

## RUSSIAN CULTURE – Postclassical Period

**Overview** The early Russians commercial, economic and political relations with their neighbors (the Finns, Balts, Iranian tribes, Byzantines and other Slavic tribes), together with their acceptance of Christianity in the 10<sup>th</sup> century created unique national culture by not blindly accepting foreign cultural customs, but adapting them to their own culture.

### VERBAL ARTS

#### Literature

**Beginning** The story of Russian literature begins in 988 - a date of great importance in Russian political and cultural history, when the ruler of Kievan Rus officially accepted Christianity and made it the new faith of his realm. Prior to this date there was no written literature in Rus, but with his conversion Prince Vladimir laid the foundation for what is now known as medieval Russian literature, although it would not attain its true form — on the basis of the literature which survived the destruction of the Mongol invasions - for a number of years thereafter. But the eastern Slavs received an alphabet created by Cyril and Methodius, and also became heirs to the extensive Byzantine cultural heritage which had already been and would later be translated from the Greek.

**Religious literature:** The needs of the church were clearly predominant in the foreign works which were translated during this period: almost all were from Greek originals. All literary activity was conducted by churchmen, so the works of this period were either clearly religious in content or else displayed a strong religious influence. The literature produced in Kievan Rus' consisted of chronicles, homiletic works, and saints' biographies.

Written in 1056-1057, the *Ostromirovo evangeliye* (*The Ostromir Gospel*) is the oldest Russian manuscript which can be securely dated. Hilarion's *Slovo o zakone i blagodati* (*Sermon on Law and Grace*) is another notable work of Old Russian literature.

**Hagiography (biography of the saints):** Hagiography was the most common genre of Old Russian literature, with a number of works from the earliest period. Among these surviving works are a chronicle and two hagiographies of Boris and Gleb, the first Russian saints. The most important hagiography of this period is the *Life of Saint Sergius of Radonezh* (*Zhitie Sergia Radonezhskogo*) written by Epifany Premudry.

**Historical works:** The most important secular work written in the period between the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century is the *Primary Chronicle* (*Povest' vremennyh let*) written by Nestor in the Pecherskiy Monastery in Kiev sometime in the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and covers the history of Russia between the years 1040-1118. The *Chronicle* begins with the genealogy of the Slavs.

**Epic** *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*, an epic poem about Prince Igor's raid against the Polovtsy (Kipchak), his capture, and his escape is one of the masterpieces of Old Russian literature. The Campaign was written sometime between 1185 and 1187 and was re-discovered in 1795 by Count Musin Pushkin. However, the manuscript was destroyed in the Moscow fire of 1812. Fortunately, a copy has survived which had been made for Catherine II. A number of scholars have questioned the poem's authenticity, but the majority of experts now accept its authenticity. The destructive infighting among the Russian princes is the main topic of this work.

**14<sup>th</sup> Century** In the period between Vladimir's conversion and the Mongol invasions in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, Kiev was the cultural and political center of Rus, as well the capital and seat of the new Russian

church's metropolitan. It was not until the late 13<sup>th</sup> century that Kievan Rus was able to recover from the results of the Mongol invasion. The first areas to recover were Novgorod and Pskov, since they had not suffered from the raids of the Tatars. These cities, ruled by local assemblies, developed a unique culture. Leadership in the north-eastern lands was transferred from the Principality of Vladimir to Moscow in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, which would then fight for leadership against Tver for another century. Functioning as one of the border fortresses of north-eastern Russia, Moscow was a part of the Vladimir lands. By leaving Vladimir and settling in Moscow in 1324, Metropolitan Peter transferred the residence of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The late 14<sup>th</sup> century was marked by one of the most important events in Russian history - the first serious blow to the Golden Horde dealt by Dmitry Donskoy and his army in 1380. Reflecting these political conditions, the chronicles and saints' lives served the interests of different local powers. A series of works in assorted genres, known collectively as the Kulikovo cycle, celebrated the first Russian victory over the Tatars in 1380 under the leadership of Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich Donskoy. A less-accomplished imitation of the Igor Tale, the Zadonshchina glorifies Dmitry Donskoy.

The most important hagiography of this period is the *Life of Saint Sergius of Radonezh* written by Epifany Premudry.

Mid -15<sup>th</sup> century Russia was characterized by bloody internal conflicts for the Moscow seat of the Grand Prince. Ivan III only managed to unite the Russian lands around the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and ended Russia's subjugation to the Golden Horde after the Great standing on the Ugra River in 1480.

