



# German Merchants in Novgorod: Hospitality and Hostility, Twelfth–Fifteenth Centuries

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## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the Novgorodians and the German merchants who would later form the Hanseatic League, from the late twelfth century until the fall of the Novgorodian Republic in 1478, presents a striking example of long-term and ongoing interaction between communities that differed in ethnicity, culture, and Christian denominations, within the broad geographical territory of medieval northern Europe. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Hanseatic merchants had effectively monopolized trade contacts between Northwest Rus' (Novgorod and Pskov) and Western Europe. The abundant resources controlled by Novgorod—mainly fur and wax—made the city one of the most important partners of the Hanse. As a result, one of the four Hanseatic Kontors, St. Peter's Yard, was established in Novgorod (the other three were in

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major economic centers of the time, such as London, Bruges, and Bergen in Norway).

Modern German and Russian historians have written a number of valuable works comprehensively covering the subject of Novgorodian-Hanseatic interactions.<sup>1</sup> These works, however, have focused not so much upon people and how they saw each other, and more on the structure of the trade, its legal basis, diplomacy (negotiations and treaties), and the history of St. Peter's Yard itself. Admittedly, such approach is to some extent supported by the very nature of sources. There is a unique corpus of sources allowing one to study contacts between Hanseatic merchants and Novgorodians—numerous documents dating mostly from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, written in Middle Low German, and related to the activities of the Hanseatic Kontor in Novgorod. Unfortunately, the Novgorodian archives from the Independence Era do not survive, yet some important evidence can be found in Novgorodian sources, particularly chronicles and literary works. To repurpose a well-known saying: in Hanseatic correspondence, good news was no news. When relations between Novgorod and the Hanse were calm and peaceful, the parties had no claims against each other and did not leave a paper trail. Only when problems arose did extensive correspondence emerge, sometimes between the Hanseatic cities themselves (in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, these were mostly the main Hanseatic cities of Livonia: Riga, Reval (Tallinn), and Dorpat (Tartu)), between these cities and Novgorod, and between the Hanseatic cities and the Kontor in Novgorod. To some extent the same is true for the extant Novgorodian sources. Novgorodian chroniclers, just as their Western counterparts, were mostly interested in out of the ordinary events, such as church-building, natural disasters (viewed as acts of God), and wars and conflicts, especially including those involving the Hanse. Nevertheless, upon closer examination, especially if one pays attention not only to what the sources say explicitly, but also to what they say implicitly, the picture becomes more nuanced.

In recent decades, both Russian and German scholarship has seen a number of works exploring the relationships between the Novgorodians and the Hanseatic merchants outside the “hostility paradigm,” but even these hardly explore the subject of hospitality.<sup>2</sup> Not so long ago, the question of how members of a Hanseatic Kontor and locals perceived each other was raised with reference to Bergen in Norway, and some

methodological approaches were suggested. These—after some adaptation, since the author’s focus was on how people from the Hanse saw the “others” (the Norse, the English, and the Dutch)—are applicable to the Novgorodian situation as well.<sup>3</sup>

As the introduction to this volume suggests, the notions of hospitality and hostility are not unambiguous and can hardly be separated clearly from each other. Immanuel Kant in his essay *Toward Perpetual Peace* argues that “hospitality (a host’s conduct to his guest) means the right of a stranger not to be treated in a hostile manner by another upon his arrival on the other’s territory.” But what exactly is “a hostile manner?” What Kant then cites as a classic example of inhospitable behavior is precisely those relationships based on trade: “If one compares with this [hospitality towards strangers] the *inhospitable* behavior of the civilized states in our part of the world, especially the commercial ones, the injustice that the latter show when visiting foreign lands and peoples ... takes on terrifying proportions.”<sup>4</sup> Kant implicitly alluded to European colonialism, in which even commercial relations (presumably, mutually beneficial) were permeated by the ideas of political, cultural, religious, or ethnic superiority. These ideas would be incompatible with true hospitality. So, how do the Novgorodian-Hanseatic relations and attitudes toward each other fit into Kant’s perspective? To what extent were these relations determined by hostility of the type described above? If, despite all the disputes and conflicts, they were indeed largely based on the recognition of the guests’ right “not to be treated in a hostile manner,” which would include granting them (at least theoretically) the right to security, then these relationships should also be seen in the context of hospitality.

Below I will argue that, although relationships between the residents of the Hanseatic Kontor in Novgorod and the locals were far from idyllic, they cannot be considered as entirely hostile. They seem to be best described as a kind of ambiguous hospitality.

### THE INFRA-STRUCTURE OF HOSPITALITY AND ITS LEGAL ASPECTS

The main residences of the Hanseatic merchants in Novgorod were the so-called “trading yards.” During the period between the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, two such yards can be identified, though both had been established long before. The “Gothic Yard,” named after the Isle of Gotland in the Baltic Sea (an important point of the trading

routes from Northwest Rus' to Scandinavia and Northern Germany), had certainly existed by the late eleventh or early twelfth century. There is some evidence that St. Olaf's Church, founded by the Scandinavians and situated within the Gothic Yard, could have well functioned in the second half of the eleventh century: a runestone from Sjusta in Central Sweden (U 687) bears an inscription in the memory of a certain *Spjall-bödi*, who died in St. Olaf's Church in *Hólmgarðr* (the Old Norse name of Novgorod).<sup>5</sup> This runic inscription was produced by the rune carver Öpir (ØpiR) who was active in the second half of the eleventh century and the beginning of the twelfth century.<sup>6</sup> In 1152, the Novgorodian chronicle mentions a Varangian, that is Scandinavian, church in Novgorod.<sup>7</sup> The 1268 draft of the treaty between the German cities and Novgorod mentions on several occasions the "court of the Goths" (*curia Gotensium*), and it even once refers to "the court of the Goths, with St. Olaf's Church and churchyard."<sup>8</sup>

