the sexual lives of their wives and daughters, thereby avoiding any stains on family honor and facilitating politically advantageous marriages.

Upper-class marriages were arranged by the parents. The prospective groom generally was kept away from his future wife until the wedding or at least until he agreed to strong penalties should he change his mind once he was allowed to meet with her. Herberstein says that otherwise if the man tried to catch sight of the young woman, he was usually told: "Learn what she is from others who have known her." The parents of the young woman also arranged for her dowry, which often included such items such as horses, cattle, slaves, weapons, and dresses.

Even though Moscow's noblewomen were isolated, this did not mean they were without power. As human links between different family clans, as wives and mothers, and as friends and acquaintances of other wives and mothers, they no doubt often influenced their husbands and sons.

The military service obligations of most nobles affected marriage and married life in a number of ways. Wars reduced the eligible bachelors and increased widowhood, and military duties also meant that husbands were often gone from home. Wives of cavalrymen, especially in the provinces, must have often played an important part in running the family estate and been less secluded than the Moscow women observed by Herberstein.

As for family life, young couples did not usually live with either set of parents, and parents had absolute powers over their minor children. They could even sell them into slavery if they wished, although this rarely occurred. A young man was considered an adult at fifteen, also the age for nobles to register for military service.

GROWTH OF THE LAW

By comparing the expanded *Pravda* code of the late Rus period with late fourteenth-century and fifteenth-century charters and law codes from Novgorod,

Pskov, and Moscow, we see that the judicial and police powers of governments increased, as did the courts and judicial officials. And courts resorted to more written materials and to harsher methods of investigation and punishment.

Judicial expansion was partly due to the more complex social relations that developed in urban areas such as Novgorod, Pskov, and Moscow. It also resulted from the expansion of Moscow and, despite some continuing tolerance of judicial variations for differing groups and regions, Moscow's exercise of more jurisdiction over newly acquired areas. Also, the monetary interests of governments and officials in levying judicial fees and fines—and collecting bribes—had an effect on judicial expansion. The Orthodox Church also extended its jurisdiction into new regions and worked closely with governments to strengthen Christianity and government order in rural and newly conquered areas.

By the time of Ivan III's 1497 law code (the *Sudebnik*), bailiffs sometimes used torture on suspects during pretrial investigations. By then, law codes prescribed such punishments as branding, flogging, selling individuals into slavery, and death. The 1497 *Sudebnik* mandated capital punishment for robbery, murder, arson, criminal slander, church theft, and certain recidivist crimes such as second-offense theft.

Although the seeking of Divine guidance via iron and water ordeals probably declined, the use of ordeal by battle (a duel) seems to have increased. In Pskov, it could be used, under certain circumstances, to settle land disputes. Sometimes a witness's allegations could be settled by having the defendant and the witness fight a duel. On such occasions, if the defendant were an old man, youth, cripple, priest, or monk, he could hire a substitute to fight the duel for him, but the witness had no like right. Although women in some cases were also allowed to hire substitutes, the Pskov law stipulated that two women could be ordered to fight a duel and neither allowed a substitute.

The hiring of substitutes by clergy occurred despite the church's general disapproval of judicial duels, with or without substitutes. The fact that lower-level clergy could themselves be subject to judicial duels reveals further the growth of governmental jurisdiction. Herberstein observed that priests charged with theft and drunkeness were dealt with in secular, not church, courts. He also saw priests publicly flogged in Moscow.

As to why the law became harsher, several hypotheses have been put forward. Some historians have attributed it to foreign influence, Mongol and Western. Others, like Daniel Kaiser, see it stemming more from internal developments. It probably resulted from both. Much blood, however, was also shed during the Rus era. Death from a vengeful relative, still allowed in the late Rus period, might not be state-inflicted capital punishment but no less blood flowed. To a large extent, harsher government punishments simply reflected state expansion as Moscow extended its judicial reach.