### **Discussion/Questions**

- 1- What do medieval Russian documents from the 11<sup>th</sup> century reveal about the literary genres used in this time?
- 2- How do the writings about saints' lives differ from modern biographical stories?

### **Reading**

- 1- Zenkovsky, S.A., *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, Meridian, 1974.
- 2- Mirsky, D.S., *A History of Russian Literature, From Its Beginnings to 1900*, Vintage Books Edition, 1958.

### **Language:**

Writing was not known in Pagan Rus' until it was introduced by Vladimir I in 988 during the Christianization process. It was the two brothers, Saints Konstantinos (Cyril) and Methodios, who spoke a Slavic language and were sent by the Emperor Michael III from Constantinople to Moravia in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century, who created the first alphabet, *Glagolitic*, for the Slavs when they were forced to move to the south of Bulgaria. There they developed the first liturgical alphabet, *Glagolitic*, and later this alphabet was developed into *Cyrillic* by their disciples.

The liturgical language of Old Church Slavonic, created in Bulgaria, was a South Slavonic language. Although it was mutually intelligible to all Slavic languages, including Old Russian, there were clear differences between them. Old Russian became the state language of the first Eastern Slavic state, the *Kievan State*, and had northern and southern dialectal divisions.

With the rise of the *Muscovite State*, a center with a northern dialectal base, and the gathering the southern dialectal speakers in the center, a new transitional dialectal group called *central* was created.

**Old Church Slavonic:** Old Church Slavonic is the oldest attested Slavic language used in Slavic manuscripts, which date from the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. At this early period, much of the writings' content was religious in nature, such as bible translations and saints' lives.

**Old Russian:** At the time of the emergence of writing among the Eastern Slavs, there was a single language called Old Russian, the oldest dialect of Russian, and the Proto language of the other East Slavic languages within the Slavonic branch of Indo-European. The oldest surviving documents date back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century. By the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the language of the Eastern Slavs had developed a number of distinctive features that distinguished it from them from other Slavic languages such as full vocalization (pleophony – polnoglasiye).

### Discussion/Questions

What are the historical and socio-cultural factors that have played a role in the evolution of the Russian language?

### Reading

- 1-Cubberley, Paul, *Russian: A Linguistic Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 12-51.
- 2-Worth, Deans S., "Language", *The Cambridge Companion Modern Russian Culture*, Edited by Nicholas Rzhevsky, 1998, pp.19-38.
- 3-Cubberley, Paul, *Russian: A Linguistic Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 12-51.
- 4- Worth, Deans S., "Language", *The Cambridge Companion Modern Russian Culture*, Edited by Nicholas Rzhevsky, 1998, pp.19-38.
- 5- Birnbaum, H., "Common Slavic in time and space", *Scando-Slavica*, 44:1, 1998 pp.131-143.

### **Script:**

Writing was not known to the Pagan Rus' and only came to Rus' in the wake of Vladimir I's Christianization process that began in 988. It was the two Slavic speaking Byzantine brothers and missionaries, Saints Konstantinos (Cyril) and Methodios, sent by the Emperor Michael III from Constantinople to Moravia in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century who devised the first alphabet, *Glazolitic*, for the Slavs. When Cyril and Methodios died, Methodios' successors were forced by the Catholic clergy to move to the south of Bulgaria, and Clement of Ochrid and Konstantine of Preslav continued to work on an alphabet, called *Cyrillic*, that was closely based on the Greek alphabet. Later on, the Cyrillic alphabet used by the Eastern Slavs was adapted to some changes in spoken language.

The first Cyrillic writing style was called *ustav* (uncial), characterized by sharp, geometric letters. *Semi-ustav* (half-uncial) distinguished by more roundish letters and the frequent use of ligatures, diacritics, and stress marks along with various abbreviations and contractions was the second type of writing which was developed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. *Cursive writing*, was used in the 15<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> centuries, was the third writing system and is characterized by letters partially linked to one another.

### Discussion/Questions

How did the life of early Russian's change after they began to use writing?

### Reading

Iliev, Ivan G., "Short History of the Cyrillic Alphabet", *International Journal of Russian Studies (IJORS)*, Issue No. 2 (2013/2), pp. 221-285.