The second, "German Yard" was from its beginnings used by German merchants. Its first mention is found in the same 1268 draft treaty (*curia Theuthonicorum*), but it had almost certainly existed before this date, and had likely been founded in the late twelfth century.<sup>9</sup> Its other name, derived from St. Peter's Church, was "St. Peter's Yard" (Peterhof), and it was this name that was extended to the whole Hanseatic Kontor in Novgorod, which was initially run by the German merchant community of Gotland, then by Lübeck, and, finally, by the Hanseatic cities of Livonia (Riga, Reval, and Dorpat). The Gothic Yard also became part of the German Hanseatic Kontor, which rented it from Gotland.<sup>10</sup>

In the first half of the fifteenth century, in the heyday of the Novgorodian-Hanseatic trade, the total number of German merchants of various ranks staying in Novgorod sometimes reached about 200 (as was the case in 1430s),<sup>11</sup> which may have made up approximately 1% of the total population of Novgorod at the time. The status of Hanseatic merchants in Novgorod was ambiguous. On the one hand, they were normally expected to stay within enclosed quarters, or yards, although even this, as we shall see below, was not always followed in practice. Both the Hanseatic and Novgorodian authorities sought to minimize their contacts with locals. On the other hand, complete isolation was neither possible nor actually desirable. Commercial tasks required interaction on a regular basis, ranging from day-to-day contacts to invitations for representatives of the German trading community to attend the local popular

assembly, the *veche* (Low German: *in eme openbaren dinghe*, as it was in 1425).<sup>12</sup> Novgorodian authorities tried to make Germans participate in the roadway paving or its financing (which was a kind of duty imposed normally on local communities).<sup>13</sup> So when it came to everyday business, guests could be considered as a part of the hosts' community. Naturally, this made the issue of the hospitality/hostility toward the Hanseatic merchants routine and dependent on particular circumstances.

All conflicts between the Novgorodians and Hanseatic merchants, according to the treaties between Novgorod and the Hanse, were to be solved legally, a provision which was first specified in the treaty of 1269.<sup>14</sup> Monopolizing relationships with Hanseatic merchants was considered particularly important by the Novgorodian authorities. Treaties between Novgorod and the grand dukes of Vladimir (later, of Moscow), who since the second half of the thirteenth century were also recognized as princes of Novgorod, repeatedly included a clause under which princes were not allowed to interfere with the relationships between Novgorod and the community of German merchants in the republic. It was first enshrined in the 1268 treaty between Novgorod and Grand Duke Yaroslav Yaroslavich (1230–1271): “And you, prince, shall trade at the German Yard [only] through our brothers,<sup>15</sup> and you shall not close the Yard and shall not put your bailiffs there.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, the princes and any merchants “from the *Huz*” (literally “from Below”), i.e., from Northeast Rus', were allowed to trade only via Novgorodian intermediaries, but not on their own. Nor they were entitled to exercise any administrative or judicial powers over the community of German merchants.

The key role of handling disputes with the community of German merchants in Novgorod was assigned to one of the three higher magistrates of the Novgorod Republic, the *tysyatsky* (literally “thousandman,” while the German sources call him *hertoch*, duke). Disputes of grave importance were to be heard “at the yard of St. John's, in the presence of the *posadnik*, the *tysyatsky*, and the merchants.”<sup>17</sup> Put differently, such cases were to be considered by the court represented by the *tysyatsky*, another (and the main) Novgorodian magistrate known as the *posadnik* (in German sources, *borchgreve* or *borgermester*, burgrave, burgomaster), and the chiefs of the Novgorodian merchant communities, in front of the Church of St. John the Baptist-on-Opoki at the Market Side of Novgorod. In reality, this procedure was often neglected, however. The *tysyatsky* could make decisions about contentious cases at his home, claiming that the local bailiffs (*vögte*) of the Hanseatic cities also judged

at any place of their choice<sup>18</sup>; or, even worse, the hearing might be interfered with by the Novgorodian popular assembly, the *veche*. If this was the case, things could go as far as they did in 1425, when, according to the Novgorod-based Hanseatic merchants, during an especially bitter conflict the Novgorodians “for five days would summon one or two assemblies daily on our case, so sometimes they were standing there until after lunchtime, and they came to the assembly running like rabid dogs, as if some wanted to have us boiled and others – roasted, and the very least they wanted was sending us shackled to the house of the bailiff.”<sup>19</sup>

In spite of numerous conflicts, the best type of relationship between Novgorod and the Hanse was nevertheless considered to be described as a “solid” (i.e., stable, uninterrupted, and long-lasting) peace. When, in 1392 following a long-running conflict, Novgorod and the Hanse made the so-called “Niebur’s Peace Treaty” (named after Johann Niebur, Ratmann and Burgomaster of Lübeck, who participated in the negotiation and signing of the treaty), a Novgorodian chronicler viewed the treaty as follows: “The same winter ... the ... envoys of the *Nemtsy* came to Novgorod, and took their merchandise; and kissed the Cross, and began to build their yard anew, because for seven years there had been no stable peace.”<sup>20</sup> While the chronicler’s lines are indeed laconic, which is quite typical for the Novgorodian literary tradition, it is still clear that good relations with the Hanse were seen by the Novgorodian elites as the norm. Naturally, the norm was interpreted by the Novgorodians to their advantage, but this was also true for the Hanseatic people.

The administration of St. Peter’s Yard, for its part, tried to limit any unauthorized interaction between German merchants and the Novgorodians. Among other things, the statute of the Yard (the *Schra*, in the fourth recension, dating from the second half of the fourteenth century) had a clause forbidding Germans from allowing Novgorodians to stay with them at night (“when dogs are let out”) under penalty of a fine. However, justifications for the ban were not of a political, ideological, or moral nature, but much more down-to-earth: the authors of the statute feared that if any Russian stuck around, the guard dogs released at St. Peter’s Yard at night might bite him and the Hanseatic community would thus face a lawsuit.<sup>21</sup> Home delivery of silver from the yard to Russians was also prohibited.<sup>22</sup> The statute also totally prohibited the Hanseatic merchants in Novgorod from playing dice, but the fine for playing “at Russian yards,” i.e., when staying with Novgorodians, was five times higher, and the perpetrator would consequently be stripped of “the Yard’s

rights,” that is, expelled from the Kontor.<sup>23</sup> At least during the night, the expectation was that this space of hospitality would be sealed off.

