

V. L. Ianin and the History of Novgorod

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An historian of early Russian history faces many methodological problems, not the least of which is the paucity of sources for the Kievan and Mongol periods. Because of the dearth of material, historians of the medieval Russian town, such as M. N. Tikhomirov and A. M. Sakharov, have generally presented a static conceptualization of urban society, thereby obscuring the dynamic processes and nuances of historical development. Despite the many studies of Novgorod, one can fairly state that historians have often described fourteenth and fifteenth-century Novgorod as though it were virtually unchanged since 1136, when the town declared its independence from Kiev. While recognizing the importance of the *Sovet gospod* (Council of Lords) and *posadnik* (mayor), some historians have nevertheless insisted that the *veche* (assembly) was the sovereign body of the republic. Its meetings were open to the town's citizens, and though the *veche* at times degenerated into brawls, no prince or *posadnik* could effectively govern without its concurrence. Indeed, George Vernadsky characterized Novgorod as a democratic republic, somewhat reminiscent of the Greek polis, while Tikhomirov viewed Novgorod's political traditions as similar to those of the urban communes of medieval Europe.

In 1961 V. N. Bernadsky published an important study on fifteenth-century Novgorod (*Novgorod i Novgorodskaiia zemlia v XV veke*), which systematically analyzed Novgorodian society and underscored the political and economic power exercised by the boyars over the republic's political institutions. One year later V. L. Ianin published his work on the Novgorodian *posadniki*, and within the last four years he has written a two-volume study on old Russian seals and two articles (one of which is coauthored with M. Kh. Aleshkovsky).¹ These latter studies complement Ianin's earlier work, and together they have completely altered the traditional conception of Novgorodian political history.

1. V. L. Ianin, *Novgorodskie posadniki* (Moscow, 1962); *Aktovye pečati Drevnei Rusi X-XV vv.*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1970); "Problemy sotsial'noi organizatsii Novgorodskii respublikii," *Istoriia SSSR*, 1970, no. 1, pp. 44-54; Ianin and M. Kh. Aleshkovsky, "Proiskhozhdenie Novgoroda (k postanovke problemy)," *Istoriia SSSR*, 1971, no. 2, pp. 32-61.

Originally the *posadniki* were drawn from the prince's retinue (*druzhina*) and represented the authority of the grand prince of Kiev. But during the first administration of Mstislav Monomakh (1088–94) the *posadniki* were increasingly chosen from the Novgorodian boyars, thus initiating a process of dual power or two secular authorities within the town. In 1126 the *veche* began to select the *posadnik*, and ten years later the town obtained its independence from Kiev. By 1156 Novgorod elected its bishop, and toward the end of the twelfth century it also elected the *tysiatskii* (chiliarch).

However, Ianin has demonstrated that the prince still retained important powers during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The prince, of course, provided military leadership, but he also executed the policies of the *posadnik* and *veche*, exercised judicial functions, and played an important role in the authorization of transactions of property (*Aktovye pečati*, vol. 1, p. 159). According to Ianin, Novgorod's administration in this period rested upon two systems: the *posadnichestvo*, which contained the town boroughs (*kontsy*) and their subdivision into streets (*ulitsy*), and the princely apparatus, which utilized the hundred (*sto*) organization. The election of the *tysiatskii* was a crucial step in freeing the urban administration from princely interference, and Ianin believes that Novgorod created its own organization to parallel that of the prince's *tysiatskii*, although he admits the possibility that the princely *tysiatskii* may have simply been brought under the control of the *veche* (*Novgorodskie posadniki*, p. 113).