### **Folklore:**

**Christianity:** With the conversion to Christianity in the 10<sup>th</sup> century in the reign of Vladimir I, many pagan practices and beliefs continued to survive, but in new forms that were acceptable to the Orthodox Church. According to the Primary Chronicle, Vladimir I had constructed a shrine to the pagan gods, but ordered the images of the gods destroyed the day before he was baptized. The images may have been destroyed, but the gods they had represented often reappeared in the guise of Christian saints. In a notable example,

Perun's thunder-making powers were transferred to the prophet Elijah. The forms of magic and divination previously practiced by pagan sorcerers was now sometimes practiced by the lower clergy.

**Dvoeverie (dual faith-ditheism):** The merging of pre-Christian beliefs and rituals with Christian ones is frequently labelled 'dual faith'. The pagan thunder-god Perun, equated with Thor by the Varangians, was identified with the biblical prophet Elijah, and Veles, god of wealth and cattle, became Saint Blasius. Pagan traditions were especially prevalent in rural communities and the borderlands. Many peasants merged Christian beliefs and practices with the older, local pagan practices. This dual faith meant that many Russians were publicly and overtly Orthodox, but still held to the old ways in the privacy of their homes.

**Folktales:** Although Christianity rapidly spread and became a part of the everyday life following Vladimir I's conversion in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, old folktales remained popular, particularly among the peasantry. The Orthodox clergy, on the other hand, opposed the survival of folklore in any form due to the fact that many of these traditions contained elements of pre-Christian beliefs, concepts, practices and ways of thought. Among these were tales of daily life before Christianity, animal tales, magic, initiation rites, ancestor worship, totemic beliefs, and human sacrifice.

Russian folklore has its roots in ancient pagan Slavic beliefs, many of which have been preserved in Russian folktales. The oldest epic poems (or songs) from the time of the Kievan state, called *bylina* (sg.), were most fully preserved in the Russian north, and in Karelia in particular.

**Byliny (Epic Songs):** Between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries a type of epic called *byliny* (pl.) emerged. *Byliny* were a type of short story, often in the form of a poem that was sung and accompanied, at times, by a type of string instrument called a *gusli*. Their topics varied from events in the Kievan state, nomadic groups, the deeds of Novgorod, and mythology. Three different groups played a role in the dissemination of *byliny*: travelling performers, *skomorokhi*; peasant performers, *skaziteli*; and itinerant pilgrims, *kaliki perekhozhie*. Although *byliny* were initially recited by professional bards in the courts of the nobility, over time they came to be sung or recited by peasant storytellers in rural areas. The theme of many Russian *byliny* is some variant of the hero's quest; for some reason the hero, *bogatyr*, leaves his home, is given a task or tasks to accomplish, accomplishes his task or tasks in spite of numerous obstacles, and, in the end, becomes wealthy or gains the hand of a beautiful maiden. Popular heroes in many *byliny* are Ilya Muromets, Alyosha Popovich, Sadko, and Dobrynya Nikitich. Frequently encountered villains include Vasilisa the Beautiful, Ivan the Fool, Grandfather Frost, Baba Yaga, the Firebird, the immortal Kashchey, etc.

**Epic Poetry:** The distinguishing characteristic of epic poetry is heroic content. The heroes of epic poetry strive for their people, not for petty, personal interests. These heroes must use all of their abilities to overcome the difficulties in their path and be willing to even sacrifice themselves to attain their goals, but in epic poetry this is their path to success. One of the most famous examples of Russian epic poetry is *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* (*Slovo o polku Igoreve*). This anonymous work, written in Old Russian, is set in the context of the feudal conflicts 12<sup>th</sup> century Russia and describes the unsuccessful campaign led by Prince Igor against the Cumans in 1185. The poem describes Igor's defeat, escape from captivity and eventual return to his people and serves as a warning to other Rus' princes on the need for unity in the face of continuing threats from Turkic tribes.

### Discussion/Questions

- 1-Why couldn't Christian Russians entirely eliminate all traces of Paganism in their culture?
- 2-Talk about the origin of Byliny and how were they spread.

### Reading

- 1-Propp, Vladimir, *Theory and History of Folklore, Heroic Poetry*, Translated by Ariadna Y. Martin and Richard R. Martin, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997, Ch. III, pp. 149-165.
- 2-Oinas, F.J., "The Problem of the Aristocratic Origin of Russian Byliny", *Slavic Review*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Sep., 1971), pp. 513-522

## VISUAL ARTS

### Painting:

**Icon Painting:** Although Byzantine religious icons were brought to Russia after Vladimir I's conversion to Christianity, Russian artists did slavishly follow Byzantine styles of icon painting. Instead, Russian icon painters began to create their own original style by modifying Byzantine models and to form distinctive schools of icon painting.

