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SOCIAL AND POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF NOVGOROD THE GREAT IN THE VECHЕ PERIOD

The article focuses on the debate about the nature and consequences of the social and political development of Novgorod the Great in the 10th to the 15th centuries. The author outlines the historiography of the topic and provides a review of his research in this field in the context of the modern historiographic situation. We argue that there are well-grounded reasons for the convergence of different concepts which exist in modern Russian historiography of medieval Novgorod. Whereas V.L. Ianin and the scholars who share his views dwell on the boyar corporation, which claimed 'sovereign ownership' of the land, and I. Ia. Froianov writes about the Novgorod vechе in general, the works of this author give an account of the status and historical significance of the 'small commune' inside Novgorod and of other issues, related to it. Refs 65.

Keywords: Novgorod the Great, 'odinachestvo' — like-mindedness, consensus, unanimity; 'usobitsy' — internecine feuds, vechе — popular assembly, 'vechevoi ukлад' — vechе system, 'gorodskie storony' — halves of the city, 'gorodskie kontsy' — city-parts, 'vechevoi gorod-zemlia' — vechе city-land, 'volost' — city-state, a city with an adjoining land, a city, headed by the urban community.

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ОБЩЕСТВЕННО-ПОЛИТИЧЕСКАЯ ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ ВЕЛИКОГО НОВГОРОДА В ЭПОХУ ВЕЧА

Статья посвящена обсуждению характера и итогов социально-политического развития Великого Новгорода X–XV вв. Автор характеризует историографию проблемы и дает панораму своих исследований в контексте современной историографической ситуации. Намечаются объективные основания для сближения различных концепций, существующих сегодня в отечественной историографии средневекового Новгорода. Если В. Л. Янин и его школа говорят о боярской корпорации, обладавшей к тому же правом «верховой собственности» на землю, а И. Я. Фроянов пишет о новгородском вече вообще, то исследования автора статьи привлекают внимание к статусу и историческому значению малой общины внутри Новгорода, со всеми вытекающими отсюда следствиями. Библиогр. 65 назв.

Ключевые слова: Великий Новгород, «одиначество», усобицы, вече, вечевой уклад, городские стороны, городские концы, вечевой город-земля, волость.

In accordance with the general view, accepted in the Russian scholarship, the republic of Novgorod represented the stage of state-building, which was more archaic than the Moscow-Vladimir monarchy, as the political centralization of Rus in the 14th and 15th centuries was in the first place apparently caused by peculiarities of internal *socio-economic development*.

Thus, what is the point in grieving for the 'free rein' of Novgorod? As one outstanding Russian researcher and a talented historical short-story writer states unemotionally: 'The stubborn old woman Marfa Boretskaia, who wanted to hand Novgorod over to Lithuania, bore little resemblance to a romantic heroine of Karamzin' [Alekseev, 1991, p. 150].

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Social conflicts, which were becoming more acute in Novgorod, especially towards the end of its independent period, seem to have ruined its state system; the potential of political development, based on veche-based 'narodopravstvo' (popular rule, democracy) also ran out. This opinion can be challenged by the opposite view. Although the limited space of this article doesn't allow of covering all the works published by the author of this article, some of the most important conclusions will be mentioned.

Both historical and historiographic analyses are impossible without the clear understanding of the specific role of scholarly succession. It can be stated that the mere existence of scholarship is based on tradition, as 'the principle of transfer, of handing down is an essential element of existence, in other words, the existence itself *is* transfer. All the things — from leptons in cosmic rays to fond feelings, foodstuffs, great ideas and spiritual values have to be transferred. Everything which is not transferred doesn't last and will eventually disappear. Those things, which remain, have their own method either to transfer themselves or to be transferred and can be characterized by this method' [Khoruzhii 2003, p.1].

