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**THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH INSTITUTION IN
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE REPUBLICAN
FORMS OF GOVERNMENT IN NOVGOROD
DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THE XII c.**

In the article the author considers a complex of problems related to the determining and characterization of the role of the church institution in the process of formation and establishment of the republican form of government in Novgorod land during the first half of the XII century. In addition, the author highlights the peculiarities of the relationship between the episcopal authorities and princely powers in Novgorod on the one hand, the specifics of relations between the ruling prerogatives of the Novgorod bishop, the territorial and administrative functions of the Kiev Metropolitan, and the canonical principles of the Patriarch of Constantinople regarding the Sophia Throne – on the other hand. Separately, the article analyzes the reform activity of the first Archbishop of Novgorod – Nifont, its significance and consequences.

Keywords: *Novgorod land, Sophia Cathedral, „Republic of St. Sophia”, Archbishop Nifont, Novgorod uprising of 1136, Novgorod church architecture.*

Ілля ТИМЧУК

**РОЛЬ ЦЕРКОВНОЇ ІНСТИТУЦІЇ У
ВСТАНОВЛЕННІ РЕСПУБЛІКАНСЬКОЇ
ФОРМИ ПРАВЛІННЯ В НОВГОРОДІ
ПРОТЯГОМ ПЕРШОЇ ПОЛОВИНИ XII ст.**

У статті автор розглядає комплекс проблем, пов'язаних з визначенням та характеристикою ролі церковної інституції у процесі формування й становлення республіканської форми правління в Новгородській землі протягом першої половини XII ст. Крім того, автор висвітлює особливості взаємовідносин між єпископальною владою й князівськими повноваженнями у Новгороді з одного боку, специфіку стосунків між владними prerogativami новгородського архієрея, територіально-адміністративними функціями Київського митрополита і канонічними повноваженнями Константинопольського патріарха щодо Софійської кафедри – з іншого. Окремо у статті аналізується реформаторська діяльність першого архієпископа Новгородського – Нифонта, її значення та наслідки.

Ключові слова: Новгородська земля, Софійська кафедра, „Республіка Святої Софії”, архієпископ Нифонт, новгородське повстання 1136 р., новгородська церковна архітектура.

Ілья ТЫМЧУК

РОЛЬ ЦЕРКОВНОЙ ИНСТИТУЦИИ В УСТАНОВЛЕНИИ РЕСПУБЛИКАНСКОЙ ФОРМЫ ПРАВЛЕНИЯ В НОВГОРОДЕ НА ПРОТЯЖЕНИИ ПЕРВОЙ ПОЛОВИНЫ XII в.

В статье автор рассматривает комплекс проблем, связанных с определением и характеристикой роли церковной институции в процессе формирования и становления республиканской формы правления в Новгородской земле на протяжении первой половины XII в. Кроме того, автор освещает особенности взаимоотношений между епископальной властью и княжескими полномочиями в Новгороде с одной стороны, специфику отношений между властными прерогативами новгородского архиерея, территориально-административными функциями Киевского митрополита и каноническими полномочиями Константинопольского патриарха относительно Софийской кафедры – с другой. Отдельно в статье анализируется реформаторская деятельность первого архиепископа Новгородского – Нифонта, её значение и следствия.

Ключевые слова: Новгородская земля, Софийская кафедра, „Республика Святой Софии”, архиепископ Нифонт, новгородское восстание 1136 г., новгородская церковная архитектура.

The 20-s – 40-s of the XII century occupy a special place in the history of Novgorod and Novgorod lands. It is this epoch that largely determined the ways of developing a republican system in the state. As it is known, the main impetus in this direction was the uprising of 1136. The consequences of these events were reflected in the following transformations related to the formation of republican institutions. The Novgorod veche also played an important role. As a result, princely power in the middle of the XII century lost its priority powers. On the other hand, there was a rise in the religious factor. The role of the Church was intensified precisely as a result of the uprising, although the chronicle tradition does not reveal the details of the events of 1136-1138 [21, p. 21]. However, the available factual material

allows us to state: the republican changes that continued during the first third of the XII century and continued in the next twenty years, were simultaneously marked sufficiently significant cultural shifts. On their background, the widespread church building also took place. As a result, the Archbishopric throne began to dominate in the spiritual and moral-ethical sphere, intensifying its control over the society [2, p. 206]. From the middle of the XII century in the „Republic of Saint Sophia”, the Archbishop’s authorities became dominant in many branches of political and legal life.

