



BRILL

The Veche and the "Council of Lords" in Medieval Novgorod: Hanseatic and Russian Data

Author(s): Pavel V. Lukin

Source: *Russian History*, 2014, Vol. 41, No. 4 (2014), pp. 458-503

Published by: Brill

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24667181>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Brill is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Russian History*

The Veche and the “Council of Lords” in Medieval Novgorod

Hanseatic and Russian Data

Pavel V. Lukin

Senior researcher, Institute of Russian History, Russian Academy of Sciences
lukinpavel@yandex.ru

Abstract

The article is a study of the two collective political bodies of medieval Novgorod – the *veche* (popular assembly) and the so called “Council of Lords.” The basis of research is mostly the Hanseatic documents in Middle Low German and Latin which have been underestimated until now. However, they are often more trustworthy than narrative sources with their literary clichés and ideological biases.

Both Russian and Hanseatic sources indicate that the *veche* was a real political institution which was open to all townsmen enjoying full rights regardless of social status. On the other hand, the sources give no grounds to suggest the rural population’s involvement in the Novgorodian *veche*. The author also argues that a governmental council did really exist in medieval Novgorod. There is some evidence of it in Hanseatic sources of the 14–15th centuries. However, no traces of its existence before the 14th century can be discovered. The council included the highest magistrates of the Novgorodian republic and was referred to in Hanseatic documents as *de heren (gospodá)*.

Finally the author comes to the conclusion that the Novgorodian medieval polity should be studied in the broader context of European medieval city republics.

Keywords

Novgorod – Old Rus’ – medieval republics – *veche* – popular assemblies – the Hansa

This study is supported by the Russian State Foundation for the Humanities (RGNF), Project No. 14–01–00126a. I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Wim Blockmans and Prof. Dr. Catherine Squires for their assistance with the Middle Low German texts.

The image of an independent "self-governing North Russian people" (Nikolai I. Kostomarov's term) has long since been an integral part not only of Russian historical analysis, but also of Russian works of fiction, political essays, and philosophy of history.

To be defined as a republic, a state needs proper republican institutions, namely, collective bodies and magistrates. While the latter do not in fact pose any serious problems (it is generally agreed that the highest officials in Novgorod were the bishop/archbishop, the *posadnik*, the *tysiatskiĭ*, later known as the *stepennoi posadnik* and *stepennoi tysiatskiĭ*, and the archimandrite; it is solely the actual sphere of their respective influence that is discussed), the issue of the collective bodies still remains rather obscure.

The Veche

There are several highly contradictory interpretations of the Novgorod veche based on the same sources (mainly chronicles). Within this article, it is impossible to present the entire historiography of the Novgorod veche,¹ so only a brief review of the Veche problem will be presented.

Despite the fact that Novgorod's veche would attract the attention of scholars and other learned people as early as in the eighteenth century, it became a *research problem* only in the 1860s and 1870s. Obviously, it does not mean that the veche was only "noticed" at that time. All historians who engaged in the study of the political organization of Old Rus and especially of Novgorod, including Nikolai Karamzin and Sergei Solov'ev, mentioned it in their works. However, the veche only became the focus of scholarly attention in the second half of the 19th century.

In 1867 the prominent law historian Vassiliĭ Sergeevich published his book *The Veche and the Prince*. Its influence has shaped both scholarly and lay views on the Old Russian veche for a long period.² Its success was hardly coincidental with the fact that the 1860s in the Russian Empire were the era of the "Great Reforms" of Alexander II, including the *zemstvo* and city reforms which created the system of the locally elected self-government and evoked a strong

1 For a detailed review of the historiography before the 1980s, see Aleksei N. Tšamutali, "Istorija Velikogo Novgoroda v osveshchenii istoriografii XIX – nachala XX v.," *Novgorodskii istoričeskii sbornik* (henceforth, *NIS*), 1 (11) (1982): 96–112; Vasilii F. Andreev, "Problemy soščial'no-političeskoj istorii Novgoroda XII–XV vv. v sovetskoi istoriografii," *NIS* 1 (11) (1982): 119–45.

2 Vasilii I. Sergeevich, *Veče i kniaz'. Russkoe gosudarstvennoe upravlenie vo vremena kniazel' Rurikovichei. Istoricheskie očerki* (Moscow: Tipografiia A.I. Mamontova, 1867).

interest in the history of Russian government. Besides, the very spirit of the time favored the search for ancient precedents for Russian democracy. Of equal importance was the familiarity of the leading Russian scholars with the contemporary historiographical trends in Western Europe, especially in Germany. Vassiliĭ Sergeevich was inspired by the works of such notable German scholars as Jacob Grimm (who co-edited with his brother Wilhelm their famous collection of folk-tales), Georg Waitz, Wilhelm Eduard Wilda etc.³ It was mainstream for the then German scholarship to hold the idea of the primordial German democracy and the popular assembly as its core.

What contributed much to the shaping of these concepts was the “invention” of the Russian peasant commune with its self-government, which took place in the mid-19th century. Slavophile ideologists saw the peasant commune as a primordial basis of the Russian lifestyle, and Ivan D. Belfaev, who was close to Slavophiles, argued that Slavs even before the “calling of the Varangians” had a “communal veche system of government”.⁴

Sergeevich and his followers (Mikhail Vladimirkii-Budanov, Mikhail Dyakonov etc.) proposed a “zemstvo-veche theory” according to which Old Rus’ consisted of small polities – *zemli* and *volosti*. The medieval Russian veche, particularly that of Novgorod, was interpreted by the scholars of the time as a supreme political body of the *zemli* and *volosti*, which were allegedly governed in compliance with democratic, “communal” principles. The theory assumed that all adult free men of *volosti* had a right (at least nominally) to take part in the veche. The adherents of the “zemstvo-veche theory” saw the medieval Russian political bodies as typologically close to polis structures of classical antiquity.

The veche had allegedly existed in Rus from time immemorial (Sergeevich would find its traces even in the 10th-century Rus-Byzantine treaties between the Rus princes and Byzantine emperors) and gradually died out after the Mongol invasion and the consequent reinforcement of the princes’ power. In Northwest Russia, the veche survived longer because the region suffered less from the Mongol-Tatar invasions; it was only forcefully abolished after the Moscow’s annexation of Novgorod.

There had been much controversy (and even hot debate) on specific issues, such as who was entitled to take part in a veche or actually did, whether there were legitimate and illegitimate veche gatherings, whether the veche existed

3 See: Vasilĭĭ I. Sergeevich, *Drevnosti russkogo prava*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Zertsalo, 2006): 2, 92–104. Here and in some other cases below the dates of new editions are given.

4 Ivan D. Belfaev, *Lektsii po istorii russkogo zakonodatel'stva* (Moscow: Tipografiia A.A. Kartseva, 1888), 5.

only in "old" towns or it could also have emerged in newly founded ones, etc. However, the general idea was broadly accepted and unchallenged.

After the Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent making, especially since mid-1930s, with the rise of the "Soviet patriotism" of the officially imposed Soviet Marxist "feudal" theory of the Russian history, the dominant tendency was to include the veche in the global scheme of the "feudal stage": within this framework, the veche was interpreted as an analogue of the communal bodies in West European medieval towns. The whole issue of the veche was regarded in this context – for instance, by Mikhail N. Tikhomirov in his classic work "Old Russian Cities" [*Drevnerusskie goroda*] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1956).

In 1967, the German historian Klaus Zernack published his work on Slavic "assemblies of townspeople."⁵ He strongly contested the views of the veche that had become mainstream in historiographies of Slavic countries since the 19th century. Zernack declared that his aim was not only to solve certain specific problems, but also to challenge the dominant Slavophile stereotypes that had merged into the official Marxist doctrine. The German historian considered medieval Novgorod to have been a "city-state" with an unique type of government and construed it as a product of specific developmental conditions – primarily, the absence of its own royal dynasty. Zernack's book was harshly criticized by Polish historians (Stanisław Russocki, Gerard Labuda, Henryk Łowmiański, Lech Leciejewicz) and the Soviet scholar Vladimir T. Pashuto.⁶

In the 1970s, two new, conflicting ideas of the veche emerged in the Soviet Union. One of them may be called the "boyar theory." For Novgorod, it was developed by Valentin L. Ĭanin; for Kiev, a similar idea was proposed by Pëtr P. Tolochko. According to this theory, only feudal lords, i.e., boyars, took part in veche gatherings. On the other hand, Igor' Ya. Froĭanov, a scholar from Leningrad, returning to the pre-Revolutionary "zemstvo-veche theory" and referring to some non-classical Marxist concepts (for instance, one of the "pre-feudal period"), proposed a theory seeing the veche as the highest democratic body in the medieval Russian volost'. From his point of view, it was an organ of popular authority that had existed in Rus' until the Tartar yoke. Recently, Froĭanov has developed the idea that in the later Middle Ages the popular authority of the veche was replaced by an equally unique "popular monarchy,"

5 Klaus Zernack, *Die burgstädtischen Volksversammlungen bei den Ost- und Westslaven. Studien zur verfassungsgeschichtlichen Bedeutung des Veče* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz, 1967).

6 On this discussion, see Pavel V. Lukin, "Gorod i veche: soĭsial'nyi aspekt. Istoriograficheskie zametki," *Cahiers du monde russe* 46, no. 1–2 (January-June 2005): 159–63.

because the autocracy was allegedly necessary for Russia to withstand various threats – first of all, from the West.

Most recently, in the post-Soviet era, a newer, postmodernist interpretation of the *veche* has been proposed. In its more moderate version, it is found in Jonas Granberg, the Swedish scholar. Granberg claims that the *veche* had been, at all the stages of its history, nothing more than an ordinary gathering of people, a mob rather than a political institution. In the radical form, the same theory has been articulated by Tatyana L. Vilkul, the Ukrainian scholar, who argues against the very existence of any *veche* (at least as a political institution), including the Novgorod *veche*. (The focus of her works is limited to the period between the 10th and 13th centuries, and she does not use sources relating to later periods.)

There have been successes and failures within almost all of the trends. It seems that the time has come to rethink and more properly categorize the various conceptualizations underlying these trends. A thorough review of less-studied material such as the Hanseatic documents gives one a chance to shed new light on old ideas. Indeed, their evidence needs juxtaposition with that from better-known sources such as chronicles, acts, travel journals of foreigners visiting Rus', etc. It is only a study of this kind that can provide us with the valuable data necessary to challenge the old interpretations.

The only present-day researcher of the Novgorod *veche* who has paid some attention to records of it in Hanseatic sources is Jonas Granberg. In his book he inferred that the Novgorod *veche* mentioned in the Middle Low German documents as *ding* was not a "legal institution."⁷ While we find it possible to partly agree with this, he then offers more questionable interpretations. For instance, he argues that the term *ding* with regard to Novgorod "was used to mark a population gathered together," and in the documents where *ding* occurs with the adjective *gemeine* "it probably refers to the entire community." The general conclusion made by Granberg is that the term *ding* did not mean "an institution that was an integral part of the administrative structures of Novgorod," but is used only "to express the gathered or acting community."⁸

7 Jonas Granberg, *Veche in the Chronicles of Medieval Rus. A Study of Functions and Terminology* (Göteborg: DocuSys, 2004). For an abridged Russian version of this work with certain additions, see Jonas Granberg, "Veche v drevnerusskikh pis'mennykh istochnikakh: funktsii i terminologiya", *Drevneišie gosudarstva Vostochnoi Evropy. 2004 g. Politicheskie instituty Drevnei Rusi* (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 2006), 3–163. For an overall review of this work, see Pavel V. Lukin, "Terminologicheskii analiz: pliusy i minusy (Po povodu monografii Jonasa Granberga o drevnerusskom veche)", *Srednevekovai Rus'* 8 (2009), 217–43.

8 Granberg, *Veche*, 206–09.

Debating on what can or cannot be defined in the medieval context as an "institution" would hardly be of any practical use. What is more important, one cannot be sure that Granberg's interpretation of the Hanseatic documents (which is the primary basis of his conclusions) is correct. However, there are even more significant issues than his specific point of view upon details. What exactly was the Novgorod veche (*dinc* in Low German documents)? Was it the term for a spontaneously gathering crowd, or for a legitimate authority (let us avoid the word "institution") which was part of the political and legal system?

From my point of view, there are reasons to think that the second interpretation is more correct. The Hanseatic sources (as well as the Russian ones) in fact corroborate it.

First of all, there are documents in which the *dinc* (veche) is clearly distinguished from its participants; among them are the most "official" documents, which tend to use precise legal terminology. One example is a document dated 1406 (Granberg also refers to it). In the course of an ordinary conflict with Novgorodians, German merchants appealed to the *tysiatskiĭ*. The latter declared that before he would give an answer, he had to "seek advice from Novgorod the Great at the general veche," adding that only "when they [Novgorodians] come to a decision on the question he would give them [Germans] an answer."⁹ It is absolutely clear that the gathered population is labelled in the text not as *dinc* but as *Grote Naugarden* – Novgorod the Great, which corresponds precisely to the Russian usage of the term. (See, for instance, the usage in Novgorodian documents: "from all Novgorod the Great at the veche at Yaroslav's Court"; "and to all the lord and sovereign Novgorod the Great ... at the veche at Yaroslav's Court").¹⁰ "Novgorod the Great" (*Grote Naugarden*) was undoubtedly a term designating all Novgorodians enjoying full rights as a whole whom the *tysiatskiĭ* planned to consult and whose decision would be binding for him, while the "general veche" (*ghemeyne dinc*) was the name of their political assembly.¹¹

9 "[...]he wolde syk bespreken myt Groten Naugarden in deme ghemeynen dinge, wu se des dan ens worden, darna wolde he en antword geven" (Karl Kunze (ed.), *Hansisches Urkundenbuch* (henceforth, *HUB*) (Halle: Duncker&Humblot, 1899), 5, 364 (no. 704).

10 "[...]от всего Великого Новгорода. На вецѣ на Ярославѣ дворѣ"; "и всему господину государю Великому Новгороду [...] на вецѣ на Ярославѣ дворѣ" (Sigismund N. Valk (ed.), *Gramoty Velikogo Novgoroda i Pskova* (henceforth, *GVNP*) (Moscow, Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1949), 38 (no. 21), 152 (no. 96).

11 When Paul Johansen argues that in Low German the veche could be called *dat gemene ding*, as well as *de gantze gemeine Nougarden*, he is correct in general but somewhat inexact. Paul Johansen, "Novgorod und die Hanse", *Städtewesen und Bürgertum als geschichtliche Kräfte. Gedächtnisschrift für Fritz Rörig* (Lübeck: Max Schmidt-Römhild, 1953), 125.

The epithet “Great” could be omitted, and in other cases the *veche* was identified simply with “Novgorod.” For example, a document from 1407 says that “a message [from Lübeck] was read to Novgorod at its general *veche*.”¹² The word (*gemeyne*) *ding* appears to mean not only “the people who take collective action in a situation of conflict,”¹³ but also an assembly of those people, who met regardless of whether there was a conflict or not.

This can be seen from another Hanseatic document, a letter by German merchants from Novgorod to Reval, dated June 9, 1407. The Germans write that the Novgorodians “ordered everybody here openly at their general *veche* to call their [relatives] back home.”¹⁴ In this case, *veche* means not a “population that gathered” but a *gathering of the population*. This is proved by the use of the possessive pronoun *ereme* (“their”).

