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In Quest of the Key Democratic Institution of Medieval Russia: Was the *Veche* an Institution that Represented Novgorod as a City and a Republic?

The *veche* as an assembly of the citizens became a symbol of Novgorod as a republic – providing an illustration of popular rule (*narodopravie*) i.e., medieval democracy in Russia.¹ The *veche* is generally understood to be the main decision-making institution of Novgorod, controlling the appointment and removal of princes and other officials, concluding treaties and deciding questions of war and peace.² Even for those who didn't believe in the highest legislative power of the *veche*, the *veche* and Novgorod as a united social body are *notiones aequipolentes*, so the legal term “all Novgorod” (*ves' Novgorod*) and, in the fifteenth century, “all Lord Novgorod the Great” (*ves' gospodin Velikiy Novgorod*) is understood to refer to the entire membership of the *veche*.³ However, the nature of the *veche* and its relationship with the legal term “all Novgorod” is still unclear. The question whether the *veche* was an institution that represented the will of Novgorod as a city and a republic, and whether this was expressed in sources with the formal term “all Novgorod” has never really been explored. However, this very question is central to our understanding of the nature of democracy in Medieval Russia.

The study of the *veche* issue has always been influenced by the politics of the time. In the eighteenth century, under the influence of the ideas of the Enlightenment, the *veche* was presented as evidence that the people of ancient Russia were free and equal rather

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- 1 Cf. ISACHENKO *Esli by v kontse XV veka Novgorod oderzhal pobedu nad Moskvoy*, pp. 95–100; LÜBKE *Novgorod in der russischen Literatur*, p. 14; GRANBERG *Veche in the chronicles of medieval Rus'*, pp. 1, 37. See also ONASCH *Groß-Novgorod*, pp. 98–99.
 - 2 KLYUCHEVSKIY *Kurs russkoy istorii*, p. 82; SAKHAROV *Sovetskaya istoricheskaya entsiklopediya*, p. 410; ZERNACK *Die burgstädtischen Volksversammlungen*, p. 176 (see here also the historiography pp. 15–29); ARTSIHOVSKIY / SAKHAROV *Bol'shaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya*, p. 595; RUSSOCKI *Wiec*, p. 424; RÜSS *Das Reich von Kiev*, p. 388; GOEHRKE *Gross-Novgorod und Pskov / Pleskau*, p. 461; LEUSCHNER *Novgorod*, p. 128; RIASANOVSKY *A history of Russia*, p. 90; BIRNBAUM *Lord Novgorod the Great*, p. 94; LÜBKE *Novgorod in der russischen Literatur*, pp. 19, 37; GRANBERG *Veche in the chronicles* pp. 48–50; LUKIN *Veche*; PAUL *Was the prince of Novgorod a “Third-Rate Bureaucrat,”* p. 72. Thus the main Novgorod political decisions were assumed to have been made by the *veche*. For a bibliography on this issue see GRANBERG *Veche in the chronicles* pp. 5–6.
 - 3 GRANBERG *Veche in the chronicles*, pp. 150, 198–199. See also KLYUCHEVSKIY *Kurs russkoy istorii*, t. 2, p. 80; ZERNACK *Die burgstädtischen Volksversammlungen*, p. 173; ONASCH *Groß-Novgorod*, pp. 98–99; ŁOWMIAŃSKI *Początki Polski*, p. 78. BIRNBAUM *Lord Novgorod the Great*, p. 94; LÜBKE *Novgorod in der russischen Literatur*, p. 37; LEFFLER *Novgorod – eine europäische Kommune des Mittelalters?*, p. 43. For *veche* in Pskov cf. PICKHAN *Gospodin Pskov*, pp. 187–188. According to Gertrud Pickhan the *veche* of Pskov as a legislative organ from as early as the beginning of the XIVth century represented the will of “Great Pskov” as a community of free citizens.

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than victims of tyranny.⁴ The understanding of the *veche* as a central democratic institution was developed in the first half of the nineteenth century by the Decembrists. According to PAVEL I. PESTEL', "the *veche* was a meeting of all citizens in which every citizen gave his voice."⁵

The study of the *veche* was strongly influenced by the liberal theories of the 1860s and '70s which argued for communities to have more control over land along with involvement in decision-making. Under the influence of the liberal ideas of the Narodniki movement, historians of the late nineteenth century started to assign a special *veche* period to Russian history – the time when they believed people took an active role in political life by means of public gatherings or assemblies (*veche*). According to them, the public gatherings which can be traced back in the Chronicles throughout Russia to the twelfth century, were gradually suppressed by the power of princes, leading to autocracy in all Russian principalities except Novgorod. Only here democratic traditions survived and the power of princes was not allowed to dominate.⁶

VASILIIY I. SERGEEVICH took the word *veche* to mean all forms of participation by the people. He believed, that the *veche* was a people's council which met on an ad hoc basis only in cases of specific need when people wanted to intervene at the prince's court of law.⁷ SERGEY M. SOLOV'EV has noted the indefinite use of the word *veche* in the Chronicles and has argued that not all *veche* gatherings had the same legality.⁸ The same observation was made by KONSTANTIN A. NEVOLIN who distinguished between legal *veches* (called by the prince in Yaroslav territory (*Yaroslav dvor*) and illegal *veches* (autonomous gatherings, with no fixed location).⁹

NICOLAY I. KOSTOMAROV has argued that Novgorod land didn't come to be owned by the princes but by its people, who were represented by the *veche*. The fact that Novgorod (i.e., the people of Novgorod represented by the *veche*) owned its own land was reflected in the city's name "Lord Novgorod the Great," on behalf of whom treaties were concluded and wars declared. He goes on to argue that the *veche* was a remnant of ancient democracy (*narodopravie*). Everyone could take part in a *veche*, so the *veche* was a source of constant chaos and tumult.¹⁰

4 LEVESQUE Histoire de Russie, p. 200; BOLTIN Kriticheskie primechaniya, p. 2–3. For a more detailed discussion see LÜBKE Novgorod in der russischen Literatur, pp. 62–80; about the spread of these ideas in the literature see LÜBKE Novgorod in der russischen Literatur, pp. 181–162.

5 "Russkaya pravda", p. 188; For a more detailed discussion see LÜBKE Novgorod in der russischen Literatur, pp. 12, 169–224.

6 BELYA'EV Istoriya Novgoroda Velikogo ot drevneyshikh vremen, pp. 156–157; SERGEEVICH Veche i knyaz', p. 20; SERGEEVICH Drevnosti russkogo prava, pp. 33–34; VLADIMIRSKIY-BUDANOV Obzor istorii russkogo prava, pp. 52–53; D'YAKONOV Ocherki obshchestvennogo i gosudarstvennogo stroya Drevney Rusi, pp. 119, 135. See also about historiography: TSAMUTALI Bor'ba techeniy v russkoy istoriografii, pp. 187–196; SVERDLOV Genezis i struktura feodal'nogo obshchestva, pp. 49–53.

7 SERGEEVICH Veche i knyaz', pp. 37–85.

8 SOLOV'EV Ob otnoshenii Novgoroda k velikim knyaz'yam, pp. 2, 26.

9 NEVOLIN Polnoe sobranie sochineniy, p. 112; Cf. ILOVAYSKIY Istoriya Rossii, pp. 171, 299.

10 KOSTOMAROV O znachenii Velikogo Novgoroda v russkoy istorii, pp. 208–212.

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It was believed that the *veche* stemmed from prehistoric assemblies of tribal societies,¹¹ or originated in the middle of the eleventh century as a result of the growing importance of cities.¹²

During the Soviet period, historical research in Russia concentrated on the study of large landownership which was seen as a form of feudalism. Soviet historians saw the *veche* either as an arena of social struggle¹³ or as an official institute of power made up of owners of large estates.¹⁴ According to SERAFIM V. USHKOV the *veche* was a political institution of the feudal state in which feudal lords and groups connected with them held power.¹⁵ VALENTIN L. YANIN argued that the *veche* of Novgorod was the organ of the boyars' (i.e., the landed aristocracy's) power. He believed that the members of the *veche* were the owners of town estates. It consisted initially of 300 people who were the representatives of the three city districts in the early period, and later of 500 people when two other districts were formed in Novgorod. Expanding on the *veche* as a city council for the whole city, VALENTIN L. YANIN believed in the existence of city-district *veche* assemblies that evolved from the original assemblies of primitive society.¹⁶