At the same time, the written sources fix the origins and causes of the Novgorod uprising. In 1130, the „Novgorod’s First Chronicle” mentions the events associated with Bishop Ioann Popyan, who was deprived of the Sophia throne by the citizens that year [2, p. 473]. The reasons for his removal were a direct reflection of the political life of Novgorod, when the struggle for power between the prince and the urban population intensified. Anti-Prince struggle was largely provoked and led by the boyar circles. It was the nobility that put forward the idea of separating the Novgorod throne from the dynastic fate of the Grand Princes of Kiev [22, p. 91].

The first step in this direction was the expulsion of David Svyatoslavich from Novgorod in 1096 and the „preservation” of Mstislav Vladimirovich on the Novgorod throne in 1102, instead of the Grand Prince’s protégé Izyaslav Svyatopolkovich. The corresponding decision was affixed by a separate agreement signed between Novgorod and Vsevolod Mstislavich in 1117, when the previous boyars’ protégé moved to Kyiv [23, p. 62]. Consequently, the conclusion of this treaty became a realization of the trends that were formed in 1088, 1096, and 1102; Finally, Novgorod citizens made the first step towards gaining the republican freedoms for themselves. Already from 1117, and not from 1136, Novgorod began to elect a prince freely [2, p. 474].

V. Yanin, an authoritative researcher of the history of the medieval Novgorod highlights two key points that influenced the future fate of Novgorod lands: first, the restriction of the right of the Prince of Novgorod to look for other thrones; and secondly, the attribution of *posadnik*’s institute as a representative body of the Novgorod boyars, which essentially limited the rights of the prince [23, p. 63]. Since 1117 the introduction of the institute of local *posadniks* in the Novgorod government begins; this



Fig. 1. Novgorod seals of the XIII century (by V. Yanin)
(scale not specified)

introduction, of course, took place in the struggle against Kyiv's protégés – *posadniks* Boris and Danylo [21, p. 22].

If the first of them succeeded to hold his position of *posadnik* in Novgorod from 1120 to 1126 due to the massacre of the rebellious burghers in 1118, and the reconciling „cross kissing”, then the arrival

