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CITY-STATES IN MEDIEVAL RUSSIA AND THE GREAT RUSSIAN STATE SYSTEM

The article provides an insight into the author's view on the rise and development of the state institutions in Rus-Great Russia. According to the author, extant sources and historiographic heritage make it possible to draw a conclusion regarding the *zemskoe* (communal) origin of the medieval Russian state system. Thus, the united Russian state emerged as a communal-autocratic state. Without idealizing relations between the grand prince, the nobility, the bureaucracy and the communal institutions, we must acknowledge that there was a certain balance and in some cases — prevalence of the traditional communal way of life. For the first time in the history of Russian civilization the turn of the 16th century witnessed the rise of a united Russian state, which embodied principles of autocracy and a communal way of life, namely a state, which was both communal and autocratic in its form and nature. Refs 53.

Keywords: medieval Rus, city-states, veche, the princely power, *zemskaia* (communal) system, Great Russian state system.

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ГОРОДА-ГОСУДАРСТВА СРЕДНЕВЕКОВОЙ РУСИ И ВЕЛИКОРУССКАЯ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОСТЬ

В статье излагается авторское понимание проблемы возникновения и развития государственных институтов на территории Руси-Великороссии. По мнению автора, дошедшие до нас источники, а также историографическое наследие позволяют сделать вывод об общинных (земских) основах средневековой русской государственности. Единое Русское государство образуется как земско-самодержавное государство. Не идеализируя отношения великого князя, аристократии, бюрократического аппарата, земских институтов, мы должны признать в целом определенное равновесие, а в отдельных случаях и приоритет земских традиционных порядков. На рубеж XV–XVI столетий приходится рождение — впервые в истории русской цивилизации — единого Русского государства. Государства, воплотившего в себе основы единой державы и общинности, государства земско-самодержавного по форме и по существу. Библиогр. 53 назв.

Ключевые слова: средневековая Русь, города-государства, вече, княжеская власть, земский строй, великорусская государственность.

The prehistory of the northeastern Russian state system dates back to the period of the colonization of the territory between the rivers Volga and Oka by eastern Slavs and is closely related to the formation of pre-state (potestarian) structures which were alliances of tribes on the territory of the East-European steppe. From the IX century, the north-eastern lands seem to have been under the influence of Novgorod and later of Kievan (“Russian land”) centres. This influence mostly manifested itself through the paying of tribute. At the same time complex ethnic and social processes, for example, the organization of territorial communes from the late 10th to the early 11th centuries were taking place in local society. In the 12th century the state system of north-eastern Russia was

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represented by the model of a city-state, typical of all the lands of ancient Russia. The *zem-skaia* system was embodied in the *veche*, which constituted its socio-political foundation [Froianov, Dvornichenko 1988].

The roots of the phenomenon, typical of that system, namely the rivalry between the communes of the cities, in this case, between the “chief” ones Rostov and Suzdal for the priority and domination in the *volost* (city-state) dates from the late 11th century. From the second half of the 12th to the early 13th centuries this struggle continued in the form of a rivalry between the “chief” cities and the “younger” cities, such as Vladimir, Pereiaslavl', Moscow and others. All authorities of the local communes — *veche*, princes and boyars — participated in the conflicts. The latter by no means dominated the society, but, to the contrary, constituted an integral part of these communes [Krivosheev, 1988]. There is no reason for considering the north-eastern princes (starting from the second half of the 12th century) to be the autocrats or the forerunners of the autocratic power. The “autocracy” of Andrei Bogoliubskii meant his reluctance to share the power with his younger brothers, but not the subjugation of the local society [Krivosheev 2003, Gibel']. Vsevolod, who may have been even more power-seeking, in the matters of succession relied on the *veche* [Krivosheev 1993].

Against generally accepted views, the so-called Tatar-Mongol yoke did not jeopardize or hinder the communal development of the north-eastern Russian lands. Neither did it encourage progress in social relations. Its impact on the domestic affairs is obvious, but it did not result in significant changes or a dramatic turn (or overturn) in the socio-economic or socio-political realm. Undoubtedly the influence of the yoke manifested itself, but it did not shatter the framework of the social relations, which developed in the 12th to early 13th centuries. The yoke just became an additional factor (or one of the factors) in the already existing system of social relations, especially in the political sphere. The system, based on communal rules, survived both at the top of the social pyramid (the *veche*, the princes, whose power to some extent gained strength due to the Tatar-Mongol factor) and at the bottom of it (the structure of hundreds, a military squadron) as well as in the cities and rural areas [Krivosheev 2003, Rus i mongoly].

