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## **"I DREAM OF WRITING ABOUT THE ORIGIN AND RISE OF ANCIENT RUSSIA": RESEARCHING NOVGOROD THE GREAT IN CZECH HISTORIOGRAPHY\***

Since when do the Czech historians write about Russia and Novgorod the Great? Where are the beginnings of their historiographical interest in the history of the Russian Empire? Although Czech-Russian relations have a prolonged and colourful past, which can be traced back to medieval diplomatic ties, the beginnings of Czech scientists studying Russian history came much later. In 1852, from the exile in Brixen, Tyrol, the Czech satirist Karel Havlíček Borovský wrote to his friend František Palacký about an urgent problem he had encountered: "the Czechs cry louder than others that they are Slavophiles, but they do not possess a single book about Russian history"<sup>1</sup>. The situation in the 21st century has not changed much since the time of Havlíček Borovský. The unpleasant fact of the lack of specialized literature on the history of Russia, which Havlíček Borovský considered "offensive and inappropriate"<sup>2</sup> in the 19th century, is all the more displeasing today and still hangs as a memento over Czech historians. There is almost no research about ancient Russian history. The first book about the history of Russia written in Czech was published in 1868, many questions have remained unanswered, yet. Several key topics that are frequently discussed in Russian science have not been elaborated on by Czech historians so far. The author wonders: why is that?

### **They cry that they love Russia, but why don't they write about it?**

The reasons for the absence of publications and little interest in older Russian history must be sought in the past, and we must return to the beginning to get an answer. In this study, the author considers the connections between the socio-political situation in the Czech lands and the gradual discovery of Russian history. During the period from the 19th to the 21st century, Czech historiography largely reproduced current political events, analysing topics that were important for understanding current affairs. Were there any cases when historians could look away from the crucial issues of the present and turn to the Middle Ages and Novgorod the Great? The author's goal is to try to reconstruct the chronological development of the Czech historiographical school and its relationship with Russia and to reveal the reasons behind the low popularity of Russian medieval history. From

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<sup>1</sup> *Quis L.* Korrespondence Karla Havlíčka. Praha, 1903. P. 656.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* P. 656.

a wide range of topics about the Russian Middle Ages, the author focuses on the image of medieval Novgorod in the works of Czech historians from the 19th century to the present, its changes and the development of understanding the history of this state. Other questions discussed are: Do Czech historians today deal with other issues than their predecessors? How did the source base about Novgorod change?

The most complex overview of Czech historiography was elaborated in a comprehensive synthesis of František Kutnar and Jaroslav Marek, covering the period from the 18th century to the 1930s<sup>3</sup>, a team led by Jaroslav Pánek and Petr Vorel presented an overview of contemporary Czech historians<sup>4</sup>. Both publications focus on the general tendencies of Czech historiography and its involvement in the Western world. The thematic publications devoted to the reflection of Russian history are still missing.

The growing interest in Russia as a subject of historical research is linked to the growing influence of the ideas of Pan-Slavism, which have begun to disseminate in Europe since the end of the 18th century. In the first half of the 19th century, this movement started to spread rapidly among the Slavic peoples in Austria-Hungary and contributed to the formation of their national identity<sup>5</sup>. The feeling of oppression and inferiority of the Czech nation, which was lost on the political map alongside powerful and more advanced German-speaking neighbours<sup>6</sup>, made the Czech intelligence look for a protector and think about an ideal and appropriate form of government. Since the beginning of the 19th century, a process called the Czech National Revival took place, the aim of which was to gain freedom from the three-hundred-year domination of the Habsburgs and restore the Czech language as a language of education, culture and politics<sup>7</sup>. The first generation of national leaders<sup>8</sup> leaned towards Russophilia and saw a role model in the Russian Empire. These revivalists came to believe that the future of the Slavic nations could have been secured if they had united politically, linguistically and religiously and had merged with Russia, which was a guarantee of a new and better future for the whole world<sup>9</sup>.

The vision of a strong Russian state, which defeated Napoleon and at the same time was the largest territory inhabited by the Slavs<sup>10</sup>, however, had its downsides. The Czech revivalists strongly idealized Russia because they never visited this country, for which **Karel Havlíček Borovský** (\*1821) criticized them in his correspondence. He spent more than a year in Russia, and upon his return in 1844, he understood that the idea of Slavic reciprocity was not achievable<sup>11</sup>. During the 1850s, Havlíček planned to create a pioneering work on the history of Russia<sup>12</sup>, in which he would have distanced from Russophilic and Russophobic views and would have presented an objective picture of Russian history. However, his

<sup>3</sup> Kutnar F., Marek J. Přehledné dějiny českého a slovenského dějepisectví. Praha, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Vorel P., Pánek J. Lexikon současných českých historiků. Praha, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Vlček R. Ruský panslavismus – realita a fikce. Praha, 2002. P. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Kutnar F. Obrozené vlastenectví a nacionalismus. Praha, 2003. P. 211.

