Byzantines, Russians, and Turks Interact, 500–1500

Between the 6th and 12th centuries, Christian and Muslim empires battled in the eastern Mediterranean region. At the same time, Russia emerged as a powerful force to the north. The map to the right shows these various empires at their height. Use the map to answer the questions below.

1. What three empires are shown on the map and in what time periods?
2. Why might the Dnieper River have been important to Kievan Russia?
3. What lands did the Seljuk Turks occupy?
4. How does the map indicate that there was probably conflict between the Byzantine and Seljuk empires?

Connect History and Geography

For more information about Byzantines, Slavs, and Turks...

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Yaroslav the Wise was a prince of Kievan Russia who created an important legal code.

527
Justinian becomes ruler of Byzantine Empire.

850s
Byzantine culture spreads to Russia.
1054 Christianity splits into Roman Catholic and Orthodox branches.

1240 Kiev destroyed by Mongols.

1480 Ivan III ends Mongol control of Russia.
You are a Byzantine diplomat working to serve the best interests of your emperor and your empire. Byzantium is threatened by a rampaging army moving from the north down to Constantinople. You know that diplomacy, or clever negotiating with foreign powers, has been important in preserving Byzantium from destruction.

Your mission is to convince the invading chief to stop advancing on the city. Will you threaten the chief with military retaliation, try to buy him off, or arrange a marriage between him and a Byzantine noblewoman to form an alliance?

How will you save the empire?

As the Byzantine ambassador, you may be proposing to pay yearly tribute to the invading chief if he will just leave the empire alone. You may also be offering the chief a lavish, all-expense-paid trip to Constantinople. Such visits could impress potential invaders with Byzantine hospitality, wealth, and (above all) power.

If shrewdness and good sense fail, a display of Byzantine military forces might scare the enemy away.

As you weigh your options, consider

- the advantages of diplomacy over war
- new diplomatic strategies to stop the coming attack
- circumstances that might convince you to recommend war

Which option(s) will you choose? Explain your choice(s).

As you read this chapter, think about how empires keep themselves alive over long periods of time.

EXAMINING THE ISSUES
SETTING THE STAGE  The western Roman Empire crumbled in the 5th century as it was overrun by invading Germanic tribes. (See Chapter 6.) The threat to the empire, however, was already apparent in the 4th century. Emperor Constantine rebuilt the old port city of Byzantium on the Bosporus strait for two reasons. In Byzantium, he could respond to the danger of the Germanic tribes. He could also be close to his rich eastern provinces. He renamed the city Constantinople and in the year 330, he made it the capital of the empire.

A New Rome in a New Setting  Constantine planned Constantinople as the new capital of the empire—the New Rome. As a result of his decision, the empire’s center of power moved eastward. The eastern provinces then began to develop independently of the declining West. An eastern empire would gradually come into being.

Justinian: A New Line of Caesars  Because of the difficulties of communication between the eastern and troubled western parts of the empire, they were officially divided in two in 395. Despite this separation, Constantine’s successors in the East continued to see themselves as Roman emperors. In 527, a high-ranking Byzantine nobleman named Justinian succeeded his uncle to the throne of the eastern empire. In his official writings, court historian Procopius (pruh•KOH•pee•uhs) described Justinian as a serious, even-tempered ruler who worked from dawn to midnight. But in The Secret History (a book of gossip published after Justinian’s death), Procopius portrays Justinian as “deceitful, devious, false, hypocritical, two-faced, cruel, skilled in dissembling his thought, never moved to tears by either joy or pain . . . a liar always.”

Whatever his true character, the new emperor quickly decided to make good on his claim to be the head of the whole Roman Empire—of both eastern and western parts. In 533, he sent his best general Belisarius (behl•uh•SAIR•ee•uhs) to recover North Africa from the Vandals. Belisarius got the job done in a few months. Two years later, Belisarius attacked Rome and took it from the Ostrogoths. But the city was repeatedly attacked by other Germanic tribes. In the next 16 years, Rome changed hands six times. After numerous campaigns, Justinian’s armies won nearly all of Italy and parts of Spain. Justinian now ruled almost all the territory that Rome had ever ruled. He could honestly call himself a new Caesar.

The Absolute Power of the Emperors  Like the last of the old Caesars, the Byzantine emperors ruled with absolute power. They headed not just the state but the Church as well. They appointed and dismissed bishops at will. The politics, however, were brutal, not spiritual. Emperors lived under constant risk of assassination. Of the 88 Byzantine emperors, 29 died violently, and 13 abandoned the throne to live in monasteries.