The traditional system of the city-states (lands) continued throughout the 13th, 14th and the first half of the 15th centuries. The fact that the centres, which acted as “chief cities”, were not the same as those which dominated in the ancient Russian period, should not distress us. The system of the medieval Russian city-states appears to have been developing and volatile. The same processes, which had already been taking place earlier also occurred during this period: in particular, the rise of the former subordinate cities, which took on functions of the chief cities and vice versa, a process which amounts to the demotion of some former chief cities. The former subordinate cities of Moscow, Tver', Nizhny Novgorod, Yaroslavl' and others became new big centres. Some chief cities managed to preserve their status: Rostov briefly, and Ryazan for much longer.

According to N. P. Pavlov-Sil'vanskii, the formation of larger independent principalities, such as that of Tver', Yaroslavl', Rostov, Belozersk, Moscow and others cannot be characterized as “feudal, but represented an ordinary division of a united state into a number of states, equal in rights” [Pavlov-Sil'vanskii 1988, p. 473]. At the same time the political division of these city-states continued.

Of course, the qualitative changes, which occurred inside the system of the city-states, were quite significant. In general, medieval Russian city-states inherited the main character-

istics of the ancient Russian city-states [Froianov 1980, pp. 216–243; Froianov, Dvornichenko 1988]. The socio-political activity of the population, expressed in the first place by the veche assemblies is also worth mentioning. The social unity of the townsfolk and the villagers, the functioning of the system of hundreds and finally the peoples' voluntary military forces also played an important role [Krivosheev 2003 Rus i mongoly, pp. 334–401]. All these facts confirm the statement that the cities in the 13th and 14th centuries usually managed to preserve their former structure and functions, thus guaranteeing the efficacy of the city-state system.

Serious changes started from the second half of the 14th century. By that time Moscow had become the most powerful city-state. Muscovite princes managed to depose the supremacy (although it was formal and purely symbolic) of Vladimir. Commenting on the move of the princely throne from Vladimir to Moscow, M. F. Vladimirkii-Budanov claims: 'It was just one more victory of a subordinate city over a chief city; in the same way Vladimir pushed aside Rostov and Suzdal' in the 13th century [Vladimirkii-Budanov, 1907, p. 110]. Rostov and Yaroslavl' also became subordinate to Moscow. The annexation of big and important territories contributed to Moscow's unprecedented strengthening. The princely power also grew. Historiography gives many reasons for this "rise" [Gumilev 1989, pp. 555–558; Zimin 1991, pp. 191–211; Averianov, 1993, pp. 3–11]. Muscovite *zemshchina* (the people, commune), the influence of which is underestimated, seems to have played an important role here. Meanwhile I. D. Beliaev observed, that "it was typical of the representatives of Muscovite *zemshchina* to be strongly attached to the princely court; they became inseparable from the prince's boyars. Several times they rescued the princely court from terrible hazards. They fought the formidable Tatars even when the princes were absent and were the first to neglect the decrees of the khan if they were unprofitable for a princely court. Actually it was *zemshchina*, which within a century transformed a weak and subordinate Muscovite principality into the biggest and strongest in north-eastern Rus [Beliaev 1905, p. 69; Zabelin 1873; Liubavskii 1929, p. 39].

At the same time the internal system of Moscow land preserved the structure of a city-state. It is no coincidence that the veche assemblies (although attended only by the citizens of Moscow) took place there as early as in the middle of the 15th century in a very unfavorable atmosphere.

Historians have repeatedly referred to the causes of the decline of the veche system. The Tatar-Mongol rule has thus been mentioned as merely one of the "external causes" (N. M. Karamzin; M. V. Dovnar-Zapolskii). Iu. A. Kizilov, addressing eastern European analogies, points to the "consolidation of the urban aristocracy into the city council", which replaced the veche, and, finally, to the formation of the "urban municipality, in which the executive power was vested" [Kizilov 1982, p. 32]. According to A. M. Sakharov, the decline of the veche activity on the contrary reveals the "tendency of the cities to develop the veche system" [Sakharov 1959, p. 216].

