

Is Martin Sixsmith right about the 'culture, beauty and embryonic democracy' of Kievan Rus?

TASK: Read the story of the unit, to find out more about what we're going to study in the next eight lessons. Then, answer the questions at the bottom of the page (use a separate piece of paper).

According to traditional belief, the **Viking** ruler **Rurik** was invited to reign in the city of **Novgorod** in the year 862. Before Rurik arrived, Kievan Rus was not united - and there were no laws governing the people, with different tribes fighting against one another to be in control. However, Rurik (and the rulers that followed him) established Kievan Rus, building it up to be a powerful state in Eastern Europe.



One of the most important rulers of Kievan Rus in the early days was **Oleg**, who is nicknamed 'Oleg the Wise'. Oleg helped to fight off the threat from the neighbouring **Khazar** tribes, and he expanded the state of Kievan Rus by conquering lands that had previously been part of the **Byzantine Empire**.



According to some historians, Kievan Rus was a **democratic** state. This means that it was not ruled over by one, all-powerful leader: the people of Kievan Rus were involved in decision-making. It was common in the city of Novgorod for 'veches' to be called: these were meetings where ordinary men were invited to discuss how the city would run. However, some parts of life in Kievan Rus were less democratic. For example, there was a lot of **censorship**, which meant that certain books could not be published. Also, neither women nor the poor were allowed to take part in the veches.



In 1240, the **Mongols** arrived in Kievan Rus. The Mongol Empire was growing in size, and the Mongol warriors managed to conquer the state of Kievan Rus. From this point on, Kievan Rus stopped existing as its own, independent state: it became part of the Mongol Empire's '**Golden Horde**'. Mongol influences gradually spread within Kievan Rus, and the features of **democracy** that had previously existed were slowly wiped away.



In 1242, the people of Kievan Rus - led by **Alexander Nevsky** - managed to hold off an attack from the **Teutonic knights**, who wanted to try to spread their version of Christianity (Catholicism) across Europe. However, Kievan Rus was decreasing in power and authority by this point, as the Mongol influence increased.



Finally, Mongol influence in the area began to decline - and a new, powerful 'Rus-ian' state began to emerge. This time, its power was not in Kiev, but in the city of Moscow. **Muscovy** princes and tsars ruled over a huge area of land, which came to be known as 'Russia'.



TASK: Answer the questions below:

- 1: Where did the first ruler of Kievan Rus come from?
- 2: How did Oleg consolidate and extend power in Kievan Rus?
- 3: Why do some historians consider Kievan Rus to have been a democratic state?
- 4: What happened after the Mongols invaded Kievan Rus?
- 5: What did the Teutonic knights want to do?
- 6: What happened when Mongol influence began to decline?

