



DEBATABLE PROBLEMS OF THE SOCIO-POLITICAL SYSTEM OF KIEVAN RUS: THE ELITE AND DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The article is clarifying the features of the political system of Kievan Rus in terms of the extent of the spread of authoritarian traits and democracy. The importance of penetrating into the deep essence of our early political genesis, among other things, is dictated by the fact that it will help to understand a lot about the fundamental foundations of the modern domestic political order, including both institutional, cultural and psychological aspects. **Methods:** The research involved an analysis of historical sources and the works of experts. **Results:** It was found that Kievan Rus was already a typical early state in which the administrative apparatus was in the process of formation, while the life of the social majority was regulated through traditional institutions, most of which were rooted in the pre-state period. **Conclusion:** The authors believe that the main political actor was still not the zemstvo, but the princely power. At the same time, expressions of the people's will often occurred in the form of a mass emotional impulse, regulated for certain rational purposes. People's decisions were made largely on an ochlocratic basis, and therefore they were not always successful.

Keywords: Druzhina. Early state. Politogenesis. Princely power. Statogenesis. Veche institute.



PROBLEMAS DISCUTÍVEIS DA ESTRUTURA SÓCIO-POLÍTICA DE KIEVAN RUS': ELITE E DEMOCRACIA

RESUMO

Objetivo: O artigo esclarece as peculiaridades do sistema político de Kievan Rus' em termos da extensão das características autoritárias e da democracia. A importância de penetrar na essência mais profunda da gênese política primitiva é ditada pelo fato de que ela ajudará a compreender muito na base fundamental do sistema político russo moderno, incluindo tanto os aspectos institucionais como culturais e psicológicos. **Métodos:** A pesquisa envolveu uma análise de fontes históricas e o trabalho de especialistas. **Resultados:** Foi estabelecido que Kievan Rus' já era um típico estado inicial no qual o aparelho governante estava em processo de formação e a vida da maioria social era regulada através de instituições tradicionais, a maioria das quais tinha suas raízes no período pré-estatal. **Conclusão:** Os autores acreditam que o principal fator político ainda não era o zemstvo, mas a autoridade do príncipe. Ao mesmo tempo, a expressão popular da vontade muitas vezes tomou a forma de uma explosão emocional em massa, regulada para certos propósitos racionais. As decisões das pessoas foram em grande parte tomadas em uma base burocrática e, portanto, nem sempre foram bem sucedidas.

Palavras-chave: Druzhina (vigilância da comunidade). Estado inicial. Politogênese. Poder principesco. Statogênese. Instituição veche.

1. INTRODUCTION

The issues of determining the essence of the domestic political system in the Kiev period can not lose their theoretical and practical relevance. Already in the pre-revolutionary period, there was a wide discourse on this issue, including opposing positions; in Soviet times, under the pressure of the ideological context, disputes were partially leveled, and in the post-Soviet period they received a new impetus, often leading to the polarization of scientific points of view. The importance of penetrating into the deep essence of our early political genesis is also dictated by the fact that it will help to understand a lot about the fundamental foundations of the modern domestic political order, including both institutional and cultural and psychological aspects. The Kiev period is the primary stage of the formation of the national statehood, in connection with which this fact also has an ideological sound within the framework of at least the relations between Russia and Ukraine. A close analysis of the political and historical aspects of this era should help clarify a number of long-standing theoretical



problems, such as the causes and sources of domestic statism, or the mechanisms of continuity of the political system from Kievan Rus to the Moscow Kingdom.

It must be recognized that the mentioned spread of scientific positions is dictated not least by the scarcity of information received about this era. The main range of sources consists of chronicles and archaeological data, the interpretation of which often occurs not without a strong influence of subjectivism. Historian P. V. Lukin rightly believes that a comprehensive study of the Old Russian social system is hindered by apriorism, the essence of which is reduced to relying on a pre-formulated concept, which leads “to a certain adjustment of reality to the already existing idea of what it should be”. Analyzing the same chronicle news, scientists often find exactly what they want to find in them, and data that contradict a priori a given concept are either interpreted in the “right” way, or are declared “unreliable, internally contradictory, or, for example, not evidence of real socio-political relations, but rhetoric” (Lukin, 2008, p. 47).

