Sophia – the Personification of Divine Wisdom in the Culture of Novgorod the Great from 13th to 15th Century*

Sophia – the personification of Divine Wisdom – was surrounded by special esteem and inspired a devoted following in the area of Novgorod the Great. Hagia Sophia, erected in the middle of the 11th century was without doubt the most important temple in the city on the Volkhov River. Furthermore, the chronicles of Northern Rus’ show that with the escalation of republican trends in Novgorod the Great, the cathedral dedicated to the Wisdom of God took on an additional meaning: it became an ideological city center, a symbol of its sovereignty and political independence.

It should be noted that – according to the historiographical sources appearing in the environment under consideration – in the square in front of the temple of Hagia Sophia was held the so-called veche – in theory, the supreme authority of the Republic on the Volkhov River. For example, in the oldest chronicle of Novgorod in the year 6798 AM (1291 AD) it is said: Новгородцы же съзвонаша вење у святєи Софеи и у святого Николы. The Cathedral Square is, in this case, one of two pla-

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2 Д.С. Лихачев, Новгород Великий..., p. 14–15; О.В. Кузьмина, op. cit., p. 82; В. Тулупов, op. cit., p. 54, 86. It is worth noting the fact that according to Klaus Zernack, a researcher of the Novgorod veche, this type of assembly, which took place even in the 12th century in Kiev (e.g. in 1113 and 1147), was also held in front of the Hagia Sophia cathedral. K. Zernack, Die burgstädtischen Volksversammlungen bei den Ost- und Westslaven. Studien zur verfassungs-geschichtlichen Bedeutung des Večе, Wiesbaden 1967, p. 76–77.

ces for the meeting. However, it is worth bearing in mind that the quoted passage comes from a description of socio-political unrest in Novgorod, when, after the sudden deposition of the incumbent posadnik (one of the most important officials of the Republic) and the assassination of a citizen of Novgorod, the citizens of the city gathered at a veche in full armor (енідшася в доспѣсѣ)\(^4\). However, the mention of a veche convened a few years later is much clearer in meaning: созвониши \(\text{вѣче у святѣи Софѣи} \) (6807 AM/1299 AD)\(^5\).

A description of an interesting situation can be found in the oldest chronicle of Novgorod in the year 6850 AM (1342 AD). When Luka Valfromeyevich, the son of the former posadnik, was killed, his son Ontsifor and brother Matvei convened a veche in the Cathedral Square. Their political opponent, the incumbent posadnik Fedor, who they accused of having a hand in Luka’s death, organized a separate meeting in another place\(^6\): Онцифоръ с Матфѣемъ созвони \(\text{вѣче у святѣи Софѣи} \), а Федоръ и Ондрѣшко другое созвониша на Ярославля дворѣ. In the description of the events in 6896 AM (1388 AD) the square in front of the Hagia Sophia temple was the only place in the city where the veche was held: ззвонивше \(\text{вѣче у святѣи Софѣи} \). From the above review of sources, a basic conclusion can be drawn: even if it was not the only location where, according to tradition, meetings of the citizens of Novgorod the Great were held, the Cathedral Square may be regarded as a very important place in the Republic\(^9\).

Interestingly, in the chronicles of Northern Rus’ from the middle of the 12\(^{th}\) century, another interesting element appeared: the seat of the Archbishop of Novgorod began to be considered as the Court or the House of Sophia. The Archbishop of Novgorod was – according to many researchers – one of the most politically influential persons of the Republic, responsible not only for religious issues, but also for economic and financial matters (care of the treasury and the