<sup>7</sup> Lenderová M., Macková M., Jiránek T. Z dějin české každodennosti: Život v 19. století. Praha, 2013. P. 309.

<sup>8</sup> Particularly Josef Jungmann, Antonín Marek and Ján Kollár.

<sup>9</sup> Kutnar F., Marek J. Přehledné dějiny... P. 256.

<sup>10</sup> Šťastný V. Slovanství v národním životě Čechů a Slováků. Praha, 1968. P. 87.

<sup>11</sup> Havlíček Borovský K. Obrazy z Rus. Brno, 2008. P. 107.

<sup>12</sup> During the period between 1852 and 1853 Havlíček Borovský exchanged many letters with František Palacký, where he depicted his idea and also his progress in writing an objective historical book about Russian history. *Quis L. Korrespondence...* Pp. 656–686.

untimely death in 1856 thwarted his plans, and the dream of the beginnings of a historical exploration of Russia vanished for several years.

### The beginnings of the study of Russian medieval history

The first issue about the medieval history of Russia was published in 1868<sup>13</sup>. Its author is a linguist and historian **Josef Perwolf** (\*1841), who taught at the University of Warsaw. Although Perwolf could be characterised as an “apostle of Slavic reciprocity”<sup>14</sup>, his life's task of “introducing the full history of the Slavs to the Czech nation”<sup>15</sup> went far beyond the simple Slavophilism of the first representatives of the national revival. Despite his progressive approach and the pursuit of objectivism, Perwolf's work is still almost unknown, and his contribution to the development of the study of Russian history has fallen out of the pages of comprehensive publications on Czech historiography<sup>16</sup>.

In his work, Perwolf identified Novgorod as “the centre of Russian trade”<sup>17</sup>. He analysed Novgorod's expansion to the northwest<sup>18</sup> and agreed with Nestor's interpretation of the invitation of the Varangians, whose Scandinavian origins he fully accepted<sup>19</sup>. He also dealt in more detail with the internal organisation of Novgorod<sup>20</sup>, in his synthesis Perwolf used the adopted Russian-language terms as “*a veche*” or “*a posadnik*”. However, the sources on which the author relied were not mentioned and nowadays it is not possible to discover where the specific information was taken from. The only source, which is mentioned by the authors in the preface, is Nestor's Chronicle<sup>21</sup>. Perwolf approached Novgorod's history dynamically, his effort was to capture the change in structures and the changing face of this state.

The contrast to Josef Perwolf's progressive work is represented by the much better-known monograph the *History of the Russian Nation* (1889)<sup>22</sup> by **Josef Ladislav Píč** (\*1847), which means a significant step backwards in the development of heuristic research. As Píč proclaimed, he wrote the history of Russia to “explain to the Czech reader phenomena and questions that were understandable to the Russians, but could be confusing for the Czechs”<sup>23</sup>. Píč expanded the used materials with Arabic and Byzantine sources, but he made several minor mistakes and errors in their interpretation<sup>24</sup>. Píč described Novgorod's history from the founding of the city to the end of the reign of Catherine II. His publication was a

<sup>13</sup> Perwolf J. Přehled historie národu ruského. Praha, 1868.

<sup>14</sup> Dvořák L. Josef Perwolf. Studie s ukázkami z díla. Praha, 1972. P. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. P. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Even the most complete publication by František Kutnar and Jaroslav Marek did not mention Perwolf and his impact on Czech history.

<sup>17</sup> Perwolf J. Přehled historie... P. 25.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. P. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Pp. 16–17.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Pp. 22–23.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. P. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Píč J. L. Dějiny ruského národa. Praha, 1889.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. P. 1.