Unfortunately, an essential element of apriorism is contained in the picture of the political life of Ancient Russia, proposed by the famous historian I. Ya. Froyanov and his followers, among whom we note first of all the St. Petersburg scientist A. Yu. Dvornichenko. The essence of the so-called volost approach of I. Froyanov and A. Dvornichenko is reduced to the statement about the existence of a republican system in Kievan Rus, which was formed in the process of transition from primitiveness to a class feudal order. As a result of the transition from the generic to the territorial principle and the emergence of coordinating urban centers in the lands of the Eastern Slavs, not principalities-monarchies were formed, as in Europe, but republics that took the form of a city-state, with “the resulting democracy of public relations” (Froyanov & Dvornichenko, 1988, p. 26). Such an internal political situation, according to scientists, was due to the lag behind Europe in the development of feudal relations, as well as statehood in general. According to A. Dvornichenko (2010), feudal relations were formed in Russia only in the XIV century, while statehood – only by the XV-XVI centuries.

In general, the Kiev period is characterized by these scientists in the form of an evolution from a complex chiefdom to a volost system, the basis of which was a civil community consolidated in the main city of the volost. The collapse of tribal relations and the territorial social ties that replaced them brought two political subjects to the



forefront – the prince and the people's veche (zemstvo). And the confrontation of these political subjects by the middle of the XII century was marked by the widespread victory of the Zemstvo (Froyanov, 1995). The people's assemblies-veche, which towered above the princely power, are recognized as the main political institution of the Kiev period, which predetermined the democratic people-right character of the political system. This explains the sympathy of these scientists for this period (Dvornichenko, 2010).

The logic of this article will be based on a polemic with a similar vision, which we do not completely reject. It must be admitted that both the volost approach of I. Froyanov, A. Dvornichenko, and the vision of their opponents (A. Gorsky, V. Lukin, P. Stefanovich, etc.) have very, very limited empirical argumentation. Nevertheless, with appropriate handling of theoretical calculations in combination with the use of facts, it is possible to get significantly closer to the truth, at least at the level of reliable hypotheses.

The purpose of this article is to determine the features of the political system of Kievan Rus precisely from the point of view of the spread of authoritarian power and democracy, which can be said, if not with sufficient confidence, then at least with a high degree of hypotheticism. We intend to concentrate our own efforts on solving the following tasks, during which a significant place will be given to a critical analysis of the parish approach.

First, the justification and proof of the existence of the statehood of Kievan Rus.

Secondly, the consideration of the upper strata of society of the Kiev period, the definition of the scope of their functions and political subjectivity.

Third, the analysis of the current domestic political situation in order to identify the real aspects of democracy.

In the process of writing the work, the works of representatives of the volost concept proper were studied: I. Froyanov, A. Dvornichenko; the works of L. Grinin, where the general picture of the early stages of politogenesis passing into statogenesis is successfully presented; the works of S. Nefedov containing a three-way model of factor analysis of historical and political processes; the works of M. Diakonov on the institutions of the veche, the works of V. Yanin about ancient Novgorod, H. Lovmyansky about the influence of the Normans, as well as A. Gorsky, V. Lukin, P.



Stefanovich about certain aspects of the political life of Kievan Rus. Some attention was paid to the works of military historians V. Taratorin, K. Zhukov.

2. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The article is of a theoretical nature, and its substantive meaning is determined by the controversy with the provisions of the volost concept. The methodological support of the authors in the framework of this polemic is the concept of politogenesis-statogenesis of L. Grinin, factor analysis proposed by S. Nefedov, as well as the work of historians of Kievan Rus (V. Lukin, A. Gorsky, P. Stefanovich) specializing in narrow problematic issues that clarify specific aspects of the political system of the named era. That is, in the latter case, we should talk about expert analysis data. The synthesis of Marxist and elitist approaches served as a common socio-philosophical basis. In addition, the methods of comparative analysis, historicism, and mass psychology were used in the course of constructing the author's arguments.