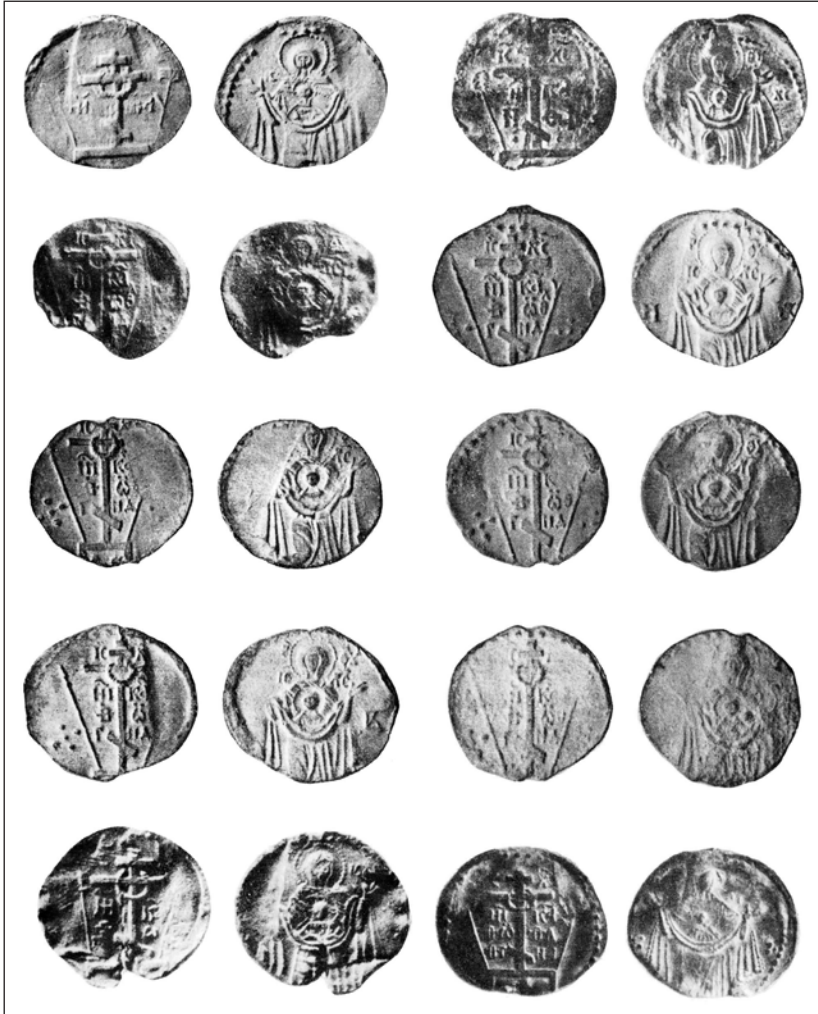


Fig. 2. Novgorod seals of the XIII century (by V. Yanin)
(scale not specified)

of the Kyivan Danylo to the position of *posadnik* in Novgorod in 1129 immediately faced the sharp opposition of the townspeople. Due to this fact, Novgorod prince Vsevolod Mstislavovich was forced to leave for Kyiv to settle the issue of the *posadnik*'s position [18, p. 134]. Such political realities had a pronounced orientation: the characteristic

feature was a tangible increase in the dependence of the prince on the will of the Novgorod boyars; under these conditions there was the deprivation of Ioann Popyan of the archbishopric throne.

O. Khoroshev, a well-known researcher, emphasizes that Vsevolod's visit to Kyiv in 1130 was undoubtedly connected with a diplomatic mission, the purpose of which was to hold talks on the nature of the institute of *posadnik* [21, p. 23]. The further transfer of the post to Novgorod citizen Petril Mikulchich by the Grand Prince's protégé Danyl confirms this. The chronicle report of Ioann's „rejection” was recorded the same year [3, p. 83]. The reason for this event was the contradiction that arose between the ruling prerogatives of the Archbishop of Novgorod and the princely decree. Academician M. Tikhomirov, a well-known Soviet scholar, defended this idea, emphasizing that the conflict intensified due to the intensification of the national anti-feudal struggle, which unfolded in the first quarter of the XII century.

Academician V. Yanin supports another scientific stand. In 1976 the archaeological expedition under his leadership, except for numerous acts of seals [26, p. 46-50, 174-178] (*fig 1; 2; 3*), found an interesting bishop's bulla. The analysis of its text allowed the scientist to state the following: most likely, the true reason for the deprivation of the bishop of the archbishopric throne was not due to the people's unrests, but due to the fact that Ioann Popyan declared himself independent from the Kyiv metropolitanate (from the point of view of the church's territorial and administrative jurisdiction) [26, p. , 179]; In addition, the bishop of Novgorod affirmed his own autocephaly in relation to the Patriarchate of Constantinople [25, p. 76].

A similar „apostasy” of the clergy of the northern diocese from the norms of church politics, the violation of the hierarchical pyramid, and, of course, the hidden political ambitions, were bound to lead to corresponding punitive actions by both the Metropolitan and the Patriarch. Consequently, Bishop Ioann was excommunicated in a quite foreseeable and anticipated way – for the pronounced religious separatism. On the other hand, in Novgorod during the first half of the XII century, there emerged such a political situation, which became the impetus for a whole series of social transformations and changes in power. As a result, Novgorod lands changed the form of state organization and