RELIGION

The 300 years following the Mongol invasion was an age of great expansion for the Orthodox Church. But it began slowly. At first, there was the spiritual

comfort that religion offered in a time of woe. Within decades after the intitial invasion, favorable Mongol policies toward the church assisted its growth. In exchange for prayers for the khan's health and refraining from political opposition, the church was exempted from paying taxes. Mongol tolerance even went so far as to allow the establishment of a bishopric in Sarai, the capital of the Golden Horde.

It was not until a century after the Mongol's conquest, however, that Russian monasticism began its rapid growth. The central figure in this spiritual outburst was St. Sergius of Radonezh (d. 1392), who emphasized humility and love of all God's creation. He founded what was to become the famous Holy Trinity–St. Sergius Monastery, located a little less than fifty miles from Moscow. As we have seen, the Muscovite grand princes did all they could to promote the cult of St. Sergius and identify their own regime with his holy life.

Following St. Sergius's example, others founded additional monasteries. Among the most notable were the Andronikov and Chudov monasteries in Moscow and that of St. Cyril at Beloozero (White Lake) and the Solovetskii on the White Sea. Kliuchevsky has estimated that some 250 monasteries and convents were founded from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries. They grew continually more prosperous. By 1533, they operated vast agricultural lands—perhaps one-third of the state's populated land—and some of their agricultural and other enterprises were among the best run in the country. Because many cloisters employed peasants and were located in the countryside, unlike in earlier Rus times, Christianity now made more headway among rural people still strongly influenced by pagan beliefs.

Some monks, such as the fourteenth-century Stephen of Perm, went beyond the ethnic Russians to win other peoples over to Christianity. Going out to the Komi (or Permians), just west of the northern Urals, St. Stephen converted many of them. To further his work, he devised a Komi alphabet and translated religious works into the Komi tongue. In this and other cases, the fanning out of Russian monasteries contributed to Great Russian colonizing efforts.

A further monastic contribution was in introducing the mystical Hesychast movement into Russia. Hesychasm was stimulated by a cultural-religious renaissance that was then occurring in Byzantine and South Slavic lands. As a result of Russian-Byzantine religious ties and the Turkish conquest of part of the Balkans, many Byzantine and South Slav monks and other clergy came to Russian lands in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The Hesychasm some of them promoted had been practiced in Byzantine and Balkan monasteries, especially Greece's famous Mt. Athos, and aimed at enabling an individual to attain oneness with God, the Divine Light. To accomplish this, various techniques were recommended, including the control of one's breathing and the repetition of the Jesus Prayer—"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me."

An outstanding monk whose writing reflect the Hesychast influence was Nil Sorsky (1433–1508). Its impact on him was apparently strengthened by his visit to Mt. Athos in Greece. After returning to the St. Cyril Monastery, he later established his own hermitage nearby. There he taught monks to emphasize mystical union with God. In an age of increasing monastic wealth, often willed to the monasteries by laymen, he espoused a simple life. He quoted St. John Chrysostom's words,

saying that "if a man wishes to donate sacred vessels or other funishings to a church, tell him to give them to the poor."[6]

Some historians have claimed that Nil opposed any monastic landholding and led a group of "non-possessors" against "possessors," led by abbot Joseph of Volokolamsk Monastery, who advocated ample monastic possessions in order to help monks perform God's work on earth. More recent scholarship, however, has called into question the reliabilty of sources concerning this so-called dispute. On several other matters affecting Joseph, however, sources are reliable enough to indicate that he did attack heretics and write about a ruler's authority—allowing for disobedience only when a ruler violated God's law.

A major heresy appeared already a century before Joseph's time. In 1375, some *Strigolniki* were thrown into Novgorod's Volkhov River. The justification given for this act, in the sixteenth-century *Nikonian Chronicle*, was an almost literal interpretation of the words of Jesus (Matthew 18:6): "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it were better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." The crime of the *Strigolniki* was their criticism of several church practices, including simony—the buying and selling of church offices. They might have even preached against the existence of a priesthood and at least several sacraments, including the Eucharist and confession. They certainly inveighed against the drinking habits of priests.

