Chapter 23

The Rise of Russia

OUTLINE

I. Introduction

Between 1450 and 1750, Russia created a land-based empire. Much of the territory taken was Asian, but its acquisition elevated Russia to the status of chief power in eastern Europe. From there, Russia embarked on a course of selective Westernization. Despite its willingness to emulate Western civilization, Russia remained outside the global trade system dominated by the West.

II. Russia’s Expansionist Politics Under the Tsars

A. Introduction

The Duchy of Moscow led the movement to free Russia from Mongol influence. Under Ivan III, Moscow freed much of Russia by 1462. In the process of expelling the Mongols, Ivan won a vast expanse of land for Russia.

B. The Need For Revival

Although Russia had been within the Mongol orbit for a century, Russian culture and government was little affected by their former overlords. Local administration remained in the hands of local princes. The period of Mongol dominance had diminished literacy and economic growth. Russia remained a largely agricultural country. Ivan III reestablished centralized government in Russia, styled himself tsar, and proclaimed Russia the third Rome. His successor, Ivan IV, called the Terrible, continued the policy of territorial expansion and political centralization. Ivan IV killed many of the Russian boyars, or nobility, to remove potential challengers to his authority.

C. Patterns of Expansion

Ivan III and Ivan IV pressed Russian expansion into central Asia. Newly conquered lands were settled by peasants called cossacks. A cross between farmers and warriors, the cossacks provided volunteers to press the frontiers farther eastward. Eventually they moved out of the region of the Caspian Sea into western Siberia. The tsars rewarded loyal followers with grants of land in the area of Asian conquest. Conquered peoples were occasionally reduced to slavery to feed the need for labor. The conquests provided new trade connections for Russia. Russian expansion eliminated the free peoples of Asia, from whom the various nomadic invaders of earlier civilizations had sprung. The conquests also produced great ethnic and religious diversity within the Russian empire.
D. Western Contact and Romanov Policy

Both Ivan III and Ivan IV pursued cultural and commercial ties with the West. When Ivan IV died without an heir, boyars attempted to regain their former influence. Sweden and Poland invaded Russia in hopes of seizing territory. In 1613, the Time of Troubles was brought to an end when an assembly of boyars selected the Romanov dynasty to rule Russia. Although the Time of Troubles was temporarily catastrophic for Russia, it did not produce any lasting constraints on the power of the tsars. Michael Romanov restored order and resumed foreign expansion. He successfully seized part of the Ukraine from Poland. Alexis Romanov restored tsarist autocracy. He abolished the assemblies of boyars and assumed direct state control over the Orthodox Church. After enacting reforms, the tsar exiled the “old believers,” - those who remained attached to the old rituals - to Siberia.

III. Russia’s First Westernization, 1690-1790

A. Introduction

By the end of the 17th century, Russia remained an agricultural nation with limited cultural achievement. Peter I, called the Great, concentrated on emulation of the West as a means of developing a more diverse economy and culture.

B. Tsarist Autocracy of Peter the Great

Peter retained the autocratic structure of Russian government. He recruited bureaucrats from outside the ranks of the aristocracy and granted titles of nobility to those who served well. He improved the Russian military through the introduction of Western reforms. The tsar created the Secret Police to prevent dissent and to oversee the bureaucracy. In foreign affairs, Peter attacked both the Ottoman Empire and Sweden, his rival on the Baltic Sea. Victories over Sweden allowed the tsar to move his capital from Moscow to St. Petersburg.

C. What Westernization Meant

Peter the Great streamlined the military and political organization of Russia along Western institutional lines. The army, local administration, and Orthodox Church were all brought more firmly under autocratic control. Economic reforms concentrated on Russia's mining and metallurgy sectors. Improvement allowed Russia to achieve independence in these areas from the West. In order to cut off the Russian elite from their traditional cultural background, Peter enforced Western styles of dress and personal appearance and improved the status of elite women. Schools emphasizing mathematics and science were constructed to introduce Western intellectual developments. Among the elite, Peter successfully Westernized Russian society. Changes did not extend to peasants or commoners. New manufacturing sectors in Russia continued to be based on partially coerced labor systems. The intent of the economic development was to strengthen the military, not to enter the global commercial system. Some elements of Russian society bitterly opposed the reforms as attacks on traditional Russian customs.

