

## The Development of Discourse on the Novgorod Republic During the Enlightenment Era

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There have been two sides to the historiographical attempts to understand the tradition of the republic in Rus'. On the one hand, Medieval Novgorod seems almost indisputably to have embodied the republican tradition in ancient Rus'. In fact, Novgorod of the 12<sup>th</sup> through 15<sup>th</sup> centuries has, in the modern Russian imagination, become a symbol of the freedom once enjoyed by the Russian people. On the other hand, the majority of discourse on the subject has long treated the lack of a democratic tradition in Rus', as well as the impossibility of developing democratic roots within a country with a historically authoritarian government. Strong governmental power posits itself as the only possible guarantor of social liberties or defender of civic interests. *Per uso*, after the fall of the Soviet Union, when Russia was faced with the necessity of democratic development, the four-century-long experience of the Novgorod Republic was not invoked. Post-perestroika, during Felix Razumovsky's "Who are we? Novgorod lessons in Russian Democracy" opinion programs, Novgorod's lessons in democracy acquired a bitter flavor, considered in tandem with the "bitter lessons" of democracy from the 1990s—democracy that had brought on the crisis and had impoverished the masses.

Let us propose that the Enlightenment-era discourse on Novgorod has played a decisive role in this double nature to the questions regarding the republican tradition.

The image of the Novgorod Republic has never been static, and to this day is still experiencing a continuous transformation in Russian historiography.

Eighteenth-century court historians emphasized the "obstinacy" and "unruliness" of Novgorodians, portraying the republic as yet uncultivated by the monarchy, mired in strife and discord. Under the pens of liberal writers, however, "mutinous" Novgorod became a symbol of early freedom and democracy, a republic interested in opposing tyrannical power.

A decisive transformation awaited ancient Novgorod in the the second half of the nineteenth century. During this period, the image of Novgorod was transformed from a savage space of uncultured monarchic power, where a mob of obstinate republicans were destroying themselves with greed and perpetual suffering, into a garden of Eden where people lived communally in a state of primordial peace and harmony. Now the golden age of Russian history acquired a new interpretation. Instead of universal equality before the law, the spirit of living communally was glorified, and the embodiment of this ideal was the Novgorod *veche*, emblem of a happy time when a people innocent of submission or slavery cultivated their own land. The liberal reforms of Alexander II (known as Alexander the Liberator) became the historical precondition of the *veche* mythology. His zemstvo and judicial reforms expanded the rights of local self-government and established formal class equality before the law. And his urban reforms established laws to which citizens of all classes were subject, instead of letting individual classes govern themselves. During the formulation of the so-called communal-parliamentary system, the Novgorod *veche* was relied on heavily as an example of an assembly of all the people in the land. Novgorod seemed the best example of the triumph of zemstvo administration. Novgorod differed from other Russian states in that for other states, local princely rule gradually suffocated the communal *veche* system, to the point where the princes reached "complete sovereignty," whereas in Novgorod, princely rule was "quickly diminished." "In that specific epoch," wrote famous historian V. O. Kliuchevsky, "Novgorod merely developed the political order for relations which had begun much earlier throughout Rus'." In his opinion, the possibility for this political order was lost in other regions as a result

of the Mongol conquest, but in Novgorod, due to its geographical location, it had time to evolve into a complex government system, and was destroyed only after the republic was subordinated by Moscow.