<sup>24</sup> From the Byzantine sources *De Administrando Imperio* is used, Arabian source base consists of works by Ibrahim ibn Yaqub, Abu Abdallah Jayhani, al-Istakhri and Ahmad ibn Fadlan. Ibn Fadlan's name is wrongly shown as Ibn Fotland. In his work, Píč referred straight to Abu Abdallah Jayhani, even though his geographical work got lost and only remained preserved in later authors' books.

non-critical retelling of Nestor's Chronicle, which the author did not explain, nor did he add his point of view. The author translated Nestor's Chronicle in pseudomedieval style, which is hard to comprehend, he also did not specify Russian terms used in it. The author dealt with the Novgorod foreign policy in the most detail, unfortunately, he completely ignored all relations between Novgorod and the Hanseatic League, which were well known to his predecessor Perwolf. On the contrary, he focused on the expansion towards the Urals, repeatedly emphasising the moral and character traits of the Finno-Ugric tribes<sup>25</sup>. Píř did not write about issues of Novgorod's inner affairs and conflicts between princes and the veche. The author did not fulfil his goal of explaining the complicated moments of Russian chronicles to the reader, for which he was criticised by fellow historians<sup>26</sup>. Nevertheless, the *History of the Russian Nation* symbolises one of the first attempts to capture the continuous development of Russian history.

The turn of the 19th and 20th centuries did not bring any new moments to the development of the study of Novgorod the Great. During this period, Czech historians focused on the current problems of Russian politics, and special attention was paid to the events associated with the fall of the monarchy in 1917. The lack of interest in medieval Russian history was connected with the situation in the Czech lands at the time. During the period of the struggle for independence in Austria-Hungary and the first years after the establishment of an independent Czechoslovakia, Czech scientists focused on national history and moments that supported the idea of a long tradition of independence and sovereignty of the Czech people. After Czechoslovakia was established in 1918, it was necessary to grow an interest in current political processes and foreign policy issues, which were crucial for the young state. The works about Russian history, which were published at the beginning of the 20th century, hence focus mainly on contemporary events and regime change<sup>27</sup>.

In addition to the political-national discourse, it is also necessary to mention another obstacle that prevented a more detailed examination of the Russian Middle Ages. The already mentioned Karel Havlířek Borovský came across the fact that Czech scientific libraries did not possess almost any books by Russian historians. At the time of Havlířek Borovský, the Prague National Library had only the main works by Nikolay Karamzin, Nikolay Artsybashev and Mikhail Pogodin written in Russian<sup>28</sup>. At the beginning of the 20th century, the primary works of Vasily Klyuchevsky, Mikhail Pokrovsky and Pavel Milyukov were translated into Czech<sup>29</sup>. In 1896, A. N. Rambaud's synthesis of Russian history was translated from French as well. The situation with the translation of written sources was even more sorrowful. Until the beginning of the 21st century, only the *Primary Chronicle* (1867) and *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* (1821) were translated into Czech. The possible interest in studying

<sup>25</sup> Píř J. L. Dějiny... Pp. 18–21.

<sup>26</sup> Macůrek J. Dějiny východních Slovanů I. Praha, 1947. P. 7.

<sup>27</sup> The most important issues about the modern history of Russia were written by Jaroslav Bidlo (*"History of Russia in the 19th century"*, 1907–1908), Tomáš Garrique Masaryk (*"Russia and Europe"*, 1919–1921), Jan Slavík (*"On the Eve of the Russian Revolution"* (1926), *"The Meaning of the Russian Revolution"* (1927), *"Lenin"* (1934), *"Lenin's Government 1917–1924"* (1935)) and Zdeněk Nejedlý (*"Lenin"*, 1937).

<sup>28</sup> Information about the Prague National Library can be found especially in his letter to František Palacký from 25 August 1852. Quis L. Korrespondence... Pp. 650–660.

<sup>29</sup> Macůrek J. Dějiny... Pp. 7–8.

Novgorod thus ran into a completely insufficient source base, which caused problems in scientific work.

### Two important issues of the 20th century

The gap between Píč's issue and another book on the history of Novgorod and medieval Russia is more than half of a century. In 1947, **Josef Macůrek's** *History of the Eastern Slavs*<sup>30</sup> was published, his publication is devoted to the collective history of the Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians until the end of the 17th century. Macůrek's monograph already presents complex historical work, based on a critical analysis of sources. Unlike Píč, who was significantly influenced by the ideas of Pan-Slavism, Macůrek (\*1901) maintained a distance from all ideologies and tried to bring an objective and impartial view. The source base about Novgorod enlarged again, the author interpreted Russian history based on a comparative analysis of Russian historians and representatives of the German historiographical school<sup>31</sup>, who were invited to Russia by Peter the Great. In explaining the founding of Novgorod, the author stated for both Norman and anti-Norman arguments, the references reveal that he was acquainted with all the key works of Russian historians published so far<sup>32</sup>, he also relied on linguistic sources in the chapter about the beginnings of the Russian state<sup>33</sup>. Macůrek distanced himself from attempts to portray the ancient Slavs as wild and barbaric tribal unions while emphasising their developed material culture and spirituality<sup>34</sup>. Like Perwolf, Macůrek dealt with the *veche*, which he did not consider a purely Novgorodian phenomenon, stating that it was a traditional Slavic feature, which, however, due to a number of circumstances, fully developed only in Novgorod<sup>35</sup>.

