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# Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond

SERGEY A. IVANOV



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# Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond

SERGEY A. IVANOV

Translated by Simon Franklin

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## *Preface to the English Edition*

The first version of this book, *Vizantiiskoe iurodstvo*, was published in Russia in 1994. The intervening years have seen the publication of at least three monographs and dozens of articles relevant to the theme of Byzantine holy foolery. In places this has made it necessary to rewrite or edit my original text for the English edition. The greater challenge, however, lies in how to adapt the book for readers whose very language lacks any proper equivalent term for its central concept. The word *iurodstvo* in the original is instantly accessible to anybody in Russia, evoking a mass of cultural associations. Only Russian-speakers need no quotation marks or additional clarifications when they talk about this ancient and bizarre phenomenon. The conventional English phrase for the phenomenon is ‘holy folly’, or sometimes ‘holy foolishness’. Neither term is satisfactory. ‘Folly’ nowadays implies something done rashly and often in error, while ‘foolishness’ is merely silly. Not so *iurodstvo*. Here, therefore, we have preferred the unfamiliar but more apt locution ‘holy foolery’. Though still not ideal, this nevertheless conveys some of the essential features: in particular, it implies behaviour which is caused neither by mistake nor by feeble-mindedness, but is deliberate, irritating, even provocative.

Other Russian words could also be used to convey the same meaning: *pokhab*, *blazhennyi*, *bui*, for example. All

these words still exist in my native language today, but they have undergone semantic shifts. *Buinyi* now means ‘crazed’, ‘violent and a danger to others’. *Blazhennyi* has two distinct meanings: in the first place it designates one of the degrees of sanctity; but in its other sense it implies a kind of gentle imbecility, a feeble-minded person with a silly smile on his face (a ‘beatific’ smile, as one might say), utterly unable to engage with the world. *Pokhabnyi*, in contrast, might now refer to a salacious joke, or scabrous behaviour, indecent, but with no implication of insanity. In the modern language, therefore, all these words have different meanings, yet the point at which their semantic paths intersect is in the multi-valent concept of the *iurodivyi*, whose very essence is in his volatility: now he is insane, now he is not; now quiet, now wild; now manifestly pious, now obscene—or several or all of these things at once.

As for the word *iurodivyi* itself (cognate with *urod*—a person with a birth defect): in modern Russian it is used too frequently (there are more than 85,000 occurrences of words with this root in the Russian internet) and has too many meanings. For example, in Dostoevskii’s *The Brothers Karamazov* eight characters in different contexts are referred to as *iurodivye*. The English translator of the novel had to render them in very different ways, depending on the context: ‘idiot’, ‘religious idiot’, ‘pious ecstatic’, ‘saintly fool’, ‘crazy’, ‘fanatic’ (F. Dostoevskii, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York, 1949), 72–7, 145, 57, 58, 256, 150, 258) while the quality of *iurodstvo* is translated as ‘buffoonery’, ‘foolery’, or ‘crazy streak’ (Dostoevskii, *Karamazov*, 51, 259, 29). The secular meaning evolved as late as

the nineteenth century and is derived from the religious meaning. The common ground for both is their reference to another reality. In the context of Orthodox culture this reality is divine; secular culture reinterpreted this concept—*iurodstvo*—in different, psychological terms. In both cases such foolery sends the same message: that the obvious is in fact deceptive. While a ‘religious’ holy fool alludes to the inscrutability of divine judgement, the ‘secular’ holy fool hints at his own hidden merits.

Typically, a *iurodivyi* today is a person who is aware that he looks pathetic in other people’s eyes and pre-emptively their contempt by exaggerated self-humiliation, as if saying to himself: they are incapable of understanding what I am really like anyway. The next step in this psychological display is for the performer to let it be known that his behaviour is staged and that its function is to disguise his superiority over his audience. Finally, the performer, who may suspect that the pathetic impression he makes is not entirely undeserved, attempts to forestall the act of judgement by making a public scene. Such a person plays the buffoon not for enjoyment but in resentment; he insults by pretending to instruct; employs ostentatious cheerfulness to conceal his constant readiness for a scene; he expresses public remorse for his sins while refusing to accept any reproach.

In Russian there is a saying: ‘Self-abasement is higher than pride.’ The original meaning appears to have been a banal Christian admonition that humility is superior to pride (cf. Prov. 29:23; 1 Peter 5:5), but eventually it came to imply something very different: that self-abasement is in fact the highest form of pride.



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## Abbreviations

AASS	<i>Acta sanctorum</i>
AB	<i>Analecta bollandiana</i>
BHG	F. Halkin (ed.), <i>Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca</i> (Brussels, 1957); idem, <i>Novum auctarium Bibliothecae hagiographicae graecae</i> , <i>Subsidia hagiographica</i> 65 (Brussels, 1984)
BHL	<i>Bibliotheca hagiographica latina</i> , <i>Subsidia hagiographica</i> 6 (Brussels, 1949)
BHO	P. Peeters (ed.), <i>Bibliotheca hagiographica orientalis</i> , <i>Subsidia hagiographica</i> 10 (Brussels, 1910)
ChOidr	<i>Chteniia v Obshchestve istorii i drevnostei rossiiskikh</i>
CPG	<i>Clavis patrum graecorum</i>
CSCO	Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
GIM	Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Muzei. Moscow
JÖB	<i>Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
PE	<i>Pravoslavnaia entsiklopediia</i>
PG	Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeca, ed. J.-P. Migne
PL	Patrologiae cursus completus. Series latina, ed. J.-P. Migne
PO	Patrologia orientalis
PSRL	Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei

<i>REB</i>	<i>Revue des études byzantines</i>
RGADA	Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Drevnikh Atkov. Moscow
RGB	Rossiiskaia Gosudarstvennaia Biblioteka. Moscow
RNB	Rossiiskaia Natsional'naia Biblioteka. St Petersburg
<i>ROC</i>	<i>Revue de l'Orient Chrétien</i>
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
SKKDR	<i>Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi</i>
TODRL	<i>Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury</i>
VV	<i>Vizantiiskii vremennik</i>

Sainthood is...a thing that human beings must avoid...Some who achieve...sainthood have never felt much temptation to be human beings.

George Orwell, 'Reflections on Gandhi', in  
*A Collection of Essays* (New York, 1945), 176

## Introduction

'Holy fool' is a term for a person who feigns insanity, pretends to be silly, or who provokes shock or outrage by his deliberate unruliness. However, the term does not apply to all such behaviour. Extravagant conduct may qualify as holy foolery only if those who watch it assume that what lies beneath is sanity and high morality, even pious intent. The Orthodox Church holds that the holy fool voluntarily takes upon himself the mask of insanity in order that he may thereby conceal his own perfection from the world and hence avoid the vanity of worldly praise. A further stimulus to such behaviour, in the Orthodox view, may be as a comical, paradoxical form of spiritual instruction. However, the holy fool's indecorous behaviour can be edifying only if he abandons his disguise (for otherwise how would one tell him apart from a real, non-pretend fool or delinquent?); yet if he does reveal himself, the holy fool subverts his own vocation. If he has no intention of edifying anybody, then he could far more easily avoid worldly renown if he were to retreat to a place of solitude; yet he is drawn to company, to

the very crowd whose devotion he ostensibly abhors. This is a basic paradox in the Orthodox conception of the holy fool.

Associated originally with the Church, holy fools have been studied mainly in a religious perspective.<sup>1</sup> For most Orthodox believers the holy fool has been among the most revered types of saint, but not all Orthodox writers have approved. The distinguished church historian E. Golubinskii took the view that ‘strictly speaking, holy foolery is anti-canonical’.<sup>2</sup> I have nothing whatever to contribute to such debates, and they do not figure in the present study. I take no position on the question of the holy fool’s sanctity, nor on how to distinguish ‘true’ and ‘false’ holy fools. It is wholly irrelevant whether any given Byzantine tale of holy foolery deals with an ‘actual’ saint or with a sinner.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I. Kovalevskii, *Iurodstvo o Khriste i Khrista radi iurodivye vostochnoi i russkoi tserkvi* (Moscow, 1902, 2nd edn. 1992), 1–63; Aleksii (Kuznetsov), *Iurodstvo i stolpnichestvo: Religiozno-psikhologicheskoe, moral' noe i sotsial' noe issledovanie* (Moscow, 1913, 2nd edn. 2000), 45–266; T. Spidlik, ‘Fous pour le Christ: I: En Orient’, in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, v (1964), cols. 752–61; N. Stange-Zhironova, ‘La folie-en-Christ comme phénomène culturel’, *Annuaire de l’Institut de Philologie et d’Histoire orientales et slaves* 24 (1980), 83–8; I. Gorainoff, *Les fols en Christ dans la tradition orthodoxe* (Paris, 1983); Kallistos of Diokleia, ‘The Holy Fool as Prophet and Apostle’, *Sobornost* 6 (1984), 6–28; T. Goritschewa, *Die Kraft christlicher Torheit* (Freiburg, 1985); P. Martines, *Ho salos hagios Andreas kai he saloteta ste Orthodoxe ekklesia* (Athens, 1988); Ch. A. Stamoules, ‘Saloi kai pseudosaloi sten orthodoxe hagiologia’, *Gregorios ho Palamas* 721 (1988); E. Behr-Sigel, ‘La folie en Christ dans la Russie’, *Mille ans de Christianisme russe: 988–1988: Actes du Colloque International de l’Université Paris-X* (Paris, 1989), 141–2; I. Gagliardi, ‘I saloi, ovvero le “forme paradigmatiche” della santa follia’, *Rivista di Ascetica e Mistica* 4 (1994), 361–411, etc.

<sup>2</sup> E. Golubinskii, *Istoriia russkoi tserkvi*, i. ii (Moscow, 1881), 547.

<sup>3</sup> A secular approach to the phenomenon of holy foolery is attempted in: J. Grosdidier de Matons, ‘Les thèmes d’édification dans la Vie d’André Salos’, *Travaux et Mémoires* 4 (1970), 277–328; L. Rydèn, ‘The Holy Fool’, in *The*

Any cultural phenomenon can be approached in a number of ways, and it would be as well to state at the outset which approaches I do *not* pursue. It would be legitimate, for example, to study holy foolery in the context of a history of psychiatry (that is, to look at medieval descriptions of holy foolery and consider which currently known mental disorders they may fit); or one could explore a typological comparison between the holy fool and the Finnic shaman,<sup>4</sup> or with the Suibne Geilt cycle of early Irish legend.<sup>5</sup> Some scholars detect a link between holy foolery and carnival,<sup>6</sup>

*Byzantine Saint*, ed. S. Hackel (London, 1981; 2nd edn. New York, 2001), 106–13; A. M. Panchenko, ‘Smekh kak zrelishche’, in D. S. Likhachev, A. M. Panchenko, and N. V. Ponyrko, *Smekh v Drevnei Rusi* (Leningrad, 1984), 72–153; E. Thompson, *Understanding Russia: The Holy Fool in Russian Culture* (Lanham, 1987); G. Dagron, ‘L’homme sans honneur ou le saint scandaleux’, *Annales ESC* 45/4 (1990), 929–39; Ch. Angelides, ‘He parousia ton salon ste Byzantine koinonia’, in *Hoi perithoriakoi sto Byzantio* (Athens, 1993); V. Déroche, *Etudes sur Léontios de Néapolis* (Uppsala, 1995), 154–225; D. Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius’ Life and the Late Antique City* (Berkeley, 1996), 57–71; C. Ludwig, *Sonderformen byzantinischer Hagiographie und ihr literarisches Vorbild*, Berliner Byzantinistische Studien 3 (Berlin, 1997), 291–348. Our conclusions do not coincide with those of the above-mentioned works. A recent monograph, C. Wodzinski, *Sw. Idiota: Projekt antropologii apofatycznej* (Gradnsk, 2000), repeats in general terms the arguments made in the original Russian version of the present book.

<sup>4</sup> E. Thompson, ‘Holy Fools and Shamanism’, in *American Contributions to the VII International Congress of Slavists* (Columbus, Ohio, 1978), 691–706; *eadem*, *Understanding Russia*.

<sup>5</sup> J. Saward, *Perfect Fools* (Oxford, 1980), 31–41. For a different view, see T. A. Mikhailova, *Suibne-geilt: zver’ ili demon, bezumets ili izgoi* (Moscow, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Likhachev, Panchenko, Ponyrko, *Smekh*, 72–153. For a different view, see Iu. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspenskii, ‘Novye aspekty izucheniia kul’tury Drevnei Rusi’, *Voprosy literatury* 3 (1977), 164; I. P. Smirnov, ‘Drevnerusskii smekh i logika komicheskogo’, *TODRL* 32 (1977), 312; H. Birnbaum, ‘The World of Laughter, Play and Carnival: Facets of the Sub- and Counterculture in Old Rus’, in *idem*, *Aspects of the Slavic Middle Ages and Slavic Renaissance Culture* (New York, 1991), 493.



others see it as an ecclesiastical conspiracy against the masses,<sup>7</sup> or, vice versa, as a form of social protest.<sup>8</sup> The phenomenon of holy foolery could fruitfully be investigated in the context of the mythology of sacrifice or self-sacrifice, or as an aspect of the ways in which various cultures have regarded outcasts and especially clowns.

The clown is a well known figure in many traditional cultures, from Samoa to the Masai to the Indian subcontinent. Among the American Indians in the northwestern USA the clown has some attributes of the ritual madman: 'he is privileged to ridicule, burlesque and defile the most sacred and important ceremonies... licensed to behave as no ordinary mortals would dream of behaving'.<sup>9</sup> In some respects the Native American clown is remarkably like the holy fool: among the Moyo-Yaqui, for example, clowns are noted for their indecent and profane behaviour during the Great Fast.<sup>10</sup> In the Anachkina ritual, clowns of the Pueblo catch a dog (see below, p. 113)—a ritually impure animal—tear it to pieces, and sprinkle onlookers with its blood. Almost all the clowns wallow in filth, eat excrement and drink urine. The Zuni describe 'Kiyemishis'—a kind of 'doleful clown'—

<sup>7</sup> I. U. Budovnits, 'Iurodivye Drevnei Rusi', *Voprosy istorii religii i ateizma* 12 (1964), 173; E. A. Snigireva, 'Iurodstvo i pravoslavnaia tserkov', *Sotsial'no-psikhologicheskie aspekty kritiki religioznoi morali*, iii (Leningrad, 1977), 74–91.

<sup>8</sup> E. A. Snigireva, 'Antiklerikal'nye i antireligioznye motivy v russkoi narodnoi skazke', in *Ateisticheskie traditsii russkogo naroda* (Leningrad, 1982), 107.

<sup>9</sup> J. Haynes Stewart, *The Clown in Native North America* (New York and London, 1991), 72.

<sup>10</sup> E. C. Parsons and R. L. Beals, 'Clowns of the Pueblo and Mayo-Yaqui Indians', *American Anthropologist* NS 36/4 (1934), 497.

who behave oddly and speak in their own 'prophetic' language while the entire tribe mocks them; during the Shalako festival, however, they suddenly change from pathetic outcasts into all-powerful priests able to summon rain. Thus the clown evokes ambivalent responses.<sup>11</sup>

The jester, by contrast, bears only a superficial resemblance to the holy fool. Although both inhabit a topsy-turvy world and neither can survive without spectators, nevertheless the jester is part of the crowd whereas the holy fool is entirely alone even in the midst of the urban bustle; the jester thrives on dialogue, while the holy fool is monologic; the jester is immersed in 'festival time', or 'carnival time' whereas the holy fool is outside time; the behaviour of the jester is akin to an art form, whereas art is quite alien to the holy fool. 'The holy fool's laughter is a reflection: the holy fool becomes a mirror for those who mock poverty and impotence, and as such he mocks poverty and impotence. The laughter of the holy fool is the laughter of a world which is horrified by its own reflection in the mirror.'<sup>12</sup>

Yet however tempting these and numerous other possibilities might be, they will not be addressed in the present book, for our subject is holy foolery and its genetic rather than generic connections.

Genetic links can also, of course, be traced to greater or lesser degrees of remoteness. Thus one could choose to trace the holy fool's provocative behaviour right back to God's

<sup>11</sup> L. Levi Macarius, *Le sacré et la violation des interdits* (Paris, 1984), 269–76.

<sup>12</sup> E. A. Gorobinskaia and L. M. Nemchenko, 'Simuliatsiia iurodstva', *Russkaia literatura XX veka*, iii (Ekaterinburg, 1996), 187.

instruction to Abraham that he sacrifice his son, or the licence given by God to Satan to torment Job. Or one could go still further, and assert that there is an element of such provocation in the very act of Creation which permits evil to exist in the world. The holy fool's simulated insanity can be compared to the *kenosis* of Christ, who, according to the New Testament, 'made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men' (Phil. 2:7). That there is an element of concealed provocation here is suggested by the semantic development of the word *skandalon*, which in scriptural usage may even allude to Christ himself. Originally a physical obstacle, 'that which causes someone to stumble', already in New Testament usage *skandalon* has taken on a moral sense, 'that which causes someone to sin', 'a temptation', 'a provocation'.<sup>13</sup> The holy fool is a 'scandalous' figure both in the modern sense (shocking, causing outrage) and in this very specific moral sense.

In the present work I do not attempt to trace the hypothetical deep roots of holy foolery. The aim is to explore the immediate origins, the emergence, and the life-span, of a specific cultural phenomenon which could only arise in particular historical circumstances.

The main source for our survey is the complete (as far as possible) corpus of Byzantine and Old Russian hagiographic literature (lives of saints) and the associated genre of 'beneficial tales'. Supplementary—though still very import-

<sup>13</sup> See J. Lindblöm, *Skandala* (Uppsala, 1921); G. Stählin, *Skandalon: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte eines biblischen Begriffes* (Berlin, 1930); A. Humbert, 'Essai d'une théologie du Scandale', *Biblica* 35 (1954), 1–28, etc.

ant—sources include theological and historical works; here I cannot claim that the coverage is comprehensive, and significant material has doubtless been overlooked. The texts under consideration are mostly in Greek and Old Russian. As regards texts in other languages, only those in Latin (and its derivatives) and Slavonic have been perused in the original. Sadly, my familiarity with Coptic, Syriac, Amharic, Arabic, Georgian, Armenian, Hebrew, and Sanskrit texts extends no further than those which have been translated into European languages. This has consequences for Chapter 13, which is bound to be somewhat amateurish and where I cannot claim that the issues have been fully addressed. The Russian variant of holy foolery will be surveyed down to the end of the seventeenth century. The more recent, mostly ‘secular’ evolution of this institution is touched upon briefly, in a somewhat impressionistic manner.

A holy fool is someone whose *behaviour* is no different from that of any madman (or, more broadly, than any other trouble-maker or delinquent) yet who is accorded notably high *status* in society. He is seen—accurately or otherwise—as a righteous man who assumes a guise of irrationality for ascetic and educational purposes. However, not every pretence at insanity can be deemed holy foolery. Instances of feigned stupidity for non-religious purposes are beyond the scope of our study. Moreover, a Christian context in itself is not sufficient grounds for inclusion. One Byzantine text, for example, tells of how a certain man decided to expose a thief’s crimes: ‘He went into the church, took off his clothes and began to make as if he was possessed by demons (*ποιεῖν ἑαυτὸν δαιμονιζόμενον*), shouting incoherently.’ Horror-struck, the

thief confessed his transgressions, and the fake demoniac ‘began to stifle him, saying “St Andrew commands you to give this person fifty coins”’. As soon as the stolen property was returned, the impersonator ‘took his clothes and dressed himself decently’.<sup>14</sup> Although this pretence takes place in a church, and even in the name of a saint, it cannot be called holy foolery, since its aim is practical rather than metaphysical. The same can be said of cases of insanity feigned for the sake of modesty. For example, when Ephrem Syrus was threatened with being consecrated a bishop, he decided to simulate insanity so as to avoid this honour. He ‘rushed into the square and began to act the imbecile (*παραπαίων*). He wandered aimlessly, tore his clothing, ate in public’. And he kept up his pretence until someone else was consecrated bishop.<sup>15</sup>

Obviously one cannot count as holy fools the hirelings whom exorcists sometimes paid to ‘act as if possessed’ (*δαίμονᾶν ὑποκρίνεσθαι*) so that they could seem to demonstrate a miraculous healing. The vita of St Auxentios (*BHG*, 199–203) tells of such pseudo-exorcists in Byzantium,<sup>16</sup> while the vita of Lazaros Galesiotes has evidence for the existence of the pseudo-insane.<sup>17</sup> Nor should the label of holy foolery be applied to those who may feign insanity in order to protect themselves. When St Domna ‘began to

<sup>14</sup> F. Nau, ‘Histoires des solitaires égyptiens’, *ROC* 12 (1907), 177.

<sup>15</sup> Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica*, PG 67, col. 1092. Cf. C. Brockelmann, *Syrische Grammatik*, 4th edn. (Berlin, 1925), 38.

<sup>16</sup> *Menologii anonymi byzantini saeculi X*, ed. B. Latyshsev, vol. i (St Petersburg, 1911), 70.

<sup>17</sup> *Vita Lazari Galesiotae*, in *AASS November*, iii (Brussels, 1908), 512–13.

dissemble, rolling her eyes and dribbling . . . uttering incoherent sounds, by turns weeping and laughing,<sup>18</sup> her intention was to save herself from her pagan accusers. Nor can one define as holy foolery—in the sense in which the phenomenon is conceived in this book—‘divine simplicity’. St Philaretos the Merciful, for example (*BHG*, 1511–12), complies with the most absurd requests, and his love of poverty knows no bounds, but he is not faking anything at all: on the contrary, he is simple-mindedness personified.<sup>19</sup> A holy fool can be many things, but he is never simply simple.

Nor, quite emphatically, is the Orthodox holy fool either a heretic or a religious reformer. He does not recruit imitators and followers; indeed, he actively repels them. Nor is the holy fool a mystic, for he makes no attempt (though he would be capable of it) to share with others his unique experience of communion with God.

Holy foolery always, in our view, involves aggression and provocation. By ‘provocation’ I mean the deliberate manipulation of a situation such that somebody is forced into an otherwise undesirable action which the provocateur can foresee. By ‘aggression’ I mean an activity whose purpose is to disrupt the *status quo* in personal relations and which is perceived as hostile by the person at whom it is directed.

Why do holy fools engage in their foolery? This is perhaps the central question which the present study ought to

<sup>18</sup> *Vita ss. Indae et Domnae*, PG 116, col. 1048.

<sup>19</sup> A. P. Kazhdan and L. F. Sherry, ‘The Tale of a Happy Fool: The *Vita* of St Philaretos the Merciful (*BHG* 1511z–1512b)’, *Byzantion* 66 (1996), 360.

address. However, since our concern is with cultural history, we can reformulate the question thus: What prompts a given community or society to perceive signs of holiness where the only thing visible, at an empirical level, is insanity?

# 1

---

## Precursors and Emergence

Christianity sprung up from within Judaism, but early in its growth it was grafted onto Hellenistic culture. We might logically suppose, therefore, that the phenomenon under investigation also has both Jewish and Hellenistic roots. Not that such 'roots' are likely to bear very close resemblance to the eventual blossom: Christianity was radically different even from the cultural systems that influenced it most directly; its concept of the holy is its own, borrowed neither from Greece nor from the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> And yet the new religion could hardly avoid relying on some of the established and accepted cultural stereotypes. We should therefore consider Middle Eastern and classical Greek attitudes to performative, culturally interpreted insanity.

\* \* \*

Old Testament prophets often behave in ways which are by 'normal' standards odd or paradoxical. Hosea took a whore

<sup>1</sup> See H. Delehayé, *Sanctus* (Brussels, 1927), 2, 21, 24–7.



as his wife (Hos. 1:2). Isaiah walked around naked (Isa. 20:2). Jeremiah wore a yoke on his neck (Jer. 27:2), Zedekiah wore horns of iron (3 Kgdms. 22:11: unless stated otherwise, references are to the Septuagint version). Ezekiel lay 390 days on his left side and forty on his right side (Ezek. 4:4–6). Sometimes the prophet engages in direct provocation reminiscent of that of the holy fool:

And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to his neighbour by the word of the Lord, Smite me, I pray. And the man would not strike him. And he said unto him, Because thou hast not hearkened to the voice of the Lord, therefore, behold, as thou departest from me, a lion shall smite thee; and he departed from him, and a lion found him and smote him. And he finds another man, and says, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man smote him, and in smiting wounded him. (3 Kgdms. 21:35–7; transl. Brenton)

Like the holy fool, the true prophet is hard to distinguish from the false (Deut. 18:20–2). Like the holy fool, he could be taken for a madman (4 Kgdms. 9:11; Hos. 9:7; Jer. 29:26).<sup>2</sup>

Yet despite these affinities the Old Testament prophet differs fundamentally from the holy fool, and his distinctness is rooted in Middle Eastern culture. Whereas the

<sup>2</sup> In the Hebrew Bible the word for ‘mad’ in each of these passages is *meshugga*. Curiously, in the cuneiform prophecies of the Neo-Assyrian period from Mari the related Akkadian word *muhhum* (‘insane,’ ‘possessed’) simply designates a prophet, see: ‘Prophets and Prophecy,’ *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1971), 1159. See R. Cohn, ‘Sainthood on the Periphery: The Case of Judaism,’ in J. S. Hawley (ed.), *Saints and Virtues* (Berkeley, 1987), 93.

sanctity of the holy fool cannot be clearly discerned until his death, the prophet bears the signs that mark him out as such (3 Kgdms. 21:41). Prophets formed a separate caste, and it caused surprise if anybody not of their number began to prophesy (1 Kgdms. 19:24; Amos 7:14–15). Unseemly behaviour by a prophet is not mere unseemly behaviour, but a sign, an ominous hint that must be interpreted (cf. Jer. 43:9). The prophet speaks only in the name of God (Deut. 18:20), sometimes against his own will (1 Kgdms. 18:10), as if he no longer has his own human identity. The prophet is only an intermediary. He can suffer for his mission (Jer. 20:14–18), he can even reproach God (Jer. 14:9), but he is not capable of rejecting His choice. The prophet is chosen. This is a given, an inescapable fact. Hence the notions of sin, grace, and sanctity—the essential contexts for discerning the holy fool—are quite different from their equivalents in Christianity. Andrew the Fool, for example, as we shall see (below, p. 158) may fear to set out on his path, and may pray fervently to God that He might confirm His will, but the saint's decision is nevertheless his own personal choice, and he himself bears the responsibility for all that he subsequently does.

The Old Testament is also quite distinct in its treatment of insanity. The truly insane person (Heb. *nabal*) is he who does not acknowledge God's demands (Isa. 32:6). 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' (Prov. 9:10; cf. 1:7). Foolishness was simply a failure to recognize God's will. In the Septuagint a people is called 'foolish and without understanding (*μωρός και ἀκάρδιος*)' when it 'has eyes, and sees not' and when it 'has ears, and hears not' (Jer. 5:21), yet

overall the word *moros* ('foolish', 'stupid') is not common in the Greek version; as if the Seventy felt it did not match any appropriate equivalent in the Hebrew terminology.<sup>3</sup>

'Everyday' insanity does, of course, figure in the Old Testament. The Septuagint's word for the 'real' madman is *epileptos*. With regard to feigned madness we can note the episode in which David, arriving at the court of the potentially hostile King Anchus, is anxious to protect himself, so:

he changed his appearance before him, and feigned himself a false character (*προσεποιήσατο*)... and fell against the doors of the gate, and spittle ran down upon his beard. And Anchus said to his servants, Lo! ye see the man is mad (*ἐπίλημπτον*): why have ye brought him in to me? Am I in want of madmen, that ye have brought him in to behave madly (*ἐπιλημπτεύεσθαι*) in front of me? (1 Kgdms. 21:13–15; cf. Ps. 33 (34))

This kind of feigned madness, however, has no connection with any notion of sanctity.

Jewish culture was eventually infiltrated, to some extent, by Hellenistic ideas. This took place mainly in the cosmopolitan cities of the Mediterranean, and it is first visible in Greek texts written by Jewish scholars. 'I would rather be called stupid (*μωρός*) all the days of my life than appear dishonourable for a single hour in the sight of the Lord.'<sup>4</sup> In the Midrash the commentary on Psalm 34 (= 33 in the Septuagint) notes that: 'in sea-ports fools are called *morim*.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, iv (Stuttgart, 1966), 838.

<sup>4</sup> Edujot 5:6, cited from *Theologisches Wörterbuch*, iv. 845.

<sup>5</sup> *Midrash Rabbah, Numbers*, transl. J. Slotki, ii (London, 1939), 759.

This must allude to the borrowing of the Greek word *moros*, which was apparently felt not to have a precise equivalent in Hebrew.

Yet, in spite of all dissimilarities, the image of the God-chosen man, despised by the stupid crowd, is definitely borrowed by the Christian holy fool from the Jewish prophet. His solitude comes across most expressively in the late biblical book, the *Wisdom of Solomon*:

Then the righteous man will stand with great confidence in the presence of those who have afflicted him, and . . . they will speak to one another in repentance . . . : 'This is the man whom we once held in derision and made a byword of reproach—we fools (*ἄφρονες*)! We thought that his life was madness (*μανίαν*) and that his end was without honour. Why has he been numbered among the sons of God? And why is his lot among the saints?'<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \*

The Greek idea that true wisdom may be hidden under the guise of stupidity was embodied in Socrates. Plato says:

He spends all his life in teasing mankind, and hiding his true intent . . . His discourses . . . are ridiculous when you first hear them, they are enveloped in words and phrases . . . for his talk is of pack-asses and smiths and cabbies and couriers, and he is always repeating the same thing in the same words, so that any stupid or inexperienced person might feel disposed to laugh (*katagelaseien*) at him . . . But . . . they are the only words which have a meaning in them.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Sapiaientia Salomonis 5:1–5.

<sup>7</sup> *The Dialogues of Plato*, transl. B. Jowett, ii (London, 1970), 231, 235–6.

Although Socrates has not been appropriated by Christianity<sup>8</sup>—yet the paradigm is set: genuine wisdom is hidden from the public eye and to fools it comes across as stupidity.

The important cultural pattern which may be reckoned to have had some influence on holy foolery is Greek Cynicism.<sup>9</sup> Here one should distinguish several levels of reception. First there is the general influence exerted on early Christianity by devotees of the Cynical school of philosophy. The Emperor Julian asserted that Cynics and ‘impious Galileans’ had much in common (*Oratio* VII. 224B). Aelius Aristides aptly points out that Christians and Cynics both display a similar blend of wilfulness and humility (*ἀνθάδεια καὶ ταπεινότης*).<sup>10</sup> Hippolytos describes the Christian Tatian as leading a very Cynical life (*κυνικότερος βίος*) (Hippolytos, *Haeresis* x. 18). Second, when hagiographers wrote about holy fools, they tended to pay special attention to the ‘Cynical’ aspect of their behaviour. Thus Leontios of Neapolis describes how Symeon the Fool used to go around with a dead dog and would relieve himself in public view—just like the great Diogenes (cf. below, p. 117) and nearly a thousand

<sup>8</sup> Sometimes Socrates was mentioned by Christians as a model of steadfastness: see A. Harnack, ‘Sokrates und die alte Kirche’, in *idem, Reden und Aufsätze*, i (Giessen, 1903), 41.

<sup>9</sup> D. Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontios’ Life and the Late Antique City* (Berkeley, 1996), 72–107, 125–8; N. Largier, *Diogenes der Kyniker: Exempel, Erzählung, Geschichte in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit* (Tübingen, 1997), 375–7.

<sup>10</sup> Aristides, *Oratio* 46, ed. W. Dindorf, ii (Leipzig, 1829), 309.9–11.

years later Nikephoros Gregoras in his *Life of John of Herakleia* calls the holy fool a ‘pious Cynic’ (cf. p. 222).

And yet a huge gulf separates the Cynic from the holy fool. While the provocative behaviour of the Old Testament prophet is, in a sense, not really provocative behaviour at all, since the challenge does not come from man—the uninhibited conduct of the Cynical philosopher is—in contrast—a way of achieving a higher freedom. The Cynic exposes superficiality and casts down false idols not in the name of any divinity but by the authority that he asserts for his own wisdom. Defending classical Cynicism from later imitations, Julian formulated the philosophy’s central principle thus:

I do not mean that we are obliged to be publicly shameless and to do that which it is thought improper to do (*πράττειν τὰ μὴ πρακτέα*). But all that we do and all that we refrain from doing... let us either do or not do not because the crowd thinks it fine or base but because it is forbidden by reason and by our god, that is the mind (*λόγῳ καὶ τῷ ἐν ἡμῶν θεῷ τοῦτ’ ἐστὶ τῷ νῷ*). As for the crowd: let it abide by common opinion; better thus than that it should be utterly shameless. (Julian, *Oratio* VI. 196D)

If the behaviour of the prophet is a kind of performance—one that assumes a spell-bound audience—then for the Cynics, in Julian’s view, ‘the main aim was to achieve a state of bliss, and I think they were of interest to others only to the extent that they understood that man is a political being’ (ibid., 201C).

Cynics had no desire to speak in anyone’s name but their own: they had no fondness for prophecy and they mocked

the oracles mercilessly, for they regarded man as absolutely free. Julian had to concede that ‘Diogenes did not frequent the temples nor did he venerate the statues and altars’ (ibid., 199B).

The holy fool thus combines features both of the prophet and of the Cynic. On the one hand his eccentric behaviour is sacralized, unlike that of the philosopher. On the other hand, since Christianity also allows man free will, the holy fool’s contrariness is just that—contrariness—and not a sacral performance like that of the prophet.

We now turn to the sources of holy foolery within Christianity itself.

\* \* \*

The young religion boldly broke with both of the traditions that had influenced its formation. It offered belief in a miracle that could not be grasped by empirical reasoning, and which also ran counter to conventions of the Old Testament. The Greek of the Gospels still bears traces of Aramaic usage. Christ applies the words *moros* (Matt. 5:22; 23:17, 19) and *aphron* (‘senseless’: Luke 12:20) in their ‘Jewish’ meaning, implying a rejection of God’s will,<sup>11</sup> but already the apostle Paul, discussing reason and foolishness, proceeds from Greek axioms about ‘common sense’. In the earliest Christian texts, therefore, even praise for foolishness entails a tacit acknowledgement of the primacy of reason. It

<sup>11</sup> J. A. Kelso, ‘Fool’, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vi (New York, 1913), 69; *Theologisches Wörterbuch*, iv. 844.

is in this context that we should read the classic lines from Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians:

Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? . . . For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock (*σκάνδαλον*), and unto the Greeks foolishness; . . . but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. . . . If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God. (1 Cor. 1:20, 22–3, 27; 3:18–19)

These words have been cited throughout the ages as the theoretical foundation of holy foolery. But Paul himself knew nothing of holy foolery as it was to become. Moreover, the phrase that was later applied to holy fools, *moroi dia Christon*, originated from a misunderstanding. When Paul turns to his Corinthian followers with the words 'We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised' (1 Cor. 4:10), he is being ironic.<sup>12</sup> In fact the apostle hints that the reverse is the case: *he* is wise in Christ and not the Corinthian neophytes! Paul's discourse on 'foolishness for Christ's sake' should be understood in the context of arguments—among his Christian contemporaries—about pagan wisdom.<sup>13</sup> Early Christian theologians, who put a fair amount of effort into commentating on the 'foolishness

<sup>12</sup> A. Besançon Spencer, 'The Wise Fool (And the Foolish Wise)', *Novum Testamentum* 23/4 (1981), 351–4.

<sup>13</sup> J. Goetzmann, 'Moria', in C. Brown (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Exeter, 1978), 1025.



for Christ's sake' passages from the first Epistle to the Corinthians,<sup>14</sup> knew nothing about holy foolery.<sup>15</sup>

In early Christianity the concepts of 'foolishness' and 'wisdom' each had two meanings: a secular meaning broadly accepted in the Hellenistic world, and a sacral meaning borrowed from Judaism. As Basil of Caesarea writes: 'the epithet "wise" is homonymic, for it is applied equally to those who are wise in this world and to those who have received the true wisdom of our Lord through faith in Him'.<sup>16</sup> This duality was well known among early Christian writers. Tatian, for example, when addressing pagans, uses a pagan concept of foolishness: 'O you men of the Hellenes, we are not insane (*οὐ μωραίνομεν*) . . . when we say that God

<sup>14</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 1.5 (CPG, 1376), PG 8, col. 269; *idem*, *Stromata* 1. 11 (CPG, 1377), PG 8, col. 748; Didymos of Alexandria, *De Trinitate* 11. 3 (CPG, 2570), PG 39, cols. 477–80; Basil of Caesarea, *Homilia in Hexaemeron* VIII. 6 (CPG, 2835), PG 29, col. 180; *idem*, *Enarratio in prophetum Isaiam* 11. 75 (CPG, 2911), PG 30, col. 245; Gregory of Nazianzos, *Contra Julianum imperatorem* 1 (CPG, 3010), PG 35, col. 588; Gregory of Nyssa, *In Ecclesiasten homiliae* VIII (CPG, 3157), in *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, v (Leiden, 1962), 359; John Chrysostom, *In illud 'Quia quod stultum est Dei'* (CPG, 4441.14; unpublished), etc. The subject of Pauline 'foolishness for Christ's sake' had wide repercussions: see the sixth–seventh-century papyrus fragment, found in Egypt, which quotes from chapters 1:27 and 4:10 of the first Epistle to the Corinthians: *Sammelbuch Griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten*, ed. H.-A. Rupprecht, xii (Wiesbaden, 1977), no. 11144. The text is somewhat different from the canonical one and is written by somebody not particularly well educated: yet another indication that this motif was highly popular.

<sup>15</sup> Note that the authors of the later, Byzantine comments on the first Epistle to the Corinthians never refer to holy foolery as an example of observing Paul's commandments: see: Nicholas of Methone, *Refutation of Proclus' Elements of Theology*, ed. A. D. Angelou (Athens, 1984), Prooem. 40–5; Michael Psellos, *Theologica*, ed. P. Gautier, i (Leipzig, 1989), 8a.48–55, etc.

<sup>16</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Homilia in Principium Proverbiorum* (CPG, 2856), PG 31, col. 416.

took on human form' (Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 21.1). Ignatios of Antioch, by contrast, plays on the Christian idea of foolishness: 'Why have we not all become sensible (*φρόνιμοι*), though we have recognized God? Why are we dying in foolishness (*μωρῶς*).'<sup>17</sup>

Ignatios was not, of course, talking about life skills. A Christian was bound to reckon earthly practical intelligence to be the height of foolishness, even if he acknowledged it as part of human nature. Pseudo-Athanasios of Alexandria writes:

People call intelligent (*φρονίμους*) those who are adept at... buying and selling, at conducting business, at taking from their neighbours, at oppression and profiteering, at turning one obol into two. Yet God considers such men foolish and unwise (*μωρούς καὶ ἀσυνέτους*) and sinful... God wishes people to become foolish (*μωρούς*) in earthly affairs, and intelligent (*φρονίμους*) in the affairs of heaven... We call intelligent those who can perform God's will.<sup>18</sup>

However, early Christians' reverence for the divine in no way hampers their down-to-earth ability to distinguish the stupid from the clever. Thus Origen is manifestly proud of his own refined intellect:

Very little is required—only a tiny part of God's foolishness—to put earthly wisdom to shame... To take an example: if I, knowing a great deal, compete with an imbecile and ignoramus who has no understanding and no ability to argue on any elevated topics

<sup>17</sup> Ignatios, *Epistula ad Ephesios* (CPG, 1025.1), PG 5, col. 657.

<sup>18</sup> [Pseudo-]Athanasios of Alexandria, *De virginitate* 4 (CPG, 2248), PG 28, cols. 256–7.

whatever (τινα ἀνόητον καὶ ἀπαίδευτον καὶ μηδὲν συνιέντα καὶ μὴ ἀγωνιζόμενον ὑπὲρ λόγων γενναίων ὁποιωνδήποτε), do I really need dialectics and profound argument if his thoughts are foolish (μωρά)? Surely all I need in order to prove his foolishness (μωρία) is just one little word that is slightly more subtle than his speech.<sup>19</sup>

Origen is still more insistent in his famous work *Against Celsus*: ‘We do not claim that foolishness is unequivocally (ἀπολελυμένως) good... It is far better that belief in the doctrines be supported by argument and wisdom than by faith alone.’<sup>20</sup>

Many Fathers of the Church saw danger in this kind of intellectual smugness, and urged the wisdom of humility. Thus, Basil of Caesarea urges: ‘cast off any conceit about your intelligence.’<sup>21</sup> And this is what John Chrysostom had to say on the subject:

When God reveals something, we must accept it in faith, and not make an insolent fuss about it... It is when we restrain the inopportune raving (ἀκαίρως λυττώντας) of our own reasoning, when we make our mind empty and devoid of secular learning, so that we can offer it cleansed and ready to admit the Divine words when the time comes to hearken to Christ’s commands.<sup>22</sup>

Although divine wisdom is infinitely superior, earthly wisdom still has a modest measure of dignity in the eyes of the

<sup>19</sup> Origen, *Homélie sur Jérémie* (CPG, 1438), ed. P. Husson and P. Nautin, ii, SC 232 (Paris, 1977), 372–4.

<sup>20</sup> Origen, *Contre Celse* (CPG, 1476), ed. M. Borret, i, SC 132 (Paris, 1967), 110, cf. 112.

<sup>21</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Regulae brevis tractatae* (CPG, 2875), PG 31, col. 1272.

<sup>22</sup> A.-M. Malingrey (ed.), *Jean Chrysostome: Sur l’incompréhensibilité de Dieu*, SC 28 bis (Paris, 1970), § 2.70–4.

Fathers of the Church. They are not militantly anti-intellectual. Didymos the Blind writes: 'If the discussion turns to trivial and everyday issues . . . no matter if they turn everything inside out with their Aristotelian logic and rhetoric!'<sup>23</sup>

Although the Fathers of the Church were happy to use the word *idiotes* with reference to Christians (especially the apostles), the word did not then have its present meaning. In classical Greek it was a neutral designation for people who led withdrawn lives and who held no public office. Such escapism was viewed with disapproval, for it could give rise to the suspicion that the person was not merely unwilling but unable to fulfil his obligations to the state. Hence the term came to acquire (especially in Latin, which borrowed it from Greek) disparaging overtones, and this was how it reached Christians. When the Church Fathers needed to show (as apparently they often did) that the apostles had acted not on their own behalf but in God's name, and that the apostles' successes had in no way been due to their own virtues, then the Christian writers were liberal in their use of unflattering epithets so as to highlight the significance of intervention from above. *Idiotes* was one of the epithets applied.<sup>24</sup> However, this word is never used in connection with the Pauline notion of 'foolishness for Christ's sake'.

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<sup>23</sup> Didymos of Alexandria, *De Trinitate* 11. 13, col. 447.

<sup>24</sup> See John Chrysostom, *In Epistulam II ad Corinthos Homilia IX* (CPG 4429), PG 61, col. 458; *idem*, *Panégryrique de S. Paul* v. 19, ed. A. Piedagnel (Paris, 1982), 204; Gregory of Nazianzos, *Epistula XVII* (CPG, 3032), PG 48, col. 1061, etc.

In the later Middle Ages, and especially in Rus, holy foolery merged with prophetism. Although some early Christian teachers did take on prophet-like mannerisms, in the second and third centuries this was generally frowned upon.<sup>25</sup> The trance was unfashionable and came to be regarded as an inept form of buffoonery.<sup>26</sup> Although the New Testament mentions that Christ himself was said to be ‘beside himself (ἐξέστη)’ (Mark 3:21) and that ‘he has a devil and is mad’ (John 10:20), the Church disapproved of ecstatic states and never commended the idea of holy madness. According to Origen, ‘to prophesy while in a state of ecstasy and madness, with no control over oneself (ὡς μηδαμῶς αὐτὴν ἑαυτῇ παρακολουθεῖν)—this comes not from God’s Spirit.’<sup>27</sup> Basil of Caesarea treats this in even more detail: ‘Some say that they make prophecies when ecstatic (ἐξέστηκότας) and their human reason is overshadowed by the Spirit. This runs counter, however, to the prescriptions of Divine revelation: to feign being insanely possessed (ἐκφρονα ποιεῖν τὸν θεόληπτον) and, being filled with God’s teachings, instantly to lose your own mind.’<sup>28</sup> The early Christian saint also had little in common with the Old Testament prophet. If the latter, when prophesying, shed his own persona and was

<sup>25</sup> R. P. Van de Kapelle, ‘Prophets and Mantics’, in *Pagan and Christian Anxiety*, ed. Robert C. Smith and John Lounibos (Lanham, 1984), 99.

<sup>26</sup> P. Brown, ‘The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), 93; cf. L. Cracco Ruggini, ‘Potere e carismi in età imperiale’, *Studi storici* 20 (1979), 600. This distinction already inhibited the appearance, in the West, of phenomena analogous to holy foolery.

<sup>27</sup> Origen, *Contre Celse* IV, SC 150 (Paris, 1969), 20.

<sup>28</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Commento al profeta Isaia*, ed. P. Trevisan, I (Turin, 1939), Praef., 5; cf. Procopius, ‘Commentarii in Isaiam’, PG 87, col. 1817.

regarded as a medium, the saint was, by contrast, supposed to maintain clarity of thought and to use his own efforts.

Ancient medicine contributed greatly to the healing of mental disorders.<sup>29</sup> Greek psychiatry may look naive from today's point of view, but it differentiated clearly between diseases that needed treatment and possession which defied treatment. Christians borrowed this dichotomy from pagans. It is often said that in Byzantium any abnormality was attributed to demonic possession,<sup>30</sup> but in fact the concept of naturally caused mental disorder was never repudiated by the Byzantines.<sup>31</sup> Demonic possession may have been regarded by the Church as retribution for certain sins (there was no universal opinion on this matter), yet mental diseases had no ethical implications. When Patriarch Nicholas Grammatikos (1084–1111) was asked whether the possessed should receive the sacraments, he answered: 'If somebody suffers from black bile to the extent that he looks as if he is possessed by the devil, he should not be prevented; if one is indeed possessed, then he by no means should be honoured with sacraments.'<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> G. Roccatagliata, *A History of Ancient Psychiatry* (New York, 1986).

<sup>30</sup> L. Mavrommatis, 'Byzantine Fools: The Link Between Nature and Society', in *Nature and Society in Historical Context*, ed. M. Teich *et al.* (Cambridge, 1997), 37–50.

<sup>31</sup> P. Horden, 'Responses to Possession and Insanity in the Early Byzantine World', *Social History of Medicine* 6 (1993), 186–90; N. Theocharis *et al.*, 'He psychopatheia sto Byzantio', *Archeia Hellenikes iatrikes* 20/5 (2003), 547–50.

<sup>32</sup> Nicholas Grammatikos, 'Canonica', *Spicilegium Solesmense*, ed. J. Pitra, iv (Rome, 1858), 479; cf. Michael Psellos, *Theologica*, ed. P. Gautier, i (Leipzig, 1989), no. 99, ll. 130–1; Anna Comnena, *Alexiad* xv. 8.4.

Thus far we have considered only mainstream Christianity, and only its Greek version. We should not forget, however, that Christianity emerged from within the Semitic world, where it maintained a distinctive existence. Here the encratic strands were more prominent, making it somewhat akin to the orgiastic cults of the Middle East. This kinship can be perceived most clearly in the apocryphal Gospels.

In the canonical New Testament there are, for example, no precepts to cast off shame, yet Christian apocrypha are littered with such injunctions. The heroine of the *Acts of Thomas* (from the second half of the third century) announces: ‘And that I am not veiled, (is) because the veil of corruption is taken away from me; and that I am not ashamed, (is) because the deed of shame has been removed far from me.’<sup>33</sup> In the Coptic *Gospel According to Thomas* Jesus says: ‘If you renounce shame and take off your clothes and throw them down beneath your feet like little children . . . only then will you see the Son of Him who lives.’<sup>34</sup> A Greek papyrus fragment of an unidentified Gospel (which is apparently close to the Semitic tradition) puts it frankly: ‘His disciples say to Him, “When will You be manifest to us and when will we see You” And He replies “When you undress and are not ashamed (ὅταν ἐκδύσητε καὶ μὴ αἰσχυνθῆτε)”.’<sup>35</sup> And in the *Secret Gospel of Mark* the

<sup>33</sup> *The Acts of Thomas*, transl. and comm. A. F. J. Klijn (Leiden, 1962), 71.

<sup>34</sup> G. Garitte, ‘Le nouvel Evangile copte de Thomas’, *Académie royale de Belgique. Classe des lettres et sciences morales et politiques* 5/50 (1964), 23.

<sup>35</sup> *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, iv, ed. B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt (London, 1904), 23–8 (no. 655).

words ‘naked with the naked’ (γυμνὸς γυμνῶ) are used in connection with Christ himself, and although the context is obscure, the reputation of the early Christians apparently bore ‘an ambiguous hint of scandal’.<sup>36</sup> These apocrypha circulated widely in the Christian world. We will encounter the motif of the holy man’s shamelessness again, in relation to classic holy foolery (see below, p. 70). The difference is that such conduct was the norm among the Encratites of the Middle East, whereas in a holy fool it represented a deviation from the norms of Christian behaviour.<sup>37</sup>

Here was where the call to ‘foolishness for Christ’s sake’ ought to have found its keenest response: in the Semitic East, where reaction against the regularity and rationality of Hellenistic civilization was particularly strong. And indeed, the most extensive commentary on this injunction is to be found in the fourth-century *Liber graduum*. The main aim of this treatise is to draw a distinction between the ‘righteous’ (those who strictly observe the rules) and the ‘perfect’ (those who overflow with an abundance of virtue). The latter are ‘like angels, and angels neither clothe the naked nor feed the hungry, nor do they care for their souls or for their brothers’.<sup>38</sup> Not only do they not seek earthly praise,

<sup>36</sup> S. Levin, ‘The Early History of Christianity in the Light of the “Secret Gospel” of Mark’, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, ii. 25. 6 (Berlin and New York, 1988), 4290.

<sup>37</sup> The idea of undressing as a pathway to Truth, as it emerged in early Christianity, was also influenced by the classical Greek aesthetic ideal; see S. Brock, ‘Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition’, in M. Schmidt (ed.), *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den Östlichen Vätern und ihrer Parallelen im Mittelalter* (Regensburg, 1982), 22.

<sup>38</sup> *Liber graduum*, ed. M. Kmosco, *Patrologia syriaca* 1. 3 (Paris, 1926), col. 751.



but they 'humble themselves, saying that they are useless, though they are righteous... They are despised for their humility of mind, for they are foolish for Christ's sake'.<sup>39</sup> It comes as no surprise that 'the fools who were chosen by God were fools in earthly matters but were wise in heavenly matters'.<sup>40</sup>

The author of the *Liber graduum* attempts to solve the problem of how to distinguish the 'fool for Christ's sake' from an ordinary madman:

Now I will explain to you about the madman. If you see that he despises himself, that he has neither house nor wife nor wealth, nor even clothes or food except for the day, then say: 'This is for me, this is what I must imitate.' And when you see that in his insanity he converses with everybody, and makes it a rule not to be angry or abusive and to despise the worldly wise, say: 'This is for me, this is the madness of the apostles.' But if you see that he tells lies, or utters prophecies, or commits fornication, or talks nonsense, say: 'This is not for me.' The world ridicules madmen for their madness, for they cannot tell who is mocking them and who respects them, and so they will converse in the morning with the man who beat them the previous evening. In this you should imitate them. Count as foolish only those who in their foolishness cannot tell the good man from the bad. If you can tell them apart, you must love the good man and the bad equally. If you see that the madman is impelled by his madness, and that somebody is saying to him 'go and commit fornication', or 'steal', or 'blaspheme'—and that he does this out of foolishness, then do not

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., cols. 882–3.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., col. 778.

be like him; for you are told 'be foolish' not with regard to heavenly wisdom but with regard to earthly conceit.<sup>41</sup>

Thus the *Liber graduum* proposes that one should not ignore the accepted worldly criteria of good and evil, but that nor should one be wholly constricted by them. Imitation of the madman should not extend to disorderly behaviour. One should not deliberately seek to be the object of violence and ridicule. The book brings its reader to the very brink of holy foolery but holds back from taking the final step, from casting aside a sense of social decency.<sup>42</sup> This final step was taken in Egypt rather than in Syria.

\* \* \*

Egypt was the homeland of monasticism: first of the desert fathers, then of the monastic community or *koinobion*. The very word *monachos*, in the sense of 'solitary', was coined in Egypt in the early fourth century.<sup>43</sup> 'Foolery for Christ's sake' is mentioned quite often in the numerous anecdotes and stories of the Egyptian monks and hermits, and the word used—*moria*—clearly alludes to Paul's epistle. The Epistle to the Corinthians is cited directly in the oldest,

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., cols. 303–4. Note that the *Liber graduum* preaches tolerance towards 'real' madmen: 'I urge those who beat the possessed and the insane: if you can calm them, so be it, but otherwise let them live in their dwellings until God either cures them or gathers them to Himself' (ibid., col. 174).

<sup>42</sup> V. Déroche, *Étude sur Vie de Syméon d'Emèse par Léontios de Néapolis* (Uppsala, 1995), 163–4.

<sup>43</sup> See E. A. Judge, 'The Earliest Use of Monachos for Monk and the Origin of Monasticism', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 20 (1977), 73–86.

Coptic version of the vita of Pachomios the Great,<sup>44</sup> and we commonly find utterances such as ‘Whosoever shall become foolish for the Lord’s sake (μωρὸς διὰ τὸν κυρίον), the Lord shall make him wise (συνετίσει)’;<sup>45</sup> ‘either avoid people or mock the world (ἐμπαιξον τὸν κόσμον) and people, making yourself out to be a fool (μωρόν)’.<sup>46</sup> Although such maxims were widespread throughout the Eastern Christian world, even in remote regions such as Ethiopia,<sup>47</sup> Egypt remained the acknowledged model for the type of self-abasement from which holy foolery was later to evolve. As one of the desert fathers put it: ‘the Egyptians conceal the virtues which they possess and display the vices which they lack; the Syrians and the Greeks show off the virtues which they lack and conceal the vices which they possess’.<sup>48</sup> The concealment of virtues is, of course, a traditional Christian attribute, but any simulation carries in itself the potential for holy foolery.

One of the stories of the Egyptian hermits tells of how a disciple persuaded the holy man to visit his (the disciple’s) father’s house:

He ran into his house, saying ‘come out and meet the recluse’. And when from a distance the holy man saw them coming out with lamps, he guessed the reason, and he took off his clothes and threw them into the river and began to wash them as he stood

<sup>44</sup> *Les vies coptes de Saint Pachome*, transl. L. Lefort (Louvain, 1943), 163.

<sup>45</sup> F. Nau, ‘Histoires, des solitaires égyptiens’, *ROC* 12 (1907), 403.

<sup>46</sup> *Les apophthegmes des pères: Collection systématique*, ed. Jean-Claude Guy, SC 387 (Paris, 1993), § 8.31.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Collectio monastica*, ed. V. Arras, CSCO 239 (Louvain, 1963), 80.

<sup>48</sup> *De vitis patrum libri VII*, PL 73, col. 1035.

there naked. On seeing this the disciple was embarrassed and said to the people, 'turn back, for the holy man has gone out of his mind (ἐξέστη)'... And he went up to him and asked, 'Father, why have you done this? Everybody said that the you were possessed by a demon.' And he replied, 'That is what I wanted to hear.'<sup>49</sup>

This example shows that the anchorite does not (or not yet) initiate the act of provocation: it is a defensive reaction to the intrusion of the world into his life. Yet already we can see the element of aggression that was to take holy foolery beyond the limits of apostolic 'foolishness' (*moria*) and into a different sphere, for which another term was required. The term was *salos*.

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The etymology of *salos* is unclear. Although it first occurs in Greek texts emanating from Egypt, it cannot be a Coptic word.<sup>50</sup> In Coptic texts it appears as a simple transcription from the Greek.<sup>51</sup> This implies that the Egyptians regarded the word as foreign. From the Copts the word migrated to the Ethiopians, in the form *shâlûsî*.<sup>52</sup> The most widely accepted theory is that it derives from the Syriac *sakla*,

<sup>49</sup> Nau, 'Histoires des solitaires égyptiens', *ROC* 12 (1907), 181.

<sup>50</sup> J. Grosdidier de Matons, 'Les thèmes d'édification dans la vie d'André Salos', *Travaux et Mémoires* 4 (1970), 279.

<sup>51</sup> W. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford, 1939), 106, cf. 358. In Old Armenian this word is also borrowed from Greek: C. Brockelmann, 'Die griechischen Fremdwörter im Armenischen', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 47 (1893), 31.

<sup>52</sup> E. A. Wallis Budge (ed.), *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, iv (Cambridge, 1928), 1211.

which renders the Greek *moros* in the Syriac version of the Epistle to the Corinthians.<sup>53</sup>

The similarity between the borrowed word and the original Greek *σάλος*, which means ‘rocking’, ‘fluctuation’,<sup>54</sup> must have also played a role. Grosdidier de Matons suggests a different Syriac etymology, from *sela*, which means ‘to reject’, ‘to despise’.<sup>55</sup> This version has not been generally accepted. Indeed, if this is a Syriac word, then why, in the Syriac translation of the vita of Symeon of Emesa, is the word *salos* rendered either as *salosa* or simply as *salos*, or *sale* in the vocative case?<sup>56</sup> This means that the Syriac translator believed this was a Greek word. At all events, it is clear that the origins of the word *salos* lie in the East.<sup>57</sup> The word first

<sup>53</sup> P. Hauptmann, ‘Die “Narren um Christi Willen” in der Ostkirche’, *Kirche in Osten* 2 (1959), 34. It is worth noting that this Akkadian word was also used in Assyrian tradition to designate the madman who was ritually placed on the king’s throne and then killed: see V. V. Ivanov, ‘Iz zametok o stroenii i funktsiakh karnaval’nogo obraza’, in *Problemy poetiki i istorii literatury* (Saransk, 1973), 2. Thence begins the parallel existence of the jester-fool and the holy fool.

<sup>54</sup> T. Spidlik, ‘Fous pour le Christ: I: En Orient’, *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, v (1964), col. 752.

<sup>55</sup> Grosdidier de Matons, ‘Les thèmes’, 279.

<sup>56</sup> L. Van Rompay, ‘“Life of Symeon Salos”: First Soundings’, *Philohistor: Miscellanea in Honorem C. Laga Septuagenarii*, ed. A. Schoors and P. Van Deun (Louvain, 1994), 396.

<sup>57</sup> We should reject on linguistic grounds a superficially attractive link to the Buriat *shali*, meaning ‘to talk nonsense’, ‘to make mischief’ (personal communication from E. A. Khelinskii). There is similarly no link with Slavonic *shalyi* or Lithuanian *selytis*, ‘to play the fool’, etc.: here the roots go back to the Indo-European *qhel*, which led in Greek to *khalis*, ‘disturbed’ (H. Peterson, ‘Studien über Slav. *ch-*’, *Archiv für slavische Philologie* 35 (1913), 368) or to *keleo*, ‘to enchant’ (V. Machek, ‘Untersuchungen zum Problem des anlautenden *ch-* im Slavischen’, *Slavia* 16 (1939), 184–5), but definitely not to *salos*.

appears in the Egyptian collection known as the *Lausiaca History*, whose author, Palladios, is aware of its novelty: ‘this is what they call people who are afflicted [in the mind]’, he explains.<sup>58</sup> Several examples show that initially the terms *salos* and *moros* were synonymous. In the heyday of holy foolery the Eastern word almost ousted the Greek, but the language again admitted the neutral, perhaps less controversial, terms once holy foolery became an object of persecution.

The word *salos* was not originally a religious term. In a private letter dating from the fifth century and preserved in one of the papyri from Oxyrhynchus, it is used in an entirely mundane context, in a dispute over the occupancy of a property: ‘I want you... to know how much trouble we had with that imbecile (σαλοῦ ἐκείνου) Horos until we could eject him.’<sup>59</sup> Also in the fifth century, the word was used by Hesychios of Alexandria in his ‘Lexicon’: ὑσθλός = σαλός, φλυαρός (vacuous = mad, babbler),<sup>60</sup> Thus *salos* was at first a quite secular expression; and even subsequently, after it had become a religious term, it did not disappear entirely from colloquial, everyday secular usage<sup>61</sup> (see below, p. 205).

<sup>58</sup> C. Butler (ed.), *The Lausiaca History of Palladius*, ii, Texts and Studies VI. 2 (Cambridge, 1904), 99. There is no such aside in the Syriac translation of Palladios: see R. Draguet, *Les formes syriaques de la matière de l’Histoire Lausiaque*, ii, CSCO 398 (Louvain, 1978), 238–45.

<sup>59</sup> *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, lxxv, ed. M. Sirivianou (London, 1989), 146 (no. 3865). I am grateful to C. Zuckerman for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>60</sup> Hesychios of Alexandria, *Lexicon*, ed. M. Schmidt, iv (Jena, 1863), 220, no. 826.

<sup>61</sup> Originally the word *salos* also meant ‘deaf-mute’; this meaning follows from the vita of Gregory of Agrigentum (*BHG*, 707): ‘The abbot said: “Sir,

In Christian texts the word *salos* is initially applied to anchorite monks, first in Egypt, then in Palestine. Here is a typical example from a collection of *Apophthegmata patrum*:<sup>62</sup>

A certain official heard of the monk Moses and went to the Skete to see him, but Moses was informed of this and fled into a swamp. [On his way Moses by chance encountered the official and his retinue.] They said, ‘Father, where is the cell of the monk Moses?’ And he replied: ‘What do you want from him? He is a madman (*ἀνθρώπος σαλός ἐστι*).’<sup>63</sup> The official turned back and related this to the monks, who were grieved that anybody should speak thus of the holy man.<sup>64</sup> But when they learned of the man’s appearance, they said: ‘This was father Moses himself. He answered you thus so as not to converse with you.’ The official departed, having received great benefit.<sup>65</sup>

this is a *salos*: he can neither speak, nor hear.” The saint prayed, then he took the brother by the hand and said “Speak normally and hear!” He screamed instantly’, *Vita s. Gregorii Agrigentini*, PG 116, col. 232. It is noteworthy that in the metaphrastic version of this *vita* the same character is referred to as *paraphoros* (‘mad’), ‘*Vita s. Gregorii Agrigentini*’, PG 98, col. 632, which indicates that by the tenth century the meaning ‘deaf-mute’ had disappeared.

<sup>62</sup> *Apophthegmata patrum*: collections of memorable sayings and stories of monks, mainly anchorites. The composition of these collections varied over time, and they were translated into many languages: see *BHG*, 1442u–1448n; *CPG*, 5558–620.

<sup>63</sup> Variants in the Greek manuscripts include *salos kai hairetikos* (‘a madman and a heretic’, with the latter word scratched out), *salos kai hamartolos* (‘a madman and a sinner’). The Latin version reads *homo fatuus est et haereticus*, PL 73, col. 967; and the Slavonic has *mam’n’ i bliadiv’* (‘lazy and heretic’): see *Drevnii paterik, izlozhennyi po glavam* (Moscow, 1899), 136.

