

**Vikings, Slavs, Byzantines and the Development of Russia**

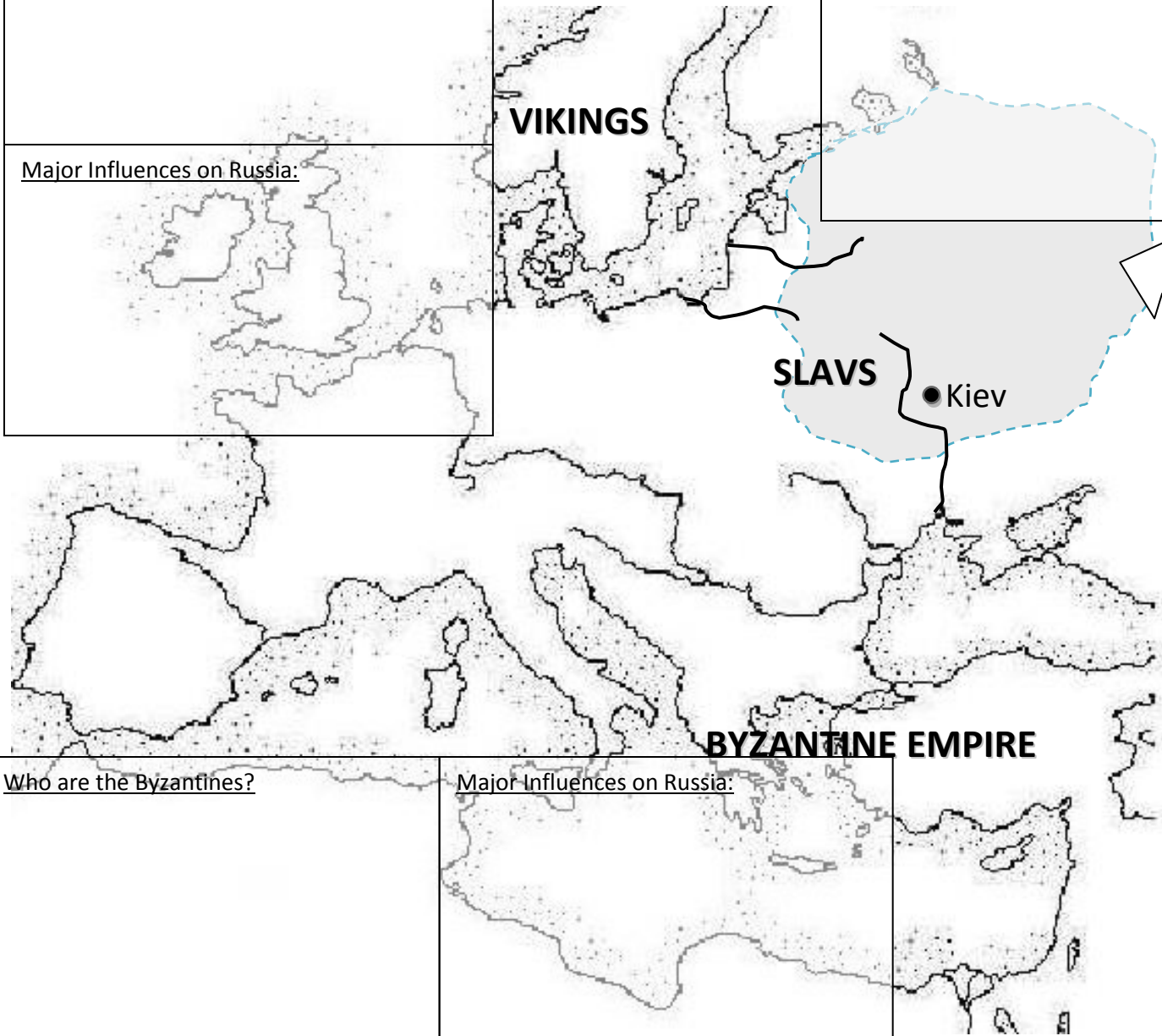
Who are the Vikings?

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Major Influences on Russia:

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NOTES ON RUSSIA



Who are the Byzantines?