The main rule and at the same time the most important condition of mastering the scholarly tradition is to perceive it *fully, as a whole*. According to a well known definition of Tomas Stearns Eliot (which in the first place refers to the domain of art, but can apply to the academic sphere as well), following the tradition doesn't necessarily mean sticking to it in a blind and timid manner. Following the tradition is to study the history from Homer to modern times and to define one's place in it. Mastering the tradition means to be imbued not only with the past, but with the present as well, to synchronize them in one's feelings and mind. Relying on the tradition implies hard work [Plakhov, 1982, p. 179]. T. S. Eliot, with the insight so characteristic of him, said about poetry: 'the most individual parts of a poet's work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously... Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, tradition should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense...' [Eliot, 1919]. If this sense *is* so important for an artist, a *historian* also needs it to a considerable degree. Any researcher of history has his/her own idea of the ways, forms and results of accumulating knowledge in the field this person is interested in and respectively his/her own view on the starting point and objectives of his/her work. Therefore it is very important to provide a correct assessment of the role and significance of a particular research tradition for the scholarship in general.

The establishment of different schools of historiography in Russian historical literature is sometimes subject to certain opportunistic ideas. Some opinions abound in either eulogistic or 'unmasking' enthusiasm. The establishment of historiographic schools in its turn can lack full-scale understanding of the process of the accumulation of historical knowledge.

The tradition of the study of veche city-lands, public rule and communal independence of ancient Rus and 'zemskoe nachalo' (the principle of local self-government) in medieval Russia formed in Russian historiography of the 19th century. The historians, who developed this tradition at different periods of time, agreed on a number of important conceptual issues. It is noteworthy, that such historians as V.I. Sergeevich [Sergeevich 1867; 1900–

1902], M. F. Vladimirskii-Budanov [Vladimirskii-Budanov 1995], M. A. Diakonov [Diakonov 1926], A. E. Presniakov [Presniakov 1993], G. V. Vernadskii [Vernadskii 1996] and many others as well as modern scholars I. Ia. Froianov [Froianov 1974; 1980; 1990; 1999; 2001; 2003; Froianov and Dvornichenko 1988]¹. A. Iu. Dvornichenko, Iu. V. Krivosheev, A. V. Petrov, A. V. Maiorov, V. V. Puzanov, V. V. Dolgov and other experts hold similar views on the political system of ancient Kievan-Novgorod Rus. There are many historians in the Russian academic milieu who support these scholars and share some of their ideas. Modern historiography is characterized by the insufficient recognition of scholarly continuity and conceptual similarity and even by the intentional or unintentional attempts to conceal them.

It is necessary to mention that *Sergei Fedorovich Platonov's* views on the ancient urban veche-based popular rule are extremely important for the Russian scholarship and coincide with the conclusions of the above-mentioned scholars. (Generally speaking, many details of the ancient Russian veche organization are reconstructed by means of Novgorod sources, due to their well-preserved state).

The observation of the rise and course of the internecine feuds on the shores of the river Volkhov helps to reveal the structure and the principles of operation of the veche institution. My analysis of the chronicles resulted in the conclusions, which to some extent agree with the findings of the historian S. F. Platonov, presented in two lectures (in comparison with other works of this author they are not widely known).

At the moments of the escalation of the conflicts in Novgorod in the middle and late XII century the city 'fell not into random crowds of antagonists, but into particular groups or corporations which constituted the whole city or some of its parts [Platonov, 1916b, pp.1–9].

As it was emphasized by A. D. Gradovskii: 'veche symbolized not the personal freedom of an individual, but the communal way of life. That is why is expressed the freedom and rights of the whole commune, rather than of individuals [Gradovskii 1899, p.348].

To sum up, the city veche in the capital on Volkhov represented the meeting of the city halves or the 'konchanskie' communes (the communes of the city-parts), which grew due to the transformation of the halves of the city and were headed by the local boyars. Thus, an individual, no matter how noble he was, 'would be outweighed by the milieu he belonged to, by the alliance, which got the upper hand in the city. Not the people disagreed with each other, but these alliances; and these alliances went to the veche and voted there.' *'Veche is composed not of the individuals, but represents a number of organizations, which constitute the political community of Novgorod the Great (a kind of 'allied state')*' [Platonov 1916b, pp. 4–9]². When the conflicts occurred, the veche '...used to fall into pieces. The internecine feuds of Novgorod provide an insight into its internal structure' [Platonov 1916a].