The author wrote a special chapter about the history of Novgorod from the 12th to the 14th century<sup>36</sup>, in which he focused on the following topics: 1) the inner organisation of Novgorod, the history of relations between princes and the *veche* 2) social structure and social classes 3) foreign trade relations with Hansa and northern Europe. In his work, Macůrek also described the moment of Novgorod's annexation to Moscow, during the narrative, he maintained a strictly neutral tone and did not incline towards anyone's side. He allowed himself to express his sympathy for Novgorod only in the part about medieval Russian culture, in which he underlined the uniqueness of Novgorod. He illustrated this individuality by the example of *Gennady's Bible*<sup>37</sup>. Macůrek also highlighted the fact that Moscow never managed to eliminate dominance of Novgorod<sup>38</sup>.

The beginning of the second half of the 20th century in Czech-Russian studies is mainly associated with **Milan Švankmajer** (\*1928), who worked on monographs about Catherine the Great and also Peter the Great during the 1960s. The need to revise the existing issues on Russian history was transformed into a collective work *History of the USSR*

<sup>30</sup> Macůrek J. Dějiny východních Slovanů I. Praha, 1947.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Pp. 19–25.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. Pp. 34–42.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. P. 50.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. P. 72.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Pp. 95–96.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Pp. 94–97.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. P. 135.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. P. 135.



(1967)<sup>39</sup>, in which Karel Herman, Vladimír Hostička and Bohumila Zástěrová also participated. The list of sources and materials about Novgorod's history expanded again, the documents from the period of Prince Yaroslav Yaroslavich were added, as well as sources documenting the Mongol invasion, including literary ones<sup>40</sup>. All excerpts from the annals received a detailed explanation and analysis. Unlike Josef Macůrek, authors of the *History of the USSR* focused exclusively on political history. Švankmajer and his co-authors presented a chronological development of Novgorod history with an emphasis on several levels of political ties: they examined the internal dynastic relations between the Rurikids, between Novgorod and other Russian principalities, and finally, they presented the global view on Novgorod foreign policy in Europe.

The collective also noted a crucial moment in Novgorod's history that had not been particularly addressed: the issue of the Mongol invasion of Kievan Rus and the determination of the "yoke". According to the authors, the non-involvement of Novgorod in this invasion enabled its specific development, different from other parts of Russia<sup>41</sup>. Švankmajer's work also did not go without criticism. Similarly to Píč's monograph, it is accused of a certain "plainness" and "simplicity"<sup>42</sup>, but it is necessary to take into account the limited availability of Russian archival materials at the time of preparation of this publication. It is also important to remember that this is a summarising, general work on Russian history, which is not focused on a specific period or topic.

However, it is quite surprising that although the authors used many works that were published in the 50s and 60s in the Czech and foreign historiography<sup>43</sup>, the list of references lacks any works associated with the discovery of birch bark manuscripts. Birch bark letters had already been considered as an essential source for the study of Novgorod history and the Czech community of historians certainly knew about these materials. News about this finding was first mentioned by Luboš Řeháček in 1958 in the journal *Slavonic Review* (Slovanský přehled)<sup>44</sup> almost ten years before Švankmajer published his work. Unfortunately, his team did not mention this discovery in any way.

Unfortunately, the research of the team under Milan Švankmajer fell into disfavour for several decades. After the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, these historians were persecuted, forced to leave their positions in the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and to stop working in the academic sphere. Despite the impossibility of publishing books, Švankmajer continued to study Russian history and he also innovated methodological approaches. His methods represent one of the dominant branches of modern views of Russian history: the creation of general monographs, mapping the history of Russia from its beginning to the present. After 1989, the persecuted historians' activities resumed; in a

<sup>39</sup> Švankmajer M. Dějiny Svazu sovětských socialistických republik. Díl 1. Dějiny Ruska. Praha, 1967.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Pp. 40–42.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. Pp. 39–42.

<sup>42</sup> Vlček R. Proč hledíme s despektem na ruské a sovětské dějiny? // X. sjezd českých historiků: Ostrava, 14. – 16. 9. 2011 / A. Zářický, P. Kadlec, M. Závodná. Ostrava, 2017. P. 38.