D. Consolidation Under Catherine the Great

After the death of Peter the Great in 1724, there were a series of weak rulers dominated by the military. In 1761, the mentally handicapped Peter III became tsar but was rapidly replaced as
the effective power by his wife, Catherine the Great. Catherine continued the policy of autocratic centralization and suppressed the uprising of peasants under Emelian Pugachev. Catherine flirted with Enlightenment ideas and attempted legal reforms along Enlightenment concepts. However, she also favored centralization and strengthened the power of the nobility over the Russian peasantry. The nobility continued to serve as the primary source of recruits for the bureaucracy and military. Landlords gained almost absolute jurisdiction over the peasants who resided on their estates. Catherine turned rapidly against Western ideas during the French Revolution and censored Russian intellectuals who criticized autocracy. Catherine pressed the attack on the Ottoman Empire, gaining lands in the Crimea. Russia colonized Siberia, and explorers reached Alaska and the California coast. Catherine directed an aggressive foreign policy against Prussia and Poland. In 1772, 1793, and 1795, Russia participated in the partition of Poland, which ceased to exist as an independent state. In some ways, Russian expansion was reminiscent of the early United States.

IV. Themes in Early Modern Russian History

A. Introduction

Unlike the West, Russian economy continued to rely on a coercive labor system and a repressive serfdom. The Russian nobility enjoyed a position of power because of its authority over the peasantry and its service relationship to the state.

B. Serfdom: The Life of East Europe’s Masses

During the 17th and 18th centuries, Russia saw an intensification of serfdom. After the expulsion of the Mongols, the Russian nobles, with the consent and assistance of the central government, gained almost exclusive ownership of the land. When new conquests were added to the Russian empire, serfdom was extended. By 1800, half of the peasantry was enserfed to the nobility, the other half to the state. An act of 1649 made the status of serfdom hereditary. In much of Russia, the condition of serfdom approached slavery. Eastern Europe also adopted a coercive labor system based on serfdom. Coerced labor supported the dependent agricultural economy of eastern Europe within the global commercial network dominated by the West. In Russia and most of eastern Europe, it was possible for landlords to sell whole villages of serfs as manufacturing laborers. Serfs were not quite slaves. They remained free to manage their village governments, but they were subject to taxation, owed labor services to lords and the government, and were subject to landlords’ jurisdiction. The onerous conditions produced occasional rebellions, such as the Pugachev revolt of the 1770s.

C. Trade and Economic Dependence

Aside from the nobility and the serfs, there was little social stratification in Russia. There were few artisans and an inadequate merchant class. Without classes directly related to commerce and manufacturing, the state was left to handle trade and industrialization. International trade was handled through Western merchant companies located in the capital city. The Russian economy was sufficiently expansive to support military conquest, a substantial nobility, and population growth. Both agricultural and industrial production lagged behind Western standards. To a certain extent, Russia was self-sufficient and did not fall into total dependence on the West. Russia’s most profitable trade was internal and with central Asia. Russia became increasingly dependent on exports of raw materials to the West to support its program of acculturation. Russia’s political dominance in central Asia set it apart from other dependent regions of the world.
D. Social Unrest

The conditions of Russia produced intellectual dissatisfaction and criticism of the government. Peasants resented the overweening authority of their landlords, and rebellions were frequent. Both intellectual and peasant dissatisfaction engendered repressive measures on the part of the government. Russia’s total dependence on serfdom as a source of labor produced an inflexible economy that eventually challenged the country’s political and social stability.

V. Russia and Eastern Europe

The expansion of Russia reduced eastern Europe to a narrow band separating Russia from the West. Poland, the Czech, and Slovak regions of Europe remained more a part of the Western tradition than part of the Russian cultural milieu. These areas participated in the scientific revolution and the Protestant Reformation of the West. Even those areas that remained outside of Russian political control tended to fall under the aegis of the authoritarian regimes of Prussia and Austria. Perhaps the most striking political feature of the period was the decline of Poland from the largest entity in eastern Europe to a subdivision among Russia, Prussia, and Austria. The existence of a dominant aristocracy, coercive agricultural labor systems, and the absence of a substantial merchant class were common to eastern European nations and Russia. The eclipse of Poland highlighted the emergence of the Russian empire in Europe and in central Asia.

VI. Global Connections: Russia and the World

Russia’s emergence is crucial to early modern history. Reaching to the Pacific and Alaska, Russia gained direct control of much of Central Asia, while Russian policy affected Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East.
TIMELINE

Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.

- election of first Romanov tsar
- hereditary status of serfs fixed
- Time of Troubles begins
- last partition of Poland under Catherine the Great
- beginning of reign of Peter the Great
- Ivan III frees much of Russia from Mongols

1462
1604
1613
1649
1689
1795

TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS

The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Define each one.

