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The Paradigm of the Hebrew Prophet and the Russian Tradition of *Iurodstvo*

ABSTRACT: This paper proceeds from the premise that Russian *iurodivye*—or fools for Christ—display a remarkable resemblance to the Hebrew prophets. As it explores the genealogical link between these two cultural paradigms, the paper shows that, during the various stages of the developmental history of holy foolery, the figure of the Old Testament prophet served as the holy fool's literary and behavioural model. The influence of the prophetic paradigm on the cultural phenomenology and hagiographic imagery of *iurodstvo* was exercised through the prominence assigned to the prophet in the written, visual and audible texts available to the Eastern Slavs from the beginning of Christian era. On the literary level, this enduring influence is discernable in the prophetic *topoi* that reached holy foolish hagiography directly and indirectly. While the direct venues are confined to Old Testament texts, which described the lives and acts of the Hebrew prophets, the indirect ones include New Testament texts and hagiographies. When the holy fool finds his place in the urban setting, his paradigm undergoes crucial changes, losing its ascetic aspects and acquiring the prophetic ones. This shift of emphasis defines Russian hagiography and cultural tradition, where the *iurodivyi* often emerges as the Russian version of the Hebrew prophet.

Russian Orthodox Christianity has a peculiar category of saints, fools for Christ, who feign madness and exhibit subversive behaviour in order to provide the public with spiritual guidance—and at the same time avoid praise for their holiness. The hagiographic imagery and phenomenology of the fool for Christ or *iurodivyi*[1] and Hebrew prophet share key traits: both are believed to be God's chosen and mediate between the sacred and profane realms;[2] both are known to be mentors, clairvoyants, and miracle-workers; both come from various social backgrounds and are represented by both genders.[3] In the same way as the prophet serves his people as a reminder of the Old Testament covenant, the holy

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[1] Comprehensive studies of holy foolery include Sergey A. Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); A. M. Panchenko, "Smekh kak zrelishche," D. S. Likhachev, A. M. Panchenko, N. V. Ponyrko, *Smekh v Drevnei Rusi* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1984); George Fedotov, *Sviatye Drevnei Rusi*, *X–XVII st.* (New York: Izdanie russkogo pravoslavnogo Bogoslovskogo Fonda, 1959).

[2] On the dichotomy between sacred and profane and its universality in world religions, see Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and Profane* (San Diego: Harcourt Trade Publishers, 2001).

[3] For a discussion of different aspects, functions and taxonomies of the Hebrew prophet see my LMS thesis, Svitlana Kobets, *The Prophetic Paradigms: the Fool in Christ and the Hebrew Prophet* (Toronto: PIMS, University of Toronto, 2006) 1–11.

Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue canadienne des slavistes
Vol. L, Nos. 1–2, March–June 2008

fool reminds the congregation of the evangelical message and is seen as a walking, talking, ranting impersonation of scripture. By defying the established order of life and challenging the people's lukewarm faith, the holy fool exposes himself/herself to the wrath and persecution of his/her audiences who, not unlike the Old Testament ones, persistently resist God's will and fail to grasp His message. Just like the biblical prophet, the holy fool utters predictions of calamities and woes and castigates both the common people and the authorities. The *vitae* further relate that because of his defiance and unsolicited prophecies, the fool for Christ is beaten, rejected, persecuted and marginalized by the infuriated crowds. Quite in line with the prophetic paradigm, the *iurodivyi's* safety, indeed his life, is constantly endangered, providing the hagiographies with the *topos* of the holy fool's martyrdom, which closely parallels that of the prophet. The way these two cultural phenomenologies converge in their social functions and meanings raises a question about their interrelation. By analyzing the genetic links between them, my paper will show that these analogies are not accidental and that the paradigm of the holy folly self-consciously drew on the cultural model of the Old Testament prophet. It will show the important role that the textual legacy of the Hebrew prophetic tradition played during the formative years of Russian holy foolery, finding reflection in its phenomenology and textualizations. Furthermore, I will argue that this influence was so significant that to a large degree the paradigm of Russian holy foolery was modelled directly on the image of the Old Testament prophet. On the other hand, the prophetic paradigm exerted indirect influence on the imagery and phenomenology of holy foolery through New Testament texts and later hagiographic literature, i.e., through the paradigm of Jesus Christ and the derivative paradigm of the Christian saint. Prophetic *topoi* were present in hagiographies of Byzantine fools for Christ, but it was the Russian Orthodox tradition that made them part and parcel of the image of the *iurodivy,* thus producing a unique cultural type.

The Eastern Slavs' initial exposure to the imagery and phenomenology of the Hebrew prophet occurred at a time of close contact with the neighbouring carriers of the Hebrew faith, the Khazars.[4] The first representative of the Judeo-Christian tradition to be venerated by the Eastern Slavs was the Hebrew prophet Elijah.[5] The churches dedicated to him—e.g., Pskov and Kyivan Churches of St. Elijah—were among the first Christian churches in Kyivan Rus'. Elijah's

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[4] See Gumilev's discussion of contacts between Khazars and dwellers of Kyivan Rus' in Lev Gumilev, *Drevniaia Rus' i velikaia step'* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Akt, 2002) 133, 152, 170. Also see M. I. Artamonov, *Istoriia Khazar* (St. Petersburg: SPB Universitet, 2002).