Special emphasis in the *Schra* and other Hanseatic regulations of trade between the Hanse and Novgorod was placed on outlawing the so-called *borch*. This word, in the context of the Novgorodian-Hanseatic relationships, referred to a broad range of practices, which included any kind of trade outside of a normal trade-exchange interaction taking place at the designated place and time. During a period when bartering was predominant, this mostly meant the direct exchange of commodities. The receipt of the goods had to be immediately followed by payment on the spot. Fixed monetary prices (presumably in Novgorodian *grivnas* of silver, and later in *rubles*) were only set for equivalent quantities of goods from each party.<sup>24</sup> The Hanse sought to minimize—or even outlaw—all other kinds of trade, e.g., buying or selling a commodity in one city under the obligation to exchange it for some other commodity in another city at the agreed time. The Novgorodian *Schra* (the fifth recension, dating from the end of the fourteenth century) has a clause directly banning such practices: “Of trading on credit. Furthermore, German merchants should never buy from, or sell to, any Russian in Novgorod any goods on credit, but [should] accurately and fairly trade one [kind of goods] for another. This is to be observed under the threat of exclusion from the yard [i.e. St. Peter’s Yard] and a fine of fifty marks.”<sup>25</sup> The prohibition against trading on credit was justified by the objective to avoid overpayment and fraud; but at the same time, it essentially limited any informal interaction with the Novgorodians.<sup>26</sup> Thus, all these measures were supposed to provide security to the community of the German merchants in Novgorod. However, this desire for self-security was balanced by the need to remain in contact with locals, and in many respects, it contradicted the very nature of trade. This fact created a very specific, ambivalent kind of rhetoric present in both Hanseatic and Novgorodian sources, one vacillating between segregation and hospitality.

### AMBIVALENT RHETORIC OF (IN-)HOSPITALITY

The policy aimed at limiting contact between the Novgorodians and the Hanseatic merchants was backed up by the ethnic rhetoric of segregation that dominated both Novgorodian and Hanseatic sources. The Russian sources consistently refer to Hanseatic merchants as Germans, while the Novgorodians in Hanseatic sources are often referred to not

just as Novgorodians, but as “Russians from Novgorod.” For instance, the sources mention a “Russian from Novgorod, called David” (*Rüsse van Nauvgarden, de het Daewyde*),<sup>27</sup> or, the “senior Russian ambassadors from Novgorod” (*drapelike Rusche boden van Nowgharden*).<sup>28</sup> Most often, the Novgorodians were generically labelled as Russians. The word “Russians” in formal Hanseatic correspondence typically referred to the Novgorodian authorities in general, including “all Novgorod the Great,” that is, the political community of Novgorod represented by the *veche*. Thus, in 1401, envoys of the Hanseatic towns to the *Hansetag* (congress of representatives of the Hanseatic cities) in Lübeck specified that their message to Novgorod was directed to “...Russians, namely, the Archbishop of Novgorod, *nameesnicken* [officials representing the prince in Novgorod], burgomasters, thousandmen and all Novgorod the Great.”<sup>29</sup> Such classification may have been reinforced by the fact that the full name of the German Kontor (actually, the very term Kontor is of later origin) in the Novgorodian Independence Era included an ethnic self-identification: *de meyne Dudesche kopman to Nogarden* (“all of the German merchants in Novgorod”).

Even at the earliest stage when Scandinavian merchants used the Gothic Yard, attempts were made to limit contact between them and the Novgorodians, especially when it came to religious practices. The evidence from *The Questions of Kirik*, a text from the 1140s or 1150s (a record of questions that a Novgorodian hieromonk named Kirik asked the Orthodox bishops, especially Niphont, the archbishop of Novgorod, along with the answers he received), indicates that Novgorodians would sometimes take their children “to pray in the Varangian church.” This act was punishable by a six-week penitence, but the very fact of prohibition suggests that this illegal practice, in the eyes of the Orthodox hierarchs acting in their capacity of hosts, was not uncommon in Novgorod. The same text says that adherents of the Latin faith (that is, of Roman Catholicism) in Novgorod converted to Orthodoxy, which required the relevant canonical procedure.<sup>30</sup>

As far as the problem of definitions used by both parties for referring to each other is concerned, some of them can be described as exclusive. These, as mentioned above, particularly centered on ethnic definitions like *Nemtsy* or *Russen*, literally, “Germans” and “Russians,” though the meanings of these words are not identical with those of the present day. However, in some contexts and situations, other, more



inclusive designations were used. Such was the designation of Novgorodians as Christians. This religious characterization, at least implicitly, smoothed over the confessional differences between Roman Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy.

In contrast, even the historian Norbert Angermann, who did not share the hostility discourse represented by mainstream scholarship, believed that the Hanseatic people and Novgorodians did not always see each other in negative terms, but rather in ambivalent terms. He went as far as to suggest that positive experiences contradicted the formal discrepancy between the religious beliefs of both parties. He also stated that the Novgorodian clergy used to instil hostility toward the Hanseatic merchants, while the latter, on the contrary, felt that their belonging to Roman Catholic Church was crucial for their identity, which led to hostility toward Orthodox Russians.<sup>31</sup> However, one should take into consideration the differences between historical periods and specific historical contexts, often ignored by historians. The Hanseatic people seem to have seen Novgorodians of the Independence Era (before 1478) and the Russians of Muscovy differently. The narrow religious designations of Russians appear in the Hanseatic correspondence only after the annexation of Novgorod by Moscow; the annexation of the city by a new, more powerful host may have changed the perception of its inhabitants in the eyes of the guests. Angermann cites two sources. A letter from the Reval authorities to those of Lübeck reports on “starting combat against the Schismatic Russians.”<sup>32</sup> However, this letter was written at the height of the war between Livonia (including the Hanseatic cities within the Livonian territory), allied with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, against Ivan III, Grand Duke of Moscow and All Russia (r. 1462–1505). Actually, the text was written on the day immediately following the battle at River Seritsa (Pskovian Land, south of Izborsk) on August 27, 1501, in which the Russians were defeated by the Livonians.<sup>33</sup> Naturally, in this context, any ambivalence toward the subjects of the Grand Duke of Moscow would have been out of place. Moreover, this document never refers specifically to the Novgorodians, and even though a Novgorodian unit was indeed present at Seritsa, as attested by a Pskovian chronicle, the newly established Novgorodian land-owners were actually Muscovite nobles who resettled the Novgorodian Land after Ivan III had forced the Novgorodian nobility out of there. Most important of all, the unit was commanded by the Grand Duke’s voivode.<sup>34</sup>