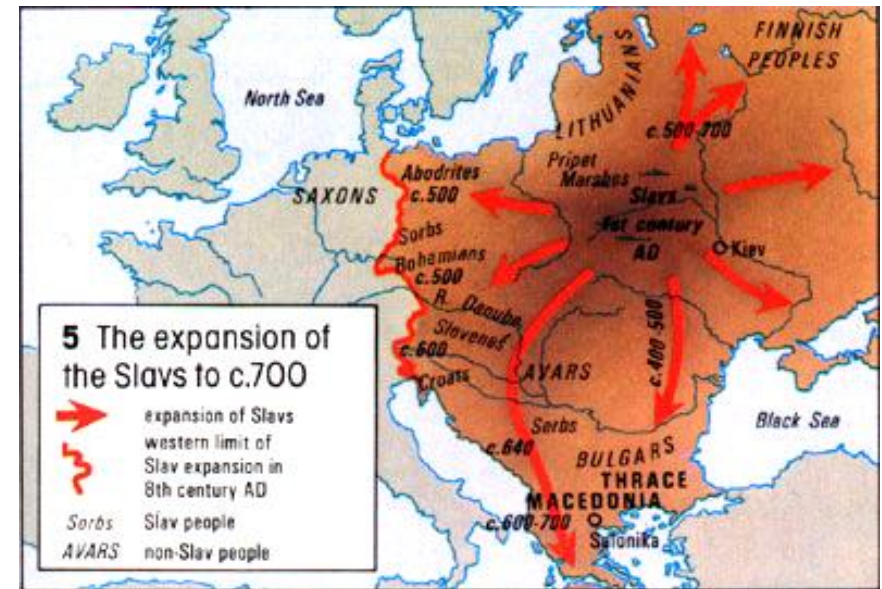
Major Influences on Russia:

# THE SLAVS

## Who are the Slavs?

The Slavs were people who lived among the forests of north of the Black Sea in Eastern Europe. These Slavic peoples had similar languages but had no political unity (lacking united government). The Slavs were farmers, but also hunted and fished. The Slavs were polytheistic whose most important gods were animals (bear was the master of the forest; wolf was the master of the hunt).

As the barbarian Germanic tribes began attacking and moving into the Western Roman Empire, the Slavs began spreading out into the fertile areas of Eastern Europe.



## What influences did they have on Russia?

The Slavs will be the basis of the culture that becomes Russia.