<sup>64</sup> This clearly implies that the word was seen as negative.

<sup>65</sup> PG 65, col. 285.

Another example of the use of the word *salos*, this time in Palestine:

Near the village where the blessed Silvanus lived, was the abode of one of the brethren, who simulated foolishness (*προσποιοῦμενος μωρίαν*): whenever he encountered another brother, he would immediately laugh and do the other suchlike things (*καὶ λοιπὰ ἐκ τούτου*), and then they would go away and leave him.

[When a group of venerable hermits came to visit Silvanus and asked permission to visit all the monks], Silvanus said to his attendant: ‘See that you do not take them to that madman, lest they be led astray (*πρὸς τὸν σαλὸν ἐκεῖνον, ἵνα μὴ σκανδαλισθοῦσι*).’

[But the holy elders declared that they had not seen everybody, and despite Silvanus’ assurances they departed dissatisfied. The attendant reported that he had not taken them to see ‘the mad brother (*πρὸς σαλὸν ἀδελφόν*)’. Pondering this incident, Silvanus discreetly went to the cell of the ‘brother who simulated foolishness (*ἀδελφὸν ὑποκρινόμενον τὴν μωρίαν*)’ and, looking surreptitiously inside, he saw that the monk was sitting in front of two baskets.]

When the monk noticed Silvanus he burst out laughing, as usual. The elder said: ‘Stop this and tell me why you are sitting thus,’ but the monk again burst out laughing. Then Silvanus said: ‘You know that I never leave my cell except on Saturdays and Sundays, yet now I have left it in the middle of the week, for God has sent me to you.’

[Only then did the monk abandon his pretence. He explained to Silvanus that he put pebbles into each of the baskets, depending on whether he had good or bad thoughts in his head: if the ‘bad’ basket was the heavier, then on that day he would not eat. Silvanus



was delighted, and he understood that the group of hermits had come ‘wishing to make known this monk’s virtue.’]<sup>66</sup>

This tale is curious in two respects. First, the word *salos* is used only in direct speech. The narrator himself uses descriptive expressions instead, and declares that the holy fool is ‘simulating’ even before the pretence is revealed. Secondly, the virtue of the holy fool has no connection with his role-playing and is certainly not derived from it.

John of Ephesos also depicts holy foolery as a means of averting the reverential attentions of others. St Maro (*BHO*, 18) would drive away visitors, saying: ‘Why do you come to me, the madman and man of evil life?’ Yet the stone to which the holy man had chained himself attracted ever greater numbers of pilgrims. Then he:

would speak to many with simple and ridiculous words, and like a fool, saying, ‘Why then come you to a madman? Have you, pray, seen anyone fouler than I am? Since I am bound to a stone like a malefactor, or as a vicious dog... know you not that, if it were open to me to escape hence, I should like each one of you have both made a house for myself and had a wife and children? ...’ But those who knew the blessed man’s character and way of life used to say when they heard these things: ‘Yes, sir, we also are come as to a criminal...’ But those who were not thoroughly acquainted with him... wondered greatly.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>66</sup> *Les apophtegmes des pères: Collection systématique*, chs. 1–9, ed. J.-C. Guy SC 387 (Paris, 1993), § 8.32.8–36 (*BHG*, 1450 E); PO 8.178–9. Cf. *Drevnii paterik*, 140–2, no. 3. 31.

<sup>67</sup> John of Ephesos, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, ed. E. W. Brooks, PO 17, fasc. 1 (1923), 64–5, 68–9. Cf. M. Whitby, ‘Maro the Dendrite: An Anti-Social Holy Man?’, *Homo Viator: Classical Essays for J. Bramble*, ed. M. Whitby et al. (Bristol, 1987), 310–12.

In this extract also, the saint acts mad in self-defence. The pretence does not in itself add to his sanctity.

By contrast, in one of the tales in the *Apophthegmata patrum* we read of how people came to the monk Ammon, and he ‘played the fool (ἐμωροποιείει)’.

And one woman stood up near him and said: ‘This monk is a fool (σαλός).’ When the holy man heard this he said to her aloud: ‘How much labour have I spent in the wilderness in order to acquire this foolishness (σαλότητα), and because of you I am deprived of it today.’<sup>68</sup>

Ammon’s answer seems to imply that a *salos* is a holy man who hides his holiness behind the mask of a fool (*moros*), and as soon as his game is revealed he can no longer be called a holy fool. If this is the case, then we have here the first example of holy foolery as it was to become in its heyday, but the author of the text is apparently unaware of its significance, so the story looks somewhat odd.

For a long time the word *salos* continued to be used in a purely negative sense. Take, for example, the tale of Eulogios. This elder came to the holy man Joseph and was disappointed that Joseph gave no sign of being especially ascetic. Yet when fog forced him to return to Joseph’s monastery, he caught him unawares and discovered that in his humility he had hitherto simply concealed his asceticism. In particular, it emerged that the brethren drank salt water. Joseph in some embarrassment assured Eulogios that ‘the brother who mistakenly mixed [the salt and fresh water] is mad (σαλός)’.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>68</sup> PG 65, col. 121. Cf. *Drevnii paterik*, 274, no. 15. 12.

<sup>69</sup> PG 65, cols. 169–72. Cf. *Drevnii paterik*, 132–4, no. 8. 7 (4).

A central feature of classic holy foolery is that the fool represents himself as worse than he really is—just as Joseph does here. However, such behaviour had not yet been elaborated as a concept, nor had the word *salos* become firmly associated with voluntary self-abasement, and so Joseph here uses it in a non-technical, non-terminological sense.

For an utterly exotic usage of the word *salos* we turn to the story of John, pupil of Paul. The teacher sends his disciple into the valley:

but [the pupil] said to him: ‘How can I do this, father? There is a hyena in the valley.’ The holy man jokingly (*χαριεντιζόμενος*) replied: ‘If it attacks you, tie it up and bring it here.’ That evening the monk set out on his journey, and the hyena did indeed attack him, yet he himself rushed at the hyena, following the holy man’s instruction. The hyena turned and fled, but the monk chased after it, saying: ‘My teacher told me that I was to tie you up.’ And he caught the hyena and tied it up. Meanwhile the holy man was concerned as he sat and waited for his disciple. Then the latter returned, carrying the bound hyena. Seeing this, the holy man was amazed, and he beat his disciple in order to chasten him, saying: ‘You madman, have you brought me a mad dog (*Σαλέ, κύνα σαλὸν ἤνεγκας*)?’ And immediately the elder untied the hyena and released it.<sup>70</sup>

The hyena is presumably called a mad dog (*salos kyon*) because of its laugh (see above on the laughing monk), but with regard to his simple-minded pupil, Paul uses the word *salos* as a form of abuse. Indeed, if anyone here displays any features of holy foolery, it is Paul himself rather than

<sup>70</sup> PG 65, col. 240.

his pupil. This brings us to the problem of Christian education.

\* \* \*

The highest Christian virtue was the renunciation of the will. In cenobitic monasteries this was among the hardest tests. In the tales of the Egyptian hermits we read of an anchorite (*boskomenos*) who lived with a herd of wild buffalo and ate grass with them. ‘Lord’, prayed the anchorite, ‘how can I perfect myself still further?’ And he heard a voice: ‘Go to a certain koinobion and do everything that you are told.’ The anchorite obeyed:

And the younger monks began to teach him humility, and they said to him: ‘Do this, idiot (*idiota*), and do that, you mad old man (*σαλὲ γέρων*).’ And he prayed to God in his suffering, saying: ‘Lord, I cannot serve people; send me back to the buffalo.’ And God released him and he returned to his former place to graze with the buffalo.<sup>71</sup>

After taking the vow of obedience, monks endeavoured to fulfil even the most absurd, humiliating, or temptation-filled injunctions of their spiritual mentors. So long as the latter acted with their disciples’ knowledge and assent, one cannot call their behaviour provocative, and hence it was not, in the strict sense, holy foolery. Yet the two do share the notion of deliberately, for edificatory purposes, leading others into sin, and it similarly raises the question of

<sup>71</sup> Nau, ‘Histoires’, 181.

whether righteous behaviour must adhere to standard norms, or whether one can do evil in the cause of good.

There are numerous examples of how a teacher deliberately gives sinful and provocative instructions so as to test the obedience of his spiritual children. One monk ordered a man to throw his son into the river (an obvious echo of Abraham's sacrifice, though here we are concerned with the testing of man by man rather than by God);<sup>72</sup> another—to throw a sacred book into the stove;<sup>73</sup> another—to steal from his brother monks;<sup>74</sup> and another (*BHG*, 1440x) forbade a disciple to embrace his parents, who had come to visit him, yet kept on summoning him from his cell and sending him back again.<sup>75</sup> One must obey one's spiritual father even if he leads one into sin.<sup>76</sup>

Besides its somewhat sinister aspects, absolute obedience can also contain an element of buffoonery, of the carnivalesque. For example: father Dorotheos mockingly (*hos diasyron*) used to set his disciple Dositheos all sorts of absurd tasks, which the latter always fulfilled to the letter.<sup>77</sup> The story of John and Paul and the hyena is itself manifestly 'carnavalesque'. Perhaps the clearest sense of the ambiguity of obedience comes across in a story told by John Climacus.

<sup>72</sup> PG 65 cols. 394–401.

<sup>73</sup> Nau, 'Histoires', 179–80.

<sup>74</sup> Paulos Evergetinos, *Synagoge ton theophthoggon rhematon kai didaskalion* (Istanbul, 1861), 134.

<sup>75</sup> J. Wortley, 'A Repertoire of Byzantine "Beneficial Tales" no. 923'. See [home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~wortley/intro.html](http://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~wortley/intro.html)

<sup>76</sup> Barsanuphios and John of Gaza, *Correspondance*, ed. F. Neyt and P. De Angelis-Noah, ii. 1, SC 450 (Paris, 2000), § 288.10–17.

<sup>77</sup> Dorotheos of Gaza, *Oeuvres spirituelles*, ed. L. Regnault and J. de Préville, SC 92 (Paris, 1963), 140–2.

Brother Abbakyros lived for fifteen years in the monastery, where:

everyone humiliated him. Almost every day I saw the servants chase him from the refectory. This monk was somewhat excessively uninhibited in his speech (*μικρὸν πάνυ περὶ τὴν γλῶσσαν ἀκράτητος*). I said to him: ‘Brother Abbakyros, why does barely a day go by without my seeing you being driven from the refectory, so that you often go to bed with no supper?’ And he answered: ‘Believe me, father, this is how the brethren test me (*δοκιμάζουσι*) to see whether I am fit for the monastic life. They don’t really mean what they do (*οὐκ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ τοῦτο ποιοῦσι*). I know their purpose, so I bear it all lightly.’<sup>78</sup>

Everything here looks perfectly decent and pious, except for the odd phrase about the monk’s ‘uninhibited’ speech. The text does not make it clear whether this uninhibitedness was the reason he was ejected from the refectory, or whether it was merely an attendant circumstance. The most natural explanation is that the monks left Abbakyros without food as punishment for his notorious uninhibitedness. Yet Abbakyros himself insists that they did not really mean it (*ouk en aletheia*),<sup>79</sup> even though he really was left without food. Perhaps, then, this ‘uninhibitedness’ was a symptom or manifestation of an underlying aggression of which even he may not have been fully aware. This cluster of

<sup>78</sup> John Climacus, *Scala Paradisi*, PG 78, col. 693 (cf. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, transl. C. Luibheid and N. Russell (London, 1982), 100).

<sup>79</sup> There was no unanimity among monastic authorities on when it is important to play the fool: see: Barsanuphios and John of Gaza, *Correspondance*, i, SC 426 (Paris, 2000), 334–6.

ambiguities, with humility in the guise of revolt and aggression in the guise of instruction, likewise contains the seeds of future holy foolery.

This is demonstrated by a story in which obedience actually does turn into holy foolery. John Climacus relates that the monk Antiochos had a dream of a tax collector, who demanded a hundred *litra*. He realized that the dream referred to his spiritual debt, so he lived for three years ‘in total obedience, and all in the monastery humiliated and tormented him as a stranger’. But again the tax collector appeared to him, saying that he still owed ten *litra*. The monk said to himself:

‘you’ll have to try harder, humble Antiochos’. And thenceforth I began to pretend to be mad (τὸν ἑξήχρον ὑποκρίνεσθαι), though without slacking in my service . . . Those merciless monks loaded me with all the most arduous tasks in the monastery.<sup>80</sup>

Thus the monk lived for thirteen years. Only then was he released from his ‘debt’. This is the first occasion on which the pretence of madness is linked directly to the eradication of the will.

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Thus far, we have considered precursors of holy foolery in relation to concepts of insanity and its simulation. But in Byzantine eyes the holy fool was a saint. We therefore also

<sup>80</sup> John Climacus, *Scala Paradisi*, col. 721; cf. Climacus, *The Ladder*, transl. Luibheid and Russell, 116–17.

need to consider Byzantine notions of sanctity, at least in those areas that are relevant to the present study.

Peter Brown has remarked that Eastern Christianity, by contrast with its Western version, has always had a sense that the world is saturated with sanctity which is just waiting for the opportunity to manifest itself.<sup>81</sup> This outlook (which no Byzantine writer describes as such) implied that sanctity could overflow, so to speak, even into somebody who neither wanted it nor suspected it. For example, one of the 'beneficial tales' (the genre was especially popular from the late fourth to the sixth century) (*BHG*, 1450 kb) tells of a robber who dressed up as a monk and went to a women's monastery near Antioch, intending to open the gates at night so as to let in his accomplices. The sisters received him with reverence, as a holy man, and washed his feet, and by this water one of the nuns was cured of her paralysis. Embarrassed by their requests for his blessing, the robber confessed to the sisters, but they were unwilling to believe him. In the end he really did become a monk, as did all his accomplices.<sup>82</sup>

This sense that the world was permeated with sanctity, which could reveal itself where you least expect it, gave rise to a favourite motif of Byzantine hagiography: the motif of the 'secret servants of the Lord'. Many 'beneficial tales' tell essentially the same story. An ascetic (usually an anchorite) prays to God, asking to be told whether there is a righteous man on earth who equals him in feats of asceticism. God

<sup>81</sup> P. Brown, 'Eastern and Western Christendom in Late Antiquity: A Parting of the Ways', in *idem*, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1982), 179–88.

<sup>82</sup> Wortley, 'A Repertoire', no. 861.



invariably replies in the affirmative, and each time God's nomination sounds unexpected and astonishing.

The *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* contains a long story about a famous hermit, Paphnutios, who asks God this question three times. God first names a flute-player. The righteous elder visits him and asks about his feats, but the flute-player insists that he is 'a sinner, a drunk, and a lecher'. He admits, however, that once he saved a virgin from rape and that once he helped a worthy lady who fell into poverty. When Paphnutios asks again, God directs him to a village elder. The curious monk comes to visit him and learns that he enforces social justice in his village. God's third response leads to a fabulously rich Alexandrian merchant, who gives all his wealth to the poor.<sup>83</sup> In each case Paphnutios admits that these laymen are truly righteous, but he still feels somewhat superior to them. He tells all of them that their virtue will remain imperfect unless they leave the world and join him in the desert. Later, as we shall see, this detail disappears from analogous tales: the curious hermit comes to feel more and more inferior, while the 'secret servant' grows more self-assured.

In another story (*BHG*, 1449i) an anchorite named Pырhос asks God the same question, only to learn that he is surpassed in righteousness by a certain Sergios, who is in charge of Alexandria's brothels.<sup>84</sup> Then there is the tale of

<sup>83</sup> *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, ed. A.-J. Festugière (Brussels, 1971), 102–9; cf. M. Richard, 'Les textes hagiographiques du Codex Philothéou', *AB* 93 (1975), 151.

<sup>84</sup> J. Wortley (ed.), *Les récits édifiants de Paul, évêque de Monembasie, et d'autres auteurs* (Paris, 1987), 128–30, 170.

the famous St Makarios, who turns out to be no more favoured by God than two lay sisters who persuaded their husbands to practice sexual abstinence.<sup>85</sup> In the vita of Antony the hermit learns that he is inferior to a leather-worker from Alexandria, whose only virtue is that every day he says to himself that all the Alexandrians will go to heaven while he alone—on account of his sins—will go to hell. Antony admits that he has not yet achieved such a level of virtue.<sup>86</sup>

A detailed account of a ‘secret servant’ can be found in the vita of St Theodulos. In reply to the traditional question, Theodulos—a stylite—learns that he is inferior to Kornelios, a bandore-player from Damascus:

Hearing this, Theodulos begins to cry and says: ‘Woe is me, unfortunate and forsaken! So, my Lord, your slave is inferior to a bandore-player? I, who have toiled and suffered for so many years, I, my Lord, am lowlier than a bandore-player? Oh what a worthless and contemptible end! What does this ignominy mean, Lord, that You have ranked me below a bandore-player? I, who stand on a pillar, am worse than one who plays on a stage! I, fasting and wakeful, am worse than the devil’s bandore-player!’<sup>87</sup>

After this vehement and theomachic tirade, Theodulos can no longer stand on his pillar. He descends and goes to Damascus in search of Kornelios the bandore-player. A passer-by, asked about Kornelios, says: ‘Father, horse races

<sup>85</sup> ‘Aphrothegmata sur saint Macaire’, *Annales du Musée Guimet* 25 (1894), 228–30.

<sup>86</sup> *Vitae patrum*, PL 73, col. 1038. The list of such examples can easily be continued: cf. PG 65, cols. 84, 168–9.

<sup>87</sup> *Vita Theoduli Stylitae*, in *AASS Maii*, v (1866), 753.

are now being held. Kornelios spends his time there.' On learning that the man has not only a disgraceful trade but also a disgraceful passion, Theodulos again begins to cry, much to the passer-by's concern. After the race the bandore-player himself appears, 'carrying his instrument under one arm and embracing a whore with the other'. When Theodulos asks him about his spiritual feats, Kornelios stares: 'Please, father! Why do you mock me, a sinner? Why do you ask me, who lives among harlots and jesters?' But the elder insists that the bandore-player remember. Kornelios thinks for a while, and then says that once he gave all his savings to a woman who was about to sell her body in order to buy her husband out of jail; but he does not regard this as a virtuous, spiritual act, and he begs the elder not to think him complacent. Yet Theodulos rejoices. In his eyes, justice has triumphed. He throws himself at the bandore-player's feet, and as he leaves he repeats to himself: 'Indeed the Lord knows His people.'<sup>88</sup>

The reasons given for the laymen's elevation are not obviously compelling, and in a number of other stories the explanations sound absurd. For example (*BHG*, 1438i), a hermit learns that he is no better than the city greengrocer who eats at night, gives to the poor everything he does not need, and believes that he is worse than everybody else. Still the elder is unconvinced of the greengrocer's superior righteousness. But when he hears that the greengrocer is not even

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 754; cf. H. Delehaye, *Saints stylites* (Brussels, 1925), CXVIII–CXIX.

irritated by the sound of singing from the street, the anchorite has to admit defeat.<sup>89</sup>

In the still more detailed ‘Tale of a Sign-Bearing Father’ (BHG, 1445ub–v) a hermit is told that the emperor Theodosios is more righteous than he. When they meet, the emperor denies that he has performed any spiritual feats. But when pressed by the elder, he discloses one after another his secret virtues: he visits hospitals at night and heals ulcers; he lives with his wife as if she were his sister; he wears chains under his purple robes. However, the hermit does not think that this is enough to outweigh his own achievements. Finally the emperor confesses:

‘When horse races are held, in accordance with the custom of our State, I sit there as befits my Imperial duties; but when the race begins, I do not raise my eyes but proceed with my regular tasks.’ Hearing this, the astonished elder throws himself at the emperor’s feet and says, ‘I . . . have not attained this degree of virtue.’<sup>90</sup>

On the surface, the moral of all these stories is that monks should not feel superior to laymen, since the latter have their own ways of achieving sanctity.<sup>91</sup> However, this cannot be all, since there are other stories of the same type in which all the characters are monks, so that the comparison between monks and laymen cannot be paramount.

<sup>89</sup> Wortley, ‘A Repertoire’, no. 538.

<sup>90</sup> J. Rufus, *Plérophories*, Appendix, PO 8 (1912), 173–4; cf. Kh. Loparev, ‘Povest’ ob imperatore Feodosii II’, *VV* 5 (1898), 67–76. There are insufficient grounds for Loparev’s view (88–9) that the ‘Tale’ was compiled in the twelfth century.

<sup>91</sup> Loparev, ‘Povest’’, 65.

Early 'secret servants' look like ordinary laymen; later they begin to look like the worst of laymen. The early 'secret servants' have no inkling of their own sanctity; later they become aware of it, and try as hard as they can to hide it from others. As the saints' awareness of their own status grows, so the grounds for it appear more obscure to the reader. The 'gift' of sanctity becomes ever further removed from the personal qualities of its bearer. At the same time, the motif of asking God gradually disappears from hagiography. The righteous man enquiring as to who is the more righteous is no longer the central figure. He becomes auxiliary, and eventually turns into the saint's confidant (indispensable in the 'classic' vita of a holy fool).<sup>92</sup>

Thus the 'democratic' character of the the early tales of 'secret servants' (which imply that anyone can achieve sainthood) was in time replaced by an 'aristocratic' assumption (that God's chosen ones would remain his chosen ones in spite of everything). Hence the emergence of the figure of the holy fool: a saint 'in spite of', rather than a saint 'because of'.

<sup>92</sup> S. Ivanov, 'From "Secret Servants of God" to "Fools for Christ's Sake" in Byzantine Hagiography', in *The Holy Fool in Byzantium and Russia* (Bergen, 1994), 5–17.

## 2

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### Insane Saints

As cenobitic monasteries proliferated and became the dominant form of monasticism, so holy foolery migrated to the cenobion. Whereas the anchorite had been able, by and large, to regulate his own relations with the outside world, a monk feigning madness in the cenobion put himself under constant stress. John of Ephesos tells of the complications which can arise from the transfer of exotic habits from the desert into the monastic community. John reports his conversation with a monk who had spent five years with a stone in his mouth. John thought that ‘this man is a solitary, and further he is his own master, and there is none to command him, and it is easy for him . . . but how are we [cenobitic monks] able to do so?’ As the monk Zacharias said on another occasion: ‘I know, my son, that these things are to many folly, and lead them to deplorable laughter, but to me they are useful.’<sup>1</sup>

Both John Climacus and Isaac Syrus (Isaac of Nineveh) leave descriptions of simulation in the cenobion. John’s narrative runs as follows:

<sup>1</sup> John of Ephesos, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 256–8, 272.

He who conquers his passions thereby wounds the demons, and he who pretends to be in the grip of passions (τὰ πάθη ὑποκρινόμενος ἔχειν) thereby deceives his enemies [the demons] while himself remaining invulnerable to them. Once, a brother was subjected to some indignity. In fact he was completely untouched by this in his heart, yet, offering up a prayer in his mind, he bewailed his indignities aloud, concealing his inner equanimity with faked passion (δὲ ἐπιπλάστου πάθους). Another brother, who had absolutely no desire for high office, made a show (ὑπεκρίνατο) of being very keen on it. Or: how can one express the chastity of the monk who entered a brothel ostensibly for sinful purposes while in fact he was trying to persuade a whore to take up the spiritual struggle? Or again: early in the morning someone brought to a certain silentary a bunch of grapes; and when he had left, the silentary began to devour the grapes avidly—though he took no pleasure in this but simply wanted to have the demons believe that he was a glutton. Another brother lost some small saplings and for a whole day he made himself out to be (ἐποίει ἑαυτόν) upset. Such feats require great vigilance, so that, in mocking (ἐμπαίζειν), one should not oneself be mocked.<sup>2</sup>

And this is what Isaac Syrus has to say:

Some deliberately cultivated for themselves a reputation for coarseness, though they were not really so; others endured being known as fornicators although actually they were anything but this. Others asked their slanderers' forgiveness for transgressions that they had not committed . . . Finally, others, in order not to be praised for the virtuous life that they led in secret, feigned insanity (ἐν σχήματι παραπληγῶν), filled with the divine will. Their

<sup>2</sup> John Climacus, *Scala Paradisi*, PG 88, col. 1064.

perfection was so extraordinary that the very angels in heaven praised them for their fortitude.<sup>3</sup>

\* \* \*

The first tale dedicated specifically to a fake fool in a cenobitic monastery is the legend of Isidora (*BHG*, 958z–959, 1399x),<sup>4</sup> or rather of a nameless Egyptian nun who later came to be called Isidora.<sup>5</sup> Her story is told by Palladios.

In the Tabennisi nunnery in Upper Egypt there lived a nun whom everyone thought mad, so she was kept in the kitchen and mocked and ridiculed. But once the monastery was visited by Piteroum, a great holy man, who had been told by an angel that here, in this nunnery, lived the one who was holier than he was himself. He was to recognize her by the crown on her head. All the nuns were shown to him, but not one of them matched the description. Piteroum insisted that there must be someone else living in the community, to which they replied, ‘Well, we do have the madwoman (*σαλή*) in the kitchen.’ So they dragged out the ‘madwoman’, who had a filthy rag bound around her head. Recognizing this ‘crown’, Piteroum prostrated himself:

<sup>3</sup> Isaac Syrus, *Oeuvres spirituelles*, transl. J. Tourailles (Paris, 1981), 299; Latin transl., see *Liber de contemptu mundi*, PG 86, col. 832.

<sup>4</sup> Note that both in Antiquity and in the Western Middle Ages, women were regarded as being closer to insanity and served as a symbol of insanity: see J.-M. Fritz, *Le discours du fou au Moyen Age (XIIe–XIIIe s.)* (Paris, 1992), 88–91, 167; yet ‘Isidora’ is the only woman among the Byzantine or classic Russian holy fools, cf.: F. Rizzo Nero, ‘Percorsi di santità: “σαλή” versus “σαλός”’, *Bollettino delle badie greca di Grottaferrata* NS 35 (1991), 326.

<sup>5</sup> In the medieval West the legend of Isidora gave rise to the emergence of the Cinderella tale: see J. Duffy, ‘Some Byzantine Narratives in the Alphabet of Tales’, [www.cca.unimelb.edu.au/byznarr/abstracts.html](http://www.cca.unimelb.edu.au/byznarr/abstracts.html)



The nuns rushed to pick him up, saying: ‘Father, do not bring shame upon yourself. She is mad (σαλή ἐστι).’ But Piteroum answered: ‘It is you who are mad, but she is my *amma* and yours (this was how they called spiritual mothers). I pray that I may be found worthy of her at the Day of Judgement’. Hearing this, the women fell at his feet and confessed their various transgressions: one, that she had splashed dishwater on [the mad-woman], another that she had hit her with her fists, a third that she had smeared her nose with mustard—every last one of them told of their multifarious misdeeds.<sup>6</sup>

But the righteous woman fled the nunnery.<sup>7</sup>

Although this is a much-studied text-book tale of early holy foolery,<sup>8</sup> Palladios’ heroine is not yet a holy fool in the true sense. The Tabennesiot nun is always silent (in the Greek version the reader does not even discover her name); she tries hard to prevent herself from being unmasked (it eventually takes a miracle); she even resists when Piteroum demands to see her, and she has to be dragged forcibly. She imposes herself on nobody, provokes

<sup>6</sup> S. Poliakova, ‘Vizantiiskie legendy kak literaturnoe iavlenie’, in *Vizantiiskie legendy* (Leningrad, 1972), 257, argues that the author of this tale ‘fails to notice—whether by naivety or by oversight—that he is painting a negative picture of life at the nunnery’. A more persuasive explanation, however, is that the negative portrayal is deliberate, so as to highlight the magnitude of the heroine’s spiritual feat.

<sup>7</sup> C. Butler (ed.), *The Lausiatic History of Palladius*, ii, Texts and Studies vi. 2 (Cambridge, 1904), 98–100. For another example of flight from a monastery in order to avoid honours, cf. the Syriac version of the vita of St Hilaria: A. J. Wensinck, *Legends of Eastern Saints*, ii (Leiden, 1913), pp. xxvii, 54.

<sup>8</sup> W. Bousset, ‘Der verborgene Heilige’, *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 21 (1922); M. de Certeau, ‘Le silence de l’Absolu: Folles et fous de Dieu’, *Recherches de science religieuse* 67 (1979); K. Vogt, ‘La moniale folle du monastère des Tabennesiotes’, *Symbolae Osloenses* 62 (1987), etc.

nobody. She is meek in her apparent madness, humility personified. Her virtues—obedience, modesty, the repudiation of vanity—are common enough among ‘ordinary’ saints.

Michel de Certeau points out that the skivvy in the nunnery’s kitchen is beyond categorization. She is outside all conventions, including conventions of language: Piteroum does not succeed in making her a saint, for she eludes objectification in whatever capacity. She is the absolute.<sup>9</sup> Yet her estrangement is not in fact complete. If it were, she would have avoided people altogether. She still needs spectators. Even Certeau, despite his own theory, is forced to concede that the behaviour of this hagiographic Cinderella does include a degree of provocation.<sup>10</sup>

We find the same early type of ‘inoffensive’ holy foolery in another *vita* from the fifth century: the legend of the cook Euphrosynos (*BHG*, 628):<sup>11</sup>

They despised him as a simpleton (*ιδιώτης*), and only trusted him to do the cooking. He performed many secret deeds [of virtue]...but people saw him only when he was dirty after his cooking, and in shabby clothes.<sup>12</sup>

Covered in soot, as if in opulent clothing, he was hourly subjected to public scolding and taunting. Everyone despised him, for everything he did. It was as if he was an obnoxious abomination. Sometimes they would thrash him and call him a useless slave, and

<sup>9</sup> M. de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, i (Chicago, 1986), 38–9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>11</sup> F. Nau and L. Clugnet, ‘Vies et récits d’anachorètes’, *ROC* 10 (1905), 42–5. The same story found its way into the tenth-century *vita* of St Blasios of Amorion: *De s. Vlasio Amoriensi*, in *AASS Novembris*, iv (1925), 658–9.

<sup>12</sup> Nau and Clugnet, ‘Vies’, 42.

they would wear him down with hunger and thirst. Yet every day he noted down how he profited from remarkable benefits, by which he meant precisely the abuse meted out to him by all, for he took it as praise.<sup>13</sup>

Once a pious elder of the monastery had a dream of heaven, where, to his great surprise, he met Euphrosynos. Euphrosynos worked there as a watchman, whereas the elder himself had only managed to get in after three years of ceaseless spiritual labours. At the elder's request, Euphrosynos gave him three paradise apples, which he found in his cell when he woke up. The elder rushed to the church and told the monks:

'Pray . . . in our monastery we have a precious pearl: Euphrosynos. We despised him as an ignoramus (*ἀγράμματος*), but he is deemed more worthy of God's grace than any of us' . . . But Euphrosynos, the cook of whom the elder spoke . . . opened a side door and went out of the church, and to this day he has not shown himself, for he shunned earthly praise.<sup>14</sup>

Another version of the same story (*BHG*, 1440md) includes a motif in which an elder asked God who could compare with him in holiness, and was told that there was such a monk in the neighbouring monastery. The elder came to the monastery and asked that all the monks be brought before him:

And on the abbot's instructions all the monks came out, but the elder did not see the one about whom he had been told, and he asked: 'Is there another brother here?' And [the abbot] replied:

<sup>13</sup> *De s. Vlasio Amoriensi*, 656.

<sup>14</sup> Nau and Clugnet, 'Vies', 45.

‘Yes, but he is mad (σαλός ἐστι) and he works in the garden.’ The elder said: ‘Call him.’ So he was summoned, and when he appeared the elder stood up and kissed him and took him aside and said: ‘Tell me, what is your spiritual feat?’ And he answered: ‘I am a madman (ἄνθρωπος σαλός εἰμι).’ But the elder insisted, and eventually the monk revealed: ‘The abbot housed an ox in my cell, and every day the ox breaks the strands of the mat that I am weaving. I have endured this for thirty years, yet not once have I allowed myself any thought against the abbot, and not once have I beaten the ox. I bear it with fortitude, and weave my strands anew, and thank God.’ Hearing this, the elder was astonished.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, step by step, a story of secret sainthood is transformed into a story of human blindness; and true holy foolery is unthinkable without its context of human imperviousness and cruelty. For the moment, the secret saint does nothing to provoke aggression against himself; yet in this inoffensive ‘imbecile’ we can already detect—albeit concealed, in embryonic form—the ominously explosive potential which would later be scattered far beyond the confines of the monastic kitchen. The development of these aggressive tendencies can be seen in other stories, whose contents are in some respects reminiscent of the tale of the Tabennesiot nun.

In one such story, in the ‘Tales of Abba Daniel’, we read of how the elder and his disciple arrived at a nunnery and

<sup>15</sup> Paulos Evergetinos, *Synagoge*, 128. The tale of the gardener obviously imitates the vita of Euphrosynos, yet is also reminiscent of the vita of Isidora. The surviving text of the latter is older than that of the former, but we should remember that all these legends circulated in many versions, and it is not impossible that the earliest version of the story of Euphrosynos was as old as the story of Isidora. The motif of ‘holy foolery’ is less prominent in the behaviour of the cook/gardener than in the behaviour of the Tabennesiot nun.

asked to stay the night (*BHG*, 2101). For a long time they were not allowed in, but Daniel's great reputation melted the nuns' suspicions. A sister was sleeping in the courtyard. 'She's a drunkard (*μεθύστρια*), the elder was told, 'and we don't know what to do with her: we are worried about throwing her out of the nunnery, yet if we allow her to stay she will corrupt<sup>16</sup> the sisters.' They splashed water over the 'drunkard', but she just rubbed her eyes stiffly. 'As always', said the abbess in irritation, and led her guests to the refectory:

They gave the elder vegetable preserves, figs, and water, and they gave his disciple roast beans, a small piece of bread, and diluted wine; but the sisters were fed with many kinds of foods, and fish, and wine in abundance, and they ate much and they ate well, and nobody spoke.

After the meal Daniel enquired as to why he had been fed so modestly, to which the abbess replied: 'You are a monk, and I gave you food as befits a monk; your disciple is the disciple of a monk, and I gave him food as befits a disciple; but we are novices and ate the food of novices.'

That night, while the nunnery slept, the elder and his disciple arose and went surreptitiously to observe the 'drunkard'. They saw how she stood up, raised her hands towards the heavens and began to pray fervently, bowing as she did so. But as soon as she heard one of the sisters going to relieve herself, the 'drunkard' dropped to the ground and

<sup>16</sup> *ekbolizei*: see A. I. Papadopoulo-Kerameus, 'Melkie zametki i izvestiia', *VV* 15 (1908), 437.

started snoring. Daniel brought the abbess to watch, and she wept and said: ‘O, how much ill have we done to her!’

As soon as her pretence was unmasked, the ‘drunkard’ fled from the nunnery, but she left a note: ‘Pray for me and forgive me for the things in which I have sinned against you.’ A great wailing arose in the nunnery, but the elder said:

‘I came because of her. God loves such drunkards (τοιούτως γὰρ μεθυστὰς ἀγαπᾷ ὁ Θεός).’ Tearfully the sisters confessed to him their transgressions against that righteous woman, and in their cells they praised God, who alone knows the number of his secret servants.<sup>17</sup>

Thus ends this curious tale, which is, when examined, full of enigmas. Not only are we not told why the righteous woman manifests her sanctity in such an odd manner, but neither are we enlightened on the simple matter of how the episode in the refectory is supposed to relate to the main plot. The author pointedly abstains from expressing a view, and retreats behind the pedantic listing of the dishes and the abbess’s punctilious explanations. As far as we can tell, the abbess acted correctly: the wine in the refectory is perfectly permissible according to monastic *typika*,<sup>18</sup> and it was indeed incumbent on her to expel a reprobate nun from the community.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> L. Clugnet, ‘Vie et récits de l’abbé Daniel’, *ROC* 5 (1900), 69–70.

<sup>18</sup> M. Dembińska, ‘Food Consumption in Monasteries’, *Byzantion* 55 (1985), 440–2.

<sup>19</sup> C. Galatariotou, ‘Byzantine Women’s Monastic Communities: The Evidence of the *Typika*’, *JÖB* 38 (1988), 267–8.

On the face of it, therefore, we see pious obedient nuns, and the 'drunkard' as the black sheep in their midst. But through Daniel God ploughs up, as it were, this surface layer, and the hitherto hidden depths reveal that she, the drunkard, is the true saint. But why she? Had she performed great feats of piety? If so, we are not told. The only difference between her and the other nuns is that she prayed in secret while in public she pretended to be drunk, thereby inducing others to sin. Yet it is she who is the saint. There is no ambiguity: 'God loves such drunkards.' But if everything here is the opposite of what it appears to be, then the other nuns are not as virtuous as they seem. And their defect is not in the fact that they break rules, but in the fact that they are too punctilious in following them. The author of the parable tries to look impartial, but his disapproval of the nuns can be glimpsed in, for example, the way he asserts that they 'ate much and ate well', and in the pedantry of the abbess's explanations. Every detail is decent and proper and cannot be faulted. But taken together they amount to an insipid, mundane existence with no scope for the blinding light of the Celestial. The righteous 'drunkard' nun does not accuse the sisters, but she (or rather the hagiographer) reacts instinctively to the diminution of the Absolute. This reaction is a kind of parody of the correctness of the refectory: better to drink oneself into oblivion and wallow in the dirt (onlookers had no way of knowing that this was a deception) than to calculate meticulously what is due to whom according to the letter of the Rule.

The 'drunkard' differs from the Tabennesiot holy fool in an important way: she has come out of the kitchen into the

courtyard. Nobody is obliged even to notice the mild simpleton in the kitchen, still less to maltreat her, since she is innocent of her ‘madness’.<sup>20</sup> The behaviour of the ‘drunkard’ is much more of a public outrage and the situation is far more fraught with tension. The ‘drunkard’ will not let herself be ignored. She forces those around her to make a choice. ‘Something has to be done’ about her.

Thus the motif of the holy fool’s provocativeness enters hagiography.

Although the story of the Tabennesiot nun takes place in Egypt, it was first written down in Syriac or Greek.<sup>21</sup> No Coptic version survives, if indeed one ever existed. But the tale was translated into Latin, and the Latin version coincides with the Greek in all except one small detail: here the holy fool acquires a name—Isidora.<sup>22</sup> The unspoken reproach to the world, whose impact depended precisely on the fact that it was wordless, is suddenly disrupted by

<sup>20</sup> In a Syriac legend, which lies half-way between Palladios’ version and the ‘drunkard’ story, a nun feigns madness but at the same time ‘sprawls on the ground in the middle of the courtyard... as though in a drunken sleep’ and ‘sleeps by the monastery latrines’, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, transl. S. P. Brock and S. Ashbrook Harvey (Berkeley, 1987), 144–5.

<sup>21</sup> The surviving Syriac version is a translation from the Greek; see R. Draguet, *Les formes syriaques de la matière de l’Histoire Lausiaque*, i, CSCO 390 (Louvain, 1978), 60. I am grateful to Professor S. Brock for his help in studying the Syriac texts.

<sup>22</sup> *AASS Maii*, i (1968), 49–50. Later, the name Isidora returned to the Greek tradition. Filaret of Chernigov claimed that her Coptic name was Varankis: see *Zhitiia sviatykh podvizhnits Vostochnoi tserkvi* (St Petersburg, 1871), 72. This claim appears in several studies, but its source is unknown. There was no such name either in Coptic or in Ethiopic; see K. S. Kekelidze, ‘Epizod iz nachal’noi istorii egipetskogo monashestva’, in his *Etiudy po istorii drevnegruzinskoj literatury*, vii (Tbilisi, 1961), 82.



the sound of a name; both the Tabennesiot nun and the ‘drunkard’ had originally been nameless. Curiously, the name Isidora itself did not survive in subsequent versions, where the nun appears as Onesima (*BHO*, 814–16). We have several later variants of the story: Syriac, Garshuni (that is, an Arabic text in Syriac characters), Arabic, Ethiopic, and Georgian.<sup>23</sup>

Onesima was an empress, who renounced her wealth and abandoned her home:

Totally naked . . . she reached the place where the city’s refuse was brought. Here she gathered old rags to cover her nakedness, and she said: ‘I shall not stay where people might recognize me . . . I shall pretend to be foolish and mad, so that people insult me, and I shall endure their abuse and their beatings, and I shall do all this willingly.’<sup>24</sup>

Onesima spent forty years in the desert, and then decided to enter a monastery, saying to herself:

‘I shall make myself strange. The sisters will despise me and the abbess will punish me, and I shall endure all this from those who are younger than me, and . . . I shall endure the obloquy for the love of Christ . . . And when I fast, they will say “she is a glutton”; and when I abstain from wine, they will reckon me as drunk as at a feast; I will serve, and they will count me lazy.’

<sup>23</sup> On the interrelationships of these versions (except the Ethiopic) see N. P. Tsakadze, ‘Siriiskaia, arabskaia i gruzinskaia versii “Zhitiia sv. Nisimy”’, Ph.D. thesis (Tbilisi, 1975). The word *sale* was added to the name of Onesima in one of the Old Georgian manuscripts containing her vita, cf. M. Van Esbroeck, ‘La légende géorgienne de l’Ascète Nisime’, *Revue des études géorgiennes et caucasiennes* 1 (1985), 117, 124.

<sup>24</sup> Kekelidze, ‘Epizod’, 93–4.

She enters the monastery, which is called Sedrarum in the Syriac version, Bantasin in the Georgian version.<sup>25</sup> She is silent in response to all questioning. She even ‘did not want to walk, so she had to be compelled by force’.<sup>26</sup>

[She was tethered by three chains,] and she pretended to be mad... The sisters tried to wash her feet, but she would not allow them, and she tore their clothing... And every day, as she kneaded dough, she would stamp her feet and shout. Sometimes she even took the dough and hurled it to the floor, acting as if insane, and the sisters would beat her and pull her along the ground, at which she inwardly rejoiced... Each day she would carry a cup of water out to the travellers by the road, and each day she would smash the cup in the monastery’s courtyard, as if driven wild by a demon... But three times a year the place where the nuns went to perform their necessary functions was washed assiduously by her hands.

The end of the story is identical to that of the Tabennesiot holy fool: after forty years God sends a righteous man, an anchorite elder (the Ethiopic version—where the heroine is ‘Arsima’—calls this elder Daniel,<sup>27</sup> and thus finally merges the tale of the ‘drunkard’ and the tale of Onesima-Isidora). The saint does not merely refuse to appear before the elder; she resists furiously, and the sisters beat her and drag her to him. The righteous man recognizes her by the ‘crown’ on

<sup>25</sup> Kekelidze, ‘Epizod’, 82–4, argues that the form ‘Bantasin’ derives from a corruption of ‘Ta-bennisi’. The name ‘Bantasin’ also occurs in the Arabic version; see Tsakadze, ‘Siriiskaia’, 26.

<sup>26</sup> Kekelidze, ‘Epizod’, 95.

<sup>27</sup> E. A. Wallis Budge (ed.), *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, iii (Cambridge, 1928), 877.

her head, and he bows down before her. Then we have the familiar scene of the sisters' astonishment and repentance. After ten days, Onesima flees the monastery.<sup>28</sup>

Here the heroine's external meekness has vanished completely. Instead we have clanking chains, ripped clothes, the smashed cup, fights, raving: all of which shows how the holy fool's passive provocativeness is being transformed into active aggression. The only remaining exterior virtue is, perhaps, the washing of the washroom—that despised place which, like the kitchen, continues to be an emblematic locus of holy foolery.

The legend's development does not end here. In several manuscripts of the vita of St Onesima, the narrative goes further.<sup>29</sup> After fleeing the nunnery, Onesima became the head of a community of four hundred male recluses living in the desert, known as *boskoi* ('grazers', 'shepherds').<sup>30</sup> In defiance of canon law, she wore men's clothing.

\* \* \*

<sup>28</sup> A. S. Lewis (ed.), *Select Narratives of Holy Women*, *Studia sinaitica* 9 (London, 1900), 62–9; cf. Kekelidze, 'Epizod', 78–80. Apart from migrating, hagiographical tales also exchanged motifs and even individual phrases. Thus an episode in the vita of Martinian (*BHG*, 1177–80) is obviously copied from some story of a 'secret servant': the saint asks that the bishop be informed of his presence; the servants convey his words, but add that he is 'like a madman (*ἄφρονι ἐοικώς*)', and the bishop answers with what could be a quotation from Piteroum: 'You are the madmen yourselves (*ὕμεις ἔστε ἄφρονες*)'; *Menologii anonymi Byzantini saeculi X*, ed. B. Latyshev, fasc. 1 (St Petersburg, 1911), 65. The allusion is all the more peculiar since St Martinian never pretended to be mad.

<sup>29</sup> Tsakadze, 'Siriiskaia', 5.

<sup>30</sup> Kekelidze, 'Epizod', 86.

Transvestism spread in the Eastern church<sup>31</sup> during the same period as holy foolery, implying a comparable challenge to established order, a similar whiff of heresy.<sup>32</sup> It was formally banned by the thirteenth canon of the Council of Gangra in the 340s. The difference between Onesima and all the other hagiographical transvestites (Hilaria, Euphrosyne, Eugenia, Apollinaria, Antonina, Theodora, Pelagia, Matrona, Glaphyra, Euphemiana, Anastasia, Susanna, Anna, Marina)<sup>33</sup> is that all the others were mistaken for eunuchs, but in this case the hermits know that Onesima was ‘by nature a woman, not a man’.<sup>34</sup> Onesima is therefore a unique example of a combination of two anticanonical spiritual feats: holy foolery and transvestism. Actually, there is an affinity between them. On the one hand, the holy fool has a tendency to blur the boundary between male and female (see below, p. 115). On the other hand, the transvestite shares the holy fool’s provocativeness, aimed not only at others but also at the self.<sup>35</sup> When St Matrona’s cross-dressing is revealed,

<sup>31</sup> See E. Patlagean, ‘L’histoire de la femme déguisée en moine’, in *eadem*, *Structure sociale, famille, chrétienté à Byzance* (London, 1981).

<sup>32</sup> E. Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance, 4–7 s.* (Paris, 1977), 135–7.

<sup>33</sup> The first in this line is Thekla, from the apocryphal *Acts of Paul*. See J. Anson, ‘The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif’, *Viator* 5 (1974), 1–33. Anson does not mention Onesima; nor is she mentioned in the list in *AASS Januarii*, i. 258.

<sup>34</sup> Kekelidze, ‘Epizod’, 86, 100.

<sup>35</sup> Note that there were male as well as female transvestites. In one of the ‘beneficial tales’ a monk is accused of an amorous connection with a woman in the next village. Later he is discovered in women’s clothing, and he confesses that he himself had been that ‘woman’ (Wortley, ‘A Repertoire’, no. 520; *BHG*, 1317u). Whatever the real reasons for such behaviour, it is indicative that society was prepared to see it as a feat of piety.

she says: 'When I kissed the brethren I looked on them as angels of God...I did not press the lips of men but of impassive (*ἀπαθέσιον*) beings.'<sup>36</sup>

We should remember these words: subsequently one of the main justifications for holy foolery would be as a test of one's own 'impassivity' (see below, p. 184).

\* \* \*

Holy foolery spread from monastery to monastery, from Egypt to Syria, and thence into Asia Minor. The carriers of the contagion were the *gyrovagoi*, the wandering monks of Byzantium. Although church and state insistently tried to bind monks to a sedentary life and repeatedly forbade transfers from one monastery to another, vagabonds never paid much attention.<sup>37</sup> 'Wandering for God's sake' (*ξενιτεία διὰ Θεόν*) was recognized as a specific ascetic category,<sup>38</sup> which was of course highly proximate to holy foolery. We can locate the point where they merge.

The Armenian synaxarion of Ter Israel tells of the blessed Onesimos (f.d. 14 July in Orthodox calendars, 28 August in Armenian calendars) from the village of Carinae in the region of Palestinian Caesarea. This saint flees from his home, and in their grief his parents go blind. Onesimos settles in Ephesos (here travelling from east to west; later

<sup>36</sup> *Vita s. Matronae*, in *AASS Novembris*, iii. 794, 822.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. P. Rousseau, 'Eccentrics and Coenobites in the Late Roman East', *Byzantinische Forschungen* 24 (1997), 38–46.

<sup>38</sup> A. Guillaumont, 'Le dépassement comme forme d'ascèse dans le monachisme ancien', *Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes Études* 5 (1968/9), 41–50.

the direction will be reversed), where he lives ascetically in a monastery. When the monastery is dissolved under Diocletian (!), the saint returns home unrecognized and lives under the same roof as his parents without once saying who he is but merely assuring them that their son is alive. Then Onesimos departs again, for Magnesia in Asia. At home he leaves a note with the truth about himself. The note is found by a neighbour, who reads it to Onesimos' parents, thereby intensifying their suffering. Eventually, Onesimos appears to his parents in a dream and invites them to his new monastery, where their sight is restored.<sup>39</sup> This anachronistic tale (which finds monasticism in Asia Minor at the end of the third century) is interesting in that it gives the well-known name of Onesimos to a type of hero who will later be dubbed the 'man of God'.

<sup>39</sup> *Le Synaxaire armenien de Ter Israël*, ed. and transl. G. Bayan, PO 5 (1910), 452–3. The Greek vita of Onesimos (Codex Patmensis, 185) remains unpublished.

### 3

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## Lechers and Beggars

The return of monks and anchorites to the city is a major topic in itself. Here it concerns us only in so far as holy fools became established in the urban setting.

As long as the anchorite went around in the desert wrapped in hide, or naked, with uncut hair and untrimmed nails, unwashed for years, feeding on grass, etc., all this was a matter for his own personal relationship with God. If anybody happened to stumble across such an odd creature in the wilderness, then the shock to the unfortunate traveller's system was an accidental side-effect of the desert form of asceticism, which by nature was not meant for human eyes. The appearance of monks in the city changed this situation fundamentally. The previously irreproachable 'leave me in peace' was replaced by the importunate 'I won't leave you in peace'; contempt for the world was complicated by dependence on the world. This ambiguous and fundamentally undignified position led to the ostentatious aggressiveness of wandering monks.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. Guillaumont, *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien* (Bégrolles en Manges, 1979), 49, 106.

Pagans were especially irked by the outrageous behaviour of monks. This is what Eunapios of Sardis has to say about them:

They began to send the so-called ‘monks’ to the holy places. These monks look like humans but live like pigs. They made a show of their suffering (ἐς τὸ ἐμφανὲς ἔπασχον) and performed thousands of unspeakably obnoxious acts. But piety for them lay precisely in despising the holy. Thus any man wearing black and wanting to behave indecently in public (δημοσίᾳ . . . ἀσχημονεῖν) possessed tyrannical power. (Eunapios, *Vitae sophistarum* VI. 11. 6–7)

Christians, too, could disapprove of the movement of monks into the cities. St Neilos of Sinai complained that ‘all the towns and villages are groaning with pseudo-monks who gad around aimlessly and pointlessly’ (μάτην καὶ ὡς ἔτυχεν ἐν πολλῇ χυδαιότητι καὶ ἀδιαφορίᾳ). Every householder is pestered by them and is now justifiably annoyed by their very appearance.’<sup>2</sup>

Even without shocking or importunate behaviour, however, the interloper could provoke unease, by the mere fact of being different. John Rufus tells such a story. Near the entrance to the palace in Antioch there lived beggar who accepted no alms. Realizing that this was a holy man, John asked him:

‘If you love the ascetic life, why do you not go into the desert, or to a monastery? Why do you stay in a rich and splendid city such as this, in full public view, surrounded by animosity?’ The beggar

<sup>2</sup> St Neilos, *Epistula* CXIX, PG 79, col. 437.



silently stretched out his right hand towards heaven, as if to say: 'God told me to.'<sup>3</sup>

This beggar is no longer a hermit but not yet a holy fool. He seems to be unprovocative, yet the very fact that he refuses alms sets this strange man apart from other mendicants and turns him into a mysterious and even somewhat sinister figure. John Rufus is of course being disingenuous, asking a question to which he already knows the answer: this beggar is the silent accuser of the 'rich and splendid' secular world which has forgotten the precepts of eternity. Not that the holy fool was unable to break silence when necessary: he attacks Bishop Nonnos with his fists, shouting 'This one! This one!' The point of the shouting remains obscure until, some time later, Nonnos compromises with heterodox opponents. This is the first specimen, in Byzantine literature, of the topos of apparently pointless aggression which later turns out to have prophetic meaning.

Anticipating a little, we can note that the world did feel the attentive, disaffected gaze of the holy fool, which it interpreted in its own—worldly—terms. For example, the holy fool is often taken for a foreign spy and is thrown in prison (this is what happened with Cyril Phileotes and with Sabas the Younger).<sup>4</sup>

A short *vita* of Priskos, preserved by John of Ephesos, corresponds fully to the canon of the tales of 'secret servants' at the stage of their transformation into holy fools: the saint

<sup>3</sup> John Rufus, *Plérophories*, 142–3.

<sup>4</sup> Thus Peter Brown's view that holy fools won hearts through their serene openness is not in our view substantiated: see P. Brown, *The Body and Society* (London and Boston, 1988), 336.

rejects alms, refuses warm clothes in frosty weather (this is the first mention of the holy fools' resistance to cold) and prays in secret. When caught praying he makes the narrator pledge not to disclose his secret virtue. Priskos says he was 'reckoned a madman' by everyone around him except one man—the abbot of the monastery. Thus the figure of the confidant emerges.<sup>5</sup>

Even behaving himself with reasonable decorum, the vagabond monk in the city attracted special attention, and all his deviations from standard urban conduct provoked interpretation. For example, John Moschos relates how in the church of St Theodosios in Alexandria he and Sophronios met a man who was 'bald, and wearing sackcloth down to his knees; he seemed mad (σαλός)'.<sup>6</sup> Sophronios proposed a way of demonstrating to John the man's holiness. They gave this 'apparent madman (φαινομένω ὡς σαλῶ)' five coins; he accepted them silently, but threw them away when he had gone round the corner.<sup>7</sup> This act may have been committed by a madman, but Moschos interprets it as a sign of secret sanctity.

While in the city, the former hermit had a chance to meet different people. Let us consider how hagiography presents his various encounters. The vagabond's protest against the conventions of urban life led to provocation, which inevitably turned into holy foolery. The most striking example is

<sup>5</sup> John of Ephesos, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, PO 19 (1926), 180–3.

<sup>6</sup> In the Church Slavonic translation 'urod': *Sinaiskii paterik*, ed. V. S. Golyschenko and V. F. Dubrovina (Moscow, 1967), 194.

<sup>7</sup> John Moschos, *Pratum spirituale*, PG 87, col. 2976; cf. *The Spiritual Meadow*, transl. Wortley, 92.

Serapion<sup>8</sup> Sindonites, about whom we learn both from Palladios and—independently—from a Syriac vita. Both these sources derive from oral tales about the saint (BHG, 1617–1618c; BHO, 1045–7).<sup>9</sup> The popularity of these stories is shown by the fact that they were translated even into such an exotic language as Sogdian.<sup>10</sup> It is quite possible that Serapion did actually exist.<sup>11</sup> Only one episode concerns us here. On his arrival in Rome (surely Constantinople, the New Rome; it is most unlikely that this refers to the ‘real’ Rome) Serapion visited a famous holy woman, who was known as a recluse and silentary.

Serapion said: ‘If one is dead [to the world], everything is possible... Come out of your house and walk about.’ She replied: ‘I have not been outside for over twenty four years. Why should I come out now?’ ‘If you are dead to the world and the world to you,’ said Serapion, ‘then it should not matter to you whether you go out or not.’

The woman came outside. When she and Serapion had gone into a church, he said to her:

‘If you want to convince me that you really are dead to the world, and that you are not alive with the desire to please people, do as I do: take off all your clothes like me, and drape them over your

<sup>8</sup> The form of the name varies in the sources: we also find the form ‘Sarapion’: see J.-C. Guy, *Recherches sur la tradition grecque des Apophthegmata patrum* (Brussels, 1962), 39. There were also several Serapions.

<sup>9</sup> R. Reizenstein, *Hellenistische Wundererzählungen* (Leipzig, 1906), 77. The edition of the Syriac texts in P. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum*, v (Paris, 1897) was unavailable at the time of writing.

<sup>10</sup> O. Hansen, ‘Die buddhistische und christliche Literature der Sogder’, in *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, iv. 2. 1 (Leiden and Cologne, 1968), 96.

<sup>11</sup> Reizenstein, *Hellenistische Wundererzählungen*, 73.

shoulder and walk through the city, and I will walk ahead of you likewise.' She answered: 'I will tempt many people with the indecency of this act (ἀσχήμω τοῦ πράγματος), and they will have cause to say: "She is out of her mind and is possessed (ἐξέστη καὶ δαιμονιῶσά ἐστιν)".' 'But what do you care?' Serapion responded. 'You are dead to people.' Then the woman said to him: 'Whatever else you tell me to do, I will do, but I do not claim to have achieved this degree [of impassivity].' Serapion answered: 'Indeed! So do not pride yourself on being more devout than all others, or on being dead to the world; for I am more dead [to the world] than you, and I can prove it in deed, for I can do all this without feeling and without shame (ἀπαθῶς καὶ ἀνεπαισχύντως)!'<sup>12</sup>

This curious narrative shows that the Greek parts of the Empire encountered urban holy foolery later than the Syrian East:<sup>13</sup> the righteous woman was clearly shocked by Serapion's demands, although Serapion's behaviour fitted the well established pattern, complete with provocation and sacrilege (he proposes undressing near a church).

The most scandalous encounter for a hermit in the city was the encounter with a prostitute. Here is one of John Moschos' parables (*BHG*, 1440 kg):

An elder living in the Skete set off to Alexandria to sell his handicrafts. There he saw a young monk entering a tavern. The

<sup>12</sup> Butler, *The Lausiatic History*, ii. 114.14–116.2.

<sup>13</sup> The imperial capital was swarming with all sorts of prophets and feigned madmen. Agathias talks about scores of 'feigned madmen and possessed (μαίνεσθαι εἰκῆ καὶ δαιμονῶν ὑποκρινόμενοι)' who crowded Constantinople after an earthquake (see Agathias Myrinaeus, *Historia*, ed. R. Keydell (Berlin, 1967), 169). However, early in its history, holy foolery had nothing to do with prophesying.

elder was grieved by what he saw, and he waited outside so as to speak to the young monk when he emerged. And so it was: when the young monk came out, the elder took him by the hand and led him aside, saying to him, ‘Brother, do you not understand that you are wearing the holy schema? That you are young? Are you not aware that the snares of the devil are many? That in the city monks can suffer harm through their eyes and through their ears and through gestures? You went into the tavern of your own free will; you hear things you do not want to hear and see things you would rather not see, dishonourably mingling with both men and women (ἀσέμνως καὶ γυναιξὶ συναναστρέφῃ). Please do not do it, but flee to the wilderness, where you can obtain the salvation you desire.’ The young monk replied: ‘Go away, old man. God requires nothing but a pure heart.’ Then the elder stretched forth his hands toward heaven and exclaimed: ‘Glory to God! In fifty years at the Skete I have still not achieved purity of heart, but this monk has attained purity of heart while frequenting taverns (εἰς τὰ καπηλεῖα ἀναστρέφόμενος)!’ Turning to the monk, he said: ‘May God save you, and not disappoint me in my hope.’<sup>14</sup>

Why did the monk enter the tavern at all? Allegedly, to convert prostitutes. The motif of the repenting harlot was popular in Christian literature from very early times. It has its roots in the story of Mary Magdalene.<sup>15</sup> The vitae of such women are numerous (St Pelagia, St Mary of Egypt, St Theodora, etc.). Sometimes the harlot is converted by the

<sup>14</sup> John Moschos, *Pratum spirituale*, cols. 3076–7; cf. *The Spiritual Meadow*, transl. Wortley, 169.

<sup>15</sup> E. Dorn, *Der sündige Heilige in der Legende des Mittelalters* (Munich, 1967), 52–70; R. M. Karras, ‘Holy Harlots: Prostitute Saints in Medieval Legend’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1 (1990), 4–29.

argument or example of a righteous person. Thus Markian the Presbyter:

did not shrink from entering whore-houses, nor did he regard it as something incongruous . . . He persuaded harlots first to use baths, then to keep themselves untouched, and finally to go to church. Some of them even decided to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and he covered their travel expenses.<sup>16</sup>

In the group of legends that will be analysed here, the whore is converted not in the 'normal' way but by a monk who visits her in the guise of a client.<sup>17</sup> The main subject—the repenting harlot—remains the same, but the focus is somewhat different.<sup>18</sup> First, it is the monk, not the prostitute, who appears as the main hero in these legends. And second, the monk's conduct seems strange.

In mainstream hagiography the spiritual mentor of a repentant harlot acts cautiously: he is eager to help the woman but also anxious about his own soul. He fears temptation. For example, in the vita of St Pelagia a bishop replies to a harlot's letter of repentance: 'Who you are and what your goal is—God knows. But I say to you: do not dare

<sup>16</sup> *Vita s. Marciani Presbyteri*, PG 114, cols. 452–3.

<sup>17</sup> See S. A. Ivanov, 'A Saint in a Whore-House', *Byzantinoslavica* 56 (1995), 439–45.

<sup>18</sup> Legends of this kind can be traced back to a Talmudic story from the second century: a Jewish girl was sent to a brothel by the Roman authorities. Her brother-in-law, the famous Rabbi Meir, decided to save her. Dressing up as a Roman horseman, he came to the brothel pretending that he was a client ('Avodah Zarah', 18a). However, the Jewish version may in turn have been borrowed from a Christian one; see R. Adler, 'The Virgin in the Brothel and Other Anomalies: Character and Context in the Legend of Beruriah', *Tikkun* 3 (1988), 102.

to tempt my humbleness. I am, alas, a sinful person.<sup>19</sup> Such caution is understandable. In Christian ascetic tradition any female was regarded as dangerous. In one of the 'beneficial tales' a monk who had to carry his own mother across the river wrapped his hands in rags because, he explained, 'the female body is flames'.<sup>20</sup>

But in the group of legends dealt with here, the spiritual shepherd's conduct is different. He bravely faces temptation and appears in the whore-house to save the fallen woman (usually his relative—a sister or niece). At the beginning he feels somewhat embarrassed by the task. This can be illustrated by the following story of an unnamed monk.

He had a promiscuous sister in the city, who brought many souls to ruin... When he arrived in that place... she attempted to embrace him, but he said to her: 'My dear sister, save your own soul, for through you many have been lost...' She cast herself at her brother's feet and begged him to take her with him into the desert... As they made their way, he urged her to repent. They saw some people coming to meet them and he said to her: 'Since not everyone knows that you are my sister, go a little way from the road until they have passed by.'<sup>21</sup>

The monk in this vita was apparently ashamed to be seen with a harlot. In later stories, however, the monk gradually becomes more carefree. Here, for example, is the legend of John the Dwarf and Paesia:

<sup>19</sup> H. Usener (ed.), *Legende der heilige Pelagia* (Bonn, 1879), 8.