- Ivan III
- third Rome
- Ivan IV the Terrible
- boyars
- cossacks
- Time of Troubles
- Romanov dynasty
- Alexis Romanov
- old believers
- Peter I the Great
- St. Petersburg
- Catherine the Great
- partitions of Poland
- obrok
- Pugachev Revolt
- Radishev
MAP EXERCISE

The following exercise is intended to clarify the geophysical environment and the spatial relationships among the important objects and places mentioned in the chapter. Locate the following places on the map.

Moscow

St. Petersburg

boundaries of the Russian empire by 1800

Compare the boundaries of the Mongol empire of Chinggis Khan to the Russian empire by 1800. To what extent could the Russians claim to be the heirs of Chinggis Khan and the unifiers of central Asia? How were these empires different?
MAKING CONNECTIONS

The following questions are intended to emphasize important ideas within the chapter.

1. How did the Mongol occupation affect Russian civilization?
2. What was the nature of Russian expansion under Ivan III and Ivan IV?
3. What was the impact of Westernization under Peter the Great? What were its limitations?
4. What was the extent of Westernization under Catherine the Great? What were its limitations?
5. What was the nature of Russian serfdom? What was the ‘peasant problem’?
6. Why did Russia become economically dependent on the West?
7. What characteristics did eastern Europe share with Russia? How were Russia and eastern Europe different?

PUTTING LARGER CONCEPTS TOGETHER

The following questions test your ability to summarize the major conclusions of the chapter.

1. In what ways was the development of the Russian empire from 1480 to 1800 similar to the expansion of the West in the same period? In what ways was it different?
2. What was the impact of Westernization in Russia during the 17th and 18th centuries? Did the policy of Westernization surmount the separation of Russia and the West?
SELF-TEST OF FACTUAL INFORMATION

1. What was the primary difference between the Western and non-Western empires?
   a. Non-Western empires were largely land-based and contiguous to their original centers.
   b. Non-Western empires lacked the new military technology, particularly the use of gunpowder.
   c. Non-Western empires stayed outside the Western-dominated world economy.
   d. Non-Western empires lacked economic significance and failed to develop commercial systems.

2. Ivan III was responsible for the
   a. abolition of serfdom in Russia.
   b. military campaigns that freed much of Russia from the Mongols.
   c. policies of Westernization that required changes in dress among the Russian elite.
   d. conversion of Russia to Roman Catholicism.

3. Why did Russian expansion policy focus particularly on central Asia?
   a. The Russians wished to seize control of the trade routes with China.
   b. Most of the Russian population remained ethnically Mongol with cultural ties in Asia.
   c. There were natural barriers to westward expansion.
   d. The Russians were motivated by a desire to push the former Mongol overlords farther back to prevent renewed invasion.

4. Cossacks were
   a. those who objected to reforms in the Orthodox Church.
   b. members of the Russian nobility.
   c. peasants recruited to migrate to newly seized lands in the Russian empire.
   d. the designated heirs of the tsars.

5. Which of the following was NOT a policy of Alexis Romanov?
   a. the abolition of the assemblies of nobles
   b. the abolition of serfdom
   c. the reform of the Orthodox Church
   d. the continuation of colonization in central Asia

6. Peter the Great’s creation of a new capital at St. Petersburg
   a. followed the destruction of Moscow during the peasant rebellion.
   b. demonstrated the continued emphasis of Russian expansion in central Asia.
   c. was indicative of the desire to push the borders of Russia into the Balkans.
   d. reflected the growing importance of Russian dominance of the Baltic Sea.
7. Where was Peter the Great’s program of economic development concentrated?
   a. cloth production  
   b. mining and metallurgical industries  
   c. urbanization  
   d. pottery production

8. The government of Catherine the Great
   a. controlled all aspects of central and local administration.
   b. advocated the abolition of serfdom and the reform of coercive labor systems in Russia.
   c. was so hamstrung by peasant rebellion that it scarcely functioned by the end of the reign.
   d. was strongly centralized but yielded virtually all local control to the nobility.

9. All of the following countries participated in the partition of Poland EXCEPT
   a. Prussia.
   b. Hungary.
   c. Austria.
   d. Russia.

10. In 1649, Russian serfdom
    a. was abolished.
    b. was converted to legal slavery.
    c. began to modify to a free peasantry as the result of Westernization.
    d. became hereditary.