The image of Novgorod was to undergo another transformation in the twentieth century. During the Soviet Union, the conception of a republican Novgorod or a communal *veche* as the ideal for the *aurea saecula* of Russian history was replaced by the concept of a primordial communist society, free from class struggles and relationships governed by money. Republican Novgorod, under the rule of rich boyars, was exiled from communist Eden. The Novgorod republic began to take on the attributes of a republic run by exploitative boyars who were only interested in protecting their own wealth. It came to be perceived as the “class instrument of major landowners—landowners who had created their own government, immediately begun to plunder reserves of communal land, turned this land into feudal estates, and denied both the urban and rural masses of Novgorod any and all liberties, all by increasingly severe means of exploitation.” From the Soviet point of view, there was no longer any reason to lament the fall of the republic of the exploiters of the people. “Modern Western historians,” wrote V. L. Yanin, “love to shed tears over this event [Novgorod’s loss of independence – *O.S.*]. According to them, the Asian despotism and tyranny of Moscow suppressed Novgorod’s democracy; a monarchy suppressed a republic; the shining progress of Novgorod’s development was replaced by the dark night of unconditional regression. And they have looked to the Russian democratic historians to find allies in these judgments, from Radishchev to Herzen.” In Yanin’s opinion, however, the fall of Novgorod was an expression of rebellion against the exploitation of the lower classes, who found support in the princes of Moscow. And the Novgorod *veche*, in Yanin’s opinion, bore the unmistakable quality of class suppression. According to him, its members were, for the most part, wealthy landowners, especially nobles. “The concept of a populous urban *veche*,” wrote Yanin, “that included the participation of all the free people of Novgorod, is entirely incorrect.” However, “the highly creative activity of the masses” was evident, according to Yanin, “in the *veche* assemblies of Konchansk and Ulichansk, which can be genetically traced back to ancient *veche* assemblies. However, these assemblies served as a means for the boyars to incite struggles for political power. The political fervor incited at these assemblies were conducted through the very channels desired by the boyars.”

Novgorod was not invoked in its old self-destructive guises during the Soviet period—guises of a land of the free, or the idyllic ancient *veche*. New aspects of the history of Novgorod began to surface. The theme of the patriotic struggle of the Russian people against crusaders and invaders gained popularity. In Eisenstein's film *Alexander Nevsky*, the clothing of the Novgorod strongly recalls the attire of the Red Army soldiers, while the battle with the crusaders serves as a prototype of the struggle against Fascist Germany. After the Second World War, the restoration of architectural monuments began to garner attention, and Novgorod excavations became a site for Soviet archeologists to participate in the patriotic education of Soviet youth.

Modern Russia witnessed a turn back to the conception of democracy as anarchy and lack of political order. This understanding of history took Novgorod as its point of origin, and came to a head during the crisis of the 1990s.

The image of ancient Novgorod completed its circle of transformations and returned with only a few changes to the form that had taken shape during the Enlightenment. It appears that the Enlightenment laid the foundations for the double nature of conceptions of the republican tradition in Rus'. So let us more carefully consider the discourse on the republican tradition during the Enlightenment.

The political theories of Charles Louis Montesquieu (1689-1755), which in the Russian imagination became a distorted version of enlightened absolutism, served as the impetus for Novgorod's mythology in the eighteenth century. In his book *The Spirit of the Laws* [De l'ésprit des lois, 1748], Montesquieu presented the Greek historian Polybius's (201-12 BCE) concept of the separation of powers anew. Considering the various forms of government (monarchy, aristocracy, democracy) and the disadvantages of each, Polybius noted a tendency among all forms of government to degenerate: from monarchy to despotism, from aristocracy to oligarchy, and from democracy into ochlocracy, or mob rule. According to Polybius, this tendency results in anacylosis, or the circulation of government; only a government that combines monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy will reach perfection, so that each kind of authority can check the others.

In Montesquieu's presentation of Polybius's theory of mixed rule, he proposed replacing the balance between monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy with a balance between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. And it was in this form that Polybius's theory was borrowed by the founding fathers of the United States of America. In Russia, Catherine II used Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* in her political writings, but in a rather distorted form. Article 294 of Catherine's *Instruction* (1767) was taken in large part from Montesquieu, but failed to express the proper ideas of the French philosopher. Instead, monarchy was heralded as the ideal form of rule, and the separation of powers was qualified by the provision that all institutions of the empire should exist as "channels through which flows the power of the Emperor," the Emperor being "the source of all state and civic power." Not only did Catherine refuse Montesquieu's proposed limits on monarchical power, she also considered it important to specify the particular danger involved in "breaking up the power." "A large state," she claimed in the *Instruction*, "requires autocratic power, so that speed in legislative decisions can compensate for tardiness due to great distance. This is why every other form of rule would not only be harmful to Russia, but would ruin her."