In this regard I would like to mention some statements which have been proved long ago. 'The meeting of all the citizens of the leading city was not necessary. Only those interested gathered there without any roll call'. Veche 'was considered to be successful regardless of the number of people who attended it, provided this group was big enough to insist on its resolution'[Sergeevich 1867, pp.52, 57–58; 1893, pp. 60, 101–102]. The resolution was to be adopted *only unanimously*, since 'it was impossible for the majority to win over

¹ These monographs date back to the 1970s and 80s.

² My emphasis.

a strong and unyielding minority'. However, 'a contemporary could hardly distinguish between a unanimous opinion and an opinion of the overwhelming majority of the people in the crowd, who were not registered, and whose votes were not counted. If a suggestion was approved by many and there were no objections, it was adopted as a common decision of all the participants. Few protestants did not dare to oppose the vast majority and the latter believed to be entitled to force others into agreeing with their decision' [Diakonov 1926, pp. 96–98, 100–102; Sergeevich 1867, pp. 54–55; 1893, pp. 63–64; Vladimirkii-Budanov 1995, p. 80].

Thus, the most populous part of Novgorod had the chance to shut other citizens down at the veche place and ram through the decision, it wanted. If it failed to outvoice its fellow citizens immediately, or the voices of the city-parts clashed with each other, that 'resulted in the conflict of the constituent parts of the complex political mechanism' [Platonov, 1916b, pp. 1–9]. The more important the stumbling block was, the fiercer this struggle became.

In order to provide a review of the study of ancient Russian veche city-lands in the context of the *most recent* historiography, we should first of all mention the name of I. Ia. Froianov [Froianov 1992; 1995; 1996; 1997; 2015], who has been doing research in the field of ancient Russian history over the last two decades, has authored a number of monographs, which *differ considerably from each other*, but at the same time are characterized by certain conceptual similarity [Dvornichenko 1993; 2010; 2013a; 2013b; 2014; Puzanov 1995; 2007; Pashin 1996; 2001; Krivosheev 1999; 2003a; 2003b; Maiorov 2001; Petrov 2003; Dolgov 1999; 2004; 2007; Dolgov, Kotliarov, Krivosheev, Puzanov 2003; Derbin 2007; Sokolov 2010]. In the 1970s-1980s the restoration of the 'time links' in the studies of medieval Russia was carried out within the framework of the Marxist methodological paradigm. The attempts to accuse Froianov of deviation from Marxist theoretical principles in the Soviet period were nothing more than the deceitful trick, which embodied the worst features of the Soviet era. The works of this historian, a staunch supporter of particular theoretical propositions, were characterized not by the formal references to 'classics', but by the real correlation between his conclusions and their statements. Those researchers of the ancient Russia, who did not agree with these propositions, in the 1990s, got the opportunity to abandon rigid methodological limitations.

The school of historiography, which is in the focus of this article, does not have clear boundaries, which is quite typical of other historiographic schools as well. The scholars, who adhere to it, vary in style and professional characteristics; sometimes they do not agree on certain issues and even engage in polemics with each other [Dvornichenko 2014, pp. 296–299]³. At present this school of historiography is not the only one in the Russian medieval scholarship and this situation will remain the same in the foreseeable future; the works of numerous critics are also being published. As long as the authors with opposite opinions communicate with each other, observing the rules of academic correctness (covering all the aspects of this wide term) the difference in their positions deserves nothing but approval: modern historiographic culture is pluralistic.

At the same time effective discussion is impossible without the participants' *exact* knowledge of the academic views of their opponents. Thus, one of the recent studies claims: 'The main idea of I. Ia. Froianov, shared by his followers, at least by those, who

³ For example, see the concepts of the origins of ancient Russian political organization by A. Iu. Dvornichenko and V. V. Puzanov.

explicitly assert this, remains the same: the Russian medieval social system *noticeably stood out against the common European background* [Lukin 2014, p.26]⁴. I. Ia. Froianov has never stated this in any of his works and never put the question this way, although he undoubtedly mentions the peculiarity of Russian history — indeed, what ‘local’ history is not distinctive? Moreover, it was Froianov, who, taking into account and supporting the concept of A. I. Neusykhin and A. Ia. Gurevich about the ‘pre-feudal period’ and ‘barbarian society’, made efforts to analyze ancient Russian society against the ‘general European’ background in the context of early medieval European antiquity.