\(^{5}\) Нов. пер. лет., AM 6807, p. 330.
\(^{6}\) О.В. Кузьмина, op. cit., p. 153; В.Л. Янин, Очерки истории..., p. 137.
\(^{7}\) Нов. пер. лет., AM 6850, p. 356.
\(^{8}\) Нов. пер. лет., AM 6896, p. 382. В.Л. Янин, Очерки истории..., p. 140.
\(^{9}\) However, Klaus Zernack believes that throughout the life of the Republic of Novgorod there was not a single official place where veche should be held. Moreover, the dates and frequency of convening assemblies were not determined. Over time, the custom of organizing veche at Yaroslav’s Court was established (K. Zernack, op. cit., p. 183). The contemporary literature usually includes four places where Novgorod’s veche could have been held: a courtyard of the Hagia Sophia cathedral, the region of Yaroslav’s Court, the area of Forty Martyrs Church and the square in front of the temple of Sts. Boris and Gleb. The most important veche of the republic was at first held at Yaroslav’s Court. Then the participants went to the areas of Hagia Sophia cathedral. There is also a hypothesis that sometimes two veche might have been held at the same time in Novgorod the Great, one in each of the main areas of the city – in the square in front of the Hagia Sophia temple (for the so-called ’Sophia side’ of the city) and at Yaroslav’s Court (for the so-called ’Market side’). Д.В. Пежемский, Археологический облик «вечевых» площадей Великого Новгорода, [in:] Споры о новгородском вече. Междисциплинарный диалог. Материалы «круглого стола». Европейский университет в Санкт-Петербурге. 20 IX 2010 г., ed. М.М. Кром, Санкт-Петербург 2012, p. 168, 174, 177–182.
management of the estates of Novgorod); 10: поручил ему епископу къ двору святых Софьи (6664 AM/1156 AD); 11: възведоша владыку Алексѣя в дом святых Софьи, на свои архиепископскій степень (6883 AM/1375 AD); 12: приихаша владыка в домъ святых Софьи (6884 AM/1376 AD); 13: възведоша игумена Феодосія честно в домъ святѣи Софьи (6923 AM/1415 AD); 14: възведоша игумена Феодосія честно в домъ святѣи Софьи (6929 AM/1421 AD).

At this point it is also worth mentioning that Novgorod's archbishops, starting from the second half of the 12th century, were chosen – somewhat contrary to the ecclesiastical tradition of the Eastern Church – in a rather unusual way. Typically, Novgorod's citizens gathered at a veche and chose three candidates for the throne of the archbishop. Following this, especially when there was a lack of unanimity among the deliberators, the patroness of the cathedral temple of the city, Sophia, was asked to make a final decision concerning the selection. To ascertain the will of God's Wisdom, the names of all the candidates for the position of archbishop were written on specially prepared lots, which were then placed on the altar of the Hagia Sophia cathedral. After a solemn liturgy, a blind man came to the cathedral and drew the lots (later this was usually done by a priest). The archbishop was the candidate whose lot remained on the altar as the last one. This practice is confirmed many times in the chronicles. As an example, the descriptions of events from 6867 AM (1359 AD) and 6896 AM (1388 AD) are presented here:


11 Нов. пер. лет., AM 6664, p. 216.

12 Нов. пер. лет., AM 6883, p. 373.

13 Нов. пер. лет., AM 6884, p. 374.

14 Нов. пер. лет., AM 6896, p. 381.

15 Нов. пер. лет., AM 6923, p. 405.

16 Нов. пер. лет., AM 6929, p. 414.

17 А.С. Хорошев, op. cit., p. 209.


6867 AM/1359 AD: много же гадавши посадникъ и тысячи и всь Но-
въград, игумены и попове, и не изволиша свѣк от человѣкъ извра
ни, нѣ изволиша свѣк от Бога прияти извѣщеніе и уповати на милость его,
кого Богъ въскочиет и седяти Софія, того знаменатъ, и избраша три лужи:
Олексѣа чернца, ключника дому седяти Софія, и Саву, игумена Оntonова ма
настыря, и Ивана, попа сятныхъ Бардара, и положиша три жреби на престолъ въ
святыхъ Софіи, утверждише свѣк слово: егоже въскочиет Богъ и седяти Софія,
приподостроє божиа, свѢлѣ престолу служебника нажити, того жреби да оставит
на престолѣ своємъ. И изъра Богъ, седяти Софія свѧтія служебники нажити лужа добра,
разумна и о всѣмъ ресмотрѣля Олексѣа чернца, и остави жреби его на престолѣ
своємъ.

6896 AM/1388 AD: много же гадавъ посадникъ и тысячи и всь Но-
въград, игумены и попове, и не изволиша свѣк от человѣкъ извра
ни, нѣ изволиша свѣк от Бога прияти извѣщеніе и уповати на милость его.
И избраша три лужи: Иоанна игумена сядового Спаса с Хутйна, Парфениа игумена сядового
Благовѣщенія, Афanasia игумена сядового Рожества, и положиша три жреби на престолѣ въ
святыхъ Софіи, утверждише тако: егоже въскочиет Богъ и седяти Софія,
свѢлѣ престолу служебника, того жреби остави на престолѣ своємъ.
И начаша иерѣи сборомъ пѣти, а новгородци сташа вѣцемъ у
свѢтѣи СофѢи, и сконцанѣ свѢтѣи службѣ вынесе протопопъ Измаило жеребеи Афана
сѣвъ, потомъ Парфениевъ, и избра Богъ и свѢтія СофѢи свѧтителя имѣти мужа добра,
тиха, смирена Иоана, игумена Спаса, и стави жеребеи его на престолѣ своємъ.