[5] A. M. Panchenko, *Ia emigriroval v Drevniuiu Rus'* (St. Petersburg: Zvezda, 2005) 13. Also see Nikolai Pogrebniak, protoierei, "Zametka ob ikonografii proroka Ilii," *Moskovskie eparkhial'nye vedomosti* 3 (2003): 8–14, internet article: <http://vedomosti.meparh.ru/2003_6_8/14.htm> (Aug 20, 2007).

honourable place within the pagan pantheon of Kyivan Rus'—he was a deity in charge of fires and rains—reflects the Slavs' familiarity with the biblical mythology surrounding this figure.[6]

With the Baptism of Kyivan Rus' (988), translations of books of prophets as well as other Old Testament books containing stories of such major prophetic figures as Moses and Elijah, Samuel and Elisha, David and Solomon became available to Kyivan Slavs. As it is, the voices of the prophets and narratives about their lives and oracles figure prominently in the Old Testament, where their books number sixteen among the total of fifty. The prophetic writings were included in different types of texts—liturgical, hagiographical, exegetical—and as such existed throughout the history of Eastern Slavic Christianity. Among the earliest biblical translations were the books of prophets and of Kings (Russ. *Tsarstva*), which tell the stories of the prophets Samuel, Elijah and Elisha, and of the prophet-kings David and Solomon.[7] Later translations of the prophetic texts[8] were also continually available to the Slavic reading and listening audiences, both as independent texts and as a part of numerous compilations, including Paleias, Prologs, Chronographs, and Florilegias.[9] The popularity and wide availability of apocryphal stories about prophets should not be overlooked either.[10] All these texts unfolded before the reader the image of an archetypal prophet: God's messenger invested with the power to speak on His behalf. They also illustrated his most salient characteristics, including unflagging struggle with profane-minded surroundings, his controversial stance as both an awesome

[6] It is widely regarded that the cult of prophet Elijah was brought to Kyivan Rus' from Byzantium, yet he was mentioned in Kyivan annals even before the Christianization of Kyivan Rus'. See, for example, the Primary Chronicle under the year of 945. Following Byzantine iconographical canon, the prophet Elijah, similar to John the Baptist, was seen as a link between Old and New Testaments. At the same time, he was often seen in a pagan context. On the pagan meaning of the prophet Elijah, see T. S. Makashina "Il'in den'. Il'ia-prorok v narodnyx predstavleniiakh i folklore vostochnykh slavian," *Obriady i obriadovyi folklor* (Moskva: Nauka, 1982) and I. S. Rodnikova, "Ob ikone 'Iliia prorok v pustyne' XIII veka iz Vybut" *Ol'ginskie chteniia*. (Pskov: Izdaniie khrama Sv. Aleksandra Nevskogo), Internet article <http://www.pskovcity.ru/icony_iliya.htm> (Dec 12, 2007)

[7] A. A. Alekseev, *Tekstologiia slavianskoi biblii* (S.-Peterburg: Dmitrii Bulanin Publishing House, 1999) especially chapter 5 (1–5). Also see Francis Thompson, "The Nature of the Reception of Christian Byzantine Culture in Russia in the Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries and its Implications for Russian Culture." In: Francis Thompson, *The Reception of Byzantine Culture in Medieval Russia* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1999) 107–139.

[8] Alekseev, chapters 5–7.

[9] Alekseev chapter 1.

[10] See M. V. Rozhdestvenskaia, "Introduction: 'Etogo v sbornike ne chitai…'," *Apokrify Drevnei Rusi* (St. Petersburg: Amfora, 2006).

miracle-worker and an outcast, and his martyrdom. The Christian Orthodox canon indeed placed the prophet within the Christian tradition of voluntary suffering in imitation of Christ. The *Interpretive Paleia*,[11] for example, lists the prophets together with the apostles, the righteous ones and all "other martyrs," who endured suffering in the name of God.[12]

The textual evidence shows that already at the dawn of the Christian era the Eastern Slavs had thoroughly internalized the significance of the Old Testament prophet. This is explicitly reflected in one of the first monuments of early Kyivan literature, the *Primary Chronicle* (1113 A.D.), which interprets the baptism of Kyivan Rus' as a fulfilled prophecy. The *Philosopher's Speech*, contained in that work, offers an explication of the Christian creed and its significance for the Slavs by means of extensive quotations from the books of prophets. The prophets cited and mentioned in the *Philosopher's Speech* include Hosea, Samuel, Moses, Jeremiah, Malachi, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Amos, David, Micah, and Zechariah. All in all, in this work, the prophet is introduced as an agent of God's will and as a herald of the new order of Christianization of the gentiles.

This image also gained prominence through church art—including icons, mosaics and frescoes—which was another important visual and interpretative medium through which the Eastern Slavs absorbed the theological and phenomenological peculiarities of the Hebrew prophet. The prophets were painted in the archetypal sage outfit, holding scrolls with citations that alluded to the coming of Christ and his redemptive mission. Their portrayals habitually surrounded the church centrepiece, the dome image of Jesus the Pantocrator.[13] Alternatively, depictions of prophets could be placed on the walls—as, for example, in the Cathedral of St. Sophia of Kyiv or the Cathedral of St. Sophia of Novgorod—where are found depictions of David and Solomon, Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Malachi and Avvakum (Habakkuk).[14] In the various compositional patterns of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the portrayals of the prophets were indispensable.

Thus, through the medium of the Old Testament, the Hebrew prophet arrived to the Eastern Slavs as God's mouthpiece and scourge, as teacher and miracle-worker, as ascetic and martyr, as eschatological figure and carrier of the apocalyptic message, introducing the image that was later associated with the *iurodivyi*.

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[11] *Paleia*, available in Kyivan Rus' as early as the twelfth century, served as a primary source of the Old Testament history and texts.

[12] *Paleia Tolkovaia* (Moskva: Soglasiie, 2002) 47.

[13] Lazarev traces the emergence of this artistic convention to the ninth century. V. N. Lazarev, *Vizantiiskoe i drevnerusskoe iskusstvo* (Moskva: Nauka, 1978) 132–134.