Another Hanseatic document from 1503 uses somewhat different wording but to the same effect, speaking of the damage caused on the part of “treacherous cursed Russians” (*der affgesneden vormaliedieden Russchen*).<sup>35</sup> The word *afgesneden*, past participle of *afsniden* (to split off) bears, among other meanings, that of a schismatic, sectarian, or heretic, i.e., a person who seceded from the Church. However, most notably in this case, it is used by a group of *Russian* merchants staying in Riga, who refer to some other Russians, their competitors, possibly from Polotsk!<sup>36</sup> Thus, this particular designation in this context likely bore no religious meaning at all, as both parties were presumably Orthodox, and must be interpreted as a mere insult.<sup>37</sup>

There is no good reason to see the Novgorodians—still less, Russians in general—as a homogenous mass sharing the same ideology and the same views about the Hanse, the Hanseatic merchants, and Western people in general. As evidence of the anti-Latin sentiment dominating Novgorod, Angermann cited *The Tale of Posadnik Dobrynia* (also known as *The Tale of a ropata*<sup>38</sup> in *Novgorod*), although he correctly identified this story as legendary.<sup>39</sup> There is no good reason to identify any genuine historicity in the *Tale*.<sup>40</sup>

However, this does not mean that the *Tale* is of no value for a historian. Its value is of a different nature though: among other things, it reflects a fifteenth-century Novgorodian’s idea of how the Hanseatic people should be treated. The *Tale* tells the tragic story of a certain Dobrynia, who, according to the legend, was once the *posadnik* (burgomaster) of Novgorod and was requested by “the Germans from all the seventy cities” to grant them a site for building a *ropata*, that is, a Roman Catholic church, in the city center dedicated to St. Peter and St. Paul. For a bribe, he agreed to give them a site at the marketplace, which then required removing the wooden Orthodox Church of St. John the Baptist and transferring it elsewhere. However, a judgment fell upon the burgomaster for this act. When Dobrynia was returning home from the *veche* (the popular assembly) by boat along the Volkhov, a heavy gale suddenly came; the boat was overturned and the burgomaster drowned. “For his own malignancy,” the author concludes, “he did not receive a proper burial as an Orthodox should.”<sup>41</sup>

Some details indicate that the author of the *Tale* belonged to the pro-Muscovite party, which, during the acute political conflict of the early 1470s in Novgorod, opposed those who favored the alliance with the

Grand Duchy of Lithuania. This is suggested by both its general tenor—indeed, strongly anti-Catholic—and its glorification of “our lords the Grand Dukes of Rus.” Novgorod is directly referred to as their *votchina* (inherited estate). One can naturally expect that a text of this kind would treat the “Germans” most harshly. However, even the *Tale* portrays them in somewhat ambivalent terms, to use Angermann’s words. On the one hand, the German guests’ request to build a Catholic church in the middle of Novgorod is denied, and the Novgorodians on that occasion are said by the *Tale’s* author to have cited the New Testament phrase, “and what communion hath light with darkness,” which clearly implies that the Catholics are seen as Satan’s agents. On the other hand, the beginning of the *Tale* says that the Novgorodians, at the time of the events, lived “in their freedom and with all lands had peace and harmony,” and this is followed by the account of how Germans sent “their ambassador from all the seventy cities.”<sup>42</sup> The Russian word for harmony used here is *sovokupleniye*, which, among other things, meant “unity, alliance, close relations.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, the author of the *Tale* apparently saw close cooperation between Novgorod and the Hanse, and saw the very fact of German presence in Novgorod as the norm. What vexes him is the eventual Catholic proselytism in Novgorod, rather than the German presence itself. This feeling of vexation, however, seems to have been shared by Novgorodian elites in general. The treaty (or perhaps the extant draft of it) that Novgorod made in 1471, shortly before the Novgorodians were defeated by the Muscovites at the Shelon River, at the initiative of its pro-Lithuanian party with Casimir IV Jagiellon, king of Poland and grand duke of Lithuania (r. 1440–1492), has a separate clause specifying: “And thou, good King, shalt not build any Roman churches in Novgorod the Great, nor in the *prigorody* of Novgorod,<sup>44</sup> nor in the whole Novgorodian Land.”<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, Casimir, who was a Catholic, was accepted as a sovereign of Novgorod and his *namestnik* (governor) was invited to the city. Thus, not all forms of cooperation or alliance with the West were considered to be unacceptable in Novgorod, only those involving the construction of Latin churches.