**Kievan School (10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>c):** As a newly imported art form icons produced in the early Kievan period were still very close to the Byzantine tradition in style. However, many Kievan School icons differed from Byzantine icons in their use of dark, somber colors and in their comparatively large size, a result of being painted on wood that had been hand-cut with an axe.

**Vladimir-Suzdal School (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>c):** During the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Kiev was overshadowed as a center of icon production by Vladimir and Suzdal. Icons painted here were distinctive for their harmonious blend of silvery-blue, grayish-purple and pinkish-green colors and use of motifs derived from folk art, while preserving the spirit of Kievan art.

**Novgorod School (12<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>c):** Novgorod became the center of Russian icon painting following the fall of Kiev. Frescoes produced here displayed a distinctive Russian style while still retaining clear Byzantine influence. A pivotal figure in the development of both the Novgorod and Moscow schools Theophanes the Greek (Feofan Grek) came to Russia from Byzantium in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. Theophanes, after moving to Moscow, began to work with Andrei Rublev of the Moscow School. Their works are characterized energetic drawing, the contrast of large shapes, the use of warm golds and bright yellows, and a simple, economic yet precise style.

**Pskov School (13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>c):** In contrast to icons from Novgorod, Pskov icons initially displayed greater poetic inspiration, even if less sophisticated in their execution. Over time, Pskov icons adopted some features of the Novgorod style. In particular, Pskov painters adopted the strong outlines of Novgorod painting as well as certain certain topics. Early Pskov icons are characterized by their intense colors, which contrast with the subdued palette of Kievan icons. In addition, what the figures in Pskov icons lack in elegance of proportion is more than compensated for by dynamic nature of their composition. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Pskov school showed clear influence from Western artistic traditions, leading to the charge that Pskov's icon painters were spreading "Latin heresies".

**Yaroslavl School (13<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>c):** Among the pioneers in incorporating landscapes into their paintings, fresco painters from the Yaroslavl School used scenes of daily Russian life as the setting for traditional biblical stories.

The emergence of both new forms of religious piety and new styles in icon painting is the combined result of several factors. Among these are a noticeable shift towards individual rather than communal forms of religious devotion, the rapid erosion of traditional icon painting styles, and the replacement of traditional icons with official religious painting; all of these developments took place in an intellectual milieu where Renaissance and Western ideas had tremendous influence in the Russian court.

### Discussion/Questions

1-Icons had long served in Orthodox practice as devotional aids that portrayed sacred figures, and whose familiar images were associated with the concept of "legitimacy". Can the political posters that appeared during the Bolshevik revolution be regarded as using themes and elements inspired by Russian Orthodox iconography, such as lighting etc., to legitimize both the revolution and its leaders, despite the new state's avowed atheism?

2-Talk about the development of iconography in Russia. Why did Russians adopt the style of Andrey Rublev as traditional Russian art?

### Reading

Bowlit, John, E., "Art", *The Cambridge Companion to Russian Modern Culture*, Edited by Nicholas Ryzhevsky, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 205-235.

### **Sculpture**

Due to Orthodox Church's ban on statuary, there are almost no examples of large-scale sculpture from this period. However, miniature sculpture was not included in this ban and was highly developed. Scenes from the Gospels and representations of saints with backgrounds of hills, trees and buildings were created by Russian artists using figures that were generally less than 1 ½ inches high.

### Discussion/Question

In the early history of Russia the Orthodox Church banned statuary. Why did the Church accept icons as acceptable devotional objects, but not sculpture, unlike Roman Catholic Church which recognized sculpture's iconographic role?

### Reading

Rice, Tamara Talbot, *A Concise History of Russian Art*, Frederick A. Praeger Publisher, 1967, pp.189-213.

### **Architecture**

#### **POSTCLASSICAL PERIOD**

**Kievan Russian Architecture:** Kievan architecture can be classified as wooden or stone structures. After the adoption of Christianity in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the first examples of monumental church architecture in Kiev appeared during the reign of three Russian princes: St. Vladimir (Church of the Assumption of the Virgin-Destinnaya Tserkov), Yaroslav the Wise (Cathedral of St. Sophia) and Izyaslav (Monastery of the Caves–Kievo-Pecherskaya Lavra). In the early period, Kievan architecture was under the strong influence of Byzantine architecture. However, from the beginning it also incorporated such Russian features as the preference for multiple cupolas, and, especially in the north, thick walls, small windows, and steep roofs to withstand the inclement weather as seen in the Cathedral of St. Sofia in Novgorod. The ancient Russian Chronicles also contain information about wooden churches built completely without nails, using only an axe.