In the above-quoted passages, attention is paid to one important detail: re-
guardless of the “democratic” procedures described in the chronicle concerning the

20 Нов. пер. лет., AM 6867, p. 365. And having deliberated much, the posadnik and the tysyatski, and
all Novgorod and the igumens and priests decided not to make choice of any man for themselves but
decided to take advice from God and to trust to his mercy, whomever God and St. Sophia should choose,
him let him point out. And they selected three men: Olexei, monk and almoner of the House of St. So-
phia, Sava, igumen of the Ontonov monastery, and Ivan, a priest of St. Barbara; and they placed three
lots on the altar in St. Sophia, declaring: “Whomsoever God and St. Sophia, the Wisdom of God may
desire, to have as servant at his altar, his lot will he leave on His altar” And God and St. Sophia chose
for high priest of St. Sophia and as shepherd of his speaking sheep the good, intelligent and all-discrimi-
nating monk Olexei, and left his lot on His altar. The Chronicle of Novgorod 1016–1471, AM 6867, ed.
21 Нов. пер. лет., AM 6896, p. 381–382. And after much deliberation the posadnik and the tysyatski
and all Novgorod, and the igumens and priests decided not to make choice of any man for themselves but
decided to receive advice from God, and to trust in His mercy, and selected three men: Ioan, igumen of St.
Saviour from Khutin, Parfeni, igumen of the Holy Annunciation, and Afanasii, igumen of the Holy
Nativity, and they placed three lots on the altar in St. Sophia, resolving thus: “Whomsoever God and St.
Sophia shall desire to serve at Their altar, his lot will they leave on Their altar”. And the priests began
to sing the midday service, and the men of Novgorod held a vechе at St. Sophia, and at the end of the ser-
vice the arch-priest Ismaelo brought out the lot of Afanasii, then that of Parfeni; and God and St. Sophia
and God’s altar chose the good, humble and meek Ioan, igumen of St. Saviour, leaving his lot on their
appointment of the Archbishop of Novgorod, the final selection was made by the patroness of the cathedral temple of the city on the Volkhow River: the Wisdom of God. Therefore, it seems that in the eyes of the medieval citizens of Novgorod the Great, she was considered, in her way, a separate entity, able to make independent decisions and affect the fate of the Republic. A trace of this way of thinking can be found both in the itinerary of Dobryna Jadrejkić, the future Archbishop Anthony of Novgorod, who traveled to Constantinople at the beginning of the 13th century, and also in the chronicles of Novgorod. In the chronicles, however, we can usually find the established formula, subject to only slight modification, containing the belief that Sophia – the personified Wisdom of God – is the guardian of the city on the Volkhow River, and constantly implores the Creator for grace and blessings for her charges. Important events in the history of the Republic took place – according to the medieval citizens of Novgorod – thanks to the direct intervention of God and Sophia, or were just a kind of epiphany of their strength, will or mercy: Божьєю помоцью и святыя Софія (6724 AM/1216 AD; 6733 AM/1225 AD; 6741 AM/1233 AD; 6750 AM/1242 AD); Божьєю силою и помоцью святыя Софія (6724 AM/1216 AD); силою святыя Софія (6809 AM/1301 AD); милостю святыя Софіи (6892 AM/1384 AD); Божьєю же милостю и святыя Софія.


24 Нов. пер. лет., AM 6724, 6733, 6741, 6750, p. 64, 72, 256, 269, 282, 296. А.С. Хорошев, op. cit., p. 207.

25 Нов. пер. лет., AM 6724, p. 56.

26 Нов. пер. лет., AM 6809, p. 91, 331. А.С. Хорошев, op. cit., p. 207.

27 Нов. пер. лет., AM 6892, p. 379.
Sometimes, as in the case of the inscription in the year 6856 AM (1348 AD), we also find in the chronicle traces of the conviction of intercession by the personified Wisdom of God before the throne of the Creator, in order to ensure his favor for the citizens of the Republic: милюстю Божьєю и святѣи Софѣи заступиениемъ, и молитвами пресвятыя владыцина Богородица нашей.