3. THE RESULTS OF THE CONDUCTED RESEARCH

The denial of the statehood of Kievan Rus by the supporters of the volost approach helps them to substantiate the democratic nature of the socio-political relations of this period. A. Dvornichenko examines the entire domestic political history through the prism of the confrontation between the zemstvo (people's) and state traditions. The latter was able to gain a final advantage only with the formation of an autocratic state power in the XVI-XVII centuries. Whereas in Kievan Rus it was the zemstvo principle that prevailed, and the forerunner of the state – the princely power had a subordinate meaning (Dvornichenko, 2010). To consolidate their position, I. Froyanov and A. Dvornichenko draw analogies of the urban republics of Kievan Rus with the polis system of Ancient Greece, the state character of which is also questionable (Dvornichenko, 2010). However, from our point of view, this obscures the problem more. Firstly, the economic basis of the ancient polis and cities of Kievan Rus was fundamentally different, assuming completely different internal social and political layouts there and there. Secondly, according to these historians, the fierce internecine competition of the East Slavic urban republics led to fragmentation and, accordingly,



to weakening. In ancient Greece, rather the opposite processes were observed – attempts at interpolitical integration (Athenian maritime unions, etc.).

A more adequate idea of the political essence of Kievan Rus helps to form L. Grinin's concept of “the early state”, by which he designates the first stage in the evolution of statehood or statogenesis. This category has a fairly wide coverage, including a wide variety of political phenomena – for example, the highly bureaucratic order of the third dynasty of Ur and the same ancient polis, almost devoid of an administrative apparatus. The early state of L. Grinin (2006) interprets as a special form of political organization of a fairly large and complex agrarian and handicraft society (a group of societies, territories), which determines its foreign policy and partially social and public order; it is an organization of power separated from the population: a) having sovereignty and sovereignty; b) capable of forcing to fulfill its requirements; changing important relationships and redistributing resources; c) built (in whole or in part) not on the principle of kinship.

But the main distinguishing feature of the early state is its incompleteness, organizational and social incompleteness, which primarily concerns the relationship between the state and society. We can say that both subjects only get used to each other, often acting at odds. The processes of developing the necessary balance can be facilitated by “collapses, restructuring of management, collapses and associations, civil wars, the birth of new states on the ruins” (Grinin, 2007, p. 125). Starting from the classical triad of signs of the state – territoriality, taxes, separated from the rest of society by a powerful administrative apparatus, L. Grinin points out that in the early states these signs are not fully detected, since they are in their infancy. And this is a completely typical quality for the early state. All three of these signs appear in an accentuated and pure form only at the next stage of statogenesis – the stage of a developed state, which the domestic political society entered from the second half of the XVI century. But it was at this time that A. Dvornichenko attributes the establishment of the national statehood and the subordination of the zemstvo tradition to it. The preceding period of the XIII – XV centuries is considered by him as a transitional period, while the Kievan period itself is considered as a stateless one (Dvornichenko, 2010).

It must be admitted that this position reflects some real things, namely the fact that in the conditions of the early state, society really has considerable autonomy,



having its own administrative and even military institutions. The zemstvo tradition in Kievan Rus manifested itself quite freely and did not always come into conflict with the supreme power, often coexisting with it on a conflict-free basis. After all, in the early state, the administrative apparatus is still weak, “fragmented and partial”, therefore it is limited to minimal control over social processes. The situation in Kievan Rus is fully reflected by L. Grinin's thesis that external tasks came to the fore for the state apparatus, while internal problems acquired a secondary meaning. According to the scientist, “the early states regulated the internal order only partially, leaving much in the hands of local self-government or completely letting it take its course. But external military tasks were initially concentrated in their own hands, or even monopolized” (Grinin, 2007, p. 144).

But how justified is the denial of the statehood of Kievan Rus? L. Grinin (2011), an expert on the problem of politogenesis, identified a number of distinctive features of early-stage societies of statehood from pre-state societies. It is appropriate to give them here, accompanied by comments on the situation that is developing in the Kiev period.

First, the change in the production base. I must say that I. Froyanov and A. Dvornichenko do not pay enough attention to the economic basis in their works, which is hardly justified. After all, in this case, there is an underestimation of such an important factor as the surplus product, which plays almost the most important role in the hierarchical alignment that acts as the foundation of the political (state) order. As for the specific formation of Kievan Rus, the change in the production base should be associated with the control of trade routes (the Volga way, “from the Varangians to the Greeks”), largely due to the penetration of the Norman (Varangian) element (Lovmyansky, 1985). It was trade that was the source of obtaining an additional product by the Kievan princes, the expanded volumes of which made it possible to maintain the integrity of the East Slavic lands for quite a long time (Zhukov, 2018).