MIKHAIL B. SVERDLOV has drawn attention to the broad meaning and the inconsistency in the use of the word *veche* in the Russian Chronicles from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries and to the fact that this word was not used in Novgorod charters (including the Judicial charter) of the period. Comparing the Russian *veche* with people's assemblies in Scandinavia (known as *thing*) and the people's assemblies in the emerging German kingdom (*regnum Francorum orientalium*) of the tenth century, he felt unable to find any similarities between these western institutions and the Russian *veche* either in the tenth century or later. He came to the conclusion that there was no connection between the initial assemblies of primitive societies and the Russian *veche* and that the practice of making political decisions by means of people's assemblies had already disappeared around the tenth to eleventh century. According to Mikhail B. Sverdlov the word *veche* reappeared in the Russian Chronicles in the twelfth century with a wide range of meanings.¹⁷ At the

11 SERGEEVICH Veche i knyaz', pp. 31–33; VLADIMIRSKIY-BUDANOV Obzor istorii russkogo prava, pp. 74–90; DOVNAR-ZAPOL'SKIY Veche, pp. 226–247, and during the Soviet period YUSHKOV Ocherki po istorii feodalizma v Kievskoy Rusi, pp. 35–36; YUSHKOV Obshchestvenno-politicheskiy stroy i pravo kievskogo gosudarstva, pp. 100–104, 345–360; RUSSOCKI Wiech, p. 424; GREKOV Kievskaya Rus', pp. 353–370; PASHUTO Zum Problem des altrussischen Veče, pp. 78–80.

12 KLYUCHEVSKIY Kurs russkoy istorii, p. 192; POKROVSKIY Ocherki istorii russkoy kul'tury, p. 171. For a more detailed review see LÜBKE Novgorod in der russischen Literatur, p. 21; GRANBERG Veche in the chronicles, pp. 38–41.

13 According to Vladimir T. Pashuto and Petr P. Tolochko the *veche* of Novgorod was the means whereby the common free people could voice their opposition to their land lords. PASHUTO Cherty politicheskogo stroya Drevnei Rusi, pp. 24–34; TOLOCHKO Veche i narodnye dvizheniya v Kieve, pp. 125–143. For a bibliographical review see FROYANOV Kievskaya Rus', p. 151.

14 For a more detailed discussion see BIRNBAUM Lord Novgorod the Great, pp. 83–89.

15 YUSHKOV Ocherki po istorii feodalizma v Kievskoy Rusi, pp. 194–195.

16 YANIN / ALESHKOVSKIY Proiskhozhdenie Novgoroda, pp. 56–60; YANIN Sotsial'no-politicheskaya struktura Novgoroda, p. 94. See also LANGER Yanin and the history of Novgorod, pp. 114–119.

17 SVERDLOV Genezis i struktura, p. 54.

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same time he allows for the existence of the *veche* as a ruling institution consisting of boyars, but only in the north-east of Russia. He argues that the word *veche* was not mentioned in Novgorod Chronicles before the thirteenth century, as it was usual for Chronicles not to mention governing institutions.

IGOR' YA. FROYANOV, ANDREI YU. DVORNICHENKO and ALEKSEI V. PETROV support the ideas of the second part of the nineteenth century about a specific *veche*-period (*obshchinno-vechevoy sroy*) in Russian history. They see medieval Russia as a union of city-states, organized as communities. They believe that the political structure of medieval Russia was as follows: the *veche* i.e., the supreme organ of power based on the people's assembly; the prince i.e., the supreme ruler, elected by the *veche* and the council of noblemen.¹⁸ Petrov supports the opinion of SERGEI V. PLATONOV that the Novgorod *veche* was actually an amalgamation of various people's assemblies from the different districts of the city led by boyars. According to Petrov, the *veche* united a number of different people's assemblies within the city and was something like a council of city districts, the union of the city assemblies that created the political union "Great Novgorod" (i.e., a united state).¹⁹ Such a view suggests that the roots of the Russian *veche* and democracy evolved from the original assemblies of primitive societies, thus implying that Russia developed differently from West European countries.

OREST V. MARTYSHIN agrees with Konstantin A. Nevolin about the existence of legal and illegal *veche*-assemblies in Novgorod. According to his view, legal *veche*-assemblies were gathered in Yaroslav territory (*Yaroslav dvor*) by the prince and had the power to control and cancel the appointment of specific city officials. Illegal *veches* were spontaneous gatherings with no specific location. Based on the *intitulatio* of the Novgorod charters of the second half of the fifteenth century, Martyshin defines the legal *veche* as consisting of the city officials (*posadniki* and *tysyatskie*), the archbishop, and of the representatives of the five city districts and all social groups of Novgorod society.²⁰

A very detailed study on the Novgorod *veche* has been made by West European scholars.

KLAUS ZERNACK, in his monograph on the people's assemblies in the Eastern and Western Slavic areas, holds the view that the *veche* represented the *gorod* (a fortified town society) and appears as a contracting partner of the princes. He questions the view of the second half of the nineteenth century that the *vechevoy byt* was the constitutional basis of pre-Tartar Russia. According to his view the special type of popular assembly in Novgorod, where there were special prerogatives necessary for the development of the *veche* as an institution with the highest judicial power, cannot be compared to the general East Slavic gatherings of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. When Novgorod was released from the overlordship of the Kievan grand principality it was, unlike other lands, not dynastic, and this allowed for the rise of the *veche*-type of a de facto independent city-state.²¹

18 See also DVORNICHENKO *Russkie zemli velikogo knyazhestva Litovskogo; KRIVOSHEEV Rus' i mongoly; MAYOROV Galitsko-Volynskaya Rus'*.

19 PLATONOV *Velikiy Novgorod do ego podchineniya Moskve*, p. 5; PETROV *Ot yazychestva k svyatoy Rusi*, pp. 26, 158.

20 MARTYSHIN *Vol'nyy Novgorod*, pp. 182–183.

21 ZERNACK *Die burgstädtischen Volksversammlungen*, pp. 270–271.

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CARSTEN GOEHRKE disagrees with Valentin L. Yanin's view that the *veche* was an organ of exclusively boyar power and insists on the presence of different social groups at *veche* assemblies: not only nobles, but also what the Chronicles described as *zhit'i* (i.e., the urban middle class) and *chernye lyudi* (i.e., artisans).²² He sees the *veche* assemblies as a non-institutional power which had a great influence on the political life of Novgorod. He argues that the distinction between the *veche* as a legislative body and a spontaneous gathering of the people was fluid: anyone was free to call a *veche*; any group of sufficient size could become a *veche* and there was no set order to the meeting.²³

JÖRG LEUSCHNER argues that there is ample evidence of the *veche*'s participation in the city state's legislative work and political decision-making: concluding and dissolving treaties with princes, the appointment of the prince and the election of the highest church and city officials. He suggests that, because of the uncertainty of the constitutional rules of the *veche*, the Council of Lords (*Sovet gospod*) assumed more and more legislative functions, which originally had been the prerogative of the municipal *veche*. Any decisions usually taken by the Council of Lords (*Sovet gospod*), and the decisions reached, were merely approved by the *veche* as a whole. Officials were elected by the *veche*. From 1291 onwards Novgorod was divided into five districts (*kontsy*), which were able to achieve a remarkable administrative autonomy, electing their city officials (*posadniki* and *tysyatskie*) by means of their "district assembly" (*konchanskoe veche*). The elected officials were sent to the Council of Lords.²⁴

NICHOLAS V. RIASANOVSKY sees the *veche* as a town council that acted as a supreme authority in Novgorod. The *veche* was an organ of direct democracy and was composed of all free householders. It was frequently bogged down in violent factional quarrels and couldn't conduct day-to-day business efficiently. This led to a strengthening of the Council of Lords, representing the wealthy and powerful aristocracy and presided over by the archbishop who rose in prominence in Novgorod politics. The Council would define or interpret the legislative measures discussed or enacted by the *veche* and controlled the course of Novgorod politics.²⁵

According to HENRIK BIRNBAUM the *veche* was the primary instrument of democratic rule and provided a general framework for Novgorod's political life. But these democratic beginnings of the North Russian city-state were swept away and replaced by a genuinely oligarchic form of government, since the right to hold public office soon became a privilege limited to a small social group of landed aristocracy. The organ determining the political course of the Novgorod Republic was the Council of Lords (*Sovet gospod*) chaired by the archbishop.²⁶

22 GOEHRKE Gross-Novgorod und Pskov, pp. 431–483. Cf. ZERNACK Die burgstädtischen Volksversammlungen, pp. 187–188; SMIRNOV / SMOLITSKIY Novgorod i russkaya epicheskaya traditsiya, pp. 320–321; ANDREEV O sotsial'nom sostave novgorodskogo vecha, p. 79; LEFFLER Novgorod – eine europäische Kommune, pp. 33–59.