[14] Regarding the frescoes of prophets in Sophia of Novgorod, see Lazarev 140, 144–145, 148–149, 150–151, 152–153, 156–157, 158–159, 160–161.

While the Old Testament provided the direct venue of transmission of the Hebrew prophet's imagery and *topoi*, the New Testament and hagiographic texts provided an indirect one. Indeed, in the New Testament, the Hebrew prophet finds successors in the key figures of the Christian creed, Jesus Christ and John the Baptist, both of whom were modelled as archetypal prophets. The latter epitomizes the Hebrew prophetic tradition and is represented as a healer, teacher and sage of the Elijah type (Matt. 11.14),[15] whereas the former is throughout represented as an archetypal prophet: his public life and itinerant life-style; his dress as an itinerant teacher; his unconditional devotion to his role as God's herald; his practice of speaking in parables; and his fearless opposition to the foes of his mission are in line with the phenomenology of his prophetic predecessors. Thus, in the Gospels, Jesus is identified by the people and his disciples as a prophet (Matt. 21.11, Luke 7.16, John 4.19) and is compared to Jeremiah (Matt. 16.14), Elijah (Matt. 11.14), Moses (John 1.17) and "all the prophets" (Mark 6.15). Furthermore, Jesus identifies himself as a prophet (Luke 13.33, John 4.19) and is seen in the light of fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies (Matt. 13.35, Matt. 12.39, Matt. 27.9, Luke 4.17-21, Luke 24.27, 24.44, John 1.45). In line with the paradigm of the prophet-healer (i.e., Elijah), Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead (Luke 7.14), spent time in the desert, was an itinerant sage and a prophet-teacher like Moses. Finally, as an archetypal prophet Jesus was misunderstood, rejected, persecuted, and eventually put to death.[16]

Within the Hebrew tradition, the phenomenology of the prophet was unique: he stood apart and never invited or provoked any type of imitation. The image of Jesus Christ, however, supplied his followers with an enduring behavioural model, initiating the *imitatio Christi* tradition. The imperative to imitate Christ provided the stimulus for the Christian ascetics who ventured to cultivate a new subjectivity and engender a new social dynamic.[17] To this end, they engaged in

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[15] In Christian theology John the Baptist represents the Old Testament prophetic tradition, is seen and interpreted within the Old Testament canon and provides it with a closure.

[16] For the discussion of Jesus as a prophet see Severino J. Croatto, "Jesus, Prophet Like Elijah, and Prophet-Teacher Like Moses in Luke-Acts," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 124.3 (2005): 451–465.

[17] Similar to the ascetics of Greco-Roman tradition, the Christian ones practiced self-discipline and cultivated virtue. Ideologically, however, theirs was a new venture: they proceeded from the teachings found in New Testament and other early Christian texts, imitated life and sufferings of Christ and aspired to live in uninterrupted mental and spiritual union with God. For the discussion of social, historical and cultural aspects of Christian asceticism, see Leif Vaage, and L. Vincent Wimbush, eds., *Asceticism and the New Testament* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Wimbush, Vincent L. and Vanantasis, Richard, eds., *Asceticism* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Clark, Elizabeth A., *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity*

such practices as constant prayer, non-possession, celibacy and fasting, which were implemented by means of rigorous self-discipline. Self-deprivation and suffering were important elements of the ascetic program, as they were seen in the light of Christ's voluntarily self-sacrifice and Passion.[18] Representatives of different ascetic denominations (i.e., monks, hermits, itinerants) inflicted on themselves suffering by rejecting common human conveniences (e.g., sleeping on bare ground, having no home, wearing few clothes) and depriving themselves of sleep and food during continuous vigils and fasts. Certain representatives of asceticism would go even further, inflicting on themselves intense suffering by exposing themselves to elements, contracting diseases (e.g., leprosy), enduring insect bites, living in confined spaces, wearing hair-shirts or chains, standing continuously (e.g., stylites) or even mutilating their bodies (e.g., ascetic self-castration). The holy fool occupies a place among the latter, i.e., extreme ascetics, as his suffering is seen as truly preter-human. Not only did the fools for Christ expose themselves to the elements, fast, wear chains and keep nightly vigils, they also provoked the cruelty of the people and exulted in the incessant persecution to which their hostile audiences subjected them. In fact, the holy fool's suffering was so extreme that in Russian theology the exploit of *iurodstvo* received a reputation as the most difficult ascetic practice and was qualified by the theologians as *opera superogatoria* or an optional ascetic exploit.[19]

The ascetics sought seclusion, but, as the life of the archetypal Christian saint St. Antony of Egypt shows, the ascetic's withdrawal would be followed by a return, while his feat would culminate in a special social status, that of power.[20] Gained through the cultivation of self, a new consciousness would elevate the ascetic above the profane world and attract numerous congregations to seek benefits from his presence, interference or prayer.[21] The holy man emerged in the society as an arbiter and a judge, a medical man and a counsellor, the man of power and a sage in a number of ways that mirror the social functions of the Hebrew prophet, including his continuous insistence on the personal responsibility of man vis-à-vis Judgment day. In Russian Orthodoxy,

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(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Goehring, James E., *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999).

[18] David Rensberger, "Asceticism and the Gospel of John," Vaage, Leif and Wimbush, L. Vincent, *Asceticism and the New Testament* 127–147, especially 141.

[19] Ioann Kovalevskii, *Iurodstvo o Khriste i Khrista Radi Iurodivyie vostochnoi i Russkoi Tserkvi* (Moskva: Pechatnia A. I. Snegireva, 1895) 102; Evgenii E. Golubinskii, *Istoriia Kanonizatsii Sviatykh v Russkoi Tserkvi* (Moskva, 1902 Reprint [Westmead, Farnborough: Hants Gregg International Publishers, 1969]) 186.