Secondly, the increase in the size of the territory and the population, which leads to the consolidation of internal contacts. In our case, the unification of Novgorod and Kiev by the Varangian Jarl Oleg in 882 may well be considered a similar circumstance. This leader, in addition, successfully reoriented a number of Slavic tribes or chiefdoms from the pro-Khazar orientation to the Kiev one.



Thirdly, the structure of society and its management are becoming more complicated. In many cases, professional managers appear, clothed with power. In relation to Kievan Rus, A. Gorsky points not only to the appearance of the prince's henchmen in the cities – *posadniki*, *tysyatskys*, etc., but also to the formation of a kind of service organizations – groups of people united on a professional basis and serving the needs of the prince and the nobility (*bortniki*, *bobrovniki*, *Sokolniki*, etc.). Hence, the state power was not just “layered” on society, collecting taxes from the ordinary population, but itself formed spheres of socio-economic relations dependent on itself (Gorsky, 2010).

Fourth, the traditions of management and regulation of socio-political life are changing. In general, the authorities opportunities for coercion are increasing. Already in the X century alone. The Kiev power center successfully carried out a number of measures – the planting of Orthodox Christianity, the establishment of fixed amounts of tribute and places of their collection (in fact, the tax reform of Princess Olga).

Fifth, further institutionalization of inequality in the interests of the elite. With regard to Kievan Rus, we can state the emergence of new groups of dependent population (*procurements*, *ryadovichi*, etc.), as well as the consolidation of the hierarchical structure at the official level, although the basis of the administrative system was still the norms of customary law (the editorial board of “Russian Truth”).

Sixth, the division of society into strata is increasing, differing in rights, duties, status and volume of consumption, place in management and decision-making. The *druzhinny* type of the Kiev statehood assumed the domination of the military-service layer, organized in the likeness of a corporation, whose representatives, according to A. Gorsky (2010), received income from the ordinary population – either through the administration of public offices, or through the exploitation of their own land plot granted for service. A common point of view is that already during the reign of Vladimir the Saint, an internal political structure that has existed for several centuries is being formed. The top of ancient Russian society consisted of three main components – the nobility (*boyars*); the city elite, consisting mainly of merchants, who could often take on military functions; soldiers on the maintenance of princes (*gridey/youths*) (Stefanovich, 2012). As for the mass of the ordinary population, it was divided into numerous groups that were in varying degrees of subordination from the nobility: from paying taxes to various forms of personal dependence.



Seventh, the emergence of an ideology aimed at legitimizing shifts in the socio-political structure. In the Kiev period, the problem of such legitimation obviously acted as a factor in the religious reforms of Prince Vladimir, who, as is known, chose Orthodox Christianity, which assumed these ideological functions.

Thus, the thesis of A. Dvornichenko about the absence of statehood in the ancient Russian lands of the Kiev period should be challenged. Kievan Rus is a typical early state formed as a result of the East Slavic politogenesis at about the same time as other early medieval formations (the kingdoms of Poland, Norway, etc.), where the emphasis was on the institution of the squad. As is typical of formations of this type, the political system of the Kievan princes was only built over society, limited to military and redistributive tasks, collecting tribute, duties and duties, while not penetrating deeply into the grassroots social processes (Grinin, 2006). The society of the Kiev period really lived its own life in many respects, traditional institutions such as Veche people's assemblies functioned, which, apparently, prompted I. Froyanov and his followers to hurry with a statement about the rule of the people's rule controlling the princely power (Froyanov & Dvornichenko, 1988).

This implies the need to clarify the degree of influence of the people's assemblies of the Veche on political decisions, and more broadly - on political processes in general. Was the power of the people's will really decisive at that time? Naturally, the elite context should be taken into account here – the real significance of the ruling groups that form around the prince and act as an expression and conductor of his power.