Granberg’s argument that the *ding* has never been an active agent seems groundless: on the same grounds, we should cease considering even the popular assembly of Athens, a classic historical democratic assembly, to be a political institution. At the very beginning of his *History*, Thucydides recounts a conflict between the people of Corinth and the island of Korkyra (modern-day Corfu). Both sides appealed to the Athenians for support. And the Greek historian writes: “The Athenians heard both sides, and they held two assemblies; in the first of them they were more influenced by the words of the Corinthians, but in the second they changed their minds and inclined towards the Corcyraeans.”¹⁵ Following Granberg’s logic, we should argue that it is the Athenians who “act” in this case, and the word *ἐκκλησία* (popular assembly) does not mean a legal institution but is simply “used to indicate that people gathered and that they stay together.”¹⁶

In another document of 1407, we encounter a third term for the people who gathered at the *veche* – “the Russians” (*de Russen*). German merchants informed Reval, concerning a matter that interested them, that “they [the Russians] ... compiled a charter at the *veche* and attached seals to it

12 “[...]de breff wart gelesen to Nowerden in eme gemeynen dinghe[...]

 (HUB, 5, 413 (no. 788).

13 Granberg, *Veche*, 209.

14 “[...]hebben hir openbare gehaet in ereme gemeynen dinge, dat malk den sinen sal to hus vorboden[...]

 (HUB, 5, 413 (no. 788)).

15 “Ἀθηναῖοι δὲ ἀκούσαντες ἀμφοτέρων, γενομένης καὶ δις ἐκκλησίας, τῇ μὲν προτέρᾳ οὐχ ἦσσαν τῶν Κορινθίων ἀπεδέξαντο τοὺς λόγους, ἐν δὲ τῇ ὕστεραᾳ μετέγνωσαν Κερκυραίοις ξυμμαχίαν μὲν μὴ ποιήσασθαι[...]

 (Charles F. Smith (ed.), Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 4 vols. (London, Cambridge, Mass.: William Heinemann Ltd., Harvard University Press, 1956–1959): 1, 76, 78.

16 Granberg, *Veche*, 207–208.

together."¹⁷ The testimony of this document disproves Granberg's idea that the term *ding*, in the context of Novgorod in Hanseatic documents, was used to show that "something was done at public gatherings: it might be a public announcement or a ratification of a treaty."¹⁸ According to the quoted document, the charter was not just read at the veche, and the participants did not just "stay there." The document was compiled, "made," and stamped by the Russians (participants of the meeting) at the veche. There can be no doubt that an assembly where participants compile official documents and attach seals to them cannot be a mere gathering of "the active population."

In one other case, only "they" (*se*) are mentioned as participants in the veche. In February 1442, the clerk of St. Peter's Court, Hans Munstede, informed Reval of new troubles besetting the German merchants in Novgorod: "You should know, sirs, that we are again imprisoned here. When they received news from the envoys, they ordered it declared at the market that no German would go [from the court] alive and with property. They twice sent Artemiyo Baklan and Zinovi from the veche to the court and ordered me not to allow any of the Germans to go out and not to go out by myself."¹⁹ At that veche assembly, therefore, they decided to blockade Germans in their court and to declare it to everybody at the market. They sent people twice from that veche to announce its decisions to the Germans. Granberg argues that in these documents "[d]ing seems to be used to indicate that that people gathered and that they stay together, but it is never an active agent. It is the Russians (Novgorodians) who

17 "[...]se hebben enen breff gemaket in deme dinge unde besegelt under sik[...]" (*HUB*, 5, 415 (no. 794).

18 Granberg, *Veche*, 208. See the laconic but correct interpretation in Igor' E. Kleinenberg, "Izvestiia o novgorodskom veche pervoi chetverti XV veka v ganzeiskikh istochnikakh," *Istoriia SSSR* 6 (1978): 175. Mentions of the veche in Novgorodian documents, according to Granberg, "commonly have a locative meaning," or, at best, they are used to describe assemblies where citizens were just witnesses "of a formal event," i.e., passive listeners. Granberg, *Veche*, 204. This completely artificial interpretation is not only utterly disproved by the testimony of the Hanseatic document, but is also logically contradictory. See Lukin, *Terminologicheskii analiz*, 237–38.

19 "Wetet, here, dat wii hir aver besat sin. So vro alse se tidinge hadden van den boden, do leten se int market ropen, nene Dutzsche uttovoren by live unde by gude. Ok santen se to twen malen ut dem dinge up den hoff Artemyken Baklan unde Synoven unde enboden my, dat ik neyne Dutzsche lete uthvaren unde dat ik ok sulven nergen en vore[...]" (Hermann Hildebrand (ed.), *Liv-, Est- und Curländisches Urkundenbuch* (henceforth, *LECUB*) (Riga, Moskau: Verlag von J. Deubner, 1889), 9, 559 (no. 816). It was also published in Goswin Freiherr von der Ropp (ed.), *Hanserecesse von 1431–1476* (henceforth, *HR*) (Leipzig: Duncker&Humblot, 1878), 2, 469 (no. 559).

act, and not a judicial institution.”²⁰ We have already said that to call the veche a “legal or judicial institution” or not is quite a debatable question, but it is clear that an assembly where binding decisions are made and fixed in a written form, stamped and publicly declared, has a direct relation to the legal and political system of a certain society and its government. It is true that it was “Novgorodians,” “the Russians” and even “they” who acted in Novgorod, but they acted at the veche – and this was precisely the name of a political body, although it could also be replaced by “Novgorod the Great,” “Novgorodians” or some other descriptive construction (such as in the Latin document of 1292 analyzed below, *Nogardenses convenerant*).

Secondly, the term *gemeine* used with *dīng* clearly confirms that what is meant is an assembly, a council, not an abstract “entire community.” This term can be found in the most detailed modern dictionary of Middle-Low German: *de gemeine rat* – “all members of a council,” “the complete membership of a council.”²¹ *Gemeine dīnc* means a complete, general veche, i.e., the veche of Novgorod the Great, most likely as opposed to “end” (*koneſs*, borough) or street (*ulīſa*) veche assemblies (which were known to German merchants) and/or councils of narrower membership in which only a group of the elite participated. The 1407 document mentioned above says, for example, that “a message came here [to Novgorod] in the spring to all Novgorod from Lübeck.” As we have already noted, the message “was read to Novgorodians at their general veche.”²² It is absolutely clear that the epithet *gemeyne* (general, all) is used in this document for both Novgorodians and the veche, and has the same aim: to emphasize that the case should be examined by all Novgorodians who enjoyed political rights at their general assembly. We can see the same thing in an earlier document of 1402: “all Novgorod answers a message [from Germans] at the veche.”²³

Sometimes the word veche may be omitted and only “all Novgorod” is mentioned. Thus, a document from July 28, 1431, says that the Novgorodian merchant Kliment Podvoiskī, whose property was arrested in Narva, “was before Novgorod the Great and made a claim” on it.²⁴ This word usage has no relation to the internal Hanseatic terminology.

20 Granberg, *Veche*, 207–08.

21 Agathe Lasch, Conrad Borchling (eds.), *Mittelniederdeutsches Handwörterbuch*, vols. 1– (Neumünster: Waccholtz Verlag, 1956–) (henceforth, *MHWB*), 1: 63.

22 “[...]hir en breff quam in dat vorjaren van Lubeke an gemeyne Nowerden[...].” (*HUB*, 5, 413 no. 788).

23 “[...]den bref antwert gemene Novgarden int dink” (Friedrich Georg von Bunge, *LECVB* (Reval: Heinr. Laakmann, 1859), 4: 407 (no. 1602).

24 “[...]ys gewezen vor gemeynen Nouwerden und hefft sich beklaget[...].” (Karl Kunze (ed.), *HUB* (Leipzig: Duncker&Humblot, 1905), 6: 530 (no. 955).

"All Novgorodians" could be used as a synonym for "all Novgorod." This can be seen from a message from Hanseatic merchants, possibly dated June 6, 1412. The Germans reported that they had complained about the arbitrariness of a Novgorodian, Boris Kuzin (who imprisoned one of them in a cellar) "at first to the tysyatskiĭ, then to the bishop, to the posadnik and to all Novgorodians".²⁵ "All Novgorodians" – which in this case, just as in other documents, can be interpreted as the veché – are listed along with other Novgorod institutions. The order of their appearance is also quite logical: the Germans first appealed to the tysyatskiĭ, who was in charge of such matters, then to other authorities: the bishop, the posadnik, and the veché. That "all Novgorodians" meant the veché is supported by the above-mentioned 1406 document, in which the community taking a decision at the "general veché" (in deme ghemeynen dinghe) was called "Novgorod the Great" (Groten Naugarden) and then "Novgorodians" (de Naugarders).²⁶

Finally, Granberg's argument that the posadnik, the tysyatskiĭ, and the prince's namestnik were all "formal authorities of Novgorod," whereas the ding of the Hanseatic documents was just a gathering of people "who take collective action in a situation of conflict" cannot be supported by the sources.²⁷ The troubles of the German court mentioned in the February 1442 document had a prehistory. In May 1441, German merchants wrote from Novgorod to Reval that they had problems: "the posadnik and the tysyatskiĭ and all Novgorodians sent Zinovii Scherretna²⁸ and their scribe to the steward of the court from the veché and complained against Gosschalck Kopman and the council of Reval".²⁹ (Zinovii had in some way been offended in Reval, and the Novgorodians demanded justice.) If we were to follow Granberg's logic, we would recognize

25 "[...]erst vor deme hertogen, darna vor deme bisschope, vor deme borchghreven unde vor alle Nougardere[...]" (*HUB*, 5, 550 (no. 1057)); see also *LECUB*, 4, 815 (no. 1919).

26 *HUB*, 5, 364. Cf. a message of the Reval council, possibly to the Magister of the Teutonic Order, in late February 1406: "[...]the Pskovians came and sent there envoys and asked the Novgorodians for help. Then they [the Novgorodians] decided at the veché" [quemen de Pleschauvere und sanden dar boden und beden de Nauwerders umme hulpe. Des worden se ens in deme dinghe[...]] (*HUB*, 5, 365 (no. 705)).

27 Granberg, *Veché*, 209.

28 Kleinenberg interprets this nickname as *Skoratnik* (Igor' E. Kleinenberg, "Chastnye voĭny' otdeĭnykh novgorodskikh kupĭsov s Ganzoi i Livonieĭ v XV v.," *NIS*, 3 (13) (1989), 68–74.

29 "[...]borgermester und herteghe und ghemeyne Nowerden sanden to des hoves knechte ut dem dinghe Synnove Scherretna und eren scryver und clageden over Gosschalck Kopman und over den rath van Revel[...]" (Hermann Hildebrand, *LECUB* (Riga, Moskau: Verlag von J. Deubner, 1889), 9: 511 (no. 724)).

that the formal authorities represented by the *posadnik*, the *tysyaŭskiĭ*, and Novgorodians (“all Novgorod”) appeared at an informal meeting in a situation of conflict and for unknown reasons a scribe was also present. The real picture was surely very different. The *veche* that convened under the leadership of the *posadnik* and the *tysyaŭskiĭ* was an official assembly that had the right to take decisions on important matters. The document clearly says that the claimant and the Novgorod clerk who escorted him (the text calls the latter a “scribe” – *scriyver*), went to the German court from the *veche*, obviously in accordance with a *veche* decision, but not only on the orders of the *posadnik* and the *tysyaŭskiĭ*. There was thus a “significant difference” between the *veche*, on the one hand, and the *posadnik* and the *tysyaŭskiĭ*, on the other, but not in Granberg’s sense. The Novgorod *veche* was an assembly attended by the “political people” of the medieval republic headed by its highest magistrates.

The 1406 document also says that “Novgorodians took a decision at the general *veche* that they would send great envoys ... to the Magister [of the Livonian Order]”³⁰ (the events took place in February, when the army of Grand Duke of Lithuania Vytautas invaded the Pskov Land). A decision on such a serious diplomatic matter could be taken only by a formal political body, not by an occasional gathering of Novgorodians. At the same time, this document says that at the *veche* Novgorodians “came to an agreement” (*ens worden* literally means “became single”), i.e., they did not just gather to “witness an important formal ceremony”³¹ but behaved rather actively and independently.

Although we cannot agree with Granberg’s simplified conclusions, his doubts are not completely unfounded. He is correct in noting that in the above-mentioned case of 1331 the *veche* (*ding*) is not mentioned “in that part where the final events are described.” In fact, this document shows that the *veche*, which could not function on a permanent basis, was replaced by the *posadnik*. This is quite clearly borne out by the fact that the envoys of the *veche* (except for the first, the most spontaneous one) and of the *posadnik*, who negotiated with Germans, were the same persons.³² And the *posadnik* had the same rights as the *veche*, whereas a decision taken by him did not necessarily require the approval of the *veche*. Thus, the *veche* was a political body of the Novgorod Republic (and can be called an “institution”), but it had no exclusive higher authority. In principle, its functions could be carried out by other bodies, at

30 “[...]de Naugarders ens worden in deme ghemeynen dinghe, dat se grote boden wolden senden[...].” (*HVB*, 5, 364 (no. 704).

31 Granberg, *Veche*, 209.

32 See Pavel V. Lukin, “300 zolotykh poiasov i *veche*. Nemet’skii dokument 1331 g. o politicheskoi stroe Velikogo Novgoroda,” *Srednie veka* 71, 3–4 (2010), 286.

least, on some matters. From this point of view, we should agree with Presniakov who, studying an earlier period of the veche history, pointed out that the veche "powerfully intervened" in the process of government, but "did not take it into its own hands."³³ Therefore, the veche was a real source of power in medieval Novgorod.

The Participants of the Veche (*Vechniki*)

Leaving aside academic speculations on the composition of the veche, we will start with a study of questions of substance. In doing this we cannot avoid reviewing the concept advanced by Valentin Īanin, who is possibly the best known contemporary expert on the history and archaeology of medieval Novgorod. Īanin approached the question of social composition of the Novgorod veche by trying to determine the number of the *vechniki* (participants of the veche). This number, in his view, depended on whether they were sitting or standing during the veche meetings. Īanin's calculations led him to conclude that the veche comprised as few as three hundred to four hundred people. Īanin based this conclusion on the assumption that they were sitting.³⁴ If this is true, the veche square would have had benches that made it impossible for more than five hundred people to be present on the square at the same time. The veche square at Yaroslav's Court was located by Īanin to the west of St. Nicholas Church. According to him, its size was about 1800–2000 square meters.³⁵ Īanin's location of the square has come under criticism from

33 Aleksandr E. Presniakov, *Kniazhoe pravo v drevnei Rusi. Ocherki po istorii X-XII stoletii. Lektsii po russkoi istorii. Kievskaiā Rus'* (Moscow: Nauka, 1993), 404.

34 Valentin L. Īanin, "Problemy sotsial'noi organizatsii Novgorodskoi respubliki", *Istoriia sssr* 1 (1970): 50; Valentin L. Īanin, "Sotsial'no-politicheskaia struktura Novgoroda v svete arkheologicheskikh issledovaniĭ, *NIS* 1 (11) (1982): 94.