[20] Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80. Also see Richard Valantasis, "Constructions of Power in Asceticism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63.4 (1995): 775-821.

[21] Brown 82.

this function eventually became the domain of the holy fool, in whose figure ascetic and prophetic aspects were amalgamated.

The stance of Christian ascetics found reflection in the hagiographical writings for which the prophetic paradigm was an important source of *topoi*. Thus, the desert withdrawal of Moses, Elijah and Jesus was mirrored in the *anachoresis* of the desert ascetics of Egypt, Syria and Palestine, whereas the formers' abstinence during the withdrawal was reflected in the self-purifying practices of the ascetics. The prophet's life-long struggle with his people's unfaithfulness and his call to repentance (cf. St. John the Baptist) were transposed as the ascetic's struggle with evil, which entered the hagiographic pattern personified as the struggle with demons. As was explicitly textualized in the Life of St. Antony, this ascetic venture was marked by a direct citation from the Gospel: Christ's temptation in the desert.[22] Other reflections of the prophetic paradigm include the ascetics' commitment to their cause and their position as men of wisdom and power. At the same time, early Christian hagiographers drew heavily on the miraculous component found in stories about the prophets. The scroll received by Abba Ephraim the Syrian (cf. Ezek. 2.9–3.2) and the Elijah-like ascent to heaven (2 Kings 2:11), which we find in the life of the desert Abba Sissoi, are examples of such borrowings. Allusion to Elijah's heavenly chariot becomes a symbol of holiness—although employed by Satan—in the life of Simeon the Stylite. Not unlike Elijah and Christ, Abbas Macarius and Bessarion raise the dead. Yet most common are the Abbas' gifts of clairvoyance and prophecy found in the lives and apophthegmata of Antony, Sergius, and many more desert saints.[23] Finally, the scenes of making cross-eyed or blinding of the girls (who mocked these fools for Christ)—in the lives of St. Simeon of Emesa and St. Vasilii of Moscow respectively—are modelled directly on Elisha's cruel retribution to the boys who taunted him (2 Kings 2:23–25).

To sum up, a number of components of the prophetic paradigm became an integral part of the hagiographic imagery of Christian asceticism and sanctity. These hagiographic texts served as another important, although indirect, venue of transmission of prophetic *topoi*, supplying essential building blocks for the paradigm of *iurodstvo*.

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[22] See Tim Vivian's introduction in Athanasius of Alexandria. Tim Vivian and Apostolos N. Athanassakis, trans., *The Life of Antony* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2003) xxiii.

[23] See *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks* (London: Penguin books, 2003) 184–196. For the Scriptural roots of Christian hagiography, see N. Petrov, *O proiskhozhdenii i sostave slaviano-russkago pechatnago prologa (inozemnye istochniki)* (Kiev: Tipografiia Eremeeva, 1875) 17 and 121–123.

Foolishness for Christ developed within the early ascetic movement and initially was integral to it.[24] According to the hagiographic evidence, the first ascetics who feigned madness in order to invite scorn and abuse by the community were monks. The most celebrated case is that of Isidora the Fool, whose story is found in Palladius' paterikon, *The Lausiac History*.[25] In pursuit of her ascetic endeavour, this Egyptian nun feigned madness, thereby deliberately denigrating herself and inviting abuse by the sisters of her monastery. Another holy foolish character from this compilation, Serapion the Sindonite, [26] is representative of a controversial ascetic movement of itinerancy, [27] whose practitioners often displayed traits of holy foolery, challenging and provoking the congregation by their radical interpretation of the Gospels, vagrancy, refusal to perform manual labour, subversive behaviour, antics and begging. According to Sergei Ivanov, who in his recent study of Byzantine and Russian foolery for Christ traces the cultural history of *iurodstvo*, this ascetic practice reached its apex in the urban paradigm.[28] This development was for the first time reflected in the life of a fifth-century *salos* Simeon of Emesa, which was written in the seventh century by Leontius of Napolis. This life explicitly shows foolery for Christ as one of the stages in the ascetic endeavour of Simeon the Fool, who was able to undertake it only after several decades of rigorous self-perfection as a monk and a hermit.[29]

The ascetic dimension of the holy foolish paradigm was reflected in Byzantine hagiographies, which show fools for Christ mortifying their bodies by means of vigils, fasting, and itinerancy. These practices comprise an integral part of the holy fool's ascetic program of self-abnegation, yet they—at least fasting and vigils—as well as continuous prayer, are implemented at night and therefore are unknown to his or her audiences. The holy fool's ascetic program

[24] For the discussion of early Christian *iurodstvo*, see Ivanov 49–65.

[25] Its Old Church Slavonic translation was included in *Egipetskii Paterik*, a compilation of paterik stories, which was probably available in Kyivan Rus' already in the eleventh century. See I. P. Eremin, "K istorii drenve-russkoi perevodnoi povesti," *TODRL* 3 (1936): 56–57. For the English translation of Isidora's story see Robert T. Meyer, trans., *Palladius: The Lausiac History* (New York: Paulist Press, 1964) 96–98. For the discussion, see Ivanov 51–59.

[26] Meyer 105–110.

[27] For a discussion of the controversial character of itinerancy and of Serapion, see Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 19–49.

[28] Ivanov 103.