The references to Sophia, which appear very frequently in the narration of the chronicles of Novgorod, often go beyond the usual pattern. Even a glance at the analyzed source material makes it possible to propose another thesis: the personified Wisdom seems to be a being who is constantly present in the lives of medieval Novgorod’s citizens, intervening both in their personal lives and actions and being of paramount importance for the Republic. And so, in the description of the events of the year 6701 AM (1194 AD) her figure is seen as an arbitrator who has to judge the validity of the death sentence issued to one of the citizens of the city, Yakovets Prokshinit (брате, съдит ти Богъ и святая Софѣя)30. She also appears several times (e.g. in the year 6726 AM/1219 AD and 6728 AM/1220 AD) in the context of events of a very religious nature: her purpose is to provide protection for Novgorod’s citizens against the temptations of Satan, contributing to the growth of their piety and the development of the cult of the Holy Cross (the Exaltation of the Holy Cross was solemnly celebrated in Novgorod’s Hagia Sophia cathedral)31.

In the chronicle’s relations of the events of the 13th century, Sophia is presented as a defender of the Republic, guarding its political independence and assisting Novgorodians in the fight against external threat. For example, in 6742 AM/1234 AD, in a battle with Lithuanian troops, the balance was tipped in favor of the Russian troops by God and the Holy Cross and the Holy Sophia, the Mighty Wisdom of God32: поможе Богъ и кресть честныи и святая Софѣя, Премудрость Божиа.

The brilliant military superiority of Alexander Nevsky in 6748 AM/1240 AD was also engendered – according to the authors of the chronicle of Novgorod – by the help of God and Sophia and also by the intercessory prayers of the Mother of God and the saints34. The power of the Creator, God’s Wisdom and the Holy Cross was to support the troops of the Republic several times in the 13th century: in 6764 AM/1256 AD, 6770 AM/1262 AD and 6776 AM/1269 AD35.

According to the chronicle, Sophia – the personified Wisdom of God – also protected Novgorod the Great in 6835 AM /1327 AD against the invasion of the

28 Нов. пер. лет., AM 6898, р. 384.
29 Нов. пер. лет., AM 6856, р. 361. А.С. Хорошев, op. cit., p. 207.
30 Нов. пер. лет., AM 6701, p. 233. According to A.A. Gippius, this is the earliest mention of Sophia in the oldest chronicle of Novgorod (А.А. Гиппіус, Архиепископ Антоний…., p. 20).
32 The Chronicle of Novgorod, AM 6742, p. 80.
33 Нов. пер. лет., AM 6742, р. 73, 284. А.С. Хорошев, op. cit., p. 207; С. Золотарев, op. cit., p. 260.
34 Нов. пер. лет., AM 6748, р. 77, 294. А.С. Хорошев, op. cit., p. 207; С. Золотарев, op. cit., p. 260.
Tatar forces that had conquered Tver and devastated huge stretches of Russian lands36: прииде рать татарьская множество много, и взяша Тфѣрь и Кашинъ и Новоторьскую колость и просто ркые всю землю Русскую и положиша ю пусту, токмо Новьград уклоне Богъ и святая Софѣя37. The patroness of the Republic on the Volkhov River also intervened in defense of ‘her house’ during the conflict with Lithuania in 6889 AM/1381 AD: заступи Богъ и святая Софѣя свои домы, и отъидоша, города не взяша38. A few years later (6892 AM/1384 AM) she kept Novgorodians from civil war: уклоне Богъ и святая Софѣя от усобныя рати39.

An interesting phenomenon can also be seen in the oldest chronicle of Novgorod in the year 6841 AM (1333 AD). In the description of the administrative and cultural activity of the Archbishop Vasili, an anonymous author of the chronicle quoted a thanksgiving prayer, prepared for the archbishop: даи ему, Господи Боже, святая Софѣя, к синь вѣкъ и к будущимъ отпущении грѣховъ с дѣтми его, с новгородцы40. It is not difficult to note that the Wisdom of God – even in this passage – seems to be a separate entity, having – along with the Creator – the power to accede to the requests of worshippers.