<sup>20</sup> F. Nau, 'Récits des solitaires égyptiens', ROC 13 (1908), 52.

<sup>21</sup> Nau, 'Histoires', 174.

She began to live an evil life, to the point of becoming a prostitute . . . so Abba John went to see her and said to the old doorkeeper: 'Tell your mistress I am here.' But she sent him away. . . . Abba John said: 'Tell her I have something that will be very helpful to her.' The harlot's servants mocked him, saying: 'What have you to give her, that you want to meet her?' The old woman went up and spoke to her mistress about him. Paesia said to her: 'Those monks are always going about near the Red Sea and finding pearls.' Then she got ready and said to the doorkeeper: 'Please bring him to me.' As he was coming up, she prepared for him and lay on the bed. Abba John entered and sat beside her. Looking into her eyes, he said: 'What do you have against Jesus, that you behave like this?'<sup>22</sup>

After his ardent admonitions, the harlot repented, and together they fled from the brothel.

John did not confirm the servants' assumption that he came as a customer, but nor did he deny it. He is balancing on the edge.

Symeon, another elder, can also be seen as balancing on the edge. Only a short fragment of the vita of Symeon and Salome is preserved, in the Coptic language. The scene looks familiar: Symeon, a righteous elder, learns that his relative Salome has become a harlot. He disguises himself as a soldier,<sup>23</sup> goes from Jerusalem to Jericho, and knocks on the whore-house door. Though his face looks familiar, Salome does not recognize him:

<sup>22</sup> F. Nau, 'Histoire de Thais', *Annales du Musée Guimet* 30 (1903), 76–82.

<sup>23</sup> In the Babylonian Talmud, Rabbi Meir had picked the guise of a Roman horseman because he had not wanted to be recognized as a Jew. The soldier's guise chosen by Christian monks may be regarded as a Talmudic 'birthmark'.



He said to the young people standing at her door: 'I want to see your mistress and talk to her.' But they pushed him away, saying: 'Clear off! You are old. You are not vigorous enough to have intercourse with her.' But she herself turned up, took him by the hand and led him into the house, weeping . . . He said: 'I came here because of you. When I heard people talking about you, I decided to meet and have intercourse with you.' At this point he paused, and she thought he had come for an impure purpose. She said: 'Welcome. I will gratify you in whatever way you like.' He said: 'I am a well-known person in my city, and many of my countrymen come here. I am afraid they may arrive and see you and I will be ashamed. I want to have intercourse with you in a secret place . . .' She showed him another room and said: 'Do you like this place, father? I swear that, except for God, who sees us . . .'<sup>24</sup>

Here the Coptic text breaks off. But we can conjecture the sequel, by analogy with what happens in another *vita* with a similar plot. We should note, in connection with both stories, that slowly but surely the monk who had balanced on the edge began to become involved in a game. Symeon did not dispel the notion that he came for fornication.

This is the story of Thais and Serapion (*BHG*, 1695–7):<sup>25</sup>

There was a certain harlot named Thais and she was so beautiful that many for her sake sold all they had . . . When Abba Serapion heard about this, he put on worldly clothes<sup>26</sup> and went to see her in a certain city of Egypt. He handed her a silver piece as the price

<sup>24</sup> E. Revillont, 'La sage-femme Salomé', *Journal Asiatique* 10/5 (1905), 436–7.

<sup>25</sup> In some variants of the same legend the elder is named Paphnutios or Bessarion.

<sup>26</sup> 'Military clothes' in one of the manuscripts: see Nau, 'Histoire de Thais', 91.

for sleeping with her (*συνκαθευδῆσαι αὐτῆ*). She accepted the fee and said: ‘Let us go to the bedroom.’ And he answered: ‘Let’s go.’ On entering, he saw a bed. She lay down first and invited God’s servant to sin. But he looked around and, feeling embarrassed (*αἰδούμενος*), said: ‘Is there any other chamber?’ She answered: ‘Yes’, and he said: ‘Let’s go and sleep there.’ She retorted: ‘What do you actually want? If it is people you’re afraid of, no one ever enters this room; except, of course, for God, for there is no place that is hidden from the eyes of Divinity.’ When the elder heard this, he said to her: ‘So you know there is a God? . . . If you know this, why are you causing the loss of so many souls?’<sup>27</sup>

In another variant of the story things went even further. Father Serapion came to an unnamed prostitute:

and he asked: ‘Have you prepared the bed?’ She said: ‘Yes father.’ And they locked the door, and they were sitting alone. And . . . he said: ‘Wait a little, we have a rule prescribing when we may do this.’ And he began to pray . . . [At last the woman] understood that he had come to her not for the sake of sin but to save her soul.<sup>28</sup>

But the most dramatic development of this theme is found in the vita of Abramios and Mary (*BHG*, 5–6; *BHO*, 16–17). The overall pattern is much the same, but the imaginative hagiographer embellishes it with many shocking details:

[Mary] fled to another city, changed her appearance and began to ply her trade in a brothel . . . In order to learn where she was and how she was living, [Abramios] asked someone to make enquiries.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 90–4.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 59–60. John Climacus must have had Serapion in mind; see above, p. 50.

Then this messenger found her, and with great pity...brought back the news. At once the elder...put on the dress of a soldier...took with him a pound's weight in coins, mounted the horse and hurried away. He went through the countryside to the city, adopting the customs of the inhabitants...Now when he reached the place, he went to the...brothel-keeper and smiled, like a fornicator, saying: 'My friend, I hear that you have here a very good-looking girl indeed. I would like to have her if I may.' The brothel-keeper saw that he had grey hair and judged him to be very old, and was even shocked to see an old man so lecherous... The old man then asked her name and the brothel-keeper replied that the girl was called Mary. Smiling with joy, Abramios then said: 'I beg you to take me into her presence, so that I may enjoy her today, for I have heard this girl praised by many.' Hearing this, the brothel-keeper summoned Mary... To avoid any suspicion, Abramios adopted the most unrestrained habits of lovers (*εἰς ἀνθαδέστερον ἔραστοῦ τρόπον*). She, in her turn, responded to Abramios' kiss and embraced him tightly round the neck. It was then that Mary...remembered the days when she had lived as an ascetic...and she burst into tears, unable to bear it, and she said as if to herself: 'Alas, alas, how desolate I am!' The blessed man was afraid she would recognize him, so he said soothingly to her: 'If you go on thinking about your sins, how can we expect to enjoy ourselves?' Then the holy man offered the brothel-keeper the money he had brought and said to her: 'My friend, I want you to make us a very good meal, so that I may have this girl now!'. . .

Wisdom of wisdom, understanding of understanding, discretion of discretion, come let us marvel at this inexperience, at this alteration, how this man, wise, discreet and prudent, seemed a fool and indiscreet...!

When they had eaten, the girl drew Abramios to . . . the inner chamber, and he said: 'Let us go in.' When he entered he saw the bed set on a platform, and he seated himself on it, as if in eagerness.

What shall I say of you, fighter for Christ? Shall I speak of continence or of incontinence, of wisdom or of foolishness, of discretion or of indiscretion? After forty years of austerity you lie down on a prostitute's bed and wait for her to come to you!

When he had seated himself on the bed, Mary said to him: 'Come, sir, let me unfasten your sandals for you.' And he answered: 'First close the door and lock it' . . . When she locked the door, she came towards him and the old man said to her: 'Mistress Mary, come close to me.' And she came close, and he held her firmly with one arm, as if about to kiss her; but snatching the helmet from his head . . .<sup>29</sup>

As can be seen from this long extract, the hagiographic hero has fewer and fewer scruples: while Serapion had been somewhat embarrassed by his task, Abramios shows every sign of enjoying it. Had he been on a purely moral mission, he would have seized the moment of Mary's weakness and tried to convert her when she burst into tears. But he preferred to pursue his dubious role to the very end. It is easy to imagine how such a story might have tickled the sensibilities of a pious monastic reader. But even more interesting is the position of the hagiographer, seemingly disconcerted by the conduct of his own character,

<sup>29</sup> *Vita s. Abraamii*, PG 115, cols. 69–72; cf. T. J. Lamy, 'Acta beati Abrahae Kidunaiae monachi', *AB* 10 (1895). Some fragments have been added from the Syriac variant: see *Holy Women*, transl. Brock and Harvey, 27–33.

seemingly at a loss, himself unable to understand what is happening to his hero.

The hagiographer's position is truly puzzling, and the puzzle is not easily resolved. After examining all the trivial details we can be certain that this rampant indecency has very little to do with the proclaimed goals of a saint. Instead what we see here is the transformation of one type of hagiographical hero into another: namely, the transformation of the ascetic into the holy fool. As will later become clear (below, p. 126), the hagiography of classic holy foolery is mindful of this inheritance, and the re-education of harlots by unconventional means becomes one of the favourite activities of many a Byzantine saintly reprobate.

Another encounter which might await the monk who returned to the city was the meeting with his relatives. Monastic folklore already had such a story: the legend of Andronikos and Athanasia (*BHG*, 120–123i) tells of a husband and wife who both resolved to lead the monastic life. When they met again after some while, Andronikos did not recognize Athanasia, who had grown thin and who was dressed in men's clothing. For eighteen years the two of them lived in one cell as brothers. As Athanasia was dying she left Andronikos a note telling him the truth about herself.<sup>30</sup> The text of the note is contained in just one manuscript of the *vita*: 'Father Andronikos, I am your wife. For so many years I said not a word to reveal myself to you, for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven.'<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Menologii anonymi Byzantini Saeculi X*, i. 171.

<sup>31</sup> *Acta ss. Andronici et Athanasiae*, in *AASS Octobris*, iv. 1001 n. S.

Two motifs are combined here: transvestism, and posthumous self-revelation.<sup>32</sup> We have already mentioned the link between transvestism and holy foolery; we now turn to the topic of posthumous self-revelation.

The 'man of God' story exists in two main versions. The first was composed in Edessa in the mid-fifth century,<sup>33</sup> and is originally Syriac.<sup>34</sup> The second widespread version is of Byzantine origin,<sup>35</sup> and dates from between the late sixth century and 730.<sup>36</sup>

The first version tells of how the son of rich parents—Alexios, in later redactions—flees from his family home on the eve of his wedding (*BHG*, 51–6; *BHO*, 36–44; cf. 306). In Rome (evidently this is New Rome, i.e. Constantinople)<sup>37</sup> he

<sup>32</sup> J. Anson claims that the legend of Athanasia (whom for some reason he calls Anastasia) represents 'the first stage in the gradual transformation of a religious legend exemplifying worldly renunciation for the love of God into a domestic fable of the devotion of chaste wives to their husbands': Anson, 'The Female Transvestite', 15. This is not convincing, since the heroine of this story causes her husband obvious suffering.

<sup>33</sup> On the chronology of this vita see H. J. W. Drijvers, 'The Man of God of Edessa, Bishop Rabbula and the Urban Poor', in *Media Latinitas: A Collection of Essays to Mark the Occasion of the Retirement of L. J. Engels*, ed. R. I. A. Nip et al. (Turnhout, 1996), 207–10.

<sup>34</sup> See, however, the doubts in C. J. Odenkirchen, *The Life of St Alexius in the Old French Version of the Hildesheim Manuscript* (Brookline and Leyden, 1978), 31–3.

<sup>35</sup> A. Amiaud, *La légende syriaque de Saint Alexis, l'Homme de Dieu* (Paris, 1889), pp. xliii–lii. Some scholars now incline to the view that the second version was also originally Syriac, but that it was quite soon translated into Greek: see A. V. Paikova, 'Legendy i skazaniia v pamiatnikakh siriiskoi agiografii', *Palestinskii Sbornik* 30 (1990), 86.

<sup>36</sup> F. Halkin, 'Une légende grecque de Saint Alexis (*BHG* 56a)', *AB* 98 (1980), 5–16.

<sup>37</sup> The identity of the Rome in this version remains controversial: see C. E. Strebbs, 'Les origines de la légende de s. Alexis', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 51 (1973), 506–7.

boards a ship bound for the East, and he becomes a destitute beggar in Edessa. His subsequent fate is similar to what we have seen in tales of ‘secret servants of God’. By night Alexios prays. For a long time he refuses to give his name to the church custodian, who has noticed his piety. Eventually he tells him, but only after having sworn him to secrecy. He dies in a hospice for the poor. The bishop learns that the deceased had been a man of great righteousness, but his body cannot be found, for it has been taken up to heaven.

None of these motifs is new to us, for they clearly derive from early Syrian Christianity.<sup>38</sup> The novelty is to be found in the second version of the legend, the Greek variant, where an additional text is tacked onto the old one. Apparently, Alexios did not die in Edessa after all, but simply decided to flee from men’s praises and boarded a ship in Laodicea. He meant to sail to Tarsos, where nobody knew him, but the ship was buffeted by the waves and fetched up in Rome (even if this means Constantinople, it is still a long way from Tarsos). A later variant adds that ‘at first he was grief-stricken about what had happened, for it was not what he wanted. Such a turn of events had never even occurred to him. But then he said “Praise the Lord”’.<sup>39</sup> Another redaction explains in more detail:

It was the unseen hand of God that brought him to harbour in Rome. It was not God’s will that the blessed [Alexios] should

<sup>38</sup> H. J. W. Drijvers, ‘Die Legende des heiligen Alexius und der Typus des Gottesmannes in syrischen Christentum’, in M. Schmidt (ed.), *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter* (Regensburg, 1982), 188–93.

<sup>39</sup> *Menologii*, 248.

remain utterly unrecognized (*παντάπασι λαθεῖν*), even though all his life he had striven to be inconspicuous. Truly the Man of God understood that he was returned to his homeland by God's will.<sup>40</sup>

Stepping ashore, Alexios makes an enigmatic pronouncement: 'No longer will I be a burden to anybody, but I will go to my father's house, for none of the servants will recognize me.'<sup>41</sup> The author does not explain why Alexios as an anonymous beggar should be less of a burden in his parental home. Still unrecognized, then, he receives his own father's permission to live in his house as a destitute lodger, and he remains there for seventeen years:

As evening came, the servants would set about tormenting him and mocking him. Some of them would beat him, others jostled him, while others would pour dirty dishwater over his head. But the Man of God . . . accepted all this with joy, willingly, and with fortitude.<sup>42</sup>

Strictly speaking, all that the holy man has displayed thus far is great meekness and humility. And still, if he foresaw that something like this would happen, then here is the element of provocation which is the mark of holy foolery.

As the hour of his death drew near, the Man of God 'wrote down his whole life, and the secrets that he had shared with his father and mother, and the conversations that he had had

<sup>40</sup> F. Halkin and A.-J. Festugière, *Dix textes inédits tirés du ménologue impérial du Koutloumous* (Geneva, 1984), 86.

<sup>41</sup> Amiaud, *La légende*, 11.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. Even more cruel tortures are described in the Ethiopian version: *Les vies éthiopiennes de saint Alexis l'Homme de Dieu*, transl. E. Cerulli, CSCO 299 (Wiesbaden, 1969), 107.



with his betrothed...so that they would recognize him (*ὅπως γνωρίσωσιν αὐτόν*).<sup>43</sup>

Recognize him? Why should he want that?

The saint renounces his parents, abandons his fiancée and flees from his homeland, in God's name. All this one can understand: a righteous man may be able to instruct and help redeem his relatives and neighbours, but nobody can reproach him if he turns his back on worldly vanity and distances himself in order to commune in isolation with his Creator. Both these paths have always been acknowledged, within Christianity, as equally valid.

The act of denial, of departure, is the primary impulse of the ascetic. By abandoning everything and going away, it is as if the saint is saying: 'you may live with your mundane joys and woes; marry, raise children, accumulate wealth—none of this is forbidden by the Gospels. But please, do this without me.' This attitude might be reckoned harsh, but at least it is consistent. Alexios sees that his family will not be able to cope with the burden that he is about to take upon himself, and he imposes on nobody. By the very act of departure, he who departs renders any further discussion—let alone condemnation—redundant.

To return, however, is quite another matter. The returnee can no longer claim that the world is irksome to him. All traces of ascetic self-sufficiency are gone.

In the first version of the legend, when the saint died unknown in Edessa, two truths, two authentic modes of life, existed side by side. There was no conflict between the

<sup>43</sup> Amiaud, *La légende*, 12–13.

celestial and the mundane. In the second version of the tale, these two truths confront each other.

What, then, is the moral lesson of the vita? 'To modern sensibilities Alexios' cruelty can often seem senseless and inhumane, but his legend fulfilled deep spiritual needs,'<sup>44</sup> S. Averintsev wrote. But what was this spiritual need?<sup>45</sup> We would suggest that we have here a paradigm of holy foolery. First Alexios commits an act of provocation by returning home (just as the 'drunkard' provokes the nuns by lying around in the courtyard). Then he takes the next step by revealing to his parents the truth about himself only when it was too late to change anything. In our terminology this is the holy fool's aggression.<sup>46</sup> If we wanted to translate the analysis into psychological terms we might speculate that Alexios displays certain sado-masochistic tendencies. For present purposes, however, what matters is not the psychology of the saint as a 'real person', but the cultural function of the saint's persona (see, however, p. 409).

<sup>44</sup> S. S. Averintsev, *Ot beregov Bosfora do beregov Evfrata* (Moscow, 1986), 35. Cf. B. I. Berman, 'Chitatel' zhitiia (Agiograficheskii kanon russkogo srednevekov'ia i traditsii ego vospriiatiia)', in *Khudozhestvennyi iazyk srednevekov'ia* (Moscow, 1982), 166–73.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. also D. Shestakov, *Issledovaniia v oblasti grecheskikh narodnykh skazanii o sviatykh* (Warsaw, 1910), 111–12, on parallels with *The Odyssey* and with the Greek novel. Yet such comparisons merely highlight the fundamental differences. Odysseus and other classical heroes leave home against their will and make strenuous efforts to return so as to resume their former lives. Here the hero leaves voluntarily and is returned against his will.

<sup>46</sup> Alexios destroys the order which God himself has brought into existence, see J. Göry, 'Hagiographie hétérodoxe', *Acta ethnographica Academiae scientiarum hungaricae* 11 (1962), 380.

As Averintsev rightly notes, the members of Alexios' family evoke the author's and the reader's sympathy.<sup>47</sup> They suffer not through any fault of their own, but because of the impossibility of reconciling the celestial and the mundane worlds. Yet, the delicate balance between these two principles is easily upset. Let us imagine that the saint approaches his mother or his former fiancée for alms, and is abused by them rather than by the servants. Inevitably the reader would feel antipathy towards these materially replete but spiritually myopic people. Alexios does not take this step, but another saint does: John Kalybitis (*BHG*, 868–9; *BHO*, 498–9), whose vita can to some extent be viewed as a stage in the development of the same legend.<sup>48</sup>

The plot is as follows. John fled from his parents' house and spent six years in a monastery mortifying his flesh. However, the devil instilled in him a passionate longing to see his parents. He was allowed to go home. Along the way he exchanged clothes with a beggar, so he arrived at his parents' house in rags. On seeing his parents, John said: 'Devil, I have trampled on your goads.'<sup>49</sup> The saint's father treated him well and sent him food (which of course he did not eat, but gave to other beggars), but his mother 'was shaken by the sight of his emaciated, barefoot, wild appear-

<sup>47</sup> Averintsev, *Ot beregov*, 35.

<sup>48</sup> Amiaud, *La légende*, pp. lxx–lxxii. O. Lampsides, 'Bios kai politeia agiou Ioannou tou Kalybitou lanthanon eis hellenikon paramythion tou Pontou', *Archeion ekklesiastikou kai kanonikou dikaiou* 19 (1964), 3–17, was unavailable at the time of writing.

<sup>49</sup> O. Lampsides, 'Hagios Ioannes ho Kalybitis (Anekdotia keimena ek parisinon kodikon)', *Platon*, 31–32 (1964), 269.

ance (τὸ ἄγριον), and she ordered her servants: “Take him away! I cannot go in and out of the house with him hanging around.”<sup>50</sup>

John asked the servants to let him live in a shed, ‘to escape from the cold and to be out of sight of your mistress’. Thus he lived for three years. But when he felt the approach of death, he began to pray for his parents: ‘Lord, I beg you, make no account of their sins, but open to them the ocean of your mercy.’<sup>51</sup> We should understand—although it is not stated directly—that John begged God not to take into account his parents’ sins against himself, for these were the gravest of all. Then he asked the servants to call his mother: ‘Tell her that the beggar who lay at the gate—the one whom she ordered to be driven away—summons her . . . saying: “do not ignore the poor wretch. Remember God, and deign to come in humility.”’

The noblewoman was very surprised by the lodger’s impertinent request: ‘What might this beggar want to say to me? I cannot be near him, nor even set eyes on him.’ Though her husband advised her to go, still she refused. John continued to insist: ‘If you do not come to see me, you will greatly regret it.’<sup>52</sup> She gave in. At their meeting, John made her swear that she would give instructions ‘to bury me in the clothes that I wear and in the place where my shed stands, for I am unworthy of other clothes and of a more dignified burial-place’. He then handed her a jewel-studded Gospel book, which his parents had given him when he was a child, and he said: ‘This will be your companion in this life.’

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

Events then unfold rapidly:

She took the Gospel, turned it this way and that, and said: 'It is like the book which my husband commissioned for our son.' Quickly she went out and showed the book to her husband. As soon as he saw it, he recognized it and said: 'This is none other than that very Gospel. But where did he get it? We must ask him where our son John is.' And together they went and said to him: 'We entreat you on the Holy Trinity, tell us whence you have this Gospel, and where our son John is.' No longer able to restrain himself, he wept and said: 'I am your son John, the cause of your many tears, and that is the Gospel which you gave me. For the love of Christ I took upon myself His most light yoke (*ἐφόρεσα τὸ ζυγὸν αὐτοῦ τὸ ἐλαφρότατον*).' On hearing this, his parents embraced his neck, and from the first to the third hour they so wept that all the inhabitants of the town cried on hearing how they had found their son. John, however, lest his honourable and blameless life be soiled by any concerns for this earthly life, gave up his precious soul to God.<sup>53</sup>

John's mother broke her promise to him and dressed his body in golden clothing, for which she was punished with paralysis. His father again dressed the body in rags and buried John according to his instruction, in the place where his shed had stood.

Much in this vita remains unexplained. If the devil prompted John to return home, why did he submit to temptation? And once he had submitted, what was his

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 272. In the Syriac translation of the vita John, like Alexios, writes down an account of his life and dies with it in his hand, so that his relatives find out about everything only from the patriarch, who reads the letter: Amiaud, *La légende*, p. lxx.

much-vaunted victory over the devil? If the saint asks God to forgive his parents' sins against him, then why at the hour of his death does he call his mother so insistently, thereby inducing her to commit fresh sins?<sup>54</sup> He knows that she—unlike his father—was disgusted by his rags. And most importantly: Why did he return at all to his father's house? And having returned, why did he reveal himself? And if he was to reveal himself, why only when on the point of death? There is just one answer to all these questions. John Kalybites was, in our understanding of the term, a holy fool, even though in the text he is not called a fool for Christ's sake (ὁ διὰ Χριστὸν σαλός) but a beggar for Christ's sake (ὁ διὰ Χριστὸν πτωχός).<sup>55</sup> In some of the versions that have not been preserved John must have been referred to as *salos*. If not, it would be impossible to explain why he is called *salos* in one of the surviving Old Georgian versions of his vita.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> This was unclear even when the tale was composed. One of its redactions does attempt to explain John's behaviour: 'he was concerned lest after his death his mother might discover who he was and arrange a luxurious funeral for him' (Lampsides, 'Hagios Ioannes ho Kalybites', 285). This explanation is blatantly contrived, yet hagiographers were unable to come up with anything better.

<sup>55</sup> In this sense John is a distant precursor of Francis of Assisi, who was the first in the Western church to preach 'voluntary poverty for Christ's sake' ('voluntaria pro Christo mendicitas'); see *Vita s. Francisci Confessoris*, in *AASS Octobris*, ii. 852. On Francis see also below, p. 385.

<sup>56</sup> M. Van Esbroeck, 'La vie de saint Jean le Pauvre ou le Calybite en version géorgienne', *Oriens Christianus* 82 (1998), 153 n. 1. However, John's iconographic type did not resemble that of a holy fool either in the Greek or in the Georgian tradition; see L. M. Evseeva, *Afonskaia kniga obrastsov XV v.* (Moscow, 1998), 269, cf. 80.

John provokes insults directed at himself. He then switches to the offensive, stirring things up; and unlike Alexios he has time to take a quick look at the effects thereby produced.

Saints who return home are the first to direct aggression not just at monks and pilgrims but at ordinary people who had no pretensions to becoming saints themselves but who hoped only to live a quiet life in peaceful piety. The holy fool deprives them of this option.

\* \* \*

By the sixth century, therefore, holy foolery had broken out of the monastic enclosure and had, so to speak, gone public. Pseudo-Kaisarios, writing in the mid-sixth century, has Christ describing himself in precisely the words normally used to describe holy fools: ‘I fake (ὕποκρίνομαι) mediocrity, so that, highlighting the flesh (προβολῆ τῆς σαρκός), I may catch the dragon: the devil, who mocks (ἐνπαίζοντα) mortals but who in his turn is mocked (ἐνπαίζόμενον) by me.’ In response to the question ‘Why do you say that Christ is a mocker (ἐνπαίκτην) and that He defeated the devil by cunning?’, Pseudo-Kaisarios confidently replies: ‘There is nothing improbable in this.’<sup>57</sup>

Thus holy foolery receives the highest form of approval: it becomes an imitation of Christ.

The phenomenon had acquired a self-awareness and its basic principles had been defined. The first to articulate these principles was John Climacus:

<sup>57</sup> Pseudo-Kaisarios, *Die Erotapokriseis*, ed. R. Riedinger (Berlin, 1989), 115–16.

If the definition, essence and image of extreme pride is to fake (*ὑποκρίνεσθαι*)—in order to be praised—virtues that you do not in fact possess, then surely a sign of the deepest humility is to act as if (*σχηματίζεσθαι*) guilty of something of which you are in fact guiltless, in order to be vilified. This is what was done by him who took the bread and the cheese in his hands.<sup>58</sup> And this is what was done by that striver for chastity who took off his clothes and walked around the city impassively (*ἀπαθῶς*). Such people are not concerned that others might fall into temptation (*οὐ μεριμνῶσιν ἀνθρωπίνου προσκόμματος*), for they have been endowed with the power to bring assurance (*πληροφορῆσαι*) to all through prayer, invisibly. And if they are concerned about the former (tempting others), they are inadequate in the latter (prayer). Where God is ready to fulfil a request, we can achieve anything. Better to vex (*λυπεῖν*) people than to vex God. God rejoices when he sees us striving for dishonour so as to weaken, disturb, and annihilate vainglory.<sup>59</sup>

This passage formulates for the first time, with truly revolutionary candour, the basic and most outrageous principle of holy foolery: that one should not be afraid of leading (or rather to lead) people into sin.

Not everybody held this view. For example, many ascetic writers insisted that sexual provocation was dangerous for the provoker himself. There is a stunning document to this effect: a letter by a certain Paul of Hellas. This contains several hints as to its date. The hero of the tale, a eunuch by the name of Eutropios, had served as secretary to a noble

<sup>58</sup> Apparently, what is implied is a 'beneficial tale' about a monk who pretended to be a glutton, so that people would not venerate him.

<sup>59</sup> John Climacus, *Scala paradisi*, col. 997; cf. col. 956; cf. Climacus, *The Ladder*, transl. Luibheid and Russell, 225.



lady, Anicia Iuliana, and then took monastic vows. This woman was known to be a bitter enemy of the Emperor Justinian, so one may surmise that, after her death around 527 or 528, Eutropios renounced the world because he feared persecution. He then went to live in the desert, in the vicinity of Jericho, in a tower which had been built by Elija (d. 516), Patriarch of Jerusalem. Many of Jericho's inhabitants made pilgrimages to the hermit. One of them asked him to be godfather to his son. At the time when the tale is told, the boy turns ten years old. It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that the letter was written by Paul of Hellas around the middle of the sixth century, the period when holy foolery was on the rise.

This polemical text is aimed at monks who indulge in scandalous behaviour fraught with temptation because they are confident of their 'immunity' to sin.

Those who say that they associate with women and children and are not harmed in their souls by this pleasure but are greatly strengthened and resolutely resist the temptations of fornication and the titillations of the flesh are entirely possessed by the deceit of demons . . . Either such people are foolish (*μωροί*) and have no experience of evil, or in reality they are fond of pleasure and are subject to their passions (*ἐμπαθεῖς*) and . . . they satisfy their vanity and desire for popularity, while they secretly engage in much evil and lawless pleasure, and they will be counted among fornicators and adulterers and sodomites . . . even if, as they say, they perform nothing shameful . . . History has recorded monks of Armenia with this malaise, and of Mesopotamia, Cilicia, and monks from Asia and Pontos and Egypt, and Thessalians and Greeks and Arabians and Persians . . . The demon of fornication . . . goes away

for a while...and makes the one who is being deceived (*χλευαζόμενον*) think that he has reached the heights of impassivity (*ἀπαθείας*) and...makes him...scorn (*μυκτερίζειν*) his brothers...But after all...the demon of fornication attacks the brother...and shows that the man...is like a pig wallowing in mud and is clearly worse than people who openly and publicly commit fornication in the market place.

Then Paul cites the tale of the above-mentioned Eutropios: this eunuch was smitten with a fierce passion for his godson. The author describes in graphic, verging on pornographic, detail, unprecedented in Byzantine literature, the horrible carnal temptations suffered by the hermit. Paul concludes: 'Let what happened to Eutropios...be a lesson for those who say: "We sleep with women and live with children and are not harmed." Upon hearing this, oh, brothers and fathers, let us recoil in horror and tremble and run away as fast we can!'<sup>60</sup>

What appears odd in this text is the inappropriately long list of countries in which monks were subject to the devil's temptations. This may be a reflection of polemics going on behind the scene. It is possible that proponents of oriental asceticism advocated its exotic practices by claiming that Greek ascetics (and Paul of Hellas in particular) could not achieve the peaks of 'impassivity' reached by 'Egyptian' or 'Arab' monks. The author of the letter does not respond to the point directly, but insists that all people are the same.

<sup>60</sup> A. Papadopoulou-Kerameus, *Noctes Petropolitanae* (St Petersburg, 1913), 77–82; cf. Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents, no. 30, 69–73: <http://www.doaks.org/typikaPDF/typ041.pdf>

Apart from anything else, the odd behaviour of the holy fool compromised the whole community of monks. Isaac Syrus, writing in the seventh century, hints as much:

Once I went to an experienced elder and said to him: 'Father, the idea has come to me that early on Sunday I should sit in the church porch and eat, so that everybody going in and out will scold me.' The elder replied: 'It is written that anyone who tempts a layman will not see the light. You are not known in these parts, nobody is familiar with your life, and they will only say that monks eat in the morning. Moreover, there are novice brethren there, and those weak in their resolve, many of whom trust you, and it will be to their detriment if they see you doing this. The fathers of old did such things on account of the many wonders which they worked...so as to subject themselves to abuse, to conceal the glory of this life and cut themselves off from the source of pride. But what impels you to act in similar fashion?...Not everybody derives benefits from this kind of action, but only the perfect and the great, for it involves the renunciation of feelings. For novices or for those who are only half way to perfection, this is harmful...The elders have already been through a period of caution, and they extract benefit from wherever they wish...If this is your true desire, then accept with joy the abuse which will accrue to you by God's ordinance and not through your own will.'<sup>61</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Isaac Syrus, *Slova podvizhicheskie* (Moscow, 1854), 62–3. Several surviving texts which bear the name of Isaac Syrus are of questionable attribution. Among the sermons ascribed to him there are a few that may be regarded as indirect apologia of holy fools. For example: 'Question: If a man commits a good deed out of spiritual purity, and others, unaware of his spiritual life, are tempted, should he abandon his spiritual life because of their temptation?—Answer: This is not his responsibility... For he performs something... good for his soul, motivated by his own goals, and not so as to

Amid the bustle of the city already brimming with vagrants, beggars, and madmen, it was much more difficult to draw attention to oneself than in the monastery. Hence the holy fool sets out on the path which eventually becomes definitive for him: the path of scandalizing and trouble-making. John of Ephesos records what is probably the earliest such case (*BHO*, 1184):

When I was in the city of Amida nine years ago . . . I used to see a young man of handsome appearance as in the garb of a mime-actor, and with him, moreover, a young girl, whose beauty cannot be portrayed and whose appearance was comely and marvellous, accompanied him in the garb of a courtesan, and they used to go about the city in that assumed garb in order to deceive the spectators . . . and they used constantly to perform drolleries and buffooneries, being constantly in the courts of the church like strangers, jesting at the clergymen and everyone, and being boxed on their heads by everyone as mime-actors, while at all hours of the day a large number of people surrounded them . . . joking and playing with them, and giving them slaps on their heads, but at nights men were not able to find out and learn where they slept, so many of the froward men were kindled with the passion of desire for the girl.

[Once some noblemen almost resorted to force in trying to possess the ‘courtesan’—at which point the mime-actor tearfully declared that she was his wife. John followed them secretly to their hide-out.]

tempt others . . . They are not prepared to understand his goal . . . Did St Paul have to keep silent and not preach for the sole reason that others may have thought that the annunciation of the Cross was stupid? Isaac Syrus, *Ta sozomena asketika* (Athens, 1871), 435–6.

... and I saw that both placed themselves standing with their faces towards the east, and stretched out their arms to heaven in prayer in the form of a cross, and after a time they prostrated themselves in prayer... and they went through the same form for a long time, and afterwards they sat down to rest, and thus I on my part ran and fell on my face before them.... And they on their side were alarmed and very greatly annoyed, saying, 'Man, who are you?... And what do you want to learn from mime-actors?' And, because I recognized the trouble which their minds felt... I gave them a great and terrible oath, 'No men shall hear from my mouth about you so long as you are in this city.' Then they were a little appeased, requiring at my hands that I should not be seen speaking with them by day or honour them or greet them, and should not be prevented from slapping them as mime-actors as they said. And I gave them this promise.... And so I went down from them, in fear and in great joy, as they too went down to the court of the church, and when day broke they were to be seen acting mimes before everyone.

On the next night, the couple told John that their names were Theophilus and Maria and that they were born of noble families in Antioch and were supposed to have married, but that a certain holy man—who had also fled from a noble family in Rome (Constantinople?) and had lived as a beggar in the stables—revealed to them the path of highest perfection. The holy man had persuaded them to quit their fathers' houses and, as brother and sister, to 'go out in an assumed garb and in strange countries, hiding the great profit of excellence which you are earning, lest it be snatched from you'. The story ends in a way that we now recognize: John 'had not dared to make use of insult toward

them as they desired', so the couple disappeared from the city.<sup>62</sup>

In this narrative—a striking amalgam of the 'Man of God' motif with the 'secret servants of God' story—we are not actually told what the 'gift of perfection' is. Is holy foolery the 'gift' itself, or a way of masking it? Mummery was obviously reckoned as shameful a profession as prostitution, and the humiliations to which Theophilos and Maria voluntarily subject themselves were, in John of Ephesos' eyes, as bad as can be.<sup>63</sup> But we should again consider the question which arose in connection with Abba Daniel's story of the woman who pretended to be a drunk: how are others *supposed* to react, even if they are the kind of people who are edified as the holy man would wish (assuming the fool has an edificatory purpose)? In Daniel's story it might be reasonable to expect the abbess and the nuns to show boundless patience for the 'drunkard' (or, in the case of Onesima, for the unruly imbecile): they, after all, had chosen the 'angelic' mode of life and ought not to be squeamish or scornful. But what about the ordinary inhabitants of Amida? They have taken no vows. How are they meant to respond to the mime-actor and the courtesan? Are they supposed *not* to laugh at the buffoonery? *Not* to feel attraction for the girl's 'indescribable' beauty? John's spiritual admonition cannot be

<sup>62</sup> John of Ephesos, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, PO 19 (1925), 166–78. Note that the Arabs borrowed the Byzantine word *salos* (in the form *šūlus*) to mean 'jester': see J. Horowitz, *Spuren griechischer Mimen im Orient* (Berlin, 1905), 27–8.

<sup>63</sup> There was a strong later tradition of the holy fool as jester: see G. Widengren, 'Harlekintracht und Mönchskutte, Clownhut und Derwischmutze', *Orientalia Suecana* 1 (1952), 43–51.

verbalized rationally. Yet there is one fundamentally significant aspect of the story: all the pantomimes are acted out in the churchyard, and we can surmise that they involved lampooning the clergy. For the second time, after Serapion (cf. p. 70), the theme of holy foolery is coupled with the theme of sacrilege.

Thus far, we have dealt with holy foolery as a means of self-perfection for a saint who is already perfect. But in one of the stories of Abba Daniel we come across holy foolery as a means of redemption. The tale runs as follows (*BHG*, 2254–5):

They entered the city [Alexandria] and, walking along the street, they saw a monk naked except for a small flask around his waist. This brother made himself out to be a fool (*προσποιοῦμενος ἑαυτὸν σαλόν*),<sup>64</sup> and there were other fools with him. He behaved like a fool and a madman (*ὡς σαλὸς καὶ ἐξηχούμενος*): at the market he stole produce, which he gave away to the other fools. He was called Mark the Horseman, because of the place called the Horse Baths,<sup>65</sup> which was where Mark lived. He would earn a hundred folles a day, and he slept there on a bench.<sup>66</sup> Ten of these

<sup>64</sup> Thus in the Paris manuscript which is the basis for the printed edition. The text in the Moscow Synodal manuscript (Cod. Mosq. 163) has some variants. Here it reads (fo. 207) ‘simulating a fool (*προσποιοῦμενος τὸν σαλόν*)’.

<sup>65</sup> The construction of Horse Baths in Alexandria is glorified by the poet Nicholas Grammatikos (*Anth. Pal.* ix. 628) who most likely lived at the turn of the sixth century: see A. Cameron, ‘On the Date of John of Gaza’, *Classical Quarterly* 43 (1993), 348–51, which provides the *terminus post quem* for the story of Mark.

<sup>66</sup> Bath-house attendants were rather well-paid; besides, they were allowed to live next to bath-houses: see H. J. Magoulias, ‘Bathhouse, Inn, Tavern, Prostitution and the Stage as Seen in The Lives of Saints of the Sixth and Seventh Centuries’, *Epeteris Hetaireias Byzantinon Spoudon* 38 (1971), 237.

coins he would spend on bread for himself, and the rest he gave away to the other fools. The whole town knew Mark the Horseman, because of his insanity. And so, the elder said to his disciple: 'Go and see where this fool lives.' The disciple went and asked, and was told: 'At the Horse Baths: he's a fool'... The elder found the fool...and grabbed hold of him and began to shout: 'Help! Alexandrians! The fool has been mocking the elder!' A crowd gathered...and they all said: 'Don't take offence, he's a fool (*μη πάσχε ὑβριν σαλὸς γάρ ἐστι*). But the elder answered: 'Fools yourselves...!' Clergy from the church also came running, and they recognized the elder and said to him: 'What has this fool done to you?' And the elder replied: 'Take him to the patriarch, for my sake.' And they took him away. And the elder said to the patriarch: 'Today in this city there is no other such vessel [of virtue].' The patriarch, realizing that God was telling the elder this, prostrated himself at the fool's feet and urged him to reveal who he was. The fool recovered his composure and confessed, saying: 'I was a monk, and for fifteen years I was possessed by the demon of fornication. And I came to my senses and said: "Mark, for fifteen years you have served the Enemy, now you must serve Christ for as long." And I went to the Pempton and stayed there for eight years, and after eight years I said to myself: "now go into the city and make yourself a fool (*ποιήσον ἑαυτὸν σαλόν*) for a further eight years".<sup>67</sup> And today is end of my eight years of foolery.' And they all wept as one. Mark and the elder stayed the night in the patriarch's palace.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> In the Moscow Synodal manuscript no. 163 (fo. 207v): 'pretend to be a fool so as to liberate yourself from sin'. Pempton was a strict monastery to the west of Alexandria.

<sup>68</sup> F. Nau and L. Clugnet, 'Vie et récits de l'abbé Daniel', *ROC* 5 (1900), 60-1.



That night the fool died. His path from the monastery to the town would soon be followed by Symeon of Emesa; Mark, however, does not yet venture undisguised aggression which later became Symeon's trademark behaviour. It is true that Mark steals at the market, but at the same time he earns his money honestly in the baths. As we will see below (p. 113–15), Symeon does not know how to make money, and it is only to indulge in outrageous conduct that he comes to the baths. Yet, Daniel is convinced that 'mocking' those around him is what a true holy fool is about. Even though Mark for some reason does not act this way, he has to be provoked, so that his identity (obvious to Daniel as it is) will be exposed: that he belongs to the category of saints characterized by their aggression against the world. So, what we see here is a special group of righteous men that religious thinking distinguished from others.

From this narrative we also learn that fools appeared not only in Syrian towns but also in Egyptian ones, even though there was not a particularly strong tradition of vagrancy among Egyptian monks; and secondly, we hear of a kind of commune of fools in Alexandria. Here is how this 'order'<sup>69</sup> is described by Evagrius Scholastikos at the end of the sixth century:

I will mention another thing, which I nearly missed, even though it is more important than anything else. There are some—not many, but some—who, having achieved impassivity (*ἀπαθείας*)

<sup>69</sup> The quotation marks are essential here, since the holy fool is fundamentally a solitary: see D. S. Likhachev, A. M. Panchenko, and N. V. Ponyrko, *Smekh v Drevnei Rusi* (Leningrad, 1984), 99.

through virtue, return into the world, where amidst the throng they pretend to be insane (*ἐν μέσοις θορύβοις παραφόρους σφᾶς*) and thus they obliterate vainglory which the soul, according to the wise Plato, takes off as the last covering. Their wisdom has taught them how to eat without appetite (*ἀπαθῶς*) wherever it is offered to them: at inns and street-stalls (*παλιγκαπήλοις*), unashamed of place or person or of anything at all. Often they go to the baths, and hang around there, and wash, usually with women [see below, p. 115], subduing their passions so that they have total power over their own nature (*φύσεως τυραννῆσαι*) and do not bend to its demands, whether at the glance, or the touch, or even the embrace, of a woman. They want to be men around men and women around women, they desire to belong to every nature and not just one. Their way of life is so well balanced that, even if they tilt too far sideways, this deviation is imperceptible even though the swing may be strong. For them the opposites are so closely merged (since divine grace joins the non-connectibles and separates them again) that life and death coexist in them . . . The two lives are so closely entangled in them that, even after they have fully rejected the carnal in themselves, they go on living and communicating (*συναυλίζονται*) with those alive . . . they listen to everyone and meet (*συγγίνεσθαι*) everyone . . . And when a guest visits them, they devise a peculiar type of fast: they eat unwillingly.<sup>70</sup>

This interesting text raises a number of problems. In the first place, Evagrius is obviously describing holy fools, yet for some reason refuses to call a spade a spade. Second, he dates the lives of the zealots he describes to the middle of the fifth century—the Empress Eudokia allegedly saw them during

<sup>70</sup> Evagrius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1. 21, ed. J. Bidez and L. Parmentiez (London, 1898), 31–2.

her pilgrimage to Palestine. While monastic holy foolery or the early forms of urban holy foolery may indeed have existed in this early period, holy fools at the most advanced stage of aggression, as described by Evagrius, belong in a different time. Most likely, the historian summarized and ‘aged’ the same material about Symeon of Emesa that he included in another part of his *Ecclesiastical History* (see below, p. 104).

But the problems do not end here. In this passage Evagrius not only offers a theoretical substantiation of holy foolery, but he also refers unexpectedly to the authority of Plato. The philosopher, however, never said anything like this. The pseudo-quotation may be at best vaguely reminiscent of the fragment from the *Phaedo* (87d–e) which says that the body is the ‘last cloak’ of the soul.<sup>71</sup> Meanwhile, Athenaeus and Proclus cite a similar phrase.<sup>72</sup> An early Christian writer Hippolytos of Rome ascribes the same idea to the Indian ‘Brachmanes’.<sup>73</sup> The Neoplatonist Porphyrios in a similar context also refers to ‘Brachmanes’ and ‘gymnosophists’. V. M. Lur’e believes that all these texts, including the passage from Evagrius, originate from a common Hellenistic tradition of ‘naked wizards’. He suggests that this was the source from which the ideologues close to

<sup>71</sup> V. Van Esbroek, ‘Les saints fous de Dieu’, in *Patrimoine Syriaque: Actes du colloque VI: Le monachisme syriaque du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours*, ed. M. Aitallah, i (Antelias, 1999), 220–1.

<sup>72</sup> Athenaeus Naucratis *Deipnosophistarum libri xv*, ed. G. Kaibel, iii (Leipzig, 1890), 121–2; Proclus Diadochus, *Commentary on the First Alcibiades of Plato*, ed. L. G. Westerink (Amsterdam, 1954), 138.12.

<sup>73</sup> Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium*, ed. M. Marcovich, *Patristische Texte und Studien* 25 (Berlin, 1986), 86.

the inner circle of the Empress Eudokia borrowed their 'ideology of holy foolery'.<sup>74</sup>

The observations of Lur'e are very interesting. It seems, however, that he has overlooked a text that is also related to the tradition he is seeking to reconstruct. This is a passage from Emperor Julian, an author highly sensitive to religious synthesis: 'I believe that only Socrates and his few adherents who were indeed felicitous and blessed managed to take off the last cloak of ambition (*τὸν ἔσχατον ἀποδύσασθαι χιτῶνα τῆς φιλοτιμίας*).'<sup>75</sup> This appears to be sufficient evidence to conclude that the remark about Plato slipped in by Evagrius was not accidental, especially since this is the only time he mentions the great philosopher. The phrase 'last chiton' is the only fragment of a once-solid apologetic tradition: Christian intellectuals as early as the fifth century justified the eccentric asceticism of certain monks with references either to Plato or to 'gymnosophists', shamelessly stealing the argument from their pagan predecessors and opponents.<sup>76</sup> Evagrius used this antiquated material to defend holy foolery.

<sup>74</sup> Hieromonk Gregorii (V. M. Lur'e), 'Vremia poetov ili Praeparationes Areopagiticae', in Nonn iz Himna, *Deianiia Iisusa* (Moscow, 2002), 314–24.

<sup>75</sup> Emperor Julian, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. J. Bidez, i.i (Paris, 1932), § 35.17–21.

<sup>76</sup> One cannot agree with V. M. Lur'e's statement that holy foolery was a Christian intellectual response to the increase of 'neo-Dionysian' tendencies: Gregorii, 'Vremia poetov', 325–33.

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## Holy Scandal

By now, in the cultural arena of Eastern Orthodoxy, the stage was set for the entrance of the authentic, ‘classic’ holy fool. The first such character is Symeon of Emesa (Symeon the Fool; Symeon Salos). Evagrius Scholasticus gives a brief account of Symeon,<sup>1</sup> but his full-length vita was written in the seventh century by the Cypriot bishop Leontios of Neapolis (*BHG*, 1677).<sup>2</sup> It is clear from the text that Leontios himself had never been to Emesa, and for that period in Symeon’s life he evidently relied on a vernacular, paterikon-style narrative composed in the 560s or 570s.<sup>3</sup> Although Symeon was himself a Syrian and the oldest

<sup>1</sup> Evagrius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. J. Bidez and L. Parmentier (London, 1898), 182–4.

<sup>2</sup> Leontios of Neapolis, *Vie de Syméon le Fou et Vie de Jean de Chypre*, ed. A.-J. Festugière (Paris, 1974). The hagiographer tries to gloss over the large chronological gap between himself and his protagonist. Cf. L. Rydén, ‘Time in the Lives of the Fools’, *Πολύπλευρος νοῦς. Miscellanea für Peter Schreiner zu seinem 60. Geburtstag* (Munich, 2003) 315–17.

<sup>3</sup> C. Mango, ‘A Byzantine Hagiographer at Work: Leontios of Neapolis’, in *Byzanz und der Westen* (Vienna, 1984), 30. Evagrius’ tale about Symeon ends as follows: ‘But a detailed story about him would require special consideration (πραγματείας ἰδιαζούσης).’ Based on these words, D. Krueger concludes that nothing had been written about Symeon before Evagrius; in

manuscript with his Syriac vita is 200 years older than the earliest surviving manuscript of the Greek version, nevertheless the latter is derived from the former.<sup>4</sup>

Symeon lived in the first half of the sixth century. He is therefore separated from his hagiographer by about a hundred years (Leontios died in the mid-seventh century), during which his cult must have flourished not only in Emesa but also on distant Cyprus. This is the first fully fledged 'holy foolish' vita. It was the model for the vita of Andrew the Fool (Andrew of Constantinople; Andrew Salos), and thence for all subsequent hagiography of holy foolery.<sup>5</sup>

Was Byzantine society in the late sixth and early seventh centuries preoccupied with questions of insanity? Our scarce witnesses come from distinctly exotic sources. One of the stories by the Persian writer Fahkhr al-Din Ali Safi, gathered in the compilation known as *Lata'if al-Tawa'if* (issued 1532–3), clearly derives from a lost Greek prototype.

One of the great scholars of Egypt related thus: 'Once the ruler of Egypt sent me as his envoy to Hirkil [i.e. Emperor Heraklios] in

support of this interpretation, Krueger translates *pragmateia* as 'written work' (D. Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius' Life and the Late Antique City* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996), 22). This is a weak argument, since in many contexts *pragmateia* is opposed to 'writing': see Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* 1.124.2–3. O. Kresten, 'Leontios von Neapolis als Tachygraph?', *Scrittura e civiltà* 1 (1977), was unavailable at the time of writing.

<sup>4</sup> L. Van Rompay, "'Life of Symeon Salos": First Soundings', in *Philohistor: Miscellanea in Honorem C. Laga Septuagenarii*, ed. A. Schoors and P. Van Deun (Leuven, 1994), 382, 398.

<sup>5</sup> In this sense there is something to be said for the paradoxical assertion of Ch. Angelide that 'the history of holy fools...begins and ends with Symeon': Ch. Angelides, 'He parousia ton salon ste Byzantine koinonia', in *Hoi perithoriakoi sto Byzantio* (Athens, 1993), 102.

great Rome (Constantinople). Entering the palace, I saw a fool tethered to the leg of the throne by a golden chain. His grimaces and mannerisms were extraordinary. I was fascinated by him. While Hirkil was engaging the assembled company in conversation, I stuck out my tongue and mimicked the fool. Then the fool said loudly: “Well, well! I’m in chains, but he’s a free man!”<sup>6</sup>

No other authors tell us about the institution of ‘imperial fools’, let alone about fools tethered to the throne. I have been unable to find anything like this story, whether in Arabic sources or in any other earlier sources. Yet the story was not invented by Ali Safi. The ‘great scholar of Egypt’ coming to the Emperor Heraklios strongly resembles Stephen of Alexandria who indeed visited Constantinople in 619–20.<sup>7</sup>

Another possible source of Symeon’s vita is suggested by the work of the thirteenth-century Syriac chronicler Bar Hebraeus, who tells a whole series of stories which seem like distant echoes of the vitae of holy fools. For example: ‘It was said unto a certain lunatic by the demoniacs, “Number for us the demoniacs that are in Emesa.” And he replied, “I cannot count the demoniacs because there are so many, but I can count the men of understanding who are therein because there are so few.”’<sup>8</sup> Mention of Emesa and demoniacs immediately leads one to think of Symeon, and the abundance of madmen reminds one of Symeon calling sane

<sup>6</sup> Ali Safi, *Zanimatel’nye rasskazy*, transl. S. Khovari (Dushanbe, 1985), 148.

<sup>7</sup> W. Wolska-Connus, ‘Stephanos d’Athènes et Stephanos d’Alexandrie’, *REB* 47 (1989), 87.

<sup>8</sup> Gregorius bar Hebraeus, *The Laughable Stories*, transl. E. A. Wallis Budge (London, 1897), 158 no. 630.

people mad (cf. p. 115). Bar Hebraeus says nothing about holy foolery, but the fact that this anecdote survived to his time might suggest that the legend of Symeon of Emesa lived on in folk memory for many centuries after Leontios of Neapolis. Unless the link is in fact the other way round: might the anecdote predate Leontios? It is feasible that Leontios himself relied on popular yarns of some kind. This is further implied by one more of Bar Hebraeus' anecdotes: 'Another lunatic, when the boys were throwing stones at him, ran away from them, and there met him a woman who was carrying a little child, and he went and smote the child so that he nearly died. And the woman said to him, "The wrath of God be upon thee! In what way did the child offend thee?" The lunatic said, "O harlot, tomorrow when he hath grown a little he will be worse than these."<sup>9</sup> This is reminiscent of the episode of Symeon and the girls who sang insulting couplets (below, p. 121) about him. Bar Hebraeus tells the story simply as proof of the madman's madness, with no hint of sympathy for him. The implication is thus that Leontios took a popular anecdote and gave it his own theological interpretation.

Little though we know about the cultural environment in which Symeon of Emesa emerged, or rather, in which his cult was shaped, he does not come across as a completely isolated phenomenon. In the foregoing chapters we have seen evidence to suggest that such cults already existed. D. Krueger, however, in his monograph about Symeon,<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 162 no. 645.

<sup>10</sup> Krueger, *Symeon*. The author distances Symeon from the phenomenon of *salotes* on the strange pretext that 'a discussion of a motif of holy folly is



believes that the image of the holy fool from Emesa was the product of Leontios' fantasy about a 'Christian Diogenes'.<sup>11</sup> This hypothesis looks odd.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, the shaping of holy foolery as a cultural phenomenon was a gradual process, so the reader of Symeon's *vita* would be more likely to recall Serapion Sindonites than Diogenes. On the other hand (as Krueger himself admits),<sup>13</sup> to Christian men of authority Diogenes was at best an ambivalent figure: they praised him because he held Alexander the Great in contempt, and castigated him for everything else, mostly for his unruly conduct. 'Cynicism is infinitely far from Christianity,'<sup>14</sup> wrote Eunomius in the fourth century. 'Diogenes . . . showed a disgusting example,'<sup>15</sup> echoed Theodoret in the fifth century. There is no doubt that Leontios of Neapolis used certain traits of Diogenes<sup>16</sup> by way of a literary game, yet this could not serve as a justification of Symeon. He did not need justification, especially of this sort.

Another possible source of Symeon's *vita* could be the mime show<sup>17</sup>—that is, a vulgar street show with traditional

inconclusive . . . the small size of the sample makes generalization difficult' (62 n. 11).

<sup>11</sup> Krueger, *Symeon*, 105.

<sup>12</sup> For more detail see my review in *VV* 58/83 (1999), 262–4.

<sup>13</sup> Krueger, *Symeon*, 83–9.

<sup>14</sup> Eunomius, *The Extant Works*, ed. R. P. Vaggione (Oxford, 1987), § 19. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Theodoret of Cyrrihus, *Thérapeutique des maladies helléniques*, ed. P. Canivet, SC 57 (Paris, 1958), xii, § 48.

<sup>16</sup> Krueger identifies the following motifs as borrowed from the Cynics: eating the beans which caused meteorism; a predilection for raw meat; pulling a dead dog on a string; feigning insanity: Krueger, *Symeon*, 96–104.

<sup>17</sup> See C. Ludwig, *Sonderformen byzantinischer Hagiographie und ihr literarisches Vorbild* (Frankfurt am Main, 1997), 208–9, 382; P. Speck, 'Verloren und Verkannt', *Varia* 7 (2000), 90–1.

stories and masks. We recall (above, p. 95) that in Amida a pair of young holy fools dressed in ragged clothes (in Syriac *ruqe*), as mummers; when Ephrem Syrus simulated madness (above, p. 8) he also dressed in *ruqe*. The holy fools, like mummers, receive ‘slaps round the head (κατὰ κόρῃς ῥαπίσματα)’. The Greek verb *paizein* (‘to play’) is equally applicable to the actions of the mummer or the holy fool, who also played his role in the absurd (in his view) theatre of earthly life. Most likely the mummer and the fool were also very similar in their outward appearance.<sup>18</sup> Yet we should still never forget that, by contrast with the Western court jester who enjoyed a measure of immunity, the Byzantine mummer was always despised; in effect, he was regarded almost as an ‘untouchable’.<sup>19</sup> The holy fool wore the mummer’s mask not so as to tell the truth more easily (the Byzantine truth-lover would not have been saved by the mask anyway), but in order to drink more deeply from the cup of humility.

However, neither mime-show nor any other material<sup>20</sup> that Leontios may have used should lead one to conclude that the image of Symeon can be analysed outside the cultural paradigm of holy foolery. Let us turn to the text of his remarkable vita.

Symeon and his friend John entered a monastery (58–66),<sup>21</sup> but after just two days they already felt that monastic

<sup>18</sup> G. Widengren, ‘Harlekintracht und Mönchskutte, Clownhut und Derwischmutze’, *Orientalia Suecana* 1 (1952), 43–50, 69–78.

<sup>19</sup> See F. Tinnfeld, ‘Zum profanen Mimos in Byzanz nach dem Verdikt des Trullanums 691’, *Byzantina* 6 (1974), 325.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. E. Kislinger, ‘Symeon Salos’ Hund’, *JÖB* 38 (1988), 165–70.

<sup>21</sup> Page and line numbers in the running text refer to Festugière’s edition, *Vie de Syméon le Fou et Vie de Jean de Chypre*.

asceticism was too simple, so they decided to go off into the desert and become *boskoi* (66.16–67.24), that is hermits who feed on what grows around them. Abbot Nikon blessed them in their endeavour (66.25–71.9). After they had lived as anchorites for twenty-nine years (72.10–76.13), Symeon asked his companion: ‘Brother, what is the point of our endeavours in this desert? Listen: get up and let’s go and save others as well. As it is, we are of use only to ourselves, and we receive recompense from nobody’ (76.14–16).

John objected: ‘Brother, I think that Satan has grown envious of our quiet life and has instilled this thought in you’ (76.22–3). Symeon was unbending: ‘Believe me, I will not stay here, but by Christ’s will I will set off to mock at the world (ἐμπαίζω τῷ κόσμῳ)’ (76.25–6). John no longer raised fundamental objections, but he refused to accompany Symeon, saying: ‘I have not yet achieved such a degree [of perfection] that I can mock at the world’ (76.28). As they parted, John again warned: ‘Symeon, make sure that it is not the devil wanting to make sport with you (χλευάσαι σέ θέλη)’ (77.16).<sup>22</sup>

Satan is repeatedly mentioned because laughter and mockery are his domain, while the pious ascetic is supposed to grieve and weep. Leontios gives us to understand that Symeon does not deny this general rule, but rather—relying on the degree of perfection that he has achieved—he intrudes onto the devil’s territory: ‘By the will of God he fled

<sup>22</sup> The hagiographer probably alludes to the words of Athanasios of Alexandria: ‘The devil never misses the chance to make fun (παίξειν) of those who feign insanity (ὑποκρινόμενοι τὴν μανίαν)’: Athanasios, ‘Epistulae quattuor ad Serapionem’, PG, 26, col. 532.

from the desert into the world, as if to a duel with the devil' (58.18–20).

When he reached Jerusalem, Symeon prayed 'that his deeds remain hidden right until the day of his departure from life, so that he might avoid earthly praise' (78.23–5). To John, therefore, Symeon explained his departure from the desert in terms of his desire to save others, whereas from God he asks for success not in helping people but in concealing his own sanctity from them. These two motifs intertwine with one another for the length of the vita.

While he is committed to saving people from sins, lust, in particular, the saint himself was fully immune to them.

He said that in the desert he had often been eaten away by lust, but he had prayed to God and the great Nikon that he be spared the battle against lust. And lo and behold: one day the glorious [Nikon] himself appeared and said: 'How are things, brother?' And Symeon answered: 'It will be bad if you cannot help me, for the flesh is confounding me, I know not why.' The wondrous Nikon smiled at his words, drew water from the holy river Jordan, splashed it on him below the navel, made the sign of the Cross, and said: 'Now you are healthy again.' And from that moment on Symeon never felt the fire of the flesh and the struggle, neither in his sleep nor while awake. And here was why this valiant man was bold enough to return into the world, in order to help and save those struggling [with temptation]. (89.4–14)

Here is another paradox about Symeon: he pushes people to engage in difficult struggle which he himself is miraculously spared, but he cannot in the same way deliver others from it. Just how he 'helped and saved', we shall see in due course,

but Leontios meanwhile adduces another reason for his holy foolery:

As soon as he had performed something wondrous, the saint would immediately leave that place until what he had performed was forgotten. Furthermore, he attempted immediately to contrive something improper (*σχηματίσασθαι ἄκαιρον τίποτε*), the better to mask his achievement. (81.5–8)

God was the cause of all, and He concealed the aims of Abba Symeon. (99.14)

Only with deacon John did he have long and frequent conversations, but he threatened John with great torments in the world to come if he gave away his secret. (100.18–20)

Eventually Leontios articulates this duality of purpose openly:

The righteous one performed some of his deeds for the salvation of others and out of sympathy for them, but others he performed in order to conceal his spiritual endeavours. (83.16–18)

This, in general, was the purpose of the wise Symeon: in the first place, to save souls either through his assaults (*ἐπιφορῶν*) on them in what were ostensibly jokes or deceptions, or through the miracles that he wrought in an imperceptible way (*ἀνοήτως*), or through the teachings that he uttered in his foolery (*σαλίζων*); and in the second place, his purpose was to conceal his own virtue and not to be thought worthy of praise and honour. (91.12–16)

None of these explanations, however, adequately justifies the veritable Bacchanalia of indecency with which Symeon commenced his vocation in the city of Emesa:<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Emesa (modern Hims) was an entirely Syriac town. Syriac was Symeon's native tongue, and almost all the leading characters in the vita spoke Syriac.

Here is how he entered the town: he found a dead dog at the dump outside town, removed his belt cord, tied it to the dog's paw and ran, dragging the dog behind him. He entered the city gates, near which there was a children's school. When the children saw, they began to shout: 'Look at the stupid abba (*ἄββας μωρός*)!' and they chased after him and beat him all over. (79.19–25)

Next day Symeon 'tipped over the tables of the pastry-sellers, who beat him for it to within an inch of his life'. Then he got a job selling beans, but started giving them away free, so again he was beaten and his beard was pulled out (80.5–18). He smashed wine-pitchers with a length of wood, with which the inn-keeper then beat him (81.15–18). He prevented young men from playing sports, and he threw stones at them (83.23–6). He stole a strap from a school and went around town lashing the columns (84.22–8). When a learned monk came to him for advice, Symeon cuffed him round the ears such that his cheeks were red for three days (87.9–10). He dispatched a little demon to break the crockery in the hostelry, and when the hostess chased after him he picked up filth from the ground and threw it in her face, and later he 'mocked her as he passed by' (88.3–11). He collected stones and threw them at anybody who tried to cross the square (91.5–8); he cast a squint upon a group of girls (91.17–20); and so on.