23 GOEHRKE Groß-Novgorod und Pskov, p. 461.

24 LEUSCHNER Novgorod, p. 255, see diagram on pp. 131–132.

25 RIASANOVSKY A history of Russia, pp. 90–91.

26 BIRNBAUM Lord Novgorod the Great, p. 94. Cf. POKROVSKIY Izbrannye proizvedeniya, pp. 197–200; YANIN Srednevekovyy Novgorod, p. 18.

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GERTRUD PICKHAN in her monograph on Pskov history, notes that the word *veche* is not used in the Pskov chronicles until the fifteenth century. According to Pickhan from the beginning of the fourteenth century the *veche* was the highest legislative organ and represented the will of Pskov the Great as a community.²⁷

JONAS GRANBERG has researched the use of the term *veche* in Novgorod and non-Novgorod sources of the eleventh–fifteenth centuries and concludes in agreement with the earlier views of the nineteenth century²⁸ that a *veche* meant nothing more than a gathering. Granberg finally comes to the conclusion that the *veche* never was a democratic institution of power.²⁹

Thus for VALENTIN L. YANIN, SERAFIM V. YUSHKOV and MIKHAIL B. SVERDLOV the *veche* was an important political institution of the Novgorod Republic consisting only of nobles. Whereas NIKOLAY KOSTOMAROV, KLAUS ZERNACK, JÖRG LEUSCHNER, CARSTEN GOEHRKE, VASILII F. ANDREEV, OREST V. MARTYSHIN et al. insist on the presence of different social groups at the *veche* gatherings, admitting that they were strongly influenced by the boyars. SERGEY M. SOLOV'EV, KONSTANTIN A. NEVOLIN and OREST V. MARTYSHIN argue that not all *veche* gatherings had the same legality. But all these theories imply that the *veche* represented the will of Novgorod as an urban community and the term “Novgorod” or “all Novgorod” was used to indicate a *veche* decision.

However, the connection between these two terms is left unclear. It is important to clarify whether this view is supported by the sources in order to understand the role of the *veche* in the political life of Novgorod.

The use of the word veche in the Chronicles of South Russia and Suzdalia land

In the south-Russian Chronicle of 1200 reflected in the Hypatian Chronicle (further: Hyp), and the Vladimir-Suzdalian Chronicle of the end of the eleventh century reflected in the Laurentian Chronicle (further: Lau) *veche* is used to refer to people's assemblies in different Russian lands,³⁰ which were called at wartime, when the city was threatened by an approaching army or when people were called together in a surrendered city (997, 1097, 1146, 1068, 1069, 1229). It is also seen as a synonym for revolt or insurgence (1140, 1159, 1160, 1161, 1169), for plot or conspiracy (as in the entry for 1169 the secret *veches* in courtyards – “po dvoram” – are mentioned) and used to describe meetings of the people called by the prince for his proclamations (1147, 1148, 1231). These could be attended either by all the people (“ot mala do velika” in the entry for 1148) or simply by those

27 PICKHAN *Gospodin Pskov*, pp. 187–188.

28 SERGEEVICH *Veche i knyaz'*, pp. 113–114; SREZNEVSKIY *Materialy dlya slovarya Drevnerusskogo yazyka*, vol. 1, col. 499–500.

29 GRANBERG *Veche in the chronicles*, pp. 150, 198–199.

30 Belgorod (997), Kiev (1068, 1069, 1146, 1147, 1176), Novgorod (1016, 1140, 1148, 1160, 1161, 1169), Vladimir-Volynskiy (1097), Zvenigorod (1146, 1146), Polotsk (1159), Tropol'e (1185), Stargorod (1229), Galich (1231), Rostov, Vladimir, Suzdal', Yaroslavl', Pereyaslavl' (1262), Rostov (1289).

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within the inner circle of the princely entourage (eighteen “otrokov vernykh” in the entry for 1231).³¹

The entry for the year 6684/1176 from Lau deserves special mention. This entry describes the political programme of the nobles of Suzdal’ and Rostov after the death of Andrey Bogolubskiy, when the position of his city (Vladimir) as a political centre was challenged by the old political centres (Rostov and Suzdal’). According to them, Suzdal’ and Rostov were superior towns, and Vladimir was their dependency or suburb, and according to the tradition of all Russian territories the decision of the superior and older towns also had to be accepted by their suburbs: “Новгородцы бо изначала и Смоленяне, и кыяне, [и полочане] и вся власти, яко на дому [думу – Р.] на *въча* сходятся: на что же старѣишии сдумаютъ, на томъ же пригороди стануть. А здѣ городъ старыи Ростовъ и Суждаль и вси бояре хотяще свою правду поставити, не хотяху створити правды Божья, но “како нам любо, – рекоша, – також створим: Володимеръ е пригород нашъ””.³² The mention of the word *veche* in this entry served as the basis for theories of the special *veche* period in Russian history (*obshchinno-vechevoy stroy*) in the 1860s, as the word *veche* was taken to mean an assembly with legislative power. According to ZERNACK, *veche* in this context meant the political institution of the *gorod* responsible for determining the relationship to the prince, which was common throughout Old Russia.³³

SVERDLOV acknowledges the existence of the *veche* as a legislative body in Novgorod in the second half of the thirteenth century. However, he points out that this specific situation was taken to be generally true and thus wrongly applied to all cases of *veche* gatherings mentioned by the chronicler and to the whole period of the existence of Novgorod.³⁴

However, analysis of this entry must be put into context. The word *veche*, as was shown above, was used in Lau to describe different types of gatherings, but never as institutions with legislative power. Thus the understanding of the word *veche* as an institution in this case would need to be proved. There seems to be no reason to take *veche* as a word with a meaning different from that in the other parts of the text. It is more likely that as in all the other cases the word *veche* in Lau and Hyp means people’s assemblies in wartime, assemblies called by the prince to communicate with the people, in which case decisions made in the main city also applied to its suburbs. The fact that in this case the chronicler mentions not only the Novgorod citizens, but also the people of Kiev, Smolensk and other lands (“и вся власти”) doesn’t act as evidence that the *veche* as a legislative body existed all over Russia.³⁵ Quite the contrary, it makes it clear, that here the word *veche* is not used with a meaning different from all the other cases.

31 SVERDLOV *Genezis i struktura*, p. 53; SVERDLOV *Domongol’skaya Rus’*, p. 625; GRANBERG *Veche in the chronicles*, pp. 73–95 (see also historiography); LUKIN *Upominaniya vecha*, pp. 40–46.

32 Lavrent’evskaya letopis’, in: PSRL, tom 1. cols. 377–378.

33 ZERNACK *Die burgstädtischen Volksversammlungen*, pp. 29–30, 270; cf. LÜBKE *Novgorod in der russischen Literatur*, p. 22.

34 SVERDLOV *Genezis i struktura*, p. 54; SVERDLOV *Domongol’skaya Rus’*, p. 624.

35 The Russian word “власть” could have the meaning of “земля” (land): cf. SREZNEVSKIY *Materialy dlya slovary*, t. I, col. 274.

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*The use of the word *veche* in the Older and Younger Redaction (izvod) of the First Novgorod Chronicle (NIO³⁶ and NIY³⁷).*

In NIO and NIY the word *veche* doesn't appear before 1209. From the beginning of the thirteenth century it is used in all the previously mentioned broad meanings i.e., meetings of the people of Novgorod called by the prince, revolts, uprisings, internal conflicts, communications with the princes, and ceremonies.