MAIN IDEA  Constantinople ruled an eastern empire that survived for over a thousand years.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW  Byzantine culture deeply influenced Orthodox Christianity, a major branch of modern Christianity.
Building the New Rome

A separate government and difficult communications with the West gave the Byzantine Empire its own character—different from that of the western empire. The citizens thought of themselves as sharing in the Roman tradition, but few spoke Latin anymore. Most Byzantines spoke Greek. They also belonged to the eastern branch of the Christian Church.

To regulate a complex society, Justinian set up a panel of ten legal experts. Between 528 and 533, they combed through 400 years of Roman law and legal opinions. Some of those laws had become outdated. Some repeated or even contradicted other laws. The panel's task was to create a single, uniform code for Justinian's New Rome.

The result of the panel's work was a body of civil law known as the Justinian Code. After its completion, the code consisted of four works.

1. The Code contained nearly 5,000 Roman laws, which the experts still considered useful for the Byzantine Empire.
2. The Digest quoted and summarized the opinions of Rome's greatest legal thinkers about the laws. This massive work ran to a total of 50 volumes.
3. The Institutes was a textbook that told law students how to use the laws.
4. The Novellae (New Laws) presented legislation passed after 534.

The Justinian Code decided legal questions that regulated whole areas of Byzantine life. Marriage, slavery, property, inheritance, women's rights, and crimes were just some of those areas. Although Justinian himself died in 565, his code served the Byzantine Empire for 900 years.

Creating the Imperial Capital

While his scholars were creating the legal code, Justinian launched into the most ambitious public building program ever seen in the Roman world. He rebuilt the crumbling fortifications of Constantinople. The city's coasts were ringed by a 14-mile stone wall. The city was also protected on its only land approach by a deep moat and three walls. The innermost of these was 25 feet thick and had towers 70 feet tall. Justinian saw to it that these massive fortifications were repaired.

Church building was the emperor's greatest passion. His beautiful churches also helped him show the close connection between church and state in his empire. The crowning glory of his reign was Hagia Sophia (HAY•ee•uh soh•FE•E•uh), which means "Holy Wisdom" in Greek. A church of the same name had been destroyed in riots that swept Constantinople in 532. When Justinian rebuilt Hagia Sophia, he resolved to make it the most splendid church in the Christian world. Down through the centuries, rich mosaics glittered in the light of a thousand lamps and candles. In fact, more than 400 years after Justinian built his cathedral, the beauty of Hagia Sophia helped convince visiting Russian nobles that their country should adopt Byzantine Christianity.

As part of his building program, Justinian enlarged his palace into a vast complex. He also built baths, aqueducts, law courts, schools, and hospitals. By the time the emperor was finished with his projects, the city teemed with an excitement unmatched anywhere in the eastern and western empires.
Byzantine families valued education and sent their children to monastic or public schools or hired private tutors. Basic courses focused on Greek and Latin grammar, philosophy, and rhetoric. The classics of Greek and Roman literature served as textbooks. Students memorized Homer. They learned geometry from Euclid, history from Herodotus, and medicine from Galen. The modern world owes Byzantine scholars a huge debt for preserving many of the great works of Greece and Rome.

**Byzantine’s Hectic Pace** The main street running through Constantinople was the Mese (MEHS•ee) or “Middle Way.” It ran from the imperial complex through a series of public squares and then in two branches to the outer walls. Merchant stalls lined the main street and filled the side streets. A stone roof sheltered the crowds shopping in this giant open-air market. Products from the most distant corners of Asia, Africa, and Europe passed through these stalls. Shoppers could buy tin from England, wine from France, cork from Spain, and ivory and gold from Africa. Fur, honey, and timber came from Russia, spices from India, and silk from China. Everywhere food stands filled the air with the smell of their delicacies, while acrobats and street musicians performed.

Meanwhile, citizens could enjoy free entertainment at the Hippodrome, which offered wild chariot races and circus acts. The Hippodrome (from Greek words meaning “horse” and “racecourse”) held 60,000 spectators. Fans of the different teams formed rowdy gangs named for the colors worn by their heroes.

In 532, two such factions, the Blues and the Greens, sparked citywide riots called the Nika Rebellion (because the mob cried “Nika!” or “Victory!”). Both sides were angry at the government. They felt the city prefect (mayor) had been too severe in putting down a previous riot of Hippodrome fans. Even though Justinian dismissed the prefect, the mobs were not satisfied. They packed the Hippodrome and proclaimed a new emperor. Belisarius, however, broke in with his troops and slaughtered about 30,000 rebels.