Sexual aggression is especially prominent. Symeon 'in pretence' tried to rape an innkeeper's wife (81.25–82.9). He asked to kiss the girls on whom he had conjured the squint, making this a condition for their cure (91.25).

He had a habit of visiting the houses of rich men<sup>24</sup> and amusing himself (*παίλειν*) there. Often he pretended to kiss their slave-girls. (85.10–11)

The blessed [Symeon] achieved such a level of purity and impassivity (*ἀπαθείας*) that he would often prance and join in their dancing, with a girl on each arm, and he would do this and play around in full view of everybody, so that sometimes shameless wenches would thrust their hands into the folds of his garment and tousele him and squeeze him and try to arouse him. (88.28–89.3)

Near Emesa there lived a certain *protokometes*, and when he heard about Symeon he said: ‘If I see him, surely I will find out whether he is a faker (*προσποιητής*) or truly out of his mind (*ἔξηχος*).’ And in the city he happened to come across Symeon when the latter was being dragged by one whore and whipped by another. The *protokometes* was led astray (*ἔσκανδαλίσθη*). He began reasoning with himself, and said, in Syriac: ‘Only Satan himself could doubt that this pseudo-abba is fornicating with them.’ Immediately the holy fool left the girls and came up to the *protokometes* and dealt him a blow (*κοσσόν*). Then he opened out his clothing and said, jiggling and whistling: ‘Come here, you miserable man, have some fun (*παῖξον*), there’s no catch here (*ὠδε δόλος οὐκ ἔστιν*)!’ (90.11–20)

<sup>24</sup> What follows from this revealing phrase is that Symeon was not denied welcome in places like this. Elsewhere, Leontios remarks that some regarded his character as a ‘domestic saint’ (86.3–4). There is no explanation of what a ‘domestic saint’ (*τοῦ οἴκου ἅγιον*) was, but we can surmise that the phrase describes a simpleton lodger or hanger-on. The short *vita* written by Evagrius implies that Symeon’s actual prototype, who may indeed have lived in Emesa, was in fact a much less anti-social type than Leontios portrayed him. In the short *vita* the holy fool has a whole group of confidants instead of just one: ‘Symeon was doing all this in the square. But he also had a few friends (*συνήθεις*) with whom he communicated genuinely, without any pretence.’ See: Evagrius, *Historia* 183.11–13.

Once deacon John suggested that Symeon go to the bath-house:<sup>25</sup>

And Symeon replied, laughing: 'Yes, let's go, let's go!' And with these words he removed his clothes and put them on his head, winding them into a kind of turban. John said to him: 'Put your clothes on, brother! Truly, if you show off, naked, then I won't go with you.' But Abba Symeon replied: 'Stop that, you idiot, I'm just doing one thing before another. If you don't go, I'll go without you.' And he left him and went on a little bit ahead of him. There were two bath-houses next to each other, one for men and one for women.<sup>26</sup> And the holy fool walked past the men's bath-house and aimed determinedly (ἐκουσίως) for the women's. John shouted at him: 'Where are you going, Fool? Wait, that's for women!' But the holy man turned and replied: 'Stop that, you idiot. There's hot and cold there and there's hot and cold here, and there's nothing else either here or there.'<sup>27</sup> He rushed into the crowd of women as if for the glory of God (ὡς ἐπὶ Κυρίου τῆς δόξης). And they all set upon him and forced him out with their fists. When the holy man [later] recounted all his life to the God-loving deacon, John

<sup>25</sup> The danger of visiting the bath-house is cited in one of the texts by John Moschos, who says that in the bath-house it is almost impossible to escape temptation: the righteous man Daniel intentionally set a demon on a woman from Alexandria who frequently came to the bath-house to commit sexual provocation: E. Mioni, 'Il Pratum Spirituale di Giovanne Mosco', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 16 (1950), 92–3; cf. *BHG*, 2102c.

<sup>26</sup> In the early Byzantine period it was forbidden for men and women to wash together, the ban being especially strict for clergymen; but these bans, even though periodically reiterated, were often broken: see Ph. Koukoules, *Byzantinon bios kai politismos*, iv (Athens, 1951), 460–2.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel of Sketis tells of a monk who, when he went to the bath-house, 'was not embarrassed to show his own nakedness, nor to look at the nakedness of others': but for Daniel this is reprehensible. Wortley, *A Repertoire*, no. 465 (*BHG*, 2102c). Later we will see this motif in relation to other saints: below, pp. 187, etc.



asked: ‘What, in the Lord’s name, father, did you feel when you went into the women’s bath-house?’ He answered: ‘Believe me, my son, I felt then as a log among logs. I did not feel that I myself had a body, nor that I was among bodies. All my mind was directed towards God’s work, and I did not deviate from it.’ (82.26–83.16)<sup>28</sup>

We interrupt the tale of Symeon’s improprieties to note that Leontios, in the most scandalous episodes, does not justify the saint’s shocking behaviour by saying it was just a guise. Instead he adds another justification: Symeon had no time to concern himself with trivia, since he was so deeply immersed in his inner life. This explanation is obviously strained.<sup>29</sup> Why do his legs take Symeon past the men’s bath-house to the women’s? Is the men’s bath-house a worse place to think about God? Apart from the hagiographer’s instinctive delicacy in dealing with his hero’s most brazen dissoluteness, there seems here to be a distant echo of the ‘cynical’ behavioural paradigm. The analogy is especially marked in the following episode:

He was as if incorporeal, so he saw no unseemliness (*ἀσχημοσύνην*) in anything, whether in people or in nature. Often, when his bowels demanded the performance of their regular needs, he would squat there and then, in full view, in the middle of the square, without any embarrassment whatever. By acting thus,

<sup>28</sup> The article by D. A. Koukoura, ‘He parousia tes gynaiakas sto bio Symeon tou dia Christon salou’, *Kleronomia* 19 (1987), 129–48, has remained inaccessible to me.

<sup>29</sup> Yet it is accepted by A. M. Panchenko, ‘Smekh kak zrelishche’, in D. S. Likhachev, A. M. Panchenko and N. V. Ponyrko (eds.), *Smekh v Drevnei Rusi* (Leningrad, 1984), 128: ‘Symeon proceeds from a principle of usefulness that is alien to people with superficial common sense.’

he wanted to persuade everybody that he was out of his natural mind (τῶν κατὰ φύσιν φρενῶν ἐξεστηκώς). (82.13–17)

Here again, without explanation, the usual motif of ‘simulation’ is supplemented with the motif of ‘living in accordance with nature’: the episode of public defecation refers us directly to tales of Diogenes.<sup>30</sup>

Yet the most striking aspect of Symeon’s asceticism is his sacrilege:

The day after [his arrival in Emesa], on Sunday, he gathered nuts<sup>31</sup> and went into a church at the start of the service, throwing nuts<sup>32</sup> and extinguishing the lamps. People tried to expel him, but he leapt onto the ambo and started throwing nuts at the women. He was ejected with great difficulty. (79.25–80.2)

The man who hired him to work complains that Symeon ‘eats meat as if he had no God (ὡς μὴ ἔχων Θεόν)’. As his hagiographer explains:

Often the saint would eat meat while eating no bread for a whole week. Nobody witnessed his fast, but he would eat the meat in public view, so as to deceive them. (82.10–12)

<sup>30</sup> See Krueger, *Symeon*, 95–6. Emesa, a city with standards set by Roman civilization, undoubtedly had public lavatories: see A. Scobie, ‘Slums, Sanitation and Mortality in the Roman World’, *Klio* 68/2 (1986), 408–9.

<sup>31</sup> In myths the nut is often a symbol of hidden wisdom. However, like all mysteries, it evokes feelings of ambiguity: in the folklore of some peoples, the devil carries a sack of nuts. See *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery*, ed. A. de Vries (Amsterdam and London, 1974), 345.

<sup>32</sup> Or ‘playing with nuts’, see: J. Darrouzès, ‘Bulletin critique’, *REB* 22 (1964), 264; Ph. Koukoules, *Byzantinon bios*, i (Athens, 1949), 171–2; several other examples can be added: J. Darrouzès, *Georges et Démétrios Tornikès: Lettres et Discours* (Paris, 1970), 213.7; L. Cohn (ed.), *Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt*, i (Berlin, 1962), no. 50.2; K. Stähle, *Die Zahlenmystik bei Philon von Alexandria* (Leipzig, 1931), fr. 26a.13.

He had the gift of restraint to an extent rare even among saints. When Lent came, he fasted right through to Maundy Thursday. On that day he would sit down by the pastry seller and eat from morning, and people who saw him were led astray (ἐσκανδαλίζοντο) because on Maundy Thursday he did not fast. But deacon John understood that the righteous man was acting according to God's will. (90.23–91.1)

Sometimes on Sundays he would take a string of sausages and wear them like a clergyman's *orarion*. In his left hand he carried mustard, and from early morning he would dip the sausages in the mustard and eat; and he would anoint (ἔχριεν) with mustard the lips of several of those who came to jest (παῖξαι) thus with him. (94.25–95.3)

Curiously, although Symeon himself broke the social rules of decency and the Church's canons, he was not at all forgiving towards others who did the same. For example, although he was well known as a man who 'irritates everyone and mocks everyone, especially monks (κατ' ἐξαίρετον δὲ τοὺς μοναχοὺς)' (87.4), nevertheless when a group of girls 'caught sight of him and began to sing scurrilous couplets (καταλέγειν) about monks, the righteous one prayed that they be punished, and God instantly afflicted them all with a squint' (91.18–20). Moreover, he would frequently 'shout at people, accusing them of not going to receive communion often enough' (96.19), yet he himself was obviously none too diligent in the observance of the rituals. However, though the double standard is plain enough, Leontios never declares it explicitly.

Leontios tells us that his hero could act the maniac, the moonstruck or the ranter, but that he preferred the latter:

He always behaved indecorously and in the manner of fools (*διὰ σχημάτων σαλῶν καὶ ἀσχημῶν*), and his actions cannot be put into words. Sometimes he would pretend to be lame, sometimes he would run skipingly along, sometimes he would drag himself along on his backside, sometimes he would stick his foot out in front of somebody running [in the crowd] and send them tumbling. Alternatively: at the new moon he acted like one who was moonstruck (*ἐποίει ἑαυτὸν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν θεωροῦντα*), falling flat out and thrashing around in a fit. Sometimes he would pretend to be a ranter (*διαλαλοῦντα προσεποιεῖτο*). He used to say that this mode of behaviour was most suitable for someone affecting foolishness for Christ's sake (*προσποιοῦμενος μωρίαν διὰ Χριστόν*). Thus he would often expose and avert transgressions and would cast his wrath on people for the sake of their correction, and would make predictions (*προέλεγεν τινα*) and would do whatever he liked, merely changing his voice and appearance. But whatever he did, he was taken for one of the many people who are incited to babble and prophesy by demons (*ἐκ δαιμόνων διαλαλοῦντας καὶ προφητεύοντας*). (89.19–90.4)

Others said his prophecies were from Satan since he himself was utterly insane. (86.3–4)

Leontios goes into more detail about Symeon's relation to people possessed by the devil:

He had boundless sympathy for the possessed. Often he would come to them in various guises, pretending to be one of them, and he would spend time with them and would cure many of them through prayer, so that some of the possessed said in their ranting (*διαλαλεῖν*): 'Fool, you are strong! You scoff (*χλευάζεις*) at the whole world, and have you now come to us to do us harm? Go away! You are not one of us! Why do you torment and burn us day

and night?’ When the saint was there he accused many of theft and fornication, as if his ranting was inspired by the Holy Spirit (*ὡς διαλαλῶν ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου*) (96.12–18)

We can conclude that, when Symeon pretended to be possessed, only the demons, who had entered into the unfortunate madmen, could find him out. Still more interesting is the fact that apparently ranting could be ‘holy’ as well as ‘diabolical’ (sadly, Leontios does not develop the theme), and this undermines any attempt to assess Symeon’s sanctity ‘objectively’. This passage suggests yet another important conclusion: the madmen visited by Symeon stayed together in an unidentified place, which was also where sane people came and where Symeon condemned them. Such an asylum for the insane may have been located next to a town church or monastery. If true, it is noteworthy that Leontios is reticent about it. In the Greek version of his *vita*, Symeon dies in obscurity, but the Syriac version depicts his death as a socially significant event. Some ‘believers’ take his body and place it in a marble urn in the Church of the Forerunner in the Cave monastery. One may surmise that, after Leontios’ *vita* had spread and become popular, a local cult of Symeon grew in Emesa, based in this monastery.<sup>33</sup> It is even conceivable that the ‘historical’ Symeon might also have come to the Church of the Forerunner at some point; or that he was kept there as a madman. More significant, however, is the fact that Leontios chose to omit this information, even if he knew it: to him Symeon’s only way to connect with the Church was in the form of ugly scandal.

<sup>33</sup> Van Rompay, ‘“Life of Symeon Salos”’, 389–91.

The *vita* ends with a passionate plea not to judge (103.14–104.4). Although formally this imitated the Gospel's injunction—judge not, in the sense of 'condemn not'—in fact the sense here is 'judge not' in the sense of 'do not engage in judicious assessment or analysis'. Symeon accused Origen precisely of excessive cleverness, for Origen: 'went too far out to sea, and could not get back, and drowned in the deep' (87.12–13).

Yet without the capacity to assess, one cannot tell good from evil. Christian morality is built on the principle that man is free to choose. Can we really conclude that Leontios is denying the Christian concept of freedom? He does not do so directly, though it is worth looking more closely at the passage—already mentioned—in which Symeon called down a squint upon the girls who sang scurrilous couplets.

Those of them who did not consent to the holy fool kissing them remained cross-eyed and wept . . . But when he had gone a little way off, then these, too, ran up to him crying: 'Wait, Fool, for God's sake wait! Kiss us also!' So there was the spectacle of the elder shuffling away while the girls chased after him. Some said that he was toying with them, while others reckoned that they had also lost their minds. Incidentally, these girls never did get cured. The saint said: 'If God had not sent this squint upon them, they would have surpassed all the women of Syria in their dissoluteness'. (91.26–92.6)

The burlesque character of this scene (on a possible folk prototype see p. 107) should not obscure from us its somewhat alarming point: the girls were already doomed. Were it not for the squint, they would have had no chance of salvation. This may be cruel, but it is consistent. If saints

are 'doomed' to sainthood, then sinners are 'sentenced' to sin. This is the only way in which a holy fool may avoid responsibility for driving people into temptation.

The story of the girls and the squint is also important because it touches on the issue of a Christian's freedom.

We can summarize one of the 'edifying tales' attributed to John Moschos, though it is absent from his main collection, the *Spiritual Meadow*.

An anchorite wanted to penetrate the secrets of Divine Providence. An angel appeared to him in the guise of another anchorite, and each thing he did was odder than the last: he threw out the precious vessel on which their hospitable host had given them food. He straightened a bad man's fence; and finally when a pious Christian brought him his son for blessing, the angel/pseudo-anchorite killed the boy.<sup>34</sup> In response to the questions of the astonished hermit, the angel explained that the good Christian had received the vessel through improper means, so that to be rid of it was a blessing; there was hidden treasure under the bad person's fence, which he would certainly have found if he had begun to repair the fence himself; and finally, the good Christian's love for his son was detrimental to his almsgiving, so the murder was also a blessing.

This parable corresponds almost exactly to Sura 18 of the Koran.<sup>35</sup> A similar legend can be found in rabbinic

<sup>34</sup> Mioni, 'Il Pratum Spirituale', n. 6. This tale has survived to our own times in modern Greek folklore: see R. M. Dawkins, *Modern Greek Folktales* (Oxford, 1953), 482–7; cf. *idem*, *Forty Five Stories from the Dodekanese* (Cambridge, 1950), 257–61.

<sup>35</sup> B. Paret, 'Un parallèle byzantin à Coran', *REB* 26 (1968), 138–41.

literature. The story was also subsequently known both in the Catholic West<sup>36</sup> and among the Slavs.<sup>37</sup> It is impossible to say whether the angel in the parable does good or ill, since his action is wholly governed by Providence. But because this creature of the heavens acts in the visage of a man, the legend leaves a strange aftertaste of unease and uncertainty. Can all these incomprehensible and sinister actions truly be prescribed by God? Meeting a holy fool must have evoked a similarly ambiguous sense of alarm and amazement, of horrified wonderment. The following circumstance shows that this analogy did exist in popular consciousness.

In Russian folklore we find a legend of an angel who hires himself out to work for a priest. This 'hired hand' behaves in the most perverse ways. Walking past a church, he starts to throw stones, and tries to aim straight at the cross; yet next to the tavern, he prays. As A. M. Panchenko has cogently observed, 'this legend is a folkloric analogy of the typical vita of a holy fool; it is especially close to the vita of Vasilii (Basil) the Blessed',<sup>38</sup> the famous Russian *iurodivyi* (see below, p. 320). Yet Panchenko, in our view, is mistaken on two counts. First, this Russian story<sup>39</sup> is merely a paraphrase of the equivalent Byzantine story, where all the elements of

<sup>36</sup> Dawkins, *Modern Greek Folktales*, 482; A. Ia. Gurevich, *Kul'tura i obshchestvo srednevekovoi Evropy glazami sovremennikov* (Moscow, 1989), 340–1.

<sup>37</sup> See L. G. Barag *et al.*, *Sravnitel'nyi ukazatel' siuzhetov: Vostochnoslavianskaia skazka*, (Leningrad, 1979), no. 796\*; cf. no. 759\*\*.

<sup>38</sup> In Likhachev, Panchenko, and Ponyrko, 'Smekh', 106–7; cf. B. A. Uspenskii, 'Antipovedenie v kul'ture Drevnei Rusi', *Problemy izucheniia kul'turnogo naslediiia* (Moscow, 1985), 332.

<sup>39</sup> Barag *et al.*, *Sravnitel'nyi ukazatel' siuzhetov*, no. 795.



holy foolery were already present: the angel who worked as a priest's(!) servant, who throws stones at the demons leaping around at the entrance to the church, and who makes the sign of the Cross next to the tavern, that the drunkards may be saved; who berates the beggar (because he is actually rich), etc.<sup>40</sup> More importantly, however, Panchenko was mistaken with regard to the story's origins. In his view both the angel and the holy fool derive from the folkloric 'tale of the fool', yet if we look carefully at the question of origins it becomes clear that the angel/hired hand is a later development of the angel/anchorite in the story attributed to John Moschos: his behaviour serves to demonstrate not the wily wisdom of the folkloric fool (a typical character in Russian—but not Greek—folklore, from which this tale is derived), but the inscrutability of God's judgement. The fact that the folkloric angel's behaviour is also transferred to Vasilii the Blessed indicates, in our view, their fundamental similarity of function: the holy fool, like the angel, is perceived as a living reminder that the ways of the Lord are 'non-linear'.

\* \* \*

Leontios of Neapolis wrote another extensive vita: that of John the Almsgiver (*BHG*, 886–9), composed in 641–2.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> In its Greek variant this tale of the inscrutability of Divine Providence has another level: the angel has been cast down to earth for muttering against God's command that he gather in the soul of a young woman, mother of two infant children. See *Pontiaka phylla* 1/3–4 (1936), 43.

<sup>41</sup> Mango, 'A Byzantine Hagiographer', 33.

This vita includes an inserted novella about Vitalios, a holy fool from Alexandria.<sup>42</sup> Scholars disagree on whether this work was written before or after the vita of Symeon. V. Déroche<sup>43</sup> and C. Mango<sup>44</sup> proceed from the assumption that if deacon John, Symeon's confidant, was middle-aged at the time of the 588 earthquake (mentioned in the vita), and if it was from him that Leontios learnt the details of the holy fool's life, then it is unlikely that Symeon's vita could have been written after John's. This argument is refuted by L. Rydèn, who believes that John never existed: he was merely a literary character and Leontios used written sources, not oral ones. There is additional evidence confirming that Leontios portrayed Vitalios before he portrayed Symeon: Vitalios is said to turn whores to piety (see below, p. 127), but Leontios says nothing of this sort about Symeon, though it is mentioned in Symeon's short vita by Evagrius Scholastikos. All the other episodes in this brief vita have parallels in Leontios' text. Rydèn's explanation is that Leontios had 'used up' this motif in the tale of Vitalios.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, Vitalios in some sense is a more radical holy fool than Symeon, so it might be logical to suggest that he is the later character. Yet, he is not labelled *salos*. It is impossible to reach a firm conclusion.

<sup>42</sup> See the use of this legend in the story 'Der schlimm Heilige Vitalis' by the nineteenth-century Swiss writer G. Keller: *Sieben Legenden* (Berlin, 1958).

<sup>43</sup> Déroche, *Études*, 16–18.

<sup>44</sup> Mango, 'A Byzantine Hagiographer', 33.

<sup>45</sup> L. Rydèn, 'The Date of the Life of St. Symeon the Fool', in *Aetos: Studies in Honour of Cyril Mango* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1998), 264–9; cf. J. Hofstra, 'Leontios van Neapolis als hagiograaf', in *De heiligenverering in de eerste eeuwen van het christendom*, ed. A. Hilhorst (Nijmegen, 1988), 189–91.

By contrast with the vita of Symeon—which survives in few manuscripts, none of them earlier than the eleventh century—the vita of John the Almsgiver has come down to us in a large number of copies, the oldest of which is from the ninth century.<sup>46</sup> So Vitalios must also have been renowned, although his story is only tenuously connected to the main subject of the vita.

One great elder, who was sixty years old, heard of the deeds of the blessed [John] and decided to test him: whether he was quick to believe slander, whether he was easily led astray (*εὐσκανδάλιστος*), whether he ever condemned anybody. And so, after living for a while in the monastery of Abba Spiridon,<sup>47</sup> Vitalios entered Alexandria and took on the way of life by which people could be easily led astray, but which God—who, in the words of David, gives to each according to his heart—deems desirable. (387.1–7)

Vitalios began by paying prostitutes but not using their services (387.9–30; cf. 603), just like Symeon, and before him Serapion, except that here the sinister power of the holy fool is more prominent than in the previous cases:

When one of them gave him away, revealing his way of life, saying: ‘he doesn’t come to us for fornication but to save us’, the elder prayed, and she became possessed, so that the others might be alarmed by her example and would not give him away during his lifetime. And people said to the one that was possessed: ‘Well, God has paid you back for your lies. This poor man came to you for fornication, not for anything else!’ (387.21–30)

<sup>46</sup> Leontios of Neapolis, *Vie de Syméon le Fou et Vie de Jean de Chypre*, 269–70. As above, references in the running text refer to this edition.

<sup>47</sup> This monastery was situated in Gaza: *ibid.*, 629.

[Yet, owing to the saint's tireless labours,] some of them did give up their fornication, some married and lived chaste lives, others left the world entirely and became nuns. But until his death nobody knew that the women stopped sinning because of his prayers. (389)

The saint's cell was near the Sunny gates, next to the church of St Mithra.<sup>48</sup> So as to encourage the prostitutes to go to services, Vitalios organized mock liturgies for them. 'And when they came, he did their bidding and ate and played with them (*συντρῶγων καὶ συμπαίζων αὐταῖς*). And people were enraged that 'all of them love this pseudo-abba and are tolerant towards him' (390).

And so St Vitalios (for this was his name) wished to eschew human praise and to save souls from darkness. When he finished his work and received his pay, he would say to himself, so that everybody could hear: 'Master, let's go; mistress so-and-so awaits you'... And when many accused him and laughed at him, he would reply: 'What is the matter? Do I not have a body, as all men? Or is God angry only with monks, because they are dead to this life? In truth monks, too, are people, as all men.' Then some people said to him: 'Abba, take a wife, change your garb, and have children! You should not insult God, nor should you take the penalty for the souls that are led astray by you (*ἵνα μὴ βλασφημῆται ὁ Θεὸς διὰ σου καὶ ἔχῃς τὸ κρῖμα τῶν σκανδαλιζομένων ψυχῶν εἰς σε...*).' He replied with abuse, pretending to be annoyed: 'I swear to God, I don't hear you! Leave me alone! Can I really do nothing to stop you being led astray (*σκανδαλίζησθε*) except take a wife, mind the house and spend my days miserably (*ποιῶ κακὰς ἡμέρας*)? No, by God! He who wants to be led

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 596, 609.

astray will be led astray in any case (ὁ θέλων σκανδαλισθῆναι σκανδαλισθῆ) and will knock his head against the wall. What do you want from me? Has He really appointed you as my judges? Go away! Mind your own business! You don't answer for me. There is one Judge and the holy Day of Judgement, and on that Day He will render unto each according to their deeds. I would not have come to Alexandria if God had not wanted me to.' This was all said pugnatically (στασιάζων) and vociferously, so that eventually the others shut their mouths. Finally he said: 'If you don't stop this, I'll make you do so, to your cost!' And some of those versed in canon law, when they had heard such things from him several times, complained to the patriarch. But God, knowing that the saint did not mean to offend Him (οὐ θέλει προσκροῦσαι αὐτῷ ὁ ὁσιος), stiffened the patriarch's heart, and he believed none of it. (388)

Here the theme of the holy fool's sacrilege is encapsulated, as a philosophical argument: although the dialogue is superficially chaotic, its essentials are conceived with far greater precision than in the vita of Symeon. The holy fool's position can be summarized thus: God decides what is and what is not offensive to Him; if people are led astray, that is their own fault. Subsequently, this latter proposition is somewhat modified:

And God's servant Vitalios did not cease from his labours. And he asked God that after his death [he be allowed] to appear to some people in their sleep and to reassure them, and that it should not be counted a sin if anybody had been led astray by him (μὴ λογίσηται ἁμαρτίαν τοῖς σκανδαλιζομένοις εἰς αὐτόν). 'For,' he said, 'what I did can easily lead astray (εὐσκανδάλιστόν ἐστιν),

and I bear no ill will against any man, even if he has said something [against me].’ (389.90–3)

Before his death Vitalios left an inscription on the floor of his cell in Alexandria: ‘Alexandrians, judge nobody until the time when the Lord shall come.’

Then all the whores gathered... with candles and lamps... and they told of his life, that ‘he did not visit us for shameful ends’, and ‘we never saw him lying on his side, or drinking wine... or holding any of us by the hand’. Many reproached them saying: ‘Why did you not tell of this [before]? The whole town was led astray (ἐσκανδαλίζετο) because of him!’ (390–1)

The answer is clear: what is done cannot be put right, but in future one should hold back from precipitous judgement.

We might note that the same vita also continues the tradition of ‘secret servants’. The hero, John the Almsgiver, welcomed all monks: ‘the good, and those who seemed bad (τοὺς νομιζομένους κακοὺς)’. On one occasion, a wandering monk arrived in Alexandria with a woman. Since she was taken for his wife, the monk was thrown into prison and punished with lashes, on the grounds that he ‘ridiculed (κωμωδεῖ) the angelic monastic garb’ (373). The patriarch decided to inspect the traces of the blows on the body of the imprisoned monk, and by chance he saw that the monk was a eunuch. Realizing that the eunuch was not guilty of fornication, John nevertheless reproached him gently: ‘My child, you should be more circumspect than to go about the town in our angelic clothing while taking a woman with you, for the idle crowd to abuse you’ (374).

The monk gave the not entirely coherent explanation that the woman was a Jew who had asked him to baptize her. Yet John, when he heard this, exclaimed: 'Ah, how numerous are the secret servants of God! And we, in our humbleness, know them not!' (375). Thus in one and the same work we find the developed form of holy foolery side by side with its embryonic form.

Overall it would be fair to say that the writings of Leontios of Neapolis represent the pinnacle of the *literary* development of the ideas of holy foolery. All that followed was, in essence, merely a succession of adaptations and regurgitations of what had been achieved by him.

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In the mid-seventh century the eastern Mediterranean was taken from Byzantium by the Arabs. Into the hands of infidels fell the ancient centres of Christianity—Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria; and also the centres of holy foolery—Emesa, Amida, the Nile Valley. In a later chapter we shall consider the extent to which the Christian notion of 'foolishness for Christ's sake' may have had an influence on Islam (below, Chapter 13); but what happened to the holy fools themselves?

The sources tell us nothing.<sup>49</sup> As we have observed, holy foolery arises where Christianity is *not* subject to persecution and where the Christian state is not threatened by

<sup>49</sup> J. Grosdidier de Matons, 'Les thèmes d'édification dans la Vie d'André Salos', *Travaux et Mémoires* 4 (1970), 301.

infidels: when the self-sacrifice, the rebelliousness, the ambiguities and unpredictability of early Christianity gradually give way to conformity and compromise. In this sense the Arab advance restored Christianity to a more pristine condition: Christian culture was no longer in danger of 'silting up', and hence no longer needed anybody to disturb its peace, for there was no longer any peace to disturb.

Holy foolery was forced to move westwards, at the very moment when the challenge of Islam forced Orthodoxy to reflect on its own traditional practices, and the 692 Council in Trullo was an important stage in this process. The Council prohibited many customs which seemed suspicious even though they had traditionally been tolerated (e.g. mime shows, New Year celebrations). Holy foolery, too, was engulfed by this wave of standardization. Canon 60 of the Council declared:

[One must] by all means punish those who pretend to be possessed (*δαίμονας ὑποκρινομένους*) and who deceitfully (*προσποιητῶς*) imitate the possessed in the corruption of morals. Such people must be subjected to the same severity and chastisement as if they had truly been possessed.<sup>50</sup>

In addition, the eighth century was scarred by the Iconoclast controversies, whose bitterness left no scope for spiritual slackness. The struggle also claimed its share of martyrs, and this was perhaps another factor which sapped the energy from holy foolery.

<sup>50</sup> J. B. Mansi (ed.), *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, xi (Paris, 1901), ed. 969. Canon 62 also dealt an oblique blow against holy foolery.



A consequence of all this, added to the general scantiness of the sources for the Byzantine ‘dark ages’, is that for a hundred years from the mid-seventh century we hear nothing about holy foolery. The works of Leontios of Neapolis were forgotten everywhere except on his native Cyprus: in 788, at the Seventh Ecumenical Council, one of his successors, Constantine, had to remind the bishops about the author and his works, including a mention of the *vita* of Symeon.<sup>51</sup> The next episode of holy foolery is understandably linked to Cyprus, which had been spared occupation by the Arabs. The short *vita* of the ascetic Theodulos (d. 755) tells of how the saint:

had the gift of foreseeing the intentions of all people. If anybody came to him and said one thing rather than another, he would reveal such a person’s fault . . . and tell him of his hidden intentions and, making himself out to be foolish (*σχηματισάμενος δὲ ἑαυτῷ μωρίαν*), would expose his transgressions and turn him to repentance.<sup>52</sup>

The text does not make it fully clear why Theodulos acted the fool, but we can be sure in any case that holy foolery was merely a supplementary device for him.

After the Council in Trullo, attitudes to holy foolery changed. It is mentioned twice in the ninth-century *vita* of Gregory Dekapolites (*BHG*, 711), negatively on both occasions:

A monk, who had attained the spiritual achievement of silence, along with the other brethren, pretended to be driven wild by a demon (*προσεποιήσατο ὑπὸ δαίμονος ὀχλεῖσθαι*), and those who were with him could not endure his improprieties and violence, so

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii (1902) col. 53.

<sup>52</sup> *Il Menologio de Basilio II*, ii. (Turin, 1907), 223; cf. *Menologium Basilianum*: PG 117, col. 192.

they shackled him and decided to bring him to the saint. But the saint exposed his wilful pretence and his deliberate demoniac behaviour (*ἐπίπλαστον σκοπὸν καὶ τὸν ἐθελούσιον δαίμονα*), saying: ‘Brother, no good can come of false pretence.’<sup>53</sup>

The very appearance of the sixtieth canon of the Council in Trullo shows that holy foolery had migrated from literature into life: and this episode clearly demonstrates that the canon was applied in practice. The second episode is yet more curious: [When the saint lived in an isolated cell outside the city] the enemy [of humankind] turned himself into one of the city’s fools (*σαλῶν*) and suddenly appeared in the cell. Inside, he leapt onto the saint’s shoulders and began to mock (*καταπαίζειν*) the saint with malevolent laughter. But the saint called on Christ and was filled with holy fervour, and drove him off.<sup>54</sup>

So, a Christian must bear in mind that not only a holy fool, but also the devil may disguise himself as a madman. It is not so strange, since there had always been similarities between the two: the mission for both of them was to mock the world (*ἐμπαίζειν τῷ κόσμῳ*).<sup>55</sup> In effect what we have here are the first expressions of the fear of the holy fool—a fear which had always been latent.

Developing this theme, we turn to the *vita* of Leo of Catania (*BHG*, 981), which was written in roughly the same period. The *vita* brings to the fore an unusually colourful character: Heliodoros the magician, who turned money into rotting refuse, charmed women into exposing

<sup>53</sup> Ignatios Diakonos, *Vita des hl. Gregorios Dekapolites*, ed. G. Makris (Stuttgart, 1997), 106–8.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>55</sup> See, on the devil, Symeon the New Theologian, *Catecheses* xxiii. 181–3.

themselves, and performed many other foul deeds. The following episode is relevant to our survey:

This impious and stupid (ἄφρων) Heliodoros, on the pretext that he was a Christian, entered God's temple with a crowd of believers. There he set about kicking and wildly leaping, imitating an ass, and also playfully (παικτικῶς) jumping out at everyone. Sometimes he made the townspeople laugh, but at other times he provoked indignation, for he chattered about trivia and declaimed monstrous, blasphemous speeches. Once during the performance of a religious ceremony this trouble-maker declared to all those present: 'I can make your bishop and all his priests leap about.'<sup>56</sup>

Clearly Heliodoros misbehaves in church almost exactly like Symeon of Emesa. We cannot be certain whether the author had in mind the holy fool's type of provocation; still less whether the intention was to unmask it; but in any case the readers of the vita of Leo of Catania were given a lesson—that such behaviour derives from demonic forces.

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Thus far we have considered only religious foolery, but in the ninth century we find a curious example of what might be called 'secular' holy foolery. The phrase is, of course, an oxymoron, since the very concept of holy foolery describes a specific religious phenomenon. Yet for the following passage we can make an exception and use the term loosely and metaphorically, to describe a type of behaviour—much as the term *iurodstvo* is used in Russian today.

<sup>56</sup> *Vita s. Leonis Catanensis*, in B. Latyshev, *Neizdannye grecheskie agiograficheskie teksty* (St Petersburg, 1914), 25. Cf. A. Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature (650–850)* (Athens, 1999), 301.

The chronicle of Theophanes Continuatus describes how the Emperor Michael III (856–67) surrounded himself with a gang of rogues whom ‘he clad in priests’ clothing, and he iniquitously and sacrilegiously persuaded them to perform sacred rituals’. Michael dubbed his protégé Gryllos ‘patriarch’, and he called himself ‘Metropolitan of Koloneia’, and ‘he filled the gilt vessels with mustard and pepper... and thus made a mockery of the sacraments’, and so on.<sup>57</sup> In these scenes the emperor is not in the foreground, but he is the orchestrator of the sacrilegious amusements, whose nature becomes obvious in the following episode:

Intemperate in his pursuit of temperance (*μέτριον ἦθος ἀμέτρως καταδιώκων*), he departed from decorum (*ἐξέπιπτε τοῦ πρέποντος*), and in particular from imperial dignity. Once, along the road, he met a woman, to whose son he was godfather. She was coming from the bath-house and was carrying a pitcher. Leaping from his horse, the emperor... overtook the woman, grabbed the pitcher from her hands and said: ‘Come on, woman, don’t be shy, take me home with you, I want to try bran bread and fresh cheese’ (his exact words must be cited). The woman was nonplussed by this strange spectacle, and completely at a loss (*πάντως ἠπόρει*)... Yet in the twinkling of an eye Michael had turned round, grabbed her towel that was wet after the bath-house... taken her keys and had himself become everything at once: emperor, butler, chef, and diner. He emptied this poor woman’s store-room, helped himself to the food, and supped with her in imitation of Christ our God (*τὴν μίμησιν πρὸς τὸν ἐμὸν ἀναφέρων Χριστὸν καὶ θεόν*).<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *Theophanes Continuatus* ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1838), iv. 38–9, 44; v. 23–4, 25.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, iv. 37; 199–200.

Even more striking is the fact that the mother of the emperor's godson is later numbered among 'tradeswomen and whores',<sup>59</sup> while a parallel source, Pseudo-Symeon, adds that Michael 'reckoned that he had bought this woman for fifty obols, which he gave to her husband'.<sup>60</sup> Ia. Liubarskii noted the carnivalesque character of Michael's sacrilegious amusements, and concludes that 'the actions of the emperor and his company of jesters must somehow or other be linked to the rituals of "upside-down" relationships'.<sup>61</sup> Here, as so often in the late Soviet study of the humanities, we see the influence of the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin; but in this case perhaps Bakhtin's concept of the 'carnavalesque' is interpreted too broadly. We will return to the theme later in connection with Ivan the Terrible (see p. 288), but suffice it to say that carnival is equally carnivalesque for all its participants, whereas here the woman is dumbstruck by the incongruity of the spectacle being played out before her. She cannot even work out such a basic question as whether Michael is laughing with her or at her. Nobody knows what is in the emperor's mind. He is fearsome in his unpredictability, like a holy fool.

Liubarskii proposes that 'Michael is giving a performance in the style of a mime-show'.<sup>62</sup> C. Ludwig agrees that here we might be witnessing something reminiscent of mime.<sup>63</sup> However, when actors put on a show, the spectator is at a

<sup>59</sup> *Theophanes Continuatus*, 200.12.      <sup>60</sup> *Symeon Magister*, 661.4–5.

<sup>61</sup> Ia. N. Liubarskii, 'Tsar'-mim', in *Vizantiia i Rus'* (Moscow, 1989), 254–5.

<sup>62</sup> Ia. N. Liubarskii, 'Sochineniia prodolzhatelia Feofana', in *Prodolzhatel' Feofana: Zhizneopisaniia vizantiiskikh tsarei* (St Petersburg, 1992), 252.

<sup>63</sup> Ludwig, *Sonderformen*, 370–2.

comfortable remove from the stage, but here everybody is drawn into the incomprehensible scene, as is the case with the actions of the holy fool. Liubarskii acutely observes that the list of the roles that Michael takes upon himself matches the masks of mime: the chef, the 'butler', and the diner can all be found in Chorikios' list of thirteen regular theatrical characters.<sup>64</sup> But Liubarskii passes over the function which stands at the very head of the list in Theophanes Continuatus' story: *he was the emperor*. Hence the woman's problem. Michael presented, as it were, a divided image: while posing as others, he never ceased to be emperor. Michael's aim was to show that he remained emperor *even though* he may deny himself his emperor's attributes. For him the charisma of power is absolute, not conventional. The emperor is playing exactly like a holy fool.

The divinely crowned emperor has no qualms about visiting his 'hostess'; nor had Symeon. Michael turns out to be the godfather of her son; the holy fool of Emesa falsely confesses his paternity of the son of a servant-girl. The emperor buys the woman from her husband; Vitalios (in the *vita* of John the Almsgiver) pays prostitutes. The ambivalence of the emperor's behaviour is conveyed through the use of the participle *paizon* (playing), a word which was regularly applied to holy fools. Just as Symeon's sanctity is not in the least diminished by his visit to the women's bath-house, so in the emperor's hands the woman's towel, still damp from the bath-house, becomes a *messalion*, a special coverlet used only on tables at the palace.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Liubarskii, 'Sochinieniia', 252.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De caerimoniis aulae Byzantinae*, i (Bonn, 1829), 465.10.

If we 'read' Michael III's behaviour as playing at holy foolery, then the final words of the cited episode (he 'helped himself to the food, and supped with her in imitation of Christ our God') appear in a new light. Here, surely, we glimpse the same kind of guardedly ambivalent attitude to Michael that we have seen with regard to holy fools. The 'mime' context cannot account for the reference to Christ, but it becomes perfectly explicable in a context of holy foolery. The holy fool condescends to mimic human vices, as Christ condescended to take on human form.

Michael is first in the line of holy foolish rulers. There were others, apparently. It is no accident that Theodore Metochites condemns the tyrant who 'plays the fool with fools and the ruffian with ruffians'.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Theodore Metochites, *Miscellanea philosophica et historica graeca*, ed. G. Müller and T. Kiessling (Leipzig, 1821), 638; cf. Dr. Doran, *The History of Court Fools* (London, 1859), 380–1.

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## The 'Second Edition' of Holy Foolery

Gradually holy foolery began to re-establish itself. It is noteworthy that a similar pattern of decline and revival can be observed among the other category of Byzantine saints 'beyond the call of duty': stylites. Two stylites were venerated in the fifth century, one in the sixth, and another in the first half of the seventh century (all four were Syrians). Then there is a gap of two and a half centuries until the next two stylites emerge in the tenth century, and another in the eleventh (all in Constantinople and its environs).<sup>1</sup> This similarity is all the more significant because there is a certain inner kinship between the two types of spiritual endeavour. Superficially this might seem paradoxical: the stylite displays his piety for all to see, while the holy fool is a saint in secret. But on a deeper level all becomes comprehensible. The stylite lays bare, in the starkest possible way, the latent thirst

<sup>1</sup> See J.-M. Sansterre, 'Les saints stylites du V au XI siècle, permanence et évolution d'un type de sainteté', in J. Marx (ed.), *Sainteté et martyre dans les religions du Livre* (Brussels, 1989); for different figures, but showing the same tendencies, see I. Peña, P. Castellana, and R. Fernandez, *Les stylites syriens* (Milan, 1980), 79–94.



for attention that is also a component of holy foolery. Both types of spiritual endeavour were seen by many as having the potential to be motivated by pride, and as early as the fifth century Theodoret of Cyrrihus had to defend stylites with arguments which could perfectly well have been applicable in a defence of holy fools:

God gathers people, [showing them] something unexpected (*παραδόξω*), and thus prepares them for listening to prophecy. Who can fail to be stunned at the sight of a man of God walking naked? Just as almighty God gave his commands to each of the prophets, in his concern for the [spiritual] benefit to those who lived too frivolously, even thus He has also devised this new unlikely spectacle so as to attract people and prepare them to listen to instruction.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, we have an instance of the complete fusion of the two types of asceticism. The following tale is to be found in the vita of Theodore of Edessa (*BHG*, 1744):

[Outside the city] the saint saw a multitude of pillars... and he asked what this was. The clergymen who were travelling with him said that the pillars had been erected in the days of the pious emperor Maurice [late sixth century] and that at various times many stylites had lived atop them and had spent their entire lives thus. When the saint asked whether there was still even one stylite monk living on these pillars, they answered that there was nobody except for a lone elder called Theodosios... who had lost his reason (*τὰς φρένας ἀπολωλεκότα*): 'he', they said, 'looks from above, and when he sees people passing by, he rejoices and says

<sup>2</sup> Theodoret of Cyrrihus, *Histoire des moines de Syrie*, ed. P. Canivet and A. Leroy-Molinghen, ii, SC 257 (Paris, 1977), 186–8.

pleasant things to some of them, but at others he complains, and he bewails himself and them; this is why he has gone out of his mind (ἐξέστηκώς). The saint enquired how many years this person had lived on a pillar. They said they did not know but that they had heard that he had spent eighty-five years there.<sup>3</sup>

Naturally, Theodore did not believe that the elder was insane and he approached him for instruction. At first the elder asked to be left in peace so that he could bewail his own inadequacies; but, enlightened from above, he then abandoned his pretence and began a normal conversation with Theodore, whom he first obliged not to reveal his (Theodosios') secret.

It is hard to date the first signs of the revival of holy foolery. The word *salos*, with a new meaning of 'pretender, buffoon' but not 'madman', is first registered at the turn of the ninth century, in a homily of Theodore of Stoudios: 'You think, my children, that to be a monk means merely to put on black clothing, to shave your head, and to grow a long beard? Not at all. A *salos* or actor can do all of this (συμβαίνει γὰρ καὶ σαλὸν τοῦτο ποιῆσαι καὶ θυμελικόν).'<sup>4</sup> So, for Theodore holy foolery exists as a well-known form of asceticism. About a century later the Emperor Leo VI recommends holy foolery as a remedy against conceit: 'If a man's cleverness instil in him pride and pretension, let him clothe himself in foolishness for Christ's sake (διὰ Χριστὸν ἀφροσύνην). He who has grown arrogant

<sup>3</sup> *Zhitie izhe vo sviatykh ottsa nashogo Feodora arkhiepiskopa Edesskogo*, ed. I. Pomialovskii (St Petersburg, 1892), 52–3.

<sup>4</sup> Theodore of Stoudios, *Magna catechesis* 82, ed. J. Cozza-Luzi, in *Nova patrum bibliotheca*, x. i (Rome, 1905), 25.

because of his feats, by himself or because of the praise of others, let him heal by means of a light and feigned insanity.’<sup>5</sup>

The first evidence of Symeon of Emesa’s veneration is found in a ninth-century calendar from Sinai; this is also where Vitalios (from the *vita* of John the Almsgiver) is commemorated;<sup>6</sup> however, unlike Symeon, he is not referred to as a holy fool.<sup>7</sup> More significant, however, is the reappearance of the holy fool on the streets of the Byzantine city, and the earliest such case seems to be the hitherto entirely forgotten figure of Paul the Corinthian.

St Paul the Corinthian (*BHG*, 2362) is well attested in many synaxaria (calendars of canonized saints) from the tenth century onwards. Unfortunately, his *vita*, which is found in just one manuscript (Cod. Paris 1452, fol. 227<sup>v</sup>) under 29 February, breaks off after the very first sentence.<sup>8</sup> All synaxaria agree, however, on the nature of his sanctity:

<sup>5</sup> A. I. Papadopoulo-Kerameus, *Varia graeca sacra* (St Petersburg, 1909), 243.

<sup>6</sup> A. Dmitrievskii, *Opisanie liturgicheskikh rukopisei*, i. i (Kiev, 1895), 215, 219. The first canon dedicated to Symeon was probably written by Theophanes of Nicaea (d. ca. 850); see Sergii, *Polnyi mesiatseslov Vostoka*, ii (Moscow, 1997), 219.

<sup>7</sup> Afterwards, Symeon was always commemorated on the same day (21 July) and appears in all the menologia, whereas for Vitalios the date of his commemoration was never firmly established; see Sergii, *Polnyi mesiatseslov Vostoka*, ii, 219–20.

<sup>8</sup> A. Ehrhard, *Überlieferung und Bestand der hagiographischen und homiletischen Literatur der griechischen Kirche*, i (Leipzig, 1937), 579 n. 1. Note that Paul is also mentioned under 28 February and 6 November. For more details see my article: S. A. Ivanov, ‘St. Paul the Corinthian, Holy Fool’, in *The Heroes of the Orthodox Church: The New Saints, 8th–16th C.*, ed. E. Kountoura-Galake (Athens, 2004), 39–46.

Paul was a *salos* for Christ's sake. The commemorative iambic distich, found in several manuscripts, tells us very little: 'Paul feigned stupidity while alive (*Υποκριθεὶς ὁ Παύλος ἐν γῆ μωρίαν*), but after his death he joined the chorus of those who are divinely wise.'<sup>9</sup> Yet there does exist a text dedicated to Paul: a canon in his honour, appearing under 11 November.<sup>10</sup>

Although the genre of canon does not normally go into details, this text—written by one of Paul's fellow countrymen—contains interesting data. 'You shone the light of your virtue on all your fatherland and on your townspeople' (200–2; cf. 242). The canon facilitates the task of establishing the date of Paul's life, or rather of his death: several times the author turns to the Mother of God for help: 'Enemies strive to overthrow us, who are without hope; please thwart them and defend us' (64–7; cf. 214, 242–4). On one occasion the 'enemies' are identified: 'Lay low the insolence of [the people of] Ishmael, who bark madly at us' (220–2). The enemies threatening the city of Corinth were therefore Arabs. Other sources record only one such attack:<sup>11</sup> that of 879.<sup>12</sup> This moment of trepidation is depicted in the canon. Moreover, we can assume that the glorification of the memory of Paul, which was called into question by the city authorities, became possible thanks to the dire

<sup>9</sup> *Martyrologium metricum Ecclesiae Graecae*, ed. V. G. Siberas (Leipzig, 1727), 364.

<sup>10</sup> *Analecta Hymnica Graeca*, iii, ed. J. Schiro (Rome, 1972), 346–55. Hereafter references to lines of this edition are given in the text.

<sup>11</sup> A. Bon, *Le Peloponnèse byzantin jusqu'en 1203* (Paris, 1951), 77.

<sup>12</sup> V. Christides, *The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (ca. 824): A Turning Point in the Struggle Between Byzantium and Islam* (Athens, 1984), 162.

circumstances of the siege: 'As your relatives and friends and as people of your fatherland, the authorities, together with women and beggars, look at your grave and praise your virtues and cry, bewailing their orphanage, and calling you father and great defender' (207–14). Paul probably died not long before the siege, and therefore lived in the middle of the ninth century.

It is fairly clear why Paul appeared when and where he did. The crisis of the Dark Age in Corinth seems to have come to an end in the middle of the ninth century. According to archaeological evidence, the city was growing continually from the year 835. Trade with other parts of Greece increased, and, to judge by the numismatic evidence, a money economy flourished.<sup>13</sup> After a long break a bishop of Corinth appears at a synod of 869.<sup>14</sup> So, the cultural ground of Corinth had been made ready for the emergence of a holy fool, an indispensable accuser of civilized Orthodox Christian society.

What do we learn of Paul from the canon? Some of his features are characteristic of any *salos*. 'You, o wise father, were mocking the senseless and stupid [people] with your unseemly words and in their eyes you became foolishness for Christ's sake and a laughing-stock (λόγοις ἀσχήμοσι, πάτερ, τοὺς ἄφρονας καὶ ἀνοήτους ἐπιγελῶν, τούτοις μωρία διὰ Χριστὸν καὶ παίγνιον γέγονας)' (33–6). And again, 'With your unseemly words you looked like a laughing-stock to

<sup>13</sup> D. M. Metcalf, 'Corinth in the Ninth Century: The Numismatic Evidence', *Hesperia* 42 (1973), 196, 201.

<sup>14</sup> T. A. Gritsopoulos, 'Ekklesiastike historia Korinthias', *Peloponnesiaka* 9 (1972), 134.

those who met you (ῥήμασιν ἀσχήμοσι τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσι παίγνιον ὠφθης)' (79–82). Like any *salos*, Paul feigns debauchery in the daytime, but 'at night, unseen, you watered the meadow of your plantations with the springs of your tears' (111–14). Like the earliest holy fools, such as Mark of Alexandria, Paul 'used to distribute benefits to the needy, and paid for the feeding of the poor . . . and he used to give away the wealth that he got from devout and Christ-loving people' (51–7). We learn from the canon that Paul not only spoke unseemly words but also 'filled his lips with indecent songs (Ὁμιλῶν ἀσχημόνως καὶ ἀσμάτων ἀσέμνων χεῖλη πληρῶν)' (153–5).

The hymnographer addresses his hero: 'you bestowed the grace of healing upon those who believed in you, Paul, while you lived, and even after your death, appearing to many people in dreams' (93–6). Such conduct reminds us of Symeon of Emesa, as does: 'walking in the night . . . in prayer and supplication you shone with virtues as if in daylight' (197–9). Yet the canon also indicates some traits which are lacking in previous vitae of holy fools and which prefigure aspects of the vita of Andrew the Fool (see below, p. 157). Like Andrew, Paul commenced his spiritual endeavours in childhood (ἐξ ἀπαλῶν ὀνύχων) (11). Like Andrew, Paul was not a monk, since the canon praises him for being 'a supporter of monks (τῶν μοναζόντων ἔρεισμα)' (181). We recall that Symeon, on the contrary, was especially famous for mocking monks.

The author links Paul the Corinthian to the words of his namesake Paul the Apostle—in the first Epistle to the Corinthians—concerning the 'foolishness of God', which is

'wiser than human wisdom'. Interestingly, however, the author does not quote Scripture directly, but just makes a faint allusion which, presumably, was supposed to be understood: 'Truly you received a symbolic name, for you are indeed a chosen vessel following the words of Paul. You were never pleasing to people, but remained a servant of God. To those who looked at you you seemed drunk and insane, but you directed your thoughts to God (*ἀνθρώποις ἀρέσκων μηδαμῶς δοῦλος ὑπηρχες Χριστοῦ μέθην καὶ ἔκστασιν νοὸς τοῖς βλέπουσιν, ἄνω δὲ τὴν ἔννοιαν πρὸς Θεὸν διεβίβαζες*)' (42–50). This means that the contextualization of holy foolery was by that time well established in Corinth. Perhaps those who defended Paul against the adherents of the Trullo regulation made some rhetorical use of the fact that the Apostle Paul had addressed his words about *moria dia Christon* to their native city.

The veneration of Paul the Corinthian was clearly controversial: 'O blessed one, the flow of blood from your painful ulcers extinguished the fire of the lies of foul slanderers, who, father, reproached your way of life and called you possessed and unlawful *salos* (*δαιμονιῶντα καὶ σαλόν σε καλούντων ἀθέμιτον*)' (116–22). As we see, the author tries to distinguish his hero from other fools, whose foolishness might really be 'unlawful', and who are denounced as *saloi*. In the canon itself the word *salos* is never applied to Paul. He acquired the label only in later synaxaria. Yet to the author of the canon (or to his audience) even the celebrated notion of a 'fool for Christ's sake' is suspect, and he distinguishes Paul from this group too: 'Outwardly in your conduct you seemed a fool for Christ, but in your mind, Paul, you were

a prudent servant of God (ἐξώθεν τῶ σχήματι διὰ Χριστὸν μωρὸς δείκνυσαι, ἀλλὰ τῶ νῶ φρόνιμος θεράπων τοῦ Θεοῦ, Παύλε, γέγονας)' (74–8).

It is noteworthy that the author uses the theological and ascetic term *apatheia* (impassivity) to justify holy foolery: 'Having mortified the members of your body you at the same time mortified all stirrings of passion and lived the life of impassivity' (123–6). The idea that the holy fool was immune to sin due to his *apatheia* had been developed earlier, but in the canon it acquires a special emphasis: what appears to be implied here is a polemic against those who denounced Paul's provocative conduct.

The most famous holy fools of Byzantium—such as Isidora/Onesima, Alexios the Man of God, Symeon, or Andrew, who are mentioned in all synaxaria—barely existed in reality. They are literary fictions, or, at best, composites of several persons. By contrast, Paul the Corinthian was apparently real, an acquaintance of the author of the canon. The canon mentions a small trait which has no literary pedigree and looks like an observation from real life: Paul seems to have been an obsessive hand-washer, whereas generally holy fools never washed. 'By washing clean your saintly hands with an abundance of water, O most wise one, you teach those who watch you to cleanse their hearts' (145–50). If this suggestion is correct, then probably Paul was the first real person whose abnormal conduct was 'normalized' in accordance with a pre-existing hagiographic cliché.



A still more enigmatic holy fool is St Theodore (feast day 25 February; in calendars from the eleventh century).<sup>15</sup> A couplet about him appears in several synaxaria: 'Like David, O most blessed one, you willingly deserted your reason. But you were saved not from Anchus [cf. 1 Kgdms. 21:13] but from the life of the world.'<sup>16</sup> The only biographical detail that we have about Theodore is the word *Kolokasiou* (a place-name?) next to his name in the Cryptoferrata Eklogadion.<sup>17</sup> The toponym (probably a monastery) 'Kolokasion' does not occur in other sources. One may hypothesize, if only tentatively, as to its whereabouts. *Kolokasion* was a very rare Greek word meaning the root of the Egyptian water-lily that was used for medicinal purposes. This plant was also found in Asia Minor; in Galatia (Sykeon)<sup>18</sup> and Pontos.<sup>19</sup> It may be that the town (or monastery) where Theodore the Fool performed his feats was located somewhere in these same vicinities. This is why it is unlikely that he was a Balkan saint.

As has recently been shown,<sup>20</sup> the second half of the ninth century saw the composition of the vita of St Grigentios,

<sup>15</sup> This Theodore is not to be confused with his namesake Theodore the Fool, whose feast day was 16 March (see below, p. 233), nor with the Russian holy fool Fedor of Novgorod (feast day 19 January).

<sup>16</sup> Cod. Mosqu. 390, fol. 345<sup>v</sup>; cf. Nikodemos Hagioreites, *Synaxaristes ton dodeka menon*, i (Athens, 1868), 479.

<sup>17</sup> Sergii, *Polnyi mesiatseslov Vostoka*, ii. 55.

<sup>18</sup> Athenaeos Naucraticus, *Deipnosophistarum libri xv*, ed. G. Kaibel, i (Leipzig, 1887), 170.

<sup>19</sup> Photios, *Epistulae et Amphiloquia*, ed. B. Laourdas and L. G. Westerink, vi. 1 (Leipzig, 1987), 125.

<sup>20</sup> A. Berger, 'Das Dossier des heiligen Grigentios, ein Werk der Makedonenzeit', *Byzantina* 22 (2001), 64. I am grateful to Professor Berger for giving me access to the text of the vita, which he is preparing for publication.

containing no fewer than four persons reminiscent, in various ways, of holy foolery. The author locates them in different towns: Morino, Agrigentum, Carthage, and Rome. However, the modern editor of the text, A. Berger, argues that the author had never been to any of these towns, but had spent his life in one of the monasteries in Constantinople. Hence the specifics all relate to the imperial capital. The first of these episodes runs as follows:

In that city there was a holy man named Peter, who began to pretend to be a fool, on account of his repute among people (*διὰ τὴν ἀνθρώπων δόξαν προσεποιεῖτο μωραίνειν*). He was very undemanding. At times he lived unnoticed (*λεληθότως*) in the unpopulated parts of the city, and at times in the centre. People did not know the extent to which this man was a servant of Jesus Christ. Once the blessed [Grigentios] set off for the Great Church, and the holy Peter was there as well. When this child of Christ had prayed and had gone to sit on one of the nearby benches, the holy Peter noticed him and said: 'Welcome, child Grigentios! Your father and your spiritual mother, and their household, grieve for you very much, but Jesus Christ has called you to great honour and glory. Be manful, child, renounce your kin for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.' On hearing this, the blessed Grigentios was astonished by the holy man's perspicacity, and he bowed to him and repented. He was struck by his appearance: extremely meek and worn down from strict abstinence, so that he looked like just skin and bones (*ὥστε τὰ ξερά καὶ μόνον εἶναι αὐτόν*). He was extraordinarily bent and did not raise his head, and this honourable person was dressed in the merest rags. (2.52–66)

In his depiction of Peter the hagiographer uses a few small fragments from the paradigm of the holy fool (the

desire to avoid human praise, frequenting the city centre), but all the other components of this portrait are quite unlike those of the holy fool. In the subsequent narrative, as in this extract, Peter demonstrates wondrous spiritual vision, but there is nothing provocative in his behaviour.

A woman in Agrigentum is described more amply and with more gusto: leaning over the balcony of her house, she would reveal the marital infidelities of passers-by, and would give the precise names and circumstances of the adulterers and of other transgression (2.340–57). The scene is evidently derived from real life, for the accusations which the woman blurts out are full of plausible details. Only when she launches into praises for Grigentios, whose holiness she prophetically perceives, does the narrative return to the well-worn path of rhetorical cliché (2.358–73). Yet the hagiographer himself is apparently uncertain as to how to explain the woman's gift: 'The Lord alone knows whether she was willingly demented (*έκουσίως παρατραπέν*), or whether she was "possessed with a spirit of divination" [Acts 16:16], according to Scripture' (2.341–2).

The third case of pious simulation in the *vita* of Grigentios concerns a certain Philothea of Carthage (the location is, we again stress, purely conventional). This girl 'pretended a demon had driven her wild (*σχηματισσαμένη τε έαυτήν ώσανει δαίμονα ληφθεϊσα*)' just at the moment when a young man had been about to seduce her. Thenceforth, Philothea consistently maintained her assumed persona and 'in the image of one possessed she served the living God' for fully thirty-six years (4.43–4). Strictly speaking,

however, she cannot be defined as a holy fool, since she displays no aggression towards those around her.<sup>21</sup>

The fourth character in this series from the *vita* is the most interesting, and we must consider him at greater length. The author affirms that the following episode took place in Rome, though the topographical details are not specific.

As [Grigentios] was crossing the city square, he saw a demented man (*παραφρονοῦντα*) named John, who had appeared in the distance near an abandoned garden. He was standing under a blossoming nut-tree (*καρύας*) pretending to throw stones at the people walking along that street. A bunch of children turned up and, standing a little way off, began to throw stones viciously back, as if they themselves had gone mad. But the man was not really throwing stones at them, but was only pretending. Taking aim as if to let fly at somebody, he would miss them and do them no harm. When the blessed [Grigentios'] route took him close to [John], the children who were standing a way off shouted: 'Don't go near him, brother, so as not to get hit by one of his stones!' But the saint took no notice and continued on his way until he found himself next to the man. He saw how [John] would gather stones from a pile and store them in his garment, apparently ready to throw them at anybody who tried to walk down that street. The righteous [Grigentios] said to him: 'Greetings, brother in the Lord!' [John] looked at him, immediately tipped the stones from his garment onto the ground, bent his knee in respect, stretched out on the

<sup>21</sup> If Philothea's foolery is her penance for having once lapsed into the sin of lust, then she is one of a small group of 'penitential holy fools' such as Mark and Hierotheos (see pp. 99, 177). Perhaps this is the group alluded to by Isabella Gagliardi, 'I saloi, ovvero le "forme paradigmatiche" della santa follia', *Rivista di ascetica e mistica* 4 (1994), 380 n. 31.

ground, stood up, and embraced the blessed [Grigentios] and kissed him and said: 'See, God's chosen one, Grigentios, has deigned to visit me . . .'

The righteous one kissed him in return and said: 'My lord, would it not have been more appropriate for you to please the Lord God in some other way instead of such foolishness (*μωροποιίας*)? Such a feat is unattainable because of the hardships and grief and sufferings and afflictions (*ἀπόρρητος γὰρ πρόεστι ἡ ταύτης ἐργασία ἐν πόνοις τε καὶ ὀδύνας καὶ στενοχωρίαις καὶ θλίψεσιν*). For Grigentios had noticed that the man was worn down by excessive asceticism and hardship: he did not bathe, had neither bed nor hut nor any spiritual guide; everybody shunned him and turned away from him as if from one possessed. And he answered: 'O most dear [Grigentios], I was previously in a monastery, serving the Lord my God; but when I began to receive honour from people, I feared the devious schemes of that haughty serpent [the devil], and I also recalled the words of the Apostle, who said that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men", and I resolved to take the path which you see, so as not to fall away from God. If, in the words of the Apostle Paul, anyone is crucified in this world while mocking the world before leaving it and parting from this life in spiritual exhaustion, then, regardless of his sins, he will be pleasing to the Lord God and will follow Him in His tenderness and love for mankind. For this reason, kind sir, I have chosen to follow God in the manner that you see, and I pray to my Lord and Master that he pluck me from the dread darkness and the horrors of hell and the tortuous serpent and the ghastly Gehenna . . .'