The author of the above-mentioned study also argues, that: ‘I. Ia. Froianov detects the cause of this distinctiveness in the external factor (‘military invasions occurred one after another throughout Russian history’) and in the ‘communal nature of Russian state structures’. The first argument does not explain why this ‘external factor’ did not result in the emergence of similar structures in other countries and the second one explains one unknown element via another unknown element’ [Lukin 2014, p.26]. I. Ia. Froianov never considered the ancient Russian city-lands of the 11th to early 13th centuries to have been the product of the external factor. He speculated about the important role of the latter in the Russian history with regard to the ‘Moscow’ period in the first place. It was A. E. Presniakov, who suggested that the land-city-state system in Russia in the 11th and 12th centuries was the result of the ‘organizational efforts’ of the Rurikid princes [Presniakov 1993, pp. 306, 372, 407]. Although I agree with many generally accepted propositions of this expert scholar, I take the liberty to note that he attaches *excessive importance* to the role of ‘Varangian’ princes in the establishment of ‘Kievan state’ and the organization of lands-city-states [Petrov 2003, p.111]. ‘The communal nature of the ancient Russian state structures’ can be confirmed by the fact that the veche had existed throughout all its territories up to the invasion of Khan Batu. Any area where a veche assembly took place, is supposed to have had some form of community. Besides, speaking about the ‘city communes’ and the ‘communal way of life’ does not necessarily mean confining oneself to one particular type of communal state structures, namely the antique polis, but would rather involve city-states as a universal type of political organization of many peoples in different periods of ancient and medieval history. Summing up his version of our scholarly views our colleague from Moscow claims: ‘I. Ia. Froianov and his disciple A. V. Petrov (with some alterations) applied this approach for the study of Novgorod veche’ [Lukin 2014, p.26]. Such interpretation does not contribute to the academic discussion of the problems of ancient Russian history.

Another extremely important breakthrough was achieved in the course of the recent study of medieval Novgorod. The thesis of the ‘radical difference between the state system of Novgorod and the monarchic state systems of Smolensk and Kiev’ is based on the latest archeological findings [Iarin 2000, p.681; 2002, p.79; 2001]. There is no doubt that the discovery of the new sources contribute to our knowledge of the political order of the capital on the shores of Volkhov. Although these new materials enrich the intellectual context of the discussion, they do not provide answers to all the questions.

What conclusions can we possibly make, analyzing all the latest data? *Originally a prince in Novgorod was not considered an all-powerful monarch. The nobility of Novgorod, as the ‘leading stratum of the society’ had been controlling the state income from nearly the*

⁴ My emphasis.

9th century. The 'joint court' of a prince and a 'posadnik' (governor of medieval Russian city-state, appointed by the prince or elected by the citizens) — one of the representations of 'odinachestvo' of a prince's reign and a commune — had existed before the events of 1136 and 1137.

The idea of the existence of any form of monarchy in ancient Novgorod ('early feudal' or some other form) can be dismissed for good. In my opinion, the findings of the research expedition to Novgorod and the works of V. L. Ianin not so much revealed the *distinctive features of Novgorod* as demonstrated in all possible detail the *general Russian rule*. The characteristics of the state system of ancient Russian territories were not fixed from the very beginning; they developed gradually and in the period before the Mongol invasion represented the specific features of separate regions, variants of the conventional norm, and did not embody any political systems. 'The rudiments of autocracy must have existed in Rostov and Suzdal' area in the 12th century, but they would hardly have sprouted so much if it had not been for the foreign invasion' [Kostomarov 1995, pp.6–7]. Taking into account all their local specificity, 'ancient Russian lands-city-states in general had been demonstrating the fundamental identity of their historical fate up to the invasion of Batu [Froianov, Dvornichenko 1988, p.265]. Communal veche system, which required the political consent of all forms of power and the unanimity of the veche itself, in one way or another determined the life of ancient Rus. The thesis about the omnipresent veche as an instrument of the public rule, which regulated the socio-political system of pre-Mongolian Rus, is thoroughly analyzed in the works of V. I. Sergeevich [Sergeevich 1867, pp.2, 20; 1893, pp. 1–50]⁵, N. I. Kostomarov [Kostomarov 1994, pp.145–146] and M. A. Diakonov [Diakonov, 1926].