In our opinion the decline of the veche might have been caused by the underlying processes, which were taking place in the Russian society at that time and were associated, in particular, with a change of state structures. The second part of the 15th century is the beginning of the formation of the Russian state. This was the state structure which, from a historical perspective, quite naturally accumulated and absorbed the former ones, i.e. the city-states.

V. I. Sergeevich appears to have shared this view, claiming that "the amalgamation of numerous separate *volosti* (city-states) into one Muscovite state undermined the basis

of the veche system, which could not function in the state of considerable size". He also points out that the consolidation of the princely power and the subsequent strengthening of the military might (the nobles, who were obliged to serve in the army) resulted in a situation where the "Muscovite princes no longer needed to counsel with the people" [Sergeevich 1893, pp. 40–41]. The very fact of the formation of the service stratum of the society demonstrates a general cause of the change of political institutions — the beginning of the formation of *sosloviia* (forerunners of the classes).

Thus, the period of veche democracy proper was replaced by the period, dominated by the class representation. M. A. Diakonov observed that the expansion of state territory, when 'individual participation in the state affairs became impossible' resulted in the 'substitution of the initial people's assemblies of free citizens for the assemblies of people's representatives' [Diakonov, 1908, p.135].

Of course there was no direct link between the veche councils and *Zemskie* councils. However, L. V. Cherepnin noticed a kind of connection, which is thought to have a different explanation [Cherepnin 1978, pp. 60, 67]. The veche system of the ancient Russian and subsequent periods as well as the *zemskaia* system of the second half of the period between the 15th and 16th centuries had one common social factor, a universal basis; i. e. the communal archetype. It gave rise to future protest actions of the citizens (in Moscow in 1547, 1584, 1586) and occasionally even to the return to the veche system (in Pskov in 1650) [Khoroshkevich 1986, pp. 41–42; Preobrazhenskii 1987, p. 254; Kulakova 1994, pp. 270, 271]. It was the factor, which allowed the emerging united Russian state to acquire the features of the communal-autocratic state, as we will see from this article.

At the same time the very system of the city-state and veche as one of its constituent parts already seem to be archaic, incapable of corresponding to new historical realities. The expansion of the territory, the consolidation of the princely power and the emergence of the classes resulted in the transformation of the initial state system in the state system of the new type — the united state system. The suspension of the tribute-paying dependence on the horde, which had already become formal by that time, and the annexation of Novgorod and Tver' completed this process [Krivoshchev, 2003 Rus i mongoly, pp. 169–252 and others]. Of all the main former structures of the veche system only the princely power remained [Moskovskaia vlast' 2010, pp. 22–49 and others].

The development of the united state and the independent autocratic princely power should not be associated exclusively with the tribute-paying dependence on the Tartar-Mongols. On the contrary it was the final elimination of this dependence which made it possible. However, the politically independent power of the grand prince needed some social support, as it couldn't function in the social vacuum. What social group could it resort to under the new circumstances?

It was neither the clan of the grand prince, often involved in strife over dynastic succession, nor the Boyars' Council, whose views the grand prince had to take into account, nor the Orthodox Church, which openly confronted all the claims on its land on the part of the temporal authorities and in addition was going through a number of internal conflicts, nor the newly formed system of the *prikazy* (administrative bodies, departments).

In this circumstances the grand princes relied not on the system of *kormlenie* (the system of the maintenance of the officials at the expense of the population by payments in kind), which had been discredited by the 15th century, but on the *zemskie* structures.

Due to the traditional long-term interaction of the princely power and *zemskie* institutions, their close cooperation also contributed to the formation of the united state. *Zemstvo* (the commune) and autocracy mutually reinforced each other, supplementing each other and relying on each other. Thus, the new state, which was communal-autocratic both in its form and nature, came into being. The middle of the 15th century witnessed the last successfully completed period of the annexation of the biggest and most powerful of the formerly independent lands. From the point of view of land ownership Ivan III can be titled the 'sovereign of all Russia'. However, the annexation of the formerly independent territories did not mean the triumphal advance of the Muscovite way of life on these territories, where 'local peculiarities and differences were felt for a very long time despite their integration into a united state' [N.N. Pokrovskii]. Using the example of Tver', B. N. Floria demonstrated, that the process of the replacement of old local administrative bodies by the central Muscovite ones dragged on for decades and resulted in the establishment of 'local administrative bodies, composed of the elected representatives of the nobility' [Floria 1975, p. 290, also see Makarikhin 1985, p. 90; Smetanina 1991]. The system of self-government made up for the loss of the former independence of the lands and at the same time indicated the weakness of the central administration and the traditional "dualism" of power in Russia.