<sup>43</sup> For example, the works of German historian Günther Stökl, emigrés Dimitri Obolensky and František Dvorník and Polish medievalist Henryk Łowmiański.

<sup>44</sup> Řeháček L. Novgorodské gramoty na březové kůře // Slovanský přehled. 1958. No. 44. Pp. 363–364.

changed team with Václav Veber, Zdeněk Sládek and Václav Moulis, Milan Švankmajer published his most famous work, the *History of Russia*<sup>45</sup>, in 1995.

### Monumentalism: The path of large monographs

In contrast to the *History of the USSR*, the approach of Švankmajer's team to Novgorod has changed quite radically, which is a reflection of the political situation after the overthrow of the communist regime. The period of lack of freedom, during which it was not desirable to focus on the liberal elements of Novgorod history, was over. For most of the second half of the 20th century, Czech historians could not openly write about freedom and rights in Novgorod. Since 1989, it again became possible and the Czech historiography began to highlight and support these elements.

Švankmajer, the author of chapters on medieval Russian history, opened the section about Novgorod with a relatively radical statement that “Kievan Rus” is not appropriate as a title for the first state of Eastern Slavs. According to the author, it is better to use the term “Kievan-Novgorodian” Rus or accept the theory of two independent states (the Kievan Rus around Kyiv in the south and the Novgorodian Rus in the north), which, although cooperating and intertwining in many spheres, represent different entities<sup>46</sup>. The diversity of Novgorod and Kyiv is also illustrated by cultural influences. Although the study of political history is still dominant, the spiritual and cultural spheres are gaining more space.

The following change in research is the use of new sources, mainly the Novgorod Judicial Charter and also the reflection of the discovery of the birch bark letters<sup>47</sup>, which illustrates the maturity, western character and European character of Novgorod. These enlightening moments are often put into contrast with the scary and dark Moscow, these comparisons are, however, not always objective. Sympathy for Novgorod, which as an island of freedom fighting a tyrannical and much stronger rival, evokes a parallel with the history of Czechoslovakia and its attempt to break out of the Eastern Bloc. The interpretation of Novgorod's history represents a standard chronological account of events from the founding of the city through the struggles with the Teutonic Knights and the Swedes and later the Muscovy<sup>48</sup>. The apparent compassion for Novgorod is evident in statements that, by suppressing the Republic of Novgorod, “Russia has distanced itself from Europe more than we would like to admit”<sup>49</sup>. The history of Novgorod is described as one of the alternatives in the historical development of Russia, as a historical possibility that, unfortunately, has not prevailed.

Twenty years after the publication of Švankmajer's *History of Russia*, the academic team around **Zbyněk Vydra** (\*1978) stated that the monograph is becoming outdated and no longer meets the requirements of contemporary historiography. In 2017, therefore, a new *History of Russia*<sup>50</sup> was published. Vydra was joined by Michal Řoutil, Jitka Komendová, Kateřina Hloušková and Michal Téra, together they abandoned the traditional interpretation

<sup>45</sup> Švankmajer M. Dějiny Ruska. Praha, 1995.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. P. 38.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. P. 40.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. Pp. 38–45.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. P. 45.

<sup>50</sup> Vydra Z. Dějiny Ruska. Praha, 2017.

of Russian history “only from the point of view of the winners”<sup>51</sup> and tried to incorporate new historical perspectives such as the history of everyday life or gender history.

The authors replaced the withdrawal from political history from the chronological point of view and the gradual transformation of Moscow into a power hegemon by a thematic approach<sup>52</sup>. Older Russian history is therefore shown in the form of medallions of influential personalities and chapters dealing with Russian iconography, the social structure of society or heresies. Despite the authors' claim that the focus is not on Moscow but its opponents, the history of Novgorod has shrunk to just four pages that cannot in any way cover the history of this city and state<sup>53</sup>. Coping with changes in science, respecting modern approaches and bringing out revisions is praiseworthy, but reducing such a significant state entity as Novgorod is at least controversial.