**Cave Structures:** Early cave structures were used by hermit monks to hide from persecution, and built to provide parishioners shelter against enemy attacks. Kyiv-Pechersky Lavra, Zverinetsky and Anthony's Caves of the Trinity-St. Elias Monastery are well-known Kievan cave structures. The other most notable examples of the cave structures are Svyato-Spassky Cave Church (12<sup>th</sup> century) found near the small Russian village of Kostomarovo, Pechersky Ascension male Monastery (13<sup>th</sup> century) found in Nizhny Novgorod, Pskov-Pechersky cave-monastery (mid-15<sup>th</sup> century) found in Pskov oblast and Kalachevskaya Cave (late 18<sup>th</sup> century) used as an underground monastery found in the Voronezh region.

#### **Wooden structures:**

**Klet'** – Used as a summer residence, a *klet'* is simple quadrangular structure made of wood or stone. If the *klet'* has some form of heating it is referred to as an *izba*.

**Izba (Khata)** is a single-room heated log dwelling in the countryside that lacks a chimney. Instead, the windows are used as an outlet for smoke, and the windows were kept small to protect against the cold and humidity.

**Khoromy (mansion)** Formed by linking several groups of houses with roofed passageways (*seni*), the structures of a *khoromy* were all located in one yard.

Russian art and architecture prior to the acceptance of Christianity consists of idols from the pagan period made of wood and stone, and burial mounds. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century we see that wood craftsmanship held an important place. This can be seen from artifacts recovered in archaeological excavations, remains of temples, and surviving princes' palaces. It is known that during the time of Prince Vladimir Svyatoslavich the number of wooden structures and stone temples increased significantly, and in Kiev the Cathedral of St. Sophia with thirteen spires was also built. The interior of the cathedral is decorated with frescos and mosaics.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century we can see an increase in the number of structures made from stone. During this period in Novgorod the Cathedral of St. Sophia, and in Chernigov Spasskiy Cathedral were built. All of these cathedrals were adorned with rich frescos and mosaics. Also in this century Kiev became famous for its golden gates, made in the time of Yaroslav.

In the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and early years of the 13<sup>th</sup> century both churches and princes' palaces were made of stone. These structures display an architectural style that displays a synthesis of Byzantine elements combined with local traditions. This period witnessed the construction of the Georgiyevskiy Cathedral and the Spasskiy Church in Novgorod's lower sections, the Uspenskiy and Dmitriyevskiy Cathedrals in the city of Vladimir, a palace in Bogolyubovo, and nearby the Pokrov Church. These cathedrals were decorated with statues. In the late 13<sup>th</sup> – early 14<sup>th</sup> century, in the period of Ivan Kalita, four architectural works were erected in the Kremlin in Moscow: the Uspenskiy Cathedral, the Church of Ivan Lestvichnik, the Spas Church, and the Arkhangelskiy Cathedral. Of all the aforementioned structures, only a few have been preserved. Those in Moscow were restored in the time of Dmitriy Donskoy, and the Kremlin's walls were reinforced with white limestone. The Lazarus Church in Murom, a timber structure from the last years of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, is the first surviving example and holds an important place in Russian architecture.

The two schools of architecture opened in Novgorod and Pskov left their mark on Russian architecture in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Moscow School of Architecture, established on the basis of the architectural traditions of Pskov and Novgorod, later became one of the most important schools. In Zvenigorod, the Uspenskiy Cathedral, and the Troitse-Sergiyev and Savvino-Storozhevskiy Monasteries were built in the Moscow style. Aristotel Fioravanti, brought from Italy in 1479, finished the construction of the Uspenskiy Cathedral in the Kremlin. Dionisii, his two sons and his students gained fame from the frescos they painted in the Kremlin's Uspenskiy Cathedral and in the Pafnu'yevo-Borovskiy Monastery.

### **Discussion/Questions**

Discuss how Christianity effected the architecture in Russia. Do these structures show the influence Byzantine architecture?

### **Reading**

1-Brumfield, William Craft, *A History of Russian Architecture*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 9-64.  
2-Voyce, Arthur, *The Art and Architecture of Medieval Russia*, University of Oklahoma Press, Oklahoma, 1966, pp.87-127.

## **PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Dance**

Ancient Russian dance was religious in nature, a part of organized pagan rituals where dances were performed in honor of the gods. Although dance later lost its religious character, it remained a part of social events such as births, marriages, religious and national holidays, festivals, etc.