Much credit for saving the day must go to Justinian’s wife, Theodora. As her husband’s steely adviser, Theodora had immense power. During the Nika Rebellion, when Justinian considered fleeing the city, Theodora rallied him with a fiery speech:

**A VOICE FROM THE PAST**
My opinion is that now is a poor time for flight, even though it brings safety. For any man who has seen the light of day will also die, but one who has been an emperor cannot endure to be a fugitive. If now you wish to go, Emperor, nothing prevents you. There is the sea, there are the steps to the boats. But take care that after you are safe, you do not find that you would gladly exchange that safety for death.

**THEODORA,** quoted by Procopius in *History of the Wars*

**Vocabulary**
rhetoric: the study of how to use spoken or written language effectively.
The Empire Confronts Its Enemies

Constantinople remained rich and powerful for centuries. After Justinian’s death in 565, however, the empire suffered countless setbacks. There were street riots, religious quarrels, palace intrigues, and foreign dangers. Each time the empire moved to the edge of collapse, it found some way to revive—only to face another crisis.

The Mysterious Plague of Justinian

The first crisis actually began before Justinian’s death. It was a disease that resembled what we now know as the bubonic plague. This horrifying illness hit Constantinople in the later years of Justinian’s reign. The plague probably arrived from India on ships infested with rats. In 542, at its peak, it is estimated that 10,000 people were dying every day. The illness broke out every 8 to 12 years until around 700, when it finally faded out. By that time, it had destroyed a huge percentage of the Byzantine population. The smaller population left the empire exposed to its enemies.

 Attacks from East and West

Byzantium’s enemies pressed in on all sides. Lombards overran Justinian’s conquests in the west. Avars, Slavs, and Bulgars made frequent raids on the northern borders. The powerful Sassanid Persians attacked relentlessly in the east. The Persians and Avars struck against Constantinople itself in 626. With the rise of Islam, Arab armies attacked the city in 674 and once again in 717. Russians attempted invasions of the city three times between 860 and 1043. In the 11th century, the Turks took over the Muslim world and fought their way slowly into Anatolia. The Crusades brought armies of knights from Western Europe who pillaged Constantinople in 1204 on their way to fight the Turks.

As their first line of defense, the Byzantines used bribes, diplomacy, and political marriages to prop up their shaky empire. These strategies, however, were not enough. So, in the 7th century, Emperor Heraclius reorganized the empire along military lines. Provinces became themes, or military districts. Each theme was run by a general who reported directly to the emperor.

In spite of these measures, the Byzantine Empire slowly shrank under the impact of foreign attacks. By 1350, it was reduced to the tip of Anatolia and a strip of the Balkans. Yet thanks to its walls, its fleet, and its strategic location, the city held out for another 100 years. Finally, Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

The Church Divides

During those many centuries, the Eastern Church in Constantinople continued to flourish. At the same time, however, distance and lack of contact slowly caused the doctrines and rituals of Western and Eastern Christianity to diverge. The Church would eventually split into the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches.

A Split Between Rome and Constantinople

Eastern Christianity built its heritage on the works of early church fathers. One was Saint Basil, who, around 357, wrote rules for the life of monks. Another key figure was Saint John Chrysostom (KRIHS•uhs•tuhm). As bishop of Constantinople from 398 to 404, Chrysostom was the patriarch (PAY•tree•AHRK), or leading bishop of the East. But even the patriarch bowed to the emperor.

A controversy that tested the emperor’s authority over religious matters broke out in the 8th century. In 730, Emperor Leo III banned the use of icons, religious images used by eastern Christians to aid their devotions. The emperor thought the use of icons amounted to idol worship. The army supported the emperor’s view, and enthusiastic iconoclasts (eye•KAHN•uh•KLASTS), or “icon-breakers,” broke into churches to destroy images. But the people rioted,
Byzantines, Russians, and Turks Interact

and the clergy rebelled. In the West, the pope became involved in this eastern dispute and supported the use of icons. One pope even ordered the excommunication of a Byzantine emperor—that is, he declared that the emperor was an outcast from the Church. In 843, more than a hundred years after the controversy began, an order from an empress named Theodora restored icons to Eastern churches.