In the context of the examples mentioned above, the spreading practice of relating the figure of the personified Wisdom of God within a military sphere, which began to be more common in Novgorod the Great in the 13th century, should not be surprising. In the chronicles of Northern Rus’, there is a number of passages that make it possible to assume that the citizens of the city on the Volkhov River, while taking military action in defense of their homeland, went to war with the name of Sophia on their lips. Moreover, giving one’s life for the Republic and its patroness was considered an act to be admired and followed, a way of showing the purest civic virtues41. One of the earliest mentions of the analyzed custom can be found in the oldest chronicle of Novgorod in the description of the conflict between Novgorod and the Grand Prince of Vladimir, Yuri Vsevolodovich, in 6732 AM/1224 AD. Assisted by an army of other Russian rulers, he demanded the most significant Novgorodians surrender, threatening that otherwise he will make his horse drink the water of the Volkhov River. His ultimatum was rejected, however: the citizens of the Republic announced that they would rather die for St. Sophia and the posadniki than betray their fellows: хотѣша умерти за святую Софѣю о посадники Иоанкѣ о Дмитровици42.
A similar theme appears in the accounts of the events the ten years later. The Novgorodians who died in the above-mentioned battle with Lithuanian troops in 6742 AM/1234 AD are characterized by the authors of the chronicle as local martyrs to the faith, who never hesitated to shed their blood in defense of Sophia and Christianity: покон Господи душа их къ царствии небесному, проливших крови своя за святую Софью и за кровь крещенскую. The citizens of Novgorod the Great declared their willingness to die for the patroness of their city during the Tatar invasion in 6767 AM/1259 AD: умирахъ честно за святую Софью и за долю церковную. In 6776 AM/1268 AD in a battle with the forces of the Teutonic Knights, which involved huge losses, many citizens of the Republic were again forced – according to information in the chronicle of Novgorod – to shed blood in defense of the independence of their homeland and save the honor of God’s Wisdom: главами покинаяще за святую Софью и кровь свою пролияша за святую Софью, живот свои отдавше честно.

In the year 6809 AM (1301 AD), there is a passage that shows that the figure of personified Wisdom was invoked by Novgorodians not only on the occasion of defensive actions aimed at repelling an external threat, but also during a military campaign of the Republic. The traditional formula (главы свои положиша за святую Софью) appears in a description of the siege and capture by the troops of Novgorod of a castle built by the Swedes (most probably the future Schlüsselburg fortress).

The latest references, including the phrase interesting to us, can be found – of course – in the account of events of the Republic’s struggles with the troops of the Moscow princes, who wanted to gradually reduce the sovereignty of Novgorod. For example, in 6906 AM/1398 AD the citizens of the city on the Volkhov River, raising in revolt against the expansionist tendencies of Prince Vasili I, declared openly that they would prefer to die in defense of Sophia and their Lord Novgorod the Great than endure harm and humiliation from the Moscow authorities: свои головы положиша за святую Софью и за своего господина за великъ Новгород [и] лучше, братие, нам истрети за святую Софью, нежели в обида быти от своего князя великаго.

Among the passages on Sophia – the personified Wisdom of God – scattered in the chronicles of Novgorod, special attention should be paid – due to their ideological significance – to two passages relating to events from the 13th century. In the year 6723 AM (1216 AD), there is a quote about Mstislav Mstislavich, who held the office of Prince of Novgorod in the years 1210–1215 AD and 1216–1218 AD, who proved the fact that at that time, Sophia and the cathedral dedicated to her constituted an undeniable symbol of independence and political identity.
of Novgorod the Great. Encouraging the citizens who gathered in a veche to take military action against his political competitor, Yaroslav Vsevolodovich, who resided then in Torzhok, he said – according to the authors of the chronicle – the following very significant words: 

не будет Новыи Торгъ над Новыгородомъ, ни Новьгородъ под Торжкомъ, въ гдѣ святая Софія, и ту и Новъгородъ; а въ мнозѣ Богъ, и въ малѣ Богъ и правда.

49.

A statement of a Novgorodian, Lazar Moisievich, cited by the authors of the chronicle in the context of the events of the year 6778 AM (1270 AD), seems to be important. Interestingly, it appears – like many of the above-mentioned passages relating to the figure of the personified Wisdom of God – in the description of a dispute of the Republic with the prince who was trying to impose his rule. This time the course of events can be reconstructed as follows: the ruler of Tver and the Grand Prince Yaroslav Yaroslavich, who also ruled for a few years in Novgorod, in an attempt to place the city on the Volkhov River under his command, asked the Golden Horde for help. When the military intervention of the Tatars under the leadership of Mengu-Temir failed to force Novgorod to surrender, Yaroslav Yaroslavich tried to peacefully settle his relations with the Republic. The legation sent by the Novgorodians, however, refused to submit to his authority, arguing the will of the veche in the following way:

княже, сдумалъ еси на святую Софію; и ты поиди, дажь изомремъ честно за святую Софію; у нас князя нѣту, нь Богъ и правда и святая Софія, а тебе не хощемъ.