As [John] was speaking, the blessed Grigentios stood grief-stricken, silent, tearful, as if bewailing his piteous fate. Yet in his heart he said: 'Such a terrible secret: how God's chosen ones walk this fearsome path, and their only wish and desire is to conceal themselves and to be pleasing to God alone! . . .'

thus to himself, he fell down before the holy man and addressed him: 'What you do is good, my lord; it is good! I entreat your holiness: remember me, too, before the Lord. If I have said anything amiss, I have done so unthinkingly, like one deranged (*παραφρονῶν ὡς εἶς τῶν ἀφρόνων*). With these words the blessed Grigentios kissed lord John and—after they had prayed together—went on his way, rejoicing and praising and glorifying Christ. As for the youths who had previously warned the blessed one not to go near the man who they said was possessed, 'so as not to get hit by a stone': when they saw how warmly [John] conversed with Grigentios, they were amazed, and they explained to one another: 'This deacon must be either some kind of magician or sorcerer, or a very holy man, since the wild demon sitting in that unfortunate man has become calm and has submitted to him.' And they went closer to [John], intent on checking whether he had indeed recovered his sanity (*σεσωφρόνηκεν*). But [John] gathered stones again, and began to chase [the youths], throwing [stones] at them and in all directions and making himself even wilder (*ἀγριώτερος*) than before. (5.380–445)

John is a model of early holy foolery: a monk who goes out into the world to wrestle with pride. The *vita* says not a word about saving others' souls or about the holy fool's secret good deeds. Yet John's favourite activity is in the 'Symeonian' tradition: Symeon throws nuts.

Various signs point to a full-scale revival of holy foolery. Now, however, social attitudes towards sanctity had changed. In the hagiography of the ninth and tenth centuries we see a reappraisal of values, and pride of place was given to social rather than ascetic virtues. Naturally, Byzantium could not

have assimilated the 'aristocratic' ideal of sanctity that was so widespread in the West, but nevertheless we find more and more saints who were from well-off families, were active and enterprising, generous donors and assiduous overseers.<sup>22</sup> In such company the holy fool inevitably looked odder than he did amongst the fiery ascetics, anchorites, transvestites, wanderers, and self-imposed beggars who populated the early Byzantine synaxarion. For this reason, as we shall see, the revised version of the holy fool, too, behaved far more moderately than had his predecessors.

The first apologia for holy foolery to appear after a long period was the *vita* of Basil the Younger (*BHG*, 263–4), composed in the mid-tenth century. The hero of the *vita* is a practising holy fool, albeit on a modest scale. He sets out on his spiritual endeavours by refusing—for no obvious reason—to give his name to the authorities when required. This scene is a blatant device, in an age when there was no anti-Christian persecution, to show the saint's fortitude under torture. The authorities suspect he is a spy. A further hint at holy foolery can be detected in the tale of how Basil was asked to bless some wine but instead smashed the vessel because there was a snake in it.<sup>23</sup> But whereas Symeon of

<sup>22</sup> W. Lackner, 'Die Gestalt des Heiligen in der byzantinischen Hagiographie des 9. und 10. Jahrhundert', in *The 17th International Byzantine Congress: Major Papers* (New York, 1986), 526–30; B. Flusin notes that saints in this period more often feel at home not in the desert but in the city; in the early Byzantine period the saint entered the city as if it were an enemy camp, now he entered it as if it were sacred space: B. Flusin, 'L'hagiographie monastique à Byzance au IXe et au Xe siècle', *Revue Bénédictine* 103 (1993), 47–9.

<sup>23</sup> *Zhitie sv. Vasiliia Novogo*, ed. S. Vilinskii, pt. ii (Odessa, 1911), 170–1.

Emesa gave no explanation for his actions in the analogous situation, so that everybody thought it was a result of his madness,<sup>24</sup> Basil the Younger is happy to reveal his perspicacity to all. Basil's holy foolery manifests itself from time to time, when he is already leading a quiet and comfortable life as a lodger in the rich houses of Constantinople.

People would come to him for advice, and he would generally respond with riddles or with foolishness (*μωροποιΐας*). Some thought he was filled with divine wisdom, behaving as if stupid and insane (*ἀνοηταίνειν καὶ ἐξεστηκέναι*). They reckoned thus because of wise foolishnesses (*πανσόφους μωροποιΐας*) which he deliberately perpetrated in front of those who tried to praise and exalt him.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, the *vita* paints a picture of the afterlife, where holy fools, it seems, stick together:

Another group—not at all numerous—consisted of the fools for Christ's sake (*διὰ Χριστὸν μωροί*)... These are those who, by acting foolishly (*μωροποιΐαις*), defeat the evil-wiled Cunning one. In this world of vanity they present themselves as fools in the Lord's name, and people despise and persecute them, but in the other world they are all the more honoured by the Judge.<sup>26</sup>

It is curious that here the hagiographer, for all his respect for holy fools, nevertheless avoids using the word *salos*, which had most likely become too offensive.

<sup>24</sup> Leontios of Neapolis, *Vie de Syméon*, 81.

<sup>25</sup> *Zhitie sv. Vasiliia Novogo*, 311.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 78–9; cf. *trelloi* for *moroi* in a more colloquial version (226).



The decisive rehabilitation of the term *salos* occurs only in the *vita* of Andrew the Fool (*BHG*, 115z–117b). Andrew of Constantinople is by far the most famous Orthodox holy fool, who overshadowed even his great predecessor, Symeon of Emesa. Andrew's *vita* was extremely popular both in Byzantine times (30 manuscripts have survived from the period from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries) and in the post-Byzantine period (82 Greek copies from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries).<sup>27</sup> The fate of his *vita* in Rus merits a separate discussion (see below, p. 255).

Yet Andrew's image is radically different from that of Symeon. The saint of Emesa may or may not have had real prototypes; more important was that his image had existed in folklore and in grassroots faith and it was from there that Leontios borrowed it. The holy fool of Constantinople is a purely literary character. The *vita* begins with the assertion that Andrew 'loved to read... the lives of the God-bearing Fathers, so that his heart was aflame... and aroused to imitation' (29–32). Other characters' reactions to him show that they regard him as an emulator: one of them exclaims: 'What we heard from the lives of the saints, we have seen with our own eyes' (1333–4).<sup>28</sup> Although the author of the *Life of Andrew the Fool* sets the action in the

<sup>27</sup> *The Life of St Andrew the Fool*, ed. and transl. Lennart Rydén, *Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia* 4.2 (Uppsala, 1995), 151–7; henceforth, references in the main text are to line numbers of this edition.

<sup>28</sup> See P. Magdalino, "'What we Heard in the Lives of the Saints we have Seen with our Own Eyes': The Holy Man as Literary Text in Tenth-Century Constantinople", in *The Cult of Saints in Christianity and Islam: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. J. Howard-Johnston and P. A. Hayward (Oxford, 1999), 83–112.

fifth century, and even scatters around the text a fair number of chronological pointers to the early Byzantine period, nevertheless the presence of certain anachronisms, as well as aspects of genre and style, allow the work to be dated to the mid-tenth century.<sup>29</sup> It is conceivable that the hagiographer employed his chronological subterfuge so as to bypass the canonical interdiction, since a fifth-century saint was not obliged to know about the decision of the Trullo council.

According to his *vita*, Andrew was a foreigner: a 'Scythian' (perhaps a Slav?). He was bought as a slave by a Constantinopolitan magnate, who had the youth baptized and taught him to read and write. Once Andrew had a dream in which he fought a duel with a demon in front of the ranks of heavenly and infernal powers; he was victorious, and received from Christ a promise of bliss in the afterlife. This dream, as well as his enthusiasm for reading lives of saints, prompted the youth to set out upon the path of holy foolery. It must be admitted that another cause—an external cause—is also mentioned here: once the devil tried to

<sup>29</sup> The earliest date—the end of the seventh century—is proposed by C. Mango, 'The Life of St Andrew the Fool Reconsidered', *Rivista di studi Bizantini e Slavi* 2 (1982), 297–313. For justification of the later date see the series of studies by L. Rydén: 'Zum Aufbau der Andreas Salos-Apokalypse', *Eranos* 66 (1968), 101–17; 'The Date of the Life of Andreas Salos', *DOP* 32 (1978), 127–53; 'Style and Historical Fiction in the Life of St Andreas Salos', *JÖB* 32 (1982), 176–83; 'The Revised Version of the "Life of St Philaretos the Merciful" and the "Life of St Andreas Salos"', *AB* 100 (1982), 486–95; 'The Life of St Basil the Younger and the Date of the Life of St Andreas Salos', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7 (1983), 568–86. The earliest of the surviving fragments is from the tenth century: S. Murray, *A Study of the Life of Andreas: The Fool for the Sake of Christ* (Leipzig, 1910), 81, 86–106, 120–1.

force his way into Andrew's room, and Andrew was so shaken by this that he lost his mind. He arose at night and went to the well and, sitting on the rim, set to cutting his clothes with a knife and muttering incoherently, 'like a lunatic' (99). He was bound with chains and confined at the church of St Anastasia, an asylum for the possessed. By day Andrew howled like a madman, but by night he prayed, 'begging the martyr of Christ to appear to him if she was pleased with the task he had undertaken'. One night he saw St Anastasia herself with a bright-visaged elder walking about the church and healing the madmen. The elder came up to Andrew and asked: 'My Lady Anastasia, are you not going to cure him?' 'His teacher has treated him', she replied, 'and he does not need any cure' (113–29). This text implies that Andrew really had been ill, but that his cure was effected in a manner invisible to the eyes of the flesh.

When four months had passed . . . and the church's clergy saw that instead of being cured he deteriorated, they informed his master . . . who instructed that he be released, as a madman, from his fetters and that he be set free . . . And thenceforth Andrew would run around the city's squares, making mockery in the manner of the admirable Symeon of old. (219–24)

[During the day Andrew was] in the middle of the turmoil, never sitting down anywhere throughout the day, for he spent it fasting. When night fell he walked through the porticos of the city. He knew a place where the dogs used to sleep. Thither he went, chased away the dogs and lay down, resting as it were on a mattress [ . . . ] In the morning he arose again, saying to himself, 'Poor Andrew, look, like a dog among dogs you have slept! . . . Therefore let us run with toil and be despised in this world,

that we may receive praise and glory from our heavenly king...’ (272–84)

Andrew’s wayward behaviour took many forms: drinking from a puddle (400–3); stealing fruit at the market (1355–9); grabbing food from the customers at the inn while pretending to be drunk; knocking people about (1409–11). The author seems to have had a copy of the vita of Symeon, so that several of Andrew’s actions look familiar: he relieved himself behind the tavern in full view of passers-by, one of whom told the innkeeper, who came outside and beat the saint with a stick (1241–5).

A further point of similarity between Andrew and Symeon is their contact with whores:

[On another occasion] he was walking near the brothels and playing, as it were, and one of the immoral women... dragged him into her dwelling. And he, the real adamant and true scoffer of the devil, yielded and accompanied her. As he followed her in, the other prostitutes gathered around him, asking him jokingly, ‘How did this happen to you?’ But the righteous man just smiled, giving them no answer. They slapped him on the neck and tried to force him to commit the most disgusting act of fornication. They caressed his flesh and tested him, inviting the chaste man to shameless deeds, saying, ‘You fool, fornicate and satisfy the desire of your soul!’ One must admire this valiant man, for despite all their caresses they completely failed to excite or arouse him to the stinking passion of fornication. (298–311)

However, despite the variety of his unruly behaviour, Andrew was no Symeon. Andrew was not sacrilegious and he frequented churches. When he stripped naked, he was

immediately clothed again (1450–3). Even the story with the whores is presented as a chance occurrence, not as a way of life. More generally, the part of his life which involved holy foolery takes up less than half of the *vita*.<sup>30</sup> Yet the inhabitants of Constantinople treat Andrew more cruelly than the inhabitants of Emesa had treated Symeon:

The whole day he was busy in the heart of the turmoil, or rather, was tested in the middle of the fire. He pretended to be drunk, pushing and being pushed in return, obstructing passers-by, some of whom beat him while others kicked him and still others flogged him recklessly. There were people who broke their sticks on his head, others who pulled him by the hair and slapped him on his neck, and still others who threw him to the ground, bound his legs with a rope and dragged him across the market-place, neither fearing God nor, as Christians, having compassion on their fellow creature. (741–50)

The boys of the city, beating, dragging and slapping him without mercy, put a rope around his neck and dragged him along in full view of everybody, making ink from charcoal which they smeared on his face. (1220–3)

The righteous man worked another wonder, the benevolent God strengthening him. In the days of summer, when the scorching heat of the sun was unbearable, he pretended to be drunk, went to a parched place and exposed himself there to the burning heat, reclining in the middle of the road without eating or

<sup>30</sup> Grosdidier de Matons, *Les thèmes*, 303–10. L. Rydén, 'Zum Wortschatz der verschiedenen Fassungen der Vita des Andreas Salos', in W. Hörandner and E. Trapp (eds.), *Lexicographica byzantina* (Vienna, 1991), 221, produces the interesting calculation that Andrew is labelled nineteen times with the disreputable term *salos* and eight times with the literary term *moros*, while in the case of Symeon the ratio is 67:1.

drinking. People who passed by stumbled over him by the activity of the devil and became angry, so that some of them beat him with sticks, others kicked him in passing, while others railed at him and trampled him under their feet as they hastened by, still others seized his leg and dragged him down the street. When night came, he rose and went away to the entrance of a church. (1280–9)

This is not all that distinguishes Andrew from Symeon. While the Emesans view Symeon either as a saint or as a madman, the Constantinopolitans engage in far more multi-faceted discussions:

When the people of the city saw him they said, 'Look, here is another fool'. Others said: 'This is not the way of fools (*οὐδὲτος ὁ τρόπος παρὰ σαλῶ οὐκ ἔστιν*)'. Some felt pity for him, others slapped him on his neck and spat at him in abhorrence. (286–9) [When Andrew predicted to some youths that they would fall into the hands of the night watch and be flogged, and the prediction came true], one of them said: 'Brothers, curse upon Satan! How could this fool predict what happened to us?' One of the others answered, 'You fool, do you not know that what the demon intends to do he tells his companion? No doubt it was the demon living in him that did this to us because we mocked him.' The first said, 'Not at all! In my opinion God punished us because we beat him pitilessly.' The other replied again, 'You fool, do you think God cares about a madman (*μέλει τῷ Θεῷ περὶ σαλοῦ*)! God gave him a demon and we beat him for fun, there is nothing strange about that. Had he been a saint you would have convinced me that we were punished by God, but since he is mad God does not care.' Discussing this and other matters of concern to the young they went away. (260–71)

[When Andrew turned out to be impervious to carnal temptation, the harlots said]: 'This fellow is dead, either a piece of wood or a stone!' One of them, however, said, 'I marvel at your lack of feeling when I hear you talk like this, for a fool and demoniac (*δαίμωνῶν*), one who suffers from hunger, thirst and cold and has nowhere to lay his head, why should he desire this? Let him go his way!' (311–15)

[A man was surprised by Andrew's foresight and told his drinking companions about it]: When the tavern keeper heard this he said, 'I see that you are even more stupid than he is. It is not he who speaks, but the demon who lives with him. Does not the demon know who fornicates, or who steals, or who is miserly, or how many obols somebody carries in his pocket when he leaves home? Since the demon accompanies him he knows everything.' . . . With these arguments the tavern keeper convinced them that this was the way it was. (363–70)

Some said he was a saint; others that he was a soothsayer who could tell the future from the conjunction of the signs of the Zodiac, while others declared, 'It was by demonic operation that he revealed all this to us.' (1185–8)

[Someone hit him very hard, and Andrew] fell down on the ground and kissed his feet, praying for him. Some people who happened to see him said, 'Look how this crazy man (*παρατετραμμένος*) . . . like a dog kisses the feet of the one who beats him. He feels nothing—that's how the demon rages within him!' [But Andrew] withdrew to a corner of the portico, where he lay down and took a brief nap. Some of those who went by and saw him said, 'This suffering befell him through the magic arts of a woman.' Others said, 'No, he received it from epilepsy.'<sup>31</sup> . . . Once

<sup>31</sup> In a fourteenth-century manuscript E this passage has the following continuation: 'The third said: "His mind is failing, it is broken under an unbearable burden, as he has plunged into the deep and impassable abyss of

an ox-cart passed by. The driver was blind drunk from much wine, making his way singing, unaware of the righteous man's presence. When the oxen passed they trampled him under their hooves. As also the wheels ran across his abdomen, those walking in the street shouted at the driver. Some even dealt him a blow and said, 'Even if you were not aware of him, you could at least have looked where your cart was going!' But he, stupefied with drink, answered with difficulty, 'And who forced him to lie in the middle of the road?' They said to him, 'May God give you the insight and the spirit that leads to such imperturbability!' Through God's grace the righteous man remained unharmed. Some marvelled at this and said, 'We are at a loss to what to say or what to utter about this crazy man (*πεφυρμένου*). Was he protected by God or by the evil spirits, in whose company he wastes his time to his own destruction?' Others said, 'We think it was the demon who lives with him, who in his desire to stay with him quickly lightened the weight of the cart and thus preserved him unharmed.' Still others said, 'No, not at all, but God who is merciful had pity on his ill fortune and illness and protected him.' All this [Andrew] did of his own free will, for he hated the world and the things in the world because of the kingdom of heaven. (1250–79)

[Once Andrew came to church, and] people wondered, 'What happened to this demoniac, since he has come in here?' And some said, 'Perhaps for a moment he was relieved from the evil spirit that disturbs his mind.' Others said: 'He happened to pass by and went in to see as if it were an ordinary house, for how could he know that this is a church? May the Lord punish similarly the one who did this to him!' (1652–7)

the Scripture.' This is how different people had different theories about the cause of his misfortune' (1257 app. crit.).



[It was revealed to Andrew that an epidemic in Constantinople was imminent, and he wept] and when passers-by saw him thus upset they said, 'Look how he wails and laments over his mother who just passed away!' Others said, 'Look how the crazy man bewails his sins, as the Holy Writ says, for one can also shed tears under the influence of demons.<sup>32</sup> O, that there were Christians who had such tears, so that they could drown in the abyss of their trespasses!' Still others said, 'Who knows? Maybe regaining his reason for a moment he laments over his own fate?' With these remarks they went away. (1835–42)

As we see, the *vita* reflects the animated debates on the nature of insanity which took place in Constantinople, but which had not taken place in sixth-century Emesa. Conflicting reactions to a holy fool's conduct are among the main themes of the *vita* (cf. 2875–9, 3559–762, etc.). Moreover, the hagiographer not merely refrains from stating his own view of such speeches, but on occasion he clearly implies his agreement. For example, he puts into Andrew's mouth precisely the assertions about the omniscience of demons (2636–42) that had previously (363–70) been uttered by people who reckoned that Andrew himself was possessed. One episode in the *vita* can reasonably be interpreted as a cautionary tale against holy foolery:

One of Epiphanius' servants . . . observed the holy man and understood his way of life. Sitting down before the feet of the holy man he entreated him with tears to ask God to let him pursue such a way of life. The righteous man understood in his spirit what the

<sup>32</sup> A characteristic false allusion: the Bible says no such thing. Andrew's 'mother' is never mentioned in the *vita*.

boy wanted to obtain, and as he wished to speak to him in private, through the power of the Holy Spirit he changed the boy's language to that of the Syrians and sat down and talked to him in fluent Syriac.<sup>33</sup> The boy said, 'If I were unable to do it, I would not beg you to let me become such as you yourself are.' The holy man answered him, 'You cannot endure the sweat and trials of this way of life, for the road is narrow. Remain instead as you are, godly and respectful...' The boy, however, replied, '... admit that you cannot do what I want, and I shall surely leave you alone.'... The blessed Andrew asked the Lord what should happen to the boy with regard to his request. A voice came to him saying 'This is not fitting (*οὐκ ἔστι τοῦτο συμφέρον*)... Yet, show him the nature of this task...' The blessed man ordered the angel who was standing beside him: 'Fill the cup with spiritual rejoicing, from which the grace of my special gift sprouted!' The angel of the Lord did so, and the blessed man said, 'Give him... to drink!'... The boy began to make gestures similar to those of the God-bearing Father, who looked on with a cheerful smile. But when Epiphanius saw what was happening he was upset, fearing that the whole wrath of his father would rebound upon himself. (1100–31)

Andrew complies with Epiphanius' request that he return the servant to his former condition.

The servant, however, was very distressed and begged the holy man that the marvellous gift be given to him again. But he

<sup>33</sup> It has been suggested that this is an echo of the initial version of the vita, in which Andrew was identified as a Syrian (Ludwig, *Sonderformen*, 245). It appears more likely, however, that the Syriac language is mentioned here as an oblique reminder of Symeon of Emesa (Rydèn, *The Life*, ii. 316; cf. B. Uspenskii, 'Vopros o siriiskom iazyke v slavianskoi pis'mennosti: pochemu diavol mozhet govorit' po-siriiski?', in *Izbrannye trudy*, ii (Moscow, 1994), 59–66).

answered, 'You told me that I could not show anything like this on you, yet see and learn that in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ I can show even greater things on you, if I want. But your master Epiphanius is a hindrance for you, for the divine rules do not permit you to act against the will of your master.' [At this moment] at the behest of his master, one of the boy's fellow-slaves summoned him to his usual service. (1142–8)

That the operation of awesome heavenly forces may be revoked because of someone's childish fear of a grumpy father is a striking demonstration of the paradoxical situation in which a holy fool now found himself. The hagiographer himself admits that, although sainthood may be a good thing, it is still wrong to deprive a master of his servant.

Andrew's vita is the first since that of John the Almsgiver (above, p. 128) to raise the question of the holy fool's moral responsibility.

[A certain woman once had the following revelation: she saw] how the blessed man walked amidst the crowd flashing like a fiery pillar... Some foolish people slapped him on the neck, others hit him on the back of the head, many who saw him said in disgust, 'Lord, may not even our enemies meet with such misery?' But some dark demons, walking behind him, heard their comments and said, 'Yes, may God listen to your prayer...' But the woman noticed that the dark demons marked (*ἐσημειοῦντο*) those who hit the righteous man, saying, '... They strike him unjustly, making themselves guilty of sin! At the moment of their death we shall surely be able to condemn them... and in their case there will be no salvation.' When the blessed man heard this he was filled with mighty power from God and wiped out their marks (*ἔλυνεν αὐτῶν τὰ σημειώματα*) with divine spirit. He rebuked

them and said, 'You are not permitted to mark these men (οὐκ ἔξεστιν ὑμῖν σημειοῦσθαι τούτους), for I have besought my fearsome Lord (ἐγὼ γὰρ παρεκάλεσα τὸν φοβερὸν Δεσπότην) not to reckon as a sin that they strike me. They know not what they are doing, and their ignorance gives them grounds for defence.' (3565–85)

The vocabulary of the cited extract reminds us that both the hagiographer and his readers lived in a police state, where eavesdropping and informing were standard, and where anybody could be arrested without obvious cause or released no less arbitrarily. In Byzantine eyes the inscrutability of divine judgement mirrored the equally inscrutable judgements on earth.

We have already remarked (cf. above, p. 48) that, as a genre, the *vita* of the holy fool grew out of legends about 'secret servants' of the Lord. In the process of this transformation the image of the righteous person who discovers the existence of still more righteous people gradually receded into the background. Eventually this character is turned into the confidant of the holy fool, who himself represents the final stage in the transformation of the image of the 'secret servant'. The hero's confidant is a necessary auxiliary, for without him nobody would find out about the holy fool's sanctity. Yet in the *vita* of Andrew the confidant steps into the foreground. This is the righteous youth Epiphánios, to whom Andrew reveals many of his greatest secrets, whom he takes with him on his journey to hell (2323–80), and who together with the saint saw the Mother of God in the church (3732–58). Indeed, Epiphánios

is not merely singled out for the saint's trust and love; he turns into an autonomous hagiographic hero. Several chapters of the *vita* are devoted to him alone, with not a mention of Andrew. Sometimes he simply puts Andrew in the shade. How has this youth merited such honour? His virtues, it seems, are the plainest of the plain: the most ordinary, straightforward righteousness and moralizing. But this is exactly what is significant. The tradition of stories of 'secret servants' came into being because, in the fifth century, ordinary spiritual endeavours seemed insufficient for the attainment of sanctity. The religious consciousness of the time demanded something out of the ordinary. This, ultimately, is also what gave birth to holy foolery. But in the tenth century we can observe a reverse movement. The decent and polite righteous man, who does everything 'properly', comes back from the hagiographical periphery towards the centre. In the person of Epiphanius, classic righteousness defeats the exotic version, while still showing it due deference. Only in one respect does holy foolery remain unsurpassable: it is Andrew who has the gift of clairvoyance and who foretells the end of the world (this 'Apocalypse according to Andrew' takes up a fair proportion of the *vita*). Holy foolery yields ground, but it is still acknowledged as the possessor of a certain higher knowledge inaccessible through the 'ordinary' virtues.

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Also in the genre of popular hagiography is the *vita* of Niphon of Constantia (*BHG*, 1371), written between 965

and 1037.<sup>34</sup> Niphon was brought as a child from the provinces to Constantinople. Beguiled by the temptations of the big city, he abandoned himself to pleasures, but later repented and began a long and fitfully successful struggle with his demons. After finally defeating the devil, Niphon became a seer and moral teacher. While Basil the Younger had lodged in rich houses, the source of Niphon's material sustenance is not indicated in the *vita*. He was not a monk (he even criticizes monasticism for avarice and usury).<sup>35</sup> Although there are many similarities between the *vita* of Niphon and that of Andrew, there are no grounds for asserting that the former derives from the latter.<sup>36</sup> It is more likely that both were produced within the same cultural milieu.

Whereas any holy fool is utterly righteous and has no doubts about his own perfection, Niphon is represented as a troubled and repentant sinner who occasionally doubts even the existence of God (31–2), and who for many years engaged in self-flagellation (20, 24) through which he was able to free himself from his enslavement to the demons (116). Having paid his dues to all kinds of vices in his youth, once he has achieved the status of a righteous man Niphon never crosses the threshold either of a tavern (42) or of a brothel (44).

Two holy fools are mentioned in the *vita*, as transient characters. One is an anonymous Ethiopian monk (in itself

<sup>34</sup> S. A. Ivanov, 'K datirovke zhitia sv. Nifonta', *Vizantiiskii vremennik* 58 (1999), 72–5.

<sup>35</sup> *Materiialy z istorii vizantiysko-slov'ians'koi literatury ta movy*, ed. A. V. Rystencko (Odessa, 1928), 160.23–32. Further page references to this edition in the main text.

<sup>36</sup> *Pace* L. Rydèn, 'The Date of the Life of St Niphon, BHG 1371z', in S. -T. Teodorsson (ed.), *Greek and Latin Studies in Memory of C. Fabricius* (Göteborg, 1990), 39.

a bold narrative move, since Ethiopians in hagiography are usually demons). This righteous man never changed the water in his bowl (made from a hollowed-out pumpkin), so the water turned green. 'Often, if anyone approached him so as to look at him, he would pretend to be insane (*ἐποίει ἑαυτὸν ἔξηχον*) and would say: "Ah, you have turned up to murder me, but God sees you from above," and would point to the sky' (74.29–31). This is all that we know about the Ethiopian monk, whom the *vita* never mentions again. The author does not explain the meaning of his foolery, or of his talk of murder. Most likely the hagiographer is here recounting an episode which involved a real person, whose odd behaviour was none-too-successfully moulded to fit the holy fool template. The second and more 'literary' example involves another Ethiopian, a former robber from the (Boeotian?) town of Hysia. The robber repented, became a righteous man, and carried wood from the hills, leaving just two obols for himself and giving away the rest to others. He would 'ceaselessly go this way and that, mumbling something' (the Church Slavonic version adds 'looking around himself', perhaps from a lost Greek original: 300.12–13). Some said 'he has gone mad' (*ἐξήχος περιέστω*), others claimed that he was perverted (*παρετράπη*)' (72.23–5); but when there was a drought in the city, only his prayer managed to summon rain (72.25–74.5).

Despite the blandness of the *vita*'s representation of these cases of authentic holy foolery, the text is saturated with vindications of 'secret sanctity'. Niphon himself evoked contradictory reactions (81.30–2) and said that 'many do things pleasing to God in their inner life, even if outwardly

they act foolishly (*μωραίνουσι*). God sees the inner essence and does not let such people perish utterly. . . . But those who in their souls are slaves of the demons . . . even if they do good with their hands and their flesh, this does not weigh in their favour' (126.20–5). For Niphon the true saints are the secret saints (81.24, 26; 118.4–5, 7–8, 16–18; 160.22–3).

On one occasion the *vita* produces a true apology for paradoxical sanctity. Niphon is asked: 'Why do many people hate righteous men, and others are led astray (*σκανδαλίζονται*) by them?' The saint replies that abuse brings the righteous man great benefit (55.8–12), and he tells the story of a man who lived with cattle and was considered a reprobate, yet who was all the while praying that his abusers should not have God's wrath brought down upon them (55.17–56.4). The hagiographer does admit that this kind of sanctity was not to everybody's liking: 'Many righteous men provide temptation for others, and these others complain saying: "if they want salvation, let them sit in the desert, but those who abide in the world are puffed with pride and are concerned to please people"' (56.19–24). Niphon objects to this argument: in the first place the patriarchs, too, had lived among people, and God abides everywhere; second, even natural phenomena cannot please all equally, for some people like the winter and others the summer; and third, not even Jesus pleased everybody (55.25–58.15). None of these dubious and idiosyncratic arguments actually addresses the ethical substance of the reproaches, but they do reveal a lively polemic on this theme in Byzantine society (as we have seen already, with regard to Andrew the Fool, p. 161–4).



The vita of Niphon is also important to us for another reason. Almost as if anticipating the thoughts of Symeon the New Theologian (below, p. 184), the hagiographer develops the concept of the righteous man's 'impassivity':

Regarding those virtuous ones who eat [during the fast] and who drink wine, take heed, my child, and listen: those whom you have noted are valiant soldiers [of God], they have crushed sinful passions and are now the lords and masters of their passions, having received the gifts of impassivity (*χαρίσματα τῆς ἀπαθείας*) from God. And God's gifts are irreversible (*ἀμετάτρεπτα*), and those who have received them—even if they eat [that which is forbidden during the fast] and even if they drink wine—they do all this in impassivity... Often such people do such things deliberately when in company, but when they are alone they perform acts of piety in silence, through fasting in their cells replenishing that of which they deprived themselves in the presence of others. (164.10–17, 26–9; cf. 232.4–31)

The people described here are obviously holy fools, but Niphon does not use the term to describe them. We find a similar reticence elsewhere: Niphon, like Basil the Younger, paints a picture of the Last Judgement; but in his picture—unlike Basil's—holy fools are not explicitly named among those who are saved. Perhaps their presence is implied among 'those who are for Christ's sake...' (96.10; one of the late manuscripts adds 'poor'), or perhaps among the 'blessed (*μάκαρες*)' (98.36–99.6); but this is just guesswork.

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The late tenth century marks a surge of interest in Symeon of Emesa: the hymnographer Gabriel wrote a *kontakion* in his

honour. This is a voluminous piece.<sup>37</sup> Even though its author does not use the word *salos* anywhere except in the title, the hymn is written in an unusual, not very grammatical language,<sup>38</sup> although it is unclear whether this gives us any clue about its origins. For the most part the hymnographer follows the text of Leontios of Neapolis, but at least twice he unleashes his own fantasy: where he describes how the holy fool ventured deep into the realm of temptations but did not succumb, Gabriel compares him to a mythical creature, the salamander which may be aflame but does not burn.<sup>39</sup> And in the scene where Symeon turns aggressively against the town residents, one word missing in the original is added: the saint was not only pushing, but also 'spitting' (πτύωv).<sup>40</sup> Perhaps Gabriel drew from his own experiences of such people.

Holy foolery must have played a certain role also in the learned culture of the second half of the tenth century. It is impossible to explain otherwise the appearance of a separate entry on 'foolery for Christ's sake' (μωρία διὰ Χριστόν) in the encyclopedic dictionary *Suda*, compiled around the year 1000 and comprising far more secular than ecclesiastical matters.<sup>41</sup> Even though this is merely a quotation from John Chrysostom's 'On the Inscrutability of God',<sup>42</sup> its appearance in the dictionary is nevertheless significant. More revealing, however, is the fact that the ten-volume encyclopedia of Symeon Metaphrastes—who in the late tenth century was charged with the task of reviewing the entire hagiographic corpus and of producing a new standard compilation—included not a single holy fool.

<sup>37</sup> P. P. Paschos (ed.), *Gabriel l'Hymnographe: Kontakia et Canons* (Paris and Athens, 1978–9), 138–73.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>41</sup> *Suidae Lexicon*, 419: m. 1339.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. p. 22.

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### The ‘New Theologians’

The *vita* of Symeon the New Theologian was written in the eleventh century. Symeon was a real person, who lived at the turn of the second millenium, and his biography is set forth in a plausible detail. This extensive and extremely interesting text describes many characters, doubtless real people, who deliberately acted in the manner of holy fools. Here for the first time we have an opportunity not only to ‘read’ holy foolery as a literary expression, but also to analyse it as a world-view.

The first such character is Symeon the Pious, a monk of the Stoudios monastery. This is what the *vita* tells us about him:

He had no more feelings with regard to bodies around him than a corpse has for the dead, yet he would pretend to be aroused (*ὑπεκρίνατο τὴν ἐμπάθειαν*), hoping thereby to conceal the treasure of his impassivity (*ἀπαθείας*)...and also surreptitiously (*λανθανόντως*) to save perhaps only a few—though all if possible—of those who were at the bottom, using this bait (*δελεάματι*) to draw them up from the depths of ruin.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Niketas Stethatos, *Vie de Syméon le Nouveau Theologien*, ed. I. Hausherr, *Orientalia Christiana* 11 (Rome, 1928), 110.2–10 (henceforth, references to this edition in the main text).

This is a familiar motif, and readers of the *vita* would surely have picked up the obvious allusion to the behaviour of Symeon of Emesa. The difference between Symeon the Pious and his earlier namesake is that this Symeon is an historical figure, author of several surviving theological works. His foolery is a deliberately chosen lifestyle. Not that this prevented him from acquiring a fairly scandalous reputation in Constantinople, which is why he could not be canonized after his death. Symeon the New Theologian, his spiritual disciple, encountered such fierce opposition from the ecclesiastical authorities, in his attempts to establish the cult of his teacher, that he was even sent into exile. So Symeon the Pious can be reckoned an authentic holy fool.<sup>2</sup> And yet it is noteworthy that, uncompromising though he was, Symeon the New Theologian never mentions the precedent of Symeon of Emesa, nor does he explicitly label his teacher a holy fool. Apparently by the turn of the eleventh century an exponent of holy foolery no longer had any chance of official canonization.

Another example of holy foolery is also linked to Symeon the New Theologian. His *vita* mentions a certain Western bishop, Hierotheos, who had killed a man by accident and resolved to redeem his terrible sin through unseen repentance. He was advised to retreat to the monastery of St Mamas, where Symeon was abbot.

<sup>2</sup> I. Rosenthal-Kamarinea, 'Symeon Studite, ein Heiliger Narr', in *Akten des XI Internationalen Byzantinistenkongress* (Munich, 1960), 515–19; cf. H. Alfeyev, *St Symeon the New Theologian and Orthodox Tradition* (Oxford, 2000), 26.

[There Hierotheos] in his eagerness to suffer pretended to be crazy (*παράφορά τινα ὑπεκρίνατο*), and he deliberately threw around and smashed a lot of vessels, so as to hear abuse and to be slapped in the face (*κατὰ κόρρης ῥαπίσματα*). Therefore he rejoiced when people reviled him, and he longed to be whipped, for blows to his outer shell freed his inner self from future sufferings... Hierotheos had the job of cellarer. Once the saint [Symeon] instructed him to fill one of the empty vessels from a barrel. He complied immediately and went to the barrel. But he had a habit of always singing psalms and repenting. In addition, whenever he saw faces of saints or a depiction of the Cross, he would kiss them, even if there were thousands of them. The Cross happened to be depicted on the lid of the barrel. Opening the lid, he began... to kiss the Cross, and he overturned the vessel, and its contents spilled out onto the ground. Seeing the vessel empty, Hierotheos laughingly said: 'I will not deal with the vessel, O evil demon, until I have kissed my Cross, or I'm not Hierotheos the Fool (*μὰ τὸν σαλὸν Ἱερόθεον*)! I know why you have arranged this spectacle.' Since the vessel was completely drained, he picked it up empty and ran to tell the blessed father Symeon everything that had happened. The saint knew Hierotheos and understood that he did everything in order to bring dishonour upon himself, and Symeon wished to grant him the prize that he so sought. So this is what he determined in the case of Hierotheos: that day, as the monastery's mules were leaving with their burden of jars, he ordered that Hierotheos be sat on them and that he be taken thus to Xerolophos,<sup>3</sup> and that the muleteer should intone: 'If anybody is damaged in the mind (*βεβλαμμένος τὰς φρένας*), behold what

<sup>3</sup> The Xerolophos region was situated at the north-western end of Constantinople, a long way from the monastery of St Mamas, which was in the south-west: see R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique* (Paris, 1969), 314.

triumph awaits him!' When this was done and Hierotheos set off atop the jars, the mule-driver started shouting loudly as he had been told, and Hierotheos repeated it after him, augmenting the words with floods of tears. (72–5)

Hierotheos is interesting as the first holy fool from the West (probably from Italy). We can conjecture that in the West this odd form of asceticism was regarded as specifically Byzantine. Anyone who felt such a fever of devotion knew that in the East he would be adequately understood (see below, p. 378). We should note, however, that Hierotheos' motivation for his foolery is different from the 'classic' Byzantine motivation. Only in the case of Mark the Horseman (above, p. 99, cf. p. 151) have we come across someone whose exotic asceticism was stimulated by a desire for repentance: this was in holy foolery's embryonic period. The others had embarked on their holy foolery only when they had already reached the summit of self-perfection. In the West, as we shall see (p. 382), to be contemptible to others was regarded as the highest form of contempt for oneself.

The story of Hierotheos is also important for another reason. Hitherto the holy fool had broken established norms in isolation, provoking general indignation and—in the case of Emperor Michael—fear in those around. Even the fools' confidants, although they knew that the unseemly behaviour was deliberate, and although they pitied the saint and admired him, yet they did not assist him. We recall that the mummers were annoyed with John of Ephesos because he could not bring himself to humiliate them as they demanded (above, p. 96). There is perhaps a hint of

'playing along with' the holy fool in the tale of how Abba Daniel behaved towards Mark the Horseman. In the present example, however, it is not clear who is leading who on: whether Hierotheos is prompting Symeon, or vice versa. Naturally the abbot reckons such behaviour distinctly peculiar. Yet it is not the only such example.

This is what happened in the case of the monk Arsenios, Symeon's favourite disciple. Arsenios tried to outdo everybody in feats of asceticism, and eventually he fainted. Symeon forbade his pupil to indulge his own vanity.

And from that moment on, Arsenios was overcome with such remorse that, tormented by his conscience, he plunged to the depths of self-abasement. In order to show his success at becoming meek, we will sweeten our narrative (*εἰς ἡδυσμα*) with the recollection of one or two occasions when the blessed Symeon arranged for him to be humiliated.

[Arsenios was baking bread when birds flew into the bakery and pecked at it.] Seeing this, and filled with fury against the birds, Arsenios shut the door and beat all the birds to the ground with a club. On completion of this heroic act, he informed the blessed [Symeon] of what he had done. Symeon said, 'Let's go, I also want to see what a fine job you did of slaughtering them (*καλῶς ποιῆσας ἀπέκτεινας*)'. But when he saw the murdered birds scattered on the ground, the saint wept, sad about Arsenios' senseless fury. Calling one of the servants, Symeon asked him to bring a rope and to tie together all the fallen birds and to hang them round Arsenios' neck. When this was done, he ordered that Arsenios be dragged out and led around the monastery, to be made a spectacle amid the assembled crowd of monks (*μέσον τῶν συνόντων θεατριζέσθαι μοναχῶν*). And Arsenios bore the

humiliation of this spectacle (*δράματος*) meekly, shedding tears and even calling himself a murderer. This story is enough to demonstrate their [Arsenius' and Symeon's] meritoriousness and the virtuous wisdom of their deeds (*ἐμφιλόσοφον ἔργον*). (69)

This narrative looks somewhat odd. First Symeon plays along with Arsenios; then suddenly, for no reason (since Arsenios had already told him everything) he starts to moan, and the episode ends in a grotesque display, like the displays of public disgrace (*katapompeuseis*) in Byzantine political life. The generally whimsical tone is especially disconcerting. But the most interesting part is what comes next:

Symeon was at a gathering of friends. One of them was physically weak and needed to eat meat, particularly the meat of young pigeons, so in compassion for him the blessed Symeon ordered that the birds be roasted and brought to the person who needed them. As the sick man began to eat, Arsenios, who was also at table, looked at him in disgust. The blessed Symeon noticed his reaction and . . . in order to show his companions the scale of his [Arsenius'] humility—that they might know that God does still have children of obedience and true toilers in virtue—he took one of the birds and tossed it to Arsenios, telling him to eat it. Arsenios heard this and was horrified by the instruction, but he knew that disobedience was worse than meat-eating. He made his penance, asked for blessing, took the bird and tearfully started to chew it and eat it. When the saint saw that Arsenios had gnawed the bird enough with his teeth and was on the point of dispatching it to his stomach, he said: 'Enough! Now spit it out! You glutton! Once you start eating, not even all the pigeons will be enough to satisfy you. Modify your passion!' (66–8)



In a formal sense what we have here is just another run-of-the-mill tale of the education of novices: we have already mentioned the eccentric ways of curbing the will in such tales (above, pp. 39–41). But the actual content of the passage is far richer than the bland moral lesson that the hagiographer Niketas Stethatos gives us. The atmosphere of these episodes is sustained through a pervasive—if ill-defined—implication of impropriety. Interpret it how we will, it is not just a tale of plain pedagogy. The combination of aggression, open provocation, and burlesque—together with the hagiographer's a-priori assumption of the sanctity of his hero's purpose—makes the behaviour of Symeon the New Theologian strongly suggestive of holy foolery, even though Symeon himself is, of course, no *salos*.

The same combination of elements of holy foolery and inordinate obedience can be found in the vita of Athanasios of Athos (925–1000; *BHG*, 187), who, while being a learned man, feigned ignorance, 'wise childishness mocking or being mocked (*νηπιότητα πάνσοφον παίζουσιν καὶ παιζομένην*)',<sup>4</sup> as well as in the life of another tenth-century saint, Neilos of Rossano (910–1005; *BHG*, 1370).

[He] would rather have died a terrible death than that anybody should think him holy. On the contrary, he tried to give many the impression that he was domineering (*ύβριστήν*) and liable to all

<sup>4</sup> *Vitae duae sancti Athanasii Athonitae*, ed. J. Noret (Turnhout, 1982), 21, cf. 141. After he became a hegumen, Athanasios began to struggle with exotic forms of asceticism, urging a switch to a lifestyle appropriate for monks. He criticized a monk who 'walked around with his feet bare and unwashed, wore heavy chains and suchlike around his neck' (*ibid.*, 75) as well as a monk who wandered around naked (77).

the other passions. Many foolish people were led astray, but we, who were undeservedly deemed worthy to eat and drink with him, were certain . . . that Neilos was a blessed saint.<sup>5</sup>

[Once Neilos' spiritual mentor John instructed] that he be given a large goblet of wine, wishing to see whether he lived a godly life. The holy father Neilos took the goblet, asked for blessing, and drained it without hesitation. The great [John] . . . said to those present: 'The fathers assert that Abba Neilos does not drink wine. Let people look, and they will say differently.' Neilos immediately stood up and offered his repentance, saying: 'Forgive me, honourable father! I have never done anything righteous in God's sight.'<sup>6</sup>

We might also mention that, alongside the brief tale of Symeon the Pious (see above), the theme of 'impassive indecency' enjoyed a surge of popularity in the hagiography of the tenth century. We have at least three examples. The vita of Luke the Younger (*BHG*, 994) tells how the saint 'often slept next to women, if the occasion arose, yet never experienced the slightest harm as a result, nor was he subject to any [indecent] desire'. Once two women came to the monastery:

and he settled us down on one side, and himself on the other, and he told the women to lie in the middle, on account of the cold. He did this like a child snuggling up to its mother, as if he was lying next to stones or logs. Not one fleshly desire took hold of him! Such was the simplicity (*ἀπλότης*) and impassivity of this earthly angel.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Vita s. Nili Abbatis*, in *AASS Septembris*, vii. 316–17.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>7</sup> G. Kremou (ed.), *Phokika: Proskyneterion tes en Phokidi mones tou hosiou Louka*, i (Athens, 1874), 50.

Once, when a woman was ill, Luke instructed the monk Pankratios thus:

‘Go . . . to the woman, and smear all of her with ointment, along her naked body.’ Pankratios, who had the gift of simplicity (*ἀπλότητι*) and good habits, did not pause to ponder, but set off immediately to fulfil what he had undertaken, showing himself a son of obedience. See the fruit of obedience! He did not experience the slightest harm from such contact!<sup>8</sup>

Also in the tenth century we find Elias the Cave-dweller, whose *vita* (*BHG*, 581) contains a similar episode. True, this saint becomes the object of women’s attentions against his will, but the vocabulary is the same: ‘Later the glorious [Elias] assured us that “my flesh experienced no fleshly motion. The flesh did not arouse me, for I was thinking of the eternal fire [of hell]; but I was like a tree, which does not feel it when it touches another tree.”’<sup>9</sup>

Finally: at the end of the tenth century lived St Phantinos (*BHG*, 1508–9), who had a habit of reciting his teachings while naked, in public, and especially to women. Like all the saints mentioned above, he, too, ‘achieved such impassivity and perfection that he did not feel the difference between a woman and a man’.<sup>10</sup> In the twelfth century this tradition was continued by Neophytos the Recluse.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 50–1.

<sup>9</sup> *Vita s. Eliae Spelaeotae*, in *AASS Septembris*, iii. 857.

<sup>10</sup> *La vita di San Fantino il Giovane*, ed. E. Follieri, *Subsidia hagiographica* 77 (Brussels, 1993), 454.

<sup>11</sup> C. Galatariotou, ‘Eros and Thanatos: A Byzantine Hermit’s Conception of Sexuality’, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 13 (1989), 128–9.

Let us return, however, to Symeon the New Theologian. Thus far we have encountered him only in the context of his vita, but he was also a prolific author of spiritual tracts. We shall now consider whether the theme of holy foolery is reflected in his works.

At first sight Symeon the New Theologian has nothing in common with a holy fool. The two seem like polar opposites. The holy fool is always obscure, Symeon was a prominent public figure. The holy fool is at the bottom of the social heap, whereas Symeon (at least according to his hagiographer) was a *spatharokoubikouarios* and *synkletikos*, and his uncle was close to the emperor. The holy fool shuns ecclesiastical office, while Symeon was for many years abbot of St Mamas. The holy fool is dissolute, insolent, and brazen, Symeon was consistently self-possessed, strict, and aloof. The holy fool blasphemes, Symeon was famed for his piety. Finally, Symeon expressed his own attitude to holy foolery in no uncertain terms:

The man who lives in humble abstinence is reckoned a poseur, while the man who eats like a glutton is reckoned guileless and simple-hearted, and people all too often take pleasure in dining with him, indulging their own weakness. Moreover, even those who pretend to be mad (τοὺς τὸν σαλὸν ὑποκρινομένους), who joke and prattle utter nonsense, who adopt indecent poses and thus make people laugh—even those men are revered as if they were impassive and virtuous (ὡς ἀπαθῆϊς καὶ ἀγαθούς), on the assumption that the real purpose of their strutting and gesticulating and chattering is in fact to conceal their virtue and their impassivity (ἀπάθειαν καλύπτειν). Yet those who abide in piety and virtue and simplicity of heart and who truly are holy—nobody

pays them any attention; people pass them as if they were just ordinary.<sup>12</sup>

This should be more than sufficient to deter anybody from looking to Symeon for an apologia of holy foolery. But let us not be precipitate. The one thing we should *not* expect from Symeon is consistency.

In his writings Symeon the New Theologian devotes a lot of attention to the popular (in Byzantium) question of whether it was possible to achieve total freedom from passions, total impassivity. Many theologians warned against violating human nature (see above, p. 91), but there was no unanimity.<sup>13</sup> Orthodox thinkers were particularly cautious about the deliberate provocation of temptation with the aim of testing one's own impassivity. But Symeon had little patience with such a circumspect attitude, with its bashful acknowledgement of human weakness and of the potential for sin. He begins with a show of calm:

Many laymen, in the course of our discussions, would frequently dispute with me about passion and impassivity. Practically all of them—not just those who were deficient in piety and virtue, but even those who seem utterly virtuous and have won a name and great praise for themselves in the world—practically all of them assured me that it is impossible for a man to achieve such heights

<sup>12</sup> Symeon the New Theologian, *Catecheses* xxviii. 364–78, ed. B. Krivochéine, transl. J. Paramelle (Paris, 1963), 156–8. Henceforth references to this edition in the main text (*Cat.*).

<sup>13</sup> See G. Bardy, 'Apatheia', *Dictionnaire de la spiritualité* 1 (1937), cols. 733–44; W. Völker, *Praxis und Theorie bei Symeon dem neuen Theologen* (Wiesbaden, 1974), 269–70; T. Špidlik, *La spiritualité de l'Orient chrétien*, i (Rome, 1978), 261–70.

of impassivity that he can consort (*ὁμιλῆσαι*) and dine with women without any detriment to himself and without secretly experiencing some motion of the flesh or some defilement (*κίνησιν ἢ μολυσμόν*). Hearing such utterances with my own ears, I was filled with great sadness.<sup>14</sup>

Here Symeon becomes more strident:

It is possible to attain such freedom...that one can remain unharmed and impassive not only when dining and consorting with women, but that one can avoid suffering any detriment even while in the midst of the city, hearing people singing and playing the kithara, seeing them laughing and dancing and amusing themselves (*παίζοντας*). (*Eth.* VI. 39–46, p. 122)

This passage still leaves us ignorant of why a saint, if he is not a *salos*, should be struggling through the city crowds at all, especially in such dubious districts. But the New Theologian goes much further:

Just as the sun cannot soil its rays when it lights up the dirt, just so the soul or the reason of a man endowed with grace, a man who carries God within himself, cannot be polluted even if his most pure body should chance to roll about (*ἐγκυλιωθεῖσθαι*) in, so to speak, the dirt of human bodies—which is not the kind of thing that pious people do.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the righteous man's faith will be

<sup>14</sup> Symeon the New Theologian, *Traitées théologiques et éthiques*, VI. 1–11; ed. J. Darrouzès, I (Paris, 1966); henceforth references to this edition as *Eth.* in main text. Cf. Symeon the New Theologian, *Centuries*, 3. 87; ed. J. Koder and J. Paramelle (Paris, 1976), 176.

<sup>15</sup> Symeon's French translator seizes on this proviso, noting with relief: 'This implies that such an occurrence is exceptional and involuntary, as in the case of martyrs. The allusion is *not* to exhibitionism... which is present in some vitae, such as that of Symeon the Fool' (*Eth.* 125). Yet the devout commentator is proved wrong by the text which follows.

unharméd and he will not be separated from his Lord even if he should happen to be shut in with thousands of faithless, impious, and defiled people and, with his body naked, if he should conjoin with them in their nakedness (*γυμνὸς τῷ σώματι γυμνοῖς αὐτοῖς ἐνωθήσεται*). (*Eth.* VI. 202–11)

The final words do not easily fit with the metaphor of imprisonment and martyrdom with which this passage apparently commenced. Can one at least hope that Symeon's ever-righteous hero is merely acknowledging circumstances rather than taking any initiative himself? Not in the least:

And henceforth you will make no distinction between male and female [cf. above, p. 115] and you will suffer no harm for this . . . but, when you meet and associate with men and with women and kiss them (*αὐτοὺς ἀσπαζόμενος*), you will remain unharméd and unmoved [in the flesh] . . . and you will look at them and pay heed to them as precious limbs of Christ and temples of God. (*Eth.* VI. 462–9)<sup>16</sup>

Surely the provocative temptation can go no further than kisses? Wrong again:

Even if he consorts with them body to body (*σώματι σώμασι πλησιάζων*),<sup>17</sup> the righteous man can remain pure in spirit: for outside this world and these bodies there is no arousal of carnal passions, but only impassivity. And even if you then see such a

<sup>16</sup> Here Symeon interrupts himself to add: 'But before you achieve this level and see in your members the life-giving deadness of Christ our God, you would do well to avoid harmful spectacles' (469–71). This proviso shows that Symeon is aware of the risks of what he describes, although he never explains why they are necessary.

<sup>17</sup> This can be rendered more specifically as 'joining in intercourse': see, for example, Nau, 'Histoires', 269.

person behaving indecently (*ἀσχημονοῦντα*) as if actually trying to do something shameful, know that all this is being performed by a dead body!<sup>18</sup>

Clearly Symeon here has in mind his own spiritual mentor:<sup>19</sup>

Just recently there was such a man, the holy Symeon the Pious, the Stoudite. He was not ashamed of anybody's bodily members, nor to see people naked, nor to be seen naked himself. For he . . . remained unmoved, unharmed, and impassive. (*Hymn.* xv. 208–13; cf. *Cat.* vi. 300–5).

Of course, the New Theologian understands that such conduct cannot be recommended as a model, and he therefore brims with rage against an imagined opponent:

If you, when you are naked and come into contact with flesh, become frenzied with lust, like a donkey or a stallion, then how dare you criticize this saint! (*Hymn.* xv. 216–20)

Perhaps the authentic saint merely 'performs' sin but does not in fact 'commit' sin? Let us attempt to sort out the answer.

The saint's mind is not soiled even if he does dabble (*παρακύψειεν*) in the murky and dirty passions . . . Even if sometimes (*ποτέ*) he should wish to enter into the contemplation of these [passions],

<sup>18</sup> Symeon the New Theologian, *Hymnes*, ed. J. Koder, transl. J. Paramelle, 2 vols. (Paris, 1967), ix. 20–8; henceforth references to this edition as *Hymn.* in main text. Cf. 'Those who follow the example of holy fathers and feign passion, while remaining impassible, are saintly and worthy of praise' (*Cat.* 8.9–20).

<sup>19</sup> H. J. M. Turner, *St Symeon the New Theologian and Spiritual Fatherhood* (Leiden, 1990), 212.



he does this with no other purpose but to explore and understand the motives and mechanisms of arousal. (*Eth.* VI. 258, 260–8)

So, the 'impassive' saint simply takes a look into the abyss of passions. We are used to this. It is the saint's normal state. But how, then, is this different from the 'entering into' which takes place 'sometimes'? It is clear from the context that this is a subsequent stage, a kind of experimentation on oneself. The righteous man does not merely 'perform the part of' a sinner; he becomes a sinner; only here it is not—as before—in the eyes of the ignorant, but in his own eyes. Granted, Symeon tries to justify this descent into sin as being in the interests of the saint's spiritual children (*Eth.* VI. 269–328; *Cat.* XX. 83–5), but he probably does not even believe this himself: there is no place for helping others in his spiritual world. His idea of salvation is deeply individualistic.<sup>20</sup> These experiments with sin and impassivity are the righteous man's game with God, or the author's game with the reader.

Symeon's writings do not make it clear whether God's favour is bestowed as a result of ascetic endeavours or as a charismatic gift.<sup>21</sup> In any case, he who has obtained it no longer has any obligation to reaffirm his own sanctity. The gift is never taken back. But now the righteous man himself wants confirmation of the fact that he has been chosen. Symeon's 'impassive' hero is a hostage to his own divine favour. He is plagued by secret doubts as to whether God's

<sup>20</sup> A. P. Kazhdan, 'Predvaritel'nye zamechaniia o mirovozzrenii vizantiiskogo mistika X–XI vv. Simeona', *Byzantinoslavica* 28 (1967), 19–21, 37–8.

<sup>21</sup> B. Faigneau-Julien, *Les sens spirituels et la vision de Dieu selon Syméon le Nouveau Théologien* (Paris, 1985), 138.

gift is indeed boundless. He flutters around sin like a moth around a flame, until he lets it engulf him—purely, of course, so as to be convinced of his own immunity to it. In a sense, he provokes God rather than those around him.

On the other hand, Symeon is well aware that, in rejecting objective criteria of sinfulness, he is painting himself into a corner. This is what explains his impotent fury when he writes about *saloi* (above, p. 183), for they are living proof of the logical consequences of his own theory. Symeon cannot take the notion of charismatic gifts to its conclusion, for then he would have to reject the Church's hierarchy and even its sacraments, and that is further than he is prepared to go.

Unlike his mentor Symeon the Pious, outside his writings the New Theologian indulged only in a 'psychological', secular foolery. As we have seen, Symeon was sent into exile for his passionate advocacy of his teacher. According to Niketas Stethatos, Symeon's principal enemy was the patriarch's *synkellos* Stephen of Nikomedeia. It was he who led the struggle against the cult of Symeon the Pious, and it was he who (from a 'rationalist' position) argued furiously with Symeon on theological questions. The two of them also evidently detested each other on a personal level. Stephen could reckon himself the victor in this prolonged contest, and after Symeon was exiled as a result of the *synkellos*' intrigues, it was to Stephen that he wrote a letter as soon as he arrived in his place of exile. This was conceived as a thank-you letter: obedient to the gospel, Symeon blesses his persecutor and thanks Stephen for the fact that he [Symeon]

has received from him sufferings that bring him [Symeon] closer to God. The letter concludes:

If you have anything left in reserve, that you could add to the happiness and glory of those that love you, then please do so without hesitation, so that your recompense may be multiplied and your reward from God may be yet more generous. Farewell! (132–4)

The most interesting feature of this missive is that it was not conceived as ironic. To seek out torments and to pray for one's tormentor was normal behaviour for any saint. Yet every word of the letter drips with such devastating hatred that nobody could take it as a model of Christian humility. This is a vivid example of how in Symeon great self-abasement merges with great pride.<sup>22</sup> This is 'mundane foolery' of a kind implied in the modern Russian use of the word *iurodstvo* (see above, p. vii).

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This is the appropriate moment to talk about the relations between holy foolery and heresy. The Syriac *Book of Degrees* (see above, p. 27) is a key text for the Messalian heresy, which spread across the Eastern Empire in the fourth century, and which was condemned (as the heresy of the Eustathians) at the Council of Gangra. Subsequently the heresy survived in various guises right up to the death of Byzantium. We will not here dwell on the doctrinal differences between Messalianism and Orthodoxy (they are often

<sup>22</sup> 'Unprecedented pride is unexpectedly and paradoxically revealed in this constant self-abasement': Kazhdan, 'Predvaritel'nye zamechaniia', 30.

minimal).<sup>23</sup> Instead we shall consider how heretics behaved. According to St Epiphanius:

... men and women... sleep together in the squares, since they have—as they say—no possessions on earth. They are uninhibited (*ἀκώλυτοί εἰσι*)... their words are like the speech of madmen (*ἀφρόνων ἐπέκεινα*)... They know nothing of fasts... though sometimes they pray until nightfall without eating... They do everything without fear... As for indecency and lewdness (*αἰσχρότητος ἢ λαγνείας*)... of these there is no shortage.<sup>24</sup>

According to Theodoret of Cyrillus,

[the Messalians] do other things typical of madness (*φρενίτιδος ἔργα*): they suddenly leap up and down and boast that they are outleaping the demons, or they go through the motions of shooting from a bow, asserting that they are shooting demons, and many other things filled with the same insanity.<sup>25</sup>

Another source, Maximos' scholia on Dionysios, asserts that:

After three years of asceticism [the Messalians] begin freely to commit acts of indecency, abandoning themselves to lewdness and profanity, to gluttony and licentiousness... while claiming that they do all this impassively... like those in the grip of insanity (*φρενίτιδι κατεχόμενος*) they rejoice in their own illness.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See I. Hausherr, *Études de spiritualité orientale* (Rome, 1969), 84–96, 153; Ph. Escolan, *Monachisme et église: le monachisme syrien du IV au VII siècle: un monachisme charismatique* (Paris, 1999), 121–3.

<sup>24</sup> Epiphanius, *Ancoratus und Panarion*, ed. K. Holl, iii (Leipzig, 1933), 487.

<sup>25</sup> Theodoret of Cyrillus, *Haereticarum fabularum compendium*, PG 83, col. 432.

<sup>26</sup> Maximos, *Scholion in Dionysium Areopagitam*, in *Liber graduum*, p. ccxxx.

Several sources speak independently of the heresiarch Lampetios of Cappadocia:

Often [writes Theodore Bar Koni] he would take off his clothes and stand naked in front of all-comers. Everything that happened to him as a result of his madness and insanity, he would attribute to purity and impassivity. He interpreted Scripture allegorically... claiming that he had understood Scripture by revelation, not through study and reading... He mocked monks, saying that a man must eat, drink and make merry. And he branded as mad all who opposed his teachings.<sup>27</sup>

Photios adds that Lampetios

kissed girls on the lips and embraced them... and in Jerusalem he sinned with a deaconess... And when somebody asked him about a cure, he said: 'Bring me a beautiful girl and I'll show you what holiness is.' He mocked those who sang the hours (*ἔξεμυκτῆριζε ὥρας ψάλλοντας*) and laughed at them, saying that they still lived in the realm of law [rather than Grace].<sup>28</sup>

The theoretical justification for all these improprieties was that the righteous man can in his own lifetime be deemed worthy of divine impassivity (*apatheia*), and that when this has been vouchsafed to him he is subsequently inoculated, as it were, against evil and can do whatever he likes.

<sup>27</sup> Theodore Bar Koni, *Scholarium lib. XI*, in *Liber graduum*, p. ccli.

<sup>28</sup> Photius, *Bibliothèque*, ed. R. Henry, i (Paris, 1959), 39. L. Rydén notes that Orthodox polemicists describe the Messalians in the same terms in which Leontios of Neapolis describes the actions of Symeon of Emesa: L. Rydén, *Bemerkungen zum Leben des Heiligen Narren Symeon von Leontios von Neapolis* (Uppsala, 1970), 103–4.

The soul becomes entirely liberated from any desire for ill, so that there is no longer any need for fasting, which wears out the body, nor for any restraining advice which might nurture the ability to lead an orderly life of virtue.<sup>29</sup>

All that the Messalians were accused of doing became part of Byzantine mystic teachings. For example, in the tenth century Eleutherios of Paphlagonia was charged with

advising that a monk share his couch with two women. After a year of total abstinence he reckoned it permissible to indulge fearlessly in pleasures and intercourse (*μίξεις*), both with relatives and with outsiders, saying that this made no difference and that it was not against nature. I think he attracted many through his uninhibitedness and his passion . . . Anathema on those who put on a show of frenzy and who pretend (*ὑποκρινόμενοις*) that they see some kind of revelation while in a trance, and thus deceive people.<sup>30</sup>

Symeon the New Theologian's teachings were in many respects akin to those of Eleutherios. The fact that one of them was condemned while the other canonized (albeit controversially) is most likely a result of specific circumstances rather than of any substantive difference in doctrine.<sup>31</sup> One could say the same about another such couple: Symeon the New Theologian and Constantine Chrysomallos, who was condemned for heresy in 1140: their teachings were so similar that followers of Chrysomallos were able to save some of his

<sup>29</sup> P. B. Kotter (ed.), *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, iv (Berlin, 1981), § 80.143–5.