Novgorodian chronicles, which were primarily written by the archbishops’ scribes, contain few if any religious invectives against German “guests” (*Nemtsy*) who traded with Novgorod; indeed, at least one reference of a quite different nature—flattering, in fact—survives. In 1230/31, autumn frost in the Novgorodian Land resulted in a severe famine, so that people were forced to eat horse, dog, and cat meat; even instances

of cannibalism occurred. Mass deaths ensued.<sup>46</sup> The following year saw deliverance come from the West, however. According to the chronicler, “God showed His mercy towards us sinners. He did His mercy quickly. The *Nemtsy* came from beyond the [Baltic] sea with corn and with flour, and they did much good, for this town was already near its end.”<sup>47</sup> Notably, here the *Nemtsy*—i.e., the merchant guests—are represented as agents of God’s will and divine mercy sent to the rescue of the host community, effectively assuring its food security. One should pay attention to the fact that this entry was written, as previously mentioned, by a chronicler working for the archbishop of Novgorod (likely Archbishops Spyridon and Dalmatius).<sup>48</sup>

A totally opposite set of qualities is given to the *Nemtsy* who waged wars against Novgorod, namely the Teutonic Knights and Swedes.<sup>49</sup> Again, there does not seem to have been a common view shared by all Novgorodians. There must have been some variety in contemporary views and a certain degree of rethinking after the fact. Details of this complex picture are elusive due to the nature of the sources, but some traces can still be observed. For instance, a chronicle entry describing an attack by *Nemtsy* (literally “Germans”) on the Novgorodian Land is succinct and virtually unemotional: “...for our sins the *Nemtsy* attacked Ladoga and burned it.”<sup>50</sup> The event in question is a 1313 incident when a Swedish troop raided Ladoga, one of the fortified outposts of Novgorod.<sup>51</sup> The later, revised Novgorod chronicles from the fifteenth century, however, recount the same event, but characterize the *Nemtsy* in pejorative terms, describing them as “our foes” and “accursed.”<sup>52</sup> Obviously, these accursed or cursed *Nemtsy* had absolutely nothing to do with the Hanse. Moreover, in these same years, in the early fourteenth century, they were busy at the Neva and Ladoga Lake robbing precisely those merchants from Lübeck who traded with Novgorod. There is little doubt that in the fifteenth century Novgorodian readers of these revised chronicles could harbor negative feelings toward the *Nemtsy* in general and, in particular, toward those living nearest to them, i.e., the guests inhabiting St. Peter’s Yard.

It is noteworthy that Hanseatic merchants could seek help or blessings from the Orthodox archbishop of Novgorod; the fact that, formally, the Catholics and the Orthodox were expected to see each other as schismatics and heretics does not seem to have been any hindrance at all to such interactions. The archbishop of Novgorod sometimes mediated between the Novgorodian authorities and the community of German

merchants in Novgorod. A striking example of this mediatory role is the abovementioned case of the 1425–1426 conflict, when the archbishop’s intercession for the Hanseatic merchants actually contributed to physically saving their lives.<sup>53</sup> An earlier Hanseatic message, from 1409, went so far as to refer to the current archbishop of Novgorod, John III (r. 1388–1415), as “our holy father” (*ynsen hilgen vader*).<sup>54</sup>

Ethnic and religious designations were only one of the available forms of rhetoric, even if they represented the most ideologically charged one. In practice, descriptions related to the status or activities of German merchants and their Russian partners could have held as much, if not more, significance. Sometimes, such designations were quite important in the context of hospitality. Thus, the treaties between Novgorod and the Hanse refer to the Hanseatic merchants as guests. This word sounds like the Middle Low German *gast* and Russian *gost’* (гость), and would have been mutually intelligible, despite the fact that the Middle Low German word did not bear the specific connotation that the equivalent in Old Russian had. Unlike in present-day Russian, the Old Russian *gost’* meant not only guest as stranger, but also served as a special term for a “merchant trading in another city or overseas.”<sup>55</sup> Whenever an Old Russian document was translated into Middle Low German, the word *gost’* would be rendered as *gast*. The notion of guest apparently had positive connotations in this context: a guest was one who had to be protected and cared for. This is directly stated, for instance, in a 1405 letter from the Novgorodian authorities to those of Dorpat offering to extend an earlier treaty beyond its original term: “We shall protect your guests as our [men] according to the cross-kissing, and you shall protect our guests according to the cross-kissing.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, the document mainly focuses on hospitality manifested through securitization, achieved in part by ritualistic and spiritual means.

A curious example of a search for an integrative rather than divisive rhetoric for Novgorod-Hanseatic relations is the use of the term “neighbors” (*сусѣду, nabers*) as a form of address. This was originally an Old Russian form of address, which was then borrowed by German partners and used in their own letters to the Novgorodian authorities. Interestingly, the Hanseatic translators used to render the Old Russian address “our neighbors” (сусѣди наши) into terms more common from the perspective of Western courtesy, adding adjectives such as *guden/leven* [*nabers*] (“good/beloved neighbors”).<sup>57</sup> The logic of hospitality, or, rather, good neighborliness, was thus manifested even at the linguistic level.

## EVERYDAY PRACTICES VS. STRICT LEGAL REGULATIONS

As demonstrated, even at the level of rhetoric, the Hanseatic people in Novgorod had never been generally portrayed as purely evil. In everyday life, this non-polarizing image of the “other,” despite all formal restrictions, provided opportunities for contacts between hosts and guests. This was possible through what might be termed an informal infrastructure and spaces of hospitality, which remain important for us to emphasize.

Regardless of the opposition from the Hanseatic cities and their prohibitions, German merchants could stay and keep their commodities at Novgorodian households rather than at St. Peter’s Yard. For instance, on May 5, 1421, the Dorpat authorities wrote to the authorities of Reval about some merchants who arrived to Novgorod from Narva and Neva and, apparently untroubled by the possible seizure of their property by the Novgorodian administration, they “stayed at Russian households” (*legeren zik up der Russen hove*), in defiance of the clause of the statute of St. Peter’s Yard.<sup>58</sup>

The prohibition against trading on credit (*borch*) was also repeatedly violated.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the letter of August 16, 1406, from the community of German merchants in Novgorod to the authorities of Reval, reports that the community’s assembly (*stevene*) raised the issue of offenses committed by two Hanseatic merchants, Bernd van Anklem and Claws Huxer. They were accused of “trading on credit with the Russians” (*hadden myd den Russen to borge gekopslaget*). In practice, this meant that Claws Huxer “traded here, in Novgorod, with two or three Russians, not in his own name, but on behalf of two or three other men.” Bernd van Anklem did the same, “and they arranged selling some dye and woolen cloth to the other party in Novgorod at the agreed price, in order to then get fur from a Russian in Narva and, in exchange, to supply this Russian with cloth.”<sup>60</sup> This piece of evidence reveals a network of informal and close interactions between Novgorodians and Hanseatic merchants. This network covered not just Novgorod, but also Narva, a town closely tied to the Hanse but not formally Hanseatic (Narva belonged to the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order). Due to its special status, this Livonian town was used both by Russians and the Hanse as a kind of neutral territory, a space of more equitable trade hospitality. This scheme apparently involved many people: contractors themselves, their suppliers, those who transported goods, and so on. These informal practices, which would have been impossible without mutual trust, point to the desire of both sides