The same distortion of Montesquieu was repeated in the works of court historian Prince Shcherbatov. Following the Empress's lead, Shcherbatov neglected to consider the anacyclosis predicted by Polybius and Montesquieu, claiming instead that monarchy was the only correct or even possible form of government in Russia. Meanwhile, Prince Shcherbatov had no problem reiterating Montesquieu's criticism of republican rule, nor his theory of the degeneration of democratic government—which, according to Montesquieu, tended to weaken and deteriorate due to moral decline, as the citizens became "infected with greed," their hearts "seized by ambition." But if Polybius found that the most obvious natural form of government was monarchy (the rule of the strong), then for Shcherbatov it was, at least in Russia, democracy. His reason for this was a tale found in a chronicle about the invitation to rule extended by the Novgorodians to the Varangians:

[Въ времена же Кыева и Щека и Хорива новгородстии людие, рекомии Словени, и Кривици и Меря: Словенѣ свою волость имѣли, а Кривици свою, а Мере свою; кождо своимъ родомъ владыше; а Чюдъ своимъ родом; и дань даяху Варягомъ от мужа по бѣлѣи вѣверици; а иже бяху у них, то ти насилье дѣяху Словеномъ, Кривичемъ и Мерямъ и Чюди. И вѣсташа Словенѣ и Кривици и Меря и Чюдъ на Варягы, и изгнаша я за море; и начаша владѣти сами собѣ и города ставити. И вѣсташа сами на ся воеватъ, и бысть межю ими рать велика и усобица, и вѣсташа град на град, и не бѣше в нихъ правды. И рѣша к себѣ: «князя поищемъ, иже бы владѣлъ нами и рядилъ ны по праву». Идоша за море к Варягомъ и ркоша: «земля наша велика и обилна, а наряда у

нас нѣту; да поидѣте к намъ княжить и владѣть нами». [emphasis mine. –O.S.] ]

Despite the fact that this episode treats the temporary weakening of royal Varangian control over tribes comprised of a population contemporary with the chronicler of the Novgorod state, Shcherbatov recounts the history of ancient Novgorod in the following way: “This city was ruled by the people, and so fell into the disorder that generally accompanies democracies, and so came to be conquered by Varangians.” According to Shcherbatov, the Novgorodians drove the Varangians out over the sea, and subsequently, upon inviting the Varangian princes back to reign, “did not grant them unlimited power, but merely entrusted them with protecting the borders from enemy attacks.” Rurik, upon arriving in Novgorod to reign, “transgressed the boundaries of power voluntarily handed to him, and oppressed the freedom-loving people,” which effectively caused the uprising of the Novgorodian Vadim, who perished “at the hand of Rurik himself.” Shcherbatov neatly explained Ivan III’s conquest of Novgorod at the end of the fifteenth century by citing Montesquieu’s theory of moral decline.

The scheme proposed by Catherine II and Prince Shcherbatov set the tone for all subsequent historiography of Novgorod. Novgorod history would be ever after viewed through the lens of Polybius and Montesquieu’s anacyclosis, but in a distorted and frozen form: a democracy that had outlived its era, deteriorating due to the evils of mob rule, colliding with a monarchy at the peak of its power. Historians and journalists have been particularly interested in two narratives from Novgorod’s history: the conflict between Rurik and Vadim (or more broadly, the Novgorodians inviting the Varangian princes to rule in the ninth century), and the conflict between Ivan III and Marfa Posadnitsa (or the Great Prince’s conquest of Novgorod in the fifteenth century). In these narratives, the famous Novgorod “freedom” is portrayed as wild, uncultivated, conducive to riots and deaths, as opposed to the orderly, regulatory rule of the monarch.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, Lomonosov proposed that the well-organized autocratic power of the monarch be extolled in one of the paintings decorating the capital buildings. The painting, “Bringing Novgorod Under Autocracy,” was to depict the Great Prince on horseback in the Novgorod square, right in front of the St. Sophia cathedral, after a victorious entry into the city. The conquest of Novgorod is portrayed as a symbol of the freedom of Novgorod under the Great Prince. The Yaroslav letters are confiscated, the *veche* bell has fallen from the belfry, Marfa Posadnitsa’s hands are tied behind her back. The faces of the people are depicted with angst combined with joy. The Moscow boyars, seated on horseback, do not attempt to hide their pleasure. The painting was to celebrate the strengthening of the Russian state, in the context of which the conquest of Novgorod was perceived as a kind of domestication of space, comparable to the destruction of the crusaders’ castle.