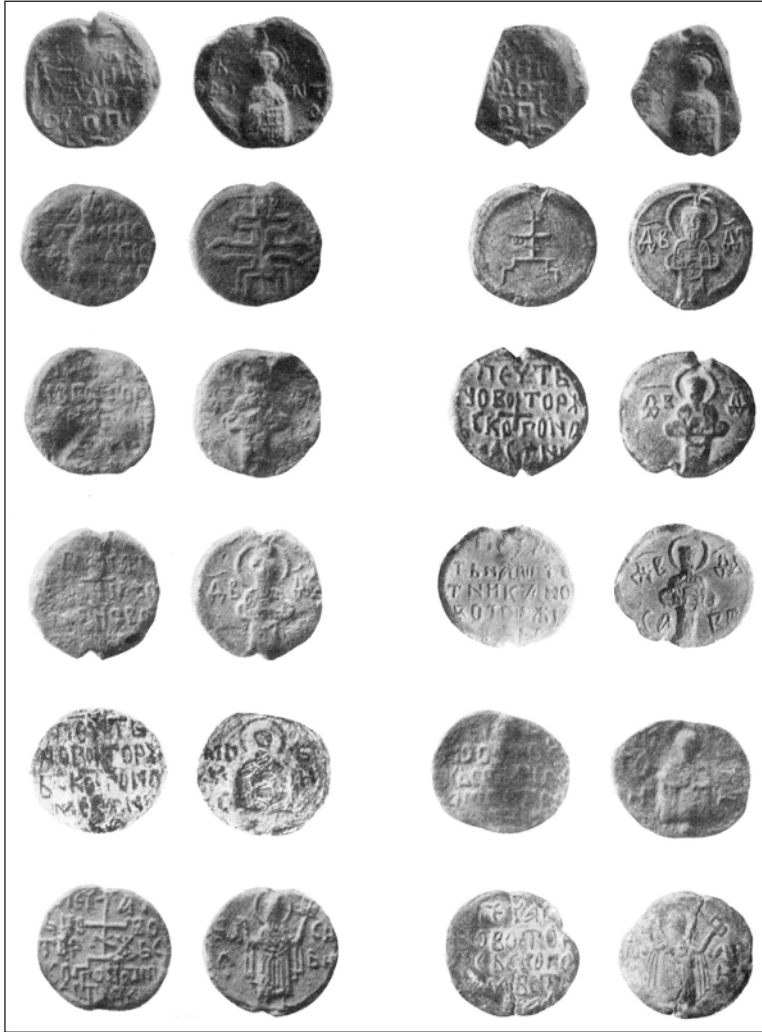


Fig. 3. Novgorod seals of the XIII century (by V. Yanin)
(scale not specified)

management and turned into a republic [24, p. 125-126]. According to the sources [3, p. 87; 4, p. 59; 5, p. 38], in the pointed out era – the 20s – 30s of the XII century – in Novgorod, along with the maturing of the tendencies of separatism in the church circles, the same tendencies began to be demonstrated by the local boyars. However, the boyar

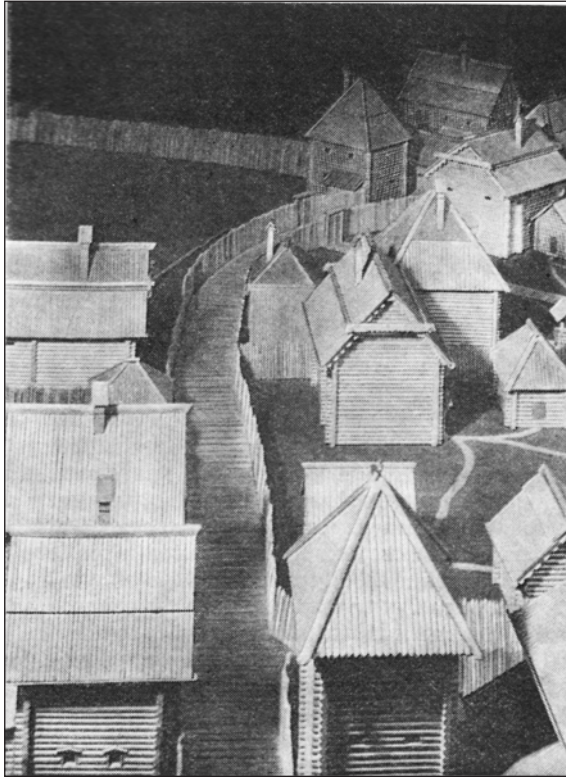


Fig. 4. Street Great (Central) in the XII century.
View from the south (reconstruction of P. Zasztsev)

opposition was more determined, organized and tougher in relation to the Grand Prince power. At the same time, the boyars supported the illegal autocephalous of the St. Sophia's throne and the Bishop's desire to get rid of the Kyiv metropolitan „guardianship”.