**Prisyadka (Cossack Dance):** Danced by men, this folk dance is characterized by kicks performed from deep squats.

**Barynya:** A fast, spirited folk dance characterized by squats and stomping, the barynya is accompanied by *chastushka* (folk song) and is improvised, rather than following a set pattern.

**Kamarinskaya:** This traditional folk dance is characterized by losing oneself in the dance, improvisation, and strong emotion.

**Chechotka:** Performed by a *bayan* (accordion) player wearing *lapti* (shoes made of birch bark fiber), the chechotka is a traditional Russian form of tap dance.

**Mazurka:** Of Polish origin, the mazurka was popular at balls in the time of the Russian Empire. It was danced by couples, often four or eight, and involved heel clicks and stamps together with improvised moves.

**Pletionka (the Braid):** Although similar to a Greek chain dance, in the pletionka while the dancers in the chain perform the same basic steps, the lead will often break free of the other dancers and perform an improvisation.

**Troika:** Named after the traditional Russian sled pulled by three horses, this dance is performed by one man and two women.

**Trepak:** Characterized by prisiadka (kicking from a deep squat), this lively Cossack dance is generally performed by men.

**Yablochko:** Generally considered a sailor's dance, it is performed to accompaniment of *chastushka* folk songs.

### **Discussion/Questions**

- 1-How did Russian traditional folk dances lose its religious character?
- 2-Why is folklore important in the contemporary world?

### **Reading**

Prokhorov, Vladimir, *Russian Folk Songs: Musical Genres and History*, The Scarecrow Press Inc., London, 2002, pp.60-65.

### **Music**

When Prince Vladimir converted to Orthodox Christianity in 988 he ruled a land that had not yet become a sovereign state and whose culture was pagan in nature. As a result, the Church moved quickly to become the dominant cultural force in Kievan Rus'. However, Vladimir's decision to convert to Orthodoxy led to Russia's political isolation from its neighbors, and in order to prevent outside religious influences from entering Russia the Russian Church became isolationist. One area of culture in which the Church sought to assert its influence was music, both religious and secular.

**Early Liturgical Music** Like Orthodox Christianity itself, the music of the Russian Orthodox Church was imported in the 10<sup>th</sup> century from the Byzantine Empire. Initially, musical instruments were not used in the liturgy, as their use was considered sinful by the Orthodox Church, an attitude which would not change until the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Another aspect of this hostility towards the use musical instruments was the church's long, bitter struggle against folk musicians, in particular instrumentalists. This animosity was fueled by the Orthodox Church's rivalry with the Catholic Church, which allowed instrumental music, and by its struggle against Russia's pagan heritage, a heritage which folk instrumentalists were continuing in the church's view.



Liturgical music in the Orthodox Church was sung a capella by all-male choirs who performed a monadic chant in unison. Over time this type of liturgical music began to evolve into new forms that were unlike the Byzantine chants. One of these, developed some time around the 12th century was the *Znamenny chant* (*Znamenny raspev*). These chants were performed using a system of eight voices.

**Traditional Instruments and the *Skomorokhi*** Before the introduction of Christianity the musical instruments found in Russia were similar to those used throughout medieval Europe. Among these were the *svirel*, an oboe-like instrument; the *gusli*, similar to a zither; the *gudok*, similar to a fiddle; and horns. In addition there were tambourines, assorted noise makers, drums, and small bells, instruments more typically associated with shamanic rituals. These instruments were played during religious and court ceremonies, and for entertainment. They were also associated with the *skomorokhi*, folk musicians in Kievan Rus and Muscovy who often played at weddings.

**Skomorokhi:** Skomorokhi were the wandering minstrels in Russia; they were singers of freedom, who dared to ridicule the power, the clergy, and the rich and sympathized with the common people. The *skomorokhi* found themselves officially banned during the “Time of Troubles”, the period when Muscovite Rus’ was being transformed into a secular, centralized state between the 14<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The reasons for this ban are not entirely clear; they may have been sacrificed to maintain relations between the church and the state, or they may have been regarded as a threat to the state. Whatever the true reason, pressured by the church Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich issued the decree banning the *skomorokhi* in 1648. After having been an integral part of Russian popular culture for over 700 years, the *skomorokhi* found themselves exiled to northern Russia or Siberia, and their instruments destroyed.

### Discussion/Questions

Discuss the early developments in Russian music. For what reasons were the Skomorokhi banned?