51. The above passage shows in a general and clear way the nature of the political system of Novgorod the Great: the citizens of the Republic seem to fully and consciously reject monarchical power, putting emphasis on the fact that their sovereign and guardian can only be God or Sophia – the personified Wisdom of God.

At this point, however, a doubt appears: some researchers are willing to say that the references to Sophia in the chronicles of Northern Rus’ are related not to the hypostatic form of the Wisdom of God, but to the cathedral dedicated to her. In the literature one can even come across a thesis that the issue under discussion is essentially a reflection of a wide phenomenon, typical of Old Russian culture, meaning the perception of a particular temple as a kind of symbol, a visible sign of
being, that it was dedicated to\textsuperscript{52}. For example: in the oldest chronicle of Novgorod in the year 6807 AM (1299 AD) it can be read that Dovmont, Prince of Pskov, suffered acutely because of \textit{St. Sophia and the Holy Trinity (много пострадавъ за святую Софію и за святую Троицю)}\textsuperscript{53}. Some researchers think that the terms appearing in the quoted phrase should be understood as terms for specific churches, not the Wisdom of God and the Holy Trinity as spiritual beings\textsuperscript{54}. However, attention should be paid to the fact that the message of the chronicle is quite ambiguous at this point, and does not allow final conclusions to be drawn. Another part of the chronicle of Novgorod, which refers to the events of 6746 AM/1239 AD, seems much more distinct in its meaning. There is an unequivocal ascertainment that it was not the personified Wisdom of God that protected Novgorod against external threat, but the cathedral dedicated to her: \textit{Новъ же градъ заступи Богъ и святая великая соборная и апостольская церковь святая Софія}\textsuperscript{55}. It should be noted, however, that this type of record is rare in the analyzed sources. There are expressions which prevail and can be interpreted in two ways (\textit{St. Sophia} as a cathedral and as a separate spiritual being). What is more, reading about God’s Wisdom protecting the Republic against the invasion of the enemy army or selecting the Archbishop of Novgorod, there are no doubts as to what (or rather – whom) the creator of the chronicle had in mind in this case.

Additional comparative material is also provided by normative sources which originated in the Novgorod environment. However, one should strongly stress here that, contrary to an opinion that is well established in the literature on the subject\textsuperscript{56}, the figure of Sophia – God’s Wisdom appears relatively rarely in the documents of the Republic. References to this figure are, nevertheless, interesting enough to devote a few sentences to them.

Most likely, the oldest document from Novgorod containing the element under our consideration would be the so-called \textit{Ustav} of Vsevolod – a compilation of legal texts based on the famous \textit{Ustav} of Prince Vladimir I Svyatoslavich. The compilation is currently dated to the 13\textsuperscript{th} century and attributed by some experts in the subject (e.g. V.L. Yanin) to Vsevolod Mstislavich, who reigned in Novgorod the Great between 1219 AD and 1221 AD\textsuperscript{57}. In the introductory part of this source, in a description of levies established by Prince Vladimir I Svyatoslavich on behalf of the so-called Church of the Tithes he had erected in Kiev, we encounter a statement that these tributes are due, in fact, to the Savior, the Mother of God, and

\textsuperscript{52} А.С. Хорошев, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 211; С. Золотарев, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 261.
\textsuperscript{54} С. Золотарев, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 261.
\textsuperscript{56} Г.П. Федотов, \textit{Республика Святой Софии…}, p. 28; \textit{идем, The Russian Religious Mind…}, II, p. 191; С. .. \textit{op. cit.}, p. 261; О.В. Кузьмина, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 3; В. Тулупов, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 84.
St. Sophia (святому Госпу и пречистеи его матери и премудрости Божии скятен Софии)⁵⁸. Therefore, it is easy to see that Sophia is presented here as an independent being, almost equal in rank to the Son of God and his Mother.