Since Kievan Rus belongs to the military type of the early state, it will be advisable to touch on the military aspect, which was very important, if not at all decisive in the early Medieval era. The actualization of defense problems in the conditions of the constant threat of external attack predetermined the division of society into military and non-military groups. Moreover, those belonging to the first category in early medieval European countries received the cultural legitimation of the noble estate. Here we should associate ourselves with the thesis of A. Gorsky (2010) said that at that time, the factor determining the nature of the internal structure was not so much economic as functional-class. The military-service class really stood in the foreground, but there are opposite opinions about its origin, as well as the vector of the service orientation. The same A. Gorsky is convinced of the origin of the military nobility from



the princely squads, but I. Froyanov and A. Dvornichenko, who oppose him, believe that the cities that sought a preponderance over the princely power also had military arguments in the form of local or “zemstvo” boyars.

The military aspects of Kievan Rus were not without Norman participation, the problem of the degree of which does not lose its discussion. For example, S. Nefedov is inclined to believe that the Slavs were conquered by the Norman people of the Rus, who had a clear military superiority over them. Having formed a kind of military ruling class, the Russ were engaged in military campaigns, and the Slavs, after paying tribute, lived their own customs (Nefedov, 2010). In our opinion, this is too simplistic a position. The vocation of one of the leaders of the Danish Vikings, Rurik, was realized on a voluntary initiative and after the Swedish Vikings who collected tribute were expelled (the testimony of the First Novgorod Chronicle). That is, there is hardly any reason to assume both the overwhelming military superiority of immigrants from Scandinavia (if they were able to be expelled), and a certain “Norman yoke” over the Slavs.

A more balanced approach is proposed by the Polish historian H. Lovmyansky, as well as domestic researchers A. Gorsky, P. Stefanovich, specializing in the study of the phenomenon of the squad and the boyars of the Kiev period. The actual institution of the squad was not introduced by the Varangians, but it also developed among the Slavs long before the IX century. The squads of the Varangian kings and jarls apparently ensured the military superiority of Kiev over other Slavic associations. It is in this circumstance that A. Gorsky (2010) sees the main reason for the unification of the East Slavic territory into one state. A close point of view is inherent in H. Lovmyansky (1985), who believes that the first Russian princes used the Varangians as mercenary soldiers, and some were entrusted with administrative functions. At the same time, the Norman element was initially hardly dominant even within the framework of military resources and was assimilated quickly. For example, in the chronicles of the events of the X - beginning of the XI centuries, 15 names of representatives of the druzhina nobility are mentioned, including 11 Slavic, 2 Scandinavian and 2 Turk (Gorsky, 1989). As remark is very reasonable A. Gorsky says that the ethnically alien elites who have come here have been resisting assimilation for quite a long time (for example, this was the case in early medieval Bulgaria). However, the third Kievan prince already had a Slavic name-Svyatoslav, and the traditional



collection of tribute is known not under the Scandinavian name “veitsla”, but as the Slavic “polyudye” (Gorsky, 2010). According to H. Lovmiansky (1985), the called Scandinavian dynasty became Slavonic already in the second half of the IX century after the occupation of Kiev by Oleg.

As for the problem of military effectiveness, it should be recognized that the forces that make up the Old Russian city militia (the so-called “voi”) had significantly greater combat capability than, for example, the militia of Western European cities. Nevertheless, their training and experience were not equated with vigilantes, genuine military professionals. Regiments of “warriors” often formed a foot part of the princely army (Taratorin, 1998). However, in the X-XIII centuries the main striking force was made up of mounted vigilantes, since the cavalry was the most adequate in solving the problem of repelling mobile raids “from the steppe” - the Pechenegs, and then the Polovtsians who replaced them (Zhukov, 2018). From this we can conclude that the princely armed contingents acted as the main force argument, which was recognized by the rest of the population, including the townspeople. Thus, A. Dvornichenko's statement that the dictated their will to the prince should hardly be supported.

As for the problem of the zemstvo boyars, the existence of which is insisted on by I. Froyanov and A. Dvornichenko, while A. Gorsky denies the existence of “community leaders” sharing power with princes, claiming that the persons “offered” in this capacity, in fact, turn out to be princely people (Gorsky, 2010). A meticulous and attentive researcher of the Old Russian elite, P. Stefanovich (2012), partially supporting the position of A. Gorsky, still does not rush to a final conclusion, for which there is insufficient data. It seems to us that this uncertainty does not particularly prevent further consideration of the institution of the veche, namely, its real people-power content.