Relations between the prince and *veche* were often stormy, and a further complication of Novgorodian politics was the continual internecine struggle among the boyars for the office of *posadnik*. Ianin's analysis of the political instability of the *posadnichestvo* in the last quarter of the twelfth century, the revolt of 1207, and the antiprincely movements of the 1220s and 1230s indicate that during the 1220s Novgorod reached an understanding with its princes concerning the liberties of the republic. The Novgorodian princes had to pledge their oath to uphold the "charters of Iaroslav" (*gramoty Iaroslava*), which were probably issued by Prince Iaroslav Vladimirovich (1182–99) (*Novgorodskie posadniki*, pp. 115, 136). Judging from the treaty between Novgorod and Grand Prince Iaroslav Iaroslavich of Tver in 1266, the charters limited the princely administration of the Novgorodian districts (*volosti*); nor could the prince purchase lands or establish tax-exempt settlements (*slobody*) in these areas. He could not unilaterally abrogate public or private transactions in Novgorod, and his hunting and fishing privileges were curtailed.²

The factional struggles of the boyars erupted in the turbulent events

2. S. N. Valk et al., eds., *Gramoty Velikogo Novgoroda i Pskova* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1949), no. 1, pp. 9–10.

from 1255 to 1259 between the “great” (*viatshie*) and the “less” (*menshie*) over the Mongol tribute. Unlike many historians, such as Tikhomirov, Ianin does not see this as a struggle between the boyars and the Novgorodian masses but as a conflict initiated by a group of lesser boyars who were unable to penetrate the boyar oligarchy. Many of those boyars who comprised the republic’s oligarchy in this period lived along Prusskaia Ulitsa (literally, Prussian Street) and remained staunch supporters of Alexander Nevsky. In all probability the *menshie* were the social nucleus of the class of Novgorodians known in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as the *zhit’i liudi*.

Novgorod’s bitter conflicts with Alexander Nevsky and Iaroslav Iaroslavich were nothing less than the town’s attempt to prevent the full restoration of princely power, but by the 1290s the outcome was fundamentally decided. The period of the 1290s is the great watershed of the republic’s assertion of independent urban rule. Western sources already note the existence of an urban council (*den herran Rad*) in Novgorod in 1292, which served as the prototype of the fifteenth-century Council of Lords. Each of the five boroughs elected a life member to the council, one of whom was selected annually by the general *veche* as *posadnik* of the republic (*Novgorodskie posadniki*, p. 170). But the town was still torn by boyar factions from Prusskaia Ulitsa (representing the Liudin and Zagorodsky boroughs), and those from Nerevsky, Plotnitsky, and Slavensky boroughs. The extant Novgorodian seals reflect the fundamental changes which occurred in Novgorod: the establishment of Novgorod’s three major courts (joint court of the prince or his *namestnik* [lieutenant] and *posadnik*, the merchant court of the *tysiatskii* and two merchant elders, and the court of the archbishop), and the gradual extension of the archbishopric’s administration. Although the evidence is still scanty, Ianin has demonstrated that the archbishop was not simply the titular head of the republic, but exercised juridical and administrative powers in the Novgorodian *piatiny* (provinces). In addition, the church, through its monasteries, was connected in some manner to the administration of the borough; thus Novgorod was a complicated mixture of secular and ecclesiastical rule (*Aktovye pečati*, vol. 2, pp. 86–87, 110–11, 134–41).

The basis of political power of the Novgorodian boyars lay in their landed estates and their control of the administration of the boroughs. From 1316 to 1354 Prusskaia Ulitsa elected one *posadnik* to represent both the Liudin and Zagorodsky boroughs, while each of the other three boroughs elected one. However, in 1354 an attempt at reform was made. According to Ianin, the *posadnichestvo* now consisted of six *posadniki*: two from Prusskaia Ulitsa, two from the Slavensky borough, and one each from the Nerevsky and Plotnitsky boroughs. From among these six, a senior *posadnik* (*stepennyi posadnik*) was elected by the *veche* for one year. What is crucial about this

reform is that it was a result of the rebellion in 1350, when many boyar homes along Prusskaia Ulitsa were plundered and a whole new stratum of boyar families seized political control of the boroughs (*Novgorodskie posadniki*, pp. 199–201). These events coincided with an outbreak of the Black Death in Novgorod and Pskov, and it is quite possible that the plague facilitated the rapid shift in power among the boyar families. But Ianin pays little attention to the plague, as indeed do most Soviet historians.