The figure of the personified Wisdom of God also appears in the text of a trade and diplomatic contract between the authorities of Novgorod the Great and Lübeck in 1301 AD. Interestingly, in this document Sophia is mentioned – besides God and the Prince of Novgorod – as the owner of lands governed by the Republic: lant des almechtigen Godes unde der hilgen Sophie unde des groten koninges van Nowarden⁵⁹. In the 15th century, the name of Sophia was evoked sporadically in invocations of documents issued by the archbishops of Novgorod or the authorities of the Republic on the Volkhov River. For example, an act by Archbishop Feofi, dated to 1473–1474 AD, begins with the words: миластно Божьею и скятны Софіи⁶⁰. A much more elaborate formula precedes the text of an agreement between Novgorod and the Bishop of Yurev, signed on 13th January 1474 AD. Here, the personified Wisdom of God is mentioned along with the Creator and the Holy Trinity: миластно Божьею, стоанимъ скятны Софіи премудрости Божьи, и стоанимъ скятны жывоначальныя Троицæ⁶¹.

A thesis assuming that the citizens of Novgorod the Great perceived Sophia – the personified Wisdom of God – as an autonomous spiritual being, almost independent from God Himself and therefore able to play the role of a patroness, a protector of the Republic, and a depositary of supreme political power⁶², is also corroborated by the surviving numismatic material from the area of Northern Rus'. In light of the current state of research, it is unquestionable that in around 1420 AD, the city on the Volkhov River began to produce its own coins⁶³. Moreover,

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⁵⁸ Устав великого князя Всеволода о церковных судах, и о людех, и о мерилах торговых, [in:] Российское законодательство X–XX вв..., p. 250.
⁵⁹ Грамота Новгорода Любеку о торговле и присылке послов для переговоров по поводу захвата невского пути Швецией, [in:] Грамоты Великого Новгорода и Пскова..., 33, p. 62–63. The reference under discussion may refer both to the personified Wisdom and the cathedral dedicated to her, which, after all, used to own vast land estates in the area of the Novgorod Republic.
⁶⁰ Вкладная новгородского архиепископа Феофила Вяжицкому монастырю на церковь св. Николая в Шунге, [in:] Грамоты Великого Новгорода и Пскова..., 315, p. 305. С. ЗОЛОТАРЕВ, op. cit., p. 261.
⁶¹ Договорная грамота Великого Новгорода и Пскова с епископом юрьевским о перемирии на 30 лет, [in:] Грамоты Великого Новгорода и Пскова..., 78, p. 133. Perhaps the terms used in the quote under analysis should be understood as the names of churches rather than specific spiritual beings. This would somewhat explain the theological contradiction, resulting, in the source under discussion, from the evocation of God and the Holy Trinity as two separate beings. С. ЗОЛОТАРЕВ, op. cit., p. 261.
the numismatic items that have survived until our age allow us to claim that Novgorod’s iconographic program would differ from the images traditionally put on Russian metal money of the late Middle Ages. The 15th century citizens of Novgorod dared to adorn the reverse of the coins they minted with a quite enigmatic composition (the obverse, most likely, usually bore the inscription: ВЕЛИКОГО НОВГОРОДА)\textsuperscript{64}. Two figures were shown on the artifact under discussion: one of them, depicted enthroned, with an open crown on her head, seems to accept homage from the other one kneeling before her. On the basis of a detailed iconographical analysis of the image, V.L. Yanin, an expert in the history and culture of medieval Novgorod (as well as many other scholars following him), is inclined to think that the reverse of the Republic’s coins bore a depiction of Sophia – the personified Wisdom of God – shown with angel wings, in emperor’s gowns and with an insignia of monarchical power (as on Sophia-icons made in Novgorod workshops since the 15th century). The portrait of the protector of the city on the Volkhov River was usually accompanied by a depiction of a posadnik receiving a symbol of supreme power in the Republic (possibly a shield, a belt or a seal) from the hands of his heavenly superior\textsuperscript{65}.

Sometimes, we find another image on the reverse of Novgorod coins: a depiction of a woman’s head with long hair pinned up around her face. However, one should pay attention to the fact that the temples of this figure are adorned by an open crown, strikingly similar to the one appearing on iconic depictions of Sophia enthroned, characteristic of the art of the Novgorodian area in the late Middle Ages\textsuperscript{66}. Such artifacts would corroborate the thesis that the figure depicted on the coins of the Republic on the Volkhov River was its divine protector – the personified Wisdom of God.