A. D. Gradovskii emphasized that all Russian cities were *equally entitled* to hold veche assemblies [Gradovskii 1899, p.345]. The position of M. F. Vladimirkii-Budanov, was, in fact, close to the one, expressed by Gradovskii. Although the former spoke about the predominance of power of the boyars (in the southwest) and the power of the princes (in the northeast) over veche, he placed these phenomena in the framework of one 'zemskii period' of the 9th to the 13th centuries, characterized by the triple form of supreme power (namely, the veche, the prince and the Boyars' Council) [Vladimirkii-Budanov 1995, pp. 39, 62, 76–90]. A. E. Presniakov, who believed 'any idea about the existence of either autocratic or collective state supreme power of Russian princes to be misleading', also did not accentuate the 'monarchic nature' of the 'pre-Mongolian period'. Not only in Novgorod, but also in Pskov and all over Russia, it was the veche which controlled 'the top political issues' of the lands-city-states [Presniakov 1993, pp.132, 427]. G. V. Vernadskii, who claimed that 'Russian political institutions of Kievan period were based on the free society, also supported the opinion, that veche had existed in all Russian lands prior to the Mongol invasion [Vernadskii 1997, pp. 51–54; 1996, p. 195]. Finally, the comparatively recent studies of the scholars from the Institute of History (the Faculty of History at St. Petersburg State University) have revealed no traces of monarchy (in the strict sense of the word) in the south, southwest and even northeast of Russia in the 'pre-Mongolian period' and focused

⁵ According to the fair judgment of N. I. Kostomarov, the excellent work of V. I. Sergeevich 'Veche and the Prince', 'being the best study in this field, should remain the desk book of all the students of ancient Russia' [Kostomarov 1995, p.6].

on the significant political role of the democratic public assemblies instead [Dvornichenko 1993; 2013a; 2013b; 2010; Krivosheev 1999; 2003a; 2003b; Maiorov 2001].⁶

In this regard, what the sources allow us to say about the ancient Russian state system is limited to the idea of a 'specific dualism of the prince and the veche', which can hardly be defined in modern political and juridical terms, 'with the position of the prince in the Kievan South being more independent' [Presniakov, 1993, p. 428]. From my point of view the specific character of this 'dualism' is better understood from the perspective of the political principle of 'odinachestvo' — the inseparable indivisibility of all forms of power and the consensus of the veche itself [Petrov 2003; 2011].

The principle of political 'odinachestvo', for the first time in Russian history was recorded in the writings of Yaroslav, did not originate in Novgorod. It represented a very important feature of the ancient Russian veche system. Without the inseparable unity of all forms of power and the consensus of the veche, this system could not function. The 'idea of Russian unanimity', rooted in the ancient times, characterized the political and juridical structure of Moscow state as well [Ermoshin, Efremova, Isaev, Korpets and others 1986, pp. 88–109].

The structure of the Great Russian state, which became a historical 'answer' to the 'challenge' of the external threat, was not devoid of certain preconditions at earlier stages of its development. The 'mirskaia' (communal) tradition and the tradition of 'zemskii' self-government have never been interrupted throughout the history of Russia.⁷ The elimination of Novgorod veche ... 'did not mean that northern popular rule as a local structure was destroyed by Moscow. 'Collecting' Russian lands, Moscow also 'collected' their social systems, inserting them into one general state system' [Ermoshin, Efremova, Isaev, Korpets and others 1986, p.109]. The period of veche-based popular rule, which reached its culmination in Novgorod the Great, and the epoch of Moscow autocracy are closely tied together by the *principle of ancient Russian 'odinachestvo'* and the *indivisibility of power*. Without this principle neither the nature of the Moscow monarchy with its religious and moral aspects, nor the characteristic features of Zemskie Councils and the Boyars' Council and the relationship between these forms of power can be adequately understood.

