

The Red Heart of Russia

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The Moscow Kremlin, and adjoining Red Square, is an image that stalks our imagination and fixes our view of Russia. Within its precincts are treasure-laden museums, opulent palaces, cathedrals of jewel-box interiors whose white bell-towers are capped with golden domes beneath a forest of Orthodox Christian crosses. For centuries, it has been, and still continues to be, the seat of government, a centre for church ceremonial, and a hive of civil servants. Here is an extraordinary political and spiritual powerhouse from which Moscow enforced its rule over Russia. But first and foremost, the Kremlin exists as a fortress, encircled by massive red-brick walls made more formidable by high towers and powerful gateways. Today, Russians draw deep feelings of national pride from its splendour. This mighty complex is steeped in history but yet it is not timeless. Over the centuries these buildings have served as text and theatre to project the political message of Moscow's rulers. The Kremlin has been physically re-shaped and publically re-invented to glorify an apparently unchanging Russian state. Behind this myth the reality of the Kremlin's story is more curious and fascinating.

Moscow, one of the world's great cities with a population of around 12 million, began life modestly as a stockaded settlement on a low hill where the river Neglinnaya flows into the Moscow river. Protected by dense forests of oak and birch, this trading outpost stood at a strategic junction of trade routes, linking the important river systems of northern and western Russia. Medieval chronicles first mention Moscow in 1147, a date which has become enshrined as the city's birth year. Archaeology has undermined this official dating with evidence that the Kremlin site had been occupied much earlier, probably by Finns, and there is a suggestion that Moscow's name itself derives from Finnish. After around 800 AD the area was held by the Viaticchi, a Slav tribe with an unenviable reputation for violence. In 1156 AD, Yuri Dolgoruky

'the Long-armed', Prince of Kiev, is said to have raised an impressive earth and timber rampart on the site of the modern Kremlin. In this case excavation has supported the chronicle statement. It needs to be mentioned that the word 'kremlin' derives from Russian 'kreml', a fortified citadel, and there were many in medieval Russia. As Moscow rose to political dominance, its fortified centre was advanced from being a kremlin to being the Kremlin. Unfortunately, the new defences failed their first major test in 1176 AD during a raid by a hostile neighbour and the township of Moscow was left in flames.

And then came the Mongols, also known in the West as Tatars or Tartars, an unstoppable storm that brewed up far to the east on the plains of Inner Asia and overwhelmed the disunited princes of Russia. Newly united by Genghis Khan, these ferocious warriors, superbly led and highly organised, demonstrated exceptional skills at archery and horsemanship. Their astonishing mobility, backed by clouds of arrows to weaken and confuse an enemy, preceded a final charge by heavy cavalry while kettle-drums thundered out a fatal message over the field of battle in a medieval demonstration of 'shock and awe'. In 1223 an invading army of unknown origin defeated a coalition of Russian princes and their steppe allies at the river Kalka before disappearing as swiftly as it had come. The 'devil's horsemen', as Mongol armies were named by horrified Western sources, came back in 1237, defying the extremes of Russian weather that would halt future invasions by Napoleon and Hitler, to launch a new winter onslaught. One by one, the greatest towns of northern Russia were destroyed and their inhabitants killed or enslaved. Only an early spring thaw in the swampy region around Novgorod saved the merchant city from destruction by the Mongols. The following year, in 1239, it was the turn of south-west Russia to endure the onslaught. Succession disputes among the leadership deflected Mongol attentions away from eastern Europe back to their homelands. In 1242 Batu, grandson of Genghis Khan, set up a khanate, the Golden Horde, stretching at its peak from the river Danube to Siberia, with its capital at Saray on the Volga.

The impact of the Mongol invasion brought immediate disaster but also had lasting economic, political and social effects. Karl Marx described the next two centuries as 'the bloody swamp of Mongol slavery'. Khans of the Golden Horde were essentially interested in submission and tribute from Russia's princedoms; their direct intervention amounted to one hand grasping a sword and the other extended for tribute or captives. The Mongol armies left a burnt-out Moscow on their road to more important places. But the town was quickly rebuilt, benefiting from a flood of refugees escaping more vulnerable places. It was, however, unforeseeable, that insignificant, isolated Moscow would become the territorial heartland for the rise of the modern state of Russia.