*In a quarter of the cases when the word *veche* is mentioned it is used to denote gatherings of people in order to listen to the prince's pronouncements.*

All these cases date back to the thirteenth century: 1209, 1214 (mentioned twice), 1215 (mentioned three times), 1228, 1230, 1299. In the entry for the year 6717/1209 the word *veche* indicates the gathering of the people of Novgorod provoked by Yaroslav, the prince of Vladimir, in order to settle accounts with his opponent, the Novgorod official *posadnik* Dmitriy Miroshkinich.³⁸ In the entry for 6722/1214 *veche* is used three times in descriptions of and references to military campaigns. In the first case the prince called a *veche* ("съзва вѣче") to invite the people of Novgorod to march with him against his enemy Vsevolod. Then the word *veche* is used to indicate the gathering of the Novgorod troops during the military campaign in Smolensk. On the way to Kiev the Novgorod warriors had a quarrel with the warriors of Smolensk and refused to follow their prince any longer. The prince called a *veche* ("въ вѣче поча звати") to persuade the people of Novgorod to follow him onwards to Kiev. They refused and had a *veche* of their own ("новгородъци же, створивъше вѣче о собе, почаша гадати"). When they gathered, the *posadnik* of Novgorod made them change their mind and remain loyal to the prince and to the interests of the Russian land ("яко, братие, страдали дѣди наши и отчи за Русьскую землю, тако, братъе, и мы поидимъ по своему князи")³⁹ and the Novgorod troops rejoined the prince's army. In the entry for 6723/1215 the word *veche* is used in a narrative when the chronicler describes the gathering called by the prince in order to make a public announcement. A *veche* was called by prince Mstislav Udaloy in order to inform the people of Novgorod that he was leaving Novgorod. At the end of the entry another *veche* is mentioned, also convened by Mstislav to call the people of Novgorod to a military campaign. It is worth noting that the word *veche* is not used to indicate an assembly gathered in order to make a decision about the invitation of a prince to Novgorod. After the description, in NIO, of how the prince had left Novgorod it was said that the people of Novgorod, after

36 The Older Redaction (*Starshyy izvod*) of the First Novgorod Chronicle (NIO) is represented by the Sinodal Transcript (*Sinodal'nyy spisok*) of the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries. Its beginning has been lost. It covers the period of 1016–1333 (the additions made by different hands take the narrative up to 1352). BOBROV *Novgorodskie letopisi*, pp. 7–8.

37 The Younger Redaction (*Mladshyy izvod*) of the First Novgorod Chronicle. Here: Commission Transcript (*Komissionnyy spisok*). The Younger Redaction is preserved in several transcripts beginning with the middle of the fifteenth century. Its text is very close to NIO, but goes to the 1430s – 1440s. BOBROV *Novgorodskie letopisi*, pp. 7–8.

38 When Vsevolod gave Novgorod to his oldest son, as an act of defence the people of Novgorod elected Dmitriy as *posadnik* much against Vsevolod's wishes. NPL, pp. 51, 248.

39 NPL, pp. 53, 251.

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having argued a lot (“много гадавъше”), sent their envoys to call prince Yaroslav Vsevolodovich to be the prince of Novgorod.⁴⁰ The word *veche* is used to denote the gathering of people in Yaroslav territory (*Yaroslav dvor*), bearing arms in order to go to plunder the court of one of the Novgorod officials, the *tysyatskiy*, of whom the prince did not approve. In the context of the entry for 1209 and 1215 the word *veche*, referring to the Novgorod assembly, doesn't imply that it represented Novgorod as an independent political body. On the contrary, it is used to describe the meeting of people of Novgorod mobilized by the prince in order to suppress the opposition. In the entry for 6725/1217 the word *veche* is mentioned to indicate the gathering of the Novgorod people headed by the prince during the siege of the town of Medvezh'ya Golova (Otepää) in Estonia. The besieged sent their envoys “with bows and flattery” (“съ поклономъ льстью”). The people of Novgorod then gathered to discuss what answer to give to the envoys. In the entry for 6726/1218 the word *veche* is used to describe a gathering of the people of Novgorod called by the prince to inform them about his decision to leave Novgorod.⁴¹ In the entry for 6736/1228 it is reported that the prince called a *veche* on the archbishop's estate (*Vladychnyy dvor*) to make a speech in order to justify his Pskov campaign and to call upon the people of Novgorod to join his military campaign to Riga.⁴² In 6738/1230 a *veche* was gathered by prince Yaroslav who had arrived in Novgorod as new prince. In front of a crowd of people he kissed the icon of the Mother of God acknowledging the charters of the previous princes given to Novgorod.⁴³

In a third of all cases of the use of the word, veche refers to the internal conflicts (raspri) in Novgorod.

In the 6738/1230 entry the word *veche* is used to describe the conflict of the *posadnik* of Novgorod with some of the Novgorod nobles. The conflict started when the armed people of Novgorod gathered to plunder the houses on Prusskaya street, the owners of which were involved in the assassination of one of the Novgorod boyars.⁴⁴ One of the boyars had been beaten by the men of the Novgorod *posadnik*. That triggered the convocation of a *veche* by the people in Yaroslav territory (*Yaroslav dvor*), from where the mobilised crowd went to plunder the house of the *posadnik*. The *posadnik* made “the whole city boil” (“възъвари городъ всъ”), so the crowd went from another *veche* to plunder the estates of the *posadnik*'s opponent. The boyar who had wanted to burn the *posadnik*'s house was killed. In the first and in the second case the word *veche* indicates the gathering of the crowd to plunder the houses of their political opponents.⁴⁵ In the entry for 6763/1255 the word *veche* is used to denote the meeting of only a section of the citizens of Novgorod: the *vyatshie* (seniors), who had united against the *menshie* (juniors) gath-

40 NPL, pp. 53, 252.

41 NPL, pp. 57, 258–259.

42 NPL, pp. 66, 271.

43 “и створи вѣцѣ, и цѣлова святую Богородицю на грамотахъ на всѣхъ Ярославлихъ” (NPL, pp. 70, 278).

44 NPL, p. 69, 276.

45 “створи вѣцѣ на посадника на Ярославли дворѣ, и поиде на дворѣ его, и розграбиша и.” [...] “пойдоша съ вѣчя и много дворовъ розграбиша, а Волоса Блуткиница на вѣчи убиша” (NPL, pp. 69, 276).

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ered not at a *veche*, but at a council (“свѣтъ”).⁴⁶ In the entry for 6798/1290 the *veche* is used to indicate the gathering of the people of Novgorod at the ringing of the bell of St. Sophia’s cathedral (“съзвониша вѣче у святѣи Софѣи”). The people of Novgorod gathered bearing arms and went to plunder the houses on Prusskaya street, where the owners had taken part in the assassination of one of the Novgorod boyars.⁴⁷ In the entry for 6799/1291 the word *veche* is used to indicate the gathering of the people of Novgorod to deal with two market thieves. The thieves were thrown from the bridge into the river.⁴⁸ In the 6824/1316 entry *veche* is used to indicate the gathering of people to take revenge on a political traitor during the increasingly tense relationship with prince Michael of Tver’.⁴⁹ In 6850/1342 the assassination of a prominent Novgorod boyar triggered a conflict and Novgorod was divided into two opposing military groups. Each side gathered ready for battle. Both of these gatherings are called a *veche*. In the afternoon, due to the efforts of the archbishop and the *posadnik* of Novgorod, the two sides were reconciled. It is significant that in the report about the reconciliation, the word *veche* is not used: “доспѣша въ город, сия страна собѣ, а сиа собѣ.”⁵⁰ The entry for 6854/1346 describes the *veche* as a meeting of armed people, gathered to take revenge on the *posadnik* of Novgorod, Ostafiy Dvoryaninovich, guilty of having provoked the attack by the Lithuanian prince at Luga and Shelon’.⁵¹ In 6892/1384 Novgorod was divided into two opposing military camps as a result of the protest of the people of some Novgorod territories against the prince of Lithuania Patrikiy, who held these territories. The prince of Lithuania managed to get the Slavna district to side with him. The people of Slavna gathered bearing arms (their gathering is called a *veche*). At the same time another armed group gathered in another district of Novgorod (“обои въ оружьи, аки на рать”). During the conflict, the bridge across the Volkhov River was destroyed. The chronicler describes the conflict as an internal one (“усобная рать”).⁵²

In the context of these entries a *veche* means a gathering of armed people. The chronicler didn’t use the word to describe the gatherings where a new internal peace was agreed upon or other territories were given to the prince of Lithuania. In the entry for 6896/1388 the word *veche* is used to describe the uprising of the three districts of the Sophia Side against the *posadnik* of Novgorod. The insurgents gathered near St. Sophia’s Cathedral and went to plunder the house of the *posadnik*. The word *veche* is not used when two sides had gathered in peace and a new *posadnik* was named.⁵³ In the entry for 6926/1418 *veche* refers to the spontaneous gathering of the people who came to take revenge on one of the Novgorod boyars. According to the chronicler a man called Stepanko inspired by the devil (“научением дияволим”) seized a boyar and began to shout for help, calling people to take revenge on him. The people came to his aid and pushed the boyar towards the crowd

46 NPL, pp. 80–81, 307.

47 NPL, p. 326.

48 NPL, p. 327.

49 NPL, pp. 95, 336.

50 NPL, p. 356.

51 NPL, p. 359.

52 NPL, p. 379.

53 “и потомъ снидошася в любовь; и даша посадничьство Василью Евановичю” (NPL, p. 382).