The chronicles inform [3, p. 90; 4, p. 62] that assistance from the influential boyars of the capital began with the discussion regarding the borders of the independence of the archbishopric throne. The next step was the boyars' assistance in the bishop's receiving power functions in public administration. Finally, the third step was connected with the boyars' support of the idea of the local church independence from Constantinople [11, p. 44]. Thus, there appeared really two sharp conflict situations. In the specified context, the mission of Prince Vsevolod

to Kiev in 1130 had a specific goal: settlement of both conflicts. The cession of the Grand Prince administration in establishing the regional representation in the township was offset by the refusal of the Novgorod boyars to support the unjustified encroachments of the Sophia Throne. The Greek Nifont was sent to the diocese and later he reaffirmed his vassalry in relation to the higher hierarchs and the dogmatic support of the church canons [25, p. 77]. At the same time, it is worth noting yet another symptomatic fact: Kyiv-Pechersk monk, Nifont, inducted into to the throne, managed to obtain maximum benefits for the „House of St. Sophia” during the years of radical transformations in Novgorod [27, p. 51].

As an archbishop, Nifont distinguished himself favorably from his predecessors in secular (political, economic, cultural) Novgorod affairs. Not being a Novgorodian by birth, he became a Novgorodian by his convictions, took on the traditions of the „Novgorodian antiquity” and soberly appreciated the current reality in terms of possible perspectives. He not only supported the Republican aspirations of the Novgorod boyars, but also used them to carry out a democratic reform of his eparchial organization [20, p. 242]. Nifont’s activities are the key to understanding of many issues in the further history and the bishop throne, and the Novgorod republic. The vigorous participation of the Bishop in internal events and foreign policy of the Novgorod lands, which took place against the background of uncovered autocephalous landmarks, determined the vector expected by the population of the republican changes by many signs. It is also appropriate to emphasize: the corresponding transformations could be made and realized only in conditions of close interaction of the Sophia Throne with Novgorod boyars [17, p. 101; 27, p. 52]. Bishop Nifont became the first bishop who understood and realized the benefits of such cooperation.

Consequently, in practice, Nifont clearly demonstrated the effectiveness and expediency of the boyar-bishop alliance. After the anti-princely action of the Novgorodians, when the corresponding status of independence of Novgorod was developed (the prince was still in custody at the bishop’s court), one of the most important duties of the archbishop was the search for a prince suitable for the capital [9, p. 170]. After quite lengthy negotiations, disputes and „consultations”, Novgorod people sent Nifont to Kiev for „Prince”. However, the following events

turned out to be somewhat unexpected, especially for the bishop [8, p. 319]. Kyiv appointed its new protégé in Novgorod, but soon the burghers refused from the service of the newly arrived Grand Prince's protégé Svyatoslav. The next conflict with Kiev caused Nifont's disgrace. As the sources fixed, the Bishop was returned from the road to Novgorod and detained at the court of Grand Prince Vsevolod [4, p. 155-156].

The „Novgorod Chronicle” also mentions a series of events associated with this archbishop of Novgorod. Twice the bishop led the embassy to Yuriy Dolgorukiy. The first trip, which took place in 1148, was aimed at establishing peace with the Prince of Suzdal. Accepted „with honor”, Nifont persuaded Dolgorukiy to release the imprisoned Novgorod citizens [2, p. 270]. However, the main task was never fulfilled: Yuriy, as the chronicler writes, did not like the Novgorodians and postponed the peace „for later”. In its turn, the embassy of 1154 was more successful for Nifont. A new agreement was signed, and the Bishop „introduced”

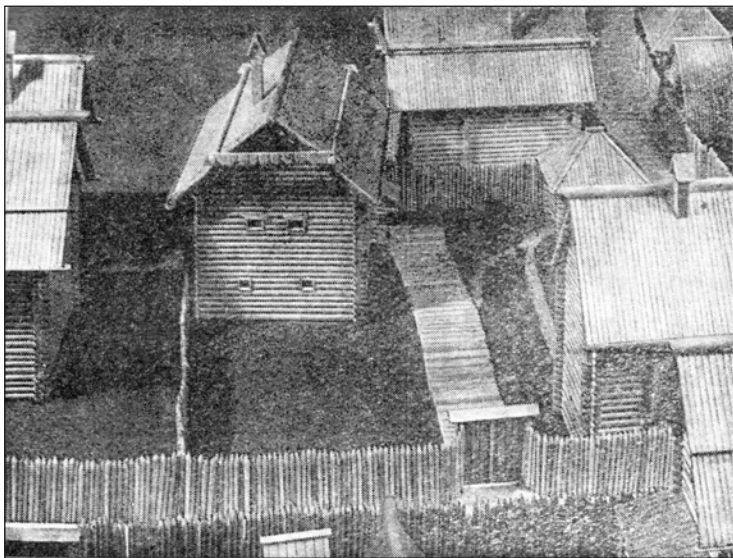


Fig. 5. Boyar manor „Clean Yard” at the beginning of the XIII century. View from the south (reconstruction of P. Zasztsev)