Catherine herself wrote two theatrical plays on themes from the history of Novgorod. The basis for the first play, “Boeslavich the Novgorod Bogatyr” (1786), was V. A. Levshin’s version of the folk epic about the Novgorod bogatyr Vasily Buslaevich. In Levshin’s version, the battle between the bogatyr and the Novgorodians becomes the conquest of Novgorod by the monarch. The son of a widowed princess, Vasily strikes “with all the force of the Novgorodians” and defeats Novgorod alone. The Novgorodians ask him to rule them, and submit to him. Catherine’s second play, “The Life of Rurik,” was written under the influence of Ya. V. Knyazhnin’s play “Titus Mercy” (1786). In this play, the Roman emperor Titus discovers a conspiracy his friends have organized against him. Rather than punish the conspirators, Titus forgives them. Knyazhnin calls Titus “father of the fatherland,” suggesting by proxy that Catherine II was, in 1767, the “mother of the fatherland.” Catherine decided to borrow the plot

of the play, shifting the story onto Russian history. She gave Rurik Titus's role, who graciously pardons Vadim for his rebellion. At the end of the play Vadim falls onto his knees before Rurik, declaring, "I am your faithful servant forever."

In short, projecting Montesquieu onto Russian history has generated three myths:

- The myth that democratic rule was originally inherent to Russian soil (but not monarchy, and not Polybius's anacyclosis);
- The myth that Novgorod was a republic, which in turn gave rise to widespread distrust of Novgorod's political system (Montesquieu and Polybius's distrust of the absolute power of monarchy was never adopted);
- The myths that the conflicts between Rurik and Vadim, as well as between Ivan III and Marfa Posadnitsa, were symbols of the triumph of monarchy over decrepit democracy (only here was the concept of anacyclosis borrowed from Polybius and Montesquieu).

Both identifying Novgorod as a republic and dating Novgorod's liberties back to antiquity have played a cruel joke on the perception of Novgorod's political system in historiography. This has meant that historians, citing the shortcomings of democratic rule, have been able to discredit Novgorod's political system, effectively devaluing research on the features of the city's political life, and precluding Russians from their own political and historical heritage. Thanks to the work of eighteenth-century historians, Novgorod and its inhabitants acquired several negative characteristics in the popular imagination: "obstinacy," "unruliness," "the rage of the Novgorodians," their "pride," their "contrariness," "variability," "madness," "turmoil."

However, the ideology of the empress, ignoring Polybius's warnings that monarchy would degenerate into despotism, could not withstand the criticism *de la république des lettres*. At least, not the criticism of the French.

On the orders of the Paris Academy of Sciences, Jean Chappe d'Auteroche (1722-1769) was sent to Siberia in 1761 to observe the passage of Venus across the sun. During his travels, he sharply criticized Russia for ruling in the spirit of servility and slavery. The empress hastened to respond to the criticism. In 1770, a book came out in Amsterdam. It was called *Antidote, or an examination of the bad (albeit nicely published) book called "Voyages in Siberia,"* and was attributed to Catherine the Great. The book denied d'Auteroche's writings word for word.