In the 21st century, Alexander Nevsky (1220-1263) has been voted as the greatest-ever Russian but there is much more to his career than this high accolade implies. He achieved immortality in the unsettled years after the Mongol invasion as both military hero and venerated saint, a giant whose name has been honoured by tsarist and soviet medals, as well as on warships, from wooden men-of-war to nuclear submarines. Aged only 19, he defeated an invading Swedish army by the river Neva in 1240, earning his title of Nevsky. Two years later, he was victorious against the Teutonic Knights on the frozen Lake Peipus, a battle commemorated in Sergei Eisenstein's highly political and patriotic film 'Alexander Nevsky' (1938). With the Mongols, Alexander followed a less glorious but more prudent path of appeasement. It undoubtedly benefited him personally but it also softened some of the harsher edges of Tatar rule.

After Alexander's death in 1263, his infant son Daniel, the youngest of four brothers, was awarded Moscow and its lands, a modest inheritance suited to his junior status within the family. At the time of the Mongol invasion Moscow was one of the most insignificant principalities in the Russian north-east. Dwarfed in importance by neighbouring centres of power, it was probably no more than 500 square miles in extent. By the 15th century, Daniel's descendants had broadened their territory to around 15,000 square miles. In the long run, Moscow's location and general situation had real advantages. Despite being ransacked during the first Mongol campaign, it lay too deep in dense forests to be an easy target, and

stood on a river which, in turn, gave access to the great waterways of northern and western Russia: the Dnieper, the Don, the Volga and the Oka. Over the next two centuries, a series of cunning and ruthless princes had extended their lands by force, murder, marriage, purchase and treaty. The dynasty profited both from good fortune, as capable rulers were long-lived, and from a different type of inheritance system by which a prince left the bulk of his estate to the eldest son rather than divide it among all brothers. Most tellingly, Moscow's princes followed a policy of total submission to their Tatar overlords. By remaining on good terms with the Golden Horde and acting as its agent against other Russians, Moscow suffered less from Tatar punitive raids and was able to grow in strength.

Dealings with the Golden Horde were delicate and dangerous even for the most willing of collaborators. The khan had the right to confirm Russia's princes on their thrones and authorise them to collect tribute. Ivan I (1325-41) of Moscow proved himself to be a supreme exponent of drawing advantages from humiliating subservience. His older brother's career was, no doubt, a salutary warning. On a visit to Sarai, the Tatar capital, in 1318, Yuri had ingratiated his way to a marriage with the khan's sister, secured authority over other Russian princes and brought about the brutal murder of a rival. A return journey in 1325 was markedly less successful: he was killed by another Russian prince although the khan was so affronted by such behaviour that next year he had the offender executed. Ivan I benefited from a long stay with the Golden Horde. He willingly aided the Tatar destruction of Tver, a grander rival to Moscow. The reward for Ivan was to be granted the title of grand prince indicating his superiority over other all other Russian rulers. He was also authorised to collect taxes in Russia for the Golden Horde. This was done with sufficient vigour to satisfy the Tatars and still leave a sufficient surplus for Ivan's own treasury, earning him the nickname 'Kalita' (Moneybags). The prosperity of Ivan's Moscow, as well as its security, persuaded Metropolitan Peter, head of the Russian Orthodox church, to make the city his residence in 1326. This fusion of political and religious power was crucial for the future of Russia, adding a layer of sanctity to the grubby realities of tax extortion. It also transformed the Kremlin's appearance.

In the 14th century Moscow was still a small place, built from wood. Flames were an even greater threat than the Tatars. The incomplete chronicles report four major fires in 15 years, with 18 churches lost in 1337 and another 28 in 1343. For the first time Moscow's citadel is described as a 'kremlin' (fortress) although for centuries afterwards it was known as the 'grad' (town). Surrounded by a trading district and workshop areas, Ivan Kalita's Kremlin extended over 47 acres (19 hectares). He enclosed it with formidable walls of oak, having obtained permission from his Tatar masters although the results were, perhaps, far more substantial than they had been led to understand. Ivan and his family shared the Kremlin with the mansions of his leading nobles and a small number of wealthy merchants, living in separate compounds with enough room for gardens, orchards and stables. There were wooden churches but it seems likely that the first constructed from stone was the Cathedral of the Dormition, begun in 1326. In succeeding years, Ivan's growing prosperity allowed him to raise more limestone churches: the Church of St John of the Ladder (1329), the Cathedral of the Saviour of the Forest (1330) and the Cathedral of the Archangel Michael (1333) where the ruling family was to be buried. None of these have survived. Moscow possessed resources of fine stone but Tatar khans had taken native stonemasons to work at Sarai while their rule cut Russia off from European skills.