35 Valentin L. Īanin, "Tainstvennyi 14 vek," *Znanie-sila* 7 (1969), accessed April 14, 2013, <http://www.pagan.ru/lib/books/history/isto/janin140.php>; Īanin, *Sotsial'no-politicheskaia struktura*, 93–94. In a later work, however, Īanin cited (without any additional argumentation) a new set of figures – 1200–1500 square meters. Valentin L. Īanin, *Srednevekovyi Novgorod* (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2004), 80. It turns out that the area of the veche square was equal to or even less than the established area of the square of the joint (*smesnyi*) court – 1400 square meters. Valentin L. Īanin, *Ocherki istorii srednevekovogo Novgoroda* (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskikh kul'tur, 2008), 48–49; Denis V. Pezhemskii, "Arkheologicheskii oblik 'vechevykh' ploshchadei Velikogo Novgoroda", *Spory o novgorodskom veche: mezhdistsiplinarnyi dialog* (henceforth, *Spory*) (Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2012), 162–86. This would be rather odd if

some experts.³⁶ I will try to show that *even* if we accept ĪAnin's location and his estimate of its size, it was capable of accommodating many more people.

we take into account a priori a lesser number of people taking part in the court proceedings at the same time. ĪAnin's calculations seem even less convincing because, in his opinion, the general number of *vechniki* who could be present on the square simultaneously remained the same ("no more than 400–500 people") when he diminished the area of the square by a third. If the square was smaller in size, the quantity of *vechniki* should be between 266 and 417 according to the methods of calculation used by ĪAnin, and there is no reason to speak of five hundred people. But in this case there are too few *vechniki*, and this destroys another supposition made by ĪAnin – about the growth of their quantity by one hundred persons when a new *konets* ("end") was organized. See ĪAnin, *Sośsial'no-političeskaia struktura*, 94; ĪAnin, *Srednevekovyi Novgorod*, 80. The numbers in ĪAnin's new scheme contradict each other, and that is why we should probably accept the previous estimates for the area of the *veche* square.

- 36 Vasilii F. Andreev put forward an alternative concept. He suggested that that the *veche* could gather at a larger place to the southeast of St. Nicholas Church, between the Gothic and German courts where "several thousand *vechniki*" could be present. Vasilii F. Andreev, "O sośsial'noi strukture novgorodskogo vecha," *Genezis feodalizma v Rossii. Problemy istorii goroda* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo Universiteta, 1988), 74; Vasilii F. Andreev, "Ob organizatsii vlasti v Novgorodskoi respublike v XIV–XV vv.," *Proshloe Novgoroda i Novgorodskoi zemli: Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii. 18–20 noiabr'a 2003 g.* (Velikii Novgorod, n.p., 2003), 7. ĪAnin locates the *veche* square to the west of St. Nicholas Church using the method of exclusion: "I studied spots where some findings not connected with the *veche* were discovered, and in the end delineated the place within whose limits the *veche* could gather." ĪAnin, *Sośsial'no-političeskaia struktura*, 50. In 1947–48, thirty-six meters to the west of St. Nicholas Church there were large-scale archaeological excavations on a vast area of 748 square meters (on territory occupied before WWII by the Krestianin plant) and on a small spot (eighty-four square meters) near the church porch. At the first excavation site, remnants of wooden boarding (in layers from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, over an area of more than ninety square meters) were found. At the time, they were interpreted as remnants of the *veche* square (Artemii V. Arġikhovskii, "Arkheologicheskoe izučenie Novgoroda," *Materialy i issledovaniia po arkheologii sssr* 55 (1956): 12). The head of these excavations, however, noted that "no *veche* facilities were found in the western part of the Dvorishche [Yaroslav's Court]; they were completely destroyed and extirpated either in the fifteenth or sixteenth century." Later, however, researchers who took part in the excavations in the late 1940s became skeptical about the hypothesis of the "veche boarding." See Boris A. Kolchin and Valentin L. ĪAnin, "Arkheologii Novgoroda 50 let," *Novgorodskii sbornik. 50 let raskopok Novgoroda* (Moscow: Nauka, 1982): 16. At the second excavation site, as noted in 1950, "no constructions [...] were found, and there were no interesting findings" (Artemii V. Arġikhovskii, "Raskopki v Novgorode," *Kratkie soobshcheniia o dokladakh i polevykh issledovaniakh Instituta istorii material'noi kul'tury* 33 (1950): 9). However, that excavation site was laid out just near the western wall of St. Nicholas Church. See Vasilii F. Andreev, "Kniazheskii dvor v drevnem Novgorode,"

The only argument for a "sitting" veche provided by Īnin is an entry in the Novgorod First Chronicle (Younger recension), dated 1360/61,³⁷ on a "mutiny"

NIS, 2 (12) (1984): 123, illustration. The latest excavations also did not find any artifacts that could be associated with the veche square on the premises of Yaroslav's Court. See Pezhemskii, *Arkheologicheskii oblik*, 174. Thus, as it was repeatedly noted by Andreev, there is no direct evidence for locating the veche square to the west of St. Nicholas Church. Andreev, *O sošsial'noi strukture*, 74–75; Andreev, *Ob organizatsii vlasti*, 7–8. But there are no arguments for its location in any other sites on the Dvorishche. The "exclusion method" seems irrelevant under the circumstances, when no one knows what to search for. It is sufficient to assume that the veche tribune in Novgorod resembled wooden steps (a pyramid), just as in the city of Szczecin in Pomerania, according to thirteenth-century sources (see Pavel V. Lukin, "Zachem Iziaslav Īaroslavich 'v'zguna torg na goru'? K voprosu o meste provedeniia vechevykh sobranii v srednevekovom Kieve," *Srednevekovaiā Rus'* 7 (2007): 47–50) and that there was no boarding at all, to understand that there can hardly be any chance of finding artifacts and, therefore, material arguments for exactly locating the square. On Yaroslav's Court, in spite of all the efforts made in the 1930s and 1940s, no remnants of the prince's palace were found, either, but it is quite likely to have existed there and should have left behind many more artifacts than the veche square. It is not quite clear how to date "materials not connected to the veche" but found on Yaroslav's Court near St. Nicholas Church. In the published materials of the excavations of the 1930s and 1940s, there is no clear evidence of it, but Īnin does not analyze them in detail, however. Moreover, the dates proposed during the excavations of that period were of such quality that a "water pipeline of the eleventh century" found by the Aršikhovskii expedition turned out to be a part of drainage system from the fifteenth century, and a "prince's road" turned out to be in reality an extension (a narthex or gallery) of St. Nicholas Church. Pezhemskii, *Arkheologicheskii oblik*, 173. On the other hand, in 1583, as we can conclude from the plan of the Market (*Torg*), as reconstructed by Aleksandr I. Semenov using data from the *pisŭsovye* and *lavochnye knigi* (fiscal censuses), Yaroslav's Court was not developed on the vast territory to the west of St. Nicholas Church almost up to the Volkhov River, and there were also vast undeveloped spots to the south and to the east of the church. If the Novgorodians used to gather at the veche even in the sixteenth century, an extremely large number of people could have gathered near St. Nicholas Church, see Aleksandr I. Semenov, "Topografiia novgorodskogo torga v 1583 godu," *NIS*, 1 (1936), 40–41, plan. In the new plan of Yaroslav's Court and the Market made by Aleksandr N. Sorokin, no structures dating to the period of Novgorod's independence are indicated, see Aleksandr N. Sorokin, "Īaroslavovo Dvorishche," *Velikii Novgorod. Istorii i kul'tura IX–XVII vekov. Enŭsiklopedicheskii slovar'* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Nestor-istoriia, 2009), 549, plan. Moreover, Sorokin has rather skeptically assessed Īnin's concept for locating the veche square, noting that it contradicts the "direct and indirect data of written sources" (he prefers Andreev's hypothesis). Sorokin, *Īaroslavovo Dvorishche*, 550.

37 Not 1359, as it is stated by Īnin. Īnin, *Sošsial'no-politicheskaia struktura*, 94. See Nikolai G. Berezhekov, *Khronologiia russkogo letopisaniia* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1963), 292, 299.

in Novgorod: “a big conflict started at Yaroslav’s Court and there was a battle: because *Slavliane* [inhabitants of the Slavenskii end] wearing armour attacked and dispersed *Zarechane* [inhabitants of the Sophian side of Novgorod].”³⁸ Scholars have already pointed out that the word *podsiēsti* meant not “to sit (down),” but “to press hard,” “to attack.”³⁹ This interpretation was clear not only to modern linguists but also to the educated people of medieval Russia, since in the Avraamka Chronicle this entry is edited in the following way: “because Slavliane in armour went to the veche and dispersed the Zarechane.”⁴⁰

A closer reading of sources reveals that Novgorodians in fact stood during veche meetings. In 1425, another conflict occurred between the Novgorodians and German merchants.⁴¹ A detailed account of the events is found in a message sent to Dorpat. The message specifically reports that the angry Novgorodians “over five days held one or two veches every day ... to review our case, and sometimes they stood until the afternoon and ran to the court like barking dogs; and if one of them wanted to boil us, the others wanted to fry us, and [they said that] we had to go to the bailiff’s house in irons” (emphasis mine).⁴² Readings of this phrase can vary. “Stunt” literally means “they stood”

38 “[...]створися проторжъ не мала на Ярославѣ дворѣ, и съча бысть: занеже славлянѣ в доспѣсъ подсълѣ бяху, и розгониша заричанѣ” (*Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei* (henceforth, PSRL) (Moscow: Ĭazyki russkoĭ kul’tury, 2000), 3: 366).

39 Andreev, *Ob organizatsii vlasti*, 8. See: Izmail I. Sreznevskii, *Materialy dlia Slovaria drevnerusskogo iazyka* (henceforth, Sreznevskii), 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Imperatorskoĭ Akademii Nauk, 1895–1912), 2: 1070; *Slovar’ russkogo iazyka XI–XVII vv.*, (Moscow: Nauka, 1975–), 16: 55. Cf. the similar verb *pod’siēdati* – “to occupy, to settle (in someone else’s land).” *Slovar’ drevnerusskogo iazyka (XI–XIV vekov)*, (Moscow: Russkii iazyk, Azbukovnik, Leksrus, 1988–), 6: 557.

40 “[...]занеже Славлянѣ в доспѣсѣхъ вышли бяху на вѣце и разгониша Зарѣцанѣ[...].” (PSRL, XVI, 88). A part of the manuscript containing this fragment is dated to the late 1460s – early 1470s.

41 On the premises and circumstances of that conflict, see Aleksandr I. Nikitskii, “Otnosheniia novgorodskogo vладыki k nemetskому kupechestvu po novym dannym”, *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia* 228 (1883), 5–6; Leopold Karl Goetz, *Deutsch-Russische Handelsgeschichte des Mittelalters* (Lübeck: Lübecker Verlagsanstalt Otto Waelde Komm.-Ges., 1922), 114–118; Natal’ia A. Kazakova, *Russko-livonskie i russko-ganzeiskie otnosheniia. Konets XIV – nachalo XVI v.* (Leningrad: Nauka, Leningradskoe otделение, 1975), 107–108.

42 “[...]hebben sei wol 5 daghe jo des daghes en dinck gehat edder twe ume unser sake willen, dat somme tiid stunt wente na der maltiit, unde quemen lopen uppe den hoeff alze donendighe hunde, offte uns dey eine wulde seiden unde dei ander braden, unde wy solden jo in des bodels hues unde in dey yseren gan” (Hermann Hildebrand (ed.), *LECUB* (Riga-Moskau: Verlag von J. Deubner, 1881), 7: 221 (no. 31)).

which would imply physical standing. This reading could be challenged, however, as the Middle Low German verb *stân*, apart from its meaning "to stand," also had a figurative sense: "to be, to be present."⁴³ So another possible translation is "they were there." Nevertheless, the context of the message excludes sitting on benches: the veche assemblies convened once or twice a day with people repeatedly running back and forth. Moreover, there is Russian evidence clearly corroborating that from the Hanseatic document.

A 1376 entry in the Novgorod First Chronicle (Young recension) reports on the election of the bishop in Novgorod: "And the Novgorodians stood at the veche on Yaroslav's Court and sent a petition to the bishop to Derevyanitsa from the veche with the prince's namestnik, Ivan Prokshinich, and the posadnik Yury and the tysiat'skiĭ Oliyey and many other boyars and good men; and the bishop took the petition and the Bishop Alexius was elevated to the archbishop's *stepen'* [throne] in the cathedral of St. Sophia, on March 9, on the day of the Forty Blessed Martyrs; and Novgorodians were glad to have their bishop."⁴⁴ The phrase "stood at the veche" [*stasha vĭetsem*], however, can mean not only "standing," but can have a figurative meaning (cf. the phrase "set up tents" [*stati shatry*]).⁴⁵

Another entry in the chronicle shows, however, that regardless of other possible meanings of the word, the Novgorod chroniclers undoubtedly spoke exclusively about standing. Thus, when the above-mentioned Archbishop Alexius left his post, Novgorodians had to elect a new head of the local church; this happened in May 1388: "And the priests began to sing together the liturgy, and Novgorodians stood at the veche near St. Sophia [Cathedral]; and after the end of the holy service the Archpriest Izmailo took out the lot of Athanasius, then the lot of Parthenius, and God and St. Sophia and the Throne of God chose a good, quiet and meek man, John, Hegumen of St. Saviour, and put his lot on his altar."⁴⁶ This entry shows without any doubt that the phrase "stood at

43 *MHWB*, 3, 415–422.

44 "И новгородци сташа вѣщемъ на Ярославли дворѣ и послаша с челобитѣмъ ко владыцѣ на Деревяницу с вѣца намѣстника князя великаго Ивана Прокшинича, посадника Юрья и тысяцкого Олисѣя и иных многих бояръ и добрых муж; и владыка приѣх челобитѣ, възведоша владыку Алексѣя в дом святѣя Софѣя, на свои архиепископскыи степенъ, мѣсяца марта въ 9, на память святых мученикъ 40; и ради быша новгородци своему владыцѣ" (*PSRL*, 3, 373).

45 *Sreznevskii*, 3, 506.

46 "И начаша иерѣи сборомъ обѣдиюю пѣти, а новгородци сташа вѣщемъ у святѣи Софѣи; и сконцанъ святѣи службѣ вынесе протопопъ Измаило жеребен Афанаѣевъ, потомъ Порфѣниевъ; и избра богъ и святая Софѣя и престолъ божию мужа добра, тиха, смирена Иоана, игумена святого Спаса, и стави жеребен его на престолъ своею[...]" (*PSRL*, 3, 381–382).

the *veche*” [сраша вечем], even if it had a literary origin, meant standing: that particular *veche* assembly began with a celebration of the liturgy, a time when Novgorodians, naturally, could not sit.