### Reading

Prokhorov, Vladimir, *Russian Folk Songs: Musical Genres and History*, The Scarecrow Press Inc., London, 2002.

### **Theatre**

Pagan ceremonies in which tales, proverbs and fables were recited, together with the songs and dances of itinerant jesters, known as *Skomorokhi*, laid the foundation for the development of Russian theater. The Skomorokhi, based on Byzantine models, appeared around the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century in Kievan Rus and were performers who played musical instruments, sang, danced and even composed the scored for their performances.

The Skomorokhi were not universally popular in Kievan Rus; they are described in pejorative terms in the *Primary Chronicle*. Both the ruling authorities and the Orthodox Church viewed the Skomorokhi as being in league with the devil, and persecuted them for maintaining what they saw regarded as pagan traditions. A major reason for the Skomorokhi’s unpopularity with both the secular and religious leaders was the nature of their art. The Skomorokhi’s performances were aimed at ordinary people, and often were in opposition to those in power. As a result the clergy and feudal rulers viewed the Skomorokhi as useless to society at the very least, and politically and religiously dangerous at the very worst.

Both civil and religious leaders subjected the Skomorokhi to particularly intense persecution during the period of Mongol rule, a period which also coincided with the Orthodox Church’s strong advocacy of asceticism.

The Skomorokhi’s performances continued to be viewed with suspicion during the time of Ivan IV; it was believed that they undermined the authority and interest of the civil and religious leaders. There were even claims that their practices were somehow a form of devilry from the Greeks.

## Discussion/Questions

Discuss the *skomorokhi* and their importance in the history of Russian theater.

## Reading

- 1- Malnick, B., "The Origin and Early History of the Theater in Russia", *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 19, No. 53/54, The Slavonic Year-Book (1939 - 1940), pp. 203-227
- 2- Senelick, L., T., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture*, Ch.11. The Cambridge University Press, Inc., 1998, pp. 264-299.
- 3- Kelly, C., *A History of Russian Theater*, the Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp.18-41.

## WORLDVIEW

### **Religion:**

**Paganism:** Prior to the adoption of Christianity the Russian people worshiped pagan gods, fairies, spirits, the earth, trees, stones, fire, the sun and water. In order to cure people of illness the Russians would place them in trees whose trunks were split or broken, seek sacred stones, and offer them to the forests, lakes, and wells. The burials of princes and nobles become elaborate rituals; burial mounds were made for the dead, and one of their wives or slaves was buried with them. After the burial competitions were arranged and memorial meals were given.

The Russians' religion was also based on the influence of hunting and agriculture, and for these people things such as fields, forests, rivers, lakes, pools, houses, and stables held great importance. As a result their religious thinking and emotions were formed within the framework of this life. These people who obtained their living from hunting and from the earth sought the aid of supernatural powers to protect them from difficulties and dangers they encountered in their daily lives and to live in peace, even giving these powers a corner in their homes.

**Christianization:** The acceptance of Christianity in Kievan Russia began a new era in Russian history. In the late 10<sup>th</sup> century the centers of eastern and western Christianity were Constantinople and Rome. By accepting Christianity from Byzantium the Russians moved in the direction of Byzantine civilization, and thus isolated from Rome, and western culture. Through Byzantium the Russians took the customs of Near Eastern, Greek and Christian civilizations "ready-made", but adopted them by giving them a uniquely Russian character. The political hegemony of princes recognized by the Orthodox Church in Byzantium was carried to Kievan Russian also, and was the reason for the princes' consolidation of their power. At the same time, Christianity ended the separation between the indigenous and foreign tribes, merging these peoples with one another. Not only the Slavic tribes, but the Finnish tribes, too, were forced to accept Christianity, and thus, the first step in the new religion's spread from Kiev to Lake Ilmen. As soon as Christianity had been accepted, beginning with Kiev churches and monasteries were constructed, icons made and craftsmen were brought from Byzantium. Kiev became a religious center, the Metropolitan of Kiev was appointed from Constantinople and became the highest ranking religious leader in Russia. The first Metropolitan for the Russians was Greek, and this situation that would continue to 15<sup>th</sup> century. In 1051 the Metropolitan Ilarion, a Russian, was accepted by Constantinople, but remained in his post for only one year. The rules for the churches in Russia (Nomokanon) were also brought from Byzantium.

Another characteristic that the Russians inherited from Byzantium was the relationship between the church and the state. In Russia, as in Byzantium, the church remained subservient to the state. In western Europe the church and the state were often in conflict, the church was independent of the state and often held a position superior to the state.