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(“к народу”), where he was almost beaten to death and thrown from the bridge. The crowd that gathered to help the boyar was called a *veche*. The boyar was rescued from the river and he later captured his offender and began to torture him. As a result of this behaviour, the opposition began to ring the bell in Novgorod. The armed and rabble-rousing crowd that set off to plunder the house of the *posadnik* was called a *veche*.⁵⁴

In some cases the word veche is used to determine the uprising of people against the city officials.

In the 6736/1228 entry *veche* is used to indicate the uprising of the ordinary people (“простая чадь”) against the archbishop of Novgorod. The uprising is called a great mutiny (“крамола великая”). The ordinary people gathered in Yaroslav territory (*Yaroslav dvor*) and set off for the archbishop’s estate. The archbishop was accused of being the cause of the hot weather. This was due to the fact that he had ousted the previous bishop, sent him to the Khutynskiy monastery and bribed the prince to become an archbishop himself (“сѣлъ, давши князю мзду”).⁵⁵ In the entry for 6778/1270 *veche* is used to describe the insurgency which was classified by the chronicler as an uprising. The insurgents mobilised in Yaroslav territory (*Yaroslav dvor*) (the gathering is called a *veche*) killed one of the prince’s men. The others managed to escape to the church. The next morning the prince’s men ran away to the prince’s residence at Gorodishche in the suburbs of Novgorod. Their houses were plundered. The people of Novgorod composed a letter to the prince setting out his transgressions and asking him to leave Novgorod. No meeting in order to compose the letter is mentioned in the Chronicle. The word *veche* is only used to describe the communications with the prince.⁵⁶ In the 6845/1337 entry *veche* indicates an uprising of the ordinary people, caused by the inspiration of the devil (“наважениемъ дияволимъ”) against the abbot (archimandrit) of the Yur’ev monastery. The chronicler classifies the insurgents as *koromolnitsi*.⁵⁷

In this context the word *veche* doesn’t refer to Novgorod as a political body, but quite the opposite: it is used to determine the uprising (*kramola*).

In some cases the word veche is used to describe ceremonies.

In the 6701/1193 entry *veche* refers to the people’s gathering to witness the procedure of the election of the archbishop of Novgorod by drawing lots. After the liturgy, a blind man

54 “...начаша звонити на Ярославли дворѣ вѣче, и собирахуся людии множество, кричаху, вопиюще по многы дни: ‘пойдем на оного боярина и дом его расхытим’” (NPL, p. 409).

55 “Тогда же оканьный диаволь, исперва не хотяи добра роду челоуѣческому и завидѣвъ ему, зане прогоняшет его ношнымъ стояниемъ, и пѣснословиемъ и молитвами, и въздвиже на Арсѣния, мужа кротка и смирена, *крамолу велику, простую чадь*. И створише вѣче на княжи дворѣ, и поидоша на владыченъ дворѣ, глаголюще сие: “того ради стоитъ тепло долго, выпровадилъ Антониа владыку на Хутино, а самъ сѣлъ, давши князю мзду”; акы злодѣя пѣхающе в шию, выгнаша; и на малѣ ублюде Богъ от смерти: затворися въ церкви святыя Софѣя, иде на Хутино” (NPL, pp. 67, 272).

56 NPL, pp. 88, 319.

57 “наважениемъ дияволимъ сташа простая чадь на архимандрита Есифа, а думои старого архимандрита Лаврентия, и створиша вѣче, и запроша Есифа въ церкви святого Николы; и сѣдоша около церкви ношъ и день *коромолници*, стрегуше его” (NPL, pp. 100, 347).

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was brought from the *veche* and told to draw one of the three lots. However, the word *veche* is not mentioned in connection with the election of the candidates to the post.⁵⁸ In 6808/1299 a *veche* was called by the prince and by all the people of Novgorod to the ceremony of the inauguration of the bishop of Novgorod who had been recently elected. In the report about the election the word *veche* is not used.⁵⁹ In the beginning of the fourteenth century in the descriptions of the gatherings to witness the ceremony of the bishops' inaugurations, the word *veche* appears in the Chronicle on a regular basis (entries for 6923 / 1415 and 6929 / 1421).⁶⁰ In the 6945 / 1437 entry of N1Y *veche* is used to describe the blessing of the archbishop of Novgorod and its officials before leaving for Moscow.⁶¹

Thus a wide range of meanings of the word *veche* is revealed by textual analysis. The *veche* as a city assembly is more an *accidens separabile* than *differentia specifica*. ~~It did not necessarily indicate a city assembly.~~ The word *veche* is widely used in descriptions of revolts, uprisings, insurgencies, conspiracies, plots (1228, 1270, 1337, 1418), internal conflicts (1230, 1255, 1290, 1291, 1316, 1342, 1346, 1384, 1418), and military conflicts. In the case of reconciliation, when different groups or different city districts came together, their meetings were not called *veche* by the chronicler (1384, 1388). In the entry for 1209 and 1215 the word *veche* is used to describe the assemblies called by the princes in their attempt to settle accounts with the opposing nobility. There are *veche* assemblies that were summoned by lower class people (*men'shie*⁶² and *chernye lyudi*⁶³). In 1228 and 1337 only *chernye lyudi* held *veche* meetings, and these are characterized by the chronicler as an insurrection (*kramola*). Cases when the word *veche* denotes the gathering of the whole city are unusual. In the 6726/1218 entry *veche* is the assembly of the whole city where the ceremony of kissing the cross confirmed the relationship between Novgorod and the prince. It is important to emphasise that the word *veche* itself did not necessarily mean an assembly of the whole city and was not used by the Chronicle in reference to the city as a united body. In the very same entry this word is used to determine small meetings of different groups of the people of Novgorod, gathered for a whole week (“и тако быша вѣча по всю недѣлю”) before all the people of Novgorod came together to kiss the cross (“и съидошася братья въкупѣ однодушно, и крестъ цѣловаша”).⁶⁴

58 NPL, p. 40, 232.

59 “По преставлении же Климонтовѣ новгородци, много гадавшие с посадникомъ Андрѣемъ, възлюбивши вси Богомъ назнаменана мужа добра и смѣрена Феоктиста, игумена святого Благовѣщения; и съзвонивше вѣче у святой Софьи, князь Борисъ Андрѣевич со всѣми новгородци введеша его с поклономъ, и посадиша и въ владычни дворѣ, донде увѣдають, кдѣ митрополитъ” (NPL, pp. 90, 330).

60 NPL, pp. 405, 414.

61 NPL, p. 419.

62 The discussion about *men'shie* as a social group see YANIN Novgorodskie posadniki, pp. 147–149.

63 The discussion about *chernye lyudi* as a social group see LEUSCHNER Novgorod, p. 245.

64 NPL, pp. 59, 260.

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*The use of the word *veche* in the Chronicles of the beginning of the fifteenth century*

In the Chronicles originating from the Chronicle of Metropolitan Fotiy 1418 – the First and the Second Karamzinian Novgorod Chronicle (hereafter: NK1 and NK2),⁶⁵ the First Sophian Chronicle (hereafter: S1),⁶⁶ the Fourth Novgorod Chronicle (hereafter: N4)⁶⁷ written in 1430)⁶⁸ – the word *veche* continues to be used with a very wide range of meanings: revolt, insurgence, armed gathering during an internal conflict, and crowd of people. In 1382 the word *veche* is used to indicate an uprising and revolt (*myatnya*) in Moscow: “А во градѣ Москвѣ бысть мятня многа и мятежъ великъ зъло [...] И створиша вече, позвоніша во вся колоколы, и въсташа вечемъ народи мятежници, недобріи чловѣци, людие крамолници”.⁶⁹

The word *veche* is used to mean a city assembly in the 6892/1384 entry of N4: “И по оубоной тои рати поидоша вся 5 концевъ во одиначество: отняша тыи города оу князя, а даша ему Русоу да Ладогу, а Наровьскіи берегъ, и грамоту списаша съ княземъ и запечаташа на вечи на Ярославли дворѣ.”⁷⁰

In the 6893/1385 entry of N4 (NK2) the word *veche* is mentioned as a city assembly, in which *posadnik* and *tysyatskiy* of Novgorod, all boyars, the boyars’ children, *zhit’i* and *chornye lyudi* attended.⁷¹

But in the entry for 6926/1418 *veche* is used once again with the meaning of a crowd of people or an uprising (“sonmishche lyudskoe”, “myatezh”). The use of the word *veche* by the editor of N4 during his work on the entry for 6926/1418 from N1Y about the uprising of the people of Novgorod against the prominent boyar Dmitriy Ivanovich is very striking. The words *veche*, crowd, *sonmishche* (a large crowd of people), are used interchangeably as synonyms.⁷²

The following diagram of the reciprocal changing of the terms can be followed in the work of the editor of N4.