The uniqueness of the compositions discussed above in the context of the entirety of depictions characteristic of Russian metal money of the late Middle Ages prompts a question about the genesis of the iconographic program of Novgorod coins. V.L. Yanin, having compared the analyzed artifacts with relics of West European numismatics, drew some surprising conclusions. First of all, he emphasized the fact that there is a large similarity between the scheme under consideration

\textsuperscript{64} C.J. Halperin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 347; В.Л Янин, \textit{Денежновесовые системы...}, p. 186; В. ТуЛуПов, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 106.
\textsuperscript{66} A. Musin, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 34.
and an image appearing on the reverse of Venetian coins and seals from the 13th to the 18th century. Like the relics from Novgorod, we find them bearing a depiction of two figures: a kneeling doge receiving the insignia of power from the patron saint of the Republic, St. Mark, standing in front of him67.

The fact that some elements of the Venetian system of the self-presentation of power was adopted in Novgorod seems to be substantiated by the similarity of the sociopolitical system of both merchant republics. The matter, however, is complicated by the fact that contacts between Novgorod and Venice are scarcely ever documented in sources. The chronicles of Northern Rus’ mention the city of St. Mark only incidentally, e.g. in the year 6712 AM (1204 AD), in a description of the conquest of Constantinople during the IV Crusade: Дужь слепыи от Маркова острова Венедикъ68. Admittedly, archeological excavations confirm the presence of items of Italian origin in the territory of Novgorod the Great69, although they do not allow us to unambiguously determine how, in what circumstances, and in which period these relics reached the city on the Volkhov River.

Y. L. Shchapova, researching imports of Venetian glass discovered in the territory under consideration, advanced an interesting hypothesis assuming that under emperor Charles IV of Luxembourg, the trade route connecting Northern Italy with the Flemish city of Bruges had increased in significance. The products of Venetian craft, having reached North European markets, were to be sold further in many Hanseatic cities, including Lübeck70. If we take into consideration the close contact between Novgorod the Great and the Hanseatic League, the penetration of Venetian goods (and possibly coins as well) into the area of the Russian Republic will occur to us as a quite likely fact.

In the context of the sources analyzed above (historiographical, normative and numismatic), another issue is absolutely unquestionable: the image of Sophia – the personified Wisdom of God – occupied a prominent place in the spiritual and political culture of Novgorod the Great. Most probably during the 13th century, the area under discussion saw the emergence of a belief that the patroness of the city cathedral might be regarded as a kind of divine protector of the Republic, a guardian or guarantor of its sovereignty and political independence. Simultaneously, as stressed by Georgi Fedotov71, a characteristic feature of Novgorod thought is that there remains a lack of unambiguous clarification as to who – from a theological viewpoint – the hypostatic Wisdom is. Having excluded the identification

67 О.В. Кузьмина, op. cit., p. 54; В.Л. Янин, Очерки истории..., p. 168, 231, 250; идем, Денежновесовые системы..., p. 188–189.
68 Нов. пер. лет., AM 6712, p. 49, 245.
69 В.Л. Янин, Денежновесовые системы..., p. 190.
70 Ю.Л. Щапова, Новый взгляд на две новгородские находки (Венецианское стекло в Новгороде), [in:] История и культура древнерусского города, ed. Г.А. Федоров-Давыдов, Москва 1989, p. 84–86.
of Sophia with the Son of God, the incarnated Logos, so typical of the patristic and Byzantine tradition\textsuperscript{72}, it seems that the medieval Russians had no need to search for a deeper philosophical substantiation of their beliefs and imaginations.

Abstract. The idea of Sophia – the personified Wisdom of God served as a symbol of independence and identity of the republic in the political culture of Novgorod the Great. In Old Russian chronicles and other narrative sources which can be connected with Novgorod, one may find statements showing that – in the eyes of the Novgorodians themselves – Wisdom was not only one of the main attributes of God, but also a separate character, a kind of divine being, who could be interpreted as patronesses and supernatural protector of the city-state. Construction of the temple of Hagia Sophia in Novgorod is usually dated to 1045–1050. In the source material one can find information that Novgorodian Sophia church was undoubtedly the most significant and important monument in the city. The theme of Wisdom of God is also a very prominent topic in Novgorodian historiography and literature. Moreover, the feminine personification of God’s Wisdom can also be found on the coins, emitted by the city-state from 1420.

Keywords: Sophia, Divine Wisdom, Novgorod the Great, political ideology, Old Russian literature