In winter of 1384 a sharp conflict flared up in Novgorod because of the different attitudes of various Novgorod “ends” to Prince Patrikii Narimontovich. There is an account of it in the Novgorod Fourth Chronicle: “And *Slavlĭane* [people of the Slavenskii end] stood up for the prince and tolled a bell to gather the *veche* for two weeks, and here, on this [Sophian] side three ends gathered another *veche*, also for two weeks, near the St. Sophia [cathedral], and *tysiatskii* Esif went to this side to attend the *veche*, with *Plotnichane* [people of the Plotniĭskii end] and good men. And on Thursday of the week of the Prodigal Son the Slavenskĭ end attacked the mansion of Esif from the *veche*, from the Yaroslav’s Court, and *Plotnichane* did not give up *tysiatskĭ* Esif and beat looters and robbed them....And on Tuesday, February 9, on the Cheesefare week three ends, the *Nerevskĭ*, the *Zagorodskĭ* and the *Lĭudin*, attacked the *Slavenskĭ* end, and everybody was standing at the St. Sophia, armed as going to fight, from the lunchtime till the vespers; and *Plotniĭskĭ* end sent envoys to the three ends and they wanted to attack *Slavlĭane*. And on Wednesday morning *Plotnichane* did not dare to attack *Slavlĭane* with the three ends, and [the three ends] wrote three identical votive charters, and *Slavlĭane* having gathered together stood with the prince at the *veche* at the Yaroslav’s Court....”⁴⁷ Verbs *staviti* (to set up) and *stoiati* (to stand) are consistently applied in this account to the *veche* assemblies. Moreover, taking into account the course of events itself one can rule out the possibility of a ceremonious sitting on benches. Novgorodians were armed and attacked rivals right from the *veche*. The chronicler emphasizes that the people of the three ends came to the *veche* at the St. Sophia “being all armed as going to fight.” It is impossible to sit during a battle. Last but

47 “И стояху Славлянь по князи и съзвониша вече на Ярославли дворѣ по 2 недѣли, а здѣсе и на сѣи сторонѣ три конци другое вече ставиша, по двѣ же недѣли, у святѣи Софѣи, и тысячкии Есифъ ходи на сию сторону въ вече, Плотничани и добрыи люди. И бысть на Черътисовѣ недѣли, в четвергѣ, удариша Славеньскіи конецъ на тысячкого на Есифовѣ дворѣ с вѣча, съ Ярославля двора, и Плотничанѣ тысячкого Есифа не выдаша, и биша грабѣжниковѣ и полупиша[...] И бысть на мясопустной недѣли, вторникѣ, февраля 9, dospĭsha 3 konci, Nerevskĭi, Zagorodskĭi, Liudinĭ, na Slavenskĭi konecĭ, i stoiashe u sviatĭi Sofĭi na vechi, vsiakii vŭ oruzhii, aki na ratĭ, otŭ obĭda i do vecherniĭ; i Plotinskoi konecĭ sŭslavsia posly s tsemi konci, na Slavlianĭ hotĭsha iti. A zautra vŭ sredu ne potiaĭnuša Plotnichani na Slavlianĭ s tsemi konci, [i tri konci] spisashie tri gramoty vŭ odina slova obŭtĭnyi, i Slavlianĭ, sobŭ dospĭvŭ, stoiashe sŭ kniazemŭ na vŭchi na Yaroslavli dvorĕ[...]” (PSRL, 4, 1, 340–341).

not least, it is necessary to pay attention to the season. In February when snowstorms rage on the East European Plain an open air sitting gathering seems to be impossible.

What does this mean for the interpretation of the Novgorod veche? It means that, even if we agree with ĪAnin on the location of the veche square, the hypothesis that only three hundred to five hundred people could have participated in it turns out to be groundless. As was mentioned earlier, according to ĪAnin's estimates, the area where assemblies could take place was about 1,800–2,000 square meters in size. In this case, the number of *vechniki* can be estimated as several thousand, not several hundred. The exact number depends on many circumstances, from the clothes of Novgorodians (which in turn depended on the season) to their notions of personal space, but surely we should take into account average, typical numbers. There exist average figures for contemporary mass events (meetings, festival crowds, protest actions, etc). According to McPhail and McCarthy, there were two independent studies carried out with various methods (an aerial survey was even used), and they revealed the so-called golden standard. At "standing" meetings there is usually one person per five square feet on average,⁴⁸ i.e., one person per 0.465 square meters. A simple calculation shows that even on the spot identified as the veche square by ĪAnin, there was room for up to four thousand people (or about three thousand, taking into account the new version of the area proposed by ĪAnin).⁴⁹

This would seem to contradict the evidence of a document from 1439 studied by Kleinenberg – a message of German merchants from Novgorod to the burgomaster and city council of Reval about a conflict that occurred in Novgorod over the new gate at the Gothic Court. Inhabitants of *Mikhailova ulitsa* ("St. Michael's street" – *de ut sunte Michaels strate*) expressed their

48 Clark McPhail and John McCarthy, "Who counts and how: estimating the size of protests," *Contexts* 3, 3 (2004):14–15.

49 I should repeat that I base my calculations upon the location and area of the veche square as defined by ĪAnin, using them as relative data. Meanwhile, the internal contradictions in those estimates follow, at least, from his speculations about the "publicity of the veche assembly": "Although its full members were the richest Novgorodians, the work of the veche took place in the open air, and common people had no right to vote at it, but there was an appearance of their active participation when they reacted to the course of disputations with cries of reproach and praise." ĪAnin 2004, 80. This argument provokes questions. Novgorodians deprived of the right to vote had to stand somewhere to hear what happened at the veche and to follow the debates, did they not? Does this mean that the veche square was not strictly separated from the space around it? And how does this fit with ĪAnin's strict definition of the area of the square?

indignation via a kind of protest action: “[people] went from the street of St. Michael and called the posadnik and the tysiat’skiĭ and settled opposite the gate in front of St. Michael’s Church and held there a big gathering of a light-minded party and then they went and sent envoys to the steward of the court.”⁵⁰ Kleinenberg translated the fragment as follows: “[aldermen] from the street of St. Michael went and brought the posadnik and the tysiat’skiĭ and sat down [with them] opposite the gate in front of St. Michael’s Church. A lot of agitated people gathered there and envoys were sent [to call for] the steward of the court.” The translation is generally correct, but there seems to be some inaccuracy. The introduction of the term “aldermen” does not seem reasonable, in my view. When they dealt with aldermen, the latter were openly termed *olderlude ute sunte Michaels strate* (“aldermen from the street of St. Michael”). In another passage, where someone *de ut sunte Michaels strate* is mentioned, the inhabitants of the street as a whole are meant (“those from the street of St Michael,” i.e., the street organization). Kleinenberg was quite right about that. It would be more correct to translate the demonstrative pronoun *de* as “those,” which means “the people as a whole,” i.e., the inhabitants of the street. It is not so important who exactly went to the posadnik and the tysiat’skiĭ (it could have been aldermen). What is much more important is that the initiative came from the community of the inhabitants of the street, the “light-minded party” which gathered together near St. Michael’s Church. That action is called a “gathering” (*vorsamelinghe*) and characterized as rather large (not an occasional gathering of agitated people, as we would understand from Kleinenberg’s translation): street aldermen, the posadnik, and the tysiat’skiĭ, representing all of Novgorod, attended it. This gives us grounds to see it as a formal and legal assembly of townspeople, which is usually called a street (*ulichanskoe*) *veche* in the scholarly literature.

According to Kleinenberg and Sevastianova, its participants were sitting (“took seats”). This seems strange because the message is dated December 28, and its context proves that it was written right after the events. Moreover, inhabitants of the street “took seats” not in a building but opposite the gates, in front of St. Michael’s Church, i.e., in the open air. They could in fact have become quite “agitated” sitting in the cold.

50 “[...]do genghen de ute sunte Michaelē strate und halden borgermester und hertige und genghen sitten teghen de porte vor sunte Michaels kerke und hadden dar eyne grote vorsamelinghe van loser partyghe und quemen do und sanden des hoves knechte boden” (*LECVB*, 9, 391–392 (no. 546)). The text was also published in *HR*, 2, 267–269 (no. 325); see the Russian translation by Igor’ E. Kleinenberg and Alla A. Sevastianova, “Ulichane na strazhe svoei territorii (po materialam ganzeĭskoi perepiski XV v.),” *NIS*, 2 (1984): 160–162.

The misunderstanding can be resolved if we pay attention to another meaning of the phrase *sitten gan* – "sich setzen" ("to settle," not "to take seats").⁵¹ Thus, the inhabitants of Mikhailova Street, naturally, stood in front of the gates and may have not been sitting in snowdrifts or on icy benches (brought from Yaroslav's Court in advance?).

There is another option. The gathering of the inhabitants of the Mikhailova street which would have been a more or less "official" assembly for *them*, could have been perceived by the Germans as a kind of a "sit-in" demonstration (as they saw people of the street sitting down and standing up).

When the steward of the court "came to them to the church, there stood the aldermen of the street of St. Michael having hacked a beam (?) off the gatepost."⁵² Beyond any doubt, they would have had to stand up to break the gates, and it is difficult to imagine that the aldermen would work while the common townspeople sat around them in a dignified manner. We are obviously dealing here with a phenomenon, well-known in Novgorod, which the Germans took for civil disorder and the Novgorodians considered a legal way to restore justice – a collective decision to destroy a building constructed in defiance of the traditional norms of Novgorod common law. Notably, the same document says that the inhabitants of the street "wanted to hold an immediate trial and considered hanging the steward of the court on the gate with the use of (?) the beam hacked off the gatepost"⁵³

Thus we have no evidence of "sitting" assemblies, but numerous accounts on "standing" ones. Novgorodians, therefore, must have stood during their assemblies.

On the other hand, the Hanseatic document of 1425 undeniably shows that only the people who lived not far from the assembly place, Yaroslav's Court, were able to take part in the veche that gathered every day over almost a week. These could have been only townspeople of Novgorod. Another fact that supports this theory is that Novgorodians were called to the veche by the sound of a bell which could only be heard at a certain distance from the city centre. It was quite natural for a chronicler to write that a prince who wanted to call Novgorodians to a dinner (the following morning the same Novgorodians took

51 Cf. *MWHB*, 249

52 "[...]vor se quam vor de kerke, do stonden de olderlude ute sunte Michaelles strate und hadden eynen span ghehouwen ute eynem poste [...]" (*LECUB*, 9, 391(no. 546). This passage and the one cited below are quite obscure in the original, so one can only guess which exactly parts of the construction were damaged.

53 "[...]wolden [...] dar vort eyn recht sitten und menden, se wolden des hoves knecht an de porten hanghen myt dem spane, den se ute dem poste howen" (*Ibid.*).

part in the veche) sent *podvoiskie* and *birichi* [heralds] “to the streets” [по улицамъ],⁵⁴ not to the towns and villages of the Novgorod Land.

It is quite clear that the number of the inhabitants of the vast Novgorod Land (according to some estimates, which could be somewhat exaggerated, its population numbered around 400,000 people in the fifteenth century)⁵⁵ made their participation in those veche assemblies sheerly impossible. This fact contradicts the popular concepts of communal or polis character of the social and political system of Old Rus’ in general and of the Novgorod Land in particular.⁵⁶ The Novgorod *volost’* was not an Ancient Greek χώρα⁵⁷ inhabited by people equal in rights to townspeople, but a rural area whose population had no opportunity to take part in making political decisions. This can be seen not only from their non-participation in veche meetings but also from other evidence.

First, there is direct evidence that in the fifteenth century the peasants of Novgorod were not considered to be part of the civil community (as was the case in the ancient poleis); instead, they formed a specific social group that differed from other groups within the population.⁵⁸ This can be clearly seen in the treaty, signed in 1471, between the Great Prince of Novgorod and the King of Poland and Lithuania, Cazimir IV,⁵⁹ which stated on behalf of the Novgorodians: “And your namestnik must judge a boyar and a zhitiy and a junior and a villager together with the posadnik at the bishops’s court, at the usual place”.⁶⁰ Villagers were mentioned, obviously, as a separate category within the population of the Novgorod Land. They are characterized by a

54 PSRL, 2, 369.

55 Henryk Samsonowicz, *Późne średniowiecze miast nadbałtyckich. Studia nad dziejami Hanzy nad Bałtykiem w XIV–XV w.* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1968), 76.

56 See, for instance, Igor’ ĪA. Froīanov, *Kievskaia Rus’. Ocherki sośsial’no-politicheskoī istorii Rusi* (Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Leningradskogo universiteta, 1980), 216–243; Igor’ ĪA. Froīanov and Andreī ĪU. Dvornichenko, *Goroda-gosudarstva Drevnei Rusi* (Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Leningradskogo universiteta, 1988), 266–267.

57 Froyanov writes exactly in this way. Froīanov, *Kievskaia Rus’*, 232.

58 This outdated idea is still sometimes found even in those scholars who tend to revise many stereotypes in other aspects; see, for instance, Rudolf Mumenthaler, “Spätmittelalterliche Städte West- und Osteuropas im Vergleich: Versuch einer verfassungsgeschichtlichen Typologie,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas. Neue Folge* 46 (1998): 66.

59 On the date, see Valentin L. ĪAnin, *Novgorodskie akty XII–XV vv. Khronologicheskii kommentarii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), 187.

60 “А намѣстнику твоему судити с посадникомъ во владычнѣ дворѣ, на пошломъ мѣстѣ, какъ боярина, такъ и житьего, такъ и молодшего, такъ и селянина” (GVNF, 130 (no. 77).

specific status (the lowest one, according to their place in the list) along with other categories: boyars, *zhit'i* and juniors (i.e., common townspeople).

Villagers were not only a specific group among other groups; they belonged to a group that did not possess full rights. Striking testimony is preserved in one of the late Novgorod chronicles. In 1534, several decades after Novgorod's annexation by the Russian state, the Moscow *d'iaki* (officials), Iakov Shishkov and Funik Kurtsov, who were governing in Novgorod, "ordered to the whole city to build walls, not only to *volosti* [the rural population] ... and imposed a tax for construction of walls upon the whole city: upon merchants from Moscow and Novgorod, upon aldermen and common people, upon the archbishop and upon priests, and upon all clergy, and [did] what had not been [done] until now under the old Great Princes: *until now walls had been built by all the Novgorod volosti and townspeople were the customers*" (italics mine).⁶¹

It is extremely important to take into account testimony by Lannoy (he says that he had personal contacts with the highest Novgorod magistrates – the archbishop, the *tysyatskiĭ*, and the *posadnik*; according to A.V. Soloviev, Hanseatic merchants could have been among his informers):⁶² "in the above-mentioned city there are a very many great lords whom they [Novgorodians] call Boyars. And there are such townsmen who own two hundred lieu of land, they are strikingly rich and powerful."⁶³ Thus, the Novgorod boyars, although they were landowners and some of them were extremely large landowners,

61 [...]повелѣша град ставити вѣмъ градомъ, опрично волостен ... и роскинуша примѣть городовои дѣнежно[и], что город ставили, на весь град: на гости на московские и на новгородские, на старосты и на черные люди, и на архиепископа, и на священники, и на весь причетъ церковный, а доселе того не бывало при старых великих князех: ставили город доселе вѣми новгородскими волостями, а городовые люди нарядчики были (PSRL, 43, 234).

62 Aleksandr V. Soloviev, *Le voyage de messier de Lannoy dans les pays russes*, eds. Dietrich Gerhardt, Wiktor Weintraub, and Hans-Jürgen zum Winkel (eds.), *Orbis scriptus. Festschrift für Dmitrij Tschizhevskij zum 70. Geburtstag* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1966), 792.

63 "[...]y a dedens laditte ville moult de grans seigneurs qu'ilz appellent Bayares. Et y a tel bourgeois qui tient bien de terre deux cens lieues de long, riches et puissans à merveilles [...]" (Œuvres de Ghillebert de Lannoy voyageur, diplomate et moraliste, recueillies et publiées par Ch. Potvin avec des notes géographiques et une carte par J.-C. Houzeau. Louvain: Imprimerie de P. et J. Lefever, 1878, 33). This passage is often misinterpreted: instead of mighty citizens, one mighty townsman appears; only recently it was translated in this way by Stéphane Mund; see Stéphane Mund, "Opisanie Novgoroda i Pskova v memuarakh Voyages et ambassades rytsaria Gil'bera de Lannoa (1413)," *Drevniia Rus': Voprosy medievistiki* 1 (7) (2002): 49.

lived in the city and, what is more important, they *were considered* to be townspeople. Though they certainly visited their lands from time to time, they belonged to the social and political entity of townsmen (not villagers!), enjoying full rights and constituting its highest and most elite stratum.