N1Y	N4
Влечахут к <i>народу</i> (dragged to the people)	Влечахут к <i>сонму людскому</i> (dragged to the gathering of people)
Сведше с <i>веча</i> (led from the <i>veche</i>)	Сведше с <i>сонма</i> (led from the gathering)

⁶⁵ LUR’E Novgorodskaya Karamzinskaya letopis’.

⁶⁶ Sofiyskaya pervaya letopis’ (PSRL 6).

⁶⁷ Novgorodskaya Chetvertaya Letopis’ (PSRL 4).

⁶⁸ BOBROV Novgorodskie letopisi, p. 192.

⁶⁹ N4, pp. 328, 329; cf. NK2 p. 142; LA, col. 122.

⁷⁰ N4, p. 341.

⁷¹ N4, p. 342.

⁷² “Людие же, видяще его вопль, влечахут акы злодѣя къ народу и казниша его ранами близъ смерти и сведше с *вѣща*, сринуша и с мосту” (NPL p. 409); cf. “Людіе же, видяще его вопль, *пришедше*, влечахууть, якоже злаго к сонму людскому и казниша ранами близъ смерти [...]. И сведше его съ *сонма*, сринуша его с мостоу” (N4, p. 421).

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The word “sobranie lyudskoe” (“meeting of people”) is understood by the compiler of N4 as a *veche*:

N1Y

пришедши къ архиепис-
копу, молиша его, да
пошлет къ *собранию*
людску (going to the bish-
op to ask him to send to
the people’s gathering).

N4

пришедше къ архієпископу молиша его, да пошлеть и
къ *собранію людскому*; святитель же послуша моленія
ихъ, посла его съ попомъ ихъ *на вече* да съ своимъ
бояриномъ; они же пріяша его (Going to the bishop to
ask him to send him [Stepanko – O. S.] to the people’s
gathering. The Prelate heard their prayer and sent him
with a priest and one of his own boyars to the *veche*).

Thus we come to the conclusion that from the twelfth to the fourteenth century the word *veche* had a broad meaning. Though *veche* could be seen as a non-institutional medieval institution, which influenced the political life of Novgorod, it didn’t represent Novgorod as a political and social body and was not connected with the legal term “all Novgorod”.

The unity of Novgorod as a city and a republic

It seems significant that each time when the chronicler writes about a meeting of the whole city he doesn’t use the word *veche* but writes about a reciprocal oath of the people of Novgorod that was ratified by the kissing of the cross.

Such an oath-union of the citizens appeared in Novgorod during the opposition to the prince of Suzdalia Andrey Bogolubskiy. In 1167 the people of Novgorod united against the ally of Andrey Bogolubskiy, prince Sviatoslav, in support of the descendant of Iziaslav Mstislavich, Roman. The union was ratified by the kissing of the icon of the Mother of God: “Новгородъци же цѣловавъше святую Богородицю, яко “не хотимъ его”, идоша прогнать его съ Лукъ.” The word *veche* was not used in this context.⁷³

In the years 1255–1269 when, after the invasion of the Mongols, Novgorod was struggling to find its new place among the lands ruled by the grand prince of Vladimir, there was a meeting to discuss whether they should pay tribute to the Mongolians. A part of Novgorod (“men’shie”) united with the *posadnik* Onaniya in refusing to accept the supreme power of the great prince of Vladimir. In 1255 they gathered at a *veche* and made an oath on the icon of the Mother of God, that they were ready to give their lives for the “Truth of Novgorod” and for the land of their fathers.⁷⁴ In 1270 all the Novgorod lands (Ladoga, Korela, Izhera, Vozhane) gathered against the prince of Vladimir. During this conflict a new slogan of political struggle was formulated: “We have no prince, but God and the Truth and the Holy Sophia are with us, and we do not want you” [the prince – O. S].⁷⁵ Although in N1 there is no direct reference to the mutual oath made by the citizens of Novgorod, it is implied that it was sworn. In the 1270s when the Metropolitan wanted the people of Novgorod to recognise the supreme power of the prince of Vladimir

⁷³ NPL, pp. 85, 219.

⁷⁴ NPL, pp. 81, 307–308.

⁷⁵ “у нас князя нѣтуть, но Богъ и правда и святая Софѣя, а тебе не хотимъ” (NPL, pp. 89, 320–321).

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he freed them from the oath they had made: “аже будете и крестъ цѣловали, язъ за то прииму опитемью и отвѣчаю за то пред Богомъ.”⁷⁶

The union of the people of Novgorod which was ratified by mutual oath took place during the conflict of Novgorod with the Metropolitan and the grand prince of Vladimir in 1380–1390. In the entry for 6893/1385 of the N4 / NK2 Chronicles it is reported that the kissing of the cross took place at the Jaroslav territory (*Yaroslav dvor*). The *posadnik* of Novgorod Feodor Timofeevich, the *tsyatskiy* of Novgorod Bogdan Obakunovich, and all the boyars and the boyars’ children, and *zhiti* and *chernye lyudi* and all the five districts of Novgorod kissed the cross in the mutual oath not to accept the court of the Metropolitan. In addition, a new order of the Novgorod courts was established, which was now under the control of the archbishop and boyars of Novgorod:

“А тои зимы бысть цѣлованіе, въ великой постъ по Сборѣ на 2 недѣли: цѣловаше крестъ Феодоръ посадникъ Тимофеевичъ, тысячкои Богданъ Обакоуновичъ, на вѣчи на княжи дворѣ, и вси боляре, и дѣти боярьскии, и житѣи и черныи люди, и вся пять концевъ, что не зватися къ митрополиту, соудити владыкъ Алексею въ правду по манакануноу, а на соудъ поднятѣ двѣма исцемъ по два болярѣна на сторонѣ и по два житѣя челоувѣка; такоже и посадникоу и тысячкомоу судити право по цѣлованію.”⁷⁷

It is worth stressing that when in 6899/1391 the people of Novgorod refused the Metropolitan the right to judge in Novgorod, they referred not to a *veche* decision but to the mutual oath given by the kissing of the cross:

“И посадникъ Тимофѣи Юрьевичъ и тысячкои Микита Ѡедоровичъ, и вси Новгородци отвѣщааша едиными оусты: ‘господине! О судоу есме крестъ цѣловали и грамоту списали промежъ себѣ крестную, что къ митрополиту не зватися’”⁷⁸

In 6905/1398 the people of Novgorod swore mutual help to win back the lands of the Holy Sophia and the Great Novgorod in the Dvina area which were conquered by the Moscow prince: “цѣловаша крестъ за одинъ брат, како имъ святѣи Софѣи и великого Новаграда пригородовъ и волостии поискати”.⁷⁹

It is significant, that during this time the term “Great Novgorod” appears in the Novgorod Chronicles. This term is used in reference to the fact that “the Lord Great Novgorod” signified the will of Novgorod as a united social and political body whose power is opposed to the power of the Great prince. At the same time the formula “the word of Novgorod” meaning “word of the Lord” appeared in N1 (see entry 1397).⁸⁰

The expression “all Novgorod” doesn’t occur before the twelfth century both in Lau and in N1 in the context of entries written by a supporter of the prince. The use of the term “all Novgorod” in this context originated from the expression “all + name” traced back to the Byzantine-Russian agreements of the tenth century, in which the concept of all Russia is used as an indication of everything under the hand of the Kievan prince. In the agreement from 971, regarding the breach of contract by the Kievan prince was said: „Яко же кляхъся ко царемъ гречьскимъ, и со мною боляре и Русь вся, да схранимъ правая съ-

76 NPL, pp. 89, 321.

77 N4, p. 342.

78 N4, p. 371.

79 NPL, p. 391.

80 NPL, p. 392.

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вѣщания“. Furthermore, the formula “all Russia” is deciphered as “everybody under the hand of our prince.”⁸¹ Similar use of the formula “all + name” is to be found in the charters of Smolensk with reference to the citizens of Riga. In a charter from the first half of the fourteenth century of the prince of Smolensk Ivan Alexandrovich it is said that the treaty was made by the prince with the master of Riga and with the citizens of Riga “that were under his hand.”⁸²

In the First Novgorod Chronicle (N1) we see the term “all Novgorod” mentioned first at the end of the twelfth century, when Vsevolod, the prince of Vladimir, was very influential in Novgorod. With the help of favouritism and political intrigues Vsevolod managed to spread his influence over the city and to bring onto his side the merchants and the clergy. During that time the Novgorod bishop Martiriy, who was the overseer of the Novgorod Chronicle, was an ally of prince Yaroslav.⁸³ The concept “all Novgorod” appears almost simultaneously in Lau (6708/1200) to describe the Novgorod ambassadors’ visit to Vladimir to ask prince Vsevolod to give them his son to rule as prince of Novgorod, as they put it: “with all Novgorod bowing and pleading before you” (“с поклономъ и молбою *всего Новагорода*”).⁸⁴ In the entry for 6713/1205 of the First Novgorod Chronicle (N1) the formula “all the city” is used again in the pro-Vsevolod reports. “All the city” was glad to see the arrival of Konstantin, the eldest son of Vsevolod, to Novgorod.⁸⁵

If one compares the use of the formula “all + name” with the earlier references in the Byzantine-Russian agreements of the tenth century and in the charters of Smolensk it is possible to suppose that during the strengthening of Vsevolod’s power the term “all Novgorod” indicated that all people of Novgorod were under the rule of the prince.

