

Livonia and Rus' in the 1230s and 1240s

3.1 Livonia, Pskov, and Novgorod c. 1230

The 1240s has often been regarded in historiography as being the most important period for relations between Rus' and Latin Europe during the Middle Ages. The Battle of the Neva in 1240 and the Battle of the Ice at Lake Peipus in 1242 have been seen as crucial turning points in the historical development of relations between Rus' and its western neighbours. The immediate background to the events of the 1240s dates back, however, to the previous decade. Moreover, it would first have to be shown that these battles and other events in the 1240s were indeed exceptional in the context of the 13th century as a whole.

The Novgorod Chronicle describes the military campaign of Prince Iaroslav Vsevolodovich of Novgorod against the Tavastians under the year 1228. This campaign was a failure because a quarrel took place within the Novgorod army caused by disaffection with the prince. In the same year Iaroslav led his army together with Novgorod's *posadnik* Ivanko and its *tysiatskii* Viacheslav towards Pskov. When the Pskovians found out about their approach, they holed themselves up in the city and would not let the prince enter. Prince Iaroslav returned to Novgorod and rumours began to circulate that he wanted to take the most eminent men of Pskov prisoner. In Novgorod Iaroslav convened the *Veche* and declared that he had had the best intentions towards Pskov: he had merely wanted to deliver gifts, but Pskov had dishonoured him. Iaroslav then raised an army from Pereiaslav, but this time he made known that his intention was to attack Riga. It was a large army and its garrisoning in Novgorod caused the price of food to rise. These tensions must be seen in the context of the resistance of Pskov and Novgorod to rule by the Suzdal dynasty as represented by Iaroslav.

When news reached Pskov that Iaroslav's troops were ready, the town agreed a treaty with Riga and requested military aid in the event of an attack by Novgorod or Prince Iaroslav. The treaty was guaranteed by sending forty hostages from Pskov to Riga. The Novgorodians themselves assumed that the attack on Riga was merely a pretext used by the prince to disguise his real aim, namely the defeat of Pskov. The prince sent a messenger to Pskov asking it take part in the attack on Riga, seeking to convince the people that Iaroslav had no evil intentions towards them as long as his opponents were handed over to him. Pskov's response was to refuse to take part in the campaign or to hand

over its leaders. The Novgorod Chronicle represents Pskov's perspective as follows: if the prince truly intended to kill the Pskovians and abduct their women and children, then he was no better than the pagans. Novgorod too refused to take part in the campaign following Pskov's own refusal. The offensive did not take place and the army had to be disbanded.

The Livonian auxiliary army then stationed in Pskov and the "Germans, Chuds, Lettgallians and Livs" also returned home, but the men who had received a reward (*придатъкъ*) from the prince of Novgorod were driven from Pskov: "Follow your prince, you aren't our brothers". Iaroslav and his wife then left Novgorod for Pereiaslav, leaving his sons Fedor and Aleksandr, who were still minors, and his bailiff (*тиунъ*) Iakim behind. When the famine which had struck Novgorod lingered on because of heavy rainfall and a bad harvest, Archbishop Arsenii, who was accused of corrupting the prince, was removed from office. In the city the houses of the followers of the Suzdal Prince Iaroslav were plundered. Boris Negochevich was appointed the new tysiatskii. Iaroslav rejected an agreement, for he did not consent to the conditions demanded by the city regarding the prince's powers. Iakim fled the city with Iaroslav's two sons. Mikhail Vsevolodovich from Chernigov was elected the new prince, arriving in Novgorod in 1230.¹

The Russian historian Evgeniia Nazarova has suggested that the fears harboured by Pskov that Iaroslav wanted to assume control there and take reprisals against his opponents had a basis in fact.² For shortly before Iaroslav's failed military campaign Prince Vladimir Mstislavich, the same who had reigned intermittently in Pskov for at least fifteen years, is supposed to have died. In this case, the throne of Pskov may have been vacant and Iaroslav Vsevolodovich could have attempted to take power by force. However, the prince did not dare rely on support from only his small retinue and the contingent from Novgorod, which he considered untrustworthy in any case, and thus deployed the military might of north-eastern Rus'. This turned out to be a threat to Novgorod itself, not to mention the supply problems caused by the size of the army. Pskov's participation in the attack on Livonia would have constituted a violation of the defensive treaty concluded with Riga and endangered the hostages held there. This treaty had already been agreed when Iaroslav announced his offensive. The followers of the prince of Suzdal, who had themselves been corrupted by

1 NLI, pp. 65–68; 271–74. Cf. PL 2, p. 79. See also Valerov, *Новгород*, pp. 145–59.

2 Evgeniia L. Nazarova, "К истории Псковско-Ливонского договора 1228 г.," in *Восточная Европа в древности и средневековье. Международная договорная практика Древней Руси. IX Чтения памяти Владимира Т. Пацуто*, ed. Elena A. Melnikova et al. (Moscow, 1997), pp. 46–49; Matuzova and Nazarova, *Крестоносцы*, p. 302.