Reverting to the 'pre-Mongolian' period I will repeat the words of A. E. Presniakov: 'the prince — the leader and organizer of the people's military forces, the head of the communal land management, the defender of the external security and internal 'nariad' (order of life) stood next to the veche and people's communes. It was the prince, acting in both these roles, and not the veche, who headed the people's army of the zemskie forces, the alliance of those communes, which constituted the inner structure of the lands-city-states. Indeed, for the people's army and communes it was the veche, which exercised the decisive authority. The corps of the zemskaia regiment (thousand) used to set out on military campaigns by the order of the veche and the subordinate cities obeyed the decisions taken by the ruling cities and not by the prince. At the same time, the people's army urgently needed the prince to organize and coordinate its actions; his role was also crucial in the judicial, administrative and financial functioning of the lands-city-states. If the historians of law are not mistaken and it was veche and not the prince in whose hands

⁶ See the works of the representatives of the Izhevsk research school, which specializes in the study of ancient Kiev-Novgorod Rus [Puzanov 2007; Dolgov 1999; 2004; 2007; Derbin 2007].

⁷ This was brilliantly outlined by the academician N. N. Pokrovskii [Pokrovskii 1989], a well-known book of S. G. Pushkarev is also relevant [Pushkarev 1985].

the supreme power over an ancient Russian city-state was concentrated, than, it should be taken into consideration that it was the prince and not the veche, who held all the strings of the administration of the ancient Russian city-states. This is a characteristic feature of the ancient Russian state system. Nevertheless, 'the power of the prince did not reach the level of the state authority within the period under consideration' [Presniakov 1992, pp. 427–428; 437–438].

Speaking about the veche in Novgorod, S. F. Platonov emphasized, that the '*veche was extremely well-organized*'. He also stated that 'historical scholarship used to have different opinion about this matter' [Platonov 1916a, p. 5].

I will also note, that it could be '*well-organized*' only as a '*political*' institution — the *body* of the ancient urban popular *rule*, not as an 'ordinary assembly of the citizens' [Granberg 2006; p.147], or at least it was not so much 'an institution of power as one of the concepts, used for the description of the political and social activities of the people of Novgorod' [Lukin 2006, p. 167]. Modern historiography tends to return in some respect to this 'opinion', refuted by S. F. Platonov. From the point of view of the source study this tendency is inclined to the unjustified reluctance to examine *all the sources*, which provide information about the veche. Thus, only the so-called 'direct' sources (where the word 'veche' occurs) are taken into consideration, whereas the 'indirect' sources (which do not contain the word itself, but point out the facts, which are typical of this phenomenon) are dismissed. It may sound ironic, but this questionable method is believed to be the least 'risky approach' to research [Granberg 2006, p. 146]. It is noteworthy that many scholars, including the historians, who are convinced of the veche being an authority in the first place, prefer to avoid this method [Lukin 2006, p.167]. In historiography the above-mentioned tendency reflects the intentional or unintentional disregard of the works of both old and modern authors, who came up with answers to certain questions.

The study of the 'internecine feuds of Novgorod', which reveal the internal organization of veche Novgorod [Platonov 1916a, p. 5], demonstrates, that the culmination of the class discord in the city is connected with the events of year 1342. ***Later on this discord obviously went down, and throughout the second half of the XIV century it was hardly heard of.***

The disagreement between the nobility and the 'plebs' had an indirect impact on the developments of 1418. These events provide a vivid example how a personal domestic conflict grew into an internecine feud against the background of traditional animosity and rivalry between the ancient parts of Novgorod. The elements of pagan world-view in the unfolding of the internal conflicts of the 14th and 15th centuries are also worth mentioning. The typically pagan understanding of fires and natural disasters, attitudes to the neighbors and the tradition of rivalry and animosity shaped the original features of the social struggle on the shores of Volkhov.

