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**“VILLAINOUS ALIENS”: MYTHOLOGIZING SWEDISH PRESENCE IN NOVGOROD**

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**Abstract**

The article is dedicated to questions surrounding Swedish presence in early 17th century Novgorod, which are still relevant today. Pre-revolutionary authors, Soviet researchers and several modern authors conclude that the only “root of all evil” for Novgorod citizens during the Time of Troubles was the Swedes, who conquered the city in 1611 and committed acts of violence against the civilians. This opinion is further maintained due to excessive reliance on narrative sources and insufficient reference to factual materials. In this article the author studies investigation files and court documents in order to examine issues that offer insight into whether the Swedish element was the sole hostile component of that time or this conclusion is the result of partial mythologizing of data gathered from chronicles and other subjective sources. After the study of archived materials, it was concluded that it is not possible to exclusively regard the Novgorodians as victims and the Swedes as criminals, as during the severe economic crisis many people, regardless of their nationality, resorted to crime to try to improve their material well-being.

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## 1. Introduction

A unilateral approach to Swedish occupation of Novgorod in early 17<sup>th</sup> century was adopted as early as before the Russian revolution, which sometimes leads to mythologizing the previously mentioned historical period. Certainly, it must be clarified that those years were marked by severe crisis and devastation, described in Russian as well as European travelogues. The fact that it was a terrible period associated with the rise of crime, starvation and other serious issues is not subject to discussion. However, in many scientific works researchers lay the blame on the Swedes. It is not unusual, as they often referred to narrative sources to study this period of Novgorodian history (Selart, 2018). The core component of such studies is the Chronicle written by dyak Ivan Timofeev, a clerk who lived during the Swedish occupation. His portrayal of the events makes the reader believe that the only source of devastation and crisis were the Swedes, who occupied Novgorod in 1611 and kept it under their control until the 1617 Treaty of Stolbovo was signed (Arakcheev, 2019). “Alas! It was then deceitfully taken with all its vicinities by those (enemies), as if inherited forever, and for just under six years it remained in alien domain, desecrated and brutalized every day” – this is the description of the deplorable state of Novgorod in the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Timofeev, 1951, p. 325), provided by clerk Ivan Timofeev, which points to the Swedes as the culprits. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that his Chronicle has several distinctive features. Firstly, it may have been written based on the author’s emotional state, so the provided data may have been greatly exaggerated and not an accurate depiction of the real situation. Secondly, as argued by Vovina-Lebedeva (2020), the clerk might have ended up in the wrong place and at the wrong time and become hostage to his circumstances, which left a significant mark on him and his work. Moreover, Timofeev was involved in a trial where the judges sided with his opponent, which was a good enough reason to be dissatisfied with the current occupying authorities (Rosen, 2019). Of course, there is also a theory that the clerk wrote this chronicle on commission rather than based on his own woeful experiences, so exaggeration was a requirement.

## 2. Problem Statement

Russian researchers most commonly link the plight of the Novgorod territory to the arrival of Swedish mercenary fighting units in the north-western parts of Russia, that were led by Jacob de la Gardie, who came there as was agreed by King Charles IX of Sweden and Tsar Vasili Shuisky (Lukin, 2020). Russian historians often portray a grim reality in their works, where the Novgorodians fall victim to Swedish usurpers, who were robbing and murdering the locals with no remorse (Seppel, 2019). In this respect, however, it is important to remember that the situation had become so complex even before the occupation of Novgorod and its territories. Many towns and villages in Novgorod region were pillaged by the Lithuanians, Moscow Cossacks and robbers (Timoshenkova, 2007). For example, Sedov (1993) makes note that Vasily Buturlin, a member of the militia, caused serious damage to the city by ruining monastery fields while retreating from Novgorod along with the Cossacks. Consequently, the problem statement of this research suggests itself: who robbed and terrorized the civilians? Were those just the Swedes, or somebody else too?

### **3. Research Questions**

In order to understand whether the Swedes were the sole culprit of the Novgorodians' predicament during the Time of Troubles or if it is just a mythologized stereotype that came to life from the Russian narrative sources and chronicles, official records must be studied in search for answers to an array of questions regarding the circumstances surrounding the arrival of Swedes in Novgorod as well as those established during the Swedish occupation. The following questions are raised in this article:

1) What crimes were the most common in Novgorod region during the Time of Troubles and who committed them. In this respect, it is important to identify the victims of those crimes. To get a more detailed picture, a comparison of criminal activity at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, during the onset of the Time of Troubles and during the Swedish occupation is necessary. This will help determine if the number of offences rose and if their nature changed over time.

2) If those crimes were a new phenomenon, different from those committed in Novgorod region before the Swedish occupation.