But in later Novgorod documents the expression “all Novgorod” symbolizes the unity of the city community. Its appearance in the Chronicles coincides with the first cases of mutual oaths of the people of Novgorod. In 1270, when the people of Novgorod gathered against the prince of Vladimir and swore an oath of mutual help, they replied to the prince: “Prince, go away, if you don’t all the city will drive you away.”⁸⁶ It is worth noting that in the Russian documents the formula “all + name” denotes a political union forged under a ruler. This implies allegiance to a ruler as a vassal reflecting a hierarchical relationship, whereas in the Novgorod documents an equal relationship between the citizens is implied.

81 “Тако же и вы, греки, да храните тако же любовь ко княземъ нашимъ свѣтлымъ рускимъ и ко *всѣмъ иже под рукою свѣтлаго князя нашего*, несоблазну и непреложну всегда и во вся лѣта” (MALINGOUDI Russko-vizantiyskie dogovory, pp. 60, 69).

82 “Се князь великий смоленский Иван Олександрович внукъ Глебовъ докончал есмь с братомъ своимъ с местеромъ с ризьскимъ и съ епскмъ и с рыдели, и с ратманами и со всеми рижанами, *что под его рукою* докончал есмь” (Smolenskie gramoty XIII–XIV vv., pp. 69–70).

83 “и печяловахуся въ Новегородѣ князь и владыка и весь Новгородъ” (NPL, p. 41, 233).

84 Lau (PSRL 1), col. 415.

85 NPL, p. 50, 246.

86 “княже, поѣди проче, не хотимъ тебе; али идемъ *всѣ Новъгородъ* прогонитъ тебе” (NPL, pp. 88, 320).

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This leads to the conclusion that until the end of the fourteenth century not the *veche* but the union concluded by mutual swearing of the people of Novgorod to help each other expressed the unity of the city and the republic of Novgorod. The reason for the confusion of this institution with *veche* was that these meetings for mutual help were also called *veche* to refer to any type of meeting as to the proximum genus. Similar oath-agreements as those of Novgorod can be found in West European cities of the Middle Ages.⁸⁷

The term veche in sources from the second third of the fifteenth century

However, from the beginning of the second third of the fifteenth century, when more social groups were involved in the political life of Novgorod, *veche* as a meeting of the citizens and an institution of republican power is definitely found in sources. From the second half of the 1430s the mentioning of people's assemblies in Yaroslav territory (*Yaroslav dvor*) appears in the *intitulatio* of the Novgorod treaty charters with the princes. For the first time in a charter given by Great Novgorod to Kolyvan' in the beginning of July 1436 Yaroslav territory is mentioned as the place for the conclusion of a treaty and for the composition of a charter (by the bishop, *posadnik*, *tysyatskiy* and "all Great Novgorod"): "The blessing of the archbishop of Great Novgorod and the *posadnik* of Great Novgorod and from the *tysyatskiy* of Great Novgorod and from all Novgorod from Yaroslav territory."⁸⁸ It is important to note that in this charter the word *veche* was not used to indicate this institution of power. This testifies that the *veche* didn't take shape as an institution of power in the first third of the fifteenth century.

The word *veche* to mean a city assembly in Yaroslav territory (*Yaroslav dvor*) is first mentioned three years later in the *intitulatio* of the treaty charter of Great Novgorod with the German merchants (earlier then 11th February 1439).⁸⁹ The word *veche* is used also in the *intitulatio* of another charter of Great Novgorod to Kolyvan' and in the *intitulatio* of the charter to Nikita Tinchov.⁹⁰

If before the fifteenth century the word *veche* was used randomly, in the fifteenth century it becomes a regular feature. But it is characteristic that in the entry for 6979/1471 of N4 another expression appears to indicate *veche* as an assembly of all the citizens – "great *veche*" (*bol'shoe veche*): "а на дворъ великого князя на Городище з *большого вѣча* присылали многихъ люди ..."⁹¹

87 See LEFFLER Novgorod – eine europäische Kommune, p. 43; cf. WEBER Die Stadt: Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, p. 750.

88 "Благословение с любовью от архиепископа великого Новгорода Евфимия, и от посадника Великого Новгорода [...], от тысяцкого Великого Новгорода [...], и от всего Великого Новгорода, с *Ярославова двора* ..." (GVNP, No. 66, p. 109).

89 "Посадник Великого Новгорода [...], тысяцкий Великого Новгорода [...], и весь господин Великий Новгород, на *вече на Ярославовом дворе*" (GVNP, No. 68, p. 113).

90 "От посадника Великого Новгорода [...], и от Великого Новгорода, с *вѣча съ Ярославля двора*" (GVNP, No. 69, p. 114); "От посадника новгородского [...], от тысяцкого новгородского [...] и от всего господина Великого Новгорода с *вѣча съ Ярославля двора*" (GVNP, No. 75, p. 127).

91 N4, p. 501; KOSTOMAROV Severnorusckie narodopravstva, pp. 283–284.

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However, it is difficult to agree with J. GRANBERG who maintains the view that *veche* never took shape as an institution of power, even in the second half of the fifteenth century.⁹² The following facts witness the functioning of *veche* as an institution of republican power in the fifteenth century:

- In the Charter of Great Novgorod addressed to grand prince Vasiliy Vasil'evich about the final payment according to the Yazhelbitsi treaty of 1456 the *veche* secretary (*vechnyy d'yak*) is mentioned together with two *podvoyskie* (lower military commanders). This also happens in the entry for 6985/1471 of the Ustyug Chronicle which contains, according to Aleksandr G. Bobrov,⁹³ the Chronicle writing of the last years of the Novgorod Republic.⁹⁴ The existence of a special *veche* secretary makes it evident that the *veche* in the fifteenth century became a decision-making institution and Granberg's attempts to connect the adjective *vechnyy* with eternity (*vechnost'*) or to prove that this position had no importance seem very far-fetched.⁹⁵
- In the charters written in low-German after 1439 the word *veche* is translated as “ding” (the Russian expression “на вече на Ярославле дворе” is translated: “in deme dinge uppe Iresloven hove”).⁹⁶
- In the second part of the fifteenth century *veche* was understood as an assembly having judicial power. In the charter of Yazhelbitsi from 1456 *veche* charters are mentioned.⁹⁷ In the entry for 1471 of the Moscow Grand Princely Chronicle, known as the Moscow Chronicle of the end of the fifteenth century (hereafter: Mos) there is an indication of the Novgorod tradition that the candidates for the position of the archbishop of Novgorod were elected at a *veche* assembly.⁹⁸
- In the Novgorod Judicial charter *veche* is mentioned as an organ of power and in connection with the expression “all Novgorod”: “§ 34 ино взять на него *приставы с веча*, да иматъ его в городе и в селе с теми приставами; а почнет хорониться от приставов, ино его *всѣм Великим Новымгородом*”.⁹⁹
- After the conquest of Novgorod by the prince of Moscow, the abolition of the *veche* in 1477 was presented in the Chronicles of Moscow and Pskov as one of the most important prerequisites of the elimination of Novgorod freedom: “поцелова крест владыка Феофил, и посадники, и тысяцкии, и весь Великий Новгород, старейшии люди и моложышии, от мала до велика, на всемъ добръ и на всеи воли князя великого: что не быти в Великомъ Новѣгородѣ ни посаднику, ни тысяцкому, ни

92 GRANBERG *Veche in the Chronicles*, pp. 151–217.

93 BOBROV *Novgorodskie letopisi*, pp. 239–240.

94 “и ста на вѣчи и рече слово: “Бояре новгородски и *весь Новгород*, приходил к великому князю ваш подвоискои Назареи и *дьяк ваш вѣчнои*, и ркуще тако: новгородские посадники, и тысяцкие, и *весь Великий Новгород* нарекли князеи великих себѣ Ивана Васильевича и сына его Ивана Ивановичя государем Новугороду”” (ULS, pp. 91–92).