The Veche is an institution of customary law, whose roots go back to the pre-state past. According to the well-known pre-revolutionary historian M. A. Diakonov, the veche characterizes like a period of weak, weak state power, within which sufficiently strong executive bodies have not yet been formed. “The prince, for his part, constantly needed the support of the people, since he did not have sufficient own funds to implement certain measures against the wishes of the people” (Diakonov, 2005, p. 183). Meanwhile, M. Diakonov apparently shared the then widespread point of view about the participation in Veche meetings of the entire free population of a certain



territorial unit, which conveniently fits into the vision of I. Froyanov and A. Dvornichenko. However, such an expanded vision is refuted by the modern scientist P. Lukin (2008), who in his thorough analysis of the Veche institutions came to the conclusion that the veche was a purely urban phenomenon, without the participation of the rural population. Moreover, the limitation of the city was a distinctive feature of the Russian veche.

It is logical that with the growth of princely power, the latter seeks to take control of inner-city processes. In Russian cities, the position of *tysyatsky* served as a kind of link between the princely power and the urban environment, whose competence was the military organization of the city's population, as well as issues of city administration and trade fiscal. Such a position was entrusted to the most prominent boyars, who, according to M. Tikhomirov, although appointed by the prince, eventually become representatives of the urban population (Stefanovich, 2012). Thus, a certain dualism of the socio-political status of *tysyatsky* is stated here.

P. Stefanovich believes that the main role in city affairs was played by the boyars connected with the prince, who could eventually take local roots, which eventually contributed to some distance from the prince. The boyars of Kievan Rus were not limited only to military and administrative functions, but were actively engaged in economic affairs, primarily commercial. Because of this, the special interests of the boyars were formed and grew, the implementation of which was facilitated by a certain autonomy from the princely power, which at certain moments could prompt a rapprochement with the city leaders "from the people". To the greatest extent, such a process is characteristic of Novgorod, whose boyars had an official character as early as the XI century (Gorsky, 2010), but already in the next century they in every possible way contribute to limiting the princely sphere of influence. But the actual urban elite (merchants, noble artisans), according to P. Stefanovich (2012, p. 254) "it stood out mainly for her economic role, and only in times of crisis, in a situation of a vacuum of power, she, standing at the head of the city veche, could also act as a politically significant force".

Considering the composition and mechanisms of the veche functioning, researchers, especially those who are prone to its idealization (I. Froyanov, A. Dvornichenko, etc.), take little into account the model of mass psychology: "the crowd is the leader". But such arrangements were repeatedly inherent both directly to veche



meetings, and their consequences, expressed in certain collective actions and results. Meanwhile, starting from such a methodological position, many processes related to the activities of the veche become clear.

In this regard, it is appropriate to pay attention to the Novgorod Republic, which is considered almost the standard of traditional national democracy (Polosin, 1999). At the same time, the internal structural dynamics was characterized by an increasing stratification in the context of successfully developing trade and economic activities, population growth. According to B. Kagarlitsky (2010, p. 114), “the evolution of the political systems of city-states went from democracy to oligarchy. The more powerful and influential the city became, the more oligarchic its internal structure became. Novgorod and Venice can serve as examples equally”. The degree of influence of the princely power in Novgorod was really minimized, in comparison with other ancient Russian lands. However, the real power was possessed not so much by the people's assembly, but by the local elite, where the key positions were occupied by the *posadnik*, *tysyatsky* and the church head-the archbishop.

A well-known Russian expert on Novgorod history V. Yanin notes the following. Popular uprisings in Novgorod were almost always victorious, since their specific goals were fulfilled. However, the struggle of ordinary people for their interests constantly merged with the struggle for power of feudal groups. During the uprisings, the part of the boyars that was in opposition to the official government willingly led the uprisings, directing it in the direction of their own interests and tasks. “Hence the ultimate insignificance of the results that the efforts of the rebels led to and the constant success of the opposition boyars, whose victory was ensured by an alliance with the rebellious ‘black people’” (Yanin, 2003, p. 165). The clashes of the urban elite groups competing with each other were accompanied by a not unsuccessful use of the resource of the masses. Such facts fit not only into the classical model of the elite-counter-elite of V. Pareto, but also into the model of revolutions of the modern researcher D. Goldstone (2015), who considers one of the main conditions for the beginning and success of the revolutionary movement to be its support by a part of the elite.