In the 1480s, another heresy was discovered, only later labeled that of the "Judaizers." Including some clergy as well as lay persons, some of its members were highly cultured and for a while gained support of important individuals such as Ivan III's daughter-in-law Elena. Although Joseph of Volokolamsk accused them of preaching Judaism and denying the Trinity, they apparently started out attacking abuses such as simony. However they began, they eventually rejected at least the church hierarchy, monasticism, and icon veneration.

Both these heresies were strongest in Novgorod, although a Judaizer party also eventually appeared in Moscow. Both resembled some Western heresies and were dealt with as in the West. In fact, one of Joseph of Volokolamsk's chief allies against the Judaizers appealed to Ivan III to look to the Spanish Inquisition to see how heretics should be treated. After a church council in 1504, Ivan III had several Judaizers burned at the stake.

A final religious phenomenon worth noting is the Russian appreciation of the humble "fool in Christ." Such an individual acted in ways that seemed foolish or crazy to worldly people. Instead of answering a question, for example, he might just echo it back. Or he might make statements that seemed nonsensical. He would usually dress in a simple, impoverished manner, often barefoot, even in the cold Russian winters. As depicted in hagiography, however, the holy fool was aware of a higher wisdom, often proved by the realization of his prophecies.

The scriptural justification for such behavior was several passages of Saint Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, for example: "If any man thinketh that he is wise among you in this world, let him become a fool, that he may become wise.

[6]G. P. Fedotov, ed., *A Treasury of Russian Spirituality* (New York, 1965), p. 93.

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" (1 Cor. 3:18–19). Although holy fools existed in Byzantium, they were most prominent in Russia, especially from the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries.

Although the veneration of saints, including some holy fools, was affected by government policies, the desires of the common people also helped shape this veneration. As one example of this, Levin points to the transformation of St. Paraskeva Piatnitsa from a saint venerated by merchants to a special patroness of women and their work (see Fig. 4.2).

LITERATURE AND ART

Like so many other areas of Russian life, literature and art suffered from the Mongol invasion. Only beginning in the fourteenth century do we see much renewed creativity. By the end of that century and thereafter, we also increasingly see the cultural imprint of Moscow.

Literature and Ideas

As in the Rus era, so too in the period ending in 1533, many Byzantine and South Slavic translations continued to appear. So also did original works such as chronicles, religious writings, and written and oral secular literature.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, cities such as Novgorod, Tver, and Rostov produced their own chronicles. In the fifteenth century, Ivan III oversaw the compilation of chronicle accounts based on many previous chronicles but touched up to glorify Moscow and its perception of the past.

The chief surviving religious works of the era are the lives of Russian saints. They include lives of saints as different as St. Sergius, St. Dmitri Donskoi, and St. Mikhail, a Fool in Christ. The most accomplished hagiographer was the monk Epiphanius the Wise (d. 1422), who wrote of both St. Sergius and St. Stephen of Perm. Epiphanius was strongly influenced by Hesychasm. This form of mysticism led him as well as many other hagiographers influenced by the Byzantine-South Slavic cultural revival to use an ornate, wordy type of prose, referred to as word-weaving. It sought to uplift and stir readers to a better understanding of the greatness and beauty of a saint's life. As with many hagiographers, Epiphanius was not primarily concerned with factual biographical accuracy. Although his wordiness is not as appreciated today, he was a skilled and poetic writer whose ornate style influenced religious and historical writings for two centuries.

Among secular works, the period is especially rich in military tales. One of the most famous is *Zadonshchina* (see excerpt in Chapter 6). In many ways this tale of Dmitri Donskoi's 1380 victory calls to mind *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* and in some ways imitated it. *Zadonshchina* is marked by similar poetic devices and images and is written in a similar rhythmic prose. Yet it adheres more to the central narrative and has less poetic digressions than does the Igor tale. Despite its undeniable literary merit, however, most critics agree that it is inferior to the Igor epic.

FIGURE 7.1. Transfiguration of the Savior (Spasskii) Cathedral at the Andronikov Monastery, Moscow, early fifteenth century.