Nevertheless, until the very end of the history of the Republic of Novgorod, as well as during an earlier time,⁶⁴ even townsmen of the lowest status, the so-called *chernye liudi* or *chern'* (literally, "black people", i.e. plebs) had a right to take part in assemblies. There is one quite interesting and probably reliable testimony in the Ustyug Chronicle Compilation that is known in the historiography⁶⁵ but has been underestimated. The entry for 1477/78 reads:

In the same autumn, an envoy of the Great Prince, Feodor Davydovich [came]. And he stood up at the veche and delivered a speech: "Boyars of Novgorod and all Novgorod, your podvoiskii Nazarey and your veche scribe came to the Great Prince and they said as follows: 'The posadniki of Novgorod and the tysiat'skii and all Novgorod the Great called Great Princes Ivan Vassilievich and his son Ivan Ivanovich sovereigns of Novgorod'; and whom do you consider Great Princes?" And the *chern'* said: "We did not send for that; the boyars sent but the people does not know about it'. And the anger of people against the boyars appeared. And they let Fedor Davydovich go with nothing. [They were] in battle among themselves and in the course of it they killed at the veche Vasilii Nikiforovich, and others ran away. In the same mutiny they killed two posadniki: Zakharii Grigor'evich and brother Kozma, and a son of Kuz'ma left in a dead faint, they took Luka Fedorov and Fefilat Zakhar'in and put them under guard. And then [they] led them to the veche and forgave them and they kissed the cross that they would wish well for Novgorod."⁶⁶

64 See Pavel V. Lukin, "O soŭsial'nom sostave novgorodskogo vecha XII–XIII vv. po letopisnym dannym," *Drevnelshie gosudarstva v Vostochnoi Evrope. 2004 g. Politicheskie instituty Drevnei Rusi* (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 2006).

65 See, for instance, Viktor N. Bernadskii, *Novgorod i Novgorodskaya zemlia v XV veke* (Moscow, Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1961), 293–294. Scholars usually retell this event on the basis of the Pskov III Chronicle, where the social characteristics of the conflict are absent (PSRL, 5, 2, 209. For a typical example in the contemporary historiography, see Iurii G. Alekseev, *Pod znamienami Moskvy* (Moscow: Mysl', 1992), 221–222.

66 "Тое же осени от великаго князя посол Федор Давыдовичъ. И ста на вечи и рече слово: "Бояре новгородски и весь Новѣгород, приходил к великому князю ваш подвоиской Назарей и дяк ваш вечной и ркуще тако: 'Новгородские посадники, и тысяцкие, и весь Великий Новѣгород наркли князеи великих себе Ивана Васильевича и сына его Ивана Ивановичя государем Новугороду; вы чем великих

Bobrov came to the conclusion that the entry was compiled in Novgorod and, moreover, that it was "the last entry written by the last chronicler of the Republic of Novgorod."⁶⁷

The concept of *chern'* may be rather broad, and in this case it is a synonym for "the people", i.e., free Novgorodians not belonging to the nobility (not boyars). However, *chern'* as such had political rights. There is evidence that they actively participated in the events connected to the annexation of Novgorod by Moscow. The Moscow Chronicle Compilation reports that, when in 1478 the army of Ivan III came to Novgorod, envoys went to him:

the bishop from Novgorod came to the Great Prince with ... *posadniki* and *zhitii* and with them 5 *chern'* men from five ends of the city, from the Nerevskii end, Avram Ladozhanin; from the Gorncharsky end, Krivoi; and from the Slovenskii end, Zakhar Brekh; and from the Zagorodskii end, Khariton; and from the Plotnikii [sic] end, Fedor Lytko.⁶⁸

Bernadskii rightly pointed out that an indirect sign of the social origin of the representatives of the Novgorod *chern'* "were their names, which were different from other representatives of Novgorod the Great."⁶⁹ Their names were obviously of plebeian origin; for example, they contained no patronymic endings with the noble *-ich*. As envoys to the Great Prince, Krivoi, Zakhar Brekh and others surely took part in the *veche* assemblies that sent them.

князеи имеете?" И тако рыкли чернь: "Мы с тем не посылавали, то посылали бояря, а народ того не ведает". И начаша народ на бояр за то злобу имети. И Федора Давыдовича отпустиша ни с чем. Меж собою в брани [sic] и в том на вещи убиша Василья Никифоровича, а иные розбеглися. В то же возмущенье убиша 2 посадника: Захарью Григорьевича да брата Козму, а сына Кузьмина замертво оставиша, Луку Федорова да Феофиласта Захарьина, изымавшие, посадиша за сторожи. И потом приведше их на вече, и пожаловаша их, и целовали крест, что им хотети добра Новугороду" (*PSRL*, 37, 94).

67 Aleksandr G. Bobrov, *Novgorodskie letopisi XV veka* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2001), 239–240. Earlier, the same idea was expressed with caution by Yakov S. Luria. See Yakov S. Luria, *Obshcherusskie letopisi XIV–XV vv.* (Leningrad: Nauka, Leningradskoe otделение, 1976), 196, footnote; Yakov S. Luria, *Dve istorii Rusi XV veka. Rannie i pozdnie, nezavisimye i ofitsial'nye letopisi ob obrazovanii Moskovskogo gosudarstva* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1994), 146.

68 "[...]прииде к великому князю владыка из Новагорода с [...] посадники и житиими, да с ними 5 человекъ черных от пяти концовъ, от Неревского конца Аврамъ Ладожанинъ, а от Горньчаскаго Кривон, а от Словенского Захаръ Брех, а от Загородского Харитонъ, а от Плотникаго [sic] Федоръ Лытка" (*PSRL*, 25, 317).

69 Bernadskii, *Novgorod*, 294.

Thus, the Novgorod *starina* (old habits and traditions) implied the privileged position of free townspeople (*gorodovye liudi*) who in turn consisted of several categories (boyars, clergymen, merchants, *chern'*, and so on) and who constituted the collective sovereign of the population of the *volost'*, the villagers. Therefore, the popular concept of the "communal-democratic" and "polis" structure of medieval Novgorod seems farfetched and artificial. The non-participation of villagers in the *veche* was an evident consequence not only of the physical impossibility of reaching the city centre in time, but also a manifestation of their limited rights.

In general, if we accept the traditional estimates for medieval Novgorod (which are also based not on exact evidence but on analogies with other European towns), the size of the population was about twenty to thirty thousand people.⁷⁰ By excluding women, children, and dependents, we can conclude that the total number of free townspeople who were heads of families and had a right to take part in the *veche* was definitely much larger than three hundred and that Ānin wrongly took the famous "three hundred golden belts" for *vechniki*.⁷¹ Estimates surely cannot be absolutely accurate, but we base our analysis on the following considerations. Even if we estimate that the maximum size of the population of Novgorod during the fifteenth century was thirty thousand people (in earlier times it was obviously much smaller), we should subtract all those who had no political rights: women, children, dependents, and incapacitated people. As for women, the usual ratio between men and women in the towns of Central Europe at the time was 1,170–1,300 women for every thousand men. An average family in Danzig (a city with approximately the same population as Novgorod) consisted of three and a half to four and half people, but the families of privileged townsmen had more children than those of ordinary people. There were also a certain number of bachelors, but they usually were people without political rights: beggars, apprentices, etc.⁷² Circa 1400, a rich family in the cities and towns of Poland usually

70 Johansen, *Novgorod*, 124, 127 (about 20,000 inhabitants at the "high point of its flourishing"); Samsonowicz, *Późne średniowiecze*, 77 (he estimates the population of Novgorod in the fifteenth century at 30,000 people, comparing it to the populations of Hanseatic towns); Carsten Goehrke, *Gross-Novgorod und Pskov/Pleskau*, Manfred Hellmann, Klaus Zernack, and Gottfried Schramm (eds.), *Handbuch der Geschichte Russlands*, 5 vols. (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1981), 1, I, 442 (he estimates the population of Novgorod "at the end of its independence" as between 25,000 and 30,000 people, while admitting that "there are no reliable data" for such calculations).

71 See Knud Rasmussen, "300 zolotykh poiāsov drevnego Novgoroda", *Scandoslavica* 25 (1979), 95–100; Lukin, *300 zolotykh poiāsov*, 281–286.

72 Samsonowicz, *Późne średniowiecze*, 106.

consisted of six people; a family of average income, of five people, and a poor family, of four people.⁷³ According to the estimates of German scholars, an average family in a medieval Hanseatic city could have two to three living children, and the general percentage of children in the population was between twenty and thirty.⁷⁴ There are also other data that are perhaps more precise. On the basis of a thorough study of burials at the cemetery in Mlynovka (Mühlenberg), where inhabitants of medieval Wolin were buried, Piontek concluded that among the entire population of the town (like other authors, he estimated that its size was between five thousand and nine thousand) children aged fifteen or under comprised 53.1 percent (whereas people aged twenty or under constituted sixty-five percent).⁷⁵

As a result, we can suppose that among the thirty thousand Novgorodians there were about seventeen thousand women, and that among the thirteen thousand men over half were incapacitated or deprived of rights (boys, dependent men, beggars, invalids, and so on). We arrive, therefore, at a figure of no more than five to six thousand men who had the potential right to participate in veche assemblies. If we take into account that the figure of thirty thousand also is a maximum estimate (even in the fifteenth century the population of Novgorod was most likely lower,⁷⁶ and in earlier times it was significantly lower than that),⁷⁷ we get the same number of three to four thousand people who, as

73 Henryk Samsonowicz, "Społeczeństwo w Polsce około 1400 roku," Wojciech Fałkowski (ed.), *Polska około roku 1400. Państwo, społeczeństwo, kultura* (Warszawa: Neriton, 2001), 11.

74 Henryk Samsonowicz, "Zagadnienia demografii historycznej regionu Hanzы w XIV–XV w.," *Zapiski Historyczne poświęcone historii Pomorza* 28, 4 (1963): 542.

75 Janusz Piontek, "Wczesnośredniowieczni Wolinianie: analiza biologiczna i ekologiczna," *Materiały Zachodniopomorskie* 28 (1982): 27.

76 In the mid-sixteenth century, when more precise data from the *pistsovye* and *lavochrye knigi* appeared, the population of Novgorod was about 26,000 people, perhaps slightly larger. Aleksandr P. Pronshtein, *Velikiĭ Novgorod v XVI v.* (Khar'kov: Izdatel'stvo Khar'kovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta im. A.M. Gor'kogo, 1957), 31–32.

77 At the end of the twelfth century, for instance, the population of Novgorod, as based on the most reliable calculations, was 15,000 people. See Eduard Mühle, *Die städtischen Handelszentren der nordwestlichen Ruß. Anfänge und frühe Entwicklung altrussischer Städte (bis gegen Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991), 130. This also follows from an analysis of demographic processes in Europe during the eleventh to fifteenth centuries. The population of Bergen, the largest city in Norway, was about one thousand people at the end of the eleventh century; circa 1200, 5,000 people; circa 1400, 14,000. Population growth in Geneva was over sixty percent during the second half of the fourteenth century; during the fifteenth century, it was thirty-four percent. Higher rates were typical for population growth in such large cities as Bologna and Lübeck. Samsonowicz 1968, 83. According to an estimate by Leciejewicz, in the eleventh and early

we have already noted, could certainly have found room for themselves even within that limited area that is interpreted as the *veche* square by ĪAnin and his followers, and even in the unreal case that all of them, down to the last man, would have decided to come together to the square at the same time.

The *Veche* and the *Sovet Gospod*

The Novgorod “council of lords” is one of those phenomena in the historiography of medieval Russia that, although it appeared long ago and, what is more significant, without critical reflection, existed within it over a long period of time – by default, as they say nowadays. It is not surprising that in the 1990s, when waves of extremely popular postmodernist theories finally reached Russian medieval studies, it was one of the first victims. We should admit that, contrary to many other “deconstructions,” at first glance there were rather serious grounds for the attack on the “council of lords.”

The first scholar to began deliberately to search for a certain governing body in medieval Novgorod was A.I. Nikitskiĭ, a professor at Warsaw University and the author of a number of classic works on the history of Novgorod in pre-Revolutionary Russian historiography. In 1869, he published a short article in which he raised this question. Despite being highly controversial and, so to speak, deductive, even today it remains the best study of the problem. By “deductive” we mean that the historian knew beforehand that such a council ought to have existed in Novgorod and that is why he deliberately searched for it in the sources. He admitted this method in express terms. However, Nikitsky noted that initially “it was as if [the council] sank into the so-called historical gloom and returned to the surface only at the end of the thirteenth century.”⁷⁸ According to Nikitsky, the Novgorod council was first mentioned in a written source in a Hanseatic document of 1292. The most important feature of Nikitsky’s article (as well as his other works) was that he paid attention

twelfth centuries, the population of such large Baltic trade centres as Szczecin and Wolin was 5,000–10,000 people. Lech Leciejewicz, *Opera selecta. Z dziejów kultury średniowiecznej Polski i Europy* (Wrocław: Institut archeologii i etnologii PAN, 2006, 190). According to the data of such a respected researcher of the history of Wolin as Filipowiak, the population of that city in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was about 6,000 people, Wolin being “the biggest city in the region of the Baltic Sea.” Władysław Filipowiak and Marek Konopka, “The Identity of a Town. Wolin, Town-State – 9th–12th Centuries”, *Quaestiones Mediaevali Novae* 13 (2008): 248.

78 Aleksandr I. Nikitskiĭ, “Ocherki iz zhizni Velikogo Novgoroda, I. Pravitel'stvennyi sovet”, *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia* 145, 9–10 (1869): 294–295.

primarily to documentary sources, first of all to Latin and Low German Hanseatic documents that describe the activities of the Hanseatic office in Novgorod. These important materials were not subsequently used in studies of Novgorod's social and political history, and historians of the Soviet period, with few exceptions, usually did not analyze them.

Unfortunately, Nikitskiĭ was able to work only with a small portion of the Hanseatic documents because of his premature death. Thus, while working on the article on the "council of lords" he could use only Napiersky's edition, in which only a few selected documents were published, and the first four volumes of the *LECUB* collection (up to the year 1413). Meanwhile, as will be shown later, the key documents dealing with the problem of Novgorod council are of a later period. Nevertheless, Nikitsky analyzed the documents that were at his disposal rather thoroughly (albeit somewhat one-sidedly). All scholars who worked in the same field after Nikitsky followed him by using the same sources, but they used only selected documents, which in their opinion were either the most important or merely random ones.

The concept of the "council of lords" is fully rejected by some contemporary historians (Chebanova, Granberg). Granberg critically examined two Hanseatic documents, from 1292 and 1331, in which Nikitsky, Kliuchevsky, and later researchers usually detected the earliest mentions of the "council of lords."

When Granberg deals with the first one – a report by the Hanseatic envoys – he is quite right: they do not mention any governmental institutions. Granberg is also correct when he says that the "text has no expressions which could be translated as 'council of lords' or anything of the kind."⁷⁹ In fact, there are two mentions of councils with the participation of Novgorodians in the documents, but it is clear enough that, first, these were ad hoc meetings, not formal meetings of a certain governmental body; second, they were not meetings of only Novgorodians (as the "council of lords" is supposed to be), but of representatives of Novgorod with the prince and his people.⁸⁰

The second document, a well-known message of German merchants to Riga about the conflict between them and Novgorodians in 1331, is more problematic. The senders reported inter alia of payments they had to make to compensate the damage they caused to the Novgorodians: "It cost us 20 more grivnas [of silver] that we promised to those lords of Novgorod and also to the heralds

79 Jonas Granberg, "Sovet gospod Novgoroda v nemetskikh istochnikakh," *Drevneišie gosudarstva Vostochnoi Evropy. 1998 g.* (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura, 2000), 82.

80 Ibid., 82.

bi der heren rade whom we had given promises" (italics mine).⁸¹ It was on the basis of this fragment that Nikitsky concluded that there was a senate in Novgorod called the "council of boyars" (he interpreted the *heren* of the Hanseatic documents as "boyars")⁸² and Kliuchevsky introduced the term "council of lords,"⁸³ which was later commonly used in the literature. It quite recently became clear that there are no serious grounds for such an interpretation of the text. Chebanova has doubted the existence of a "council of lords" in Novgorod on the basis of the 1331 document.⁸⁴ However, the most serious arguments were put forward by Granberg, who based his argument on linguistic consultations with Catherine Squires. The interpretation is based on the suggestion that the expression *bi der heren rade* cannot be explained as a stable compound word like **herrenrat*, which could be translated as "council of lords." This argument is supported by the fact that the article *der* accompanies the word *heren*, not the word *rade*.