The hard crust of Tatar domination under which Moscow had grown to prominence was cracked but not broken by Grand Prince Dimitry IV (1359-1389). After yet another disastrous fire ravaged the city in 1365, Dimitry ordered an intense building programme that in less than two years replaced the Kremlin's dilapidated wooden enclosure with new limestone walls, extending them to roughly their modern length of two kilometres. They soon proved their worth by frustrating repeated sieges by foreign enemies. Dimitry resumed Ivan Kalita's expansionist policies and was even bold enough to challenge Tatar overlordship. In 1378, he ceased paying the customary tribute and followed this by defeating a Golden Horde punitive expedition, the first Russian success against invading Tatars. With the blessing of the

Church and aided, more unusually, by fellow Russian princes, Dimitry routed another Tatar army at the battle of Kulikovo (1380) by the banks of the river Don. Found half-dead among a pile of corpses, Dimitry's triumph earned him the nickname 'Donskoi' (of the Don). He entered patriotic legend as an heroic prince who threw off the oppressive Tatar yoke. The Orthodox Church even proclaimed him a saint. Dimitry's victory was not, however, decisive. Within two years, another Golden Horde army appeared before Moscow. Prince Dimitry and Metropolitan Kiprian escaped but the Kremlin, although well-defended by its stone walls, surrendered by agreement, only to be brutally sacked and burned. On his return to the ruined city, Dimitry is said to have supervised the burial of some 24,000 corpses lying in the streets. Moscow, growing in size and economic clout, had gained a relative dominance over other Russian princedoms but still lay in the shadow of the Golden Horde for almost another century. Despite the achievement at Kulikovo, Moscow's warrior saint was still obliged to confirm his position with the Khan in Sarai and to pay tribute while remaining the Tatars' preferred tax-collector. The rosy glow of legend rather than fact still colours perceptions of Dimitry Donskoy's life.

The defeat at Kulikovo was a symptom of weakness in Moscow's Tatar overlords. From the middle of the 14th century, the lands of the Golden Horde were stricken by repeated outbreaks of deadly Black Death. It coincided with internal quarrels and civil wars for the throne at Sarai for the twenty years from 1360. At the end of the century the Golden Horde was heavily defeated on the river Volga by Timur the Lame (known as Tamerlane by the West), the greatest Asian conqueror since Genghis Khan. Having advanced to 200 kilometres from Moscow, Timur chose to return East, disappearing from Russia as suddenly as he had arrived. The Golden Horde briefly revived after his withdrawal but from the start of the 15th century, Tatar power began a steady decline. Its lands fragmented, after 1430 a separate khanate was set up in the Crimea while others emerged on Russia's eastern and southern frontiers.

Moscow's rulers were unable as yet to inflict a decisive defeat on the Golden Horde. The dynasty survived its own vicious bouts of family feuding to profit from the surprising longevity of only six princes who were to rule for 225 years after 1369. Vasily I (1389-1425), successor to Dimitri Donskoy, no longer paid the customary Tatar tribute in full but altered the relationship by choosing, instead, to send diplomatic 'gifts'. By the mid-15th century Moscow had further reversed the traditional power relationship by acting as overlord to Tatar nobles. If any single event showed the end of formal Tatar dominance, it was the curious stalemate in 1480 when the armies of Moscow and the Golden Horde faced each other across the river Ugra for weeks before retreating in opposite directions. The lands of Muscovy continued to be ravaged by Tatar slave-raiders throughout the 15th and 16th centuries. As late as 1591, Crimean Tatars reached Moscow in a devastating raid, carrying thousands of captives to stock slave pens in the south. It was not until 1783 that the last powerful khanate, in the Crimea, was subdued.

The consolidation of Russian princedoms under the rule of Muscovy earned Ivan III (1462-1505) the title 'Great'. (The soubriquet was later conferred on Peter I, 1682-1725, and Catherine II, 1762-1796) Patient, prudent, thrifty and judiciously aggressive, he trebled the size of the territory belonging to Moscow, bringing together Russian princedoms under his rule, and ending their subjection to the Golden Horde. Ivan had broader imperial ambitions: to promote cultural self-confidence and legitimise Moscow's position in the world. In 1453, Constantinople, the '2nd Rome' and capital of the Byzantine empire, the city which had brought Christianity to pagan Russia, fell to the Muslim Ottoman Turks. Dismayed Orthodox Christians were inclined to see the Grand Princes of Muscovy as the legitimate successors to the Byzantine emperors.