But the reforms failed to solve the chronic political instability associated with the selection of the *stepennyi posadnik*. Thus by the second decade of the fifteenth century the number of *posadniki* had reached eighteen. After the rebellion of 1418 it increased to twenty-four, but by this time the Council of Lords had emerged as the basic administrative organ of the republic and the term of office of the *stepennyi posadnik* had been reduced to six months.

Ianin's fascinating study of the *posadnichestvo* still left unanswered the problem of the composition and functions of the *veche*. Nor did it fully explain the emergence of the borough administration. In Ianin's recent articles he has presented some striking answers to these questions. Ianin rejects the commonly held view that the 300 golden girdled men (CCC *guldene gordele* or 300 *zolotykh poiasakh*) mentioned in sources from Riga, dated 1331, refer to the number of men in the Council of Lords. Sources from the fifteenth century indicate a membership of only fifty, and since the *posadnichestvo* increased in that century, the figures would seem to contradict one another. It is known that the archbishop's palace (*granovitaia palata*), built in 1433, housed the meetings of the Council of Lords and can comfortably accommodate fifty to sixty men. This figure is in keeping with the expansion of the *posadnichestvo*. But then who were the 300 golden girdled men? Using the archeological studies of Zasurtsev and others, Ianin draws our attention to the fact that Novgorod was divided into numerous urban estates (*usad'by*), which he estimates to be between 300 and 400. It is the owners of these estates, primarily boyars and the *zhit'i liudi*, who were the golden girdled men and who controlled the borough and general town *veche* ("Problemy," pp. 49–51, 53; cf. *Aktovye pečati*, vol. 2, pp. 125–33, and "Proiskhozhdenie Novgoroda," pp. 58–59).

This conclusion fundamentally alters the general interpretation of the *veche* as a body composed of the free Novgorodian population. Ianin's description of Novgorod is not of a town inhabited primarily by merchants and artisans but of a town of wealthy boyars upon whose estates the urban craftsmen lived, usually behind closed walls (each estate was virtually a minor fortress) ("Proiskhozhdenie Novgoroda," p. 55). The craftsmen were economically dependent on the boyars for their homes and shops. They lacked—as did the merchants, despite their organization called the *Ivanskoe sto*—

protective guilds and were effectively barred from the government. In Ianin's opinion the Novgorodian boyars were adept in manipulating the discontents of the urban masses, and when the people rioted and forced a *veche* to be held with their participation, it always resulted in strengthening one boyar faction over another.

Ianin believes that the uniqueness of Novgorod's political institutions is traceable to the nature of the town's foundation, which was a federation of three tribes, with each tribe forming one of the town boroughs (thus Novgorod originally consisted of three boroughs): Slovene, who comprised the Slavensky borough; Meria (perhaps also the Chud), who formed the Nerevsky borough; and the Baltic Krivichi, who settled the Liudin borough along Prusskaia Ulitsa ("Proiskhozhdenie Novgoroda," pp. 42–55). Novgorod was founded not as a princely fortress or as a market for traders and craftsmen but as an administrative center for the surrounding tribes, where such matters as war and peace were discussed and the tribute was collected.

Ianin has been the only historian to make full use of the Novgorodian municipal seals, chronicles, land cadasters, and archeological discoveries to analyze the pattern of Novgorod's institutional development and the social tensions which forced the boyar oligarchy to permit new families into the government but without fundamentally altering the political and economic relations among the various social groups. Yet Ianin has generally underestimated the role of trade and its relation to the boyar economy. In the West many artisans also lived in homes and worked in shops owned (in this case) by merchants, but they still were able to play important political roles, particularly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. But the Western artisan was never able to free himself from his dependence on merchant capital, and it is this economic relation between the Novgorodian boyars, merchants, and craftsmen that remains unclear in Ianin's work. Nor does he effectively repudiate Tikhomirov's thesis that the towns of Kievan Rus' arose as a response to the needs of rural handicrafts, or for that matter Kliuchevsky's insistence on the importance of trade.