It appears that one part of the empress's ideological program, which included a denunciation of the myths about Russian barbarism, was to invite Diderot's friend Pierre-Charles Levesque to write a history of Russia. Catherine was fully justified in placing her hopes on the enlightened Frenchman. Levesque not only proclaimed the Russians descendants of Troy, but also concluded that the Russian folk had been a free people from time immemorial. "It is commonly thought," wrote Levesque in his *History of Russia*, "that Peter saw only wilderness around him, and this wilderness was inhabited by wild animals, and from these animals he fashioned people." "Nowhere in the ancient chronicles is it mentioned that Russia was ever under the yoke of despotism." However, to prove the early freedom of the Russian people, Levesque used the example of the Republic of Novgorod, which was known from the works of Prince Shcherbatov. "It is wrong to assume that the Russian people were long under the yoke of slavery. They were a free people. In Novgorod, citizens had the right to assemble to discuss their own interests." "This country, now ruled by absolute monarchy, once produced a flourishing republic."

Thus, according to the image proposed by the French historian, the Russian people were once free, equal, intolerant of despotism, subordinate only to the law. However, over

time, succumbing to autocratic tyrants, the Russian people lost their freedom and fell into a humiliating slavery. According to Levesque, the enlightened empress of Russia should endeavor to return Russia to its original freedom.

Levesque's book came out in 1782 to great success. It appeared in many well-known personal libraries, and is even mentioned in one of the versions of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, the encyclopedia of Russian life. The newly proposed myth of Russia's former freedom, of which republican Novgorod was a symbol, not only praised Catherine's liberal ideas, but also worked to absolve Russia from its myth of "backwardness," as well as its failure to abolish serfdom, which western Europe understood as slavery.

However, the French Revolution in 1789—and especially the 1793 execution of constitutional monarch Louis XVI—contributed to the end of the romance between the enlightened empress and the French philosophers. Catherine denounced Levesque and his coauthor Leclerc as "goats," and firmly maintained the promotion of autocracy.

However, the myth of Russia's freedom—with democratic Novgorod as its emblem—was seed that fell on fertile soil, and it produced an abundant harvest in Russian literature. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the criticisms of autocracy led to the widespread perception of Novgorod as a symbol of freedom, a democracy that opposed the tyranny of autocracy. Vadim, dead by the hand of a tyrant, defender of liberty, became a folk hero.

In Knyazhnin's 1789 historical tragedy, "Vadim of Novgorod," Vadim, defender of Novgorodian freedom, mourns the servile circumstances of his countrymen:

O Novgorod! What were you once and what have you become? [...]  
And I stand, powerless from grief,  
Seeing Novgorod shackled, hating life...  
You shudder? Impossible not to tremble,  
When the depths of slavery dare to look  
Upon the heights of the fatherland! [...]

What is here? Nobles have lost their freedom;  
In base timidity they bow before the tsar;  
They kiss the yoke under his sceptre.

Knyazhnin praised Novgorod as a powerful lord of the north, subject not to tsars but to one common law:

All the strength of the North is useless before him,  
His might knows no foe,  
Equal to the terrible might of the gods.

In our sacred public square,  
The Novgorod people, sublime with freedom,  
Subservient only to laws and gods,  
Gave statutes to all nations.

And behold the glorious, sacred palaces,  
Where our lords, great as gods,  
But humble forever and lesser than the citizens,

Built firm freedom on the native land,  
In the name of the people, who revered,  
And served the laws of trembling tsars.

Knyazhnin's play followed the same plot proposed by Catherine herself. The struggle between Vadim and Rurik was understood as the struggle between democracy and monarchy. At the end of the play, Vadim is struck by Rurik, and his daughter, in love with Rurik, commits suicide. The people fall to their knees and beg Rurik to rule them. However, this did not save the playwright: the tragedy was already onstage when the French Revolution broke out.

P. A. Plavilshchikov was cast in the role of Vadim. Fear inspired him to quickly create his own version of the play, which he called not "Vadim," after the "rebel," but "Vseslav" (1791), and in 1816 he changed it again to "Rurik." The updated version of the tragedy features a wicked, cruel, envious Vadim, who, upon realizing that Rurik's autocracy is inherently good, incites the desire for dark, wild anarchy amongst the Novgorodians. Knyazhnin died in 1791 as a result of torture and interrogation at the hands of Catherine's "personal executioner," Secret Chancellery head Sheshkovsky.