Finally, it is appropriate to raise the question of the final consequences that political decisions pushed by the masses could entail. Supporters of the *volost* theory willingly cite as an example of the people's will the case that occurred in Kiev in 1068, when after the defeat of the *yaroslavichs* from the *polovtsians* at *alta*, the *Kievans*



demanded to arm them to repel the nomads. After the refusal, the people actually overthrew the ruling prince Izyaslav Yaroslavich and elevated Vseslav of Polotsk to the supreme Kiev throne – an old rival of the Yaroslavichs, who was languishing in captivity in Kiev. However, the repulse of the polovtsy was not given by the townspeople at all, but by the cavalry squad of one of the Yaroslavichs – Svyatoslav. And when a few months later Izyaslav, who had fled to Poland, returned with Polish detachments to win back Kiev, Vseslav simply abandoned the Kiev army, with which he went to meet him, leaving for Polotsk at night. The Kievans who remained without a leader were demoralized and actually did not resist Izyaslav, who re-occupied the city and arranged a massacre of the rebels.

From such a case, as from a similar process from the point of view, but not the final result of the vocation to the Kiev reign of Vladimir Monomakh in 1113, the following considerations arise. First, the political aspect of the Old Russian national consciousness already then assumed the figure of the prince as a military leader endowed with a certain charisma. For example, the expulsion of Prince Vsevolod by the Novgorodians in 1136 was largely due to the loss of the charisma of the political leader – he was blamed for the shameful flight from the battlefield, fluctuations in politics. In the case of a power vacuum or discrediting the figure of the ruling prince, the collective consciousness was looking for a figure from the princely environment, while the choice could be either successful (Vladimir Monomakh) or unsuccessful (Vseslav Polotsky). Secondly, popular expressions of the scale of the political fact could have an ochlocratic character and lead to completely destructive consequences. Within the framework of such considerations, we intend not so much to discredit as to “land” the phenomenon of democracy, pointing out the degree of expression of its authoritarian component, as well as possible inefficiency.

It seems to us that there was a wide social space in Kievan Rus, where the participation of the princely power was really minimal. We are talking about an agrarian society, where the main social institution was the community (verv), which concentrates the main agricultural producers. The processes of exploitation and enslavement of free community members accelerated significantly after the Mongol invasion, but in the XI - early XIII centuries they still occurred at a moderate pace. These questions do not relate to the problems of our article, we tried to touch on a



higher level of political subjectivity, which consists in the interactions of the princely power and structures that express the collective will coming from “below”.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

1) Kievan Rus is a typical early state, where a number of the main elements of the state apparatus are in the process of formation, while the life of the social majority is regulated through traditional institutions, most of which are rooted in the pre-state period. Nevertheless, in the Old Russian state – a rather loose and politically unstable formation (especially at the end of the IX - X centuries), an authoritarian component is distinguished, expressed in princely power. The institute of the prince among the Eastern Slavs, as well as the close institutions of the jarl and the king among the Scandinavian peoples, originates from the structures of military democracy, which assumed a certain power vertical and hierarchical relations. At the same time, there was a real coexistence and often on a conflict-free basis of the princely power and community structures.

2) The volost theory tends to exaggerate the role of zemstvo institutions as political subjects, which determines the erroneous vision of the essence and cause-and-effect relationships of feudal fragmentation. A review of the works of experts, as well as an analysis of some historical facts, leads us to the conclusion that the main political actor was not the zemstvo, but the princely power. It was the princes who made the main political decisions and, as a rule, looked not at the masses of the people, but at the elite strata that served as their main support. The princes concluded contracts, organized campaigns, invited Polovtsian detachments to fight against internal political competitors. If the Zemstvo really won in the confrontation with the princes, it is unlikely that the Polovtsy could turn from an external factor into an internal one, as it began to happen from the end of the XI century. The fact of their invitation could fully express the will of the prince, but not the people's assembly. A special case is Novgorod, the essence of which can be characterized as a republic of boyar democracy.

3) The people's power in the Kiev period already assumed a strong (if not even a leading authoritarian component), which was expressed in the importance for the collective consciousness of the figure of the prince as a military leader endowed with



a certain charisma. At the same time, expressions of the people's will often occurred in the form of a mass emotional impulse, which was regulated for certain rational purposes. However, popular decisions were made largely on an ochlocratic basis, and therefore they were not always successful.

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