Ivan III was for the first time titled 'the sovereign and the autocrat of all Russia' in 1442. Scholars have stated more than once, that 'contemporary society mostly associated the concept of autocracy with the idea of the external independence of the country' [Diakonov 1908, p. 405; Zyzykin 1925, p. 29; Alekseev 1994, pp. 21–22]. The suspension of paying the tribute to the horde was also of great importance. As A. E. Presniakov argued: 'the events of 1480 indeed turned the reign of the princes all over Russia into a state, characterized by sovereignty and autocracy'. His statement about 'the external autocracy of the Great Russian state' was also very precise and laconic [Presniakov 1918, pp. 425, 451; also see Filiushkin 2006, pp. 171–172 and others].

Nevertheless, the historical literature generally states that it was Ivan III, who initiated the absolutist aspirations and even despotic rule in Russia.¹ But was it really so? Can Ivan Vasilievich be considered an absolute monarch, who started the succession of famous Russian despots? We can hardly believe this. As a matter of fact, Ivan III (as well as Ivan IV, the Terrible) seem to have been quite weak monarchs. This was not with regard to their personal qualities, which were rather unique in many aspects, but with regard to the social conditions, in which they ruled. M. A. Diakonov, (upholding the idea of V. O. Kliuchevskii) insisted, that "it would be wrong to claim that Russian monarchs managed to realize the ideal of the absolute autocratic power ... the might of this power affected relations with individuals, but not with the existing order" [Diakonov 1908, pp. 406, 415]. It was too early for the absolute monarchy to develop, as the social foundation for it had not formed yet. In the late 15th and early 16th centuries there were no social groups in Russia the prince could resort to. The prince also could not receive any backing from his clan, nobility, bureaucracy or the church.

The events of 1479, thoroughly examined by Iu. G. Alekseev, became the focus of many social contradictions of that time. As a matter of fact these events epitomized all the conflicts of the future decades: the dynastic rivalry, the clashes with appanage princes, the

¹ The historiography of this issue is thoroughly examined in [Shishkin, 2009, p. 58–120].

governors and the church. The attitude of the grand prince was quite specific. For example, in the conflict between the Velikolukskii governor Ivan Lyko Obolenskii and the citizens, Ivan III sided with the latter. In the end this protection caused the conflict between the grand prince and the appanage prince. This example demonstrates the tendency of the grand prince to seek support among the local groups [Alekseev 1991, p. 112]. At the same time the grand princes not so much dominated the appanage princes and other princes as were the first among equals. A. A. Zimin argues that “the power of the grand prince was limited by established traditions, which were approved by religion and rooted in the patriarchal view on the nature of power. The people preferred to live like their fathers and grandfathers and did not readily accept new ideas” [Zimin, 1982, p. 242].²

The prince was overwhelmed by the traditions so excessively, that he, being unable to stop granting appanages (independent principalities) to his children, at the same time had to fight against his brothers, the appanage princes. The dynastic rivalry between the proponents of the grandson of Ivan III Dmitrii (the son of Ivan Ivanovich Molodoi, d. 1490) and the advocates of Vasilii, the son of Ivan III and his second wife Sophia Paleologos, which continued during the last fifteen years of the prince’s reign, also does not speak well for his authority [Zimin 1982, pp. 66–68, 138–147 and others; Alekseev 1989, pp. 25–44 and others; Alekseev 1991, pp. 110–111, 116–126, 146–148 and others; Lurie 1994, pp. 195–216].

The conflict between the grand prince and the Metropolitan also started in 1479. As Iu. G. Alekseev notes: ‘it had nothing to do with the doctrine; the point was that the prince wanted to put the church under his control’. It is worth mentioning that during the construction of the church in honour of his patron John Chrysostom in the Muscovite *posad* (trading quarter, situated outside the Kremlin) the prince expected to receive the support from the people of the *posad*, the capital’s numerous tradesmen and craftsmen [Alekseev 1991, pp. 112–114].