### Political history

Studies about political history represent the second significant tendency in the research of medieval Novgorod in Czech historiography. The profile of this direction allows a specific focus on a short period and thus brings a detailed historical analysis of the selected problem. **Pavel Smrž**, who specializes in 15th-century Novgorod history, especially its diplomatic ties with Livonia and also with the Grand Duchy of Moscow, should be mentioned. He elaborated on this topic in his diploma and dissertation theses, in which he relied on all fundamental works devoted to medieval Novgorod<sup>54</sup>. The benefit for Czech research is his comparative interpretation of the history of Novgorod and Pskov, the author followed the differences and similarities of these two Republics, while continuously monitoring the history of Moscow and drawing attention to the specifics of their development. Chapters dedicated to the struggle of Novgorod to maintain independence during the reign of Ivan III and its negotiations with Lithuania represent the most detailed and extensive research of Novgorod history in the Czech environment so far. Works of Pavel Smrž are comprehensive, objective and impartial historical interpretations that can withstand comparisons with the works of Russian historians.

The second notable representative of this direction is **Marek Příhoda** (\*1976), who also specializes in the history of Novgorod in the 15th century. The most important is his study *Narrative of the Fall of Novgorod*<sup>55</sup>, which provides an interpretation of the annals of the campaigns of Ivan III in 1471 and 1477–78. The author offered a well-thought-out analysis of Russian chronicles, he also pointed out the context of the origin of particular sources, their specifics and their significance for Russian history. Příhoda also brings his innovation to source studies, he examined the given annals based on the frequency of use of specific terms: traditions (*starina*), ruler (*gosudar*) and hereditary land (*votchina*). The

<sup>51</sup> Vydra Z. Dějiny... P. 5. This announcement unfortunately did not always correspond with the actual publication, the Russian history in Vydra's version is still Moscow-centred.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. P. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Pp. 48–51.

<sup>54</sup> Smrž P. Livonský stát a Moskevská Rus na přelomu 15. a 16. století. Dissertation theses. Supervised by Assoc. Prof. Danuše Picková. Faculty of Philosophy. Charles University. Praha, 2006.

<sup>55</sup> Příhoda M. Vyprávění o pádu Novgorodu // Rýžoviště zlata a doly drahokamů. Sborník pro Václava Huňáčka / V. Lendělová, M. Řoutil. Červený Kostelec, 2006. Pp. 316–335.



use and meaning of these words in individual annals make it possible to look at the history of Novgorod and Moscow and their mutual conflict in an unexplored way.

Novgorod is also involved in some studies by **Jitka Komendová** (\*1976), she discussed the processes of legitimizing the power of grand dukes of Moscow in the 14th and 15th centuries and their gradual rebirth into a sole Russian ruler<sup>56</sup>. The example of the different hierarchy of the Novgorod society and its efforts to justify and gain equality with Moscow serves for Komendová as material for comparing and illustrating other variants of Russia's historical development.

### Where and how else to go further?

In addition to her studies on political history, Jitka Komendová is one of the fundamental figures in Czech Novgorod studies thanks to her enlightenment and educational activities. In 2007, she translated the principal publication of Valentin Yanin *I've sent you a birch bark* (originally *Ya poslal tebe berestu*) into Czech<sup>57</sup>, thus gradually raising attention to the history and significance of Novgorod among the general public and non-Russian-speaking historians. In the same year, together with **Michal Řoutil** (\*1973), she organized the exhibition *Novgorod the Great* with the support of the Czech Academy of Sciences and a year later published an interview with Valentin Yanin on the perspectives of Russian archaeology and the uniqueness of the discovery of birch bark letters<sup>58</sup>. However, Jitka Komendová did not follow up on her activities from 2007–2008; the theme of Novgorod is reflected in her monograph about Stephan of Perm *The Saint and the Shaman* (2011)<sup>59</sup>. The author presents the cultural context of a medieval legend about the Apostle of the Permians. In the background of the legend, Komendová touched the problems of Novgorod's expansion into the Urals and subsequent disputes with other principalities over these territories. However, the area of Komendová's interest is increasingly shifting to the spheres of hagiography and source studies. The author, as of 2022, has not yet returned to the issue of Novgorod.

Unfortunately, only a unique attempt to study Novgorod the Great is Oksana Zapletalová's study of *To the children's world in medieval Novgorod*<sup>60</sup>, based on an analysis of archaeological discoveries. The author tried to place the childhood period and the functioning of the family in general in the context of life in medieval Novgorod in a very credible and engaging manner, but she did not continue this research anymore and after graduation, she stopped devoting herself to archaeology. Her study, therefore, symbolises an isolated publication in the otherwise promising direction of historical research and represents the only study in Czech that uses primarily archaeological excavations.

<sup>56</sup> Komendová J. Mocenské struktury a jejich legitimizace na Rusi ve 14. století // *Jedno slunce na nebi, jeden vládce na zemi: legitimita moci ve světě 14. století* / O. Beránek, P. Cermanová, J. Hrubý. Praha, 2017. Pp. 526–548.