Knyazhnin's tragedy was published two years after his death (in 1793, in "Russian Theater," 39), only to be burned by the court that year in Alexander Square, in St. Petersburg. The play was received harshly by the public: critics A. I. Klushin, N. E. Struisky, and M. M. Kheraskov all condemned it. In the 1793 "St. Petersburg Mercury," the tragedy was criticized for its plot and its language, but most of all for the representation of Vadim. "His attempts to bring the Novgorodians back to freedom," wrote Klushin, "after voluntarily handing the power to rule and the crown over to Rurik—were these attempts not senseless? His desire to draw them back into their former anarchic state—was this desire not the most brutal of all evils? His decision to overthrow Rurik—was this not so that he himself could rule the republic? And then, having become the people's ideal, to throw them into the painful chains of slavery?"

Now the Russian people could only sigh—both for the former freedom of Novgorod, as well as for their own current political freedom. "O Novgorod! What were you once and what have you become?" lamented Knyazhnin, and he was right. Free Novgorod was now nothing more than an impossible dream. All that remained was to wander the ruins of the city, mourning the great past.

Sighs for the former might of the republic are described in Radishchev's (1790) "Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow." One chapter of this work is devoted to Novgorod. Radishchev's discussion of the former greatness of Novgorod became a stereotype in Russian literature.

A passing stranger sighs in vain, lamenting that nothing remains of the ancient city:

[«Сказывают, что все сии монастыри, даже и на пятнадцать верст расстоянием от города находящиеся, заключались в оном; что из стен его могло выходить до ста тысяч войска. Известно по летописям, что Новгород имел народное правление. Хотя у их были князья, но мало имели власти. Вся сила правления заключалась в посадниках и тысяцких. Народ в собрании своем на вече был истинный государь. Область Новгородская простиралась на севере даже за Волгу. Сие вольное государство стояло в Ганзейском союзе. Старинная речь: кто может стать против Бога и великого Новагорода – служить может доказательством его могущества. Торговля была причиною его возвышения. Внутренние несогласия и хищный сосед совершили его падение.

На мосту вышел я из кибитки моей, дабы насладиться зрелищем течения Волхова. Не

можно было, чтобы не пришел мне на память поступок царя Ивана Васильевича по взятии Новгорода. (...) Но какое он имел право свирепствовать против них; какое он имел право присвоить Новгород? То ли, что первые великие князья российские жили в сем городе? Или что он писался царем всея Руси? Или что новгородцы были славенского племени? Но на что право, когда действует сила? Может ли оно существовать, когда решение запечатлется кровию народов? Может ли существовать право, когда нет силы на приведение его в действительность? Много было писано о праве народов; нередко имеют на него ссылку; но законоучители не помышляли, может ли быть между народами судия. Когда возникают между ими вражды, когда ненависть или корысть устремляет их друг на друга, судия их есть меч. Кто пал мертв или обезоружен, тот и виновен; повинуется непрекословно сему решению, и апелляции на оное нет (...) Нужда, желание безопасности и сохранности созидают царства; разрушают их несогласие, ухищрение и сила (...)

*Из летописи новгородской*

Новгородцы с великим князем Ярославом Ярославичем вели войну и заключили письменное примирение. Новгородцы сочинили письмо для защищения своих вольностей и утвердили оное пятидесятью осьмью печатями. Новгородцы запретили у себя обращение чеканной монеты, введенной татарами в обращение. Новгород в 1420 году начал бить свою монету. Новгород стоял в Ганзейском союзе. В Новгороде был колокол, по звону которого народ собирался на вече для рассуждения о вещах общественных. Царь Иван письмо и колокол у новгородцев отнял. Потом в 1500 году – в 1600 году – в 1700 году – году – году Новгород стоял на прежнем месте» [Радищев А. Н. 1938. С. 262263].]

Perhaps it was Radishchev's description of a curious stranger wandering around the ruins of Novgorod, looking for the meeting spot of the ancient *veche*, that Karamzin had in mind when he penned his character Marfa Posadnitsa, the heroine of his eponymous 1803 novel. "In vain does the curious stranger search among the sad ruins for the place where the *veche* assembled, the place where Yaroslav's house stood with the marble image of Vadim: no, no one will show him these places. He will contemplate and sadly say, 'Here once was Novgorod!'"