3) What the motives for the crimes were and if they can be classified as driven by national or religious reasons, which would explain blaming the Swedes for the Novgorodians' predicament during the Time of Troubles.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

This research expands the range of issues related to Swedish presence in early 17<sup>th</sup> century Novgorod. Due to the fact that the nature of Swedish presence in Novgorod is still debatable, the idea of the Swedish occupation terrorizing the local populace is still common in historiography. Another point of view is that the Novgorodians were traitors who supported the Swedes to gain profit at a certain point in time. A comprehensive study of the period based on official records as well as narrative sources will help clarify the issue. Studying different aspects of the Swedish presence, including criminal activity and its traits, in Novgorod allow for understanding the main point: if the Swedes were the usurpers and occupation forces in the traditionally established sense or the data is exaggerated and is the result of mythologizing the real historical picture of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century Novgorod. Studying the nature and the numbers of the crimes committed in Novgorod during the Swedish presence allows for comparison between pre-occupation criminal activity and the one established after Jacob De la Gardie's troops had taken over the city. Emphasizing this aspect helps study those facets of the Novgorodian society that cannot be analyzed purely by studying narrative materials.

### **5. Research Methods**

The study is based on a problem-based method, which is focused on Swedish presence in early 17<sup>th</sup> century Novgorod. It is necessary to find out what was the level of crime in the city during the period of the Swedish presence, whether it was directly related to the confrontation on national or religious grounds, and whether the point of view about the exclusive culpability of the Swedes in this situation can be considered correct. Of particular interest is the absence of serious contradictions between the Swedes

and the Russians, which can be clearly seen in court cases. Methodological techniques such as classification of source material into issue units, structuring and division into thematic subgroups are used. The logic of presentation is based on the principle of “from the particular to the general” and involves the use of specific examples followed by a unifying analysis.

The research was conducted with the use of a wide range of sources in historical context, which was recreated by utilizing achievements of modern Russian and foreign historiography on this topic. It is not enough to refer to narrative sources to fulfill the objectives as they are often severely biased. Administrative documents, for example, criminal cases, must be reviewed in order to assess the situation objectively and provide grounds for any statements and conclusions. The key part in forming the source base belongs to administrative papers of the Novgorod quarter, kept in the Royal Palace archives in Stockholm, which is an administrative document of great importance, relatively divided into two sets. Another important element is the Document Collection 124, which is part of the Novgorod Occupation Archive and was brought to Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by S.V. Soloviev, professor of the University of Helsinki. This Collection contains interesting data regarding not just Novgorod, but also lands of Central Russia in 1611-1697. Special attention during the course of the research was given to laws published before 1613, from the archives of Saint Petersburg Institute of History (Selin & Yablokova, 2020a). The methods of working with these sources determined the formation of documental blocks relevant to particular research objectives. In this respect, court records provide understanding of how many crimes were committed and officially registered. Pleas and voivode responses provide an insight into who the victims and the perpetrators were, as well as the motives behind the committed crimes. An essential role in this study is played by the analysis of Russian and foreign historiography.

The research was conducted on the basis of the method of working with the historical source, data extraction and analysis. After that the data was put into summary tables that allowed to identify the number, the nature and the time frame of the offences. Afterwards, a comparative analysis was conducted to understand the prevalent number of crimes in the course of various periods of time. Apart from that, information on perpetrators, victims and crime scenes was gathered as well. So, the research is based on reaching conclusions through proceeding from the specific to the general.

## **6. Findings**

Comprehensive analysis of archived materials revealed that at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century burglaries and thefts were the most common offences, in other words, crimes involving illegal appropriation of another person’s belongings. A significant percent is allocated to cases of assault and battery, and homicide. Fewer cases concerned slander or destruction of property, but multiple cases of robberies were registered as well. Other types of offences are in the minority. Taking previously mentioned data into account, it is possible to agree with Selin’s conclusion, prevalent through the researcher’s case-study, that the overall crime rate at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was quite high (Selin & Yablokova, 2020b). The situation changed slightly during Boris Godunov’s reign. The data still point to the fact that the most common crimes were those against property, but it is important to note the rise in the number of cases related to violent crimes and homicide. The number of robberies and other types of theft rose as well. Remarkably, bribery became more frequent. Judging by the acquired data, the criminal

situation in Novgorod changed for the worse, as a shorter period of time is marked by a greater number of crimes. It should be noted that the number of criminal offences, especially burglaries and robberies, rose during the 1600-s, perhaps as a consequence of critical conditions, including famine, crop failure and fleeing serfs. Robbery, which is more dangerous than burglary, can be singled out as the crime with the most significant change in frequency. Agreeing with Eliseev's (2000) interpretation of the word, robbery is defined as violent appropriation of another person's property, committed as a premeditated act. 42 criminal cases involving robbery were discovered during the research in the Archive of Saint Petersburg Institute of History of Russian Academy of Sciences. This crime was most often committed by a group of people deliberately raiding farmsteads and other places (Arakcheev, 2018). It can be concluded through analyzing this information that murder was not a prevalent crime in late 16<sup>th</sup> – early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, but the numbers were still quite high. Murders committed during a robbery or other crimes against property were widespread. Among perpetrators there are serfs, landowners, streltsy, etc. Even priests and monks sometimes took part in thefts and robberies. Some people were repeat offenders, for example, deacon Grishka Soroka was prosecuted twice. In that matter, the social composition of perpetrators was quite varied. We believe it signifies the onset of crisis related to worsening of the economic situation in the country, which affected the population.