(perhaps irrespective of the subjective will of each of them) to build up trade-based peaceful relations between different nations.<sup>61</sup>

Letters from the German merchant community in Novgorod to the Hanseatic cities of Livonia are full of complaints of injustice of the *tysyatsky* (thousandman) who, as specified in Novgorodian-Hanseatic treaties, was in charge of hearing disputes (see above). However, not only does the content of such complaints matter, but so too does the context in which they were made. A letter of July 1, 1407 from the German merchants staying in Novgorod to the Reval authorities complained about a delay in judicial proceedings: “we have visited the *hertog* [i.e. ‘thousandman’] many times, and each time he would let us go, saying nice words to us, but never gave us any clue we might hold on to, which raised our suspicions.”<sup>62</sup> Despite the delay, one of the three senior elected magistrates of Novgorod found it necessary to treat the Hanseatic merchants most courteously, speaking to them in “nice words” (*met guden worden*).

What often attracted the Novgorodians was the tavern that had been opened at St. Peter’s Yard, where high-quality German beer was served. The Hanseatic community in Novgorod, in a letter to the Reval authorities of December 13, 1412, demanded that this source of trouble be shut down: “Russians keep invoking the issue of the tavern run by the *hovesknecht* [steward of the Yard], in particular, of the trouble that can be caused by those Russians who come there for drinking, and the merchants think it a good idea that the tavern be suppressed.”<sup>63</sup> The administration of the German merchant community—at the request of the Novgorodian party in fact—struggled to control the Novgorodians’ insatiable thirst for German beer. A clause addressing this was even included in the statute of the Kontor, outlawing brewers from the Hanseatic Gothic yard: “no beer men who sell beer should stay at the Gothic Yard, as long as the St. Peter’s Yard stands, for through that the [Hanseatic] merchant community had a lot of trouble and received many rebukes from the Russians. So, we unanimously agreed that beer men who sell beer should not stay there [at the Gothic Yard].”<sup>64</sup> As we have seen above, prohibitions of this kind indicate that they were broken on a regular basis. Thus, the tavern (whatever the intentions of both parties were) de facto became a space of hospitality that was created, paradoxically, not by the hosts for the guests, but rather by the guests themselves. It was a space, if not directly intended for inviting the hosts, then at least it was likely used for informal interactions with them.

Getting down to an even deeper level of everyday practices, one can easily see what the strict prohibitions described above were worth in real life—not much. Probably in 1416, the Reval authorities gave instructions to their ambassadors leaving for Novgorod. During the negotiations with the Novgorodian authorities the ambassadors were expected, among other things, to raise the issue “of those young men staying in Novgorod who play dice and play board games [*up den worptafelen*], and [even] with women in the bath.”<sup>65</sup> Since the German merchant community in Novgorod was all-male, the women in question must have been Russian. They probably came to the bath of St. Peter’s Yard: the document clearly refers to a specific bath familiar to the authors.<sup>66</sup> Activities of this kind were, as already noted above, strictly prohibited by the *Schra*—at least in theory. Indeed, the *Schra* only explicitly forbade Novgorodians from staying at St. Peter’s Yard at night, but Novgorodian women playing games with German merchants in the bath would obviously violate the spirit, if not the letter of the regulations—as we recall, only dice as such were made illegal explicitly. Anyway, day-to-day contacts could not be effectively eliminated by either the Hanseatic or Novgorodian party, and the evidence cited by Justyna Wubs-Mrozewicz indicates that the administration of a Kontor (in this case, Bergen) could well turn a blind eye on such inappropriate contacts if the latter did not directly threaten the security of the community.<sup>67</sup>

These and other informal contacts resulted in the emergence of a Novgorodian network of “secret friends” who would inform Hanseatic merchants of possible threats from the Novgorodian authorities. Such threats primarily concerned the seizure of their property and the detention of merchants themselves; neither was uncommon in the conditions of frequent trade wars between Novgorod and the Hanse.

The fact that the Hanseatic merchants had friends in Novgorod is attested to in a number of sources.<sup>68</sup> However, this subject has received little scholarly attention, at least in part because it does not fit into the discourse of hostility which had long prevailed in the historiography. Sometimes, such friendships gained political importance. Through such friends, the Hanseatic cities were often able to obtain important political information. On September 22, 1405, the German merchant community in Novgorod informed the Reval authority that Novgorod was visited by the ambassadors from Vytautas, grand duke of Lithuania (r. 1392–1430), and Ivan Mikhailovich, prince of Tver (r. 1399–1425), who demanded the extradition of Yuriy Sviatoslavich, prince of Smolensk



(r. 1386–1392, 1401–1404), the latter an ardent opponent of Vytautas, had fled to Novgorod. The Hanseatic merchants were informed by some “Russians” who also told them that the ambassadors “greatly threatened” the Novgorodians.<sup>69</sup>