Differences between the Eastern and Western churches, however, continued to grow. (See the chart above.) In 1054, matters came to a head when the pope and the patriarch excommunicated each other in a dispute over religious doctrine. After this schism (SHILZ•uhm), or split, Christianity was permanently divided between the Roman Catholic Church in the West and the Orthodox Church in the East.

Byzantine Missionaries Convert the Slavs

As West and East grew apart, the two traditions of Christianity competed for souls. Missionaries from the Orthodox Church, for example, took their form of Christianity north to the Slavs. Two of the most successful eastern missionaries, Saint Methodius and Saint Cyril (SEER•uhl), worked among the Slavs in the 9th century. Cyril and Methodius invented an alphabet for the Slavic languages. With an alphabet, Slavs would be able to read the Bible in their own tongues. Many Slavic languages, including Russian, are now written in what is called the Cyrillic (SUH•RIHL•ihk) alphabet.

The Orthodox missionaries opened up highways for Byzantine influence in Slavic lands. As these missionaries were carrying out their work among the Slavs, an important new Slavic nation was forming.

**SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts**

1. Which church seemed to allow for greater diversity among its members? Why?
2. Who would have more political power: the pope or the patriarch?
At the beginning of the 9th century, the Byzantines regarded the forests north of the Black Sea as a wilderness. In their minds, those forests were inhabited only by “barbarians,” who sometimes made trouble along their borders. They would soon consider these Slavic peoples as fellow Byzantine Christians.

**Both Slavic and Greek**

Midway through the 9th century, the Slavs—the people from the forests north of the Black Sea—began trading with Constantinople. As they traded, they began absorbing Greek Byzantine ideas. Russian culture grew out of this blending of Slavic and Greek traditions.

**The Land of Russia’s Birth**

Russia’s first unified territory originated west of the Ural Mountains in the region that runs from the Black Sea to the Baltic. Hilly grasslands are found in the extreme south of that area. The north, however, is densely forested, flat, and swampy. Slow-moving, interconnecting rivers allow boat travel across these plains in almost any direction. Three great rivers, the Dnieper (NEE-pur), the Don, and the Volga, run from the heart of the forests to the Black Sea or the Caspian Sea.

In the early days of the Byzantine Empire, these forests were inhabited by tribes of Slavic farmers and traders. They spoke similar languages but had no political unity. Sometime in the 800s, small bands of adventurers came down among them from the north. These Varangians, or Rus as they were also called, were most likely Vikings. Eventually, the Vikings built forts along the rivers and settled among the Slavs.

**Slavs and Vikings**

Russian legends say the Slavs invited the Viking chief Rurik to be their king. So in 862, he founded Novgorod (NAHV-guh-rahd), Russia’s first important city. That account is given in *The Primary Chronicle*, a history of Russia written by monks.
in the early 1100s. Around 880, a nobleman from Novgorod named Oleg moved south to Kiev (KEE•ehf), a city on the Dnieper River. From Kiev, the Vikings could sail by river and sea to Constantinople. There they could trade for the products from distant lands.

The merchandise they brought to Constantinople included timber, fur, wax, honey, and their Slavic subjects whom they sold as slaves. In fact, the word *slave* originates from *Slav*.

Kiev grew into a principality, a small state ruled by a prince. As it did, the Viking nobles intermarried with their Slavic subjects. They also adopted Slavic culture. The society remained strictly divided between peasant masses and the nobles, or boyars. Gradually, however, the line between Slavs and Vikings vanished.

**Kiev Becomes Orthodox** In 957, a member of the Kievan nobility paid a visit to Constantinople and publicly converted to Christianity. Her name was Princess Olga. From 945 to 955, she governed Kiev until her son was old enough to rule. Her son resisted Christianity. However, soon after Olga’s grandson Vladimir (VLAD•uh•meer) came to the throne about 980, he considered conversion to Christianity. The *Primary Chronicle* reports that Vladimir sent out teams to observe the major religions of the times. Three of the teams returned with lukewarm accounts of Islam, Judaism, and Western Christianity. But the team from Byzantium told quite a different story:

> A VOICE FROM THE PAST
> 
> . . . the Greeks led us to the buildings where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendor or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We only know that God dwells there among men and . . . we cannot forget that beauty.

This report convinced Vladimir to convert to Byzantine Christianity and to make all his subjects convert, too. In 989, a baptism of all the citizens of Kiev was held in the Dnieper River. Kiev, already linked to Byzantium by trade, now looked to Constantinople for religious guidance. Vladimir imported teachers to instruct the people in the new faith. All the beliefs and traditions of Orthodox Christianity flourished in Kiev. Vladimir appreciated the Byzantine idea of the emperor as supreme ruler of the church. So the close link between Church and state took root in Russia as well.