With the arrival of the Swedes in Novgorod there was no significant spike in criminal activity. Accusations of slander became more frequent, but crimes against property were still prevalent. Unfortunately, the data garnered from court duty collection registry provide scarce and typical information, and it is rarely mentioned what type of property had been stolen. However, it was determined that horses, crops and personal possessions like hats and small sums of money were stolen like before. A singular more detailed description was given: a metropolitan serf Tomilka was relieved of his earrings and purse. Sadly, particular descriptions of crime scenes are rare, and only once a case of shoplifting, committed by a plain watchman, was encountered. It is peculiar that the social composition was still quite a bit varied, from peasants and posad residents, living beyond the poverty line (a begging elder), to clergy. The latter have specifically distinguished themselves during the Swedish occupation of Novgorod through robbery, debauchery and harming others. In this respect, one aspect is especially remarkable, and that is how vividly the confrontation between the Russians and the Swedes is portrayed in the documents. Was religion the grounds for conflict or was it something else? Some researchers have already investigated this idea. For example, Orlenko (2020), while researching the relationship between the Russians and foreigners, considered that the Russian populace was by default hostile towards all aliens, looking to protect themselves from "strange heresy". Selin (2018), in turn, believes that their relationship was based on the "order-chaos" paradigm disregarding nationality, and cites foreign translators' biographies. Usenko (2006) supposes that conflicts between the Russians and the Swedish "Germans" could only occur because of the latter, while in other cases there generally was no reason for a fight. From this data, we can assume that everyday relations between the Swedes and the Novgorodians were fairly versatile, but no signs of hostility towards the occupants on the grounds of religion or nationality are present. The Swedes took active part in Novgorod's daily life, communicated with the locals, had close bonds as well as quarrels that nevertheless were within the definition of domestic disputes. Moreover, it can be observed that the Russians asked the Swedes for help in settling personal

scores. Of course, it is impossible to state that there was no tension between the Swedes and the Russians in 1611-1617, and the particular cases described in the documents from the Novgorod Occupation Archive allow only for analysis of concrete situations. Still, it is important to note that in these examples there were no features that could distinguish the relationships between the Swedes and the Novgorodians from the relationships within the Novgorodian community.

## **7. Conclusion**

Taking all of the aforementioned information into account, several conclusions can be made. Firstly, there was no significant change in criminal activity in Novgorod since late 16<sup>th</sup> – early 17<sup>th</sup> century, and it remained consistently high. However, it is important to note that with the arrival of the Swedes to Novgorod territory there was no sharp spike in criminal activity, including on grounds of religious or national hatred. In general, few investigation files were discovered, however, this may also be due to the fact that some of them may have been lost. Naturally, the nature of the offences did not change much. Just like before, the most commonly committed crimes were robberies and burglaries, i.e. crimes against property. The number of gangs also remained the same and even rose. This situation can be explained partly by the difficulties of wartime, the endless Cossack and Lithuanian raids, that the Swedes tried to protect the local population from. During the Time of Troubles, characterized by the dire economic conditions, many people lived in a precarious situation. Not only the Swedes, who controlled the north-western part of Rus, but also the Cossacks, the Poles and even the Novgorodians resorted to robbery in order to gain some material profit. Their victims were anyone who had anything worth stealing, the Novgorodians and the foreigners alike. It must be noted that despite the Swedish control of the situation, the people were living during the time of war, when raids of Cossacks, the Lithuanians and other gangs were frequent. Of course, the mercenaries were also rampant. Still, it is worth mentioning that the percentage of cases regarding tensions between the Swedish and the Russian folk was not too high. The Russians and the Swedes were used to cooperation that developed during the years of Swedish presence on Russian territories, and some of them even developed cordial relationships and friendships.

It must also be pointed out that even during the period of general disruption attempts were made to call for justice and punish the culprits of crimes. To sum up, we can say that the administrative documents from the archives allow for a multifaceted approach to the issue of the Swedish presence in Novgorod, as compared to narrative materials usually based on the author's bias. The archived data provide evidence to the fact that historiography still bears elements of mythologizing concerning the Swedish presence in Novgorod. There is no doubt that this presence did a lot of damage to Novgorodian economics, but it impossible to single out the Swedes as the only culprits.

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