In *Marfa Posadnitsa*, Karamzin returns to Catherine's conception of Novgorod's freedom as a manifestation of barbarism. "The wild folk love independence, the wise folk love order, but there is no order without autocracy." Novgorod's freedom seemed to Karamzin the cause of endless internal strife and urban political weakness. The fall of the republic demonstrated, in the spirit of Montesquieu, the greed and moral decline inherent in democracy. "Your ancestors wanted to rule themselves, and they were the victims of warring neighbors, or even brutal internal civil wars." "Self-interest and greed have blinded you," a messenger of the Moscow prince accuses the Novgorodians. "Liberty! But you are also enslaved... You obey, because all people must obey, but not Rurik's sacred blood—no, you obey rich merchants. Oh, the shame!" And again, greed is also the cause of the fall in Karamzin's rendition of Marfa Posadnitsa's prophecy: "But if Ioann speaks the truth, if vile greed has indeed possessed the souls of the Novgorodians, if we love treasures and bliss more than virtue and glory, then our liberties will soon reach their final hour, and the *veche* bell, the ancient voice of our freedom, will soon fall from the belfry—and Yaroslav will be silenced forever!" "Your glory will fade, great city, your wide streets will become overgrown with grass, your crowds will become deserted, and your splendor, disappearing forever, will become a folk fable." For Karamzin, only autocracy could save Novgorod: the princes "reconciled the internal



strife” of the Novgorodians, “soothing and exalting” their city. The citizens themselves “cursed their disastrous freedom and blessed their power of their savior.”

And yet, at the end of the eighteenth century, ancient Novgorod began once again to be perceived as a historical period when the Russian people were free and equal, intolerant of despotism, subordinate only to the law. The liberties of Novgorod were idealized, conceptualized through ancient clichés, and liberal golden age writers subsequently granted Novgorod the role of an exemplary period in Russian history.

In Dmitry Ivanov’s 1808 painting, “Theodosy Boretsky gives Ratmir's sword to Miroslav, chief of Novgorodians and Marfa’s selected husband for her daughter Xenia,” the heroes of the Novgorod Republic are depicted based on heroes of the Roman Republic (cf. Jacques-Louis David’s 1784 “Oath of the Horatii,” in which the father presents his sons with swords).

The images of the Novgorod Republic, the Novgorod *veche*, the *veche* bell, Vadim, and Marfa Posadnitsa were also used as symbols for the call to fight for freedom. Decembrist poet Vladimir Raevsky (1795-1872), after his arrested in 1822, wrote in his prison letters:

My friends, it is time! It is time to call  
The age from its dark midnight glory,  
The spirit and morals from the tsar-folk,  
And those sacred times  
When our *veche* thundered,  
And from afar it crushed  
The shoulders of arrogant tsars.

The Decembrists cited republican Novgorod and Pskov as examples of the ideal political system. “Originally, princely power was limited,” wrote N. M. Muravyov, referring to the republican political order of Novgorod, “as the *veche* possessed the highest power. The question, then: who established autocratic rule? And the answer: no one. Our fathers said, look for a prince who would govern by law, not by tyranny or arbitrary whims. But little by little, the deceptive rulers usurped unlimited power, eventually coming to imitate the Tatar Khan and the Sultan of Turkey...”. M. S. Lunin wrote that republican Novgorod and Pskov were the “best example of the Russian people’s capacity for self-government.” The Moscow princes, though they sought to rule by autocracy, also had to consider the opinion of the people and recognize their right to participate in government.