<sup>30</sup> J. Gouillard, 'Quatre procès des mystiques à Byzance (vers 940–1143)', *REB* 36 (1978), 46–8, 52, cf. 5–12.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 12–27.

writings by attributing them to Symeon.<sup>32</sup> Other anathematized mystics, too—such as Theodore of Blachernae (eleventh century) or Clement of Sasima (twelfth century)—had ideas which differed little from those of 'legitimate' Byzantine mystics. The coincidences were on occasion so blatant that scribes copying out manuscripts of Symeon the New Theologian had to substitute the most offensive terms.<sup>33</sup>

Mystics who went so far in their solecism that they denied the role of the hierarchy were automatically heretics. Symeon, by contrast, never took his theories to their formal, logical conclusion. One can say the same about holy fools. If they had declared their behaviour to be the only true path, as did the Messalians (and any other heretics, schismatics, etc.), they would instantly have felt the full weight of repression from the State. But the holy fool acts alone. He himself takes care to discourage imitators. This is what saves him. Power fears an organization, not a lone eccentric.

This should certainly not be taken to imply that the holy fool was a heretic who deliberately held back from disseminating his ideas. Some Messalians could have masqueraded as holy fools, just as Chrysomallos masqueraded as Symeon the New Theologian, but one cannot reduce cultural phenomena to a banal case of mistaken identity through a change of clothes. Holy foolery was a kind of injection of a safe dose of heresy into the 'healthy' body of Orthodoxy. It served as the safety-valve without which no system can endure.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 29–36.

<sup>33</sup> P. Miquel, 'La conscience de la grâce selon Syméon le Nouveau Théologien', *Irénikon* 42 (1969), 315.

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## Balancing at the Edge

In the eleventh century holy foolery was still widespread in the Byzantine city. The secular writer Kekaumenos regarded it as an everyday evil, with which he was not clear how best to cope:

Do not join in the madman's jests (*μετὰ ἄφρονος μὴ παίξις*). He will insult you and even pull you by the beard. Think of the disgrace! If you let him get away with it, everyone will laugh at you; if you beat him, everyone will blame you and reproach you. And the same will happen in the case of those who feign their foolishness (*τοῖς προσποιουμένοις τὸ σαλόν*). I tell you: pity them and give to them, but on no account should you join them in their jokes and jests (*παίξειν*), for this is dangerous. I have seen some people who, laughing and jesting (*παίζοντες*) with such [a fool], ended up killing him [because of that] about which they had previously jested [together].<sup>1</sup> Do not insult or beat the fool (*σαλόν*), whoever he may be. Listen to the man who feigns

<sup>1</sup> The passage is unclear. G. G. Litavrin considers that it is the bystanders, not the holy fool, who jest, while H. G. Beck ascribes the jests to the holy fools; see G. G. Litavrin (ed., transl. and comm.), *Sovety i rasskazy Kekavmena* (Moscow, 1972), 247, 504.



foolishness (τοῦ ὑποκρινομένου τὸ σαλόν),<sup>2</sup> whatever he may tell you. Do not ignore him. He may be trying to dupe you through his foolery (διὰ τοῦ σαλοῦ).<sup>3</sup>

Kekaumenos seems to be distinguishing between madmen, fakers, and holy fools. Clearly all of them were integral to Byzantine urban life and Kekaumenos recommends treating them all with caution. But then it emerges that actually the outcasts themselves have to treat the urban crowd with caution: the throwaway remark about the murder of holy fools shows that the trouble-makers were in fact defenceless and liable to pay for their jests with their lives. According to G. Dagron, this scene is ‘contorted and harsh as a picture by Bosch’.<sup>4</sup>

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In the eleventh century Byzantine holy foolery reached the West, though the fool himself was again Greek. This was Nicholas of Trani, whose deeds are recorded in a Latin *vita* (*BHL*, 6223–6). Nicholas was born in a Boeotian village which belonged to the famous monastery of Hosios Lukas, in a poor family. When he was eight he acquired the habit of

<sup>2</sup> This is the editors’ conjecture. The sole manuscript reads *hypekeimenou tou salou*, which one should perhaps understand as ‘he who possesses the fool’—i.e. the devil; see J. Grosdidier de Matons, ‘Les thèmes d’édification dans la Vie d’André Salos’, *Travaux et Mémoires* 4 (1970), 300. If this is the case, then the phrase ‘whoever he may be’ acquires more sinister overtones. Cf. the *vita* of Gregory Dekapolites (see above, pp. 132–3).

<sup>3</sup> Litavrin, *Sovety i rasskazy*, 246.13–23.

<sup>4</sup> G. Dagron, ‘L’homme sans honneur ou le saint scandaleux’, *Annales* 4(1990), 936.

continually exclaiming ‘*Kyrie eleison!*’<sup>5</sup> His mother tried to bring him round from this ‘foolishness’ (*stultitia*). Thrown out of his home at the age of twelve, he settled in a cave, from which he drove out a she-bear by prayer (237–8). Then he was housed in the monastery where he was chained and mercilessly beaten.

Such ills this noble zealot had to endure at the hands of the monks! They suspected that he was possessed by a demon, so after many beatings and thrashings they expelled him from the church. And he, an outcast... stood at the threshold shouting ‘*Kyrie eleison!*’

They locked him up in a tower, but lightning smashed the bolts and Nicholas went back to the church and continued his shouting. ‘The monks seized him and again confined him with shackles’, but the chain miraculously snapped, ‘and he took it and went to the refectory, where the monks had gathered for their meal, and he put it where all could see it, shouting “*Kyrie eleison!*”. They expelled him from the monastery on the grounds that he was insane (*insanus*), but he found some secret means to return and again he began to shout ‘*Kyrie eleison!*’ ‘The monks, who were resting in their cells after the repast, rushed out.’ Infuriated, they even tried to drown Nicholas, but he was carried from the deep by a dolphin, while his would-be murderers themselves began to drown. Nicholas promised that they would be saved if they, too, took up shouting ‘*Kyrie eleison!*’ After this, Nicholas

<sup>5</sup> *Vita s. Nicolai Tranensis*, in *AASS Junii*, i. 232 (references henceforth in the main text); see B. Stüssi-Lauterburg, ‘Nikolaus Peregrinus von Trani’, *Quaderni Catanesi* 5 (1983), 414–18.

went back to his mother, and tried to convert his brother Gregory to his way of life, but Gregory did not want to abandon their mother.

Once Nicholas exhorted Maximos, abbot of the monastery of St Lukas, not to be so harsh in his treatment of the peasants who worked for him. In reply, Maximos beat the holy fool so severely with a stick that 'he completely broke his soles and shins' (234). And yet Nicholas would not desist. He began shouting '*Kyrie eleison!*' at night, so that he woke Maximos. The abbot summoned people with dogs, but Nicholas escaped by climbing a tree. In Olympia he was beaten by Bishop Theodore (241). Nicholas crossed over to Italy. Then the vita relates a highly significant story:

The inhabitants of Otranto had a custom of carrying an image of the Blessed Virgin from church to church... On one occasion the holy man joined in the procession, chanting '*Kyrie eleison!*' along with the others. He came across an old man, bowed, and said: 'Greetings, my brother and my lord! We have one Creator, we are from the same dough.' And he embraced him. The Christians present were indignant: 'Look, he does honour to (*adorat*) Jews and greets them!' And they set down before him the icon of the Virgin Mother of God and demanded: 'Abba, honour our Lady the Mother of God!' But he did not want to heed their words. They hit him a little, and again said to him: 'Honour her, abba!' But he replied: 'I do not wish to honour her (*nolo eam adorare*).' Now a hail of blows poured down upon him. Raising himself from the ground he began to sing a hymn: 'My Queen, for the sake of your great name and glory my soul has today been praised!' (241)

True to form, Nicholas carries on shouting '*Kyrie eleison!*' wherever he goes, for which he is constantly rewarded with

beatings. The bishop of Otranto maimed the saint 'so harshly and inhumanly that the ground all around was covered in blood' (243). Also in Otranto, 'the scoffers took him and shaved his head like a cross and mockingly (*derisive*) made him a deacon, but God did in truth consecrate him deacon'. In Luppia Nicholas' shriek unseated the local count and his suite from their horses. For this he was again thrashed.

The saint spent a long time in Otranto, where he used to give the boys apples, which he bought specially for the purpose, so that the tearaways would not pester him. 'The inhabitants thought he was insane. 'O horror!'—exclaims the hagiographer—'I hesitate even to utter it! Most of them ridiculed him and despised him as a madman (*velut dementem*)' (245). Yet the wiser among them recognized that they were dealing with a saint.

In time, apparently, Nicholas was to some extent 'socialized'. No longer did he shout '*Kyrie eleison!*' every minute of the day. 'Sometimes he even seemed to be silent; though even in this seeming silence he was muttering to himself and committing himself to God's mercy.' In spite of constant fasting 'he grew fat, as if he had not fasted'.

Whether for this or some other reason, callousness gave way to curiosity. 'Stirred by the opinion of the crowd', the local archbishop invited Nicholas to visit, and began to enquire of him as to why he was always shouting. The saint, 'with a bright face and in gentle terms', explained that he acted as the Gospels commanded, and he added:

'I was not embarrassed to act in an infantile manner and therefore I have not escaped human mockery. I leave it to you to judge

whether one ought to behave thus. I could remain here, if that would not anger you. Otherwise I will leave this city and go elsewhere.' (248)

The archbishop's decision was a compromise. He allowed Nicholas to stay in the city for a while, provided that he undertook not to disrespect the church's rituals. Nicholas died in 1094 at the age of eighteen. His veneration emerged immediately. However, rather than calling him *stultus* (this type of sainthood had never developed in the West), local people referred to him as *peregrinus* ('wanderer'). This is the word written on the late thirteenth-century icon from the Trani cathedral, in which a crowd of persecutors holding sticks<sup>6</sup> rages at his feet; the same word is found on a fresco from the thirteenth or fourteenth century in the rock crypt at Candelora.<sup>7</sup> The author of the Latin vita of Nicholas claims that the source of his information was a pilgrim, Bartholomew, with whom the saint came to Italy. There is no doubt that Nicholas is a historical figure, though apparently in Byzantium this insane youth was not regarded as a holy fool. One might tentatively suggest that the Tranian hagiographer had some idea of the paradigm of holy foolery yet the character he described can only partially be defined as a holy fool.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Splendori di Bisanzio* (Milan, 1990), 106–7 (no. 39).

<sup>7</sup> A. Medea, *Gli affreschi delle cripte eremitiche Pugliesi* (Rome, 1939), 205–7.

<sup>8</sup> F. Vandenbroucke, 'Fous pour le Christ: II: En Occident', in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* v (1964), 763.

The eleventh and twelfth centuries form a peculiar period in the history of holy foolery. The cults of St Symeon of Emesa and St Andrew of Constantinople flourished. Even John, the companion of Symeon of Emesa, had saintly status conferred upon him. Although, according to Symeon's *vita*, John did not follow him but remained in the desert, and although Leontios of Neapolis even has him voicing criticism of holy foolery, nevertheless verses are dedicated to him in the iambic calendar of Christopher of Mytilene, where he is called a holy fool (*σαλός*): 'The mortal world thought you stupid (*μωρόν*), O blessed one, but you laughed at it and were wise and raised yourself high.'<sup>9</sup> This confusion is itself evidence of the popularity of the cult of Symeon of Emesa in this period; and a further consequence of such popularity may be the appearance of a separate *vita* (*BHG*, 2315) of yet another figure from Symeon's biography, Nikon Iordanites (see above, p. 110): Nikon had declared Symeon a saint.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the popularity of the cult is attested by the large number of manuscripts of Leontios of Neapolis that survive from the period,<sup>11</sup> and its translation (in the tenth century) into Georgian.<sup>12</sup> Theodore Prodromos (c.1100–1156/8) praised Symeon of Emesa in his own verse calendar: 'St Symeon the Fool for Christ's Sake passed away in peace

<sup>9</sup> E. Follieri, 'Il calendario giambico di Cristoforo di Mitilena', *AB* 77 (1959), 289. Symeon himself is, of course, also present in this calendar.

<sup>10</sup> I. Polemes, 'Ho bios tou hosiou Nikonos tou Iordanite kai hai pegai tou', *Parnassos* 34 (1992), 207.

<sup>11</sup> Leontios of Neapolis, *Vie de Syméon le Fou et Vie de Jean de Chypre*, ed. A.-J. Festugière (Paris, 1974), p. XI.

<sup>12</sup> G. Garitte, *La Calendrier palestinogéorgien du Sinaiticus 34 (X s)*, *Subsidia hagiographica* 30 (Brussels, 1958), 285. Two translated services to Symeon survive in early Rus menaia of the eleventh and twelfth centuries (MS RGADA, 381, no. 121, fos. 23<sup>r-v</sup>; no. 122, fos. 89–95), but neither of them draws attention to his holy foolery.

[21 July]. For the world you were stupid, but for God you were wise, father.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to the officially acknowledged veneration of Symeon, the cult of Andrew seems always to have been on the fringes of legitimacy. Andrew was venerated mostly in monastic circles. The writer and magnate Michael Attaleiates, when compiling a catalogue of his private library at the end of the eleventh century, intriguingly described one item thus: ‘The four Biblical books of Kingdoms in one binding; actually containing two books of Kingdoms and the vita of Andrew, the fool for Christ’s sake.’<sup>14</sup> As early as the first half of the eleventh century the vita was translated into Georgian; there is no doubt that the translation was made in the Iviron monastery on Mt Athos,<sup>15</sup> which suggests that the work was popular among the local monks. In 1183 Andrew’s picture appeared in the rock hermitage of St Neophytos on Cyprus.<sup>16</sup> Neophytos the Recluse (d. c.1215) was himself much attached to the memory of St Andrew, and in his panegyric to Patriarch Gennadios he devoted some emotional lines to the holy fool: ‘Andrew, holy fool (σαλός) for Christ’s sake, willingly went forth as if demented (ἔξηχος), ridiculing and ridiculed (παίζων καὶ παιζόμενος), since he understood the vain snares of this world.’<sup>17</sup> The popularity of the cult of St Andrew enabled it to migrate to Rus, where it became deeply embedded in the local culture (cf. p. 000).

<sup>13</sup> A. Acconcia Longo, *Il calendario giambico in monastici di Teodoro Prodromo*, Testi e studi Bizantino-neoellenici (Rome, 1983), 132. Here Prodromos is clearly drawing on the text of Christopher of Mytilene (*ibid.*, 46).

<sup>14</sup> P. Gautier, ‘Diataxis de Michel Attaliatē’, *REB* 39 (1981), ll. 1743–4.

<sup>15</sup> *The Life of Andrew the Fool*, ed. Rydén, i. 186, 192.

<sup>16</sup> C. Mango and E. J. W. Hawkins, ‘The Hermitage of St Neophytos’, *DOP* 20 (1966), 179, 193, 196.

<sup>17</sup> Neophytos the Recluse, *Laudatio s. Gennadii Archiepiscopi*, *AB* 26 (1907), 221–2.

A saint may be generally regarded as officially canonized if he is entered in the Constantinople Synaxarion. Andrew, however, only appears in one of the versions of this compendium, compiled on Mount Athos around 1300 (Paris Coisl. 223).

Newly emerging holy fools in this period are more guarded in their behaviour, and less unrestrained than their predecessors. Thus in the eleventh century Nikon of the Black Mountain wrote a life of his teacher Luke of Anazarbos, but when he read it to the monks in his monastery they suggested that he cut certain ambiguous episodes. Instead of just removing the passages, Nikon judged it better to burn the entire manuscript.<sup>18</sup> In one of his epistles, entitled 'On Dreams and Empty Revelations', Nikon tells of his doubts regarding holy foolery:

If I make myself out to be acting the fool (*προσποιήσομαι τὸν μωρὸν ποιεῖν*), imitating the fathers of old, then many—especially those who know Holy Scripture—will find me out, and I will not be able to conceal [my intentions]. Only if I present myself as acting demonically (*ἀπὸ δαιμόνων σχηματίζεσθαι προσποιήσομαι*) will I be able to conceal myself from people.<sup>19</sup>

It is clear from these words that, thanks to the cults of Symeon and Andrew, the paradigm of holy foolery had become widely known, and hence this model of behaviour had lost its former justification (as a way of avoiding praise). If holy foolery could make one famous in one's own lifetime, then all sense of humility was lost. The dilemma facing

<sup>18</sup> I. Doëns, 'Nicon de la Montaigne Noire', *Byzantion* 24 (1954), 135.

<sup>19</sup> Khr. A. Stamoules, 'Saloi kai pseudosaloi sten orthodoxe hagiologia', *Gregorios ho Palamas* 721 (1988), 127 (citing an unpublished manuscript from the Monastery of St Catherine in Sinai).



Symeon's and Andrew's contemporaries had been to work out whether they were dealing with a saint or a madman. Now the problem had shifted: was one dealing with an authentic holy fool, or with somebody pretending to be so?<sup>20</sup>

Nikon confesses that he himself, sensing his vocation, began to engage in holy foolery without even waiting for the blessing of his spiritual mentor, Luke. When Luke returned to the monastery from a journey, he tried to dissuade Nikon:

The great elder himself, when in his youth he engaged in holy foolery (*σαλάτων*), received from God the revelation that 'neither you nor others should do this, but rather you should strive to acquire greater wisdom and understanding... Even the traditions about the holy foolery practised by the fathers of old [show] that this was done [only] by [God's] will and that it was not generally acceptable (*περιεκτικῆ*) but that it led easily to temptation and widespread harm. This is why in the vita of Symeon the Fool for Christ's Sake it is written concerning those who were led astray, that the saint asked God that for his sake this should not be counted among their sins.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the holy Council categorically pronounces against this.'<sup>22</sup>

Thus the main objection to holy foolery is precisely its provocative nature. It is noteworthy that this is the first reference to the 60th canon of the Council of Trullo.

Nikon returns to the problem of this paradoxical form of sanctity at least twice in another of his works, the *Pandects*:

<sup>20</sup> Déroche, *Étude sur Vie de Syméon*, 283.

<sup>21</sup> Probably Nikon had in mind the vita of Andrew (cf. p. 167), not Symeon.

<sup>22</sup> Stamoules, 'Saloi kai pseudosaloi', 27–8.

‘The divine laws repudiate those who practise foolery (τὸ σαλάτον . . . ἐπιτηδεύοντας) in the manner of the great Symeon and Andrew, and recently (ἄρτι) forbid this completely.’<sup>23</sup> The striking points here are, first, the appearance of a previously unrecorded term for holy foolery (*salaton*), and, secondly, the paradox whereby Symeon and Andrew are still held to be great saints, but not models to be imitated. Nikon is just as uncompromising in his other passage on the same topic: ‘If any of those who liken themselves to the God-bearing fathers should engage in any kind of foolery (σαλεύει τι), this must not be deemed [God’s] disposition, but a transgression and a betrayal of dogma and a dishonour to the Divine.’<sup>24</sup>

The use of the word *salos* also evolved.<sup>25</sup> Overall it still retained its original defamatory connotations<sup>26</sup> (so that, for example, the name of the heresiarch Silvanus was rendered as *Salouanous*<sup>27</sup>—‘twice mad’, as it were). Yet over time the new development can be seen in dictionaries and scholia, where the word is used to interpret other words. Thus in the

<sup>23</sup> K. A. Maksimovich (ed.), *Pandekty Nikona Chernogortsa v drevnerusskom perevode XII v. (iuridicheskie teksty)* (Moscow, 1998), 270.4–7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 468.6–9.

<sup>25</sup> In mid-Byzantine hagiography holy fools are no longer referred to by this word. It is often replaced by *μωρός*, which is less expressive and reminiscent rather of the New Testament ‘foolishness for God’s sake’, cf. *Menologii*, fasc. 2 (St Petersburg, 1912), 194 ff., cf. 209; *Interpretationes divinatorum mandatorum*, PG 106, col. 1372.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Psellos *Poemata*, rec. L. C. Westerink (Leipzig, 1992), 444.236; K. Krumbacher, *Mittelgriechische Sprichwörter* (Munich, 1893), 75, 94, 110, 117, 122; *Die Sprichwörtersammlung des Maximus Planudes*, ed. E. Kurtz (Leipzig, 1886), nos. 4, 10, cf. nos. 21, 47, 65, 207, 245, 251; *Scholia graeca in Aristophanem* (Paris, 1877), 101: Ad. ‘Nubes’, v. 398, 1070.

<sup>27</sup> Petrus Siculus, *Historia manichaeorum*, PG 104, col. 1280 (apparatus).

*Suda* lexicon, for example, the mysterious word *kronippos*, which occurs only once in Aristophanes, is interpreted as ‘big mouth’, ‘impertinent’, ‘sybarite’, ‘libertine’,<sup>28</sup> while in scholia accompanying manuscripts of Aristophanes the same word is rendered as either ‘big mouth’ or *salos*.<sup>29</sup> Another Byzantine dictionary has an entry ‘*Momar—ho salos*’,<sup>30</sup> while in other dictionaries the odd and rare word *momar* is identified with *momos* (= ‘scorn’, ‘mockery’). Thus, the meaning of *salos* was no longer just ‘a fool’, it also meant a libertine, a big mouth, a sybarite, and a scoffer—an obvious allusion to the image which a ‘fool for Christ’s sake’ sought to create.

So, in the eleventh century the holy fool was a common figure, and everyone recognized what was to be expected from the role. Yet this does not mean that new holy fools no longer emerged. The vita of St Lazaros Galesiotes (*BHG*, 980), written in the second half of the eleventh century, speaks thus of a certain Luke of Ephesos: ‘concerning the monk Luke, who played the fool (τὸν μωρὸν ὑποκρινόμενος) so as to be found wise in Christ, I could tell you a great deal, if I chose to write down all in order’.<sup>31</sup>

Alas, we learn nothing about the character of Luke’s foolery. We do, however, hear a little about another monk

<sup>28</sup> *Suidae Lexicon*, 199: κ, 2471.

<sup>29</sup> D. Holwerda, (ed.), *Prolegomena de comoedia: Scholia in Acharnenses, Equites, Nubes*, Scholia in Aristophanem 1.3.1 (Groningen, 1977), vers. 1070 f.

<sup>30</sup> F. W. Sturz (ed.), *Etymologicum Graecae linguae Gudianum et alia grammaticorum scripta e codicibus manuscriptis nunc primum edita* (Hildesheim, 1973), 402.

<sup>31</sup> *De sancto Lazaro Monacho*, in *AASS Novembris*, iii. 560.

of the same monastery, Nikon of Phrygia. Nikon had wanted to become a stylite, but Lazaros, head of the monastery on Mt Galesion, would not give his blessing, and instead imposed on him a three-year vow of silence. Nikon submitted, yet he also

tried to make himself out to be mad (*ἐπετήδευσε δὲ προσποιήσασθαι καὶ τὸν ἑξήχον*). For this reason those who met him on the road, and also the young monks, subjected him to many and various trials. Nikon put two stones into his mouth, so as not to blurt out words by accident; and although he was sorely tested, yet he said nothing. On one occasion there was not enough wood in the kitchen, and the abbot ordered everyone to the hills to collect brushwood. Only Nikon pretended to be unwilling to go. He thereby allowed himself to be very nastily maltreated: he was dragged, pushed and cuffed, and when they eventually saw that he did not want to follow them they threw him face downwards on the ground, weighed down his chest and legs with stones and left him thus while they went about their own business. There he lay until, on the return journey, they rolled away the stones and allowed him to get up. When night came, unbeknownst to all, Nikon twice went to the hills and brought back wood.<sup>32</sup>

The story ends when, after these tribulations, Lazaros releases Nikon from his vow of silence and allows him to ascend his column.

This whole episode makes an odd impression. On the one hand, holy foolery is here represented as a kind of additional form of asceticism which Nikon takes upon himself entirely on his own initiative; but on the other hand the monastery's

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 561.

abbot, Lazaros, obviously reckons it positive. We should note, however, that there is no hint of aggressiveness in Nikon's behaviour.

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The main characteristic of holy foolery during this period is that it tends to be combined with other forms of asceticism. For example, it would be only partially correct to label Cyril Phileotes (d. 1110) a holy fool. Although his hagiographer (*BHG*, 468) declares that the saint 'played the fool for God's sake (*μωροποιεῖν κατὰ Θεόν*)',<sup>33</sup> he relates only one instance of 'deviant' behaviour, when Cyril (like Basil the Younger—see above, p. 154) did not answer a functionary's questions, 'feigning dumbness (*ἄλαλον ὑποκρινόμενος*)'. Imprisoned as a spy, the saint spent two days and two nights without food, consoling himself with quotations from the Church Fathers (the *vita* lists nine of them), until an acquaintance recognized him. The functionary delightedly cited the Epistle to the Corinthians (1:27–9) and let the saint go.<sup>34</sup>

Another episode in this *vita* seems to have been intended to debunk holy foolery. The hagiographer, who is both the narrator and the disciple of the saint, tells the following story:

I told him, 'Abba, if you so instruct, I will tell you about the (misfortunes) we have to endure because of the devil's spite... I

<sup>33</sup> E. Sargologos, (ed.), *La vie de saint Cyrille le Philéote moine byzantin* (Brussels, 1964), 86.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 86–7.

welcomed a friar of about thirty years old who lived in the world, but ill fate had made him abandon his spiritual endeavour since he did not want to be humiliated and bear the temptation that plagued him. He left (home), found a wanderer (*κυκλοεργήν*) and exchanged clothes with him. He cut his hair with his own hands and instantly began to act indecorously (*μωροποιεῖν*) and wander about town; he acted and talked strangely (*ἄλλα ἀντ' ἄλλων*). Perhaps because he had no experience of begging, or I know not why, nobody would give him bread or anything else; and so, having spent eight days as a hungry beggar, he came to a garden. The gardener was peeling cabbage and throwing away rotten leaves. The self-proclaimed monk grabbed them and put them in his mouth. When the gardener saw him, he showed him a head of cabbage and gave it to him to eat; and then another. After he had eaten that one as well, [the gardener] gave him some bread. And so this man surrendered after the first battle and stopped acting disgracefully (*κατέλιπε τὸ μωροποιεῖν*).<sup>35</sup>

The story is completely unclear about the nature of the self-proclaimed monk's wrongdoing (besides cutting his own hair), and about why, once he was given alms, he abandoned holy foolery. Yet it does provide one more example of a move away from such behaviour.

In the eleventh century Luke of Anazarbos and Nikon of the Black Mountain had already repudiated holy foolery. In the twelfth century the same was done by another holy fool, Leontios of Stroumitza.

[In 1127] he came into the great city [of Constantinople] dressed as a monk and with monkish thoughts. On entering, this noble

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 200.

[righteous man] paid no heed to the luxury and the indulgence . . . No: he remained a stranger among strangers. Alien to the city, alien to the citizens, unversed in the ways of the capital, he plunged straight into the thick of the demonic [forces] so as to wrestle with the regiments of darkness. Playing the madman (τὸν ἔκφρονα πλασάμενος), he seemed a marvellous novelty (νέον τέρας) to the citizens, a willing jester (μῦμος ἐκούσιος) able to amuse people. He led the normal sort of life for people of his calling: on the receiving end of slaps and punches (κονδύλους καὶ τὰ ῥαπίσματα), yet he paid them no attention, but quietly calculated to himself the [spiritual] profit that he derived therefrom.<sup>36</sup>

However, Leontios' vita already belongs to a new period in Byzantine literature. It differs from earlier works of its type in that it pays closer attention to psychology. The hero is no longer a living icon, but a man beset by doubt. The more miracles Leontios works in Constantinople, the more strongly he suspects that they are the wiles of the devil, who wishes to 'sink the barge of the soul, having burdened it beyond measure'. Leontios constantly sets himself tests, and every new wonder leads him to greater despair, 'and he would bang his head against a wall with the sound of piles being driven into the earth'.<sup>37</sup> At first glance, Leontios seems to have behaved just like any holy fool: 'These things he did while strolling about the city, and he spent much time thus. Some marvelled at him and declared him a servant of God, while others beat him and considered him demented and possessed (ἔκφρων καὶ μαινόμενος).'<sup>38</sup> But the example of

<sup>36</sup> D. Tsougarakis (ed.), *The Life of Leontios Patriarch of Jerusalem* (Leiden, New York, Cologne, 1993), § 7.13–24.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, § 9.10–19.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, § 9.29–32.

Leontios highlights the fact that true holy foolery requires self-confidence. Leontios is too prone to reflection. His spiritual experiments are sometimes horrific—they include self-flagellation, lying in coffins with corpses and such like—but their purpose is the humbling of his own pride, whereas the shocking actions of the holy fool test the pride of other people. When Leontios eventually entered a monastery, he used to exhaust himself by fasting beyond what was required, yet he would still go to the refectory with the brethren and would pretend that he was eating, ‘so as not to lead people astray’.<sup>39</sup>

Another holy fool features in the same *vita*. When Leontios came to Crete, already as abbot of the monastery on Patmos (between 1143 and 1150), his appearance was predicted by a certain Constantine Skanthos.

He pretended to be demented (*ἐκφρονα προσποιούμενος*), was reckoned a prophet, foretold the future for many people, and for many people—contrary to expectation—he healed both spiritual and physical ailments. Near the monastery [of St George at Heraklion] where he spent most of his time, he took to shouting out ‘*Kyrie eleison!*’ louder than is customary. A crowd of people—local residents and those from further away—gathered to this eerie cry, convinced that he would foretell some unlooked-for woe that threatened Crete. And though a great many people were gathered, still he continued to yell ‘*Kyrie eleison!*’ When the crowd asked him what had happened and why he was shouting, he carried on as before and made no reply. Leontios decided to come out and have a look at this man . . . Barely had he stepped beyond the gate—and before those present had recognized him—when Skanthos

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, § 25.13.



stopped shouting and in great agitation, as if in a transport of ecstasy and delight, began insisting: ‘Clear the way, clear the way! He’s coming, he’s coming, he’s coming! Woe upon you, miserable people, at this hour! Woe upon you! If it were not for his coming, what would you have had to suffer!’ When the blessed [Leontios] came up to him, he changed his tone and said: ‘Welcome.’ The crowd dispersed. Moreover (*μέντοι*), nobody ever did find out just why Skanthos said and did all this, and he himself explained nothing to his companions. Presumably through his words and actions he was indicating that the blessed [Leontios] was holy and great before God.<sup>40</sup>

The two holy fools introduced by this hagiographer, Makarios Chrysokephalos, are quite distinct from one another. Leontios is a conscious imitator of literary models, while Skanthos is a regular madman; it is those around him, as well as the author himself, who seek to interpret his conduct in terms of the familiar paradigm of the holy fool. On the one hand, he meticulously reproduces Skanthos’ incoherent speeches; but on the other hand, he cannot hide his own disappointment at the fact that the story had no clear ending. His final phrase sounds quite helpless.

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The Antiochene patriarch and well-known twelfth-century canonist Theodore Balsamon had an ambiguous attitude to holy foolery. This is his commentary on the 60th canon of the Council of Trullo, that forbade holy foolery:

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, § 31.3–32.20.

The canon prescribes punishment for those who pretend to be possessed so that they can derive some profit, and for those who, like the Hellenic prophetesses, make crazed (*δαιμονιώδη*) pronouncements with false, satanic intentions... it is said that their very pretence is inspired by demons... I have seen such as these: large numbers of them roam the cities unpunished, and some people even kiss them as if they were consecrated (*ὡς ἡγιασμένους*). I tried to ascertain the reason for this, and demanded punishment. But in ignorance I counted Staurakios Oxobaphos among the fakers, whereas he was truly righteous and he feigned foolishness for God's sake (*τὴν διὰ Θεὸν μωρίαν*) using various deceptions (*διὰ τοὺς ἀπατεῶνας*). Others, too, were similarly judged (*ἐκριματίσθησαν*) unjustly by me. Naturally this is repudiated by the canon, so that the good are not punished because of the bad. For there are many ways to the salvation of the soul, and some people can be saved in this way without any temptation... Various holy patriarchs have used their power to detain and imprison many—whether sitting chained at the church of St Niketas the Martyr, or wandering the streets—in accordance with the canon.<sup>41</sup>

Balsamon's view of holy foolery is somewhat different from that of the Fathers of the Council of Trullo. It never occurred to the latter that this kind of asceticism may be a way to draw profit. Besides, ecstatic prophesying is not mentioned in the canon of the Council, although Balsamon regards it as a form of holy foolery. Apparently the prophetic functions of *saloi* grew stronger as their provocative role declined. This exceptionally confused text of Balsamon does not specify

<sup>41</sup> K. Rhalles and M. Potles, *Syntagma theion kai hieron kanonon*, ii. (Athens, 1858), 441–2.

how one is supposed to deal with a holy fool. Clearly the patriarch Balsamon has no more precise criteria than had the layman Kekaumenos for distinguishing true holy fools from fakes.<sup>42</sup> On the one hand Balsamon departs, without any explanation, from the categorical formulation of the Trullo canon; on the other hand, it is indicative that not a scrap of information about Staurakios Oxeobaphos can be found anywhere, though Balsamon writes as if he was well known for his righteousness. It would seem that the Church found it prudent to condemn the memory of Staurakios (as, incidentally, the memory of Luke of Anazarbos) to oblivion.

If Balsamon was manifestly discomfited by the problem of holy foolery, another interpreter of canon law—Arsenius—calmly and unequivocally consigned holy fools to the ranks of charlatans:

It is not permitted to play knucklebones or draughts, to go to games and be a spectator there, to frequent—for entertainment—dances, popular singing, the stunts of bear-tamers, the contortions of those who act possessed (*τῶν δαιμονῶν ὑποκρινομένων*), the tricks of fire-eaters and fire-leapers.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Dagron, 'L'homme sans honneur', 935.

<sup>43</sup> Arsenios, *Epitome canonum*, PG 133, col. 52. The fourteenth-century canonist Matthew Blastares is not so assertive: he admits that 'he who ignores things human' may emerge 'to many as a cause of temptation'. 'These people need a high degree of sobriety, as one of the saints says, so that after they have begun to mock, they would not themselves end up as objects of mockery, even if they have assumed this path with good intentions' (Matthew Blastares, 'Syntagma alphabeticum', PG 144, col. 1216). Apparently 'one of the

In the twelfth century the flow of hagiographic literature is dramatically reduced, but some data on holy foolery may be still found in secular writing. John Tzetzes (c.1100–1180/85), a Byzantine intellectual, writes in disgust about those who ‘present themselves as simpletons, with their histrionic and ostentatious secretiveness, with their artificial and utterly devious artlessness’.<sup>44</sup> But the main targets of intellectual criticism in the twelfth century were conspicuous asceticism and bogus (or genuine, for that matter) mortification of the flesh. Thus, for example, Eustathios of Thessalonica (1115–95), who wrote several works critical of monks, who enumerated many forms of deception,<sup>45</sup> and who devoted a special treatise to the subject of hypocrisy (*Peri hypokriseos*), says not a word about holy foolery. On the contrary, the entire force of his polemic is directed against fake holy men who display outward piety and virtue while being inwardly corrupt, whose self-denial is illusory and fraudulent.<sup>46</sup> Ecclesiastical and secular writers in the twelfth century claimed to dislike only the excesses of asceticism, but in fact they disliked asceticism as such. Both the Church and the State would ideally have preferred it if no more saints appeared. Zealots were too much trouble. They were too unpredictable. This attitude had begun to appear as early as the tenth century—we recall the story of

saints’ implies John, a companion of Symeon of Emesa, who refused to leave the desert.

<sup>44</sup> John Tzetzes, *Epistulae*, ed. P. A. M. Leone (Leipzig, 1972), 151.15–17.

<sup>45</sup> Eustathios of Thessalonica, *Ad stylum quendam*, PG 136, cols. 241 ff.

<sup>46</sup> Eustathios of Thessalonica, *De simulatione*, PG 135, cols. 381, 396, 400–1, 405, etc.

the canonization of Symeon the Pious (above, p. 175)—but in the twelfth century it reached its apogee.<sup>47</sup>

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We turn to the relations between holy fools and the authorities. The opposition of the fearless sage and the omnipotent ruler has a long tradition in Greek culture. The Cynics and Stoics of Late Antiquity bravely stood up to tyrants, the Christian martyrs borrowed this stereotype, along with the integrity and impartiality of Old Testament prophets, in their opposition to pagan rulers. After the victory of Christianity, holy men used their ‘candour’ (*parresia*) not only to converse with God but also to give guidance to rulers.

The Byzantine holy fool is conspicuous in lacking even the slightest interest in political engagement. When Maximos Kausokalybites in the fourteenth century (see below, p. 237) decided to instruct the emperor,<sup>48</sup> he temporarily abandoned his efforts at holy foolery. Not only did the Byzantine holy fool tend to refrain from criticizing the emperor; he was in general remarkably conformist. Symeon of Emesa, for example, never confronted those in power. He even had a habit of shouting out loudly: ‘Victory to the

<sup>47</sup> See P. Magdalino, ‘The Byzantine Holy Man in the Twelfth Century’, in *The Byzantine Saint*, ed. S. Hackel (London, 1981), 51–66; A. Kazhdan, ‘Hermitic, Cenobitic and Secular Ideals in Byzantine Hagiography of the Ninth through Twelfth Centuries’, *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30 (1985), 480–3; R. Morris, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium, 843–1118* (Cambridge, 1995), 62–3.

<sup>48</sup> F. Halkin, ‘Deux vies de s. Maxime le Kausokalybe, érmitte au mont Athos (XIV<sup>e</sup> s.)’, *AB* 54 (1936), 79, 93.

Emperor and the City!’ and it makes little difference that his hagiographer interprets the phrase as a Christian metaphor.<sup>49</sup> Andrew the Fool was quick to condemn, yet he was distinctly mild in his reproach of a courtier for sexual incontinence.<sup>50</sup> Only once does he display real aggression, with regard to the chartouarios of the Fleet from Amastris, but even here his criticism has no bearing on politics.<sup>51</sup> The closest a holy fool came to political boldness was merely to be impervious to the authorities.

Despite all this, the authorities tended to treat holy fools with suspicion. Coming out into the street one night with a bunch of drunks who had been abusing him, Andrew the Fool exclaimed: ‘What shall I do? The watch will meet me and I will be flogged.’<sup>52</sup> We have already seen how a holy fool could be taken for a spy (above, pp. 154, 208). Yet by and large the authorities did not fear him. Niketas Choniates tells of a typical encounter between the Emperor Isaac Angelos and a holy fool. The story is set in Rhaedestos in 1195:

There the emperor saw Basilakios. This man led a peculiar life and had gained a widespread reputation as a prophet and seer. Crowds therefore thronged to him, more numerous than the industrious ants scuttling in and out of the anthep. . . . Yet Basilakios’ utterances about the future were neither accurate nor clear. His words were deceptive, contradictory, and enigmatic. Often he would think up something funny, pandering to the vulgar crowd that was always happy to guffaw. When women came to him, he

<sup>49</sup> Leontios of Neapolis, *Vie de Syméon*, 166.

<sup>50</sup> *The Life of Andrew the Fool*, ed. Rydén, ll. 2869–75.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 3759–85.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 248.

groped their breasts and stared at their legs, muttering nonsense the while and blurting out meaningless words. But when his visitors put questions to him, he would usually stay silent, conveying his prophecies through bustling movement and agitated gestures. He was attended by some drunk and demented old Greek women, birds of the same feather. They would explain to those present what Basilakios was doing and what it foretold for the future. They would interpret silence as if it was speech that signified something. As I have said, many people—especially certain women—reckoned this man a prophet who foretold the future. The immodest and indecent thing that he did with their clothing seemed to them a jolly game. But sensible people found this old man fidgety, absurd, and cantankerous. There were those—and I am one of them—who astutely pointed out that he was possessed by a spirit of divination (*πνεύματι Πυθῶνος κάτοχον*) [Acts 16:16].

Then, when the Autocrat appeared, Basilakios paid him no attention; no attention to a man clad with such great and holy might. Basilakios did not even respond to his greeting (which was ‘Hello, father Basilakios!’), did not nod or bow in acknowledgement. Instead he ran this way and that, leaping about like a foal and making mad movements with his body. Furthermore, he would swear at those around him, and he made no exception even for the emperor (*μηδ’ αὐτοῦ φειδόμενος τοῦ κρατοῦντος*). Then, as his absurd leaping gradually calmed, he held out his hand, and with the staff that he held he damaged a colour portrait of the emperor which hung in the very hut that had been allocated to him for prayers. He poked out the emperor’s eyes [in the portrait]. He also tried to tear off the emperor’s headdress. When Basilakios had done all this, the emperor left, convinced of the man’s insanity (*ἀφροσύνην τοῦ ἀνδρὸς καταγνοῦς*). Eye-witnesses to what happened thought it a bad omen. Basilakios’ fame (which, as I have said, was ambiguous and which many

found dubious) was greatly increased by the fact that subsequent events deviated little from these predictions.<sup>53</sup>

It is noteworthy that after Emperor Isaac was deposed and blinded, Basilakios' tricks were interpreted as prophecy not only by Choniates' informants; even the author, though he claims to be a sceptic, is in no rush to call it a fantasy. Rather, it may be suggested, for him the holy fool's foresight was related to his demonic possession. Choniates shares this attitude with a large group of people, like those mentioned in the vita of Andrew the Fool. In the tenth century, Basilakios himself might have deserved a vita, but times had changed. Another peculiar feature of the meeting described by Choniates is that the holy fool evidently displayed no special interest in the emperor and abused him along with everybody else. The emperor, for his part, was not alarmed by the holy fool, and once he was convinced that he was simply insane he lost all interest in him. As we shall see (below, p. 285) in Russia this relationship took on a different aspect.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. I. A. Van Dielen (Berlin and New York, 1975), 448.17–450.57.

<sup>54</sup> In the metropolitan's church in Berroia (1215–1230) St Antony the Younger is depicted with the inscription: 'The Fool (salos) for Christ's Sake from Berroia' (Th. Papazotos, *He Berroia kai oi naoi tes (11<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> C.)* (Athens, 1994) 168, 212). In the vita of this saint (BHG, 2031–3033) no holy foolery is mentioned (Ch. Chionides, *Ho hosios Antonios ho neos ek tes makedonikes Beroias basei anekdoton byzantinon eggraphon kai lathanonton stoicheion* (Berroia, 1965), but in the folk beliefs of the population of Macedonia Antony was regarded as a healer of the insane.



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### Decline

In the Late Byzantine period holy foolery still remained popular. The cult of Andrew the Fool, which continued to grow, is an important indicator of this. Andrew's vita appears in five extant manuscripts from the thirteenth century, and in eight from the fourteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Travellers from Rus report that in Constantinople there were two monasteries of Andrew the Fool, which preserved his iron staff, and where the possessed were healed.<sup>2</sup> Gradually, however, this veneration shed the essential features of holy foolery. For example, in the version of Symeon's vita included in all later Synaxaria, the Emesa section is missing.<sup>3</sup> In a fifteenth-century icon manual reproducing a Komnenian model, Symeon is shown prior to his 'foolish' period: although his

<sup>1</sup> *The Life of St Andrew the Fool* ed. Rydèn, i. 151–2.

<sup>2</sup> G. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the 14th and 15th Centuries* (Washington DC, 1984), 315–16. In the popular view, Andrew the Fool appropriated the staff, which, in the early thirteenth century, was believed to have belonged to the apostle Andrew.

<sup>3</sup> Greek MS from St Petersburg Public Library, no. 240, fo. 135v. In one of the Greek synaxaria Symeon, as if mockingly, is honoured with the rare epithet *πυκινόφρων*, 'shrewd', which Homer had applied to Zeus: see J. C. Assemani, *Kalendaria Ecclesiae Universae*, vi (Rome, 1755), 489.

legs are bare from the knees down, he is clothed in monastic attire.<sup>4</sup>

The need for additional evidence to support holy fools' sainthood gave rise to a new motif that was later to play a significant role in Russian *iurodstvo*: a secret saint is revealed to have worn secret chains. This motif first appears in a brief vita of a certain Mark, who is probably the same as Mark the Horseman (above, p. 98 f.). His story is entered under 29 November in a thirteenth-century menaion. This version differs in several respects from the story told by Daniel. In particular, it states that Mark 'abandoned his wife, children, and relatives, wandered about towns, villages, and lands . . . and tried hard to hide his righteous life so that nobody would find him out . . . He came to the greatest city of Egypt [Alexandria] and lived near one of its great churches . . . [After his death people] saw that his body was wrapped in iron, which bit into his flesh . . . and they exclaimed: "Oh, how many secret servants God has!"'<sup>5</sup> The most important difference is the chains: there had been no need for them when holy foolery was still a novelty.

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Subsequent instances of holy foolery in Byzantium are all linked in one way or another to the ideas of hesychasm. Without delving into the arcane details of hesychast

<sup>4</sup> Cf. L. M. Evseeva, *Afonskaia kniga obraztsov XV v* (Moscow, 1998), 317, no. 169.

<sup>5</sup> *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, ed. H. Delehayé (Brussels, 1902), cols. 265–6.

teaching, we can simply note that, as we have seen with regard to the teachings of Symeon the New Theologian (above, p. 193), the mystical character of hesychast doctrine did in all likelihood stimulate some of its adherents to express their disdain for earthly life in ways which on occasion might have provoked shock (see below, p. 251).<sup>6</sup> But since they regarded this as ‘correct’ behaviour rooted in ideas, it cannot count as holy foolery in our terms. Here we dwell only on cases of lifestyles ‘typical’ of holy foolery.

In his vita of his uncle John (*BHG*, 2188), metropolitan of Herakleia (1249–1328), Nikephoros Gregoras (1294–1359) tells of a holy fool at court:

a certain devout Cynic, a Diogenes, so to speak, who feigned foolishness for show (*μωρίας ὑποκριτῆς τὸ φαινόμενον*) while in reality fulfilling God’s work, which can be discerned only by one who contemplates the invisible. This man suddenly entered the imperial chambers, in the sight of the pious empress Theodora, being free not only of earthly vanity but also of all clothing from his head down to his buttocks (*ἄχρη γλούτων*).<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, we do not know the identity of this nameless ‘Diogenes’.<sup>8</sup> Since he lived in the emperor’s palace, we may tentatively suggest that he was a jester. Yet we find extensive information about Byzantine holy foolery in the works of Philotheos Kokkinos (1300–79), Patriarch of Constantinople,

<sup>6</sup> See A. Rigo, *Monaci esicasti e monaci bogomili* (Florence, 1989), 202–7.

<sup>7</sup> V. Laurent, ‘La vie de Jean, métropolitte d’Héraclée du Pont’, *Archeion Pontou* 6 (1934), 38.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. D. Nicol, *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453* (Cambridge, 1979), 43–4.

even though he never actually uses the word *salos*.<sup>9</sup> Philotheos does not hide the fact that he relies on earlier authorities. In his eulogy to the holy fool Nikodemos (*BHG*, 2307) there is a reference to Vitalios from the vita of John the Almsgiver,<sup>10</sup> while in Philotheos' vita of St Sabas the entire image of the saint (in the fragments relevant to his holy foolery) is built on comparisons with known models.<sup>11</sup> Here is his commemoration of St Nikodemos. Nikodemos was born in Berroia in the reign of Andronikos II (1282–1328). He arrived in Thessalonica and became a monk at the Philokalous monastery.

There he began to practise every virtue... He displayed such obedience to the abbot and to all the brethren that they were astonished. But others thought him indiscriminate in his contacts, for he continually consorted with harlots and he made out that (*ὑποκρινόμενος*) he regularly spent time with jesters (*κώμοις*). For this he was showered with accusations; sometimes the abbot even expelled him from the monastery. But the saint was unbending, and he bore all with fortitude. The food that he received from the monastery he either gave to the poor—oh, his love in Christ's name!—or took to the harlots and gave them in lieu of payment, so that they would keep their beds undefiled for him. All this the saint performed with fervour, *striving in this as in all things to*

<sup>9</sup> G. I. Mantzarides, 'Hoi dia Christon saloi sta hagiologika erga tou hagiou Philotheou', in *Praktika Theologikou Synedriou eis timen kai mnemen tou en hagiois patros hemon Philotheou Archiepiskopou K-poleos* (Thessalonica, 1986), 93.

<sup>10</sup> Philotheos, *Hypomnema eis hosion Nikodemon*, in D. Tsames, *Philotheou Konstantinopoleos tou Kokkinou Hagiologika erga*, i (Thessalonica, 1985), 87.

<sup>11</sup> Philotheos, *Bios Saba tou neou*, ed. D. Tsames (Thessalonica, 1983), 77, 79.

*appear as an imitator of the godly Vitalios* [my emphasis—S.I.], whose life and habits he much admired . . . But the devil's henchmen said that the saint conversed with harlots and that on occasion he spent time with them, and they decided that he was doing the same as they themselves were doing. Is an impious soul capable of recognizing and imagining that which is higher than itself? People grumbled about Nikodemos and complained to God that he conducted amorous relationships with their women. And so it came to pass: once they found him lying with them and, alas—O human stupidity!—they hacked him to death. Still scarcely breathing, the saint asked to be taken to his monastery, but when he arrived there the abbot would not let him enter. The uncompromising [righteous man] reproached himself greatly for his excessive humility, and called himself unworthy not only to enter the monastery but also of the life to come, for—he said—he had always lived amid the most shameful passions. [With this] he rendered his soul to God. He was then about forty years old, perhaps a little more.<sup>12</sup>

This text shows clearly the late Byzantine fusion of different types of holy foolery: the monastic and the itinerant. Nikodemos, like Isidora, submits to all in the monastery. In an earlier age, up to the sixth century, such abnormal obedience could well have constituted the complete substance of a hagiographic account of a holy fool. But here, suddenly, with no transitional narrative or explanation, the saint starts to act according to a quite different script which has nothing to do with monastic life. Such eclectic composition started with Symeon the Pious (see p. 175). Like him, Nikodemos was obviously a real person – but was he a conscious holy

<sup>12</sup> Philotheos, *Hypomnema*, 86–9.

fool? It may be inferred from the text that what we face is a negligent and dissolute monk, whose provocative behaviour the author adjusted to the hagiographic canon. As in the case of Makarios Chrysokephalos (p. 212), the hagiographer is visibly disturbed by the conflict between the ideal and reality.

A still more extensive account of holy foolery is to be found in Philotheos' vita of St Sabas the Younger (*BHG*, 1606). This saint was born in Thessalonica in 1283. At eighteen he fled to Athos, where he took a vow of silence; but after his ascetic experiences there, he decided to go to the holy places. When he reached Cyprus, his first action was to sit in the mud and smear himself with it, for he had noticed that some woman had experienced carnal desire while looking at him. Thenceforth, his behaviour became still more eccentric:

A certain Italian, who preened himself on his nobility and wealth... encountered the great [Sabas] in the town. The Italian was riding a frisky, spirited horse and was accompanied by his suite with various external attributes [of power]. He looked with disdain at the saint's odd and peculiar clothing and—surely at the devil's prompting—asked his retinue who this man was. They replied that they did not know the man at all but that his appearance led them to suspect that he was a spy (*κατάσκοπον*) from another country, and that he wore such clothing and had assumed such a persona (*ταυτήν τήν ὑπόκρισιν*) in order to deceive the citizens. [The Italian] immediately ordered that Sabas be arrested, and with his customary pomposity and arrogance he asked him who he was and where he was from. But Sabas uttered not a word in reply; as if this speech had nothing to do with him. Thus he repudiated

vanity and haughtiness. Since Sabas could not speak [because of his vow of silence], he punctured the Italian's pride by the means available to him, that is with actions. Silently reaching out with the cane which he normally carried, he knocked off [the Italian's] hat and dashed it to the ground. Thus, wisely and wittily (*ἀστείως*), the sage taught the braggart a lesson... The Italian ordered his retinue to beat [the saint] mercilessly with sticks... And they would have killed Sabas, had not the members of the Orthodox community... prevented them.

... And the saint once again took up his previous pursuits. Sometimes he retreated into the desert and communed with God ... and sometimes he wandered through the villages and towns of the island, feigning foolishness (*μωρίαν ὑποκρινόμενος*), as I have mentioned; but a foolishness in which were concealed (*ὑποικουρούν*) great intelligence and wisdom. He never did anything offensive or unseemly to anybody, nor did he cause anybody the slightest harm, as is the custom for some (*ὥσπερ τισὶ ἦθος*), but he was a model of propriety and peaceableness; he dealt with everybody in silence, according to his custom, yet with appropriate sympathy and goodwill.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, although Sabas inherits the tradition of the holy fool's silence from Basil the Younger and Cyril Philoteos, nevertheless Philotheos draws a sharp contrast between his own hero and the 'normal' holy fool whose behaviour is 'offensive and unseemly'. Indeed, all that remains from the former disoluteness is the unceremonious knocking off of the Italian's hat. And yet the inhabitants of Cyprus, who at first had saved the saint (presumably because he was Orthodox and

<sup>13</sup> Philotheos, *Bios*, 74–7.

‘one of us’) from the Italians, in time became filled with a singular hatred of him:

There was not a man or a woman or a child or a youth who would not have attacked him brazenly and without shame. They threw stones at him, and—alas—they insolently poured ashes over his head (the most precious and pleasant for the very angels!), and smeared him with manure, and abused him in even worse ways: ‘windbag, tramp, fool (*μωρός*), madman, evil eye, misfortune for the whole town! Hit him! Stone him! Drive him out of our region quickly! To the hills with him, to the desert, to the ravines!’<sup>14</sup>

Do the Cypriots explain Sabas’ odd behaviour by his insanity or do they understand that they face a holy fool? The hagiographer does not answer this question, but in any case, in Cyprus there were no heated debates of the sort that Andrew once stirred in Constantinople. The islanders did not find the holy fool in the least appealing (we recall that foolery cost Nikodemos his life).

Moreover, Sabas himself even began to doubt his own vocation:

The devil chose a moment which he thought favourable, so as to insinuate himself as a friendly adviser, though in fact he was a wily and scheming manipulator. Thus it was that the saint, who had been impervious to all external [dangers], struck up an argument with his own thoughts. ‘Why do you torment yourself for no use?’ he said. ‘... And all this without having received any command (*ἐντολήν*)! This is the path by which you thereby also lead your soul up onto the cliffs of arrogance, forcing it to leap over the chasms. You deviate from the traditional and congenial path of the

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 77–8.



fathers, stepping out onto a strange and untried track on your own initiative. We would scarcely be able to find even one or two who have walked this path and have found a pleasant haven at the end of it. Do you really not know the snares of the demons? In the guise of striving for what is better, demons have corrupted many who have slackened their vigilance, casting them down into the abyss of pride. Many and various are the ruses of our common enemy. Whom he misses with his snares on the left, he easily catches on the right, and hooks him, and pulls him to himself. If you believe me, therefore, abandon these useless perils; return to your spiritual mentor as soon as possible. There, assuming again your former obedience, with the measure and order that it brings, you will find God.<sup>15</sup>

This speech gives tradition its due: the ‘one or two’ exceptions are doubtless Symeon and Andrew, whose sanctity is not denied. But at the same time this must surely be the first detailed argument in repudiation of holy foolery as a form of asceticism. The position here stated is far more consistent and canonical than the ambiguous writings of Theodore Balsamon. But the twist here is in the fact that, in Philotheos’ scheme, this speech is actually a temptation devised by the devil.

With such speeches the scheming adviser—or, more properly, the deceiver—would certainly have confused anybody else, but [Sabas] instantly recognized the hidden venom: ‘... You make a great issue of my salvation, but in fact with your trickery you are trying to deprive me of my true salvation, with your talk of pride and of my unusual path to God and of the traditional way of the

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 78–9.

fathers and such like. Who has ever brought about anything good without labour? I stress: without great labours? Who has ever achieved victory over you while succumbing to sleep and idleness? And conversely: have you ever let pass without tribulations anyone who was on the path to God? . . . I do not dishonour the original path of the sages, as you cunningly suggest, but I follow it as best I can. I pray that those who follow this road, and do not deviate from it, should not go too far (*μη πρόρρω θέειν*). But since there are many dwellings in the kingdom of heaven, thus the road of piety which leads thereto must branch into many pathways: it is appropriate for one man to walk one of the paths, for another man—another; for a third man—several of them, and for a fourth man—all of them, if he is able . . . We should not listen to men but to God, for men look at the outside while he looks into the heart.’ Thus [Sabas] replied to the secret enemy. And, like a great wrestler who has thrown his opponent and shows a token of his victory—thereby confirming in deed the truth of his words—he whispered hurriedly: ‘We are fools for Christ’s sake.’<sup>16</sup>

Presumably this contest reflects opinions widespread at the time. Through the words of his hero, Philotheos acknowledges the presence of dangers on the path of holy foolery, and promises not to ‘go too far’. We should note that the tone of Sabas’ speech is defensive. As for his actions along his chosen path:

In his wanderings about the island, the great [saint], with the taciturnity and modesty that were so dear to his heart, went into a monastery of Italians . . . He came upon them in the refectory, for it was meal-time. Quietly entering the building where the table stood, he walked past it and, with characteristic modesty and

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 79–82.

dignity, proceeded towards the exit...Irritated by his extreme taciturnity and total incommunicativeness, these villains fraudulently accused this most simple-hearted man (*ἀπλουστάτου*) of theft and of snooping. They thrashed him so inhumanely that they exceeded even the violence of that other Italian, their coreligionist.<sup>17</sup>

By comparison with the improprieties of previous holy fools, to call Sabas moderate would be an understatement. Yet precisely because of this, perhaps, it becomes obvious that the essence of the holy fool's aggression is not in the rudeness of his antics. Sabas is modesty and meekness personified. But why, we might ask, did he come to the Catholic monks? And once he had entered, what was his purpose in turning immediately to leave? The essence of holy foolery is provocation, and the experience of Sabas shows that it is possible to fulfil this function while maintaining a veneer of decorum. Philotheos apparently feels obliged to keep justifying his hero:

We have already said that the great [saint]'s decision to put on this act (*δρᾶμα*) and to play the fool (*μωρίας ὑπόκρισις*) was not taken simply (*οὐχ ἀπλῶς*) or without preparation in advance (*οὐδ' ἀπροπαρασκευάστως*). No: he first tempered his every bodily member and every emotion, so that there was no chance of the worse rising to oppose the better. Thus, sufficiently protected, he went forth to engage in mockery (*ἐμπαιγμὸν*) of the wily schemer [the devil]...As he himself explained to us later, he had also wanted to attempt all the modes of living (*πολιτειῶν ιδέας*) and, as far as he could, to leave none of them untried and

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 82–3.

untested . . . Yet he preferred silence to all other forms [of asceticism], and he used to say that, even if a man achieves the greatest heights in the above-mentioned simulation of foolishness (*ὑπόκρισιν ταυτηνὴ τῆς μωρίας*), his feat in itself is worthless if his safety is not ensured. Otherwise it would be mere amusement (*παίγνιον*), and manifest foolishness (*μωρία σαφής*), which, if not taken to its conclusion, turns into mockery (*ἐμπαιγμὸν*) of the one who resorts to it. In the excellent words of the ancient fathers on this subject: 'Those who seek to follow this path need great temperance, so that, having undertaken to abuse the enemy, they are not themselves then subjected to the enemy's abuse.'<sup>18</sup> And to this the wise [Sabas] added: 'He who follows this path but not [at the same time] the path of the silentary, will never achieve temperance.' He continued: 'If with God's help I was able to achieve some good on this long path, it was only because of the most wonderful [exercise of] silence.'

We have decided to dwell on this in more detail not in order to defend the saint's reputation . . . but so that others will not fall into the fatal trap, believing that the rule for a virtuous life is the display of feigned foolishness (*προσποιητοῦ μωρίας*), and not knowing the hidden wisdom of this man.<sup>19</sup>

Philotheos' panegyric is hedged with such an array of explanations and reservations that can just as easily be read as a warning. The more significant point, however, is that here holy foolery is simply one of the available forms of asceticism (and by no means the best). Its behavioural stereotypes are firmly established, and its generic models are securely

<sup>18</sup> Most likely, Philotheos did not quote this directly from 'ancient' fathers; rather, it originates from Matthew Blastares' *Syntagma* completed in 1335, cf. p. 214.

<sup>19</sup> Philotheos, *Bios*, 85–6.

acknowledged. On the evidence of the panegyric we can infer that Sabas plans his role without any great fervour, but with reference to the relevant literature, and for the sole purpose of trying out this mode of sanctity along with the others. There is no spontaneity, no special charisma—deficiencies which are especially detrimental to an ascetic mode such as holy foolery.

Sabas engaged in holy foolery on several occasions. When he began to be venerated as a saint:

he again wallowed publicly in a pool of mud, pretending to be demented and foolish (*εκφρονα καὶ μωρόν*)... But the wisest—those who could peer into the depths—understood that this was a feat of self-abasement. The great [Sabas] did everything—even pretence—with a purpose.<sup>20</sup>

To avoid earthly praise, Sabas was obliged to travel further afield. But praise pursued him—assisted by the fact that the saint nevertheless reckoned it permissible to break his silence and tell his admirers his name. In the Cretan city of Heraklion:

he again began to feign stupidity, as before, but he could not convince them [his admirers]. Instead, this only intensified their appreciation for the humility which made him thus play the fool.<sup>21</sup>

Clearly, holy foolery had become stereotyped and had lost all vestiges of its original meaning.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 264.

The next figure in the story of Byzantine holy foolery is perhaps the most enigmatic. Hitherto unknown both to scholarship and to the Church, Theodore the Fool is mentioned in a Greek inscription of 1317–18 in the Serbian church at Nagorichino, which refers to ‘ὁ ἅγιος Θεόδωρος ὁ διὰ Χριστὸν Σαλός’.<sup>22</sup> The vita of this Theodore (although it might in fact be another Theodore) survives only in a Georgian translation.<sup>23</sup> It is not fully clear whether the Georgian version is a translation from Greek or from Slavonic, but Theodore himself was apparently a Greek. The opening sentence of the vita states that he lived ‘in the country of Serbia, which is now called Bulgar, close to the town of Saras’. Serrae was a Byzantine town captured by the Bulgarians in the thirteenth century and by the Serbs in 1343. If this is the same Theodore who is mentioned in the Nagorichino inscription of 1317, then obviously his cult was already established at that time, hence he cannot have lived after the Serb conquest. There are two possibilities: either this is a different Theodore, or the phrase about Serbia was inserted into a late redaction of the vita. Either way, an indication of date is the fact that the action takes place ‘in the Sisb monastery called Silizdar’: that is, in the Serb monastery of Hilandar on Mt Athos. Since this monastery became Serbian in 1199, the vita must relate to the thirteenth century or later.