On this basis, Granberg supposed that the source implies not a council as a governmental body, but a process of discussion of important matters (a kind of *consilium*, as in the above-mentioned Latin document) or an occasional meeting (which we earlier called an ad hoc council).⁸⁵ Squires, however, came to the conclusion that "the construction *bi rade* (without an article) should be interpreted better as 'on recommendation' [of lords],"⁸⁶ i.e., perhaps no council at all is meant there.

81 "[...]mer dat costede vns .XX. stucke de wi vorloueden solcken heren van Nogarden. vnn och den roperen bi der heren rade. den wi louede louet hadden" (Karl Eduard Napiersky (ed.), *Russko-livonskie akty* (=Russisch-Livländische Urkunden) (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Imperatorskoĭ Akademii nauk, 1868) (henceforth, RLA), 61(no. 75).

82 Nikitskiĭ, *Ocherki iz zhizni Velikogo Novgoroda*, I, 299, 301.

83 Vasilii O. Kliuchevskii, *Boiarskaia Duma drevnei Rusi* (Moscow: Tovarichestvo tipografii A.I. Mamontova, 1909), 545.

84 Elena I. Chebanova, "300 zolotykh poiasov': problemy interpretatsii termina," *Problemy sotsial'nogo i gumanitarnogo znaniiā. Sbornik nauchnykh rabot* 1 (1999): 180–182. Chebanova is inclined to believe that Hanseatic merchants might have just transferred the names of governmental institutions in their own towns to Novgorodian institutions (Ibid., 182). However, first, there were no governmental bodies called "councils of lords" in Hanseatic cities (there were only city councils); second, the example of such a "transference" that she garnered from a message of the Novgorod Archbishop to Riga ("To the posadniki of Riga and *ratmany* and to all good people") is not sufficient because usage of the word *posadnik* was not a transference of the name but a translation of the term. (Moreover, the Germans did not transliterate the Russian word *posadnik* but interpreted it as *Burggraf*.) The word *ratmany* (*Ratmänner*) had no exact equivalent and that is why it was not translated.

85 Granberg, *Sovet gospod*, 83.

86 Ekaterina R. Squires, "Ganzeĭskie gramoty kak iazykovoe svidetel'stvo po istorii Novgoroda Velikogo", *Spory*: 83–91. See also Catherine Squires, *Die Hanse in Novgorod: Sprachkontakte*

Linguistically, this interpretation is fairly possible. However instead of "Council of Lords" we still have "the lords" (*de heren*). The new reading does not eliminate the necessity of explaining who were those "lords" with heralds (*roperen*) at their disposal.

Those heralds were obviously persons of rather high social status because they received compensation from the Germans along with other Novgorod officials. Perhaps, as has been already suggested,⁸⁷ they were high-ranking birichi like Miroska, who was mentioned in the Church Statute of Prince Vsevolod Mstislavich as someone who took part in making the most important decisions.⁸⁸ The birich Miroska was convincingly identified by Florya with Miroska Nezdinich, who was a posadnik at the end of the twelfth century.⁸⁹ We should agree with Kliuchevsky's conclusion that the birichi (*roperen*) in the 1331 document were three representatives of Novgorod: Matfei Kozka, Sil'vestr, and Alderman Olferi. They were precisely the men who demanded personal payments from the Germans: Olferi and Sil'vestr demanded five grivnas for each of them, and Matfei Kozka demanded purple clothes. We have no knowledge of similar demands made by the envoys who initially represented the Novgorodians, Filipp and Alderman Sidor. Two other Novgorod representatives, Zakharii Feofilaktovich and Yakun Semenovich, the son of a posadnik, who participated in the negotiations later and also demanded payments from Germans like the three others (they demanded purple clothes from them), should possibly be added to these *roperen*.⁹⁰ Only these Novgorod representatives and the "lords of Novgorod" (who will be discussed later) received personal promises from the Germans along with compensation for everyone else. The fragment with the alleged mention of the "council of lords" clearly shows the fulfilment of those promises.

Thus, the "council of lords" is obviously absent in the document of 1331, but one enigma is replaced by another. Who were the "lords of Novgorod" who held negotiations with the Hanseatic merchants (and even came to them personally once) and with whom the birichi-*roperen* were certainly connected (the Germans paid the birichi only "on the recommendation" or "advice" of the

des Mittelniederdeutschen mit dem Russischen mit einer Vergleichsstudie über die Hanse in England (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2009), 21

87 See Kliuchevskii, *Boiarskaia Duma*, 188–189; Boris N. Floriia, "K izucheniiu tserkovnogo ustava Vsevoloda," *Rossiia v srednie veka i novoe vremia. Sbornik statei k 70-letiiu L. V. Milova* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1999), 91–92.

88 Yaroslav N. Shchapov (ed.), *Drevnerusskie kniazheskie ustavy XI–XV vv.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1976), 155.

89 Florya, *K izucheniiu*, 92.

90 *RLA*, 59.

“lords”)? In the 1331 document, the composition of these “lords” is not revealed. We can assume that since the representatives included two sons of *posadniki*, one of whom (Matfeĭ Kozka) soon became a *posadnik* himself (the example of Miroshka Nezdinich shows that the high status of the *birichi* was not unexpected), they would probably have been rather high-ranked and could have been members of the Novgorod government. The *posadnik* undoubtedly belonged to the “lords of Novgorod.” This becomes evident from the fragment of the document describing the refusal by German merchants to take responsibility for the murder of the *posadnik*’s son-in-law, Ivan, in Dorpat: “the Germans did not yield in this to the lords of Novgorod” (*des mochten se an den heren van Nougarden nicht hebben*). And then it became clear that it was the *posadnik* who had formulated demands on behalf of the “lords of Novgorod.”⁹¹

At the very end of the negotiations the “lords of Novgorod” appeared once again. They came to the Germans and forgave them the twenty grivnas of silver, “against the will of the *posadnik*” [*ane des borchgreuen danc*], and after they did this, the matter was finally settled. Thus, it was the “lords of Novgorod” who took the final decision on the disputed case, and it is obvious that their decision did not need to be confirmed by the *veche*. The *veche* probably openly or “by default” delegated its powers to the “lords,” i.e., if the Novgorodians were not against a decision by the “lords,” it could be accepted as legal. Though the *posadnik* belonged to the “lords,” he had no higher authority over them. On the contrary, he was subordinate to their collective will.

Some information on the composition of the “lords of Novgorod” can be found in later Hanseatic documents. Nikitskiĭ had already drawn attention to a document describing the mission of a representative of the burgomaster and the council of Reval, Bernt Lemeghouwen, to Novgorod in the spring of 1406. The historian described the composition of the “governing council” of Novgorod on this basis.⁹²

More precise conclusions were formulated much later by Kleinenberg, who was sure that the council of lords was meant by the phrase *de heren van Nougarden* (lords of Novgorod).⁹³ In fact, as he rightly noted, the message of the council of Reval to the German merchants in Novgorod says: “we compiled a message to the lords of Novgorod ... and ordered Bernt Lemeghouwen to convey the message.”⁹⁴ The message was addressed to the archbishop of Novgorod,

91 RLA, 59.

92 Nikitskiĭ, *Ocherki iz zhizni Velikogo Novgoroda*, I, 301.

93 Kleinenberg, *Izvestiia*, 172–173.

94 “[...]wy enes breves vorramet hebben an de heren van Naugarden [...] und hebben den breff Bernt Lemeghouwen medeghedan” (*HUB*, 5, 368 (no. 714).

the posadnik, the tysyatskiĭ, and the aldermen of five ends of the city.⁹⁵ On May 11, Bernt Lemeghouwen informed Reval that on the first day of his visit to Novgorod he had gone to "the bishop and the posadnik, the tysyatskiĭ, and to the five aldermen of five ends."⁹⁶ Kleinenberg assumed that Lemeghouwen "personally visited each of the named lords."⁹⁷ However, he only had one day for the visits, since, as we will see later, the following morning he met all of them again. One can imagine that he rode a horse but it is at least as reasonable to suppose that he attended a kind of a preliminary meeting. In any event, it is obvious that on the next day there were more formal negotiations where the above-mentioned persons, according to Lemeghouwen, came together to the archbishop's court. There they declared to the German envoy that the final answer would be given only after their consultations with Novgorod the Great.⁹⁸

The participants of these meetings can be seen rather clearly: the archbishop, the posadnik, the tysyatskiĭ, and the five aldermen of the city ends – eight people altogether.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, stating this fact, Nikitskiĭ adds that "in general" members of the council (*heren*) were boyars and, first of all, their highest stratum: former posadniki and tysyatskie.¹⁰⁰ There are two arguments in favour of this conclusion: a comparison to Ancient Rome, where former magistrates (for instance, former consuls – *consulares*) became members of the Senate, and the fact that former posadniki participated in Novgorod's diplomatic missions. However, both arguments cannot overrule the clear

95 "[...]den ertzebiscope to Naugarden und den borchgreven und den hertogen und de olderlude an viff enden van Naugarden" (*HUB*, 5, 368 (no. 713)).

96 "[...]des ersten dages, do ik kwam to Nougarden, do gink ik to dem biscope unde borchgreven, hertegen unde to vyf olderluden van vyf enden [...]" (*HUB*, 5, 370 (no. 718)).

97 Kleinenberg, *Izvestiia*, 173.

98 "Des geven se my to antworde, dat se sik bespreken wolden myd Grote Nougarden unde wolden my dan eyn antworde geven" (*HUB*, 5, 370 (no. 718)).

99 Kleinenberg writes that "V.L. Īnin spoke about the same composition quoting a similar Hanseatic document of 1401." Kleinenberg, *Izvestiia*, 173, footnote. But in the cited passage from the book on the posadniki of Novgorod, Īnin quotes not "a similar document" but the same document: Lemeghouwen's report on his mission in Novgorod – but in 1406, not in 1401. Valentin L. Īnin, *Novgorodskie posadniki* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1962), 327. Only this document was published not in *HUB*, but in another collection of Hanseatic documents: *LECUB*, 4, 531–532. Īnin dates it incorrectly and, moreover, many mistakes that distorted the text were made. In the new edition of the same book, all these errors have been preserved, and the incorrect date is repeated, but there is no reference to any publication at all. Īnin, *Novgorodskie posadniki*, 420.

100 Nikitskiĭ, *Ocherki iz zhizni Velikogo Novgoroda*, I, 301–302.

documentary evidence on the composition of the council. As we have already seen, in the spring of 1406, it was not *consulares* or *aedilitii* but only acting officials who were called *de heren van Naugarden* – “lords of Novgorod” – in the source.

But what is being referred to – an ad hoc meeting (Granberg and other skeptics accept that such consultative meetings might have existed) or a session of a permanent governmental body? The fact that *de heren* (“lords”) were a permanent institution can be inferred from a Hanseatic document dating from May 28, 1409. The document carefully lists a sequence of injustices done to German merchants by the Novgorodians. It says, inter alia, that on March 31 a certain Hans vanme Loe went out of the German court and was beaten and robbed. The Hanseatic merchants “came to the lords” [do ... quemen vor de heren] and complained about the incident. The *tysiātskiĭ* (*de hertoghe*) replied on behalf of the “lords.” Their plea was unsuccessful: the injury was not recompensed; moreover, according to the Germans, the *tysiātskiĭ* laughed at them and suggested that they should not go for walks at night.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, it is clear that the “lords” would normally make decisions on such cases, especially the *tysiātskiĭ*, as he was in charge of resolving conflicts between German merchants and Novgorodians.

In another document (possibly dated October 28, 1411), we may see the place of the “lords” in the Novgorod government. The *posadnik* and the *tysiātskiĭ* informed the German merchants that they discussed a case in question “with their father archbishop and with lords and with Novgorod,”¹⁰² and they took a decision only after all those consultations. A certain pyramid of power is revealed: a narrow council of the highest magistrates (the archbishop, the *posadnik*, and the *tysiātskiĭ*) and a broader council of “lords” – the *veche* (“Novgorod”; in other documents, “Novgorod the Great,” “all Novgorod the Great”, etc.).

Moreover, despite Granberg’s assertion, direct mentions of the existence of a *council* in Novgorod can be found. We can find them in two messages from the burgomaster and the city council of Lübeck to Novgorod from 1448–1449. None of the scholars who has worked on the problem of the “council of lords” has paid any attention to these documents.

The first message is dated November 10, 1448, and is addressed to “venerable and respected wise men, sirs *posadniki* and *tysyatskie*, the council and the community of Novgorod the Great [in another passage: to “all Novgorod the

101 “[...]belachede uns darto, warumme dat wy by nachte voren” (*HUB*, 5, 464 (no. 883).

102 “[...]sik besproken hadden myt erem vadere dem ertzebisshop unde myt den heren unde myt Nougarden[...].” (*HUB*, 5, 533–534 (no. 1028).

Great"]".¹⁰³ The *inscriptio* of the second message from July 12, 1449, reads: "To the most venerable in God father and senior, archbishop of Novgorod and bishop of Pskov, to venerable and respected wise men, sirs posadniki and tysyatskie, the council and the community of Novgorod the Great".¹⁰⁴ The council of Novgorod (*rad*) is explicitly mentioned in both documents. We can assume that this reflects Hanseatic terminology rather than the terminology of Novgorod. In fact, in the Middle Ages the extrapolation of one's own institutions and habits onto alien ones was a widespread phenomenon. Was the author of the messages from Lübeck so convinced that there should be a council in every city that he "found" one in Novgorod? In general, it is possible, but in my opinion in this particular case the situation was different. The institutions that the authors of the messages addressed were not abstract but real Novgorod magistrates, and they were identified in the messages in the manner that the Germans were used to identifying them. This follows first of all from a comparison of the *intitulationes* and *inscriptiones*: the senders of the messages were "burgomasters and members of the city council of Lübeck,"¹⁰⁵ while the list of addressees looks different; it contains officials and institutions (for example, the *tysiat'skii* of "all Novgorod the Great") which Lübeck surely did not possess. It is quite clear that the authors of both messages knew the governmental structure of their Russian partners very well, and they had no reason to invent a non-existent council at the same time as they described all other political realities truthfully.

The messages from Lübeck do not provide any specific information either on the composition of the council of Novgorod (whether it included officials who are mentioned in these documents or anyone else) or on its authority. But they show that there was a governmental body in Novgorod in the 1440s that was interpreted by Germans as a council, though we do not have data on how "official" it was. On the other hand, the very fact that the authors of the messages found the term for it and addressed it formally shows a certain level of its

103 "Den werdigen unde ersamen wysen mannen, heren borchgraven, hertogen, deme raede unde den gemenen van Groten Naugarden; Ersamen unde werdigen wysen manne, heren borchgreven, hertogen, rade unde gemenen Groten Naugarden" (Ph. Schwartz (ed.), *LECUB* (Riga-Moscow: Kommissions-Verlag von J. Deubner, 1896), 10: 358 (no. 508).

104 "Dem erwerdigesten in Gode vadere unde heren, heren ertzebisschoppe van Groten Naugarden unde Pleskouwe bisschoppe, den erwerdigen unde ersamen wysen mannen, heren borgermesteren, hertogen, deme rade unde dem gemenen van Groten Naugarden[...]" (*LECUB*, 10, 473 (no. 631).

105 "[...]borgermeistere unde radmanne der stad Lubeke[...]" (*LECUB*, 10, 358, 473 (no. 508, 631).

institutionalization. We might suggest that they used the concept of “council” to denote those “lords of Novgorod” whose meetings are mentioned above.