The narrative of the conflict between democracy and monarchy became extremely popular. Suffice to say that in Russian literature there are at least seven works entitled *Marfa Posadnitsa* (N. M. Karamzin, F. F. Ivanov, M. P. Pogodin, K. F. Ryleev, P. I. Sumarokov, S. A. Esenin, D. M. Balashev) and at least five *Vadims* (V. A. Zhukovsky, Ya. B. Knyazhnin, A. S. Pushkin, K. F. Ryleev, A. S. Khomyakov). Not to mention the countless other variations on the same theme. In Lermontov's poem “The Last Son of Liberty,” the death of Vadim is both a call to and fight for freedom:

[«Ужель мы только будем петь,  
Иль с безнадежием немом  
На стыд отечества глядеть,  
Друзья мои? – спросил Вадим. –  
Клянусь, великий Чернобог,  
И в первый и в последний раз:

Не буду у варяжских ног.  
 Иль он, иль я: один из нас  
 Падет! в пример другим падет! (...)  
 Он пал в крови, и пал один —  
 Последний вольный славянин! ]

In Esenin's 1914 "Marfa Posadnitsa," the conquest of Novgorod by the Moscow prince is portrayed as a deal with the devil:

[Не чернец беседует с Господом в затворе –  
 Царь московский антихриста вызывает:  
 "Ой, Виельзевуле, горе мое, горе,  
 Новгород мне вольный ног не лобызает!"

Вылез из запечья сатана гадюкой,  
 В пучеглазых бельмах исчаведье ада.  
 "Побожися душу выдать мне порукой,  
 Иначе не будет с Новгородом слада!"

Вынул он бумаги – облака клоч,  
 Дал ему перо – от молнии стрелу.  
 Чиркнул царь кинжалищем локоток,  
 Расчеркнулся и зажал руку в полу]

The *veche* bell became a special theme in Russian literature. In Lermontov's 1838 poem "Poet," the *veche* bell is compared to the voice of the poet: "It sounded like the bell in the *veche* tower from the days of celebrations and poor folk," and these lines grew wings. "The Bell" was the name of the first revolutionary Russian newspaper published by A. I. Herzen and N. P. Ogarev in exile from 1857-1867 (after 1868 it was published as "Kolokol," or "La cloche"). The motto of the newspaper was "Vivos voco," taken from the epigraph to Schiller's 1799 "Song of the Bell": "Vivos voco. Mortuos plango. Fulgura frango." ("I call the living. I mourn the dead. I shatter lightning.") The 1862 addendum to the paper was called "The General *Veche*."

The theme of Novgorod's liberty became an integral part of Russian culture. Symbols of free Novgorod have been used in the works of F. F. Ivanov (1777-1816), G. R. Derzhavin (1743-1816), A. F. Malinovsky (1762-1840), V. A. Zhukovsky (1783-1852), P. I. Pestel (1793-1826), A. A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky (1797-1837), K. F. Ryleev (1795-1826), V. F. Raevsky (1795-1872), W. K. Küchelbecker (1797-1846), N. M. Yazykov (1803-1847), D. V. Venivitinov (1805-1827), A. I. Podolinsky (1806-1886), V. G. Belinsky (1811-1848), A. I. Herzen (1812-1870), T. P. Passek (1810-1889), E. I. Guber (1814-1847), N. P. Ogaryov (1813-1877), Ap. A. Grigoriev (1822-1864), M. L. Mikhailov (1829-1865), A. K. Tolstoy (1817-1875), N. A. Dobrolyubov (1836-1861), N. V. Shchlgunov (1824-1892), and G. I. Uspensky (1843-1902). The image of the *veche* republic as a call to fight for freedom was used in the twentieth-century military prose of V. A. Rozhdestvensky (1895-1977; "Lord Novgorod the Great," "Volkhov Winter," "Tanks in Novgorod").

However, it appears that the discourse on the Novgorod Republic developed during the Enlightenment prevented examination of the actual political premises for the tradition of the republic on Russian soil, effectively shutting the door to scholarly study of the topic for a long time. The Greek historian Polybius, together with French enlightenment philosopher

Montesquieu, played a great role in this process, as Russian thinkers distorted their conception of cyclical forms of government, and used this distortion to understand the republican tradition. From Polybius's theory, the Russian imagination latched onto the idea of the decline of democracy into mob rule. Montesquieu's warnings that royal power should be checked went unnoticed. He had more success in his suggestion that the oldest natural form of government was not monarchy (rule of the strong), but democracy (rule of the people).