In 1472 Ivan chose as his second wife, Sofiya Palaeologue, niece and nearest living heiress to the last Byzantine emperor, who had grown up at the papal court in Rome. According to the chronicle, she was very ugly and, weighing some 350 pounds, broke the bed on her first night in Moscow. In a highly intimate discussion with an adviser, Ivan gloomily expressed doubts about his ability to father a child with

the princess although he took heart from the several children of his first marriage. On the other hand, Ivan had his own imperfections: drinking to extremes at dinner and showing such hostility at the unexpected sight of women that they fainted with terror. Sofiya was also intelligent and ambitious, exercising great influence over her husband in their 21 year marriage, as well as producing 11 children. She also brought in her train renaissance culture and imperial tradition. The Byzantine double-headed eagle was adopted as an emblem (and was re-adopted in 1993 after the fall of communism) along with elaborate court ceremonial included bowing to the ground and the use of titles such as 'tsar' (Caesar) and 'autocrat'. The idea also took root that Moscow had a sacred mission mission to save the Christian world: '..for two Romes have fallen, the third (Moscow) stands and there will be no fourth'.

In keeping with his grander vision of Moscow's rank, Ivan carried out an ambitious building programme that transformed his shabby-looking citadel. He endowed it with new cathedrals and palaces, all defended by sturdy modern walls and towers that replaced older crumbling fortifications. Ivan gave the Kremlin much of its current appearance and it is remarkable that the most famously Russian buildings within the Kremlin have Italian foundations.

A first attempt to replace the decrepit Dormition Cathedral, where Moscow's rulers were crowned, ended badly in 1472 when most of the structure collapsed, either as result of flawed calculations or the effects of a modest earthquake or, perhaps, both. For the tsar, completing the cathedral central to dynastic life became a matter of state. Influenced by his wife Sofiya, an embassy was sent to Italy to recruit the best architectural talent. It returned, in 1475, with Aristotele Fioravanti, a true renaissance man in his gifts as an architect, artist, hydraulics expert, metal-caster and military engineer as well as an amusingly-talented magician. He had worked extensively in northern Italy, earned papal approval and a Europe-wide reputation. A very generous contract was offered to work in distant, barbarous Russia but Fioravanti's decision to leave Rome may also have been influenced by an accusation of counterfeiting, for which the penalty was ingesting molten lead. Working on the new cathedral within the precepts of traditional Russian religious styles, Fioravanti brought fresh Italian technical innovation, from a machine that demolished in a week what had taken three years to build to better types of mortar and, even, the use of new-fangled metal spades. He established his own brickworks which produced larger well-fired products for building. The Dormition Cathedral, lofty, light and delicate, with much deeper foundations and walls strengthened by iron tie-rods, rose to completion in 1479, after less than five years of work. Sadly, its creator became a victim of his own success; his skills had made him too valuable for Tsar Ivan to permit departure. After Fioravanti's death in 1486, more Italians were recruited over the next 30 years to continue rebuilding the Kremlin, leaving hints of their homeland on traditional Russian architectural styles.

The Kremlin's Cathedral Square was refashioned by Ivan, creating the current skyline of golden domes that rise over red crenellated walls. The Dormition Cathedral, with five cupolas, is the most important, being the coronation seat of tsars, the place of investiture for church leaders and finally their honoured burial place. Its interior is filled with magnificent frescoes painted on gold backgrounds in the Byzantine style which have been darkened over centuries by the smoke of candles and incense. The cathedral was the place to venerate Russia's finest icons, encased in gold and silver with adornments of precious stones. Pride of place went to the Virgin of Vladimir, a tender portrait of motherly love, whose origins lay in Byzantium before embarking on a singular journey that led to Moscow in 1395 and on to the famous Tretyakov Gallery, although the cathedral still holds a later copy. Here was a grand theatre for the great occasions of state life: coronations and weddings.

Shortly before his death in 1505, Ivan commissioned another Italian architect, Alevisio Lamberti da Montagnana, to rebuild the Cathedral of the Archangel Michael in stone. The Venetian had reached Moscow as a wedding gift to the tsar from the Crimean khan. His finished cathedral, had an Italianate exterior, with limestone scallop-shells under one gold and four silver domes. It was meant to be the final

resting place of Russia's rulers. The cathedral's dark frescoed interior, contrasting with the pale façade, holds the tombs of 46 rulers. Their tombs, like the collection of sacred icons from all regions of Russia in the Dormition Cathedral, emphasised Moscow's imposition of unity on heaven and earth.

The third of the new stone churches built by Ivan in the 1480's was the Cathedral of the Annunciation. Small and intimate, it was to be a private baptismal and marriage chapel for the tsar's family. The work of Russian masters, perhaps to avoid the taint of foreign influence, the frescoed cathedral was a perfect jewel-box of colour, with a striking mosaic floor inlaid with jasper and agate. Flames and restorations have destroyed much of the original painting. One precious survivor of a devastating fire in 1547 was the iconostasis (a wall of icons and religious paintings separating the body of the church from the altar) with images created by the great master Theophanes the Greek and the more famous Andrei Rublev, 'the Russian Fra Angelico'. In rebuilding the cathedral, Ivan the Terrible (1533-84), ordered some striking changes. He added four new domed chapels, all gilded with loot from his destruction of Novgorod. In 1572 a new porch was built on the south-east corner for use by the tsar himself as he was required to enter the church by a separate entrance, having exceeded the Church's approved number of three consecutive marriages.