I believe that these documents completely disprove the skeptical point of view on the council of Novgorod. At the same time, they show that the interpretation of the council which was formed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the works of Nikitsky and Kliuchevsky is in need of serious revision.

The first relatively clear information on the existence of a consultative body in Novgorod that was smaller than the *veche* and worked on a permanent basis dates not to the thirteenth century but to the 1330s. At that time, the body was not called a “council”. Its Russian name remains unknown, but Hanseatic Germans called it *de heren* – the “lords” or *de heren van Naugarden* – the “lords of Novgorod the Great”. At the beginning of the fifteenth century it is known to include the *posadnik*, the *tysyaŭskiĭ*, and the five aldermen of the ends of the city. By the 1440s, its composition possibly grew and also included former *posadniki* and *tysyatskie* (it is not clear whether it included all or merely some of them). During this period, Germans addressed messages to it (not only to individual magistrates) and called it a “council” (*rad*), which is obviously a sign of its institutionalization. Its authority was probably not strictly defined (This, however, remains unclear because of the character of the Hanseatic sources, which concentrated on trade matters and conflicts emerging from them.) But it is quite clear that it was a normal practice to appeal to it when a problem could not be solved by individual magistrates (for example, by the *tysaytskii* or the *posadnik*). At the same time, the “lords” themselves considered the *veche* to be a higher authority and emphasized that the right of final decision belonged to it.

To verify the existence of this council in Novgorod is important given the general historical background. Its alleged absence is often interpreted as an argument by those historians who tend to deny similarities between the political institutions of Novgorod and West European medieval town communes.¹⁰⁶ The existence of the council in Novgorod, even though it (the council) did not reach its full political and legal development, as happened with its Hanseatic analogues, provides us with another argument against the concept of the Novgorod political system’s absolute uniqueness. It allows us to return to the problem of the typology of the Novgorod state system in a broader European context.

106 See, for instance, Ludwig Steindorff, “Pravil’no li shchitat’ Novgorod kommunoi?”, *Spory*, 228–241.

Was Novgorod a "Republic"?

The republican institutions of Novgorod were not a fiction but a reality, although their functions, according to the sources of the time, differ from those described by most contemporary post-Soviet historians, and even more from the Romantic vision that emerged in the nineteenth century.

Until the fifteenth century, the veche of Novgorod was an assembly in which not only boyars but a significant portion of free townsmen could participate. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it evolved into a respectable and important governmental body representing the "political people" of the republic of Novgorod, and included free townsmen who enjoyed full rights. There were many more *vechniki* than the notorious "three hundred golden belts" – several thousand people who constituted just a small part of the entire population of the vast Novgorod Land. The powers of the veche were by no means exclusive, and the regulation of its work was not strictly formalized; there were no concepts of a quorum and periodicity of meetings. The very process of decision-making at the veche and the procedure of electing magistrates were based on the archaic principle of consensus (*odinachestvo*).

Were there any serious changes in comparison to the pre-Mongol period? It is difficult to answer this question because of the almost complete absence of documentary sources for the early political history of Novgorod (before the second half of the thirteenth century), and there are no sources of that time which mention the veche. Their absence opens the way to various speculations. It is no accident that the majority of fanciful theories about the social and political structure of Novgorod have emerged on the basis of the pre-Mongol material, which consists almost exclusively of narrations.

It seems that the similarity of descriptions of the veche in the chronicles, whose trustworthiness for the post-Mongol period is well verified by Hanseatic and some other documentary sources, gives us good reason not to posit any radical difference between the veche of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and that of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Thus, there are no serious arguments to support the notions that the veche was emasculated in the fifteenth century, that the veche system lost its significance and was transformed into a fiction, etc.¹⁰⁷ The active participation of the veche in the relations

¹⁰⁷ See the rather reasonable assessment of the Novgorod veche during the post-Mongol period in the interesting but not entirely convincing article by the Swiss scholar Roland Leffler. Roland Leffler, "Novgorod – eine europäische Kommune?", Carsten Goehrke and Bianka Pietrow-Ennker (eds.), *Städte im östlichen Europa. Zur Problematik von Modernisierung und Raum vom Spätmittelalter bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Zürich: Chronos,

between the Novgorodians and German merchants in the 1440s proves this point.

At the same time, there is no proof for communal and democratic interpretations of the Novgorodian social and political system. Villagers had no real right to take part in the political life of Novgorod, and they were most probably dependent on the Novgorod townspeople among whom the leading role belonged to the boyar elite. There are no grounds for seeing the difference between Novgorod and other medieval European towns as based on the alleged absence of political and legal differences between townspeople and villagers in Rus'. Only free, competent townsmen who constituted the group of "free men" (*muzhi vol'nye*) represented the "commune," as it was called by Lannoy, or the "community of Novgorod the Great" (*dat gemene van Groten Naugarden*) that was addressed by the Lübeck *ratmänner* in the messages of the 1440s. The "commune" of free townsmen could elect and replace magistrates. Employing the terms used in a history of medieval proto-parliaments in Slavic countries,¹⁰⁸ they were the "political people" of Novgorod, i.e., not merely the population but people who enjoyed the right to participate in political activities. Taking into account the proportion within the city of "political people" (who were the sole participants of the *veche*) in relation to the entire population of the Novgorod Land, the Republic of Novgorod undoubtedly should be defined as an oligarchy: the political power over those who were deprived of political rights was *de facto* and *de jure* exercised by a minority, and among the townspeople enjoying full rights boyars differed from others in terms of their privileges and political powers. During the final period of Novgorod's history, it was boyars who occupied all the highest magistrate positions. The "lords of Novgorod" were also only boyars who participated in an exclusively oligarchic institution, the council of Novgorod, which was mentioned in sources from the fourteenth century on.

However, it is incorrect to define the Novgorod political system as "boyar" or "feudal": the ruling class of Novgorod was broader than the boyar elite. Despite the obviously leading role of the boyars, even the lowest category of the

2006), 33–59; especially page 45. Leffler proceeds from Max Weber's theory of the city, interpreting the Republic of Novgorod in the context of West European medieval communes. He presents some original ideas but, unfortunately, he has almost completely ignored the Russian historiography: for instance, he even ascribes the hypothesis of the government reform of 1354 not to its real author, Īanin, but to Goehrke and Zernack. Moreover, he does not completely analyze even those sources that happened to attract his notice.

108 See, for instance, Stanisław Russocki, *Protoparlamentaryzm Czech do początku XV wieku* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1973), 12.

Novgorod townsmen, the *chern'*, was not deprived of political rights. The vague and highly controversial concept of "feudalism" does nothing to help us understand the real social and political structure of medieval Novgorod.

Recently, however, a revisionist interpretation of the "republican independence of Novgorod" emerged among historians. For instance, some authors of today's works claim that Old Russian chroniclers often tried to downplay the influence the Great Princes had on Novgorod's domestic affairs and to exaggerate the independence of townspeople,¹⁰⁹ or that until the end of the fourteenth century the Novgorod veche was summoned either at the command of the Novgorod prince or, sometimes, that of a powerful opponent who summoned the assembly in order to "slander a ruling rival."¹¹⁰

Theoretically, there is indeed some possibility that chroniclers could have created a certain artificial representation of Novgorod's liberties: chronicles are "narrative compilations," and the writers of such works most certainly did not present a naturalistic impression of reality, but would rather adjust their representation of reality to the dominant literary norms (not to mention purely ideological purposes).

Such criticism is easy to express because, outside chronicles, sources from Novgorod's early period that could provide us with specific data on the real mechanisms of the city's political life are nearly absent. Of course this does not mean that there are no sources on medieval Novgorod other than chronicles. On the contrary, Novgorod, if compared with other cities, is notably rich in extant sources: birch-bark documents, seals, archaeological findings etc. Unfortunately, as of present, they tell us almost nothing on Novgorod's collective "republican" political institutions. So dismissing the chronicles would leave us with scarcely any sources at all. That is why it is reasonable to put the chronicles aside for a moment and turn to the earliest available non-narrative sources.

109 Tatyana L. Vil'kul, "Novgorodtsy i russkie kniaz'ia v letopisanii XII v.," *Russia mediaevalis* 10, 1 (2002): 35. See also Pëtr P. Tolochko, "Kiev i Novgorod v XII–XIII vv. v novgorodskom letopisanii," *Velikiĭ Novgorod v istorii srednevekovoi Evropy. K 70-letiiu V.L. Ėnina*, (Moscow: Russkie slovari, 1999), 179. Tolochko argues that in the twelfth century and the first decades of the thirteenth century, Kiev and Novgorod were situated "within the framework of a single state and political system, albeit one affected by the rust of feudal separatism". For a slightly more careful approach, see Michael C. Paul, "Was the Prince of Novgorod a 'Third-Rate Bureaucrat' after 1136?," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 56, 1 (Spring 2008): 72–113.

110 Ol'ga V. Sevast'ianova, "Novgorodskoe veche: otkhod ot "respublikanskoi" teorii," *Spory*, 200–27.

In this quest, some rather important information can be obtained from certain documents of the Hanseatic League dealing with the activities of German merchants in Novgorod. One of these sources is a Hanseatic document written in Latin and dated March 26, 1292.¹¹¹ The letter is a report written by a delegation of representatives from Hanseatic cities about their mission to Novgorod. The reason for the mission was a dispute stemming from the confiscation of property that the Germans claimed was illegally annexed by the Novgorodians.

The negotiations were conducted by Andrei, a representative of a prince (the prince is not mentioned by name but it is clear he could only be the eldest son of Alexandr Nevskiĭ, Dmitriĭ, who ruled in Vladimir and in Novgorod circa 1292), and Novgorod representatives headed by a *tysiātskiĭ* ("thousandman", or "chiliarch", a high ranking judicial and commercial official). The prince delayed in giving a concrete answer; as for the Novgorodians, their answer was formulated by an elder (*starosta*) named Semen. The answer was negative: "We also asked him to give us an answer, and he said, 'The Novgorodians gathered and declared your affairs in turn, and it was clear to them that your claims had no merit.'¹¹² Not expecting such an answer, the German envoys petitioned directly to the *posadnik* (mayor, burgomeister) and *tysiātskiĭ* through an interpreter. The *tysiātskiĭ*'s reaction was even sharper: without beating about the bush he declared, "I would like you to return home."¹¹³ On their way back, the German envoys met people close to the prince who explained to them the complexity of the situation. It transpired that "six times they went to the Novgorodians in the name of the prince and asked [the Novgorodians] to give them an answer, and the prince himself begged them for an answer; and the prince was upset that they did not answer in spite of the fact that they were obliged to answer according to the law, because the affair depended on those who possessed the

111 Friedrich Georg von Bunge (ed.), *LECVB* (Reval: In Commission bei Kluge und Ströhm, 1853), 1, 682–685. The document has also been published in *Codex diplomaticus Lubecensis* (=Lübeckisches Urkundenbuch), (Lübeck: Aschenfeldt, 1871), 1, 3, 41–44; Konstantin Höhlbaum (ed.), *HVB*, (Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung der Waisenhausen, 1876), 1: 377–379. For an account of the document in Russian (in which some fragments that are difficult to translate have been omitted), see Mikhail Berezhkov, *O torgovle Rusi s Ganzol' do kontsa XV veka* (St. Petersburg: V. Bezobrazov i Komp., 1879), 234–237; see also Nikolai I. Kostomarov, *Istoricheskie monografii i issledovaniia* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia M.M. Stasfulevicha, 1886), 7, 146–147; Goetz, *Deutsch-Russische Handelsgeschichte*, 56–57.

112 "Nogardenses convenerant et vestra negotia singulariter exposuerant et videntur ipsi vestrae querimoniae nil valere" (*LECVB*, 1, 683 (no. 546).

113 "Vellem vos esse domi [...]" (*Ibid.*).

property."¹¹⁴ This episode was followed by dispute between one of the prince's people, the Lithuanian Vescele, and the Novgorodian elder Symen (Semën). The later declared that it was the prince who had to settle all such questions, but Vescele was indignant: "And what does the prince have to do with it? Our lord the prince does not have this property; this property is at your disposal, Novgorodians, and it is you who shared it with your *smerdy*. [They are] your serfs and, according to the law, you must answer."¹¹⁵ Unfortunately, it is not clear who exactly is referred to as *smerdy* (dependent peasants) in the text, Novgorodians themselves or inhabitants of the region (*volost'*) around Novgorod. The second reading seems to be more likely.

The next episode that takes place is akin to a detective novel. When the German envoys were already eight miles away from Novgorod, one of the prince's men caught up to them and said, "I must provide you with secret information in the name of the prince, and I will say it without an interpreter. Our lord the prince wishes to tell you that it is not his fault that you go back from Novgorod without an answer. It is the Novgorodians who do not want to return to you the captured property, but the prince keeps the oath he made to the Germans by kissing the holy cross and wants them to know the following: 'If you are men, pay them back with the same medicine that they brought down upon you, and pay them as much as you can.'"¹¹⁶ This extremely interesting document is worthy of a detailed study, but for now we are interested in the fact that the letter depicts the practice of the social-political relations within Novgorod and the relations between the people of Novgorod and the prince. It depicts these relations not as they *should have been*, but as they *actually existed*.

First of all, the *informal* character of political relations is striking. Officially, Novgorod submitted to the prince but, in fact, real decisions were made at an assembly of Novgorodians. (It is not literally called *veche* in the letter, but the phrase *Nogardenses convenerant* testifies, almost undoubtedly, to just this phenomenon.) On the one hand, the prince puts up a bold front (Goetz even

114 "[...]sex vicibus fuerint ex parte domini regis ad Nogardenses et petierint nobis dari responsum, sicut et personaliter rex ipsis supplicuisset, et rex multum doleret, quod nolent respondere, cum ipsi teneantur de iure super huiusmodi respondere, utpote qui bona habebant, de quibus quaestio vertebatur" (Ibid., 684). Although the term *rex* literally means "the king", however as well as the Middle Low German term *koenig* it could have been applied in Hanseatic sources also to Russian princes (*kniazí*).

115 "Quid ad regem! Dominus rex bona illa non habet, vos Nogardenses bona illa habetis, et ea cum smerdis vestris divisistis. Smerdi vestri sunt et idcirco de iure tenemini respondere" (Ibid.).

116 "[...]si viri estis, ipsis reddite, quod vobis fecerunt, et vicem rependite, ut bene potestis" (Ibid., 685).

mentions the prince's actions as being hypocritical)¹¹⁷ as the suzerain of Novgorod; on the other hand, he secretly hints to the Germans that de facto jurisdiction over Novgorod is not in his hands.

Thus, the uniqueness of Novgorod, the republican system of government, Novgorod's autonomy vis-à-vis the princes, even its virtual independence, were not inventions of the compilers of "narratives," but a real state of affairs. Naturally, it is possible to object that the developments described in the letter could be true of a later period but that, for instance, in the twelfth century, princes had more influence over Novgorod. Besides, in 1292 Novgorod might have won some extra autonomy due to the fierce power struggle between the children of Alexander Nevskii, Princes Dmitrii and Andrei. The struggle was just peaking at the time of the letter.

Moreover, according to ĪAnin, in the period when the letter was written, Novgorod was undergoing important political changes during which an "unstable duarchy" evolved into a "de facto republican structure" and thereby severely limited the authority of the prince. ĪAnin justifies his opinion through a detailed study of sigillographic materials in the late twelfth century which convincingly shows a redistribution of the most important judicial powers away from the prince and towards the Novgorod republican magistrates.¹¹⁸ There are, however, reasons to suppose that within the political sphere, these supposed metamorphoses (if they actually even occurred) were not of a radical nature.