<sup>57</sup> Published as Janin V. L. *Středověký Novgorod v nápisích na březové kůře*. Červený Kostelec, 2007.

<sup>58</sup> Komendová J., Řoutil M. Odkrývání středověkého Novgorodu. Rozhovor s Valentinem Lavrentjevičem Janinem o unikátních objevech a současné ruské archeologii // *Dějiny a současnost. Kulturně historická revue*. No. 30. 2008. Pp. 18–20

<sup>59</sup> Komendová J. *Světec a šaman*. Praha, 2011.

<sup>60</sup> Zapletalová O. Příspěvek k poznání dětského světa ve středověkém Novgorodě // *Děti ve velkoměstech od středověku až na práh industriální doby* / O. Fejtová, V. Ledvinka, J. Pešek. Praha, 2012. Pp. 119–138.

The beginning of the 21st century also brought a new translation of Nestor's Chronicle, published by **Michal Téra** (\*1976) in 2014. His modernised version could also be significant for future research into Novgorod history. Téra's translation appeared almost 150 years after the first translation by Karel Jaromír Erben in 1867, and, as of 2022, it is the only Russian medieval source valuable for Novgorod studies translated into Czech<sup>61</sup>. Nevertheless, Czech translations of the Novgorodian chronicles and annals are still missing. The considerably lukewarm interest of Czech historians in the subject of Novgorod does not suggest that the situation should change shortly. Czech editions of scientific literature and written sources are critical for raising the attention to Novgorod history among the public and the academic sphere as well. Due to their absence, Novgorod remains an almost unknown topic that only a small group of Russian-speaking Czech historians know about.

### Like a lost manuscript on birch bark?

#### Conclusion

Medieval Novgorod is an exceptional phenomenon in Russian history, its uniqueness has attracted the attention of historians, politicians and prominent figures since the 18th century. Influenced by the discovery of the birch bark manuscripts, it was noted that “no other medieval city was as intriguing to researchers as Novgorod the Great”<sup>62</sup>. Despite Novgorod's exclusive position in the world historiography, Czech historians, with a few exceptions, hardly deal with this topic.

The whole study on Novgorod in the Czech academic sphere carries the sad prophecy of Karel Havlíček Borovský from 1852 about the missing sources, translations and literature, which enormously complicate the research. A clear example is an already mentioned fact that in 2022 we have a translation of only two Russian chronicles. Although the Czech society likes to claim a strong position against Russia, the historians focus mainly on modern history and do not pay much attention to the medieval period, in which it is necessary to look for the beginnings of all current problems. Czech historians would like to inform on what is happening *now*, but they often overlook that the answer to the question lies in the past.

In the chronological interpretation of Czech historiography about Novgorod, we come to the fact that the interest in Russian history comes in waves, followed by prolonged periods of silence and disinterest. This development reflects the political situation and the mood in society. The beginnings of the research are connected with the Pan-Slavic movement and the effort to know the history of the state, which was perceived by a part of the social elites as a role model. In the following decades, the Czechs turned to national issues and built their state, returning to Russia's medieval history to a greater extent only after World War II, which is also associated with a growing interest in the Russian and Slavic environment. However, the continuously developing research was again disrupted by political events that did not allow many historians to continue their scientific work. The new wave of research on Russia that continues to this day begins after the fall of the communist

<sup>61</sup> The Galician–Volhynian Chronicle translation was published in 2010 by Jitka Komendová. It is the second and last of medieval Russian chronicles translated into Czech.

<sup>62</sup> Halperin C. J. Novgorod and the “Novgorodian land” // *Cahiers du Monde russe*. 1999. No. 40/3. P. 345.

regime in the 1990s. Russian history arouses interest, but it reflects an effort to distance itself from the Eastern Bloc and brings a rather cautious and critical view. The preferred topics are the current situation in Russia, its development in the 20th century and also the history of Czech-Russian relations, to which, unfortunately, Novgorod and its history do not fit because of missing connections.

Since the first work on Russian history by Josef Perwolf, the source base used by Czech historians has expanded considerably, and at present no significant qualitative differences can be seen between the Czech and Russian environments. However, this situation was preceded by a long period, during which information about the latest discoveries reached Czech historians very slowly and with a long delay. The discovery of birch bark letters was processed with a pause of almost thirty years. The reasons for this late elaboration are similar to the reasons for the low interest in Russian history in general: first of all, it is restricted entry to Russian archives, lack of professional literature, and limited access to it and its translations.