<sup>22</sup> P. Mijovic, *Menolog*, Arkheoloshki Institut, posebna izdanja 10 (Belgrade, 1973), 277.

<sup>23</sup> As yet unpublished. I am grateful to N. Vachnadze, K. K. Kutsia, and N. Chkvianishvili for kindly translating this text for me.

At the outset the vita states that Theodore ‘was so crazy that he had never in his life entered a church’. Subsequently the entire narrative is built around Theodore’s simple-mindedness. Once when he went to church and heard the Gospel’s call to ‘take up one’s cross’, the saint did not even return home but cut down two trees, bound them together as a cross, took this cross upon his shoulders and set off to seek the kingdom of heaven. A monk whom he met ‘noticed that this man was insane and crazy’ and sent him to Athos. Theodore ‘walked the whole of Macedonia for three weeks’. When at last he arrived at Hilandar, the simpleton enquired whether it was far to the kingdom of heaven. The abbot replied that it was not far, but that he would have to wait for the right caravan, and in the meantime he should work as a sweeper in the monastery’s church. When Theodore started sweeping, he ‘marvelled greatly at Christ nailed to the wood, and said to the abbot: ‘Lord, why is that person above you nailed and bound?’ And the abbot answered: ‘Like you he was a servant of the Church, but he swept the church badly, and therefore he was bound.’ Then an entertaining episode unfolds, in which Christ descends to the holy fool, who shares his repast with Him. Christ promises to take Theodore with Him to His Father. The abbot is informed that voices can be heard at night coming from the locked church. He interrogates the fool, who at the third time of asking confesses that at night he feeds his punished predecessor. Stunned, the abbot asks Theodore to put in a word for him to Christ. The fool does as he is asked, but the Saviour declares that the abbot is not worthy to come into the presence of His Father. More entreaties follow, the fool

intercedes with Christ on the abbot's behalf, and Christ eventually agrees to take the abbot with him too, for Theodore's sake. The story ends with them both dying at the same moment. The holy fool was holding a scroll with his vita written on it.

This text looks somewhat too baroque to be considered authentically Byzantine. Since there is still no scholarly publication, we refrain from detailed discussion. For present purposes it is enough to note that here the holy fool is not the aggressor and that the simpleton is close to Christ precisely because of his unbounded artlessness. Normally it is the holy fool who sees God where others do not. Here the situation is reversed: the abbot well understands with whom the fool is conversing by night, but the fool himself does not. The kingdom of heaven belongs to Theodore on account of his simple-mindedness. A further point of interest is that Theodore's path is the opposite of that travelled by Symeon: not from monastery to city but from city to monastery. We may surmise that this reflects the wider exclusion of holy fools from urban life.

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Late Byzantine holy foolery was closely linked to Mt Athos. Among the 1350–63 papers of the Ecumenical Patriarchate there is one that clears a certain Athonite hegumen Niphon of all accusations.<sup>24</sup> This is how the origin of the

<sup>24</sup> *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaeologenzeit*, ed. E. Trapp, fasc. 8 (Vienna, 1986), no. 20616.



charges against him is described: ‘Some years earlier, several people pretending to be holy fools and simpletons (τινῶν τῶν τὸν σαλὸν καὶ μωρὸν ὑποκρινομένων) had been caught on the holy mount of Athos. They were found guilty of a variety of evil beliefs and, in particular, of Messalian heresy. Then some of them out of... envy denounced Kyr Niphon, who was away at the time, and alleged that he venerated such people.’<sup>25</sup> Obviously, the case was more complicated than the author tried to portray: a group of monks could hardly have engaged in heresy without the hegumen’s knowledge or his consent. Persecutions of holy fools and traditional accusations of Messalianism (cf. p. 194) are a clear indication of a tightened official stance. It is noteworthy that Nikephoros Gregoras condemns Hesychasts for ‘Messalian’ practices: ‘Having smeared themselves in all kinds of debauchery, they fool us by saying that they do this impassively (πράττειν ἀπαθῶς τερατεύονται); they are sick with passion, but do not feel it (νοσοῦντες τὴν ἐμπάθειαν ἀναισθητῶς), they suffer from themselves and the demons who possess them—but they do not feel the pain as if swept by malignant insanity (ὥσπερ οἱ φρενίτιδι κατεχόμενοι νόσῳ). Accounts reaching us daily from Athos will suffice...they describe their loathsomeness in detail’.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Registrum Patriarchatus Constantinopolitani (1350–1363)*, ed. M. Hinterberger, J. Koder, and O. Kresten, vol. iii, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 19.3 (Vienna, 2001), no. 178.10–17.

<sup>26</sup> Nikephoros Gregoras, *Historiae Byzantinae*, ed. I. Bekker, L. Schopen, vol. 3 (Bonn, 1855), 397.

Gregory Akindynos, another opponent of hesychasm, in a letter dated 1345, writes about ‘scandalous behaviour on the Holy Mount and in Thessalonica’ of certain ‘Messalians’. According to him, many ‘jester-monks (σατυρικοί καὶ μονάζοντες)’ were banished from Athos.<sup>27</sup> It is hard to say whether the hesychasts’ public conduct was indeed provocative or whether their opponents adapted it according to the Messalian stereotype—in any case collective holy foolery does not qualify as holy foolery.

The last Byzantine holy fool was Maximos Kausokalybites (d. 1365). He was a famous Athonite hermit who was much sought-after by the most influential people of his day. Four vitae of Maximos survive, written in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.<sup>28</sup> A comparison of the two main versions (*BHG*, 1236z–1237) shows that the hagiographers’ attitudes towards eccentric actions differed markedly.<sup>29</sup> One of them, the hieromonk Niphon, depicts Maximos as a strict hermit. The hagiographer is silent about the pre-Athonite period of his protagonist’s life and about holy foolery in general. The other, prohegumenos Theophanes, writes plainly that Maximos ‘seemed as if mad (ὡς ἑξήχθος), like the great Andrew, for Christ’s sake; therefore everybody

<sup>27</sup> A. Constantinides Hero (ed.), *Letters of Gregory Akindynos* (Washington DC, 1983), 52.59–60. Cf. M. Hinterberger, ‘Die Affäre um den Monch Niphon Skorprios und die Messalianismus-Vorwürfe gegen Kallistos I’, in A. Rigo (ed.), *Gregorios Palamas e oltre: Studi e documenti sulle controversie teologiche del XIV secolo bizantino* (Florence, 2004), 225.

<sup>28</sup> F. Halkin, ‘Deux vies de s. Maxime le Kausokalybe, ermite au mont Athos (XIV s.)’, *AB* 54 (1936), 90. Archimandrite Ioannikios, *Maximos ho Kausokalybes* (Oropos, 1980) was unavailable at the time of writing.

<sup>29</sup> N. D. Barabanov, ‘Isikhazm i agiografiia: razvitie obraza sv. Maksima Kavsokalivita v zhitiinoi literature XIV v.’, *VV* 55 (1994), 177–80.

suspected that Maximos was acting foolish for the sake of the Lord. All marvelled at him and looked upon him as a fool for Christ's sake (*σαλόν*) and a simpleton.<sup>30</sup>

According to this hagiographer, Patriarch Athanasios I unsuccessfully attempted to persuade Maximos to go off to one of the monasteries in the capital;<sup>31</sup> and later, already on Athos, the monks were suspicious of his gift of communicating with the Mother of God and driving out demons.

Therefore they called him deranged (*τῆς πλάνης τὸ ὄνομα*)... Everyone persecuted him and detested him as one deranged (*πλανημένον*). But he—this steadfast beacon—accepted this too, rejoicing that they called him deranged... and he even made a habit of pretending to be deranged (*ὑπεκρίνετο οὕτως ὡς πλανημένος*) when in conversation, and he would behave foolishly (*ἐμώραινεν*) in order to eliminate within himself the conceited desire to be liked by people... And for the same reason he would often put up a hut, and then immediately burn it down again, which the monks found odd. Therefore they called this steadfast righteous man deranged. Those whose thoughts stagnate in worldly things gave him the nickname 'Kausokalybites' ['Hut-Burner'], for they did not see the divine grace of the spirit shining in him.<sup>32</sup>

The two hagiographers give different explanations for this behaviour. Niphon alludes to the need for Maximos to conceal his spiritual endeavours<sup>33</sup> (which fits the spirit of early holy foolery), while Theophanes presents it as a continuation of Maximos' previous acts of provocation. This

<sup>30</sup> Halkin, 'Deux vies', 70–1.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 79–80.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

difference in emphasis shows that social attitudes to holy foolery were far from straightforward.

When Gregory Sinaites, the distinguished hesychast, came to Athos, the elders told him about Maximos, about his 'godly life, his feigned foolishness, and his underranged derangement (ὕποκρινομένην μωρίαν καὶ πλάνην τὴν ἀπλανῆ)'.<sup>34</sup> Gregory ordered that Maximos be found and brought before him. 'Asked [about his life], Maximos answered thus, without simulation (ἀνυποκρίτως): "Forgive me, father, I am deranged." The elder said: "Enough of that! For God's sake, tell me about your virtue."' <sup>35</sup> Maximos told him about everything, including his 'feigned stupidity and foolishness (ὕποκρινομένην μωρίαν καὶ σαλότητα)'. Gregory persuaded Maximos to abandon holy foolery and let people enjoy the gifts of his sanctity. While in the case of early holy fools authoritative righteous men certified their sainthood, in this case everything is the other way round: a righteous man talks a holy fool out of his asceticism.

The vita of Maximos is the last text in which the word *salotes* appears as a technical term. The saint himself, however, is nowhere else labelled a *salos*.

In his caricatured description of the Byzantine delegation at the Ferrara-Florence Council Silvester Syropoulos mentions a Georgian bishop who 'gave away his clothing and valuables to the poor, feigned insanity (ἐαυτὸν δὲ ἐποίησεν ἔξηχον) and wandered about for some time wearing only a tunic, as a madman who had lost his mind (ὡς παράφρων καὶ πλανώμενος); then he secretly left and we never heard

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 84.

anything about him; we all think that he died an evil death'.<sup>36</sup> Whatever prompted this man's foolery, Syropoulos obviously implies that such conduct should provoke readers' laughter and condemnation.

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The Turkish onslaught, like the Arab advance in an earlier age, opened fresh possibilities for the Christian saint, and the fervour for holy foolery seems now to have been diverted into other channels.

A service in honour of the Moscow saint Vasiliï the Blessed, written between 1595 and 1598,<sup>37</sup> is an interesting example of an encounter between the two paradigms of holy foolery, the Greek and the Russian. The service was written by a high-ranking Greek clergyman, Arsenios of Elasson, who had come to live in Muscovy. Arsenios intended the service for his fellow countrymen and sent it to the monastery of Dusiku (Trikala). The author's intention was to introduce the Russian saint to the assembly of his Byzantine counterparts, and hence he inevitably stylized his protagonist in a Greek manner, writing that 'in his ways he [Vasiliï] indeed imitated Symeon, a fool for Christ's sake'.<sup>38</sup> In Arsenios' writing both the *iurodivyi* and the pillars of

<sup>36</sup> V. Laurent, *Les 'Mémoires' du Grand Ecclésiarque de l'Église de Constantinople Sylvestre Syropoulos sur le Concile de Florence* (Paris, 1971), 462.

<sup>37</sup> Ph. A. Demetracopoulos, 'Arsenios Elassonos (1550–1626): Symbole ste melete ton metabyzantinon logion tes Anatoles', Ph.D. dissertation (Athens, 1984), 89, 101.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

Byzantine holy foolery, Symeon and Andrew, are 'smoothed down', depicted as regular ascetics: 'You imitated the ways of Symeon and Andrew, fools for Christ's sake, by thoroughly observing the fasting period, by abstaining and praying, having only the ground for a bed, spending your life in homelessness, wandering from place to place, acquiring nothing—neither a bag, nor a staff, nor anything else that people (commonly) have.'<sup>39</sup>

In the modern age the Greek church has beatified several saints whose conduct resembles that of holy fools. For example, a Greek youth named Alexander, who was born in Thessaly in the late eighteenth century, converted to Islam. He completed a Hadj, joined a Muslim order of dervishes and spent eighteen years wandering about the Ottoman empire denouncing the Islamic way of life (the dervish status granted him great freedom, cf. p. 364). Alexander the Dervish acted like a holy fool. After he arrived in Chios in 1794 he attended Christian services while still wearing his Sufi garb. Finally, he threw off his turban, declared himself a Christian, and was executed.<sup>40</sup> A little later, in 1813, a certain Angelis from Argos converted to Islam, then lost his mind, was banished to Chios, and continued to act strangely. Sometimes he entered Christian churches begging for help in achieving martyrdom. At the end of that year Angelis, too, declared himself a Christian and was executed.<sup>41</sup> In both cases what we see is 'psychological' rather than religious foolery. It is provoked by

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>40</sup> O. E. Petrunina, 'Aleksandr Dervish', *PE* 1 (2000), 524.

<sup>41</sup> O. E. Petrunina, 'Angelis', *PE* 2 (2001), 297.

apostasy, remorse, a breakaway from the habitual environment, failure to adjust to the new one, and the pained doubts of a person who embarks on a spiritual endeavour. If Angelis and Alexander are to be regarded as holy fools, they are Muslim holy fools (see below), since they disrupted the Islamic establishment.<sup>42</sup>

The word *salos* disappeared from literary Greek, though it continued to exist in the colloquial language, where it was unambiguously pejorative. One of the 'Ptochoprodromic' poems refers to a man who 'bears the name *salon*, which is repugnant for anyone'.<sup>43</sup> In Modern Greek dialects *salos* for some reason remains as an archaic survival only in the northern regions: in Thessaly,<sup>44</sup> Pontos,<sup>45</sup> Epiros,<sup>46</sup> and Macedonia.<sup>47</sup> A remote relic of holy foolery may be found in a superstition still noted in Greek villages: running into a madman is a sign of good luck. This belief is especially interesting since in ancient Greece it was the opposite.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Holy foolery is sometimes ascribed to such saints of the Helladic church as Panagis Basias of Cephallenia (1801–80) and Arsenios of Cappadocia (b. 1840) (P. Martines, *Ho salos hagios Andreas kai he saloteta sten Orthodoxe Ekklesia* (Athens, 1988), 135–42), but without any reasons.

<sup>43</sup> H. Eideneier (ed.), *Ptochoprodromos*, Neograeca Medii Aevi 5 (Cologne, 1991), iv. 418; cf. ii. 93–4; iii. 223.

<sup>44</sup> *Mega lexikon tes hellenikes glosses*, ed. D. Demetrakos, iv (Athens, 1949), 35.

<sup>45</sup> A. Papadopoulou, *Historikon Lexikon tes Pontikes Dialektou* (Athens, 1961), 263.

<sup>46</sup> E. A. Mpogkas, *Ta glossika idiomata tes Epeirou*, i (Ioannina, 1964), 236.

<sup>47</sup> N. Andriotis, *Lexikon der Archaismen in neugriechischen Dialekten* (Vienna, 1974), no. 5294.

<sup>48</sup> J. C. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion: A Study in Survivals* (Cambridge, 1910), 307.

The survival of holy foolery on Mt Athos<sup>49</sup> was probably due to Russian influence. For example, a Bulgarian, Anfim Simonopetrites, began to behave as a holy fool in 1841, and was identified as a *iurodivyi* by monks of the Russian Panteleimon monastery.<sup>50</sup> Holy foolery has occasionally been registered among the monks of the Athonite monasteries until recent times.<sup>51</sup> In 1969 the protaton of the Holy Mountain sent to a Thessalonica asylum a certain Kostas Angelis who acted like a *salos*. Thus the Greek church bid its last farewell to an institution that had accompanied it over the course of 1,500 years.

<sup>49</sup> L. Kretzenbacher, 'Narren am heiligen Ort', in *Wallfahrt kennt keine Grenzen*, ed. L. Kriss-Rettenbeck and G. Moehler (Munich, 1984), 34–44.

<sup>50</sup> P. B. Paschou, 'Ho hagios Anthimos ho Simonopetrites ho dia Christon Salos', *Parnassos* 23 (1981), 614.

<sup>51</sup> S. Loch, *Athos: The Holy Mountain* (New York, n.d.), 192, pl. 17; cf. Hieromonk Antonii, *Zhizneopisaniia Afonskikh podvizhnikov blagochestiia XIX v.* (Moscow, 1994), 136–8, 194–5, cf. 83, 121.



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## Old Russian *Iurodstvo*

There is almost no evidence of how holy foolery spread beyond Byzantium's borders. A certain George Salos was venerated in the Georgian church, but nothing whatever is known about him.<sup>1</sup> An early fourteenth-century Georgian chronicle alludes on one occasion to a monk of the Gareja monastery, Pimen Salos, who had converted the Lesgians to Christianity in the reign of Demetre II the Self-Sacrificer (1125–54/55),<sup>2</sup> yet a foreign mission is an unlikely role for a holy fool.

South Slavs must have learned about holy foolery quite early, both with the translation of Byzantine works and from intensive personal contacts with the Empire. Here we should consider briefly the terms which the Slavs used to describe holy foolery. Church Slavonic (by contrast with Amharic, for example, or Georgian, or even Latin) not only borrowed the Greek word *salos*, but also created its own terminology.

<sup>1</sup> G. Garitte, *Le calendrier palestino-géorgien du Sinaiticus 34* (X s.), *Subsidia Hagiographica* 30 (Brussels, 1958), 303.

<sup>2</sup> *Gruzinskii khronograf 1207–1318 gg.*, transl. P. M. Muradian (Erevan, 1971), 151.35.

The oldest rendition seems to be *bui* (or *buiak*, or *buiav*), which appears in the earliest Cyrillo-Methodian translation of the Epistle to the Corinthians (in subsequent redactions it is gradually squeezed out by the words *ourod*, *ourodiv*, *iurodivyi*).<sup>3</sup> Both the South Slavs and the East Slavs used the word *bui* mainly in its straightforward sense of ‘stupid’, but also, on occasion, in the specific phrase ‘a fool for Christ’s sake’.<sup>4</sup> In the first Rus redaction of the vita of Basil the Younger (twelfth century), we already read: ‘...they defeated the evil wisdom [of the devil] with *ourodstvo*, for in this vain world they made themselves *bui* for Christ’s sake... becoming an object of mockery’.<sup>5</sup>

The early Rus area was distinct in its use of a word which was not widespread among Slavs elsewhere. The word was *pokhab* (from *khabiti*—‘to ruin’). *Pokhab* was ubiquitous in the first version of the Rus translation of the vita of Andrew the Fool: only later, as the text was copied and edited and smoothed out, was *pokhab* replaced in many places by *ourod* (*ourod*). These two words tended to function as synonyms; each could be substituted for the other in the various manuscripts.<sup>6</sup> Both *moros* and *salos* could equally be rendered as both *pokhab* and *ourod*.

<sup>3</sup> G. A. Voskresenskii, *Drevne-slavianskii Apostol*, ii (Sergieva Lavra, 1906), 12–15, 32–3, 40–1.

<sup>4</sup> *Slovar’ drevnerusskogo iazyka XI–XIV vv.*, i (Moscow, 1988), 323–4; *Staroslavianskii slovar’ (po rukopisiam X–XI vekov)*, ed. R. M. Tseitlin et al. (Moscow, 1994), 102.

<sup>5</sup> *Zhitie sv. Vasiliia Novogo*, ed. S. Vilinskii, pt. ii (Odessa, 1911), 518; cf. 831.

<sup>6</sup> A. M. Moldovan, *Zhitie Andreia Iurodivogo v slavianskoi pis’mennosti* (Moscow, 2000), 44.

Nevertheless, it was *ourod* which eventually became the more common designation for the specific form of Christian spiritual endeavour. In Russian the holy fool is *iurodivyi*, from Church Slavonic *urodivyi* (or the short form *urod*).<sup>7</sup> The word originally meant one who was congenitally defective ('u-' is a privative prefix, and the root *rod-* relates to birth, generation, etc.). It could therefore be applied to a cripple, or to a madman. In the latter sense it figures in the translation of the *Pandektai* of Antiochos (eleventh century): 'We are *ourody* for Christ's sake' (fo. 56),<sup>8</sup> and also in the translations of: the *Sinai Paterikon* (eleventh century)—'he was looking like an *ourod*' (fos. 79v, 145); the *Mstislav Gospel* (early twelfth century)—'our father Symeon, *ourodivaa* for Christ's sake' (fo. 202a);<sup>9</sup> the *Pandektai* of Nikon of the Black Mountain (in a Slavonic manuscript dated 1296)—'to make himself *ourod*' (fo. 13; cf. fo. 28a in a fourteenth-century manuscript), etc.<sup>10</sup> The meanings divided in the seventeenth

<sup>7</sup> A. Sobolevskii claims that texts before the end of the fourteenth century give only the form with the initial 'u-': see A. Sobolevskii, in *Zhurnal Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia* (May 1894), 218. B. Uspenskii, however, asserts that in Rus Church Slavonic texts before the 'Second South Slav Influence' the forms *urodivyi* and *iurodivyi* figure equally, but that the 'iu-' form then begins to dominate, while the old form is retained for semantic differentiation: B. A. Uspenskii, *Istoriia russkogo literaturnogo iazyka (XI–XVII vv.)* (Munich, 1987), 207–8.

<sup>8</sup> E. Thompson, *Understanding Russia: The Holy Fool in Russian Culture* (Lanham, Md., 1987), 13, asserts that this phrase does not appear until the *Mstislav Gospel* (twelfth century); which contradicts her earlier statement (p. 11) that the phrase does not appear until the Muscovite period.

<sup>9</sup> *Aprakos Mstislava Velikogo*, ed. L. P. Zhukovskaia (Moscow, 1983), fo. 274.

<sup>10</sup> Examples from the card index for the *Slovar' drevnerusskogo iazyka XI–XIV vv.; Staroslavianskii slovar'*, 805–6.

century: *urod* evolved as denoting somebody defective (or ugly) by nature, while *iurod* came to be associated specifically with madness (feigned madness included).

This does not exhaust the list of Slavonic synonyms for holy fools and foolery. In the early Bulgarian version of the vita of Symeon we find the calques *salos* and *ekzikh* (σαλὸς καὶ ἐξήχος), with the former glossed on its first appearance as ‘*salos*: that is, *ourod*’.<sup>11</sup> The early Rus translation of the vita of Andrew uses the words *nesmyslen*’ or *nesmysl*’ (‘unintelligent’), *bogolish*’ or *bogolishen*’ or *bogolishivyi* (‘godforsaken’) and others, but here also, on two occasions, we find *salos*, once with a translator’s gloss: ‘*salos* and *ezikhos*, which means *pokhab* and *bogolish*’.<sup>12</sup> *Salos* survived in Russian until quite late, as a bookish alternative (see below, p. 268).

Somewhat apart from this set of near-synonyms is the polysemic word *blazhennyi*. Most commonly it rendered the Greek word *makarios*,<sup>13</sup> meaning simply ‘holy’, ‘blessed’, ‘a saint’.<sup>14</sup> It was also used in more precise meanings: with reference to certain ‘secret servants of God’ (see above, pp. 43 ff.) such as Niketas of Constantinople, from one of the Byzantine ‘beneficial tales’ (*BHG*, 1322e); and with reference to certain Western saints such as Jerome and Augustine (here it is equivalent to the Latin *beatus*). Yet some saints with this epithet, such as the ‘blessed’ Princess Olga, defy

<sup>11</sup> MS Sinodal’naia (GIM), no. 996, fo. 367<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Moldovan, *Zhitie Andreia Iurodivogo*, 41.

<sup>13</sup> *Slovar’ drevnerusskogo iazyka*, 222–6.

<sup>14</sup> H. Delehaye, *Sanctus: essai sur le culte des saints dans l’antiquité* (Brussels, 1927), 64–6.

classification. The Orthodox Church has no fixed definition for the status of *blazhennyi*.<sup>15</sup> Here we are concerned with why the epithet came to be applied to holy fools.

Perhaps it was by association with 'secret' saints. It is also possible that holy fools came to be referred to as *blazhennye* as an allusion to the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 5:3). The appearance of the new term may be explained by the nature of the word *blago*: its Christian meaning superimposed itself on the pagan one. *Blagoe* was adopted by Christians because it conveyed the idea of the most delightful thing a pagan could think of: succulent and tasty food. Even after the subsequent semantic development, a flavour of the old meaning still remained, and the word was later reinterpreted in Christian terms in relation to food forbidden during the fast; and still later as something 'inappropriate', 'culturally wrong'. Hence such phrases as *blagaya sobaka* (rabid dog), *blagovat'* (act reprehensibly), *krichat' blagim matom* (scream wildly), etc. According to A. Strakhov, not all these meanings can be interpreted as late, negative responses to holy foolery; rather, they are the traces of an earlier semantic layer.<sup>16</sup> If this is true, then the word picked to signify an ambiguous spiritual feat had somewhat ambivalent connotations of its own. An alternative explanation could be that the word *blazhennyi* derived

<sup>15</sup> Andronik (Trubachev), 'Blazhennyi', in *PE* 5 (2002), 352.

<sup>16</sup> A. B. Strakhov, 'Slova s kornem *blag-/blazh-* s otritsatel'nymi znacheniami v vostochnoslavianskikh dialektakh (K probleme vliianiia slaviano-vizantiiskogo missionerstva na iazyk i kul'turu Drevnei Rusi)', *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics* 37 (1988), 73–114.

its connotations from two different roots: *blago* and *blazn*. *Blago* implies 'good', 'right'. *Blazn* has a rich and varied history in the Slavonic languages. In Slovene the verb *blazniti* means 'to behave injudiciously', 'prattle', 'rant', 'blaspheme'. In Czech it means 'to be out of one's mind'; in Polish 'to hold up to ridicule', 'to compromise'. The Russian verb *blazhit'* means not only 'to extol', 'laud' (from the root *blago*), but also 'to be wayward', 'capricious', 'deranged' (from the root *blazn*). From the same root we have *blazenstvo* ('buffoonery', 'tomfoolery'), *blazh'* ('caprice', 'folly'), *soblazn* ('temptation').<sup>17</sup> All these nuances are strikingly appropriate to the holy fool. Perhaps a purely fortuitous association of two Slavonic words led to the overlay of two meanings whose combination just happens to fit the attributes of the *iurodivyi*.

\* \* \*

The popularity of the Bulgarian translation of Nikon of the Black Mountain's Greek homily against holy foolery is perhaps evidence that the phenomenon was known (and was reckoned troublesome) in Bulgaria.<sup>18</sup> Other Byzantine texts illustrative of holy foolery were also translated in Bulgaria: the *vita* of Symeon of Emesa, surviving in an almost

<sup>17</sup> See *Etimologicheskii slovar' slavianskikh iazykov*, ii (Moscow, 1975), 103–6.

<sup>18</sup> Text in 'Slovo za dushevната polza', in *Kliment Ohridski: Subranie suchinenii*, ii (Sofia, 1977), 592; cf. the 1296 MS of Nikon's *Pandekts*, fos. 11<sup>v</sup>, 28, 29<sup>v</sup>, 165<sup>v</sup>, 168, etc.

negligible quantity of late manuscripts<sup>19</sup> (the translation was apparently produced in Bulgaria in the tenth century),<sup>20</sup> the vita of John the Almsgiver which contained the novel on Vitalios,<sup>21</sup> various paterika, the vita of Abramios of Qidun,<sup>22</sup> the legend about Alexios the Man of God.<sup>23</sup> However, no such works figure in native Bulgarian hagiography.

Niketas Choniates describes very vividly the soothsayers who gathered in 1185 in the Trnovo church of St Demetrios and incited Bulgarians to rise against Byzantine rule: 'A great number of the possessed of various sorts (*δαίμονολήπτων*) with bloodshot... eyes and loose hair; otherwise their conduct was also an emulation (*καὶ τ'ἄλλα ἀκριβῶς διασώζονται*) of those possessed by demons... These madmen (*παράφοροι*) as if in a fit of a falling sickness were screaming ecstatically.'<sup>24</sup> Even though this is an obvious act of feigned insanity committed in a Christian church, it cannot be referred to as holy foolery in the traditional sense of the word, because the soothsayers pursued their own political goals. Besides, the public regarded them as awesome mediums rather than as despicable outsiders. In

<sup>19</sup> N. Lazarova, 'Holy Fools in an Age of Hesychasm: A Comparison Between Byzantine and Bulgarian Vitae', *Scripta et E-scripta* 1 (2004), 365.

<sup>20</sup> Oral communication from Johannes Reinhart, Vienna.

<sup>21</sup> K. Kuev, *Ivan-Aleksandroviiaat Sbornik ot 1348 g.* (Sofia, 1981), 89–92. Another Old Bulgarian translation of the same text is to be found in *Velikie Minei Chet'i: noiabr': dni 1–12* (St Petersburg, 1897), cols. 858–62.

<sup>22</sup> The extant Slavonic text has no analogy in Greek and is closer to the Syriac version: see M. Petrova-Taneva, 'The Bđinski Sbornik: A Study of a Medieval Bulgarian Book', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Central European University, Budapest, 2003), 162.

<sup>23</sup> A. Murav'iev and A. Turilov, 'Aleksii, chelovek Bozhii', in *PE* ii (2001), 9.

<sup>24</sup> Niketas Choniates, *Historia*, ed. I. A. Van Dielen (Berlin and New York, 1975), 371.

this sense the prophets described by Choniates may resemble some of the Russian *iurodivye* of a later period (see p. 309).

Just one narrative—albeit notably vivid—bears witness to holy fools in Bulgaria. The fourteenth-century vita of Feodosii of Trnovo tells of the appearance in Trnovo of two Bogomil heretics, Kirill Bosota ('The Bare-Foot') and Lazar. While Kirill preached his message, Lazar 'began to act the fool (*ourodovati*), and walked about the whole town completely naked but for a pumpkin covering his genitals;<sup>25</sup> and everyone stared at this strange and dreadful spectacle'.<sup>26</sup> At the Synod of 1350 the heretics were condemned and expelled from Bulgaria. Although Lazar's behaviour is remarkably and concisely evocative of holy foolery, nevertheless he is not a pure specimen of the type. We have already stressed that a holy fool is a faithful son of the Church, irrespective of whether he ever actually attends church himself. His excesses were not perceived as a protest against existing standards; but the Bogomil Lazar clearly regarded—and expected others to regard—his provocative behaviour as a sign of his opposition to official norms. The fact that Lazar 'plays the fool' might well suggest that both he and his audience were aware of such a behavioural paradigm, but in Bulgaria

<sup>25</sup> The habit of wearing something on one's genitals was known in Byzantium as a form of extreme asceticism. John Tzetzes mentions 'those who wear bells on their genitals': John Tzetzes, *Epistulae*, ed. P. A. M. Leone (Leipzig, 1972), 151. Cf. the statement that the Russian *iurodivy* Ioann Big Cap 'wore brass rings in his private parts': I. I. Kuznetsov, *Sviatye blazhennye Vasili i Ioann, Khrista radi chudotvortsy* (Moscow, 1910), 422.

<sup>26</sup> V. N. Zlatarski, 'Zhitie i zhizn' prepodobnogo ottsa nashego Feodosiia', *Sbornik za narodny umotvoreniia, nauka i knizhnina* 20 (1903), 20.



there was no hagiography of independent authentic holy foolery.

The only original South Slav text in which paradoxical behaviour features as a form of sanctity is the Serbian vita of the Despot Stefan, written in the second quarter of the fourteenth century by Konstantin of Kostenets. The vita includes the following brief description:

A certain man came from the Mysian [i.e. Bulgarian] land, making himself out to be a fool (*urodiva sebe tvore*). His deeds showed him to be a secret servant of God, who walked about the town day and night weeping bitterly. 'O woe, alas!' he cried. Then he came to the attention of the Despot [Stefan], who gave him alms, but he (as was his custom) handed the alms on to the poor.<sup>27</sup>

The author is clearly familiar with Byzantine hagiography, whence he borrows the motif of the holy fool distributing to the poor all the alms that are given to him. We recall that the vita of Andrew the Fool was translated (independently of an earlier Rus version) by a Serb in the second half of the fourteenth century. Yet this translation was probably not widely disseminated: it survives in just nine manuscripts, from the late fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>28</sup> As for the prototype for the saint described by Konstantin of Kostenets, he was most likely a real person, to whose yelps (one may surmise) the Despot Stefan was more attentive (the fool 'came to his attention') than had been the Byzantine

<sup>27</sup> K. Kuev and G. Petkov, *Subrani suchineniia na Konstantina Kostenechki: Izsledovane i tekst* (Sofia, 1986), 423. A. A. Turilov drew my attention to this passage.

<sup>28</sup> Moldovan, *Zhitie Andreia Iurodivogo*, 129–34.

emperors. Much here is obscure: how do we know whether the fool was from Bulgaria—and why should this matter?—given that the text mentions neither his name nor his deeds? Yet these meagre allusions are all the evidence we have for holy foolery among the South Slavs. The modern Serbian language does not have a word for a holy fool, even though legends about Andrew of Constantinople survive in Serbian folklore.<sup>29</sup>

\* \* \*

The first East Slav holy fool was Isaakii the Cave-Dweller (d. 1090), a monk of the Caves Monastery in Kiev. According to the monastery's *Paterikon* (whose literary sources for this episode are unclear),<sup>30</sup> Isaakii began by attempting the eremitic path to sanctity, but he was put to shame by demons and abandoned his efforts: 'and he clothed himself in a hair shirt, and over the hair shirt he put on a tight tunic and began to engage in holy foolery (*urodstvo tvoriti*), and he began to assist the cooks and to work for the brethren [a familiar motif: see above, p. 51]... And when winter came he would stand in ragged sandals.'<sup>31</sup> Once as a joke the brethren

<sup>29</sup> L. Kretzenbacher, 'Jurodivi Andrej, ein byzantinisch-griechischer "Narr in Christo" in der serbischen Heiligen-Legende unserer Zeit', *Südost-Forschungen* 58 (1999), 68–80.

<sup>30</sup> See N. Challis and H. W. Dewey, 'Divine Folly in Old Russian Literature: The Tale of Isaac the Cave-Dweller', *Slavic and East European Review* 22 (1978), 257–60; *The Paterik of the Kievan Caves Monastery*, transl. M. Heppel (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 205–11, 228–30.

<sup>31</sup> *Drevnerusskie pateriki*, ed. L. A. Ol'shevskaia and S. N. Travnikov (Moscow, 1999), 79.

told him to go and catch a crow (cf. above, p. 178). Unaware of their teasing (an echo of the ‘holy simplicity’ motif), Isaakii seized hold of the bird and brought it into the kitchen.

And thenceforth the brethren began to honour him. But Isaakii, not wishing human praise, began to engage in foolery (*urodstvo tvoriti*) and to do mischief: now to the abbot, now to the brethren, now to laymen. And others caused him injuries. And he began to wander among laymen and thus make himself out to be a fool (*urod sia tvoria*)... And he gathered youths around him and dressed them in monks’ clothing.

Towards the end of the narrative, Isaakii returns to normal cenobitic life and achieves his long-sought impassivity. It is curious that the motif of Isaakii’s holy foolery is introduced twice, and that on the second occasion it is as if the first occasion had never happened. And the two are different: his first holy foolery is peaceable, the second is aggressive. The somewhat abrupt, disconnected quality of the tale is perhaps due to the fact that the hero is taken too quickly through all the forms of ascesis that were then known to the neophyte Orthodox Rus. But this is what also gives us the opportunity to see more clearly what Byzantine holy foolery looked like to an outsider.

In the same work, however, the verb *ourodstvovati* is used in a wholly unexpected context. The monk Fedor orders some demons to grind grain, and then to carry heavy logs up a hill. The demons were forced to obey, but decided to get their revenge. One of them took on the form of Fedor’s friend, a monk named Vasilii. In this guise he visited one of

the prince's counsellors and said: 'See how [Fedor] is raving (*urodstvuet*): he orders demons to grind [grain] and to carry logs up from the river-bank.'<sup>32</sup> The word appears to have had a supplementary meaning of 'to behave in a non-standard way'.

The next—brief and fleeting—experiment with holy foolery can be found in the thirteenth-century *vita* of Avraamii of Smolensk, where it is clearly presented as a bookish, borrowed form of ascesis. Avraamii, 'reading the divinely inspired books and the lives of the saints, and [seeking] how he might take on their manner of life and their labours and their endeavours, changed out of his bright garments and put on poor garments and walked around thus like one of the poor and applied himself to holy foolery... and he hid from all.'<sup>33</sup> But although Avraamii continues to behave in eccentric ways and was accused of heresy and of reading occult books,<sup>34</sup> there are no more references to his holy foolery.

No other holy fools are known from this early period. However, the fate of the *vita* of Andrew the Fool shows that this type of sanctity did gain a surprising degree of recognition. Although very little was translated in the Kievan period (most translations were imported from Bulgaria), this

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>33</sup> S. P. Rozanov, *Zhitie prepodobnogo Avraamiia Smolenskogo i sluzhby emu* (St Petersburg, 1912), 4, 31, 54, 66–7, 87, 104. A late version adds 'denouncing the world and its temptations'.

<sup>34</sup> G. Podskalski, *Khristianstvo i bogoslovskaiia literatura v Kievskoi Rusi (988–1237 gg.)* (St Petersburg, 1996), 233–5; cf. V. N. Toporov, *Sviatost' i sviatye v russkoi dukhovnoi kul'ture*, ii (Moscow, 1998), 84–7.

enormous text was rendered by an East Slav as early as the late eleventh or early twelfth century. Admittedly, this may be more indicative for Byzantine rather than for Rus hagiography, since the translator probably lived for some time in Constantinople.<sup>35</sup> Evidently, however, the cult struck a chord in Rus: the feast of the Intercession of the Veil of the Mother of God ('Pokrov'), inaugurated in the mid-twelfth century,<sup>36</sup> was closely linked to the cult of St Andrew.<sup>37</sup> A second early Rus redaction of the vita appeared at the start of the thirteenth century.<sup>38</sup>

In the fourteenth century Andrew's image emerges in the iconography of the 'Pokrov'. The earliest example is a Suzdal icon of 1360s. The saint, standing with Epiphanius in the

<sup>35</sup> Moldovan, *Zhitie Andreia Iurodivogo*, 104–5.

<sup>36</sup> See Sergii, Archbishop of Vladimir, 'Sviatoi Andrei Khrista radi iurodivyi i prazdnik Pokrova Presviatoi Bogoroditsy', *Strannik* 11–12 (1898); N. N. Voronin, 'Iz istorii russko-vizantiiskoi tserkovnoi bor'by XII v.', *VV* 26 (1965), 214; cf. L. Rydén, 'The Vision of the Virgin at Blachernae and the Feast of Pokrov', *AB* 94 (1976). At about the same time a genre of sermons on the Intercession of the Veil began to take shape (see: E. A. Fet, 'Slova na Pokrov', *SKKDR. XI–1 pol. XIII v.*, 421–3) While the earliest manuscripts (for instance, GPB, Soph. 1324, fo. 189), may mention Andrew, they never refer to him as a holy fool; the theme of holy foolery is not touched upon.

<sup>37</sup> Motifs inspired by the life of Andrew can even be found in the decoration of the church of the Intercession of the Veil on the Nerl: cf. N. Challis and H. Dewey, 'Byzantine Models for Russia's Literature of Holy Folly', in *Papers in Slavic Philology*, i (Ann Arbor, 1977), 47. Yet Andrew does not appear on the very first image of the 'Pokrov', found on the gate of the Nativity cathedral in Suzdal (V. N. Lazarev, 'Snetogorskie rospisi', *Soobshcheniia Instituta iskusstvoznaniia* 8 (1957), 110 n. 25). Moreover, in the captions to the earliest icons of the 'Pokrov' Andrew is not referred to as a holy fool, see: E. A. Gordienko, "'Pokrov" v novgorodskom izobrazitel'nom iskusstve', in *Drevnii Novgorod* (Moscow, 1983), 316–17.

<sup>38</sup> Moldovan, *Zhitie Andreia Iurodivogo*, 18, 40–9. The earliest fragment is in a thirteenth-century addition to the *Sviatoslav Miscellany of 1073*.

bottom right-hand corner, points out the Mother of God.<sup>39</sup> The holy fool is wearing a *melotas*, a long garment made of skins. He is white-haired and long-bearded, which makes him look like a hermit rather than an urban dweller; and he is certainly not young, as he is described in the *vita*. His image appears to be modelled on John the Baptist or Elijah the Prophet. He is compared to the latter in a subsequent manual for icon painters.<sup>40</sup> This iconographic pattern suggests that Andrew was originally perceived as the author of his own 'Apocalypse', as a visionary, not a holy fool.<sup>41</sup>

The veneration of Andrew was particularly strong in Novgorod, where we know of a church erected in his honour in 1371.<sup>42</sup> Apparently, Novgorodians regarded Andrew as their fellow-townsmen. In the translated version of the *vita* he is called a *slovenin*,<sup>43</sup> while in a sixteenth-century liturgy he is referred to directly as a Novgorodian: 'The Rus land takes pride in you; Novgorod that raised you, Andrew,

<sup>39</sup> V. I. Antonova and N. E. Mneva, *Katalog drevnerusskoi zhivopisi XI–nachala XVIII vv.: Opyt istoriko-khudozhestvennoi klassifikatsii*, i (Moscow, 1963), 102; *Gosudarstvennaia Treť iakovskaia galereia: Katalog sobraniia*, i (Moscow, 1995), no. 48; *Novgorod Icons: 12th–17th Century*, ed. V. Laurina et al. (Oxford and Leningrad, 1980), no. 64.

<sup>40</sup> A. Iu. Nikiforova, N. V. Pivovarova, et al., 'Andrei Iurodivyi', in *PE* ii (2001), 393.

<sup>41</sup> Andrew appears wearing a *melotas* in icons of late fourteenth (*Russkaia ikona XI–XIX vekov v sobranii Novgorodskogo muzeia: Putevoditel' po ekspozitsii*, ed. E. V. Ignashina and Iu. B. Komarova (Moscow, 2004), no. 8), late fifteenth (cf. E. Smirnova and S. Iamshchikov, *Drevnerusskaia zhivopis': Novee otkrytiia* (Leningrad, 1974), no. 3), and the first half of the sixteenth centuries (see *Novgorod Icons: 12th–17th Century*, nos. 161, 168, 227).

<sup>42</sup> PSRL: *Novgorodskie letopisi*, vol. iii, fasc. 4 (St Petersburg, 1841), 133, 230.

<sup>43</sup> Moldovan, *Zhitie Andreia Iurodivogo*, l. 18.

is proud of you; God brought you to the Imperial City (of Constantinople).'<sup>44</sup> No wonder that Rus pilgrims in Constantinople recognized the monastery of St Andrew as dedicated to a familiar saint (cf. p. 220).

Nevertheless, most of the East Slav manuscripts of Andrew's *vita* date from the Muscovite rather than the previous period (from the fourteenth century we have just one full manuscript and a couple of fragments).

\* \* \*

After Isaakii the Cave-Dweller, no holy fools are recorded in the southern Rus,<sup>45</sup> and the phenomenon of *iurodstvo* in the north is cut off from its Kievan counterpart by a very long gap in time. When, then, did the native tradition of Russian holy foolery arise?

The answer is complicated by the fact that holy fools' hagiographers often locate their heroes in remote times so as to bolster their sanctity with the authority of antiquity; and since the holy fool is by nature somewhat cut off from his everyday temporal context, dating on the basis of historical evidence is often impossible. If we believe the calendars and the *vitae*, then the earliest holy fool was Prokopii of Ustiug in

<sup>44</sup> V. I. Sreznevskii, *Opisanie rukopisei i knig, sobrannykh v Olonetskom krae* (St Petersburg, 1913), 446.

<sup>45</sup> Except in a much later period. In the seventeenth century, for example, 'there was a man in Chernigov named Ioan, who made himself foolish for Christ... For this he received God's favour; he would stand barefoot on fire... And he received such a gift of prophecy from God that whatever he said came to pass': Ioanykyi Galiatovs'kyi, *Kliuch Rozumynyia* (Kiev, 1985), 360.

the thirteenth century, and we have three from the fourteenth century—Zakhariia of Shenkursk, Nikolai Kachanov ('The Cabbage'), and Fedor of Novgorod—followed in the fifteenth century by Vasiliï of Spaso-Kamensk, Leontii and Ioann of Ustiug, and Isidor Tverdislov of Rostov. But can any firm conclusions be built on this basis?

Let us start with Prokopii of Ustiug. He is normally reckoned to have died either in 1285 or in 1303; but in neither case could he then have met, as described in his vita, Varlaam of Khutyn, who died in 1193. Most likely both the year and the day (8 July) of Prokopii's death are 'borrowed' from St Prokopios the Martyr, with a simple addition of 1,000 years (from 8 July 303). The only firm facts are that a church in Prokopii's honour was established in Ustiug in 1458; that it was demolished by order of the ecclesiastical authorities; and that it was rebuilt in 1471 or 1495.<sup>46</sup> From this, one can conclude that the saint's cult had emerged by the mid-fifteenth century. The iconographic tradition of Prokopii can be traced from the early sixteenth century,<sup>47</sup> and from the mid-sixteenth century we find the the saint's first miracles.<sup>48</sup> Yet the oldest text with any description of Prokopii's life is an encomium by Semen Shakhovskoi from the first half of the seventeenth century,

<sup>46</sup> A. N. Vlasov, 'Literaturnaia istoriia pravednogo Prokopiiia, Ustiuzhskogo chudotvortsia', in *Zhitie sviatogo pravednogo Prokopiiia Ustiuzhskogo* (Moscow, 2003), 112–13.

<sup>47</sup> V. M. Sorokatyi, 'Obraz Prokopiiia Ustiuzhskogo v ikone', in *Zhitie sviatogo pravednogo Prokopiiia*, 124.

<sup>48</sup> Vlasov, 'Literaturnaia istoriia', 109–12.



and the canonical *vita* arose no earlier than the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>49</sup>

Why should this be troublesome? Because there is every reason to believe that originally Prokopii was not perceived as a holy fool. In the first version of the *Ustiug Chronicle*, he is referred to as ‘saint’ and ‘righteous’. Only in the second version, created in the eighteenth century, is the term ‘holy fool’ applied to him.<sup>50</sup> Early local iconography depicted him as a man clad in proper and luxurious clothes and well groomed; the only odd features were the three pokers that he invariably had in his hands.<sup>51</sup> Gradually, as Prokopii’s fame spread around Rus and icon-painters began to depict his image in other cities, he was assimilated to the holy fool stereotype, mostly that of Andrew of Constantinople.

Sometimes there is quite early evidence both for a saint’s status as *pokhab* and for his veneration, but the hagiographical tradition is late. Such is the case with the Moscow holy fool Maksim the Naked. A single phrase in a chronicle entry for 1435 indicates that Maksim was venerated: ‘On 12 November God’s servant Maksim passed away, a fool for Christ’s sake, and he was laid to rest at the church of Boris and Gleb on Varvarskaia Street, behind the market, and he was buried by a certain pious man, Fedor Kochkin.’<sup>52</sup> Yet all the legends of Maksim’s life—and especially the gnomic, rhythmic incantations attributed to him—are later inventions. The tale of the translation of Maksim’s relics in 1568<sup>53</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 116–17.      <sup>50</sup> PSRL 37 (1982), 108, 111, cf. 116–21, 130.

<sup>51</sup> Sorokatyi, ‘Obraz Prokopiiia Ustiuzhskogo v ikone’, 125–6.

<sup>52</sup> PSRL 30 (1965), 133.

<sup>53</sup> N. P. Barsukov, *Istochniki russkoi agiografii* (St Petersburg, 1882), 347–9.

even contains the frank admission that ‘many speak of the saint’s life and of his miracles, of which a long book has been written, but I do not know how it disappeared from the church, or who took it from earlier priests for copying.’<sup>54</sup>

Examples of unreliability are legion. For example, the cult of the holy fool Arkadii of Viazma became fused with the cult of a different Arkadii—of Torzhok—who lived in the eleventh century and who was certainly no holy fool;<sup>55</sup> and this fusion was a result of events which occurred as late as 1679 (see below, pp. 274–6). Zakhariia of Shenkursk is supposed to have died in 1325 but is unrecorded before the late seventeenth century.<sup>56</sup> Nikolai Kachanov and Fedor of Novgorod are both supposed to have died in 1392; but we have no record of Nikolai until the early sixteenth century<sup>57</sup> (and his iconography does not resemble that of a holy fool)<sup>58</sup> or of Fedor until the seventeenth century.<sup>59</sup> The holy fool Georgii of Shenkursk is thought

<sup>54</sup> The only miracle worked by his relics, as testified by the Patriarchal Chronicle, is dated 23 April 1501. See PSRL 11–12 (1965), 253.

<sup>55</sup> E. V. Romanenko, ‘Arkadii Viazemskii’, in *PE* iii (2001), 270–1.

<sup>56</sup> Sergii, *Polnyi mesiatseslov Vostoka*, iii (Moscow, 1997), 558.

<sup>57</sup> L. V. Sokolova, ‘Chudesa Nikolaia Kachanova’, *SKKDR. Vtoraia polovina XIV–XVI v.*, pt. ii (Leningrad, 1989), 511–12; Barsukov, *Istochniki*, 398–400; cf. F. J. Thomson, ‘Slavonic Manuscripts of the Pontificio istituto orientale’, *AB* 119 (2001), 369.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. his depictions on the 1565 icon of the Mother of God Hodegetria Smolenskaia from Novgorod: *1000-letie russkoi khudozhestvennoi kul'tury* (Moscow, 1988), 349, no. 122; and on the 1686 frescoes of the church of St Sophia in Vologda: A. A. Rybakov, *Khudozhestvennye pamiatniki Vologdy XIII–nachala XX veka* (Leningrad, 1980), no. 112. According to icon painting manuals, Nikolai was to be dressed in a ‘princely fur coat’, cf. D. Filimonov (ed.), *Ikonopisnyi podlinnik svodnoi redaktsii* (Moscow, 1876), 400.

<sup>59</sup> Barsukov, *Istochniki*, 588.

to have died in 1462, yet his legend is full of chronological inconsistencies.<sup>60</sup> The hagiographer complains: 'I am not writing as an eyewitness, but I heard from old people—yet even they were not eyewitnesses, but heard from their fathers... As for the vita of the blessed [Georgii], because of the simplicity of the people of old, it remained unrecorded.'<sup>61</sup> On the basis of such sources it is obviously impossible to reconstruct a chronology of holy foolery in Russia.

Judging by when the vitae appear, Russian *iurodstvo* as a hagiographical genre is not as early as the thirteenth or even the fourteenth century. This does not mean that nobody in Rus acted the holy fool. In the 1380s, for example, while Kirill Belozerskii was still a monk at the Simonov monastery in Moscow, 'wishing to conceal his virtue from spectators, he decided to pretend to be a fool, so that he would not be recognized in his spiritual achievements; thus he began to indulge in mockery and laughter and suchlike; but when the superior saw, he forbade him'.<sup>62</sup> The saint was put on a diet of bread and water—which pleased him no end, and he 'started up his foolery again'.

When the superior realized that Kirill 'acted the fool out of humility', he stopped punishing him, and in return Kirill stopped playing the fool.<sup>63</sup> This episode suggests that

<sup>60</sup> A. A. Romanova, 'Zhitie Georgiia Shenkurskogo', *SKKDR. XVII vek*, iv (2004), 380–1.

<sup>61</sup> M. Userdov, 'Sviatoi pravednyi Georgii Shenkurskii', *Arkhangel'skie eparkhial'nye veodmosti* 8 (1899), 200–1.

<sup>62</sup> V. Iablonskii (ed.), 'Zhitie prepodobnogo Kirilla izhe na Belom ozere', in *Pakhomii Serb i ego agiograficheskie pisaniia* (St Petersburg, 1908), p. xi.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xi–xii.

monastic *iurodstvo* was well known (presumably from Byzantine models). Yet as a separate genre the hagiography of holy foolery matured only around the turn of the sixteenth century, and it was based not on the monastic paradigm but on the urban version of holy foolery: specifically, on the vita of Andrew the Fool,<sup>64</sup> which survives in eight full manuscripts and six fragments from the fifteenth century, sixteen full texts and eighteen fragments from the sixteenth century, and thirty-four full texts and twenty-seven fragments from the seventeenth century.<sup>65</sup>

As we have seen, Andrew was originally perceived as a prophet and was therefore depicted in the icons of the Pokrov wearing a *melotas*. However, a different iconographic type emerged almost at the same time, and it gradually became more widespread: a semi-naked man, barely covered with a cloth. Parallel to the change in attire, there was also a change in hairstyle: the long beard and flowing, shoulder-length hair gave way to a short beard and unkempt hair.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> There is little to support the notion that the native tradition was initially based on Byzantine models but then departed from them: *pace* Challis and Dewey, 'Byzantine Models', 42–3.

<sup>65</sup> Moldovan, *Zhitie Andreia Iurodivogo*, 35.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. the late fourteenth-century Pokrov embroidery from Vladimir (*Rossii: Pravoslavie: Kul'tura* (Moscow, 2000), no. 613), and Pokrov icons of the fifteenth century: I. S. Rodnikova (ed.), *Pskovskaia ikona XIII–XVI vekov* (Leningrad, 1990), no. 27; E. S. Smirnova, *Moskovskaia ikona XIV–XVII vekov* (Leningrad, 1988), no. 146; *Icone Russe: Collezione Banca Intesa*, i (Milan, 2003), no. 6; V. N. Lazarev, *Stranitsy istorii novgorodskoi zhivopisi* (Moscow, 1977), no. 4. From the sixteenth century the half-naked figure of Andrew began to dominate in the Pokrov iconography; see *Novgorod Icons*, no. 62; 'Prechistomu obrazu Tvoemu pokloniaemsia...': *Obraz Bogomateri v proizvedeniakh iz sobraniia Russkogo Muzeia* (St Petersburg, 1994), no. 76. From the Pokrov this version migrated into Andrew's

Apparently, the icon-painting canon was affected by the evolution in the way Andrew was perceived: he was transformed from a prophet into a holy fool.

Prokopii of Ustiug, ostensibly the earliest in the line of holy fools, is (in a literary sense) not a precursor but an imitator of Isidor Tverdislov, who apparently lived much later. This Rostov saint marks the real beginning of Russian *iurodstvo*. The main part of Isidor's vita was composed in the 1480s, and the full version by the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>67</sup> The opening words—'Playfully (*igraa*) Isidor has passed his life, and he achieved the kingdom of heaven'<sup>68</sup>—echoes Greek distichs, and 'playfully' is an obvious allusion to (or translation of) the Greek *paizon*, which occurs in the vitae of Greek holy fools.<sup>69</sup> Even though in the main text Isidor is not termed *iurodivyi*, but *blazhennyi* (he is praised only for his 'wandering for Christ's sake and for his manifold endurance'), there is nevertheless one brief mention of how the saint 'went around like an *urod*', for which he had to endure beatings.<sup>70</sup>

personal icons: see V. N. Lazarev, *Moskovskaia shkola ikonopisi* (Moscow, 1971), nos. 81–2.

<sup>67</sup> O. V. Gladkova, 'Zhitie Isidora Tverdislova rostovskogo iurodivogo v iaroslavskikh i moskovskikh khranilishchakh: k istorii teksta', in *Istoriia i kul'tura Rostovskoi zemli: 2002* (Rostov, 2003), 37.

<sup>68</sup> O. V. Gladkova, 'Drevnerusskii sviatoi, prishedshii s Zapada (o maloizuchennom "Zhitii Isidora Tverdislova, rostovskogo iurodivogo")', in *Drevnerusskaia literatura: tema Zapada v XIII–XV vv. i povestvovatel'noe tvorchestvo* (Moscow, 2002), 180.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. 's'igrav' in the distich dedicated to Symeon of Emesa: G. Petkov, *Stishniiat prolog v starata b'lgarska, sr'bska i ruska literatura (XIV–XV vek)* (Plovdiv, 2000), 440.

<sup>70</sup> O. V. Gladkova, 'Agiograficheskii kanon i "zapadnaia tema" v "Zhitii Isidora Tverdislova, Rostovskogo iurodivogo"', *Drevniaia Rus'*, 4 (2001), 82.

Isidor died in 1474 or 1484.<sup>71</sup>

Some say he was from the western lands, from the Latin tongue, from the German land. He was born to fine and rich people, some say from a family of masters. And he came to detest the Latin faith of his fathers, which is hateful to God, and he came to love our true Christian Orthodox faith . . . and he divested himself of his garment together with the sophistries that drag downwards, and adopted the unruly way of the life of the fool for Christ's sake.<sup>72</sup>

The mention of foreign origins is reminiscent of Andrew the Fool, although it feels authentically factual<sup>73</sup> (later Prokopii of Ustiug and Ioann Vlasatyi ['the Hairy'] were likewise declared to be foreigners). Several narrative twists and literary clichés are also borrowed from Andrew; yet this vita nevertheless includes plausible details. One such detail is Isidor's nickname *Tverdislov*. The hagiographer's interpretation of this name<sup>74</sup> looks artificial and far-fetched. More likely, 'Tverdislov' refers to a repetition of the same word over and over again.<sup>75</sup> If true, then here we have unique

<sup>71</sup> M. D. Kagan, 'Zhitie Isidora Tverdislova', *SKKDR 2 pol. XIV–XVI v.*, i (Leningrad, 1988), 281; cf. Sergii, *Polnyi mesiatseslov Vostoka*, ii (Moscow, 1997), 142.

<sup>72</sup> 'Zhitie Isidora Tverdislova', MS GIM, Voskresenskoe sobr., MS no. 116 (2nd quarter of the sixteenth cent.), fo. 57–57<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>73</sup> Gladkova, 'Agiograficheskii kanon', 88, points out that the foreign origin of the hero can be a literary topos. However, Isidor's 'long-perished fatherland' is likely to be paradise, rather than Baltic Pomerania, as Gladkova ('Drevnerusskii sviatoi', 180) suggests.

<sup>74</sup> Gladkova, 'Drevnerusskii sviatoi', 180.

<sup>75</sup> The earliest examples of 'tverdit' meaning 'to repeat over and over again' date from the beginning of the sixteenth century (card index of the *Slovar' russkogo iazyka XI–XVII vv.*).

non-hagiographic evidence of the way Isidor was perceived by the people in Rostov. They teased him for sounding ‘echolalic’! Another plausible detail is the saint’s hut, which the author seems actually to have seen (although its description is somewhat reminiscent of Symeon of Emesa).<sup>76</sup> The saint:

built himself an unroofed hut in the brushwood in a dry part of the town surrounded by a bog; and this is where his holy body lies even now... He had nothing in his hut; just his body, and the brushwood around him, and no roof.<sup>77</sup>

Otherwise, there are no Rostov realia in the vita and the hagiographer himself leaves the impression of being alien; he may use local people as informants, but his text is intended not for them, but for worshippers all over Rus. The vita describes two miracles. First, Isidor saves a merchant from drowning in a storm, by walking out to his boat ‘as if across dry land’.<sup>78</sup> This feat, borrowed by the hagiographer from Novgorodian tales of Sadko, was subsequently borrowed from the vita by other holy fools: Prokopii of Ustiug, Vasilii the Blessed, Simon of Iurevets. And second, there was the occasion when the saint appeared in the prince’s hall when the prince was preparing to feast with the bishop. Isidor:

asked the prince’s steward for a drink... but the steward not only refused but scolded him with abusive words and drove him off, saying, ‘Go away, you madman, you fool (*iurod*), go away!’... The

<sup>76</sup> Gladkova, ‘Agiograficheskii kanon’, 83–4.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Zhitie Isidora Tverdislova’, fo. 58–58<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 59–59<sup>v</sup>.

saint went away joyfully and praising God, and with no evil designs. But God then revealed His servant. The prince and the bishop sat down to dine, and when the time came to drink... nothing could be found in any vessel. The prince was informed about Isidor's visit and about his request, and in great grief and perplexity he had the saint sought throughout the town, but they did not find him. When dinner was coming to an end, and there was no drink, and the prince was overcome with grief and shame, then the blessed Isidor arrived, and in his hand he held communion bread, which he gave to the bishop, to whom he said, like a fool, 'Receive, bishop, this communion bread that I have just this minute received from the holy metropolitan in Kiev.' And immediately on Isidor's arrival the stewards found the vessels as full as at the beginning, and they told the prince.<sup>79</sup>

This is the only episode of holy foolery and provocation. As we see, from the very start the Russian *iurodivyi* picks on those in power (later this episode was copied in the vita of Nikolai Kachanov). In Isidor's case the conflict is still fairly mild. The prince and the bishop are represented as people who believe in Isidor's sanctity, but some of the Rostov townspeople thought he was a fake. This is implied by the hagiographer's remark to the effect that when the holy fool died his corpse was buried by 'certain God-fearing people who believed in the blessed one';<sup>80</sup> we must assume there were others who did not.

This vita allows us a glimpse of a reality behind the text, and it suggests that in Muscovite Rus holy foolery was viewed as an established mode of sanctity, authenticated

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., fo. 60–60<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., fo. 61<sup>v</sup>.



by the model *vitae* of Andrew the Fool and Symeon of Emesa. The townspeople of Rostov who distrusted Isidor doubted not his insanity but whether he measured up to the well-known yardsticks of holy foolery. This reliance on a set Byzantine prototype becomes stronger as time goes on. It is indicative that the Russian *iurodivye* are labelled *salos* not only in hagiography<sup>81</sup> but even in chronicles, which are more likely to reflect the speech habits of their age (e.g. ‘Mikhail called Salos’; ‘Nikola Salos’).<sup>82</sup>

The *vita* of Isidor of Rostov was widely disseminated. It survives in seventeen manuscripts and two versions, and it was included in the official mid-sixteenth-century ‘encyclopedia’ of hagiography, Metropolitan Makarii’s *Great Menaia*. Between 1552 and 1563 Isidor was included in the pan-Russian pantheon. His *vita* became the model for later hagiography: in the first instance, for the *vitae* of Prokopii and Ioann of Ustiug.

Or, we should perhaps say, of Ioann and Prokopii, in reverse sequence. In hagiographical narrative, Ioann (d. 1494) came to Ustiug from the countryside in order to settle and play the fool at the grave of his predecessor Prokopii; but in literary chronology the *vita* of Ioann appears

<sup>81</sup> In the Eulogy to Nikolai Kachanov (mid-sixteenth century) he is called *salos*: see L. V. Sokolova, ‘Chudesa Nikoloy Kochanova’, *SKKDR. 2 pol. XIV–XVI v.*, ii (Leningrad, 1989), 268. Note the increasing popularity of the Byzantine *saloi*—not only Andrew, but also Symeon—from the early sixteenth century; manuscripts of Symeon’s translated *vita* could be found in monastic libraries: see E. V. Sinitsina, ‘Rukopisnaia biblioteka Spaso-Iaroslavskogo monastyria’, in D. S. Likhachev (ed.), *Knizhnye tsentry Drevnei Rusi. XI–XVI vv.* (St Petersburg, 1991), 69–70.