Another document explicitly labels these political informers “friends” of the Hanseatic people, and even more specifically, “secret friends.” In the early fifteenth century, the Narva *hauskomtur* (an official of the Teutonic Order) wrote to the Reval authorities that “our secret friends” (*unse heimeliken vrunde*) sent reports from Novgorod about the relationship between Novgorod and Moscow.<sup>70</sup> In this context, *vrunt* is not merely a personal friend. This Middle Low German term corresponds to the Old Russian *приятели* (*priyatel'*) which involved not only personal attachment, but also belonging to one’s circle of followers or sympathizers. A direct parallel to the evidence cited above is the *Novgorodian First Chronicle*’s account of one of the most important events in the history of Novgorodian republicanism, which some scholars have called “the Novgorodian Revolution”—namely, the 1136 deposition of Prince Vsevolod Mstislavich (r. 1117–1132, 1132–1136) and the subsequent power struggle. The next year, after he had escaped to Pskov, Vsevolod decided to return, “wishing to take his seat again on his own throne in Novgorod, secretly called on men of Novgorod and of Pleskov, his friends.”<sup>71</sup> In this sense, it hardly matters whether the “friends” in question were actually personal friends, or were instead agents under the influence of the Hanse. The Middle Low German *vrunt*, just as the Old Russian *priyatel'*, could mean both a personal friend and a supporter or follower—the two meanings are not mutually exclusive.<sup>72</sup> What is important is that having such friends may have been a way of hacking or gaming the security system of the hosts, and therefore a method of protecting oneself.

Sometimes, the Novgorodian friends of the Hanseatic merchants warned them of dangers. Thus, in May 1409, the German merchant community in Novgorod cautioned the Dorpat authorities against any negotiations with Novgorod until the goods seized by the Novgorodian authorities were returned: “And we are advised by the Russians who want to be our friends to write to the [Hanseatic] towns and tell them that they should not send any mission here, nor make any negotiations until the goods are returned.”<sup>73</sup> This gives the impression that Novgorodians looked to the possibility of friendship with Hanseatic trade guests as something prestigious for them. In spite of all regulations on both

the Hanseatic and the Novgorodian side, personal contacts and hospitality between Novgorodians and Germans did exist and provided their interactions with an implicit but very significant background that cannot be overlooked if one wants to adequately understand how the mutually beneficial Novgorodian-Hanseatic relationship had been functioning for centuries.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The historiography of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was dominated by a very dark picture of the relationship between the Novgorodians and Hanseatic merchants. My observations do not corroborate this view and bring us to the conclusion that this Black Legend, which assumed that the relationship between the Novgorodians and German merchants had been predominantly hostile and based upon mutual distrust, needs to be revised. Indeed, it is not the case that the Black Legend should be replaced with a golden one. Rather, the lens of hospitality allows us to better account for the ambiguity of relations and attitudes between Novgorodians and Hanseatic merchants, which were highly dependent on political expediency and varied among social and political groups. Even the most conservative voices never advocated total hostility. The need for contact with the Hanse was both well understood by the Novgorodian political elites and, apparently, was not opposed by common people. Novgorod was able to shape a variety of notions and practices, which allowed it, despite conflicts, to efficiently maintain contact with the large German merchant community for centuries. At the same time, the desire of the authorities of the Hanseatic cities and of the leaders of the German merchant community in Novgorod for self-securitization was often in conflict with the need to maintain everyday contacts, including informal ones. This rapprochement was fueled, of course, not just by mutual interest at the interpersonal level—though this should not be underestimated—but by the fact that maintaining relations with the Hanse was vital for Novgorod. Moreover, there is some evidence that not only a narrow segment of the Novgorodian elite was interested in these relations, but so too was the broader community. This is indirectly confirmed by the range of Hanseatic commodities exported to Novgorod. Thus, the most popular broadcloth was that from Poperinge in Flanders, a cheaper and lower-quality option than the luxury broadcloth from Ypres. This indicates that the imported textiles were used not only by

the nobility, but also by the Novgorodian middle-class of tradesmen and craftsmen.<sup>74</sup> These were exactly the social groups that comprised the bulk of the people of Novgorod the Great, who enjoyed full rights. This was actually the key reason for why butter would ultimately overpower guns. Conflicts, despite all their rhetoric of threats, were always resolved peacefully. In full accordance with the model offered by Immanuel Kant, in the case of the relations between Novgorod and the Hanse, trade created if not an ideal, “perpetual peace,” then at the least it created a mental basis for reconciliation and compromise. As a result, both formal and informal structures of hospitality had survived until the Hanseatic Kontor in Novgorod was closed by order of Grand Duke of Moscow Ivan III in 1494.

## NOTES

1. See: Goetz (1922), Khoroshkevich (1963), Kazakova (1975).
2. See, for instance: Angermann and Endell (1989), Angermann (1994) (for a cogent critique of the hostility discourse of the earlier historiography, valuable remarks and well-posed questions); Squires and Ferdinand (2002), Squires (2009), Lukin (2018).
3. Wubs-Mrozewicz (2013). See the same work for a list of references to literature on “otherness” or “alterity” in the context of the Hanse and Hanseatic Kontors.
4. Kant (2006: 82–83).
5. Melnikova (2001: 7.29, 38–339), Zilmer (2005: 161–162) (see *ibid.* for the photo of the boulder with the inscription), Jackson (2010: 158).
6. Åhlén: 25–27. For valuable advice on Novgorod–Scandinavian relations and some other issues, I am grateful to Tatjana N. Jackson.
7. PSRL, 3: 215; For the English translation, see *Chronicle of Novgorod*: 21.
8. HUB, 1: no. 229–233, 663.
9. HUB, 1: no. 229–233, 663; Rybina (1986: 26–31).
10. Rybina (1986: 89–94).
11. Goetz (1922: 347–348).
12. LECUB, 1, 7: no. 221, 311.
13. DKU: 149–150; GVNP: no. 42, 75–76. On the legal status of the Hanseatic merchants in Novgorod, see also Feldbrugge (2009: 270–274).
14. GVNP: no. 31, 58–61.
15. Novgorodian merchants.
16. GVNP: no. 3, 13. On the date of the treaty, see Yanin (1990: 147–148).
17. GVNP: no. 31, 60.