As early as the pre-Mongol period, the image of Novgorod as a quite particular Russian land where princes did not possess the power they had in other places was shaped. Novgorodians themselves thought as much, which is clear from typical accounts in the Novgorod chronicles.

In 1214/5, Mstislav the "Udatnyi" (the Lucky),¹¹⁹ one of the most admired figures of the Novgorod First Chronicle, declared in his farewell speech addressing to Novgorodians, "You are free in [choosing] your princes."¹²⁰ In 1218,¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Goetz, *Deutsch-Russische Handelsgeschichte*, 57.

¹¹⁸ ĪAnin, *Novgorodskie posadniki*, 244–50. Cf. the serious criticism of some aspects of this hypothesis in John H. Lind, "K voprosu o posadnicheskoi reforme Novgoroda okolo 1300 g. i datirovke novgorodskikh aktov," *Drevneishie gosudarstva Vostochnoi Evropy. Materialy i issledovaniia*. 1995 g. (Moscow: Nauka, 1997); Anton A. Gorskiĭ, "K voprosu ob etapakh skladivaniia respublikanskogo stroia v Novgorode," *Norma u istochnika Sud'by. Sbornik statei v chest' E.A. Mel'nikova*. (Moscow: Indrik, 2001) (henceforth, *Norma*). .

¹¹⁹ On the date, see Nikolai Berezhkov, *Khronologiya*, 258.

¹²⁰ "Вы вольни въ князѣхъ" (PSRL, 3, 53).

¹²¹ On the date, see Nikolai Berezhkov, *Khronologiya*, 1963, 259.

posadnik Tverdislav told Novgorodians, "You, brothers, in *posadnichestvo* and in princes [are free]."¹²² In this context, the prince is obviously an official, a magistrate – and the Novgorodians have a right to replace him according to their own will; in this sense his status is not unlike the *posadnik*'s. Of course the prince (in contrast to the *posadnik*) did not belong completely in the Novgorod political system, yet the idea of the "freedom in princes" implied that Novgorodians had a right to choose them from two or more candidates from various principalities.

Was it just rhetoric? The concept of Novgorodians as "free men" was reflected in acts of later times. In the agreement of Novgorod with Casimir IV, it is written: "[Casimir] concluded a peace treaty with all Novgorod the Great, with free men."¹²³ In their copy of an agreement with the Moscow Great Prince Ivan III, concluded in 1471, Novgorodians gave a promise after the defeat on the Shelon' River: "we, your ancestral land Novgorod the Great and free men in no way will give ourselves" to Lithuania.¹²⁴ We see the same thing in a "narrative." In 1397/8,¹²⁵ after a conflict over the Dvina Land, Novgorod Bishop Ioann led negotiations with Moscow's Great Prince Vasilii I and, according to the chronicle, asked the prince "from Novgorod and from his free men to take his dislike away."¹²⁶

And, what is most important, the same understanding of the situation existed in other lands as well (although it was evaluated in another way). In the narration of the Laurentian Chronicle on the campaign of Prince Andrei Bogoljubskii and his allies against Novgorod in 1170¹²⁷ we can read the following text: "So, those people of Novgorod were punished by God and restrained exceedingly for breaking the oath by kissing the cross and for their pride were brought to it [punishment], and by His mercy [He] saved their city. Let us not say, 'The Novgorodians are right since it was long ago the Novgorodians were liberated by great grandfathers of our princes,' but was it so that previous princes had given them an order to break their oath by kissing the cross or to shame grandchildren and great grandchildren and, kissing the cross to their grandsons and great grandsons, to break it?"¹²⁸

122 "[...]вы, братье, въ посадничествѣ и въ князѣхъ [вольнѣ есте] (PSRL, 3, 59, 260).

123 "Докончаль есми с ними миръ и со всѣмъ Великимъ Новымъгородомъ, с мужи волными" (GVNP, 130 (no. 77).

124 "[...]нам, вашей отчинѣ Великому Новугороду, мужемъ вол[ъ]нымъ не отдатися никоторою хитростью[...]" (GVNP, 46 (no. 26).

125 On the date, see Berezhkov, *Khronologîa*, 293.

126 "[...]от Новагорода от своих мужии от волных нелюбе бы отложить[...]" (PSRL, 3, 390).

127 On the date, see Berezhkov, *Khronologîa*, 68, 183–185.

128 "Тако и сия люди Новгородскыя наказа Богъ и смѣри я дозѣла за преступление крестное, и за гордость ихъ наведе на ня, и милостью своею избави град ихъ. Не

The Vladimir-na-Klĭaz'me chronicler, who was the author of this fragment, argues against the obviously common idea that Novgorod had a special status because in olden times it was liberated by the "great grandfathers of our princes" and that is why it had the right to free actions in relation to contemporary princes.¹²⁹ The independent politics of Novgorod is characterized rather sharply by the chronicler, but his words certify unequivocally that the idea of Novgorod's ancient freedom vis-à-vis princes was well known by the twelfth century not only in Novgorod but also in all of Rus'. (The same fragment, albeit in slightly distorted form, was also included in the South Russian chronicle compilation.)¹³⁰

This evaluation was not altered even later, when Novgorod lost its independence, even when we take into account the obvious satisfaction that such traditions of Novgorod were already a fact of the past. In the Moscow Chronicle Compilation of the late fifteenth century, we can read under the year of 6679 (1170)¹³¹ a comment by a Moscow chronicler on his source, which was the Novgorod-Sofia Compilation: "In the same year, the Novgorodians sent Prince Roman Mstislavich away; *such were the customs of the accursed serf traitors*

глаголем же: «Прави суть Новгородци, яко издавна суть свобожени Новгородци прадѣды князь наши», но аще бы тако было, то вельми ли имъ преднии князи крестъ преступити, или внуки, или правнуки соромляти, а крестъ честными цѣловавши ко внуком ихъ и к правнукомъ, то преступати?» (PSRL, 1, 1997, 362). See also PSRL, 2, 1998, 561).

129 See also Boris N. Floriā, "Novgorod i kniazia v XII v.," *Velikii Novgorod i Srednevekovaiā Rus': Sbornik statei k 80-letiiu akademika VL. ĬAnina* (Moscow: Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli, 2009), 298–299.

130 Boris N. Floriā, on the basis of the mention, in the obituary of Mstislav Rostislavich in the Hypatian Chronicle, of his "grandfather" Vsevolod, who allegedly liberated Novgorodians "from all wrongs" ("ot vsiekh obid") (PSRL, 2, 610), supposed that the author of the Kiev Chronicle Compilation, a chronicler of Rurik Rostislavich, was sure that it was Prince Vsevolod Yaroslavich, a son of Yaroslav the Wise, who granted liberties to Novgorodians (Floriā, *Novgorod i kniazia*, 298), because he was the only prince with this name among the direct offspring of Mstislav Rostislavich. Indeed, Vsevolod Yaroslavich was remembered in Rurik's family tree: in a eulogy for Rurik in the Kiev Chronicle Compilation, the account begins with Vsevolod, and this genealogy is compared to the descent of righteous Job from Abraham (PSRL, II, 709). It was this Vsevolod who was declared "the great grandfather of our princes," i.e., of Andrei Bogoliubsky and his brothers. ĬAnin assumes that it was during the rule of Vsevolod that an independent system of posadnik-based governance was formed in Novgorod. See ĬAnin, *Novgorodskie posadniki*, 82–84.

131 Roman left Novgorod in September of the March year of 6678. Therefore, the date in the Moscow Chronicle Compilation is given in the ultra-March style, meaning 1170 AD. See Berezhevskii, *Khronologiia*, 186.

(*italics mine*).¹³² The Moscow chronicler, as opposed to today's skeptical scholars, had no doubts about the existence of such Novgorodian "customs."

Either way, the document of 1292 clearly testifies that Novgorod at that moment was independent in relation to the prince, and that the late twelfth century was not an exceptional period. The "men of Novgorod" were free before and after this time. Even after the "fundamental reforms of the late thirteenth century," the power of the princes, as represented by their governors (*namestniki*), was capable of influencing the internal situation in Novgorod. Vivid testimonies can be found in two later Hanseatic documents. One of them, dated 1331, deals with an attempt by Novgorodians to take a vengeance for the death of one townsman who was in conflict with German merchants by ravaging a German household. When Novgorodians "came from the veche with weapons and banners" and began to destroy and rob St. Peter's Court, it was only a serviceman of the prince – "a judge of the prince" [*des konighes rechter*], as he called in the document – who resolutely "came ... and drove the Russians away from the [prince's] court."¹³³ And those "Russians" were not a gang of common robbers or a crowd of rioters, but veche members who armed themselves and evidently acted in a rather organized fashion (as the banners show). Later, an important role in settling the affair was played by the prince's *namestnik*, who even accepted a bribe from Germans in the form of five silver grivnas (while the *posadnik* took ten grivnas).¹³⁴

Another document (dated 1337 and preserved, unfortunately, in defective form) deals with yet another conflict over property between the Novgorodians and Hanseatic merchants. The document contains information on the active participation of the prince's *namestnik* in the events. Envoys came to the German court from the veche and declared, "The bishop and the *namestnik* ... and all Novgorodians sent us to you [to say to you] that you would give as much property as you took from our brothers as a pledge."¹³⁵ There is a gap in the place where

132 "Того же лѣта выгнаша Новгородци князя Романа Мѣстиславича, такоу бо бѣ обычаи оканных смердов измѣнниковъ" (*PSRL*, 25, 82). See Luria, *Obshcherusskie letopisi*, 164).

133 "[...]quemen de ruscen vt deme dinghe. mit wapenen. vnn mit banyren[...]; "quam [...] eyn vnn sloch de ruscen vt deme houe" (*RLA*, 57 (no. 75).

134 *RLA*, 58 (no. 75). Cf. ĪAnin's comment that, as opposed to earlier times, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the prince in Novgorod "was strictly limited in matters of internal governance." ĪAnin, *Novgorodskie posadniki*, 248.

135 "[...]de byschop unde de amesnicke [sic] de [...] unde de meyne Nogarders hebbet us to ju ghesant, dat gi so vele godes, also usen broderen nomen is, scholen utlegghen to eynem pande[...]" (Konstantin Höhlbaum (ed.), *HVB*, (Halle: Verlag des Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1879), 2: 264 (no. 599). This is the best publication of the defective

the *posadnik* and *tysiat'skii* (*de borchgreve, de hertoge*) are mentioned; thus, in the order of official state ministers, the *namestnik* was ranked before the *posadnik* and the *tysiat'skii*, and just after the bishop. When the conflict was settled, at the *veche* "the *namestnik*, *posadnik*, *tysiat'skii*, and the claimants took an oath by kissing a cross for us [Germans], that we and visiting merchants would be in security, would trade and go without obstacle."¹³⁶ In this situation, the *namestnik* is ranked as the first figure among government officials (the bishop is not mentioned).

So even in the fourteenth century the *namestnik* was not separated from other members of the Novgorod administration: he participated actively in the internal political life of the city, took part in the *veche*, negotiated with foreign merchants, and so forth. The prince's officials helped maintain order in the city. Such a situation does not fit neatly into the model described by Īanin according to which "the prince's power became completely nominal" after the "reforms of the 1290s."¹³⁷ On the other hand, there is no reason to believe that Novgorod's freedom only manifested itself in later times. It had already appeared in narrative sources as early as the twelfth century (and some elements of it, even earlier). When we have documents containing data on the internal political organization of Novgorod (from the late thirteenth century), the main features of the freedom of Novgorod are *already* present in them.

This duality was perfectly understood by attentive outside observers. A knight from Burgundy, Gilbert de Lannoy, visited Novgorod and Pskov in the winter of 1413; he called Novgorod "a free city and a dominion of the community" [*ville franche et seignourie de commune*].¹³⁸ On the other hand, he noted that Novgorodians "had no other king or ruler besides the great king of Moscow, the ruler of Great Russia," adding that "they recognize him as a ruler when they want and do not recognize [him] when they do not want."¹³⁹

document. It had already been published twice in a collection of Baltic documents. See Friedrich Georg von Bunge (ed.), *LECUB* (Riga: Im Verlage von Nikolai Kymmel, 1873), 6, III–114 (no. 2807), and earlier, in less correct form, Friedrich Georg von Bunge (ed.), *LECUB*, (Reval: In Commission bei Kluge und Ströhm, 1855), 2: 307–310 (no. 1280).

136 "[...]heft uns de namestnicke [...] [borch]greve, de hertoghe unde de sakewolden dat cryse ghekust us unde deme gaste, velich to wesende to kopslaghende, to komende unde to varende sunder hindernisse[...]" (*HUB*, 2, 264).

137 Īanin, *Novgorodskie posadniki*, 250.

138 On the basis of a mistaken reading of *seignourie de commune*, Granberg concludes that, according to Lannoy, Novgorod was "controlled by the upper strata of society, probably the *boyary*." J. Granberg, "Ghillebert de Lannoy and the political structure of Novgorod", *Norna*, 84. In fact, this point of view is partly true but it does not follow from that particular fragment of the work by the Burgundian knight.

139 "Et n'ont aultre roy et seigneur que le grant roy de Musco, seigneur de la grand Russye, le quel ilz retiennent pour seigneur quant ilz veulent, et quant ilz veulent, non" (Lannoy, 33).

Thus, the only subject for dispute is the extent of Novgorod's independence, or the specific meaning of Novgorod's 'freedom' at various stages of its history (and we can assume now that the balance of forces "here and now" was no less important than any "radical reforms").

In search of parallels for the Novgorod Republic, we should turn to medieval Europe rather than to ancient Greece. Even within Rus, Novgorod's republican polity was not unique. Similar types of political system evolved also in Novgorod's "younger brother" Pskov and possibly in Polotsk. According to the account from the legendary part of what is conventionally called Second Chronicle Compilation of Grand Duchy of Lithuania, dating back to 1520s, "men of Polotsk" (*muzhi-polochane*) "were ruled by the veche like in Novgorod the Great and Pskov." One can compare this account with some more reliable sources (earlier accounts in chronicles or the charter granted by King Sigismund I to Polotsk Land),¹⁴⁰ to find that Polotsk's "liberties" may have gone back to the first half of the 14th century or even earlier.¹⁴¹

As for the broader context, one should consider possible parallels between the Novgorodian political system and those of other European medieval republics and free cities (Italian, Hanseatic etc.). However, taking into account the relatively autochthonic origin of republican regimes in Northwest Russia where no influence of the Roman *civitas* or "German Law" can be traced, one should also look at other regions of Europe where similar developmental trends were visible: the 12th-century cities of West Pomerania, such as Wolin and Szczecin.¹⁴² Interestingly, these cities have also often been called "city republics" by historians. In a similar way, there were city councils governing not only the territory of the city, but also the surrounding area. Indeed, their political system was not fully identical to that of Novgorod, but it was comparable to it at least during some periods of their history. This phenomenon, however, is yet open to further research. It equally applies to possible parallels between Novgorod's government and that of early medieval Scandinavian trading centres, which should be taken into account as well.

The passage about the relations between Novgorod and the Great Prince is found in only one copy of the work by the Burgundian knight, from the library of the Earl de Lannoy.

140 I. V. Ākubovskij, "Zemskie privilei Velikogo kniazhestva Litovskogo", *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia* (June 1903), 276–279.

141 See Boris N. Floriā, "Istoricheskaia traditsiia ob obshchestvennom stroe srednevekovogo Polotska", *Otechestvennaia istoriia* 5 (September–October 1995), 111–116.

142 The history of this period is known rather well thanks to the three Vitae of the apostle of that area, Bishop Otto von Bamberg.