In 1054 the Christian world witnessed the final schism dividing the Eastern Orthodox and the western Roman Catholic churches. The western church had adopted the principle papal superiority and authority

over all churches and in matters of doctrine, and claimed that this principle could not be questioned. The Russian church, having its origin in Byzantium, sided with the Orthodox church and opposed Rome.

As a result of the tolerance shown to all religions during the period of Mongol rule, the position of the Russian church was strengthened. Churches were exempt from all taxes, and respect was shown to all rites and ceremonies conducted in them. Such was the level of tolerance that in 1261, with the permission of the Mongol khan, a new bishopric was established in Saray, the seat of the khanate.

Due to the Principality of Kiev's loss of power, the Metropolitan Maxim moved his seat to the city of Vladimir in 1305. Peter, who took Maxim's place after his death, maintaining close relations with Ivan Kalita played a major role in the construction of Uspenskiy Cathedral in Moscow, the expansion of the Principality of Moscow and its becoming the permanent center of the Russian church. Fifty new monasteries were constructed by the monk Sergi Radonezh in this century and monastic life gained vitality.

The 15<sup>th</sup> century was the period in which the Moscow church declared its independence. The Metropolitan of Moscow, Isidore, who had signed the declaration of the Council of Ferrara-Florence reuniting the eastern and western churches, was removed from his position. The newly appointed Metropolitan, Iona, was the Metropolitan of Moscow and thus the head of the independent Orthodox Church. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Moscow's dream of becoming the Third Rome resulted in Moscow's status as a patriarchate being accepted.

### **Discussion/Questions**

- 1-How is Christianity reflected in Russian culture?
- 2-Is it possible to see traces of pagan culture in Orthodox Russia?
- 3-Talk about the concept of the Tsar as God. Where did this concept come from? How did the Byzantines regard their Emperor?

### **Reading**

- 1- The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture, Cambridge University Press, 1998, Ch.3: Religion: Russian Orthodoxy.
- 2- Mandelstam, M.B., Russian Traditional Culture, Religion, Gender and Customary Law, The Introduction of Christianity in Russia and the Pagan Traditions, ME Sharp, 1992.
- 3- Pipes, R., *Russia Under the Old Regime*, New York, 1974, Ch. 9.

### **Philosophy**

Russia was introduced to philosophy via religion, specifically through *The Fathers of the Church*, a work translated from Greek shortly after the late 10<sup>th</sup> century conversion to Christianity. Translations of other religious works, the theological works of St. John Damascene in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and Dionysius the Areopagite in the 14<sup>th</sup>, provided the impetus for some Russian clergymen to compose their own works on philosophy and theology.

### **Discussion/Questions**

Why Russian philosophical thought only emerged in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, remaining faithful to its Western founders?

### **Reading**

- Lossky, N.O., *History of Russian Philosophy*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1952, pp.9-64.

### **Science**

Despite the fact that during the same period of Kievan Rus' florescence some of the greatest Islamic thinkers and scientists lived in Bukhara, the likelihood that Kiev would be exposed to Arabic science from that quarter was extremely low. There was contact between the Rus and the Muslim Volga Bulgars who had commercial links with the Arabs, the Volga Bulgars had no interest in Arabic science. There was, however, one exception, medicine, where some knowledge from the Islamic world did reach Kiev.

None of the major Ancient Greek or Hellenistic scientific works were translated in Russia during the medieval era. The translation of Byzantine works introduced some technical scientific terms into Russian, as well as words like 'planet', and translations of the names of signs of the zodiac, but overall Greek science was little influence on the culture of Kievan Rus.

In addition to these factors, the strong resistance to secular learning in Kievan Rus also played a role in keeping Greek scientific works from being translated. This attitude stemmed from the fact that Christianity was a foreign religion that had only recently been adopted from Byzantium, and the art of writing that came with it was equally new. The rulers supported Christianity for both pious and political reasons, and book learning was regarded as merely another method to bolster support for the new faith.

Finally, in the approximately two and a half centuries that Western Europe transitioned from the middle ages to the Renaissance and the early modern period, growing culturally and politically, the Russian principalities were under Mongol rule. Kiev's links with the West and Byzantium were cut, and this, combined with the decline of the Byzantine Empire and the expansion of Ottoman power in the Balkans, left Russia isolated ideologically and culturally.

### **Discussion/Questions**

Why was there a strong resistance to secular learning in Kievan Rus?

### **Reading**

Graham, R. Loren, *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union, A Short History*, Cambridge University Press, 1994.