At the turn of the 15th century, the development of conflicts inside the city, caused by the confrontation between the nobility and the 'plebs', was halted due to the stabilization of the society and the state of Novgorod the Great. This stabilization was the result of the achievements in the regulation of the institute of 'posadnichestvo' and the transformation of boyars of Novgorod into the big feudal landowners. Novgorod land became a feudal republic. However, the victory of the boyar oligarchy did not lead to the virtual elimination or the decline of the veche-based popular rule. Judging by the example of the events in 1478 it is difficult to state that the boyars took the veche 'under their complete con-

trol'. The history of Novgorod abounded in paradoxes and the concepts of 'veche' and 'boyar oligarchy' were not mutually exclusive. At the height of their power the boyars, alongside the ordinary citizens, were members of the communes-corporations, which they represented. The boyar influence on these corporations to a great extent depended on the tradition. The establishment of the boyar oligarchy, legitimated in the form of the territorial-representative structure, settled a very old and serious problem of the integrity of the veche commune. The institute of 'posadnichestvo' (the institute of governors) no longer was the 'apple of discord' between the ancient parts of the city. That is why it is so important to accentuate the fact that the whole city was interested in the 'posadnichestvo' reforms, the analysis of which is usually focused on the oligarchic component.

The political evolution of Novgorod was the evolution of the ancient Russian city commune, which was successfully overcoming the shortages of its 'pre-feudal democracy' with its feebly marked differentiation of the governmental functions and adjusting to the new conditions, brought about by the process of feudalization. In this respect the internal political development did not undermine the vitality of the republic, causing its collapse, but, on the opposite, stabilized the situation on the shores of Volkhov. By the moment of Moscow invasion Novgorod with its veche system had not exhausted its historical potential. The last fatal blow, it suffered, was delivered not from within, but from the outside. By the early 15th century a *specific type* of feudal state, which managed to preserve something more than a mere phantom of veche popular rule, had formed in Novgorod.

At the same time the conception of feudalism, which was typical of the Russian historiography of the *last decades*, in my opinion, still remains one of the most effective ones, as it is still difficult to imagine the *feudal* relations without the big private landed estates, the landowners and the peasants, dependent on them. However, should all medieval relations between rulers and the subordinates be interpreted as feudal⁸. The idea that feudal ownership of land developed relatively late in Russia has a solid foundation [Danilova 1968, pp. 42–43, Froianov 1999, pp. 292–294 and others; Kobrin 1985, pp. 32–47]. In Novgorod it had started to spread only by the early XV century [Alekseev 1992, p. 99; Andreev 1995, p. 30).

The study of the socio-political history of Novgorod of the 11th to the first half of the 15th centuries demonstrates the significant role the small communes played in the urban commune of Novgorod. The analysis of the '*allied state of Novgorod the Great*' — the federation of the communes, i.e., city sections, suggests the specific role of these communes in the development of feudalism.

The idea that one of the means of feudalization was to transform power into the ownership of lands, which took a long time, is becoming more and more entrenched in modern historiography. If we apply this to the historical realities of the veche Novgorod, we will see that in the framework of ancient Russian veche system the city commune held a ruling position in its city-state. This was not a permanently fixed system. Throughout the 11th to the 15th centuries this system evolved from the dominant position of the city over a particular land in the pre-Mongolian period to its distinctly privileged status, which did not necessarily rule out the contradictions with rural neighborhood and the conflicts of interests between the urban commune and communal structures of the land. The 11th to 15th century sources on the internal political development of Novgorod demonstrate

⁸ This idea, expressed during one of the previous discussions, important for Russian historiography, is worth being repeated [Shapiro, 1969].

how the urban commune evolved from conflicts of city sections and halves of the city to the certain political unity, achieved due to the improved regulation of the political system of the city. The analyzed materials also indicate that the local boyar clans had been merging into the urban corporation gradually and had finally finished this process by the 15th century. In this respect it is possible to suggest that *originally the actual control* over the lands of Novgorod, at least over those we know of, was also exercised not by the prince, not by the corporations of the boyars as 'sovereign owners' and even not by the commune of Novgorod as a unified structure, but by the *separate small communes of Novgorod* — halves of the city and later on by the city- parts. From the earliest times the boyars ruled over particular areas of Novgorod land as *the representatives of their small communes in the first place*. In the course of a long process, which had first begun to be expressed by the 14th-15th centuries, the boyars, the common citizens of Novgorod and the peasants of the city-state believed these lands to be the property of the *boyars*.