[29] For the English translation of Liontius' Life of Simeon and its discussion, see Derek Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Liontius's Life and the Late Antique City* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1996). Also see the discussion by Alexander Y. Syrkin, "On the Behavior of the 'Fool For Christ's Sake,'" *History of Religions* 22.2 (November 1982) and Ivanov 104–130.

also embraces the day when under the mask of madness, s/he tirelessly confronts and provokes his/her audience, which does not fail to abuse and persecute him/her thus facilitating the holy fool's partaking in Christ's Passion. Thus, upon first entering the city of Emesa, St. Simeon provokes little boys to beat and tease him and almost immediately after that incites his own brutal thrashing by the congregation and then by his inadvertent employer, the bean-vender, whose merchandise Simeon ate and distributed for free. As she feigns insanity, St. Isidora of Egypt provokes incessant harassment and abuse by her sisters merely because of what she is—or appears to be—an odd, retarded person.

The ascetic dimension in the lives of Isidora, Serapion and Simeon is paramount. Yet if the former two have no vestiges of the prophetic plane, the latter acquires a considerable prominence in the life of Simeon, whose foresight, miracle working and gift of prophecy construct his identity as a successful ascetic, man of power and saint. While his identity as a saint unfolds through the prophetic *topoi*, thus reiterating the established by then commonplace of Christian sanctity, his new status as a city-dweller sets him in an archetypal prophetic milieu—after all, the prophet is an urban dweller par excellence. This twofold development—the holy fool's status of a city-dweller and a saint—marks the point of crucial importance, the fool's transition to the domain previously restricted to the prophets. Indeed, only when the fool for Christ positions himself in the middle of busy city life and starts occupying the same cultural space as the Hebrew prophet, does his paradigm start mirroring that of his model.

This development is especially obvious in the tenth-century vita of Andrew of Constantinople (X c.),[30] which portrays its hero as God's servant and mouthpiece, extensively reinstating the prophetic paradigm. Andrew is an urban holy fool, yet if his predecessors' holy foolishness was defined by its ascetic dimension, St. Andrew's stance is emphatically prophetic. Like the Hebrew prophet, he is called to, and initiated into, his foolish vocation as a lay individual, which is in sharp contrast with the ascetic lives of his ascetic predecessors and models. Unlike Simeon, he does not undertake holy foolery after years of rigorous asceticism. Nor is Andrew affiliated with a monastic institution (cf. St. Isidora). At the same time, similar to the textualizations of the lives of prophets, Andrew's life accentuates his initiation, which implies a God-inspired mission.[31] He also exhibits such prophetic abilities as clairvoyance, the ability to predict

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[30] The English translation of this text and its discussion can be found in Lennart Rydén (ed.), *The Life of St. Andrew the Fool,* Vol. I & II (Stockholm: Uppsala, 1995). For the Old Church Slavonic rendition of this life as well as the discussion of its manuscripts, see A. M. Moldovan, *Zhitie Andreia Iurodivogo v slavianskoi pis'mennosti* (Moskva: Azbukovnik, 2000).

[31] Rydén II, 17.

the future, as well as access to the ultimate knowledge on which rests his clandestine status of a saint and a sage. However, while the Hebrew prophet prophesies to the entire nation or at least to the nation's leaders—still representing their nations—Andrew, and the fool for Christ in general, often reveals his visions and predictions only to a select circle. Thus, Andrew shares his divine knowledge with his friend and spiritual son, Epiphanios. At the same time, like the biblical prophet, Andrew acts on behalf of the entire congregation and mankind in its entirety. In line with the paradigm of the Hebrew prophet, Andrew plays the role of an intermediary between the sacred and profane realms, continuously attempting to channel to the congregation his knowledge of the hidden reality. As he communicates with his chosen initiates, the author of his life and the virtuous man Epiphanios, Andrew casts off the mask of madness and assumes the role of a sage,[32] revealing to them his divine wisdom and knowledge.[33] Yet when this fool for Christ approaches the profane-minded crowds of Constantinople, he resorts to allegorical, cryptic discourse, which is regularly misunderstood,[34] exemplifying the people's separation from the divine.

Like the Hebrew prophets, Andrew tirelessly fights with the forces of evil, thereby illustrating different aspects of the scriptural truth: he calls to virtue by confronting misers, a sodomite, and by punishing a grave robber.[35] His actions, however, are not always dictated by God, as is the case with the performances of Hebrew prophets, but reveal their ascetic underpinning. For example, his subversive asceticism surfaces when he eats figs that are being offered for sale, relieves himself in public, feigns drunkenness and dances with prostitutes.[36] At other times Andrew acts on his own, exemplifying the evangelical spirit of compassion. This is exemplified by Andrew's merciful intercession for his abusers[37]—a distinct *topos* of holy foolishness—and his charitable mourning and prayer inspired by his vision at a rich man's funeral.[38]

While a number of *topoi* from Andrew's life reiterate the paradigm of the Hebrew prophet, it is his initiation to the ultimate knowledge and his role of a visionary that make his stature truly prophetic. Initiation is never an issue for a holy foolish ascetic. In fact, he always arrives to the place of his exploit incognito (cf. the paradigm of Christ) while his prior initiation to the mission is simply implied. In the life of the Hebrew prophet, on the other hand, his

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[32] See, for example, the episode of Andrew's first meeting with Epiphanios, Rydén II, 39; Andrew tells Epiphanios about his visit to Paradise, Rydén II, 45–51; the episode of Andrew answering miscellaneous questions asked by Epiphanios, Rydén II, 201–237.

[33] Rydén II, 171–185, 197.

[34] For example, Rydén II, 97, 185–187.

[35] Rydén II, 37, 137–153, 81–85, 137–141.

[36] Rydén II, 103, 99, 33–37.

[37] Rydén II, 117–119.