Towering high over other Kremlin buildings, the gleaming-white Bell Tower of Ivan the Great on Cathedral Square replaced an earlier church and bell-tower on the same site. It was ordered by Ivan III, around 1505, to complement his imposing array of cathedrals, although the construction took its name from an adjoining church, St John (or Ivan, in Russian) of the Ladder, rather than the reigning tsar. It was designed by Bon Fryazin ('Frank' the generic Russian name for Italians), an otherwise unknown foreigner. His handiwork had deep foundations and thick walls which soared in two tiers to a height of 60 metres. Tsar Boris Godunov (1598-1605) raised it a further 20 metres, partly as a job creation scheme during a time of economic crisis, and partly as an elevated notice-board for an inscription that proclaimed his legitimacy as a ruler. The tallest structure in Russia, it dominated the Moscow skyline. It is a testament to the quality of Bon Fryazin's architectural skills that his belltower survived later attempts to destroy it with explosives by Napoleon Bonaparte's retreating French army in 1812.

Familiar hazards of fire and, equally deadly, changes in taste have meant that less survives of the secular buildings that Ivan added to the Kremlin than of his churches. The complex of small, mostly wooden structures that made up the tsar's residence must have seemed very modest to Ivan's wife Sofiya Palaeologue, raised in opulent Roman palaces. Ivan, too, needed a more imposing stage on which to celebrate the increasingly elaborate rituals attaching to court ceremonial, state banquets and the reception of ambassadors. The construction of this the new palace complex was started in 1487 by one Italian, Marco Ruffo, and completed by another, Pietro Antonio Solari in 1491. Only the attractive Faceted Palace has survived, making it the oldest secular building in the Kremlin. Unhampered by the native religious traditions that influenced church architecture, the foreign architects created a distinctive two-storey structure with Italianate features. The upper chamber was a huge reception hall, covering some 500 square metres, reaching a height of 9 metres and supported by a massive central pillar. Here was a throne-room worthy of a Russian tsar. It is still used as an official reception room by Russia's president. The Faceted Palace takes its name from the diamond-pointed rustication of the limestone main façade, a nod to the fashionable style of contemporary Italian palaces.

Entrance to the palace from Cathedral Square was by the imposing Red Staircase, decorated with carved lion-heads and an archway of double-headed eagles. Like Red Square, the name derived from an old Russian word for 'beautiful', rather than an indication of colour. It was used only by members of the royal family. From this staircase in 1682, the future Peter the Great, aged 10, witnessed rebellious guards hack his mother's relatives to death. It was also the place from which Napoleon is said to have watched the spread of flames that would eventually consume the city in 1812, although, in truth, better vantage points

were available. Destroyed by the Soviets in 1934 to make way for a canteen and toilets, the Red Staircase was rebuilt to celebrate Moscow's (supposed) 850th anniversary in 1997. Through a string of disputes over costs, corruption and damage to other buildings, the Kremlin had again served as a mirror for Russia's rulers.

Ivan III turned to Italian military engineers, the finest of their time, to enclose his rebuilt Kremlin with fortifications suitable for a new age.

By the mid-15th century, it was clear that the medieval walls and towers which had deterred, not always successfully, mobile armies of horsemen from the steppes, were poorly-suited to challenges posed by the new age of gunpowder. Such new walls needed to be a platform for artillery. They needed to protect vital water supplies and store essential foodstuffs during a siege. In the event of disaster, they were to hide away the tsar's treasures in secret chambers.

Work began in 1485 and was continued by a team of Italians until 1516, a decade after Ivan's death. The older walls were cleared away and deep foundations excavated for the new defences. Eventually, the new walls, built from heavy red brick, extended for 2235 metres with a thickness that varied from 3.5 to 6.5 metres, and a height that reached from 8 to 19 metres. They were capped with 2 metre tall 'swallow-tail' battlements that brought the aesthetic flair of northern Italy to Russia. The roughly triangular Kremlin was protected on two sides by the rivers Neglinnaya and Moscow as natural moats. The threat from flames on the third side led to the creation of Red Square as a huge fire-break in front of the facing walls. In 1508 extra protection was given to this vulnerable stretch of wall by excavating a gigantic brick-lined moat, over 12 metres deep and 40 metres wide, defended by low walls and crossed only by drawbridge. Now, the Kremlin was an artificial island cut off from Moscow itself physically by water and its emblematic red-brick walls as much as by ways of ideology.