**Kiev’s Power and Decline**

Thanks to its Byzantine ties, Kiev grew from a cluster of crude wooden forts to the glittering capital of prosperous and educated people. The rise of Kiev marks the appearance of Russia’s first important unified territory.
Kievan Russia Vladimir led the way in establishing Kiev's power. He expanded his state west into Poland and north almost to the Baltic Sea. He also fought off troublesome nomads from the steppes to the south.

In 1019, Vladimir's son Yaroslav the Wise came to the throne and led Kiev to even greater glory. Like the rulers of Byzantium, Yaroslav skillfully married off his daughters and sisters to the kings and princes of Western Europe. Those marriages helped him to forge important trading alliances. At the same time, he created a legal code tailored to Kiev's commercial culture. Many of its rules dealt with crimes against property. For example, Yaroslav's code called for a fine of three grivnas for cutting off a person's finger, but 12 grivnas for plowing over a property line. Yaroslav also built the first library in Kiev. Under his rule, Christianity prospered. By the 12th century, Kiev could even boast of having 400 churches. However, the wooden churches proved to be as temporary as Kiev's glory.

Power Struggles Bring on Kiev's Decline The decline of the Kievan state started with the death of Yaroslav in 1054. Yaroslav had made a crucial error. Yaroslav divided his realm among his sons—instead of following the custom of passing on the throne to the eldest son. His sons tore the state apart fighting for the choicest territories. And because this system of dividing among sons continued, each generation saw new struggles. The Crusades added to Kiev's troubles by disrupting trade. Then, just when it seemed that things could not get worse, they got far worse.

Mongol Invasions Favor the Rise of Moscow In the middle 1200s, a ferocious group of horsemen from central Asia slashed their way into Russia. These nomads were the Mongols. (See Chapter 12.) They had exploded onto the world scene at the beginning of the 1200s under Genghis Khan (JEHNG-gihz KAHN), one of the most feared warriors of all time.

Mongols may have been forced to move out by economic or military pressures. They may have been lured by the wealth of cities to the west. Whatever their reasons for leaving, Mongols rode their swift horses across the steppes of Asia and on into

HISTORY THROUGH ART: Fine Art

Christian religious art in the West strives to show the holy in realistic situations. Eastern Orthodox icons depict a spiritual world that is far removed from what some consider the “real” world. In Western art, the divine seems near and familiar. In the East, the divine looks far from our human level, but like windows, icons can help believers glimpse heaven.

Connect to History

Contrast What are the differences between the styles of these two paintings? Consider the mother, the child, and the background.

Connect to Today

Analyzing Go to a house of worship near you. See if and how the spiritual is portrayed there.

The Mother of God of Vladimir (12th century), icon commissioned by the grand duke of Kiev
Europe. Their savage killing and burning won them a reputation for ruthless brutality. When Genghis Khan died in 1227, his successors continued the conquering that he had begun. At its fullest extent, the Mongol Empire stretched from the Yellow Sea to the Baltic Sea and from the Himalayas to northern Russia.

In 1240, the Mongols attacked and demolished Kiev. They rode under the leadership of Batu Khan, Genghis's grandson. So many inhabitants were slaughtered, a Russian historian reported, that “no eye remained to weep.” A Roman Catholic bishop traveling through Kiev five years later wrote, “When we passed through that land, we found lying in the field countless heads and bones of dead people.” After the fall of Kiev, Mongols ruled all of southern Russia. For over 200 years, the Mongol Empire in Russia held power. The empire’s official name was the “Khanate of the Golden Horde”: Khanate, from the Mongol word for “kingdom”; Golden, because gold was the royal color of the Mongols; Horde, from the Mongol word for “camp.”

**Mongol Rule in Russia** Under Mongol rule, the Russians could follow all their usual customs, as long as they made no sign of rebellion. As fierce as they were, the Mongols tolerated all the religions in their realms. The Church acted as a mediator between the people and the Mongols. It also pacified the oppressors by praying for them. Church leaders found a religious meaning in the Mongol occupation of the country. They explained it as a punishment for the people’s sins. Icons gained importance at this time, and Russians used the images to help escape their painful political realities.