Mstislav Yuryevich to Novgorod, who was blessed by Dolgorukiy on Novgorod's reign [2, p. 271]. In addition to the embassies that served the goals of the Novgorod boyars, Nifont made a trip to Kyiv in 1135

to reconcile the citizens of Kyiv and Chernihiv. This fact underlines the high authority of the Novgorod bishop in the political arena of the time. At the same time, Nifont's political aspirations were revealed most clearly and consistently during the church discussion in 1147 [7, p. 272]. As it is already emphasized above, the autocephalous prospects of the Sophia Throne are closely interwoven with the republican „modifications” of Novgorod, which liberated the princely throne from the conflicts of struggle for Kyiv; the church clergy of Novgorod has long wanted to get out of total control of the Metropolitan of Kyiv. As it is known, Nifont successfully used the discussion of 1147 to achieve his goal [2, p. 272].

In the same year Grand Prince Izyaslav made an attempt to separate the Russian metropolis from under the dictatorship of the Byzantine church hierarchy. Taking advantage of the temporary difficulties of Constantinople and the patriarchate, the prince authorized the appointment of Klim Smolyatich to the Metropolitanate. For the ordination of the princely candidate, a local council was convened. In his actions Izyaslav repeated the actions of Yaroslav the Wise, when he set up the Rusyn Ilarion to the Metropolitanate, being confident in the correctness of his actions [15, p. 128-129].

However, in 1147 the synod of the Rus hierarchs split into two camps. Most bishops acted on the side of the prince. In this camp there were, in particular, such influential church figures as Chernihiv Bishop Onuphriy, Belgorod Bishop Fedor, Pereyaslav Bishop Evfimiyy, Yuriev Bishop Demyan, Volodymyr-Volynsky Bishop Feodor. The Bishops of Novgorod, Smolensk and Polotsk acted in contrast [10, p. 235]. So, there was a situation where opponents of the Grand Prince's initiative were the heads of those thrones that existed in the cities with the most developed veche structures and tendencies aimed at the creation of self-government institutions. These are these three cities – Novgorod, Smolensk and Polotsk – which demonstrated obvious success in the anti-Prince struggle and in their aspiration for independence from Kyiv in the middle of the XII century.

Of course, Bishop Nifont could not ignore the position of the boyars and the participation of his predecessor in the St. Sophia's throne. The non-recognition of the bishops of the above dioceses of the autocephaly of the Kyiv Metropolitan virtually led to disgrace; it

was supported by the Grand Prince as well, and Nifont was arrested in the Pechersk Monastery. Only in 1150, having established himself on the Kyiv throne, Yuriy Dolgorukiy dismissed the Archbishop of Novgorod; Bishop returned to the throne, „and the people of Novgorod were very glad” [2, p. 211]. It should also be added that Nifont’s defense of the church canons in the debate of 1147 gained recognition in the person of Patriarch of Constantinople Nicholas Muzalon. As a sign of this recognition, the patriarch sent the corresponding letters to the Novgorod bishop [2, p. 212].

As O.Khoroshev emphasizes, the political goals of the archbishop of Novgorod, who advocated the independence of the diocese from the Metropolitan, but insisted on the dependence of the Metropolitan of the Byzantine Patriarch, were clearly expressed in a number of events that took place in the history of the Rus Church in the XIII century [21, p. 28]. At the same time, their origins go back to the 60-s, when Prince Andriy Bogolyubsky tried to organize a special metropolitan in Vladimir; the latter should have been autocephalous from Kiev and subordinated directly to the patriarch in Constantinople [6, p. 33].