Not only the style, but also the content of *Zadonshchina* is of interest. The author speaks frequently of the "Russian land," of the "Christian faith," of the "infidel Tatars." His message is clear: The "glorious city of Moscow" and its prince Dmitri Donskoi have come forward to unite and lead Christian Russia against its enemies.

In reworked chronicles, *Zadonshchina*, and other works we often see Moscow's ideological stamp or glorification. One example is the rewritten life of the Novgorodian Holy Fool Mikhail, who is made to espouse strong pro-Muscovite views.

Western literature and its Humanist roots had little impact on Russia during this era. We encounter no Russian love sonnets like those of Petrarch, no ribald stories like those of Boccaccio. This was not completely due to ignorance of Western ways and ideas. Ivan III's second wife, Sophia Paleologue, had been educated in Italy, and following her, Italian architects, engineers, and craftsmen appeared in Moscow.

The monk Maxim the Greek (c. 1480–1556) came to Russia in 1518 and spent the rest of his life there. Earlier he had lived and studied in Italy and was thoroughly familiar with the Italian Humanist movement. Yet, despite his considerable influence, those he most affected lost out in the political and ideological battles of the day. They included some followers of Nil Sorsky and Prince Andrei Kurbsky, who

FIGURE 7.2. Trinity Cathedral at the St. Sergius Monastery, Sergiev Posad, 1422.

would become prominent before falling out with Ivan IV. Maxim himself was condemned at church councils in 1525 and 1531. Some of the offenses he was charged with were criticizing Russian Church books, treasonous pro-Turkish behavior, and the use of sorcery. He spent many of his remaining years in monastic incarceration.

Although possessing much knowledge, Maxim was not a man of secularist sympathies. He admired more Florence's Neoplatonist philosophers and its religious reformer and zealot, Savonarola, than he did Petrarch and Boccaccio. Maxim's ultimate fate, however, indicates that Muscovy's tolerance of foreign ideas, whether religious or secular, was quite limited. The close bond between the Muscovite ruler and conservative theologians was especially important in helping to turn back new ideas just when Russia once again came into increasing contact with the West.

Art and Architecture

In art and architecture, despite some notable works in areas like Novgorod and Pskov, it was again the Moscow region that proved prominent. Its stone and brick constructions owed much to both earlier wooden traditions and borrowings from other regions. Its early masonry architecture is best seen in two

FIGURE 7.3. Church of the Holy Spirit at the St. Sergius Monastery, Sergiev Posad, 1476.

FIGURE 7.4. Assumption (or Dormition) Cathedral, Moscow Kremlin, 1475–1479.

FIGURE 7.5. Cathedral of the Annunciation, Moscow Kremlin, 1484–1489.

early fifteenth-century churches: the Transfiguration of the Savior (Spasskii) Cathedral at the Andronikov Monastery and the Trinity Cathedral at the St. Sergius Monastery. The superimposed arches of the former are especially notable. Such arches are called *kokoshniki* because of their similarity to the *kokoshnik*, a Russian woman's arched headdress. Their first appearance in masonry architecture had been in the Novgorod-Pskov region.

In 1476, Moscow brought Pskov builders to the St. Sergius Monastery, where they built a work combining some of the best Pskov architectural traditions with those of Moscow. This was the Church of the Holy Spirit. Again one notes the many *kokoshniki*. Also of interest is the unusual belfry at the base of the drum, which served a secondary purpose as a watchtower.

The refurbished Kremlin overlooking the Moscow River more than anything clearly symbolized Moscow's dominance and its political-religious significance. The work on it was carried out primarily under Ivan III.

On Cathedral Square, in the heart of the Kremlin, several new churches were constructed to take the place of earlier and smaller ones. The first of these was the Assumption (or Dormition) Cathedral. Although built by the Italian Aristotele Fioravanti (1420–1485?), Ivan wished it to look Russian and therefore instructed Fioravanti to visit Vladimir. While still reflecting some aspects of Fioravanti's Italian background, the new cathedral thus resembled the finest church

FIGURE 7.6. Palace of Facets, Moscow Kremlin, 1487–1491.

architecture of twelfth-century Vladimir, especially the original look of that city's Assumption Cathedral. The new Kremlin cathedral was a harmonious, simple, yet imposing, five-domed structure that was to serve as the coronation church of tsars for three and a half centuries.