Ianin's studies make it clear that the historian must avoid any attempt to treat Novgorod, and for that matter the other Russian towns of the Kievan and Mongol periods, as if they belonged to the medieval urban West. This fault seriously mars the otherwise fine work of Tikhomirov. Not only was Novgorod a boyar republic which lacked a guild structure, but its population, like those in the towns of northeast Russia, contained slaves and cannot be described as an island of freedom in a sea of serfdom, a characterization which is often made of the Western medieval town. The Western proverb, *Stadtluft macht frei*, is not applicable to the Russian towns. Furthermore, the standard models of urban development in the West, particularly the studies of Henri

Pirenne and Max Weber, describe the principles of Western urban law and government within the general context of feudalism, but in Russia the peasantry were not enserfed; thus in the extent of personal liberty the Russian town offered no startling contrast to the countryside. Neither is it possible to discuss the juridical position of the Russian town and its inhabitants apart from the princely practice of bequeathing towns as part of a family's patrimony (*votchina*).

Although Ianin does not discuss these questions fully, he has nevertheless contributed much to our understanding of Novgorod's institutions. What we still lack is a comprehensive study of Novgorod which would make use of the important studies of the town published in the last two decades.

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AKTOVYE PECHATI DREVNEI RUSI X–XV vv. By *V. I. Ianin*. 2 vols. Moscow: "Nauka," 1970. Vol. 1: 326 pp. 2.29 rubles. Vol. 2: 367 pp. 2.97 rubles.

This monograph by Valentin Lavrentievich Ianin is the first comprehensive study and collection of Old Russian seals in the last forty years. It contains a systematic exposition of their history from the tenth to the fifteenth century, although from the second quarter of the thirteenth to the fifteenth (vol. 2) the subject of investigation is limited to the seals of Novgorod, and the author leaves as a task for the future and the theme of a third volume of the study the seals of the other regions of Rus'—Pskov, Smolensk, Polotsk, Moscow (see vol. 1, p. 11). Each volume is divided into two approximately equal parts—text and appendix. In the latter are published virtually all seals examined in the text. The only exceptions are isolated bullas which "have not been published, have not been preserved, or for certain reasons were not accessible for study at first hand" (vol. 2, p. 126; cf. pp. 122, 133, 141).

Ianin's book belongs to that ideal type of monograph dealing with the study of sources in which the reader finds, along with the study, not only publication in the strict sense (photographs) but also archeographosphragistic description and reconstruction (tracings) of the examples. According to the author, 1,542 bullas, imprinted with 804 pairs of matrices (see vol. 2, p. 239), are reproduced.

The method of study of seals which Ianin uses derives from the principle, established in sphragistics, of isolation of certain groups of seals which share

specific features. Within large groups may be discerned subgroups based on the further differentiation of common characteristics. N. P. Likhachev has already identified certain groups of Old Russian seals; Ianin has added several. The whole classification of seals according to types acquires in his work the character of a strict system.

Beginning with establishment of specific features of each group and subgroup and proceeding to the explanation of the origin of individual seals, the author substantially broadens the range of sources he studies. In the book we find very fruitful comparisons of seals with coins and other objects bearing pictorial descriptions and also with written sources (chronicles, documents). Ianin continues the work of re-dating Novgorod documents, begun by him on a large scale in *Novgorodskie posadniki* (1962) and a series of articles.