95 Cf. GRANBERG *Veche in the chronicles*, p. 206.

96 GVNP, No. 68, pp. 113–114; GVNP, No. 23, pp. 43–44.

97 GVNP, No. 23, p. 42.

98 “Новгородцы же по старине каков бѣше обычай у них, *створиша вече и начаши избирати* о священноинок на архиепископию, и избравше трех метнуша жребия” (Mos, p. 284).

99 *Pamyatniki prava feodal'no-razdroblennoy Rusi XII–XV vv.*, p. 217.

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*вечю не быти; и вечный колокол свезоша на Москву;*¹⁰⁰ It is noteworthy that in the Chronicles of Moscow and Pskov the *veche* in Novgorod would be the first of a list of institutions that was prohibited: “А новгородской старине никоторой не быти, ни вечу, ни суду, ни посаднику степенному, ни тысяцкымъ”,¹⁰¹ “Вечю колоколу в отчине нашей в Новгороде не быти, посаднику не быти, а государство нам свое держати.”¹⁰²

The connection of the words *veche* (as an assembly of the Novgorod people) and “Great Novgorod” (as a social and political body) can be traced back to sources from the end of the fifteenth century. In the Charter of Great Novgorod to the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius monastery that was signed at the *veche* in Yaroslav territory (*Yaroslav dvor*), it is stressed, that “all Novgorod” had granted rights to the monastery. The mention of *veche* as an assembly of “all Novgorod” can also be traced back to an entry in the Chronicle of Ustyug.¹⁰³ It is said in that article, that the envoy of the prince came to the *veche* and addressed the Novgorod boyars and “all Novgorod.” He explained how their *podvoyskiy* (a lower military commander) and the *veche* secretary came to the Moscow prince to tell him that the Novgorod nobles (*posadniki* and *tysyatskie*) and “all Great Novgorod” had accepted Grand Prince Ivan Vasil’evich and his son Ivan Ivanovich as lords of Novgorod and asked them what they thought about it. However the ordinary people replied that they had not sent ambassadors and that it had been the nobles who sent them and that they knew nothing about it. And the people became angry at the nobles because of it.¹⁰⁴ In this context *veche* is taken to be an assembly of all the city. Decisions made at a *veche* seemed to have a legislative meaning. The connection of the terms *veche* and “all Novgorod” is found also in the Chronicles of Pskov.¹⁰⁵

Thus we come to the conclusion that from the twelfth to the fourteenth century the *veche* didn’t represent the unity of Novgorod as a city and a republic and the word *veche* was not connected with the formula “all Novgorod,” as was thought earlier (e.g. by KLAUS ZERNACK, KONRAD ONASCH, HENRIK BIRNBAUM et al.) It had a broad meaning. In the twelfth – fourteenth century it didn’t signify either a decision-making institution, or the whole-town assembly, though it could be seen as a ‘non-institutional’ medieval institution which influenced the political life of Novgorod.

Until the end of the fourteenth century not the *veche* but the union of the citizens constituted by the ceremony of cross-kissing expressed the unity of the city and the republic of Novgorod and was one of the typological characteristics of the Novgorod republic. However, the gathering of the citizens to give an oath could be named *veche*, as any gathering.

100 PL, pp. 57–58.

101 PL, pp. 215, 216, 255.

102 Mos, p. 318.

103 This entry of the Ustyug Chronicle was attributed by Bobrov as the last entry of the last chronicle writer of the Novgorod Republic. BOBROV *Novgorodskie letopisi*, pp. 239–240; LUR’E *Obshcherusskie letopisi XIV–XV vv.*, p. 196.

104 ULS, pp. 91–92.

105 “И пришед на вече, учаль великому Новугороду повествовати” (PL, p. 209).

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Only from the end of the fourteenth century, or more likely from the second third of the fifteenth century, when more social groups were involved in political life, did the *veche* take shape as an institute of Novgorod republican power and began to be connected with “all Novgorod.” The belief of MIKHAIL N. POKROVSKIY, VALENTIN L. YANIN, NICHOLAS V. RIASANOVSKY, and HENRIK BIRNBAUM that the *veche* as a democratic institution was swept away by the Council of Lords in the fourteenth century doesn’t hold true.

The conclusion made in this article allows for a break with a tradition originating at the end of the nineteenth century under the influence of liberal ideas and assigning a special *veche* period to Russian history (IGOR’ FROYANOV, ANDREY DVORNICHENKO, ALEKSEY PETROV), which implies that Russia developed differently from West European countries. The connection between the oath-agreements of the people of Novgorod with the oath-agreements of the other European cities clarifies the roots of the Russian democratic tradition not as coming from the original assemblies of primitive societies but as part of the development of European cities in the Middle Ages. Thus the development of Novgorod turns out to be closer to the rest of Europe than was previously thought.¹⁰⁶

Abbreviations

GVNP	Gramoty Velikogo Novgoroda i Pskova. Ed. VALK, SIGIZMUND N. Moskva, Leningrad 1949.
LA	Letopisnyy sbornik, imenuemyy letopis’yu Avraamki. Moskva 2000. = PSRL 16
Lau	Lavrent’evskaya letopis’. Leningrad 1926. = PSRL 1.
Mos	Moskovskiy letopisnyy svod kontsa XV veka. Moskva 1949.
NK1	First Karamzinian Novgorod Chronicle, in: LUR’E YA. S.(ed.) Novgorodskaya Karamzinskaya letopis’. SPb 2002.
NK2	Second Karamzinian Novgorod Chronicle, in: LUR’E YA. S (ed.) Novgorodskaya Karamzinskaya letopis’. SPb 2002. = PSRL 42.
NPL	NASONOV, ARSENIY N. (ed.) Novgorodskaya pervaya letopis’ starshego i mladshego izvodov. Moskva, Leningrad 1950.
N1	NASONOV, ARSENIY N. (ed.) Novgorodskaya pervaya letopis’ starshego i mladshego izvodov. Moskva, Leningrad 1950.
N1O	Older Redaction (<i>Starshiy izvod</i>) / Synodal Transcript (<i>Sinodal’nyy spisok</i>) of the First Novgorod Chronicle, in: NASONOV, ARSENIY N. (ed.) Novgorodskaya pervaya letopis’ starshego i mladshego izvodov. Moskva, Leningrad 1950.
N1Y	Younger Redaction (<i>Mladshiy izvod</i>) / Commission Transcript (<i>Komissionnyy spisok</i>) of the First Novgorod Chronicle, in: NASONOV, ARSENIY N. (ed.) Novgorodskaya pervaya letopis’ starshego i mladshego izvodov. Moskva, Leningrad 1950.

¹⁰⁶ About the *veche* as an institution unknown to any European city see GOEHRKE Gross-Novgorod und Pskov/Pleskau, p. 480; MUMENTHALER Spätmittelalterliche Städte, p. 67.

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N4	Novgorodskaya Chetvertaya Letopis'. Moskva 2000. = PSRL 4.
PL	NASONOV, ARSENIY N. (ed.) Pskovskie letopisi. 2-nd ed. Moskva 1955. = PSRL 5,1.
PSRL	Polnoe Sobranie Russkikh letopisey. 40 Vols. S.-Peterburg, Leningrad, Moskva. 1848–.
S1	Sofiyskaya pervaya letopis'. S.-Peterburg 1853. = PSRL 6.
ULS	SERBINA K. N. (ed.) Ustyuzhskiy letopisnyy svod. (Arkhangelogorodskiy letopisets). Moskva, Leningrad 1950.

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Summary

In Quest of the Key Democratic Institution of Medieval Russia: Was the *Veche* an Institution that Represented Novgorod as a City and a Republic?

In the twelfth to fourteenth century the *veche* didn't represent the unity of the city and the republic of Novgorod. The word *veche* had a broad meaning and signified neither a decision-making institution, nor a whole-town assembly. The expression "all Novgorod" didn't refer to the entire membership of the *veche*. Up until the end of the fourteenth century it wasn't the *veche*, but the oath-agreements of the citizens, ratified by the ceremony of kissing the cross or an icon that expressed the unity of Novgorod as a city and a republic. Only from the end of the fourteenth century or more likely from the second third of the fifteenth century, when more social groups were involved in political life, did the *veche* take shape as an institution of Novgorod republican power and began to be connected with the legal term "all Novgorod."