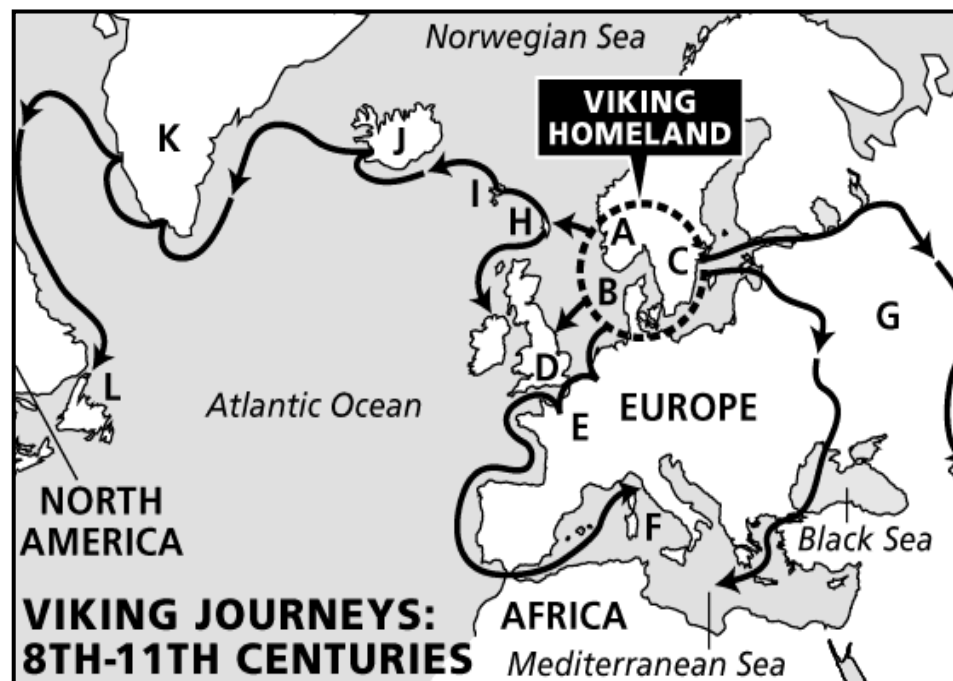


# THE VIKINGS

## Who are the Vikings?

The Vikings, also called Northmen or Norsemen, were a Germanic people who lived in Scandinavia, a wintry, wooded region in Northern Europe (in the present-day countries of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden). Vikings worshiped warlike gods and became fierce warriors who raided Western Europe with terrifying speed. Clutching swords and heavy wooden shields, these helmeted seafarers beached their ships, struck quickly, and then moved out to sea again. They were gone before locals could mount a defense

The Vikings were not only warriors but also traders, farmers, and explorers. They ventured far beyond western Europe. Vikings journeyed down rivers into the heart of Russia, to Constantinople, and even across the icy waters of the North Atlantic. The Viking explorer Leif Ericson reached North America around 1000, almost 500 years before Columbus. Gradually, the Vikings accepted Christianity and stopped raiding Europeans as the climate of Europe warmed and farming became easier.



## What influences did they have on Russia?

Viking traders sailed down rivers, like the Dnieper and Volga Rivers, to trade with the Slavs and in Constantinople in the Byzantine Empire. Vikings traded their furs for luxury goods from the Byzantines. Over time, some Vikings began to settle among the Slavs in Eastern Europe. Russian legends say the Slavs invited the Viking chief Rurik to be their king. As the Vikings intermarried with the Slavs, a new culture emerged: Russia.



# THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

## Who are the Byzantines?

One of the world's great civilizations was in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, the part that did not fall to barbarians. The Eastern Roman Empire survived for another thousand years under a new name, the Byzantine Empire with its capital at Constantinople. Byzantine emperors had supreme authority over both the Christian church and the government. Greek replaced Latin as the official language. Eventually the Christian church split into eastern and western branches, with Latin-speaking Roman Catholics in Western Europe and Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians in the East.

Under Emperor Justinian, the Hagia Sophia was constructed and was the largest Christian church in the world and served as the model for later Eastern Orthodox churches. Justinian also brought together all of the laws of the Roman Empire into a single legal code that became the basis for modern legal systems.



## What influences did they have on Russia?

The Byzantine Empire was located close to the Slavs of Eastern Europe. As Slavic and Viking culture mixed to form Russia, new trade centers were formed, such as the city of Kiev. From Kiev, merchants could sail by river to Constantinople where they could trade for exotic foreign products. This trade helped improve the wealth and power of Russia and led to cultural diffusion with Byzantine culture.

Byzantine missionaries from the Orthodox Church spread their religion north to the Slavs. Two missionaries, Saint Methodius and Saint Cyril, converted many Russians to Christianity. To help themselves spread their religion they developed an alphabet for the Slavic languages called the Cyrillic alphabet. The Cyrillic alphabet allowed Slavic peoples to read the Bible in their own language.

In 980, Vladimir the king of Kiev 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:

*“The [Byzantines] 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 his people to Orthodox Christianity. Vladimir appreciated the Byzantine idea of the emperor as supreme ruler of the Church. Eventually, Russian kings viewed themselves as the “Third Rome” and took the title of “Czar,” a Slavic term for the Roman and Byzantine title of “Caesar”

# RUSSIA

Viking traders moved into western Russia and developed river trade routes that reached south to Constantinople. Furs from Scandinavia were traded for luxury products from the Byzantine Empire. The mixture of Slavic, Viking, and Byzantine influences shaped the culture and development of Russia:

- The city of Kiev grew because of trade with the Byzantine Empire. The rise of Kiev marked the appearance of Russia's first important unified territory. Kiev was located on a main water trade route and became a prosperous trading center, and from there many Russians visited Constantinople.
- Russian trade in the Byzantine capital of Constantinople and the arrival of Byzantine missionaries in Russia led to the spread of the Eastern Orthodox religion. Orthodox Christianity is the main religion in Russia today.
- The Russian title "Czar" comes from the Roman and Byzantine term "Caesar."
- The curved domes of Russian architecture were influenced by Byzantine designs.
- Russia's Cyrillic alphabet was created by the Orthodox missionaries from the Byzantine Empire.



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