Regarding the relationship between the church and temporal authorities in general, it should be taken into consideration that the Russian church, going through serious ordeals regarding the expansion of Judaism and Catholicism and conflicts between the *osifliane* and *nestiazhateli* (adherents of Joseph Volotsky and non-possessors), sided with the prince only in the cases when their interests were mutual. Any permanent or unconditional support was out of question.

From the 1460s and 1470s the ‘rudiments of a new system of administration, based on the administrative bodies (*prikazy*), could be traced’ [Alekseev 1992, pp. 202–204; Shishkin 2009, pp. 279–332]. The *diaks* — literate government officials of common origin — started playing an important role in the state administration. They carried out the prince’s orders and developed the bodies of the Boyar’s Council, the Treasury and the Palace administration as well as the *prikazy*. Specializing in the execution of particular assignments (financial, diplomatic or military) the *diaks* paved the way for the establishment of administrative bodies, based on the functional rather than territorial distribution of tasks. However, according to A. A. Zimin, the significance of the early *prikaz* system shouldn’t be overestimated [Zimin, 1982, pp 252–254]. What is more, in the middle of the 15th century the number of the ‘forerunners of bureaucracy’ was only fifty people and under Ivan III no more than two hundred.

² ‘The tradition of the succession of princely power was based on the principles of common ancient Russian law’ argues a modern historian [Mel’nikov 2010, p. 161].

In order to retain and consolidate his power the grand prince had to draw on the system of *zemstvo*, which may sound ironic, especially in the view of the class concepts, typical of the Soviet historiography, which would never admit the existence of any compromise between the authorities and the people. Ivan III continued the tradition of the communal self-government, but on a new state all-Russian level. The Muscovite government turned directly to the practices of local elective authorities. N. N. Pokrovskii argues that “alongside with the development of the united Russian state, its central and local administrative bodies were also taking shape. At the same time the fixation of the rights of the class-representative institutions (early forms akin to modern parliament) first in the provinces and later in the centre was also in progress... The substantial rights of some local communities also were not neglected” [Pokrovskii, 1991, p.6].

The institution of the city clerks was launched at the turn of the XV–XVI centuries. Although these clerks represented the administration of the prince they were recruited from the local gentry (the children of the boyars). Being the commandants of the city fortresses they gradually took up other tasks, related to military-administrative sphere: construction of roads and bridges, military transportation and arms’ storage. One of their main duties was the conduction of the district mobilization of the peasant and urban voluntary military forces. The finances were also concentrated in their hands [Nosov, 1957, pp. 15–197; Shishkin 2009, pp. 437–458].

Iu. G. Alekseev speaks about the “reform of local administration” in relation to the last decades of the XV century. The government documents, regulating the work of the local authorities — the governors and the *volosteli* (heads of the districts) and the main approaches to the court system and administration, can be traced back to this particular period [Alekseev 1987, pp. 63–64].

The practice of granting charters, which defined the rights of the *kormlenshchiki* (officials, maintained at the expense of the population) and their responsibilities, had already been familiar to the grand princes of Moscow. Thus, in 1397, Vasiliĭ Dmitrievich granted such a charter to the population of the Dvinskaia land — from Dvinskĭe boyars to the *sotskie* (civil officials — leaders of the commune) and ‘all the black people’ (ordinary members of the commune), to the ‘entire self-governing *zemskii* world’ [S. V. Rozhdestvenskii]. It guaranteed the right of every person to make complaints to the princely court against the abuse of the officials.

The Belozerskaia charter of 1488 precisely regulated the relations between the central authorities and the local population. It not only contained the article, which gave the local people the right to complain to the prince about the actions of the governors and their assistants, but considerably expanded it. It also introduced the so-called *smesnoi* (joint) trial: the governors’ court was authorized only in the presence of the representatives of the commune — *sotskii* and the “kind people” (members of the commune). A separate provision barred the governors from interfering into the inner life of the commune.

Thus, Dvinskaia and particularly Belozerskaia charters manifest, on the one hand, the tendency of the central power to restrain the power of the governors, and, on the other hand, the fact that the centre recognized the significance of the local communes [Alekseev 1990; Alekseev 1991, pp. 161–162].