The walls of the Kremlin are studded with 20 towers, five of which serve as gate-houses. The cornerhouses and the gate-towers are taller than the intermediate towers which are more strictly defensive in purpose, with the distances in-between dictated by the range of 15th century firearms. Over the centuries, peaked and tent-shaped roofs were added to the towers and, under Stalin, five were capped with red stars to replace tsarist double-headed eagles. One of the oldest, the Secret Tower, covered an underground passage to the river Moscow to secure supplies of water during times of siege. The Saviour Gate, named after the icon which hung before it, is the best known, or most photographed of the Kremlin's towers. Rising almost 70 metres over Red Square, it carries an inscription to honour its Milanese builder Pietro Antonio Solari. This was the main entrance to the Kremlin used only by the tsars, now it is restricted to use only by modern presidential motorcades. Each of the towers has its own name and history. All are steeped in legends of lost libraries and secret store-rooms although these may be no more fantastical or unreal than rumours of tunnels and bunkers built beneath the Kremlin by Joseph Stalin.

Ivan III's energetic building programme transformed the face of the Kremlin. By the time of his death in 1505, Moscow's citadel revealed the spiritual and secular power of the Russian state. The years from the 16th to the 17th centuries were to be a golden age for the Kremlin. The tsar occupied three well-guarded palaces that were linked by gardens, walkways and terraces. Within this complex a maze of interlinking corridors connected small dimly-lit rooms and huge vaulted chambers, all decorated in gaudy-coloured frescoes. Life here was dictated by the stiff protocols of Byzantine court ritual. A reclusive tsar, robed in full majesty, would appear before his overawed subjects on important state occasions. Close by the tsarist palaces were the mansions and private chapels of the more influential boyar nobility. In 1500 the Kremlin's first internal road sliced its way from the Saviour Gate through this jumble of building to reach the Cathedral Square, Russia's spiritual heart. Here were Ivan's three great cathedrals, as well as, nearby, seven other churches, a convent, a monastery and the metropolitan's palace. It was a closed society that

brought together elements of a bazaar, night-club and monastery. Behind thick intimidating walls and beneath tall golden domes, the secret life of the Kremlin, with its deadly intrigues and unpredictable drama, played out in a golden age up to the 16th century.

The Kremlin and its population endured the period of political turmoil known as the Time of Troubles (1598-1612) that ushered in the Romanov dynasty. With restoration and reconstruction, its great buildings survived a disastrous foreign occupation (1610-12) as well as the recurrent danger of fire (1619, 1626, 1682 and 1701). There were notable additions to the tsarist palaces: the Terem palace, now hidden by other buildings, was built on older Italian foundations for the first Romanov tsar, Mikhail, in the 1630's and the Palace of Amusements (1652), so-called from a theatre that was located in a confiscated mansion, which, ironically, was to house Stalin's private apartment.

At the start of the 18th century, Tsar Peter I 'the Great' (1682-1725), took decisions that would send the Kremlin into decline for over 200 years. In 1703 he founded a new city, St Petersburg, in the bleak swamps by the river Neva, close to the Gulf of Finland, leaving landlocked Moscow for a port that would be a window on the west. When Peter transferred his court there in 1712, it had crushing effects on Moscow. Its population fell steeply. For the next 200 years, apart from a short period under Peter II (1727-30) when the capital was returned to Moscow, the city lost its dominance in Russian life. Up to the fall of the Romanov dynasty, weddings and coronations were still celebrated in the Kremlin's cathedrals although its neglected palaces decayed to a pitiful state. In Peter's own lifetime, the Kremlin was becoming an exotic tourist destination, requiring an entrance fee. As usual, change followed flames. The terrible 1701 fire consumed closely-packed wooden houses belonging to the nobility within the Kremlin's north-west corner and permitted Peter the Great to raise an Arsenal as a military storehouse and display-case for captured spoils of war. The building, completed in 1736 after Peter's death, was partly demolished by Napoleon's soldiers although the restored Arsenal now parades 750 captured French cannon before its façade.