[38] Rydén II, 243–245.

initiation is a prominent *topos* and is explicitly textualized. Elijah covers Elisha with his mantle, thereby initiating him to his new quest of the prophet (I King 19:19); Jeremiah's status of a chosen one is announced to him by God (Jer. 1.4–5); and Micah declares that in order to make him his mouthpiece, God touched his mouth (Mic. 1.9). Isaiah's purification by fire (Isa. 6.7) sets him apart from people "whose lips are contaminated by sin" (Isa. 6.5) and who, therefore, neither understand nor heed God's word. Finally, the story of Ezekiel's spectacular initiation includes both a colourful description of him eating a scroll (Ezek. 2.9–3.2) and the speech of his divine master:

> He said to me, "Son of man, I am sending you to the house of Israel … do not fear them, and do not fear their words – … You must speak my words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious. (Ezek. 2.3–2.7)

After the initiation, the prophet would emerge as a different individual who would completely submit to the will of Yahweh and become his medium. From then on, everything he says, does or experiences forms part of his mission. Hosea's marriage to a harlot wife (Hosea 1.2) and the symbolic naming of his children; Jeremiah's celibacy (Jer. 16.1–4); Isaiah's nakedness (Isa. 20.2); Isaiah's naming of his children (Isa. 8.3); and Ezekiel's refusal to mourn his wife's death (Ezek. 24.15–24) are not the personal decisions of private individuals, but deliberate actions committed at Yahweh's command. These actions are always public, odd and provocative and as such are meant to attract and shock the audience into understanding the divine message behind them. Since—as it was continuously emphasized in Yahweh's commissioning speeches (cf. Ezek. 2.3–2.7)—the prophet was dealing with audiences that were unwilling to listen, the spectacular aspect of his message was essential to attracting their attention.

The drama of Andrew's initiation to the exploit of holy foolery is in line with the prophetic model. It takes place in a vision, providing the parallel with Isaiah's initiation to his prophetic vocation, is thoroughly textualized and marks a distinct division between the pre-holy foolish and holy foolish stages of his life. Andrew's special relationship with God is further underscored in the scene of his crowning by Christ and in his recognition by St. Anastasia as Christ's chosen.[39] After his initiation, in line with the prophetic paradigm, Andrew becomes a public figure who draws the people's scorn as well as their awe before the chosen one. However, Andrew's instances of clairvoyance, visions and his apocalyptic revelation—a prophetic genre par excellence—validate his prophetic stance most of all.[40] The importance of this aspect in Andrew's life was reflected in the Byzantine readership's bias. Indeed, the most copied and

[39] Rydén II, 16, 21.
[40] Rydén II, 259–283.

read part of Andrew's life was his apocalypse, while the beginning, the most ascetic part of the life, was consistently omitted.[41] Furthermore, based on the fact that, in compilations, lives of holy fools are not frequent companions of Andrew's vita, Rydén comes to the conclusion that "The copyists seem to have felt that Andrew was not a real Holy Fool and that other aspects of his Life are more important."[42] This interpretation of Andrew was further developed in Russian iconic art, where this saint is typically depicted as part of the composition of the Mother of God's Intercession, figuring not as a mad ascetic but as a visionary and prophet, modelled on the two major prophetic figures of Elijah and John the Baptist.[43]

The fact that in Andrew's Life the prophetic plane of holy foolishness not only increases but also overshadows its ascetic aspects shows that Andrew's hagiographer, Nikiphoros, did not simply rely on the available to him hagiographic patterns of holy foolery, but had an essentially new agenda. Unlike Simeon's hagiographer, Leontius, he no longer had to establish the ascetic foundation for the exploit of holy foolery—at his time such a foundation was a datum. Nikiphoros takes the next step in the development of the holy foolish paradigm: by explicitly portraying Andrew as a prophet, he elevates his social role, charisma and asceticism to a new level. Thus, reliving the destiny of the Hebrew prophet, Nikiphoros' holy fool assumes his role after years of righteous life, which God—literally—crowns by the wreath of his prophetic role and gifts. Andrew's ensuing holy foolishness thoroughly relies on these gifts until his role as a prophet reaches a climax in the text of his apocalypse. Furthermore, the ascetic plane of Andrew's life—the key dimension of his holy foolish predecessors—is also presented in line with the prophetic paradigm: Andrew's rigorous asceticism follows—rather than precedes—the initiation into his vocation. Thereafter, like the Hebrew prophets, Andrew unconditionally dedicates his life to God.

An unambiguously prophetic Byzantine hagiography, the Life of St. Andrew the Fool received a new life in Russia, where it gained the status of the most read and published vita of the fool for Christ.[44]

The holy fool entered Kyivan cultural space both as a text and a concept, emerging in his diverse ascetic and lay guises. The earlier textualizations of foolery for Christ, which were transmitted to Rus' as part and parcel of the ascetic corpus, featured numerous stories about monks feigning madness, seeking self-denigration, challenging lay congregations by their subversive behaviours, concealing their ascetic exploits and virtues. At the same time, the

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[41] Rydén I, 160.

[42] Rydén I, 161. Similar evidence is not observable in the Russian manuscripts of St. Andrew's Life, see Moldovan 10–28.

[43] Ivanov 241–242; 255-257.