18. HUB, 6: no. 359, 638.
19. LECUB, 1, 7: no. 221, 311.
20. PSRL, 3: 384; Chronicle of Novgorod: 162–163.
21. Schra: § 54, 141.
22. Schra: § 63, 143.
23. Schra: § 77, 147.
24. Goetz (1922: 356), Kleinenberg (1970: 137).
25. Schra: § 3, 127.
26. Goetz (1922: 361–363).
27. HUB, 5: no. 69, 119.
28. HR–1, 4: no. 362, 380.
29. HR–1, 5: no. 16, 28.
30. RIB, 6: 26–27, 60.
31. Angermann (1994: 193–195).
32. LECUB, 2, 2: no. 106, 162.
33. Bazilevich (1952: 477–478), Kazakova (1975: 222–223).
34. PSRL, 5, 1: 85. On the removal of Novgorodian landlords and the transfer of their lands to Muscovites after Novgorod had been annexed by Moscow, see Bernadskii (1961: 314–352).
35. LECUB, 2, 2: no. 321, 428.
36. LECUB, 2, 2: 321, n. 5.
37. См.: MHWB, 1: 40.
38. I.e., the Catholic church.
39. Angermann (1994: 194–195). There are three surviving recensions, of which one is very late, dating from the late 1500s or early 1600s. See Rybina (1978), Dmitriev (1989), Turilov (2019). As for the dates of the other two recensions and their textual relationships, opinions have differed. The generally accepted opinion has been that the earlier one is the so-called Volokolamsk recension, written between the mid-fifteenth century and early sixteenth century (the extant manuscripts date from the sixteenth century). However, Elena A. Rybina suggested that the earlier of the two was the other, Synodal recension (the seventeenth-century manuscript). She believed that this version had some historical basis that could be traced back to the twelfth century (Rybina 1978). However, her arguments are not convincing, and the Volokolamsk recension is most likely the earliest since the Synodal one is full of anachronisms. It is most likely the creation of a later author who might not even have been a Novgorodian, which can explain its serious flaws and inconsistencies. It seems that the Synodal recension of the *Tale* may have been inspired by one of the conflicts between Muscovy and its western Catholic neighbours, which often happened in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. This, however, along with the textual history of the *Tale* as such, is outside the scope of the present study.

40. Cf. Rybina (1989: 47).
41. Nikol'skii (1907: 107–110).
42. Nikol'skii (1907: 107).
43. SIRA, 22: 60.
44. Пригороды (literally suburbs) were towns in the wider land of Novgorod that were dependent on Novgorod the Great no matter where they were actually situated.
45. GVNP: no. 77, 132.
46. On the famine, see Pashuto (2011: 275, 278, 280) (the role of the Germans is nevertheless downplayed).
47. PSRL, 3: 70–71; Chronicle of Novgorod: 77.
48. Gippius (2006: 215).
49. The Swedes could be also referred to as *Nemtsy* (“Germans”) in chronicles, which is yet another reminder that “ethnic” definitions of this sort are somewhat fluid.
50. PSRL, 3: 94; the English translation in Chronicle of Novgorod: 118 is erroneous.
51. Shaskol'skii (1987: 69–71).
52. PSRL, 4, 1: 255; PSRL, 42: 87; PSRL, 6, 1: 371.
53. Lukin (2020: 102–104). Curiously enough, another work by Angermann does mention the fact that the Hanseatic merchants asked the archbishop of Novgorod for a blessing, an action that would only be possible if, first, they expected to receive his blessing (which indicates that the archbishop was not exactly raised in an atmosphere of hostility against German Catholics), and secondly, provided that they did not see him as a graceless schismatic (Angermann and Endell 1989: 89).
54. “Wy laten groten unsen hilgen vader Johanne, ertzbisschoppe to Nowgarden” (HUB, 5: no. 469, 892).
55. SDRYa, 2: 372–373; MHWB, 2,1: 23–24. On the cognate relationship between Russian *gost'*, Gothic *gasts* and German *Gast*, see Vasmer, 1: 447–448.
56. “wi wyllen juwen gast vorwaren gelyk den unsen na der cruskussynghe, unde vorwaret gy unsen gast na der kruskussynghe” (ГБНП: no. 48, 86).
57. См. об этом: Squires and Ferdinand (2002: 243–244).
58. HR-1, 7: no. 175, 308.
59. Khoroshkevich (1977: 132–133), Bessudnova (2019: 3–4). Marina Bessudnova sees these kinds of violations as an innovation that only became widespread in the fifteenth century; but, in my opinion, the reason for the seemingly higher frequency of such incidents at that time is a straightforward preservation bias – there are much more surviving Hanseatic documents from that period. The prohibition of any trade except bartering appears already in a 1318 regulation, later included in the fourth recension of the *Schra*: “no one should buy or accept on credit

- any goods in Novgorod and pay for it in Dorpat or elsewhere, but always pay for the goods where they are bought [i.e. in Novgorod]” (Schra: § 94, 152). This clearly indicates that such a practice, contrary to the prohibition outlined in the *Schra*, was already common by the early fourteenth century, which somewhat undermines Bessudnova’s arguments.
60. HUB, 5: no. 385–386, 736.
  61. See Kant (2006: 88).
  62. HUB, 5: no. 415–416, 794.
  63. HUB, 5: no. 565, 1086.
  64. Schra: § 114, 163.
  65. HR-1, 6: no. 248, 281.
  66. See also Angermann and Endell (1989: 95, n. 33). On medieval baths and saunas in the context of Baltic hospitality, see Jeziński (2020: 410–417).
  67. Wubs-Mrozewicz (2013: 163–164).
  68. Goetz (1922: 341), Angermann and Endell (1989: 89). For correct remarks on this subject by Norbert Angermann, see Angermann (1994: 198).
  69. HUB, 5, no. 684, S. 351.
  70. HUB, 5, no. 472, S. 244.
  71. PSRL, 3: 25; Chronicle of Novgorod: 15.
  72. MHWB, 1: 1016–1017.
  73. HUB, 5: 461.
  74. Khoroshkevich (1963: 182–185). For the Novgorodian consumer market of the Independence Era, sources are lacking, but there is some later evidence from other parts of Russia. For instance, in the 1540s some peasants of Suzdal Uyezd, owned by the Monastery of the Savior in Yaroslavl, wore Poperinge broadcloth: see Florya (2020).

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