The analysis of the wide range of sources is directed toward a precise objective: to give the truest possible attribution and dating to the seal in question. After reaching this kind of synthesis, Ianin moves to a synthesis of an historical kind, drawing conclusions concerning which particular institution of political power a bulla of a given group or subgroup belongs to. The historical synthesis is carried further as the author, on the basis of observations regarding chiefly sphragistic material, examines the history of the governmental institution in question as a whole, indicates a new periodization of its development, and clarifies the significance of pivotal moments in its story. The author emerges as a brilliant master of attributions, and his identification of pagan and Christian names of princes, urban officials, and other personages is a major contribution to historical science. However, Ianin's references to the measurements of seals, their technical peculiarities, the character of the depiction of one saint or other, types of inscriptions and forms of letters, and so forth—all these are given incidentally in the course of making identifications and produce the impression of observations that are somewhat disjointed.

The great merit of the book lies in the fact that the author combines sharp critical comment (including disproof of his own previous conclusions) and an extremely constructive manner of inquiry with the recognition of a whole series of unclear points and the admission of the possibility of several different solutions of one and the same controversial question, insufficiently illuminated by the evidence.

In the category of princely seals Ianin identifies several types, appearing consecutively or sometimes concurrently. Of greatest significance for Ianin's general conception is the identification of an "archaic" type, permitting us to reject Byzantine sources of Russian princely sphragistics and to push the latter further back in time, recognizing the earliest bulla to be the seal of Sviatoslav Igorevich (d. 972), though previously the author considered the

most ancient seal to be that of Sviatoslav's grandson, Iziaslav Vladimirovich, who died in 1001.

The "archaic" type of princely bulla is depicted as unitary; in practice it is represented by a series of not always closely related seals and lacks any common positive feature, for not one out of the four peculiarities which Ianin assigns to it (vol. 1, p. 36) is observable on all seals belonging to this "type." It is identified rather on the basis of a general negative feature—the absence of a horizontal Greek inscription of several lines, peculiar to the "Greco-Russian" type of seals. The author categorically refers to an original pre-Christian emblematic of bullas of the "archaic type," although a representation of the cross is found on the seal of Sviatoslav (reverse side) and on that of Iziaslav (over the middle projection of the princely symbol).

The identification of subtypes which depict a horseman with a crown and a mounted falconer leads to conclusions of cardinal importance and provides a basis to verify the presence in princely sphragistics of the thirteenth century of the proto-emblem of the "rider" of later Russian heraldry. In order to make this conclusion more convincing, the author needed to discuss the opinion of A. B. Lakier, who explained the appearance of the "rider" by the influence of the Lithuanian heraldic "knight" (horseman with sword), which arose in the thirteenth century.

Ianin's study of metropolitan seals goes up to the second third of the thirteenth century. He examines seals of the twelfth-century bishops of Novgorod, Smolensk, Polotsk, and Galich. The author follows the course of Novgorodian episcopal sphragistics up to the sixteenth century. Owing to the absence of any link with the history of metropolitan seals, this part of the study lacks full explanation of the evolution of episcopal bullas.

Extensive space is allotted in the monograph to the study of seals of officials—*namestniki* (of princes and bishops), *posadniki*, *tysiatskie*, *tiuny*. Ianin succeeds in showing a very close tie between seals of *posadniki* and *tysiatskie* of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries with those of the Novgorod Council of Lords. The author explains the fact that bullas of the Council of Lords appear sporadically in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by reference to the conflicts of Novgorod with its princes, and he sees in the appearance and spread of later seals of this institution the result of diminution of the role of *posadniki* and *tysiatskie* after the reform of 1416–17 (transition from autocracy to oligarchy) and considers that both types of official came to employ the anonymous bulla instead of, or as, one with their own name.

The author attempts to identify five emblems of the Council of Lords used concurrently (the Pantocrator, the eagle, the beast, the soldier, and the horseman) with the emblems of the Novgorodian *kontsy* of the fifteenth century. He succeeds with respect to the soldier (the seal of the Liudin

konets), but the identification of other representations is very tenuous. The question of possible influence of Russian princely (cf. vol. 2, pp. 35–38) and foreign emblematics on the formation of the symbolism of the Novgorod state seal in various periods of its existence is not posed. Furthermore he seems to forget that the emblems studied appeared on the official seals of *posadniki* and *tysiatskie* already in the fourteenth century, but the sphragistics of the *konets* in the fifteenth century “had only begun to take form” (vol. 2, p. 136).