The Mongols demanded just two things from Russians: slavish obedience and massive amounts of tribute. The Mongols themselves made sure Russians remained obedient. However, they made local nobles collect the tribute. As long as the money was delivered, the nobles could keep their titles. Novgorod’s prince and military hero Alexander Nevsky, for example, advised his fellow princes to cooperate with the Mongols. The Russian nobles crushed revolts against the Mongols and collected oppressive taxes for the foreign rulers. At his death, Nevsky willed the principality of Moscow to his son Daniel. Daniel founded a line of princes there that in 200 years would rise to great prominence.

Mongol rule isolated the Russians more than ever from their neighbors in Western Europe, cutting them off from many new ideas and inventions. However, during this period, forces were at work that would eventually lead to Russia’s liberation and to the rise of a new center of power: Moscow.

**Mongol Rule Serves Moscow’s Interests** In some ways, the Mongols actually helped to unite Russia. Kievan Russia had been a collection of small independent principalities. Mongol rulers looked upon Russia as their unified empire, and all Russian principalities had to pay tribute to the Mongol Khan.

The rise of Moscow also began under the Mongols. The city was first founded in the 1100s. By 1156, it was a crude village protected by a log wall. Nonetheless, Moscow was located near three rivers: the Volga, Dnieper, and Don. From that strategic position, a prince of Moscow who could gain control of the three rivers could eventually control nearly all of European Russia.

That opportunity for expansion would not arise until the 14th century. In the late 1320s, Moscow’s Prince Ivan I had earned the gratitude of the Mongols by helping to crush a Russian revolt against Mongol rule. For his services, the Mongols appointed Ivan I as tax collector of all the Slavic lands they had conquered. They also gave him the title of “Great Prince.” Ivan had now become without any

**Background**

The Mongols may have been related to the Huns, who had helped topple the Roman Empire. (See Chapter 6, page 161.)

**Think Through History**

C. Analyzing Motives: Do you approve of Nevsky’s cooperation with the Mongols? Was his policy practical or cowardly?

**Vocabulary**

Khan: the Mongol word for “ruler.”

**HISTORY MAKERS**

**Alexander Nevsky** 1220?–1263

Alexander of Novgorod was about 20 when he carved his name on Russian history. In 1240, the Swedes attacked the principality of Novgorod to stop its expansion. Alexander soundly defeated the invading Swedes at the Neva River. Grateful Russians called him Nevsky (“of the Neva”) in honor of his victory.

In 1242, his fame grew even greater. In that year, the Teutonic Knights, a brotherhood of Germanic warriors, invaded the Baltics and Russia to convert them to Catholicism. Alexander cut the German armies to pieces on a frozen channel between two lakes—his famous “Battle on the Ice.” For this victory and for his long protection of the Russian church, Alexander was declared a saint of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1547.
doubt the most powerful of all Russian princes. He also became the wealthiest and was known as “Ivan Moneybags.”

Ivan was also able to convince the Patriarch of Kiev, the leading bishop of Eastern Europe, to move to Moscow. The move enhanced the city’s prestige and gave Moscow’s princes a powerful ally: the Church. Ivan I and his successors used numerous strategies to enlarge their territory: land purchases, wars, trickery, shrewd marriages. From generation to generation, they schemed to gain control over the small states around Moscow.

**An Empire Emerges** The Russian state would become a genuine empire during the long, 43-year reign of Ivan III (1462–1505). This prince was only a boy of 13 when Constantinople fell to the Turkish Empire in 1453. In 1472, Ivan III managed to marry the niece of the last Byzantine emperor. He then began calling himself czar (zahr), the Russian version of Caesar. (The title became official only during the reign of Ivan IV.) By calling himself czar, however, Ivan III openly claimed to make Russia the “Third Rome.”

In 1480, Ivan made the final break with the Mongols. He refused to pay their tribute. Following his refusal, Russian and Mongol armies faced each other on either side of the Ugra River, about 150 miles southwest of Moscow. However, neither side wanted to fight. So, after a time, both armies turned around and marched home. Russians have traditionally considered this bloodless standoff as marking Russia’s liberation from Mongol rule. After that liberation, the czars could openly pursue an empire.

The Mongols were not the only conquering people to emerge from central Asia. As you will learn in Section 3, Turks would begin establishing an empire in Southwest Asia. In one form or another, their empire would last from the 11th century to the 20th century.

**Geography Skillbuilder:** Interpreting Maps
1. About how many miles did the Khanate of the Golden Horde stretch from east to west?
2. What people controlled most of the kingdoms surrounding Mongol Russia?

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