[44] Moldovan 16–18.

urban paradigm of holy foolery was represented in the Slavonic renditions of the vitae of SS. Simeon of Emesa and Andrew of Constantinople. Hagiographers of Kyivan Rus' drew on all these sources when creating images of *iurodstvo* which initially amounted to episodes in the lives of ascetics (e.g., St. Isaakii of Kyiv Cave Monastery, St. Avraamii of Smolensk). Holy foolery becomes a phenomenon in its own right on the Northern territories of Kyivan Rus', which were called by Fedotov "the cradle of Russian *saloi*."[45] There, in stark contrast to the ascetic model of the preceding Kyivan period, holy foolery emerges as an urban phenomenon oriented towards the markedly prophetic Life of St. Andrew of Constantinople.[46] In this respect the life of the quintessential Russian holy fool, Prokopii of Ustiug (d. 1303)[47] is representative.[48]

In his Life, Prokopii is introduced, identified[49] and portrayed as a prophet, whereas his prophetic identity is textually realized in several ways. To begin with, the very first lines of his life place him, as a *iurodivyi*, together with angels, apostles, martyrs and prophets, thus equating all these categories of saints and introducing the parallel between the holy fool and the prophet. Second, Prokopii's life contains a number of references to the Old Testament prophets, including Moses, Isaiah, Jonah, David, John the Baptist and Christ,[50] which, in conjunction with the Old and New Testament citations, not only sets the life in the context of creation, but also contributes to its ostensible prophetic dimension. Third, Prokopii's life explicitly states that he "received his prophetic gift from God."[51] And fourth, it features a great number of prophetic *topoi*. Thus, similar to the Hebrew prophet, Prokopii of Ustiug is a layperson that plays the role of God's mouthpiece. He displays symbolic behaviour and the cryptic language of

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[45] George Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, vol. II (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960) 333.

[46] Ivanov 260, 263; Moldovan 16.

[47] For the vita of Prokopii, see *Zhitie sviatogo pravednogo Prokopiia Khrista radi iurodivogo Ustiuzhskogo chudotvortsa* (Moskva: Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli, 2003) 11–101; for the discussion of its literary history see A. N. Vlasov, "Literaturnaia istoriia zhitiia pravednogo Prokopiia Ustiuzhskogo chudotvortsa" (in same) 109–122; and for the discussion of Prokopii's iconography see V. M. Sorokatyi, "Obraz Prokopiia Ustiuzhskogo v ikone" (in same) 123–192.

[48] Prokopii's canonization took place in 1547. Most likely, Prokopii's cult as a saint started in the second half of the fifteenth century (Vlasov 113, Sorokatyi 134). Prokopii's hagiography was composed in installments (Vlasov 110) and its complete version appeared only in mid-seventeenth century (Vlasov 117). While Prokopii's life is not the earliest monument of urban holy foolish hagiography, it represents this tradition well: it is one of the best composed hagiographies of the *iurodivyi* and one of the earliest.

[49] *Zhitiie Sviatogo pravednogo* 26–27, 28–29.

[50] *Zhitiie Sviatogo pravednogo* 16–17, 30–31, 36–37, 38–39, 46–47.

[51] *Zhitiie Sviatogo pravednogo* 26–27.

signs that are quite in line with symbolic dramas of the prophet. For example, he carries around three pokers, the position of which—heads up or down—alludes to the quantity of the upcoming harvest.[52] In line with the prophetic paradigm, Prokopii is a healer and a miracle-worker. Not unlike the Hebrew prophets, he personifies the dichotomy between the sacred and profane realms.[53] As a prophet, he warns the citizens of Ustiug of God's wrath, telling them about the coming of a destructive fiery cloud, and calling them to repentance. As in the story of the prophet Jonah, the people's repentance prompts God's mercy and Ustiug is spared destruction. In fact, parallels with the story of Jonah provide this episode with a structural foundation and are acknowledged by Prokopii's hagiographer,[54] who discusses them as he contemplates the issue of Prokopii's and Jonah's authenticity as prophets. Significantly, in both cases the hagiographer relies on the Deuteronomy test (Deut. 18.20–22)—special instructions designed for establishing the true identity of the Old Testament prophet—unambiguously treating Prokopii as a prophet. Another important prophetic feat of Prokopii is his prophecy to the three-year-old Mariia that when she grows up she will give birth to the future bishop, Stephen of Perm.[55]

Prokopii's image as a prophet can be traced back to its very first textualizations, making it possible to state that from the very start he was conceptualized as a prophet. Indeed, the legend of the fiery cloud which most eloquently exemplifies Prokopii's prophetic behaviour—an archetypal prophet's call to repentance—is regarded as the first text dedicated to Prokopii's life and deeds.[56] Furthermore, there are a number of iconic portrayals that represent him as a prophet.[57] For example, the oldest extant icon[58] representing Prokopii shows him wearing the garb of a prophet, which makes him look like a teacher and a sage, rather than a mad ascetic. Textual and visual representations of Prokopii of Ustiug provide just one, albeit eloquent, example of a Russian conception of the holy fool as a prophet. These examples permeate the entire corpus of Russian holy foolish hagiography testifying to the fact that from the time of emergence of the urban paradigm of *iurodstvo* Russia viewed its holy fools as prophets.

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[52] Iu. M. Lotman, B. A. Uspenskii, "New Aspects in the Study of Early Russian Culture," (trans. by N. F. C. Owen) Iu. M. Lotman, B. A. Uspenskii, *The Semiotics of Russian Culture* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1984).

[53] *Zhitiie Sviatogo pravednogo* 28–29.

[54] *Zhitiie Sviatogo pravednogo* 38–39.

[55] *Zhitiie Sviatogo pravednogo* 54–57.

[56] Vlasov 112.

[57] See illustrations 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11 in *Zhitiie Sviatogo pravednogo.* The majority of Prokopii's iconic depictions, however, represent him as a fool for Christ. See, for example, illustrations 2, 8, 9, 43, 44, 46, 47. Also see Sorokatyi's article.

