9.5: Ivan I and the Rise of Moscow

Learning Objective

• Outline the key points that helped Moscow become so powerful and how Ivan I accomplished these major victories

Key Points

• Moscow was considered a small trading outpost under the principality of Vladimir-Suzdal into the 13th century.
• Power struggles and constant raids under the Mongol Empire’s Golden Horde caused once powerful cities, such as Kiev, to struggle financially and culturally.
• Ivan I utilized the relative calm and safety of the northern city of Moscow to entice a larger population and wealth to move there.
• Alliances between Golden Horde leaders and Ivan I saved Moscow from many of the raids and destruction of other centers, like Tver.

Terms

Tver

A rival city to Moscow that eventually lost favor under the Golden Horde.

Grand Prince of Vladimir

The title given to the ruler of this northern province, where Moscow was situated.
The Rise of Moscow

Moscow was only a small trading outpost in the principality of Vladimir-Suzdal in Kievan Rus’ before the invasion of Mongol forces during the 13th century. However, due to the unstable environment of the Golden Horde, and the deft leadership of Ivan I at a critical time during the 13th century, Moscow became a safe haven of prosperity during his reign. It also became the new seat of power of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Ivan I

Ivan I (also known as Ivan Kalita) was born around 1288 to the Prince of Moscow, Daniil Aleksandrovich. He was born during a time of devastation and upheaval in Rus’. Kiev had been overtaken by the invading Mongol forces in 1240, and most of the Rus’ principalities had been absorbed into the Golden Horde of the Mongol Empire by the time Ivan was born. He ascended to the seat of Prince of Moscow after the death of his father, and then the death of his older brother Yury.

Ivan I stepped into a role that had already been expanded by his predecessors. Both his older brother and his father had captured nearby lands, including Kolomna and Mozhaisk. Yury had also made a successful alliance with the Mongol leader Uzbeg Khan and married his sister, securing more power and advantages within the hierarchy of the Golden Horde.

Ivan I continued the family tradition and petitioned the leaders of the Golden Horde to gain the seat of Grand Prince of Vladimir.
Vladimir. His other three rivals, all princes of Tver, had previously been granted the title in prior years. However they were all subsequently deprived of the title and all three aspiring princes also eventually ended up murdered. Ivan I, on the other hand, garnered the title from Khan Muhammad Ozbeg in 1328. This new title, which he kept until his death around 1340, meant he could collect taxes from the Russian lands as a ruling prince and position his tiny city as a major player in the Vladimir region.

**Moscow’s Rise**

During this time of upheaval, the tiny outpost of Moscow had multiple advantages that repositioned this town and set it up for future prosperity under Ivan I. Three major contributing factors helped Ivan I relocate power to this area:

- It was situated in between other major principalities on the east and west so it was often protected from the more devastating invasions.
- This relative safety, compared to Tver and Ryazan, for example, started to bring in tax-paying citizens who wanted a safe place to build a home and earn a livelihood.
- Finally, Moscow was set up perfectly along the trade route from Novgorod to the Volga River, giving it an economic advantage from the start.

Ivan I also spurred on the growth of Moscow by actively recruiting people to move to the region. In addition, he bought the freedom of people who had been captured by the extensive Mongol raids. These recruits further bolstered the population of Moscow. Finally, he focused his attention on establishing peace and routing out thieves and raiding parties in the region, making for a safe and calm metaphorical island in a storm of unsettled political and military upsets.
Kievan Rus’ 1220-1240. This map illustrates the power dynamics at play during the 13th century shortly before Ivan I was born. Sarai, the capital of the Golden Horde, sat to the southeast, while Moscow (not visible on this map) was tucked up in the northern forests of Vladimir-Suzdal.

Ivan I knew that the peace of his region depended upon keeping up an alliance with the Golden Horde, which he did faithfully. Moscow’s increased wealth during this era also allowed him to loan money to neighboring principalities. These regions then became indebted to Moscow, bolstering its political and financial position.

In addition, a few neighboring cities and villages were subsumed into Moscow during the 1320s and 1330s, including Uglich, Belozero, and Galich. These shifts slowly transformed the tiny trading outpost into a bustling city center in the northern forests of what was once Kievan Rus’.

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**Russian Orthodox Church and The Center of Moscow**

Ivan I committed some of Moscow’s new wealth to building a splendid city center and creating an iconic religious setting. He built stone churches in the center of Moscow with his newly gained wealth. Ivan I also tempted one of the most important religious leaders in Rus’, the Orthodox Metropolitan Peter, to the city of Moscow. Before the rule of the Golden Horde the original Russian Orthodox Church was based in Kiev. After years of devastation, Metropolitan Peter transferred the seat of power to Moscow where a new Renaissance of culture was blossoming. This perfectly timed transformation of Moscow coincided with the decades of devastation in Kiev, effectively transferring power to the north once again.
Peter of Moscow and scenes from his life as depicted in a 15th-century icon. This religious leader helped bring cultural power to Moscow by moving the seat of the Russian Orthodox Church there during Ivan I’s reign.

One of the most lasting accomplishments of Ivan I was to petition the Khan based in Sarai to designate his son, who would become Simeon the Proud, as the heir to the title of Grand Prince of Vladimir. This agreement a line of succession that meant the ruling head of Moscow would almost always hold power over the principality of Vladimir, ensuring Moscow held a powerful position for decades to come.

Sources

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