The link of the sphragistics of the *konets* with that of the monastery is convincingly shown, and Ianin’s conclusion that the secular administration of Novgorod was linked with the administration of the monasteries of the *kontsy* is soundly based. Of considerable interest is the author’s establishment of the “internal chronology” of seals of the episcopal *namestniki*. Especially brilliant is the skillful analysis of sources, which Ianin carries out in the course of identifying the Dvina *namestniki* and the dating of their tenure of office. At the same time the chronology of the Dvina documents is made substantially more precise.

If one is to speak of certain general “insufficiencies” of this on the whole remarkable work, one must refer chiefly to three points: (1) the lack of organization or, more accurately, of systematization in the formal analysis of seals; (2) the failure to complete overlapping comparisons of the emblems and legends of different types of Russian seals; (3) weak application of the comparative-historical method.

One further general question concerns the relationship between seals and documents. The episodic character of the affixing of seals to the letters of the holders of political power, affirmed by Ianin, is not fully proven, and in its turn there is need for further proof of Ianin’s hypothesis according to which surviving bullas of the eleventh and twelfth centuries “in the majority . . . represent remains of numerous private documents (purchase deeds, agreements for division of property, grant charters, and wills)” (vol. 1, p. 157). Leaving aside the error of classifying grant charters as private documents, the very presumption that private documents of the eleventh and twelfth centuries were verified by seals of one or another “state institution” is dubious. The supposition that city dwellers of the eleventh and twelfth centuries preserved their private documents, authenticated by the princely seal, is arbitrary, for the later custom of employing a bulla is therefore projected into a period when it did not exist. We may assume, on the contrary, that the city dwellers were able to preserve documents of state origin but not grant charters, which were extended chiefly to monasteries (such is the case also in the West in the early Middle Ages), or judicial decisions on various lawsuits concerning property (not necessarily land). The contents of the birchbark charters, among which, as the work of L. V.

Cherepnin shows, there are quite early judicial documents—the *sudnyi spisok* in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the *bessudnye gramoty* beginning with the thirteenth—argue in favor of the latter assumption. Therefore the resolution by Iarin of the dispute between M. N. Tikhomirov and S. N. Valk unconditionally in favor of the former seems premature.

Turning to the traditional search for minor errors, one must stress that they are here reduced to the minimum. Very noticeable is the author's ignoring of the *Akty sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi istorii Severo-vostochnoi Rusi*. Scarcely successful is the translation of the Greek $\sigma\kappa\epsilon\pi\omicron\iota\varsigma \mu\epsilon$ on the seals of ecclesiastical hierarchs and $\mu\epsilon \sigma\kappa\epsilon\pi\omicron$ on the seals of the *protoproedr* (prince's councillor and lieutenant) Evstafii as "look on me." By analogy with one of the redactions of the Russian "benevolent" formula of princely bulla it would be better to use the translation "save me." The principle used in defining the left and right sides of representations on seals is debatable. The author in doing so judges from the position of the viewer, but should one not instead follow the rules of heraldry? In several cases one may observe a contradictory determination of the obverse and reverse sides of one and the same seal in the text of the study and in the description (see, for example, vol. 1, pp. 64, 182, nos. 72, 73). One meets instances of lack of correspondence between the letters of the legend in the summary and in the reconstructions; in the description, individual letters are sometimes absent (see, for example, vol. 2, nos. 411, 415, 420, 421).

The critical comments made of a general or particular nature are not intended to and indeed cannot diminish the numerous merits of this fund-of study in the realm of sphragistics, diplomatics, genealogy, and the history of mental and excellent work, the long-lasting influence of which on the course Old Russian state institutions is not difficult to foresee.