The genesis of feudalism dates back to the 11th and 12th centuries, stemming from the structure, aptly called '*a non-primitive commune*' by Neusykhin. *Having lived up in post-Mongolian period*, this process had resulted in the victory of feudal land ownership in Novgorod by the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries. The finalization of this process took place within the framework of feudal system.

The development of feudalism in Novgorod land had favored the stabilization of the veche Novgorod state by the early XV century.

In my opinion, there are well-grounded reasons for the convergence (to a certain extent, of course) of different concepts, existing in modern Russian historiography of medieval Novgorod. Whereas V.L. Ianin and the scholars, who share his views, dwell on the *boyar corporation*, which claimed 'sovereign ownership' of the land, and I. Ia. Froianov writes about the Novgorod veche *in general*, my works focus on the status and historical significance of the '*small commune*' *inside Novgorod* and on other issues, related to it.

The recent research by P.V. Lukin — an expert in source study and foreign historiography convinces me of the correctness of my scholarly position. Although P.V. Lukin definitely insists on his disagreement with the approaches and views of I. Ia. Froianov and his disciples, he, at the same time, in the course of his own analysis of the problem and thorough work with the sources corroborates a number of statements, formulated by his predecessors.

Lukin writes — 'In the 10th and 11th centuries the main social feature of the veche — the fact that almost all the participants were the citizens of Novgorod — was already taking shape'. 'In the 12th and 13th centuries, especially after the events of the 1130s, the veche becomes the most important forum for the implementation of the political will of the people of Novgorod. The 'vechniki' (participants of the veche) were free male citizens, who enjoyed full rights and were members of the 'konchanskie' (city sections, neighborhoods) or 'ulichanskie (street) organizations of different status, with boyars, being in the lead' [Lukin 2014, p. 501]. I also came to a similar conclusion in one of my works of 1988, having referred to the lectures of S.F. Platonov, which were not widely known at that time [Petrov, 1988, p. 40]. I am still convinced that the veche is the assembly of the city sections in the first place [Petrov, 2003, pp.157–160]. Strictly following a historiographic tradition and relying on it, Lukin gives a well-grounded account of the veche as a political institution, a supreme political body of Novgorod and notes the archaic features of this body. Arguing, that 'veche was an essential element of the political system of Novgorod',

Lukin considers it necessary to single out the 'political union of the citizens of Novgorod', which the sources call 'Novgorod the Great' [...] This union was the supreme authority of the republic of Novgorod, and the veche assemblies adequately represented its power' [Lukin 2014, pp. 502–504]. My propositions about the 'dualism of the prince and the veche', which is clearly seen from the perspective of 'odinachestvo' (the ancient Russian conception of the indivisibility of power) in some aspects agree with this conclusion. 'Nevertheless, should the political structures of Novgorod be considered the communal structures, which developed not on the basis of the antique tradition or 'German law', but actually on the basis of ancient Russian political and legal relations, which gave rise to organizational forms, similar to the western ones, under similar economic and cultural conditions?' — asks P. V. Lukin, summing up his study [P. V. Lukin 2014, p. 517]. Russian historical literature lacks the works, whose authors adhere to the view that Novgorod's political structures had formed on the basis of the antique tradition, and the history of veche Novgorod for a long time has been examined from the perspective, formulated by Lukin. This statement by no means deprecates the significance of recent studies, but on the opposite enhances them.

We all bend our efforts to the common cause. The future of it rests on original methods of working with the sources, responsiveness to different opinions and the synthesis of the most well-founded concepts and approaches. Taking into account a very long tradition of the study of ancient Novgorod in Russia and the obvious difference of opinions, modern historiography has enriched the intellectual context of the discussion so much, that our perception of the political system of ancient Novgorod has reached entirely new horizons.

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