Throughout the 18th century the accession of new rulers meant an urgent need to remedy the lamentably decayed buildings of the Kremlin. Empress Elizabeth (1741-1761), like her predecessors, turned to an Italian architect, Francesco Rastrelli, for a new Winter Palace in the Kremlin. Completed in 1769, this wooden residence was far more modest than its namesake in St. Petersburg and only lasted until 1838. Another empress, Catherine II 'the Great' (1762-1796), was not fond of Moscow, seeing its unplanned and disorderly layout as indicative of its general backwardness. Overambitious projects to redevelop the city were only partly realised. A plan for a huge four-storey palace that would have dominated the south side of the Kremlin failed when Catherine lost interest and it ran out of money. One project that came to fruition in 1787 was the building of a Senate. Designed in a severely neoclassical style, it was shaped as a truncated triangle with three inner courtyards and a large circular hall. The Senate building was home and office for Vladimir Lenin in the years immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Now it is the official residence of the Russian President, currently Vladimir Putin.

Napoleon Bonaparte's month-long residence in Moscow during 1812 left three-quarters of the city in ashes. The Kremlin, its buildings having been looted with systematic efficiency, survived a brutish attempt to destroy it with explosives. Planning for the city's reconstruction started in 1813 and large-scale building began the following year. Around the Kremlin, Red Square took on its modern shape and nearby Theatre Square, home to the Bolshoi, dates from this time. The river Neglinnaya, part of the moat around the Kremlin was channelled into an underground pipe. This left space for the Alexander gardens, to the west of the Kremlin's walls. Their Italianate style seemed more shocking to visitors in the mid-19th century than, perhaps, it might have done to Ivan III whose foreign architects had rebuilt the Kremlin over 300 years earlier.

While Moscow was being renewed on neo-classical lines, the Kremlin was the subject of a special commission that aspired to reconstruction rather than modernisation. Tsar Nicholas I (1825-1855) wanted suitable accommodation for the royal family during visits from St Petersburg, something more reflective of Russia's grandeur and awakened national pride. The architect Konstantin Ton designed a huge building, its yellow and white façade embellished with Byzantine and Russian motifs, in the Kremlin's south-west corner, that swallowed up earlier churches and palaces like an architectural version of matryoshka doll. The Great Kremlin Palace delighted Nicholas I when it opened in 1849 although other observers had already compared it more to a Manchester cotton factory than an imperial residence. Ton's other lasting contribution to the Kremlin was the current State Armoury, adjacent to the Great Palace and in a similar style. A major stop on any group itinerary, it houses treasures of arms, furniture, carriages, state robes and tsarist Fabergé eggs, together with the nearby State Diamond Fund's literally dazzling collection of diamonds and jewellery. In some ways, this 19th century destruction of genuinely old fragments of medieval Moscow created a medieval fantasy of Russian life as Viollet-le-Duc did for medieval France.

The Bolshevik Revolution of November 1917 brought war's destructive horrors inside the Kremlin's walls once more. Social and political tensions that had built up before the outbreak of World War I, compounded by heavy military defeats, spelled an end to the 300 year-old Romanov dynasty. After changing hands twice, the Kremlin was captured by Lenin's followers on 3 November after a week of stiff fighting. The walls had been breached and some towers had almost collapsed. Artillery had blown away the cupolas of the Dormition Cathedral and pock-marked other churches while shell damage disfigured the belltower of Ivan the Great. Palaces and museums were looted and fragments of their treasures were left among rubble. At a moment when the Kremlin's fate looked highly uncertain through damage, neglect and pilfering, Bolshevik authorities declared in January 1918 that every building within the Kremlin was state property, ensuring the property of the People was protected from the people themselves. Recognising the military weakness of St Petersburg at a time of civil war, the new Soviet government chose to move the capital back to Moscow despite Vladimir Lenin disliking the place and other Bolsheviks being hostile to its reactionary historical resonance. The temporary move became permanent from February 1918.

The Kremlin, home of the fledgling Bolshevik government, became a fortress where entry was permitted only by a restricted permit. Its cathedrals and palaces were reused as museums, living and working spaces by the small army of government officials and retainers who swarmed within the historic walls, all jostling to find accommodation. The Senate now became the living quarters for most of the important Soviet leaders including Lenin who shared a comparatively generous suite of rooms with his wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, and their beloved pet cat.

Inevitably, the Soviet period changed the Kremlin's fabric. All clergy, male and female, were denounced as spies and expelled. Ancient churches and convents, with their priceless artistic treasures, were visited by teams of experts, some to record details of the monuments, others, more definitively, to dynamite them. The 14th century Chudov monastery, and others, were torn down to provide space for a new Military School, designed in the classical style, which eventually served as the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and now, more mundanely, holds government offices. A cinema was installed in the Great Kremlin Palace for Stalin to indulge his enthusiasm for films and drunken carousing until dawn.