Next came the Cathedral of the Annunciation and the smaller Church of the Deposition of the Robe. Both were built by Pskov craftsmen, beginning in 1484. The Annunciation displayed again the *kokoshniki* but this time below three domes—more domes were added later. This cathedral served subsequent tsars for weddings and baptisms. The smaller Deposition Church became the chapel of the metropolitan and later of the Russian patriarch.

In 1487, two Italian architects supervised the building of the Italian-looking Palace of Facets, which was subsequently used for Kremlin court receptions, ceremonies, and banquets. Beginning in 1485, Italian architects also oversaw the replacement of the white stone Kremlin walls built by Dmitri Donskoi with the great Kremlin brick walls and towers that still stand today.

The final Kremlin cathedral that Ivan planned, but did not live to see completed, was that of the Archangel Michael. It was designed by another Italian and finished under Vasili III. Although it certainly looks Russian with its five cupolas, an Italian quality is reflected in its exterior decorations and two-story facades. The bodies of tsars prior to Peter the Great are interred in this last cathedral. Before his own death, Vasili III began work on the Ivan the Great Bell Tower but did not live to see its completion (see also Fig. 6.2 for the Church of the Ascension at Kolomenskoe, begun and completed at the end of Vasili III's reign).

Thus, by 1533, the Kremlin walls and cathedrals, despite some later

FIGURE 7.7. Cathedral of the Archangel Michael, Moscow Kremlin, 1505–1508.

modifications, looked much as they do today. It does not require much imagination to realize how dazzled some Russian from the provinces would be upon first seeing the Kremlin and its beautiful cathedral cupolas extending high above its walls.

Upon entering the cathedrals, a provincial would be further awed by their beautiful mosaics, frescoes, and icons—some, including works of Andrei Rublev (c. 1370–1430), preserved from the earlier Kremlin churches.

In an era that produced Russia's greatest icons, Rublev was that art's greatest practitioner. Even before him, other icon painters from Novgorod to Suzdalia were painting notable works. Novgorodian icons, such as those of the Prophet Elijah and St. George, are justly famous for their simplicity, vigor, and bright red and gold colors. By Rublev's time, and partly as a result of his efforts, Russian churches were also developing a modified iconostasis—a screen of icons that divides the sanctuary of an Orthodox Church from the rest of its interior. The new iconostases that emerged were higher and contained more rows of icons that had been traditional in the Orthodox world.

Rublev was a monk who first came to St. Sergius Monastery while its founder was still alive and went on to spend many years at the Andronikov Monastery, where he was buried. As a young man, Rublev worked with Theophanes the Greek, one of the many religious-cultural figures who came to Russia in this

period from the Byzantine Empire or South Slavic lands. Although little of Theophanes's art has survived except for some Novgorodian frescos, he was by all accounts the greatest painter of his generation and had a major impact on younger painters like Rublev.

Rublev's most famous icon is one he painted for the Holy Trinity Church at St. Sergius Monastery. It is called the *Trinity*, and at the center of it are three Old Testament angels seated around a cup on a table. In the biblical account, they had come to tell Sarah that she was to have a child despite her old age. In Rublev's icon, as in earlier icons, the three angels symbolize the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The icon displays the luminosity, harmony, and deep spiritual serenity that characterize Rublev's great works.

Along with written accounts of saints such as Sergius and churches such as the Kremlin's three cathedrals, Rublev's icons help capture the best of early Muscovy's religious spirit. The increasing political authoritarianism of Moscow, the burning of several Judaizers, and the persecution of Maxim the Greek, however, all were indications that there was a less humane side to this new political-religious capital. This would become even clearer in the reign of the son of Vasili III, Ivan the Terrible.

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