The conclusion of Iu. G. Alekseev is of extreme importance: ‘although the Belozerskaia charter was addressed to the population of only one principality, it was a fundamental, standard document...It might have been planned to grant such charters to other

principalities of the Russian state as well. A number of provisions and regulations of this charter were included in the all-Russian code of laws of the Muscovite Rus — Sudebnik of 1497 [Alekseev 1991, pp. 162, 192–193; Alekseev 2001].

Moreover the domestic policy of Ivan III seems to have been conducted for the benefit of *zemshchina* as the social stronghold of the princely power. The great prince demonstrated great flexibility and foresight, taking advantage of the sympathies and support of the people [Iu. G. Alekseev].

For example, this applies to the agrarian policy of the “sovereign of all Russia”. Some modern scholars have noted, that in the late 14th to the early 16th centuries princely power was ‘concerned with the preservation and expansion of the black (peasant, communal) and palace (prince’s) lands’; the peasants in their turn ‘facilitated the material (in terms of land) predominance of the princely power over its opponents’ [Gorksii 1974, pp. 179, 186, 187; Alekseev 1983, pp. 104–105, 111–112]. L. V. Danilova provides information about the outstanding role of the *chernososhnaia* (peasant) commune in the development of the united Russian state. Placed in the centre of the country this commune “served as a material base and massive public support of the princely power in the matter of the consolidation and centralization” [Danilova 1994, p.196].

Launching of the institution of the service people was connected with the formation of the provincial social bases. The *pomestnaia* system (the system of the conditional ownership of land) was not a prerequisite for the consolidation of the state, but a direct result of it [Danilova 1993, pp. 68–69; Danilova 1994, p. 196]. Later on it led to the dramatic change in the life of the commune [Mikhailova 2003]. However, during the first decades this system was perceived in an absolutely different way. V. B. Kobrin made important observations and conclusions about this: ‘when the black lands were given as estates to the *pomeshchiki* (landlords), the status of the land ownership was not changed completely and straight away. The estates were believed to be parts of the lands of the city-state, only allotted to the landlords, but not owned by them. The landlords acted as the protectors of the peasants. As the recipients of the taxes, which before had been collected by the before, they were expected to defend the city-state in return. This statement occurs in the documents more than once.’ It should be taken into account that alongside the *ispomeshchenye* (relocated to other places) residents of Novgorod and Moscow the service people of provincial origin, who were given estates in their own or some other principalities, also became the landlords, with the ‘major bulk of the recorded landlords of that time not belonging to the noble families’ [Kobrin 1985, pp. 107, 114–115].

Thus, during the decades the landlords did not oppose the free rural communal population, but, on the contrary, managed to gain a certain reputation and authority due to their official responsibilities and financial status. The trade policy was pursued for the benefit of the citizens [P. P. Smirnov, Iu. G. Alekseev], which actually resulted in the formation of the urban stratum of population. According to Iu. G. Alekseev, the trade reform of the 1460s and 1470s in Suzdal, for example, ‘was carried out intentionally’. The grand prince ‘favoured the citizens of Suzdal’: he did not allow the country folk to come to the rows of stalls and sell salt in exchange for money and other products.’ Thus the trade in the city became exclusively the prerogative of the townsfolk. In the same way the Belozerskaia charter permits only the townsfolk, *belozerskie posazhane*, to go to the other side of the lake and to conduct trade there in the old-fashioned manner”. Both the Belozerskaia charter and the subsequent charter of 1497, addressed to the *belozerskie* customs officials,

demonstrate that 'in its trade policy the government of Ivan III mostly focused on the needs of the townsfolk'. These charters as well as the measures, aimed at the concentration of trade in certain places, manifest the 'general tendency of the grand prince's trade policy' [Alekseev, 1988, pp. 168–169, 172–175]. The Belozerskaia charter also accentuates the intention to act in the 'old-fashioned way'. Consequently, Ivan III continued and approved of the old-fashioned trade practices.

The last statement also applies to the measures, taken by Ivan III with respect to *zemshchina*. They are actually not innovations, but old things, long forgotten: Ivan III continued the policies which had existed before him and was doing this on an all-Russian scale. In order to increase his power he relied on *zemstvo* — vast masses of population. This was the main point of his domestic policy and his role in the development of the united Russian state.