[58] Illustration no. 9 in *Zhitiie Sviatogo pravednogo.*

This tendency is discernible in the linguistic prerogative: in Russia's scriptural and hagiographic literature their designations largely overlapped, including prophet, man of God, miracle-worker and clairvoyant (Russ. *prorok, chelovek Bozhii, chudotvorets, prozorlivets* or *providets*). In the lives of Russian fools for Christ, prophetic *topoi* are predominant, while the prophetic role of the *iurodivye* is usually emphasized over their asceticism. At times the fool's prophetic image is reflected in the name (cf. Isidor Tverdislov [the one whose (prophetic) word is firm]). In other cases the fool's prophetic function is disclosed in the title of the text. For example, the life of St. Michael of Klopsko—the redaction that Kliuchevskii called the redaction of "Prophecies"—is called "The Life and Prophecy of St. Michael the Fool in Christ of Klopsko Monastery." All in all, in Russian hagiography, the holy fool's image becomes a reflection of that of the prophet, whereas his prophetic characteristics gain centrality.

The holy fool's prophetic aspects become especially prominent in modern—eighteenth to twentieth-century—renditions. From these texts emerges a figure closely resembling the Hebrew prophet: a virtuous man or woman of God endowed with extraordinary abilities and prophetic gifts. These opening lines from the first *kondakion* to Matrona of Moscow are representative:

> "Let us, Orthodox believers, weave the wreath of praise… to our blessed elder Matrona [who was] chosen by God and endowed from the cradle with the gifts of clairvoyance, miracle-working and healing."[59]

According to the hagiographic accounts, the modern holy fool no longer cultivates his/her extraordinary abilities but, like a Hebrew prophet, is endowed with them by God. The lives of the nineteenth-century fools for Christ, Feofil[60] of the Kyivan Cave Monastery and Pelageia Ivanovna Serebrenikova,[61] exemplify this model. Their *vitae* state that from the very birth these holy fools were inclined to virtuous living (e.g., as an infant, Feofil refused to suckle on his mother's left breast, thus expressing his righteousness), aspired to be ascetics (cf. Pelageia Ivanovna's refusal to marry and have a family), and even before they embarked on the path of holy foolishness, these characters revealed abilities and gifts usually attributed to saints and prophets: they both were clairvoyant and miracle-workers. In line with the medieval Russian pattern, the lives of these

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[59] *Blazhennye Matrona Moskovskaia i Kseniia Peterburgskaia: zhitie, akafist, chudesa* (Moscow: Tserkov' rozhdestva Presviatoi Bogoroditsy, 2002) 4 (my translation).

[60] Vladimir Znosko, *Hieroschemamonk Feofil, Fool for Christ's Sake: Ascetic & Visionary of the Kyivo-Pecherskaya Lavra* (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery Press, 1987).

[61] Fr. Seraphim (trans.), *Seraphim's Seraphim: The Life of Pelagia Ivanovna Serebrenikova, Fool for Christ's Sake of the Seraphim-Diveyevo Convent* (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery Press, 1979).

fools for Christ state the asceticism of their characters yet do not put it in the foreground. Nor is it always a life-long commitment and, whenever textually present, it can be confined to a short period of time. Thus, in the hagiography of Ivan Koreish, explicit asceticism—his itinerancy and successive seclusion—is very short-lived.[62] References to the asceticism of Kseniia of St. Petersburg, on the other hand, do not go beyond her scant clothing, homelessness and lack of earthly possessions.[63] In the context of the modern holy fool's downplayed asceticism, his/her madness often received an essentially new interpretation: it would be seen as real rather than feigned, yet would be invested with divine connotations.[64] The documentary evidence about the life and person of Kseniia of St. Petersburg, who was initially seen as mentally deranged yet later was venerated as a fool for Christ, presents one such case.[65]

In conclusion: this paper has argued that during the various stages of the developmental history of holy foolery, the figure of the Old Testament prophet served as the holy fool's literary and behavioural model. This influence was exercised through the prominence assigned to the prophet in the written, visual and audible texts available to the Eastern Slavs from the earliest Kyivan times. On the literary level, this enduring influence is discernible in the prophetic *topoi* that reached holy foolish hagiography directly and indirectly, through Old Testament texts, which described the lives and acts of the Hebrew prophets and through texts representative of the New Testament tradition. The Byzantine holy fool's transition to the urban space became the point of his transformation into the prophet. This hagiographic development acquired unprecedented prominence in Russia. As Russia made the holy fool one of its culturally most prominent figures, the ascetic component of his hagiographic imagery gradually became overshadowed by the prophetic aspects, bringing to the fore the *topoi* of power. As a result, in Russian hagiographies the fool for Christ emerges as a Russian Orthodox version of the Hebrew prophet: God's mouthpiece, visionary and scourge.

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[62] A. F. Kireev, *Student khladnykh vod: Ioann Iakovlevich Koreisha* (Moskva: Lestvitsa, 1996) 7, 9.

[63] *Sviataia blazhennaia mati nasha Kseniia Peterburzhskaia* (Sankt-Peterburg: Satis', 1996) 4, 6.

[64] The majority of the nineteenth-century literary portrayals of holy fools rely on this model. They include Dostoevskii's Lizaveta Smerdiashchaia from *The Brothers Karamazov* and Semen Iakovlevich from *The Possessed*, Sofonushka from Melnikov-Pecherskii's *Na gorakh* and Gorkii's eponymous hero from the short story *Nilushka*.

[65] For a controversial appraisal of Kseniia's hagiography and controversial facts regarding her canonization, see N. S. Gordienko, "Pervaia sviataia iurodivaia (Kseniia Peterburgskaia)," N. S. Gordienko*, Novye pravoslavnye sviatye: iz istorii kanonizatsii sviatykh* (Kiev: Ukraina, 1991) 235–273.