

World History

The Conquest of Siberia

Name: _____
Section: _____
Score: ____/5

Directions: Read the following article about the Conquest of Siberia and answer the thought questions below.

The conquest of Siberia

In the year 1558 a family of wealthy merchants, Stroganof by name, began to barter with the Tartar tribes dwelling east of the Ural Mountains. Ivan IV. had granted to this family the desert districts of the Kama, with great privileges in trade, and the power to levy troops and build forts—at their own expense—as a security against the robbers who crossed the Urals to prey upon their settled neighbors to the west. In return the Stroganofs were privileged to follow their example in a more legal manner, by the brigandage of trade between civilization and barbarism.

These robbers came from the region now known as Siberia, which extends to-day through thousands of miles of width, from the Urals to the Pacific. Before this time we know little about this great expanse of land. It seems to have been peopled by a succession of races, immigrants from the south, each new wave of people driving the older tribes deeper into the frozen regions of the north. Early in the Christian era there came hither a people destitute of iron, but expert in the working of bronze, silver, and gold. They had wide regions of irrigated fields, and a higher civilization than that of those who in time took their place.



Yermak

People of Turkish origin succeeded these tribes about the eleventh century. They brought with them weapons of iron and made fine pottery. In the thirteenth century, when the great Mongol outbreak took place under Genghis Khan, the Turkish kingdom in Siberia was destroyed and Tartars took their place. Civilization went decidedly downhill. Such was the state of affairs when Russia began to turn eyes of longing towards Siberia.

The busy traders of Novgorod had made their way into Siberia as early as the eleventh century. But this republic fell, and the trade came to an end. In 1555, Khan Ediger, who had made himself a kingdom in Siberia, and whose people had crossed swords with the Russians beyond the Urals, sent envoys to Moscow, who consented to pay to Russia a yearly tribute of a thousand sables, thus acknowledging Russian supremacy.

This tribute showed that there were riches beyond the mountains. The Stroganofs made their way to the barrier of the hills, and it was not long before the trader was followed by the soldier. The invasion of Siberia was due to an event which for the time threatened the total overthrow of the Russian government. A Cossack brigand, Stepan Rozni by name, had long defied the forces of the czar, and gradually gained in strength until he had an army of three hundred thousand men under his command. If he had been a soldier of ability he might have made himself lord of the empire. Being a brigand in grain, he was soon overturned and his forces dispersed.

Among his followers was one Yermak, a chief of the Cossacks of the Don, whom the czar sentenced to death for his love of plunder, but afterwards pardoned. Yermak and his followers soon found the rule of Moscow too stringent for their ideas of personal liberty, and he led a Cossack band to the Stroganof settlements in Perm.

Tradition tells us that the Stroganof of that date did not relish the presence of his unruly guests, with their free ideas of property rights, and suggested to Yermak that Siberia offered a promising field for a ready sword. He would supply him with food and arms if he saw fit to lead an expedition thither.

The suggestion accorded well with Yermak's humor. He at once began to enlist volunteers for the enterprise, adding to his own Cossack band a reinforcement of Russians and Tartars and of German and Polish prisoners of war, until he had sixteen hundred and thirty-six men under his command. With these he crossed the mountains in 1580, and terrified the natives to submission with his fire-arms, a form of weapon new to them. Making their way down the Tura and Taghil Rivers, the adventurers crossed the immense untrodden forests of Tobol, and Kutchum, the Tartar khan, was assailed in his capital town of Ister, near where Tobolsk now stands.

Many battles with the Tartars were fought, Ister was taken, the khan fled to the steppes, and his cousin was made prisoner by the adventurers. Yermak now, having added by his valor a great domain to the Russian empire, purchased the favor of Ivan IV by the present of this new kingdom. He made his way to the Irtish and Obi, opened trade with the rich khanato of Bokbara, south of the desert, and in various ways sought to consolidate the conquest he had made. But misfortune came to the conqueror. One day, being surprised by the Tartars when unprepared, he leaped into the Irtish in



Kiakhta, Siberia

full armor and tried to swim its rapid current. The armor he wore had been sent him by the czar, and had served him well in war. It proved too heavy for his powers of swimming, bore him beneath the hungry waters, and brought the career of the victorious brigand to an end. After his death his dismayed followers fled from Siberia, yielding it to Tartar hands again.

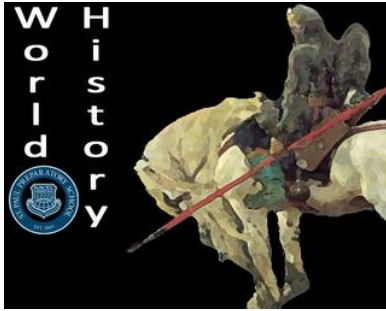
Yermak—in his way a rival of Cortez and Pizarro—gained by his conquest the highest fame among the Russian people. They exalted him to the level of a hero, and their church has raised him to the rank of a saint, at whose tomb miracles are performed. As regards the Russian saints, it may here be remarked that they have been constructed, as a rule, from very unsanctified timber, as may be seen from the examples we have heretofore given. Not only the people and the priests but the poets have paid their tribute to Yermak's fame, epic poems having been written about his exploits and his deeds made familiar in popular song.

Though the Cossacks withdrew after Yermak's death, others soon succeeded them. The furs of Siberia formed a rich prize whose allurements could not be ignored, and new bands of hunters and adventurers poured into the country, sustained by regular troops from Moscow. The advance was made through the northern districts to avoid the denser populations of the south. New detachments of troops were sent, who built forts and settled laborers around them, with the duty of supplying the garrisons with food, powder, and arms. By 1650 the Amur was reached and followed to the Pacific Ocean.

It was a brief period in which to conquer a country of such vast extent. But no organized resistance was met, and the land lay almost at the mercy of the invaders. There was vigorous opposition by the tribes, but they were soon subdued. The only effective resistance they met was that of the Chinese, who obliged the Cossacks to quit the Amur, which river they claimed. In 1855 the advance here began again, and the whole course of the river was occupied, with much territory to its south. Siberia, thus conquered by arms, is being made secure for Russia by a trans-continental railroad and hosts of new settlers, and promises in the future to become a land of the greatest prosperity and wealth.

Morris, Charles. "The Baldwin Project: Historical Tales: Russian by Charles Morris." Mainlessons.com. The Baldwin Project - Historical Tales, n.d. Web. 04 Feb. 2015.

<<http://www.mainlesson.com/display.php?author=morris&book=russian&story=siberia>>.



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Directions: Answer the following thought questions about the reading on the Russian conquests of Siberia.

Thought Questions:

1. While expanding into Siberia who were three of the groups of people the Russians encountered?
2. What was the Russian interest in Siberia? For Yermak's expedition? For later expeditions?
3. Why can it be said that Siberia was conquered by force? Use two different examples.
4. Is Yermak an example of Exploration for reasons of Gold, Glory, or Gospel? Defend your answer using the assertion, reasoning, evidence method.