Russian historiography of the 20th century tends to exaggerate the confrontation of the authorities and the society in the medieval period. Acknowledging that their relationship was far from ideal, it is noteworthy, that the nature of this relationship was evolutionary, rather than revolutionary. This implied a certain consensus of the princes, grand princes and, finally, the tsars and the communal institutions and their representatives. In the circumstances, when the authorities were not isolated from the public, the peaceful coexistence of different levels of authority seems to have been most likely.

The ideology of the people's belief in a monarch dates back to the times of Kievan Rus'. Entrenched in mass consciousness this concept moved to the subsequent era. Modern historians refer to it as 'tsarist ideology' or 'naïve monarchism'. In the 'naïve monarchism' our historians discover idealized views on monarchs, which had nothing to do with their real policy, the utopian hope of better life and liberation from social oppression. But is it really so? I. Ia. Froianov, offering an analysis of this issue, argues that the term "naïve monarchism" is explicitly defective. The idea that the people had been fostering a centuries-old belief in the tsar without any good reason to do so portrays them as simpletons, unable to understand and assess the reality. However, there is no ideology, which could take deep roots and exist for a long time without firm practical foundation. There should have been real historical reasons for the belief in the tsar and the 'justice of the monarch's will' [Froianov, Lavrov 1995, pp. 20–22]. In medieval Russia the *zemskaia* policy of Ivan III and his descendants proved to be such a reason. The words of the outstanding theorist of Russian sovereign power L. A. Tikhomirov are apt to complete this topic: 'articulating their concept of the state, our ancestors did not borrow somebody else's ideas, but generated their own, which appear to be even more solid, taking into consideration that the self-consciousness of the sovereign power was surprisingly in tune with the political self-consciousness of the people' [Tikhomirov 1993, pp. 87–88].

The period of the 1480s and 1490s was called by Iu. G. Alekseev the 'epoch'. 'This epoch represents a qualitative border between the former appanage Rus and the new centralized state, which defined the further development of the Russian state in the XVI century' [Alekseev 1987, p.65]. Agreeing in general with the conclusion about the significance of the reign of Ivan III for Russia we wish to add that from our point of view there was no dramatic turnaround: the way for the new 'quality' was paved by the previous developments with recourse to the traditional institutions. The transition to the new forms of social life was carried out smoothly and gradually without any social cataclysms.

In contrast to a number of scholars, who attribute the rise of the autocracy to the Tatar period and to the effect of the yoke, we claim that the first real signs of autocracy appeared straight after the overthrow of the yoke. However, the autocracy relied on the communal administration, in particular, on the certain *zemskie* groups, thus, contributing to the formation of the classes of peasants, townsfolk and landlords. In the late 15th to early 16th centuries the autocracy could not manage without *zemstvo* in the same way that the *zemstvo* of the early 17th century, for example, could not function without monarchy.

It is generally known, that the reforms, launched in the late 15th century, were continued in the first half of the 16th century. It should be emphasized that they did not appear from nowhere, but were preceded by the provisions of the Belozerskaia charter and Sudebnik of 1497 about the court representation of the local population, which, in turn, was based on the tradition of the unwritten Russian law [Alekseev, 1990, p. 220]. The need for these reforms was so urgent, that the reformatory activities continued unabated under Vasilii III, Elena Glinskaia and the boyars' rule.

The reforms were completed in the middle of the 16th century. *Zemskaiia*, urban and *pomestnaia* reforms became the solid foundation for the building of the Great Russian state system — the autocratic power of the grand prince, later the tsar and the *Zemskii* council, which towered above it, but could not function without it. The united Russian state took the form of the communal-autocratic state. While not idealizing the relations between the grand prince, the nobility, the bureaucracy and the communal institutions, we have to acknowledge that there was a certain balance and in some cases — prevalence of the traditional communal way of life.³

Thus, the rise of the first Russian united state **in the history of Russian civilization occurred** at the turn of the XV–XVI centuries. This state embodied the principles of the autocracy and communal way of life and was communal-autocratic both in form and nature.

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³ For the views of historians on communal self-government see: [Shishkin 2009, pp. 513–546].

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