During the three centuries of research about Novgorod history, we can trace certain changes in the choice of form and reflected themes. The first works in which Novgorod appears were published in the second half of the 19th century. In these publications, Novgorod emerges as an integral part of Russian medieval history, as a part of a larger historical and territorial unit. Specialized publications devoted only to Novgorod's history appear sporadically only in the 21st century and all of them have a form of a study. The first publication about Novgorod are general syntheses about the history of Russia, this form still remains widespread among Czech historians and it is one of the key ways of describing the Russian past. Next to this traditional variant, there are studies about political history, especially about the 15th and 16th centuries, which are popular in recent decades.

Recently, it is also possible to outline the inclination towards hagiography and source studies in the publications of Jitka Komendová. However, most of the Czech works published in the 21st century about Novgorod often remain unfollowed, the authors do not continue their research and return to their main spheres of interest. Although the view of Russian history is evolving and developing, we cannot talk about a systematic elaboration of Novgorod history, but rather individual isolated works. Despite this unfortunate picture, the situation in Czech science is generally changing for the better and Novgorod stands as a promising area of interest. As recent publications by Michal Řoutil, Pavel Smrž and Jitka Komendová show, Czech historians are gradually revealing parallels between the Novgorod and Czech states and find more common in its struggle for freedom against a stronger rival than it might seem at first glance. The study of Novgorod history is thus stimulating for understanding our own history.

### Информация о статье

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**Заголовок:** «Мечтаю писать о возникновении и расцвете Древней Руси»: к вопросу об изучении Великого Новгорода в чешской историографии

**Аннотация:** Анализ чешской историографии показывает, что изучение новгородской истории в разные периоды развития Чешского государства было неравномерным, т.к. во многом на исследовательский интерес оказывали воздействие социально-политические события в Чехии и настроения в обществе. Несмотря на традиционные отношения со славянскими государствами и длительные дипломатические связи, первые научные труды по истории России появились на чешском языке только во второй половине XIX в. Помимо минувших политических событий, на проблематику исследований, а также на места искаженную трактовку новгородской истории, влиял ограниченный доступ к научной литературе и отсутствие переводов исторических источников как таковых. В связи с чем, в данной статье автор представил детальный обзор чешской историографии, посвященной истории Великого Новгорода, с выделением наиболее перспективных векторов для чешской науки в настоящее время. Были изучены вопросы использованной источниковой базы чешских историков к проблематике Великого Новгорода и ее изменений в период с XIX в. до наших дней. Внимание также уделялось тематической дифференциации чешской новгородистики, прошедшей путь от общего синтеза по истории России к профильным статьям о конкретной теме. Анализируя предмет изучения чешских историков, можно выделить направления, в рамках которых изучаются политические связи Новгорода, дипломатика и отдельные зачатки рассмотрений социальной структуры. Вопреки редкому отражению новгородской истории в трудах чешских историков, данная тема представляет перспективное направление, т. к. наблюдаются исторические параллели между Новгородом и Чехией.

**Ключевые слова:** чешская историография, Великий Новгород, панславизм, чешско-русские взаимоотношения, средние века

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**Title:** "I dream of writing about the origin and rise of Ancient Russia": Researching Novgorod the Great in Czech historiography

**Abstract:** An analysis of Czech historiography shows that the study of Novgorod history in different periods of the development of the Czech state was uneven because to a large extent, the research interest was influenced by socio-political events in the Czech Republic and attitudes in society. Despite traditional relations with the Slavic states and long diplomatic ties, the first scientific works on the history of Russia appeared in Czech historiography only in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to past political events, limited access to scientific literature and the lack of translations of historical sources influenced the problems of research, as well as the sometimes-distorted interpretation of Novgorod history. In this connection, the author presented a detailed review of Czech historiography dedicated to the history of Veliky Novgorod, highlighting the most promising vectors for Czech science at present. The issues of the source base of Czech historians about the problems of Veliky Novgorod and its changes in the period from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present days were also studied. Further research was also connected with the thematic differentiation of Czech Novgorod studies, which developed from a general synthesis on the history of Russia to specialized articles. Analysing the subject of study of Czech historians, studies about the political relations of Novgorod, diplomacy, and some hints about researching the social structure can be pointed out. Despite the not very strong reflection of Novgorod history in the works of Czech historians, this topic represents a promising way since many historical parallels between Novgorod and the Czech Republic can be found.

**Keywords:** Czech historiography, Veliky Novgorod, Czech-Russian relations, Pan-Slavism, Middle Ages

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