Andriy’s intentions and personal motivation are the same as those of Nifont: the search for church „reinforcement” in the organization of a system of state administration independent of Kyiv through the creation of an autocephalous church hierarchy. Consequently, as H. Lytavryn emphasizes, Nifont’s aspirations, as well as the subsequent initiative of Bogolyubsky, „reflect the objective process of feudal crushing of Rus, the process that consists in strengthening the largest centers of Ancient Rus and leads to the weakening of the authority of Kiev throne” [11, p. 46].

The analysis of that time sources [1, 5] suggests that in the context of international relations, the political role of the Novgorod bishops began to grow in the first half of the XII century. In these circumstances, the Patriarchate of Constantinople cannot but take into consideration the obvious changes in the political picture of Rus [19, p. 64]. The mentioned patriarchal blessed letters, judging by their texts, promoted the rank and the title of Nifont to the level of the Archbishop. Such an event is a direct proof of the true success of the Bishop in the struggle for the autocephaly of his diocese. It is also necessary to take into account: the archbishopric order deprived its owner of his

subordination to his district metropolitan; unlike the bishop, according to the Byzantine rules of the church, the archbishop depended directly only on the patriarch [16, p. 11-12].

As we see, Nifont's receipt of Archbishop's rank automatically included the owner of the Sophia's throne in the direct „command” of the patriarch. In the future the Novgorod chronicles repeatedly mention the direct contacts of the Constantinople primate with the Novgorod bishop – the head of the „House of St. Sophia” [16, p. 12]. The first written mention of the increase of the church rank of Nifont is the mention of the lifetime antimins of 1148 from the Nikolo-Dvorishchensky Cathedral. The memorial includes the inscription: „The altar of the holy martyr Georgiy is consecrated by Nifont, Archbishop of Novgorod by the command of Bishop of Rostov Nestor at the pious Prince of Georgiy, son of Monomakh” [13, p. 125].

At the same time, the most important thing, which marked Nifont's ruling, was his radical church reform, which he held in his diocese persistently and consistently. It is with its completion that a kind of Novgorod system of electing the bishop at the veche is formed; such practice actually eliminated the Kiev Metropolitan's participation from the elections of the bishop of Novgorod. Using Church strife, Nifont succeeded, having real Byzantine support, in establishing a relative ecclesiastical independence for the state [6, p. 40].

Naturally, the transformation of state administration, focused on the formation of the republican system, as well as the successful church reform led to a noticeable and tangible democratization of the spiritual and cultural life of the city. Most clearly this is traced in architecture (*fig. 4; 5*). Instead of lush princely buildings of XI – early XII centuries there comes a new type of temple – smaller in size, not so lush and pompous, to a large extent with simplified constructive elements [13, p. 129-130]. On the other hand, democratization also contributed to the partial secularization of the Novgorod Church; the political and economic contacts of the hierarchs with the boyar circles and the city merchant's elite increased. In addition, the „deputy” representation of the lower strata of the Novgorod population became possible [9, p. 19]. At the same time, the secular element of the „Republic of Saint Sophia” from the middle of the XII century began to take an active part in church building. The first boyar-patrons and patrons-

merchants appeared; merchant corporations and representatives of the urban communities (so-called streets) also allocate funds for the construction of new temples. The Bishop himself also took an active participation in the church building [21, p. 30]. If up to Nifont, the bishops-predecessors erected only 3 churches, under his rule there were built 15 new temples in the capital, and 24 stone religious buildings in other cities of the Novgorod land [13, p. 133]. The church building is well covered in the Novgorod chronicles [12, p. 203]. In particular, with the assistance of Nifont and the prince in Novgorod, the Church of the Blessed Virgin was built at Torgovyshche (1136), the Church of Clement in Ladoga (1153), the Church of Sabbas the Sanctified on Savva Street of Novgorod (1154), Savior's Cathedral in Pskov (1154) [2, p. 23, 29, 208, 215-216].

Summarizing the article, we can note the following. The reform activity of Archbishop Nifont played a pivotal role in the establishment and development of the republican institutions within the framework of the Novgorod statehood. Under his influence, the process of transformation and merger of secular and ecclesiastical power prerogatives was completed. The prelate's activity of Bishop Nifont, at the same time, laid the foundations for a boyar-vassal union, which later, during the second half of the XII – the first third of the XIV century, determined the priority vectors in the sphere of foreign policy carried out by the Novgorod feudal republic.

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