The trappings of the former tsarist regime had to be swept into the dustbin of history and the Kremlin was dressed in new Bolshevik clothes. Monuments to two Romanovs, Tsar Alexander II and Grand Duke Sergei, killed by revolutionaries were hauled down. In 1935 gilded double-headed eagles, the enduring symbol of tsarism, were taken from the tops of the Kremlin towers and replaced by five-sided ruby red stars. Apart from the buildings themselves, two curious mementos from tsarist times were left in place:

the 'Tsar Cannon', cast in 1586 and never used, and the 'Tsar Bell', shattered after the great fire of 1737.

Under Joseph Stalin, the Kremlin's isolation became even more oppressive and for the people of Moscow it was a symbol of dread. After the Second World War it was decided to mark the alleged 800th anniversary of the city's foundation. The Kremlin, especially, was a difficult place to reconcile Russia's past with her socialist present. The modern restorers faced the challenges of the earlier 15th century Italian architects: a new brick-making plant was needed and teams of workers laboured at high speed in harsh weather conditions. Stalin's hand hovers over the Kremlin's newly-painted, restored walls and churches. Before the Bolshevik Revolution it had been open to the public. It was not until 1955, under Khrushchev, that the Kremlin was reopened to casual visitors. In the 1960's he added a final dramatic and unlovely flourish to its architecture with a 6000 seat Palace of Congresses for party assemblies or theatrical concerts.

The end of the soviet regime was effectively signalled in August 1991 when the new Russian flag, a tricolour of red, white and blue, was raised over the Kremlin. Mikhail Gorbachev, the last Soviet Communist leader, was replaced by Boris Yeltsin, a brave but impulsive maverick. Optimists who hoped to see Russia transformed into a modern democracy from this turmoil have been disappointed with the rise of the current president Vladimir Putin. Dispensing with marxist ideology, Russia's new leaders, like earlier rulers, turned to patriotic history and national pride as the means to unify the emergent Russian Federation. In 1998 Yeltsin attended the burial of the murdered tsar Nicholas II and his family. On Red square, Kazan Cathedral, destroyed in 1936, was rebuilt in full. Even more striking was the case of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. Completed in 1860, Konstantin Ton's striking pastiche Byzantine-Russian church was dynamited and replaced by an outdoor swimming pool in the 1930's. In 2000 the building rose from the water as an imposing parody of the earlier pastiche. Emblematic of the new age, a space that had been reserved by Ton for Russian heroes of the 1812 War was now filled with images of modern Russian oligarchs.

The Kremlin has played a starring role in this reinvention of the Russian state. Once more, the double-headed eagle featured on the official coat-of-arms in place of the Soviet hammer and sickle although red stars still topped the Kremlin walls. In December 1990, along with Red Square, the Kremlin was cited as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in due recognition of its historic importance. The run-up to Moscow's (imagined) 850th anniversary stimulated restoration work inside the Kremlin's walls. Toilets and catering facilities on the edge of Cathedral Square preceded a rebuilding of the Red Staircase on the Faceted palace's south side. This was first of many projects including a major restoration of the Senate and the Grand Kremlin Palace. Some of the intricate work was carried out by foreign specialists, with craftsmen from Florence echoing ancient links with the 15th century Kremlin. Much of the work was carried out by unskilled, poorly-paid labourers. The costs of refurbishment were huge. In keeping with older Russian tradition and in step with contemporary practice, the stench of financial corruption swirled around Pavel Borodin, the much-garlanded figure in charge of presidential real estate. A Swiss firm, Mabetex, was alleged to have paid millions of US dollars as bribes to secure the lucrative contracts. In a remarkable chain of events, Borodin was eventually extradited from the United States to Switzerland in 2001 before being bailed by the Russian government for an impressive \$2.85 million. On returning to Russia he put on record his gratitude to President Vladimir Putin. Eventually, in 2002, Borodin was fined \$177,000 but as he declined to recognise the Swiss court's jurisdiction, that sum was deducted from his bail surety. In the meantime, the flow of lucrative building contracts around Red Square and the Kremlin continued. UNESCO concerns about the impact of development and lack of a conservation plan have led to requests for a detailed report from the Russian authorities by 1 February 2015. It remains to be seen how far Moscow's historic red heart, having survived foreign invasion and civil war can resist this modern assault by developers and restorers to retain its place among sites of world historical significance.

The Kremlin, by day or night, still has a fascination that rewards its visitors now as it did for Lewis Carroll in 1867 who saw ‘.. that most beautiful aspect of which it is capable - a flood of cold, clear moonlight, bringing out the pure white of the walls and towers, and the glittering points of light on the gilded domes, in a way that sunlight could never do.’