<sup>82</sup> *Novgorodskaia chetvertaia letopis’*, pt. 1 (Moscow, 1929), 576; *Pskovskie letopisi*, i (Moscow, Leningrad, 1941), 115.

first, in 1554.<sup>83</sup> Ioann was from the start perceived as a *iurodivyi*, and was depicted semi-naked. The contrast with Prokopii is especially graphic in icons which show them standing side by side.<sup>84</sup> It is noteworthy that as late as 1630 in the official register of Ustiug Prokopii is invariably referred to as 'righteous', while only Ioann is called a holy fool.<sup>85</sup> The question then arises: who was the 'model' and who was the disciple? The text of Ioann's vita was composed by a local man, son of a local priest, and it includes a lot of everyday local details. It is beyond doubt that Ioann is a historical figure, and yet the hagiographer repeatedly relies on established prototypes:<sup>86</sup> Ioann climbs into the furnace, right onto the coals, in order to establish his generic provenance from Symeon of Emesa who had grabbed coals with his hands; he sits on dung, just like Andrew of Constantinople. Yet although the saint behaves like an urban madman, he does not commit any acts of provocation.

Step by step, holy foolery gained popularity. In an icon of the first third of the sixteenth century, 'Rostov and selected Moscow saints', the images of Isidor of Rostov and Maksim the Naked are three times smaller than those of 'regular' saints; but in the middle of the same century they become equal in size, as exemplified by the figures of Isidor and

<sup>83</sup> O. A. Belobrova and A. N. Vlasov, 'Zhitie Ioanna, Ustiuzhskogo iurodivogo', in SKKDR. 2 pol. XIV–XVI v., i., 268.

<sup>84</sup> *Zhitie sviatogo pravednogo Prokopiia Ustiuzhskogo* (Moscow, 2003), 193, 224–7; cf. the description of both saints in the *Tale of Solomoniia the Possessed*: A. V. Pigin, *Iz istorii russkoi demonologii XVII veka: Povest' o besnovatoi zhene Solomonii: issledovanie i teksty* (St Petersburg, 1998), 162.

<sup>85</sup> *Ustiug Velikii: materialy dlia istorii goroda XVII i XVIII stoletii* (Moscow, 1883), 6–9.

<sup>86</sup> A. N. Vlasov, *Ustiuzhskaia literatura XVI–XVII vekov: istoriko-literaturnyi aspekt* (Syktyvkar, 1995), 24.

Maksim in the altar apse of the Cathedral of the Annunciation in the Moscow Kremlin (1547–51) and in the ‘Three-Tier Icon’ (1560s).<sup>87</sup>

\* \* \*

The popularity of holy foolery in the sixteenth century is well attested by the fashion for turning ordinary saints into *iurodivye*. Thus several vitae acquire specific ‘foolish’ elements quite late in their evolution. For example, Mikhail of Klopsko (d. 11 January 1471)<sup>88</sup> lived as a hermit, and his only affinity with holy fools was his gift of prophecy. Yet a late version of the vita adds the statement that he ‘made himself out to be a *pokhab*’,<sup>89</sup> and the second redaction adds the assertion that ‘the elder, showing his humility, would respond as if appearing to show foolery’.<sup>90</sup> Such were the later interpretations of those passages in the early versions of the vita where Mikhail displays non-standard behaviour; even his appearance at the monastery is shrouded in mystery. What was perceived as enigmatic in the fifteenth century, by the early sixteenth century had been labelled holy foolery.

<sup>87</sup> A. G. Mel’nik, ‘Rostovskie i moskovskie sviaty: evoliutsiia ikonografii v XVI–XVII vv.’, in *Istoriia i kul’ tura Rostovskoi zemli. Materialy konferentsii 2003 g.* (Rostov, 2004), 354–6.

<sup>88</sup> A. A. Turilov, ‘K biografii i genealogii prepodobnogo Mikhaila Klopskogo’ (in press).

<sup>89</sup> See I. Nekrasov, ‘Zarozhdenie natsional’noi literatury v Severnoi Rusi’, *Zapiski Imperatorskogo Novorossiiskogo universiteta*, 4 (1870), 78–9.

<sup>90</sup> L. A. Dmitriev (ed.), *Povest’ o zhitii Mikhaila Klopskogo* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1958), 70, 113. Note that Mikhail curses a blasphemer by saying ‘You will be a *pokhab* and an *urod* for all people’ (ibid., 129).

There are several versions of the tale in which someone foretells the career of the future Metropolitan Iona. In a later version of this legend, dating from 1528–31, the prediction was made by Mikhail of Klopsko, whereas in the initial tale, told by Iona himself and preserved in various sources between 1470 and the 1520s, the monk is nameless. It is worth citing the tale here, for it is the first Russian narrative in which holy foolery is equated with prophecy:

‘One day as [we] children were playing after Vespers, a blessed (*blazhen*) man came along the street, and all the children rushed towards him and began to throw stones and rubbish at his eyes. I was standing motionless to one side. The man left the children and ran towards me, and took hold of me by the hair and lifted me up above his head. And he called me by my name, though he knew me not . . . , saying “Ivanets . . . you will be archbishop in Great Novgorod” . . . According to the prophecy of this fool for Christ’s sake, Iona rose to become archbishop.<sup>91</sup>

Note that only the external narrator labels the prophet a ‘fool for Christ’s sake’, whereas in the direct speech of the young Iona he is represented as a ‘blessed’ giant who hoists the boy high above himself by the hair.

The legend of Iakov of Borovichi provides graphic proof of the extent to which, in the sixteenth century, holy foolery

<sup>91</sup> A. V. Gorskii and K. I. Nevostruev, *Opisanie slavianskikh rukopisei Moskovskoi Sinodal’noi biblioteki*, sect. 3 (= *ChOIDR* 4 (Moscow, 1917), 223; cf. PSRL 4, pt. i, fasc. 2 (Leningrad, 1925), 492–3. On the role of holy foolery in Novgorod, cf. S. Kobets, ‘The Russian Paradigm of Iurodstvo and Its Genesis in Novgorod’, *Russian Literature* 48 (2000), 367–88. Svitlana Kobets’ Ph.D. dissertation, ‘Genesis and Development of Holy Foolishness as a Textual Topos in Early Russian Literature’ (Urbana-Champaign, 2001), has been inaccessible to me.

had become lodged in Russian consciousness. About Iakov we know nothing whatsoever. The Novgorodian chronicle relates that in 1540, on the third day after Easter, a 'singed coffin' containing the corpse of a young man floated up the river Msta on an iceberg, against the current, to the Novgorodian village of Borovichi. Thrice the villagers tried to launch this distressing piece of flotsam back along the river, but each time the coffin returned. Finally, the deceased appeared to the village elder in a dream, said that his name was Iakov and that in life he had been a good Christian, and asked that he be buried. All other details—that in life the deceased had been a boatman, that he had been killed by lightning, and (most significant) that he had been a holy fool—all this and more is the product of the subsequent development of oral tradition.<sup>92</sup> The saint's relics were formally inspected by the ecclesiastical authorities in 1544, after which his name was quickly included in the calendars.<sup>93</sup> In Iakov the development of the institution of holy foolery has come the full circle. With early holy fools, the actions were known but the interpretation was not. Here all is reversed: we are immediately told the result (holy foolery), but it is not backed by any details from the saint's life. This implies that holy foolery was universally acknowledged.

Why, however, did Iakov become lodged in religious consciousness as a holy fool? We can surmise that it had

<sup>92</sup> Cf. L. Sekretar', 'Sviatoi Iakov Borovichskii chudotvorets', in *Gde sviataia Sofiia, tam i Novgorod* (St Petersburg, 1998), 272–7.

<sup>93</sup> Sergii, *Polnyi mesiatsestov Vostoka*, ii. 328. Cf. S. V. Mineeva, 'Nabliudeniia nad mesiatsestvom chet'ikh rukopisnykh sbornikov XVI–XVII vekov (zhitiiia russkikh podvizhnikov)', in *Makar'evskie chteniia*, vii (Mozhaisk, 2000), 437.

less to do with any eccentricities of his life than with the somewhat menacing aura surrounding his death: a coffin on an iceberg, yet scorched; a coffin floating against the current; a coffin of a young man. All this must have been somewhat alarming. The returning corpse is the main horror motif in funerary folklore. Iakov is that nightmare corpse, yet by a strange quirk of imagination he has turned into a miracle-worker. To label him a holy fool is to recognize his dubious provenance.<sup>94</sup>

Iakov is the oddest of all, but some degree of 'impropriety' can be seen in almost every one of the cults of holy fools which emerged over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Thus the initial impulse for the legend of Prokopii of Ustiug was provided by an actual hail of meteorites in the settlement of Kotoval'skaia near Ustiug.<sup>95</sup> This was an incredible shock, whose description makes up the core of the Prokopian cycle.<sup>96</sup> An exceptional intercessor was required, and

<sup>94</sup> Note the later cult of the drowned monks Ioann and Longin of Iarenga: since both are entered in one of the 'indices of holy fools', it may be suggested that their pattern of 'iurodivization' is similar to that of Iakov. A subsequent holy fool, Simeon of Verkhoturie was also an 'evil corpse': in 1694 in the village of Merkushino a coffin with uncorrupted remains emerged from under the ground, and the name and type of the saint were revealed to the local people in their sleep; see E. K. Romodanovskaia, 'Zhitie Simeona Verkhoturskogo', *SKKDR. XVII v.*, i (St Petersburg, 1992), 382–3. As for Kirill of Velsk, who is also occasionally referred to as a holy fool: he drowned himself, being the only suicidal saint in the Orthodox pantheon; see A. A. Romanova and E. A. Ryzhova, 'Skazaniie o Kirille Vel'skom', *SKKDR. XVII v.*, iv (St Petersburg, 2004), 867–9.

<sup>95</sup> *Zhitie sviatogo pravednogo Prokopii*, 107.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 21<sup>v</sup>–41<sup>v</sup>. Certain elements of the description of the 'cloud of fire' subsequently became clichés; however, 'the content of the story... is not directly based on any literary episode': I. D. Iordanskaia, 'K voprosu o

Prokopii fitted the task. Only later did he acquire an extensive biography, although he did not manage to eliminate a few 'birth marks' which gave away his origins. In the veneration of Prokopii Christian and pagan features merge: the saint carries three pokers around with him (as depicted on icons),<sup>97</sup> and it was forbidden to make hay on his feast day, since any stacks gathered then would be burnt by lightning.<sup>98</sup> This strangeness is probably what prompted the Church to forbid his veneration in 1458: 'An evil design entered the hearts of the priests and the deacons, and they decided against...celebrating the memory of the blessed Prokopii...And they destroyed the chapel and smashed it up and scattered [the pieces], and they removed the icon of his likeness.'<sup>99</sup>

As the tradition of his cult developed, Prokopii, 'caught up with' his holy foolery; but one cannot say the same of other *iurodivye*. Let us consider in more detail the case of Arkadii of Viazma (see above, p. 261). The few recorded biographical 'facts' suggest an impossible chronology stretching from the early sixteenth century to the mid-seventeenth century;<sup>100</sup> and they include no specific indications of holy foolery. Yet his cult contains some profoundly

literaturnoi istorii "Povesti ob ognennoi tuche" iz zhitia Prokopiiia Ustiuzhskogo, in *Literatura Drevnei Rusi: Istochnikovedeniie* (Leningrad, 1988), 161.

<sup>97</sup> Sorokatyi, 'Obraz Prokopiiia Ustiuzhskogo v ikone', 124–5; cf. illustrations on 130, 196–9, 225, 230–2, 234–5.

<sup>98</sup> Vlasov, *Ustiuzhskaia literatura*, 164; idem, 'Kul't iurodivogo Prokopiiia v istoriko-etnograficheskom osveshchenii', in *Traditsionnaia dukhovnaia kul'tura narodov evropeiskogo Severa: ritual i simvol* (Syktyvkar, 1990), 86.

<sup>99</sup> *Zhitie sviatogo pravednogo Prokopiiia*, fo. 60<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>100</sup> Romanenko, 'Arkadii Viazemskii', 270–1.

‘mythological’ motifs. The saint always prayed standing on a stone, which became the focus of his veneration; and his main activity was to struggle with serpents. The motif of the holy fool’s prescient discovery of a serpent in a vessel with milk or wine is known from the time of Symeon of Emesa: usually a hagiographer cites it to explain why a saint smashes vessels. The same motif appears in the vita of Arkadii, but here something much more specific lies behind the cliché: seeing a child drinking from a pot which had a curled-up grass-snake inside it, Arkadii pronounces, ‘May this reptile be no longer in the city of Viazma or within thirty miles of it’, whereupon snakes did indeed disappear from the city.<sup>101</sup> Arkadii revives a child who has died from a snake-bite, and declares that he has been given the power ‘to expel all reptiles from the city of Viazma’. Clearly, here the saint has replaced some local deity who had been venerated in connection with a sacred stone and who had some power over the forces of the earth—in particular, snakes.<sup>102</sup> The results of an investigation by the church authorities in 1679–80 reveal that the deity was turned into a saint by the monks of the Lower Monastery of the Saviour: this had been the focal point of Arkadii’s cult, and it was probably here that he was discreetly linked to his ancient namesake from Torzhok. However, even though the authorities found it suspect, the cult of the holy serpent-slayer was deeply rooted among the populace. When archimandrite Pitirim removed Arkadii’s

<sup>101</sup> I. P. Vinogradov, *Istoricheskii ocherk g. Viaz'my s drevneishikh vremen do XVII v.* (Moscow, 1890), 100.

<sup>102</sup> Note the close link, in Slav mythology, between stones and snakes: A. V. Gura, ‘Zmeia’, in *Slavianskie drevnosti*, ii (Moscow, 1999), 226.



icon and forbade it to be carried in processions, the townsmen and soldiery revolted. In his deposition the archimandrite complained that the inhabitants had shouted at him: “How much must we suffer because of [the removal of] this icon! Worms have attacked our gardens and our vegetables!” On another occasion the people of Viazma threatened to kill the archimandrite, saying, “Until now there were no serpents in Viazma, but now they have appeared.”<sup>103</sup> Such naive syncretism is understandable, and not rare; but what has any of this to do with holy foolery? We should perhaps assume that here, too, the label implied that Arkadii’s sanctity was ‘non-standard’, that his position was dubious.

Another ‘quasi-holy fool’ is Ioann the Hairy the Merciful (*Vlasatyi Milostivyi*). His *vita* says little about the circumstances of his life. It starts with his arrival in Rostov (we do not know where he had come from) in 1570–1, and it ends with his death on 3 September 1572.<sup>104</sup> Over this brief period Ioann ‘had no abode except church porches’. Sometimes he would visit a certain widow, and sometimes Peter, priest of All Saints’ church, ‘for certain necessities’. This saint’s enigmatic peculiarity was that day and night he prayed ‘in Greek speech’. Was he a Greek? One of the

<sup>103</sup> Romanenko, ‘Arkadii Viazemskii’, 271.

<sup>104</sup> A. G. Mel’nik, ‘Zhitie Ioanna Vlasatogo Milostivogo Rostovskogo’, *SKKDR. XVII v.*, iv. 388. The saint’s main ‘life’ began—as was the case with many dubious *iurodivye*—after his death, when miraculous healings began to be effected at his grave. As often, the miracles reveal more facts than the biography, and their chronology here suggests that the cult of Ioann emerged from the 1610s to the 1660s.

manuscripts of Ioann's vita even says: 'The holy book, written in Greek majuscule. . . . inspired by God, is still found on his coffin, [since] he was as deeply loyal to the Greek land.'<sup>105</sup> A Latin parchment Psalter, which had allegedly belonged to Ioann, survives to this day.<sup>106</sup> Probably this person really was a foreigner, and for the Orthodox Christian consciousness it seemed more appropriate to declare him to be Greek. It is because Ioann was alien and extrinsic, as well as homeless and hirsute, that popular religious imagination came to regard him as a holy fool.

The lack of any concrete details of a saint's earthly life—the lack of any realia specific to the individual (marginal scenes on the earliest icon of Ioann the Hairy are all dedicated to his posthumous miracles<sup>107</sup>)—meant that a saint's image could easily be duplicated, or cloned. This, I suggest, is what happened in the case of Ioann the Hairy and Ioann Big Cap (*Bol'shoi Kolpak*).<sup>108</sup> They were venerated as two distinct *iurodivye*, one in Rostov, the other in Moscow; but to the unprejudiced gaze they appear to have a suspicious amount in common: both are called Ioann, both lived in

<sup>105</sup> MS: RGB, collection 354, no. 93, fo. 100<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>106</sup> Amfilokhii, 'O latinskoi pergamennoi Psaltiri, prinadlezhavshei sv. Ioannu Milostivomu, Rostovskomu chudotvortsu', in *Trudy VIII Arkheologicheskogo s'ezda v Moskve*, ii (Moscow, 1895), 230–1.

<sup>107</sup> A. G. Mel'nik, 'Nekotorye pamiatniki ikonografii rostovskogo sviatogo Ioanna Vlasatogo', in *Stranitsy minuvshogo: VI Tikhomirovskie kraevedcheskie chteniia* (Iaroslavl, 1997), 26–7; *idem*, 'Zhitiinaia ikonografiia rostovskogo sviatogo blazhennogo Isidora', in *VI Nauchnye chteniia pamiati I. P. Bolottsevoi* (Iaroslavl, 2000), 91.

<sup>108</sup> Yet another possible clone of Ioann the Hairy, who turned up in the town of Kargopol, is Iona the Hirsute (*Vlasianoi*): Sergii, *Polnyi mesiatsteslov Vostoka*, iii. 562–3.

Rostov<sup>109</sup> (where, according to some manuscripts, they knew each other), both were notably hirsute (Ioann of Moscow was dubbed ‘Big Cap’ on account of his huge, tangled head of hair), and both have practically featureless biographies.<sup>110</sup> We can surmise that the Rostov cult spawned an equivalent in Moscow.

The most significant facts in the lives of both Ioanns were their deaths. We can compare the descriptions of their respective funerals. When the widow and the priest buried the corpse of Ioann of Rostov in the suburban church of St Blasios, ‘there were great signs and many wonders, and thunder and lightning and the burning of houses and churches’.<sup>111</sup> In the case of Ioann of Moscow, the same motif grows to catastrophic proportions:

At that burial God showed His mercy. There was a sign in the heavens: terrifying thunder and lightning with fire. In the churches... icons caught fire, and the fearsome thunder killed countless numbers of people, and the sexton was killed in the sanctuary, and Pokrov deacon Pimin was borne right away on

<sup>109</sup> In Rostov’s Monastery of Boris and Gleb, on an image of *Bol’shoi Kolpak*, ‘his head too big for his body’: Archimandrite Amfilokhii, *Zhizn’ prepodobnago Irinarkha Zatvornika* (Moscow, 1863), 12. Later, however, ‘the big cap’ was reinterpreted as headgear: N. V. Pokrovskii, ‘Siiskii ikonopisnyi podlinnik, vypusk 3’, in *Pamiatniki drevnei pis’mennosti*, fasc. 122 (1897), 113–14, pl. 27.

<sup>110</sup> The sparse evidence about the life of the Big Cap includes a passage from the vita of Irinarkh, a Rostov saint of the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries. When visiting Irinarkh in his cell, Ioann talks to him in bizarre innuendoes and advises him to wear chains and forecasts the future: ‘Zhitie prepodobnago Irinarkha’, in *Pamiatniki drevnei russkoi pis’mennosti, otnoshichiesia k Smutnomu Vremeni* (St Petersburg, 1909), cols. 1365–6.

<sup>111</sup> Mel’nik, ‘Zhitie Ioanna Vlasatogo’, 388.

the wind and they could scarcely resuscitate him, and the priest Ivan was lifted higher than the church doors and then fell to the ground, and for an hour and a half he was speechless and he barely recovered from his ordeal. At that time in and around the church countless numbers of people were burnt by lightning and struck by thunder, and some were deafened, and others lost arms and legs—men, women and children.<sup>112</sup>

There is an explanation for this posthumous delinquency: people ignored Ioann's instruction that he should not be buried within three days. However, in the first place, the author of one variant of the saint's miracles honestly admits that he does not understand their meaning;<sup>113</sup> second, Ioann of Rostov needed no rationalization whatsoever; and third, the author of yet another version of the legend of Ioann Big Cap refers directly to the tradition of holy foolery:

Then suddenly there was a terrible and fearsome sign in the sky right above the ruling city [of Moscow], just as there had been above the town of Ustiug in the time of the wondrous Prokopii the holy fool . . . And many people were struck and perished; and the tsar and the patriarch and all the people were afraid and greatly affrighted.<sup>114</sup>

The analogy with Prokopii of Ustiug is very approximate: Prokopii's *vita* relates how the saint deflected a 'stony

<sup>112</sup> Kuznetsov, *Sviatye blazhennye Vasilii i Ioann*, 418. In one manuscript, written around 1592, the Church of the Intercession on the Ditch, which later became known as Vasilii Blazhennyi, is labelled 'Ioann, Fool for Christ's Sake' (MS RGADA, collection 181, no. 507, fos. 16, 20).

<sup>113</sup> M. D. Kagan, 'Zhitie Ioanna, moskovskogo iurodivogo po prozvaniiu Bol'shoi Kolpak', *SKKDR. XVII vek. i* (St Petersburg, 1992), 356–7.

<sup>114</sup> Kuznetsov, *Sviatye blazhennye Vasilii i Ioann*, 416.

cloud' away from the city, so that 'neither man nor beast was killed by thunder and stone'.<sup>115</sup> Thus the reference to Prokopii's *vita* alludes not to a similar event but to a deeper affinity: any *iurodivyi* could be associated with fearsome natural phenomena; it was in the nature of a holy fool.

However, the mythological affinities are not made obvious in each case even among early holy fools. In the sixteenth century *iurodstvo* became fashionable, and the label was attached to many saints for whom it seems inappropriate by any criteria. The most graphic example is Lavrentii of Kaluga. Lavrentii died in 1512, but the tale of his miracles only emerged in the second half of the seventeenth century. As the author frankly admits in one of the versions: 'It is not known how long the saint lived, nor when he died; if there were any such written account, [it has perished] . . . But we need not investigate such a thing, for we should simply believe that the saint lived in a way pleasing to God.'<sup>116</sup> The presence of a cult is already attested in 1568 in a document from Ivan the Terrible himself,<sup>117</sup> but no *vita* was written, and the only action which the tale of miracles ascribes to Lavrentii's lifetime (as opposed to posthumous miracles) contains no specific elements of *iurodstvo*: when the prince of Kaluga, Simeon Ivanovich, was fighting off an

<sup>115</sup> *Zhitie sviatogo pravednogo Prokopiia*, fo. 31.

<sup>116</sup> A. A. Romanova, 'Chudesa Lavrentiia Kaluzhskogo', *SKKDR. XVII v.*, iv. 239; V. A. Ivanov, 'Sviatoi pravednyi Lavrentii Kaluzhskii i monastyr' ego imeni', in *Monastyri v zhizni Rossii* (Kaluga and Borovsk, 1997), 225–30.

<sup>117</sup> I have been unable to locate this document, though it is mentioned in the secondary literature.

attack by the Tatars, then Lavrentii (who was in the prince's house) 'suddenly cried out in a great voice, "Give me my axe"... And the blessed one went off as if playing the fool, and he had his small axe with him... Suddenly St Lavrentii, the fool for Christ's sake, appeared on board the boat at the Grand Prince's side, supporting him.'<sup>118</sup> In the commemoration book of the princes Khitrov, kept in the Liutikov Trinity Monastery, the 'miracle-worker Lavrentii' was listed among the members of this clan.<sup>119</sup> We know nothing more about the life of this saint.<sup>120</sup>

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In the sixteenth century the Russian hagiography of holy foolery was enriched by a local tale of Andrew the Fool which has no parallel either in Andrew's Greek vita or elsewhere in Byzantine hagiography. This is a story of a certain Sofonios who murders his parents and then wants to repent, but no priest will grant him absolution. The murderer wanders in the wilderness and meets an elder named Apollonios who also admits his own powerlessness and directs Sofonios to another anchorite, Talion. Talion tells him: 'I cannot help you [atone for] your sin, my son, but I will show you a man in the city of Skete [var.: Crete],

<sup>118</sup> Romanova, 'Chudesa Lavrentiia Kaluzhskogo', 239.

<sup>119</sup> N. Z. Khitrov, *Opisaniie Liutikovskogo Troitskogo Peremyshl'skogo monastyria* (Moscow, 1826), 8.

<sup>120</sup> None of the manuscripts preserves the legend that Lavrentii dug a tunnel to the church so that he could listen to the liturgy unseen. The story probably arose in the nineteenth century, perhaps under Western influence.

who goes about naked, the blessed Andrew, fool for Christ's sake, and he will help you.<sup>121</sup> The sinner arrives at 'Skete' and meets Andrew at the city gates; but in response to his repentance Andrew beats him soundly with a stick. This is repeated day after day, until eventually Andrew leads Sofonios to the church of the Pantokrator where he arranges for him to meet his murdered parents, who in the end forgive their son.<sup>122</sup> Although this apocryphal tale has something in common with Byzantine 'beneficial tales' (the motif of the secret saint who can work wonders beyond the powers of ordinary righteous men: cf. *BHG*, 1318y, 1322e), nevertheless there are far more obvious parallels with Western legends of great sinners whose salvation depends on a 'non-standard' saint (see p. 378). In Rus, therefore, the hagiography of holy foolery developed certain Byzantine motifs either independently or in interaction with the Western tradition.

We have referred to the influence of the *vita* of Andrew the Fool on the hagiography of Russian *iurodivye*, but it should not be imagined that this was entirely straightforward. As an example, we can again turn to Prokopii of Ustiug. On the one hand, his *vita* is, for the most part, a faithful paraphrase of the *vita* of Andrew. Even the description of the harsh Ustiug winter was borrowed from a description of the harsh Constantinopolitan winter!<sup>123</sup> On the other

<sup>121</sup> MS RNB, collection 536, Q-54. I am grateful to A. M. Moldovan for this reference.

<sup>122</sup> Moldovan, *Zhitie Andreia Iurodivogo*, 117–19.

<sup>123</sup> *Zhitie prepodobnogo Prokopiia Ustiuzhskogo*, (Moscow, 2003), 44–52; cf. *The Life of St Andrew the Fool*, ii (Uppsala, 1995), ll. 422–88.

hand, this should not be taken to imply that the Russian author of the *vita* of Prokopii lacked inventiveness. He took for granted his audience's familiarity with the *vita* of Andrew, and that recognition of the prototype would evoke the 'correct' associations, but he did not copy word-for-word.<sup>124</sup> In the first place, he modernized the language, to make it simpler for his readers; and secondly, he added certain details even to the borrowed chunks of narrative. For example, where the Constantinopolitan saint complains that he has been left utterly naked in the frost, Prokopii's hagiographer gives his hero some light clothing: 'But he wore just a torn robe... for his private parts.'<sup>125</sup> While Andrew comes for help to the paupers taking shelter in the city porticos, Prokopii 'came to the small houses across the street, to the poor people who live right by the cathedral... "They heard me coming but would not let me into their houses..."'<sup>126</sup> While Andrew's body is described as having 'turned blue', Prokopii's is referred to as 'covered with faeces, stinking... and turned blue'.<sup>127</sup> Russian *iurodivye* are generally reckoned to have been more chaste in their behaviour than their Byzantine predecessors.<sup>128</sup> While this is broadly true, it does not apply to every detail: where

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Moldovan, *Zhitie Andreia Iurodivogo*, ll. 641–756.

<sup>125</sup> *Zhitie prepodobnogo Prokopiiia Ustiuzhskogo*, 46; cf. Moldovan, *Zhitie Andreia Iurodivogo*, ll. 655–6.

<sup>126</sup> *Zhitie prepodobnogo Prokopiiia Ustiuzhskogo*, 50; cf. Moldovan, *Zhitie Andreia Iurodivogo*, ll. 618–20.

<sup>127</sup> *Zhitie prepodobnogo Prokopiiia Ustiuzhskogo*, 52, cf. Moldovan, *Zhitie Andreia Iurodivogo*, ll. 739–40.

<sup>128</sup> G. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, ii (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), 317–18; Challis and Dewey, 'Byzantine Models', 38.



Andrew had been prepared simply to die of cold,<sup>129</sup> Prokopii of Ustiug ‘uttered in [his] soul improper and indecent words’.<sup>130</sup>

Holy foolery had been Russified.

<sup>129</sup> Moldovan, *Zhitie Andreia Iurodivogo*, ll. 736.

<sup>130</sup> *Zhitie prepodobnogo Prokopiiia Ustiuzhskogo*, 52.

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## The *Iurodivyi* and the Tsar

Russian holy foolery emerged at the same time as the Russian autocracy was taking shape. This is more than a coincidence: apparently society regarded *iurodivye* as a form of divine control over the state authorities. The close though ambiguous relations between Russian holy fools and their secular rulers is a distinctive feature of *iurodivye* by comparison with their Byzantine predecessors.<sup>1</sup> Isidor of Rostov had already frequented the prince's halls (cf. above, p. 267), Lavrentii of Kaluga had already lived at the local prince's residence, but these relations reached their peak in the reign of Ivan the Terrible. At the Synod of 1547, the Church officially acknowledged the veneration of Maksim the Naked and of Prokopii and Ioann of Ustiug.<sup>2</sup> Ivan's peculiar

<sup>1</sup> S. Ivanov, 'Holy Fools and Political Authorities in Byzantium and Russia', *Acts of the XVIIIth International Congress of Byzantine Studies: Selected Papers: Main and Communications*, i: *History*, ed. I. Ševčenko, G. Litavrin, and W. Hanak (Shepherdstown, 1996), 266–8.

<sup>2</sup> E. Golubinskii, *Istoriia kanonizatsii sviatykh v russkoi tserkvi* (Sergiev Posad, 1894), 54–5, 70; A. S. Khoroshev, *Politicheskaia istoriia russkoi kanonizatsii (XI–XVI vv.)* (Moscow, 1986), 176. The manuscripts which contain the synodal decree on canonization display certain dissimilarities. Some of

love-hatred for *iurodivye* represents the apogee of holy foolery in Russia. This juxtaposition brought together two forces which were in some respects akin to one another. If holy foolery is extreme self-abasement which conceals phenomenal power, then one could hardly imagine a clearer embodiment of this explosive mixture than Tsar Ivan himself. I am referring here to *iurodstvovanie*<sup>3</sup>—a bizarre game of imitating *iurodivye* for secular purposes. For example, in his letter to the monks of the Kirillo-Belozerskii monastery, Ivan begins thus:

Alas for me, a sinner! Woe is me, the accursed! Ah me, foul that I am! Who am I to presume to such a height? . . . Rather it is you, our lords, who ought to enlighten us, who have strayed. Whom can I, a stinking dog, teach? In what can I instruct? I who abide in drunkenness, in fornication, in wantonness, in pollution, in murder . . . for whom can I, a foul and polluted destroyer of souls, be a teacher?<sup>4</sup>

However, after these and many more expressions of repentance, the tsar's voice suddenly grows more forceful, as the lachrymose incantation makes way for a furious tirade against the monks for failing to show due severity in their treatment of disgraced boyars sentenced to confinement in

them prescribe that holy fools should be commemorated locally, and some—ubiquitously: Makarii Veretennikov, *Zhizn' i trudy sviatitelia Makarii* (Moscow, 2002), 107. Maybe these discrepancies reflect some discord between the participants in the Synod.

<sup>3</sup> See D. S. Likhachev, A. M. Panchenko, and N. V. Ponyrko, *Smekh v Drevnei Rusi* (Leningrad, 1984), 26–8.

<sup>4</sup> *Poslaniia Ivana Groznogo*, ed. D. S. Likhachev and Ia. S. Lur'e (Moscow and Leningrad, 1951), 162–3.

their monastery. In view of what the letter eventually says, it would be easy to dismiss the opening section as sarcasm, but the situation is more complex. In confessing to such an impressive array of vices, the tsar is not simply indulging in a self-accusatory figure of rhetoric (which might imply that the self-accusations are untrue). He is stating well known facts: all is indeed as he says. Yet this in no way diminishes him in relation to his addressees; on the contrary, it demonstrates his superhuman qualities which place him above earthly norms and rules.

In politics, too, Ivan practised the same ‘false self-abasement which in fact is the highest form of pride’. Here, for example, is how he behaved with his equerry, Ivan Fedorov. He ordered him to dress up as the tsar and to sit on the throne, while he himself bared his head and bowed his knee and said, ‘Now you have what you sought: to occupy my place. Now you are the Grand Prince. Rejoice, then, and enjoy your dominion!’ Upon which he then murdered the equerry and ordered that his corpse be thrown into a cess-pit.<sup>5</sup> Admittedly, Ivan suspected Fedorov of being involved in a plot; but he placed the Tatar prince Simeon Bekbulatovich on his own throne without any intention of revealing a clandestine conspiracy. So why did he do it? Why did he write petitions to the Tatar as if to the real tsar, signing them simply ‘Ivanets (“Johnny”) Vasilev’? In a sense, this was typical ‘holy foolish’ provocation: ‘It was said among the people that he had *tempted* [my emphasis—S. I.] people, trying to find out what rumours there would be about this

<sup>5</sup> R. G. Skrynnikov, *Tsarstvo terrora* (St Petersburg, 1992), 337.

among the people.<sup>6</sup> That is, Ivan's subjects were meant to perceive the truth, to guess the reality behind the deceptive façade. Is this not one of the impulses behind holy foolery? Samuel Collins, a seventeenth-century foreign collector of stories about Ivan the Terrible, says that the tsar played all kinds of pranks but punished some Dutch and English women who dared to laugh:<sup>7</sup> that is, only foreigners failed to understand that which was absolutely plain to Russians—that Ivan's jokes were not funny but terrifying. Surely, this is holy foolery.

Analysing Ivan's menacing buffoonery, Iu. Lotman and B. Uspenskii offer the following explanation:

Ivan reckoned that, just as pious laymen cannot judge the actions of a holy fool but must simply believe—despite the lack of any rational grounds for such a belief—that there is sanctity concealed behind his madness, so Ivan's subjects ought to submit to his God-given power regardless of the nature of his actions.<sup>8</sup>

With Ivan, as with a holy fool, it was never possible to know whether he was cheerful or angry. However, unlike the hagiographical persona who exists only in his literary

<sup>6</sup> S. K. Rosovetskii, 'Ustnaia proza XVI–XVII vv. ob Ivane Groznom', *Russkii fol'klor* 20 (1981), 80.

<sup>7</sup> [Samuel Collins], *The Present State of Russia* (London, 1671), 48.

<sup>8</sup> Iu. Lotman and B. Uspenskii, 'Novye aspekty izucheniia kul'tury Drevnei Rusi', *Voprosy literatury* 3 (1977), 164. However, Lotman and Uspenskii continue thus: 'Ivan's behaviour is holy foolery without sanctity, holy foolery not sanctioned from above: playing at holy foolery, a parody of it.' This is anachronistic. The idea that the holy fool is good and the tsar is bad (see A. I. Shaitanova, 'Iskrennost' i igra kak modusy povedeniia lichnosti', *Chelovek* 4 (1995), 69–70) is a modern way of looking at the problem. Both the tsar and the holy fool are beyond good and evil.

embodiment, and unlike the saint who is inseparable from his religious discourse, Ivan was a real person, and hence one can talk of his psychology. From this perspective one can suggest that the tsar's behaviour was a game not just with his subjects but with himself. Like a holy fool who proves by his own example that sanctity is not a decision of the Church, Ivan wanted to prove to himself that power was not just a contingent human disposition, that the tsar is not just the person who happens to sit on the throne. For him, being tsar was something absolute, beyond all limits, independent of such trifles as the regalia of office, something that was part of him no matter where and no matter what. Ivan the Terrible conducted bold experiments with his own 'regality', just as the holy fool (in so far as one can treat him as a psychological type), through his sacrilegious behaviour, tests the limits of God's mercy towards him (cf. p. 189). The tsar, too, could try his hand at sacrilege: for example, at his niece's wedding Ivan ordered the guests to dance to the sound of a psalm of St Athanasios; and he himself joined the young monks as they cavorted, tapping out the beat on their heads with his rod.<sup>9</sup> And the entire structure of Ivan's court at Aleksandrova Sloboda was permeated with a sense of sacrilege.<sup>10</sup> This emphasized that his power was boundless.

In a strange way, Ivan's stance received social approval. In one of the folkloric narratives, this is how Ivan came to be

<sup>9</sup> Skrynnikov, *Tsarstvo terrora*, 502.

<sup>10</sup> In popular tales of Ivan, the tsar orders that a book on a lectern in church be turned upside-down, and he orders the choir to be made drunk so that they sleep through the service: A. Veselovskii, 'Skazki ob Ivane Groznom', *Drevniaia i novaia Rossiia* 2/4 (1876), 322.

tsar: 'on the advice of a holy fool' a massive candle was set up at the Kremlin gates, with the idea that the candle would spontaneously light itself when the 'true' tsar appeared. A certain 'general' set off for Moscow hoping for the throne, and he promised his coachman Ivan that he would make him a general if ever he became tsar; to which the coachman replied that if *he* became tsar he would hang his master. Inevitably, the candle ignited when the coachman appeared, and the newly revealed tsar Ivan ordered that the 'general' be executed immediately; the people rejoiced and dubbed Ivan 'the Terrible' (*groznyi*—'the thunderous', more properly 'the awesome').<sup>11</sup>

It is no accident that in this legend the instigator of the odd way of choosing a tsar was a holy fool: just as there is no way of seeing the saint in the urban madman, so there is no rational way of spotting the divinely appointed ruler in the simple coachman. In the popular imagination the *iurodivyi* in effect crowns Ivan tsar; and the intemperate suffering that the fearsome tsar brings upon his country is an inevitable consequence of his intemperate election.

Ivan himself had deep reverence for the *iurodivye*: according to legends which he himself obviously inspired, great events such as the tsar's birth<sup>12</sup> and his conquest of Kazan<sup>13</sup> had been foretold by holy fools. It is likely that Ivan personally promoted the veneration of Maksim, the only *iurodivyi*

<sup>11</sup> N. Ia. Aristov, 'Russkie narodnye predaniia ob istoricheskikh litsakh i sobytiakh', in *Trudy Tret'ego arkheologicheskogo s'ezda v Rossii*, i (Kiev, 1878), 337–8.

<sup>12</sup> 'Kniga stepennaia tsarskogo rodosloviia', in PSRL 21, pt. ii (1913), 629.

<sup>13</sup> Strel'nikova, 'Galaktion Belozerskii', *PE* (in press).

Moscow could boast of at the time: he gave as his personal gift to the Staritsa monastery the ‘icon of Maksim the Holy Fool and Confessor’ (probably the icon of Maksim the Naked, confused with the seventh-century saint Maximos the Confessor).<sup>14</sup> Apparently, Ivan the Terrible regarded the status of holy fools as being in some respects equal to the status of tsar. In the *Book of Degrees of the Tsars’ Genealogy*, compiled under his patronage, in a eulogy to the descendants of Prince Vladimir we suddenly find the following passage:

Some . . . were reckoned fools for Christ’s sake and deigned to live in the way of poverty and homelessness, and with much arduous wandering, and were saved; theirs are innumerable names of incalculable nobility, which are inscribed in the heavens, and their memory on earth abides with praises forever.<sup>15</sup>

Which of Vladimir’s descendants were considered holy fools in sixteenth-century Moscow, we can only guess. Be that as it may, society acknowledged the unconstrained, superhuman status of the tsar—which it therefore balanced against the equally unconstrained figure of the holy fool.

\* \* \*

Let us look more closely at the most famous episode in the history of Russian *iurodstvo*: the meeting between Ivan the

<sup>14</sup> *Opisnye knigi Staritskago Uspenskago monastyria* (Staritsa, 1912), 11. In addition, two of his icons are listed in the late-sixteenth-century record of Mozhaisk monasteries; see ‘Mozhaiskie akty 1596–1598 gg.’, in *Mozhaiskie akty 1506–1775 gg.*, ed. Archimandrite Dionisii (St Petersburg, 1892), 51. One cannot rule out the possibility that this is also a result of the promotional campaign conducted by Ivan the Terrible.

<sup>15</sup> PSRL 21. i. 1 (1908), 134.



Terrible and Nikola of Pskov. Here we can trace in detail, from beginning to end, the formation of the legend of the holy fool. In 1570 the tsar instigated a horrific pogrom in Novgorod and Pskov. This is how the events in Pskov are described by a German participant in the campaign, Heinrich Staden:

At that time so many thousands of churchmen and laymen were killed that nothing of the kind had ever been heard of in Rus. The Grand Prince had allocated half the city for plunder, until he came to the yard where Mikula [i.e. Nikola] lived. This Mikula is a rich peasant living alone in a household in Pskov, without wife or children. He has a lot of cattle, who trample the manure in the yard all winter under the open sky, and grow, and grow fat. So Mikula became rich. He tells the Russians a lot about the future. The Grand Prince came to him in his yard. Mikula said to the Grand Prince, 'Enough! Go back home!' The Grand Prince hearkened to Mikula and departed from Pskov.<sup>16</sup>

Scholars regard the Mikula of this tale as already a legendary figure: perhaps the fabulously strong Mikula Selianinovich of local Pskov legend ('Mikula' is a Pskov dialect version of 'Nikola'),<sup>17</sup> or a witch-doctor with special powers over animals:<sup>18</sup> for our present purposes it makes little difference whether or not the legend was hatched from real facts. The words cited by Staden sound very impressive, but we cannot know whether they were prompted by personal bravery or by a belief in divine assistance, or whether or not they were

<sup>16</sup> Heinrich Staden, *Zapiski oprichnika* (Moscow, 2002), 49–50.

<sup>17</sup> V. F. Rzhiga, 'Mikula Selianinovich', *Izvestiia po russkomu iazyku i slovesnosti* 2/2 (1929), 455.

<sup>18</sup> Rosovetskii, 'Ustnaia proza', 87.

actually uttered at all, or whether they merely reflect the general and unarticulated hopes of all Pskovians. What matters, in the first instance, is that the initial image of Mikula is not in the least reminiscent of holy foolery, but that the myth very soon developed on its own and the prophesier turned into the *iurodivyi*. The next phase in its development is reflected in the *Piskarevskii Chronicle*:  
Ivan

came to Nikola the Fool, and Nikola said to him, 'Don't touch us, my sweet, and you will not answer for us. Leave us quickly, my sweet. You have nothing to flee on!' And at that moment the prince's leading steed fell. And the Grand Prince hastened to depart, and did little evil.<sup>19</sup>

Although here Nikola is already called a holy fool, in his behaviour there is as yet nothing specific to holy foolery, unless we count the highly colloquial locution '*milukhne*' (rendered here as 'my sweet'). The chronicle version is not far from Staden's version: the death of the prince's horse indicates the prophetic (or magical) powers of the 'peasant'. The next layer is represented by the Pskov First Chronicle: Ivan the Terrible 'came to the blessed Nikola for his blessing...but the blessed one regaled him with many foul words, [telling him] to put a stop to all bloodshed and not to dare to plunder God's holy churches. At first the tsar paid no heed to these words', and ordered that the bell be removed from the Trinity church; and 'that very day the tsar's best horse fell, as the saint had foretold; and they

<sup>19</sup> *Piskarevskii letopisets*, ed. O. A. Iakovleva (Moscow, 1955), 79.

reported this to the tsar, who was afraid and quickly fled the city'.<sup>20</sup>

Here for the first time, we see the motif of the prince's dependence on the holy fool: the earlier variants do not explain why the tsar visited Nikola, but here it is clearly stated that he needed the holy fool's blessing. We can agree with the standard Soviet view that the Pskov chronicle version reflects the interests of the clergy of the Trinity church,<sup>21</sup> but we cannot agree that the developed version of the legend is the result of the devious attempts of the clergy to pull the wool over the common people's eyes. Churchmen could exploit popular beliefs, but could not engender them.

The next stage of the legend is to be found in the account of the tsar's German henchmen Taube and Kruse:

By God's will a poor man by the name of Nirnla [a distortion of Nikola?—S.I.] was sent to the Grand Prince. All the Pskovians revered this man as no other, as a saint or a special prophet, and he told [the prince] to come to him. The Grand Prince did not refuse him. When the Grand Prince approached this house, then the prophet *or his diabolical impersonator* [my emphasis—S.I.] shouted from the window in Russian: 'Ivashka, Ivashka! ['Johnny! Johnny?']... How long will you shed Christian blood without cause? Think of this, and leave now, or a great misfortune will

<sup>20</sup> *Pskovskie letopisi*, i (Moscow and Leningrad, 1941), 115–16. The Polish king Stefan Batory was familiar with this version of the legend, in a conversation he mentioned that a 'prophet' by the name of Mikolo forced the tsar to obey him after he resorted to 'sorcery' to kill his best horse; see E. Koch, 'Moskoviter in der Oberlausitz', *Neues Lausitzisches Magazin* 83 (1907), 55.

<sup>21</sup> e.g. Iu. Budovnit's, 'Iurodivye Drevnei Rusi', *Voprosy istorii religii i ateizma* 12 (1964), 173.

befall you.' As a result of this warning, this menace or threat, the powerful tyrant... went away crushed and shamed... Thus the poor man put the tsar to fright and to flight.<sup>22</sup>

The Germans try honestly to convey the ambivalence of holy foolery, and their suspicion that it may be a 'diabolical impersonator' is revealing. In their version Nikola also makes the transition from rich man to beggar, and his yard—previously full of fat cattle—turns into some kind of cramped cell: Nikola invites the tsar but communicates with him through the window. Finally, the 'misfortune' of Nikola's threat to the tsar turns out to be the Tatar incursion into Muscovy in 1571.<sup>23</sup>

The narrative of Taube and Kruse was written in 1572, and already by the following year the Pskovian wonder-worker was admired as the city's main attraction by the English envoy Jerome Horsey, who gives the following description of Nikola's meeting with Ivan:

ther mett him an impostur or magician, which they held to be their oracle, a holly man, named Mickula Sweat [i.e. *sviat*, 'the Saint'], whoe, by his bold imprecacions and exsorsisms, railings and threats, terminge him the Emperour bloodsucker, the devourer and eater of Christian flesh and swore by his angell that he should not escape deathe of a present thounder boltt... therefore to gett him thence before the fierie cloud, Gods wrath, wear raised, hanginge over his head as he might behold, beinge in a verie great and dark storm at that instant. These words made the

<sup>22</sup> M. G. Roginskii (transl.), 'Poslanie I. Taube i E. Kruze', *Russkii istoricheskii zhurnal* 8 (1922), 50–1.

<sup>23</sup> A. Kappeler, *Ivan Groznyj im Spiegel der ausländischen Druckschriften seiner Zeit* (Bern and Frankfurt, 1972), 126.

Emperour to trembell, so as he desired preyers for his deliverance and forgeavnes of his cruel thoughts. I saw this impostur or magicion, a fowll creature, went naked both in winter and somer; he indured both extreame frost and heat; did many streinge things thorow the magicall illusions of the Divell; much followed, feared and reverenced, both of prince and people.<sup>24</sup>

The legend had thickened out. Just three years after the Pskov campaign, one could see on display in the town a holy fool who was retrospectively credited with saving his countrymen from the tsar's wrath. The tale now includes two new important elements: a thunderstorm and 'man-eating'. Earlier we have come across the motif of the holy fool's mysterious ties with lightning (see p. 278), but this is the first time a thunderstorm emerges as a tool of the holy fool's wrath. That the meeting takes place in February, when thunderstorms do not occur, is no obstacle to the myth-making mind: the main thing is that Nikola threatens not just anybody, but Ivan the Terrible ('Thundery') himself! The holy fool, as it were, defeats the tsar in his own realm. In a sense, as we will see, the motif of 'man-eating' suggests the same conclusion.

Sixteen years later another Englishman, Giles Fletcher (see below, p. 304), repeated the story, but with a significant additional episode. Nikola sent to the tsar

a piece of rawe fleshe, beyng then their Lent time. Which the emperour seeing, bid one to tell him that he marvelled that the holy man would offer him flesh to eat in the Lent, when it was

<sup>24</sup> In E. A. Bond (ed.), *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1856), 161–2.

forbidden by order of the holie Church. And doth Evasko [i.e. Ivashka, 'Johnny'] think (quoth Nicola) that it is unlawfull to eate a piece of a beasts flesh in Lent, and not to eat up so much mans flesh as he hath done already?<sup>25</sup>

Thus, Horsey's earlier accusation of 'bloodsucking' gradually evolved into the motif of the holy fool offering the tsar a bite of raw meat. Over time, this became the key motif of the legend; it was later 'borrowed' from Nikola by other holy fools: Arsenii of Novgorod,<sup>26</sup> Nikolai Kachanov, and Vasiliï the Blessed. Does it imply a metaphorical condemnation of the tsar as a 'man-eater'? We would argue that it is not. Unlike the folklore of Novgorod and Pskov, in which Ivan the Terrible is indeed occasionally condemned, Moscow tradition is generally kind to the tsar. Yet the vita of the Moscow *iurodivyi* Vasiliï the Blessed has a similar episode. This means that the motif under consideration cannot be interpreted as outright 'criticism'. In our view, in order to reconstruct the mythological underpinning of this legend we need to recall the main Orthodox holy fool, Symeon Salos. A distinguishing feature of the saint of Emesa was that he ate meat during Lent—'as a godless man'.<sup>27</sup> The most interesting aspect is that Symeon also ate raw meat.<sup>28</sup> Nikola is one of the first Russian holy fools who was nicknamed with the Greek

<sup>25</sup> *The English Works of Giles Fletcher, the Elder*, ed. L. E. Berry (Madison, 1964), 276.

<sup>26</sup> Rosovetskii, 'Ustnaia proza', 84.

<sup>27</sup> Leontios of Neapolis, *Vie de Syméon le Fou et Vie de Jean de Chypre*, ed. A.-J. Festugière (Paris, 1974), 82. 10; cf. 90.23–91.1; 94.25–95.3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.10. All these episodes are accurately reproduced in the Slavonic translation, cf. MS GIM, Synod. no. 996, fo. 369<sup>v</sup>, 372<sup>r</sup>, 372<sup>r</sup>.

word *Salos*.<sup>29</sup> This probably means that by the second half of the sixteenth century the role model of holy foolery, Symeon of Emesa, had reached the folklore environment where the legend of Nikola was taking shape.

On 20 February 1570, in the midst of a terror-struck Pskov, there took place (or rather, in mythopoetic logic there ought to have taken place) an enigmatic conversation, incomprehensible to ordinary people. During a bout of unbridled feasting, Nikola Salos defeated Ivan the Terrible in a dispute about precedence. The holy fool said to Ivan something to the effect that ‘you don’t dare to eat meat in Lent, but look, I do! And this gives me the right to tell you what to do. And since my ways are more inscrutable than thy ways, I want you to spare the city.’ If the *iurodivyi* stopped the tsar’s bloodshed, it was for some other-wordly reason that only the two of them understood, and not in the name of the law or of humaneness.

Nikola lived on in Pskov folklore and beyond. By the final stage in the legend, though still a holy fool, he had been transformed into the tsar’s equal in status and grandeur: before Ivan’s entry into the city, the *iurodivyi* orders all the citizens to go out into the streets bearing bread and salt (symbols of hospitality); and when Ivan appears on horseback at the gates, ‘Mikola Khristourodnyi [Christfool]’ rides to meet him ‘on a stick with his hand tucked into his side’.<sup>30</sup> He appears in several hagiographical texts<sup>31</sup> and

<sup>29</sup> *Pskovskie letopisi*, i (Moscow and Leningrad, 1941), 115.

<sup>30</sup> P. I. Iakushkin, *Sochineniia* (Moscow, 1986), 115.

<sup>31</sup> See the vita of Nikandr the Hermit in N. Serebrianskii, *Ocherki po istorii monastyrskoi zhizni v Pskovskoi zemle* (Moscow, 1908), 539.

fairy-tales<sup>32</sup> from Pskov; it is no coincidence that Aleksandr Pushkin, writing his tragedy *Boris Godunov* at his ancestral estate near Pskov, named the holy fool 'Nikolka'.<sup>33</sup>

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Ivan the Terrible's encounter with the holy fool acquired such mythical 'resonance' that it was reproduced several times in the vitae of other saints. Let us consider one example: Arsenii of Novgorod. Several layers can be distinguished in the cult of this saint. On the basis of the historical events mentioned in the vita, it seems that the saint died soon after meeting Ivan in 1579.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, some of the details are so vivid and precise that they create the impression of having been noted from direct observation or very soon after the events. Thus, on the saint's personal appearance: 'The garments of this blessed man, which he wore all the time, looked so useless and patched and worn, as if they had been left for days in the midst of the city or at the market... Similarly, his headgear only half-covered him, while the other side of his head suffered all the drawbacks of being uncovered.'<sup>35</sup> Mockery of the holy fool by the boys in the city is a standard feature of the vitae from Symeon of Emesa onwards, but in the vita of Arsenii of Novgorod the

<sup>32</sup> Cf. A. I. Klibanov, *Dukhovnaia kul'tura srednevekovoi Rusi* (Moscow, 1996), 89.

<sup>33</sup> N. Granovskaia, 'Iurodivyi v tragedii Pushkina', *Russkaia literatura* 2 (1964), 94.

<sup>34</sup> M. D. Kagan, 'Zhitie Arseniia Novgorodskogo', *SKKDR XVII v.*, i (St Petersburg, 1992), 331; D. M. Bulanin, 'Zhitie Arseniia Novgorodskogo', iv. 704.

<sup>35</sup> M. D. Kagan-Tarkovskaia, 'Razvitie zhitiino-biograficheskogo zhanra v XVII veke', *TODRL* 49 (1996), 128.



episode is surprisingly precise: ‘while the youths were mocking him, some of them held him, while others nailed his garment to the paving’.<sup>36</sup> Such details, along with information about Arsenii’s parents, may derive from his brother Grigorii, who is mentioned in an early version of the *vita*.<sup>37</sup> Yet, the style of the text indicates the seventeenth century.<sup>38</sup> If this is so, then the episode of Arsenii’s meeting with Ivan the Terrible—full of chronological inconsistencies—is merely a commonplace of the Russian hagiography of holy foolery. A similar meeting, also with a mass of chronological contradictions, is ascribed to Vasilii the Blessed (see p. 320), and both narratives look like imitations of the heroic conduct of Nikola Salos. Moreover, the motif of Arsenii’s encounter with the tsar is modified in the later versions of his *vita*: in the early variants Arsenii meets Ivan during the tsar’s second, peaceful visit to Novgorod, but as the story develops the episode is transferred to the bloody events of 1570 and the saint is credited with a denunciation of Ivan’s bestiality that is obviously borrowed from Nikola.<sup>39</sup> This episode therefore turns out to be a recurrent feature of the hagiography of holy foolery and it cannot be used to date Arsenii’s life.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>37</sup> Pace Andronik (Trubachev), ‘Arsenii Novgorodskii’, in *PE*, iii (2001), 438.

<sup>38</sup> Kagan-Tarkovskaia, ‘Razvitie zhitiino-biograficheskogo zhanra’, 128.

<sup>39</sup> Bulanin, ‘Zhitie Arseniia’, 705.

It would be wrong to conclude that *iurodivye* were always perceived as a 'political opposition'; sometimes their strange conduct was interpreted as support for the authorities. The Hapsburg ambassador to Muscovy in 1517 and 1526, Sigismund Herberstein, observed how a holy fool ('morio', 'Schalchsnnarr') carried around brooms and spades. When he was asked why he needed them, he responded by saying that the tsar's realm had not been fully cleansed (of treason).<sup>40</sup> What mattered was the independence of his political stance. In the syncretic religious perception both tsar and holy fool belonged in the sphere of the sacral. The nature of their interrelations were not subject to rationalization, as is apparent from the brief but very interesting vita of a forgotten holy fool, Artemii Tretiak from Rostov, whose deeds are inserted into the biography of Ioann the Hairy:

Once he was sad for two days, and he neither ate nor drank nor spoke with anyone. On the third day he began to run around the whole city shouting, 'Shoot! Hang! Leap! Drink! Wash! Lie down!' And on the third day news came from Moscow, according to his prophecy: the Lord Tsar and Grand Prince Ivan Vasilevich of All Rus had executed two hundred of his entourage and servants with many kinds of torture.<sup>41</sup>

The barely intelligible exclamations of the *iurodivyi* are in all likelihood reproduced accurately by his hagiographer, but they do not reveal whether or not his 'prophecy' was perceived as sympathetic to those who were executed. What is clear, however, is that the citizens of Rostov immediately

<sup>40</sup> Sigismund Herberstein, *Zapiski o Moskovii* (Moscow, 1988), 141.

<sup>41</sup> Mel'nik, 'Zhitie Ioanna Vlasatogo', 389.

linked the news of the Moscow executions to the persona of the local holy fool.

The holy fool's independent attitude to authority is a commonplace in late Russian hagiography. In the seventeenth century, for example, Prokopii of Viatka tore off a general's hat and dragged him to the prison; and he also felled the young trees on the square, thereby prefiguring the tsar's harsh laws.<sup>42</sup> Aggressive behaviour was a necessary condition for wonder-working: during a fire in Kostroma the governor turned to Simon of Iurevets for help; the holy fool struck him on the cheek, and the flames were quenched.<sup>43</sup> However, since the *iurodivyi* was not regarded as a human subject, the very idea of 'political bravery' is inapplicable to him. The hagiographer viewed acts of boldness more as signs of the hero's otherness, signs that he is not like ordinary people.

Hagiographical norms could, nevertheless, be projected onto ordinary life. Some of those whom society categorized as holy fools were not just 'normal' but had a strong sense of their social role; such people could well construct their own behaviour with one eye on the hagiographical personae. This takes us beyond the confines of religious discourse. And the authorities reacted accordingly. As Giles Fletcher says: 'Yet it falleth out sometime, that for this rude libertie which they take upon them, after a counterfeite manner, by imitation of prophets, they are made away in secret: as was

<sup>42</sup> S. A. Ivanov, 'Zhitie Prokopiia Viatskogo: Editio Princeps', in *Florilegium: K 60-letiiu B. N. Flori* (Moscow, 2000), 76, 80.

<sup>43</sup> I. Pospelov, *Blazhennyi Simon Khrista radi iurodivyi Iurevetskii chudotvorets* (Kostroma, 1879), 101–2.

one or two of them in the last emperours [Ivan the Terrible's] time, for beyng over bolde in speaking against his government.<sup>44</sup>

\* \* \*

During the reign of Tsar Feodor, who was himself regarded as a 'benign fool',<sup>45</sup> the Russian *iurodivye* reached the peak of their legitimacy. In 1584, immediately after Feodor's accession to the throne, miracles began to occur *en masse* at the grave of the Moscow holy fool Vasilii the Blessed (who had died much earlier, most likely in 1557). Although Vasilii had already become popular under Ivan the Terrible,<sup>46</sup> his canonization and solemn reburial in the church of the Intercession (Pokrov) on the Ditch (now known as St Basil's Cathedral) took place on 2 August 1588.<sup>47</sup> Patriarch Jeremiah of Constantinople, who happened to be visiting Rus, watched the ceremony. The importance of the patriarch's visit was hard to overestimate: he was expected to approve the elevation of the Muscovite metropolitanate to a patriarchate. How, then, was Tsar Feodor, or rather, his

<sup>44</sup> *The English Works of Giles Fletcher*, 276.

<sup>45</sup> 'Povest' kniazia Ivana Mikhailovicha Katyreva-Rostovskogo', in *Pamiatniki drevnei russkoi pis'mennosti, otnosiashchiesia k Smutnomu vremeni*, 3rd edn. (Leningrad, 1925), 564.

<sup>46</sup> Vasilii first appeared in 1572/3 on an icon of the Church Militant, next to Maksim the Naked and Andrew of Constantinople: G. V. Popov, *Tverskaia ikona XIII–XVII vekov* (St Petersburg, 1993), 273, pl. 169. A manuscript from the late 1570s contains a piece with a 'foreword by Vasilii the Naked, the New Miracle-Worker': N. A. Kazakova, *Vassian Patrikeev i ego sochineniia* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1960), 239.

<sup>47</sup> K. E. Erusalimskii, 'Vasilii Blazhennyi', in *PE*, vii (2004), 124–6.

plenipotentiary equerry Boris Godunov, going to please the important guest? By canonizing a holy fool. Muscovites obviously assumed that the Greeks, who had given them Symeon and Andrew, would be glad to know that Russia had its own *salos*. Unfortunately, we do not know whether this calculation proved to be correct. Indirect evidence suggests that it was: a member of the mission, Arsenios of Elasson, wrote a Greek service to Vasilii (see p. 240).

The Moscow holy fool grew increasingly famous. Bells were ringing continuously to announce new miracles. Tsar Feodor and the tsarina, Boris Godunov and the Moscow nobility brought generous gifts to Vasilii's grave.<sup>48</sup> The *Piskarevskii Chronicle*, apparently retelling some official text, states that:

for many years the streams of his [Vasilii's] grace were flowing out for the lame, the blind, the insane; about fifteen or twenty or thirty or more people every day; for many years he made miracles incessantly. We shall tell of one of the miracles: a monk by the name of Gerasim and the nickname of Bear, had been unable to walk for many years and had been crawling on his knees . . . and begging near Frolov Gate. And suddenly . . . the prayer of the great luminary Vasilii the Blessed healed him and he was healthy again as before and could walk as other people.<sup>49</sup>

On 25 November of the same year, 1588, in this exalted atmosphere, an Englishman, Giles Fletcher, the envoy of Queen Elizabeth I, appeared in Moscow. He spent the subsequent winter, spring, and summer in Russia and could not miss the veneration of holy fools, which was in its prime. Just

<sup>48</sup> K. E. Erusalimskii, 126–7.

<sup>49</sup> PSRL 34 (Moscow, 1978), 200.

before Fletcher's departure from Moscow, in August 1589, yet another *iurodivyi*, Ioann the Big Cap, was buried with great pomp in the same church of the Intercession on the Ditch (see p. 278). The Englishman's impressions were collected in a book, *On the Russe Common Wealth*, and a whole chapter was devoted to holy fools (cf. above, p. 296). Here is how a sober outsider viewed the world which we have previously seen only through the prism of native religious discourse:

Besides [monks], they have certeyne eremites (whome they call holy men) that are like to those gymnosophists for their life and behaviour: though farre unlike for their knowledge and learning. They use to go stark naked, save a clout about their middle, with their haire hanging long, and wildely about their shoulders, and many of them with an iron coller, or chaine about their neckes or middes, even in the very extremity of winter. These they take as prophets, and men of great holines, giving them a liberty to speak what they list, without any controulment, thogh it [may] be to the very highest himselfe. So that if he reprove any openly, in what sort soever, they answeare nothing, but that it is *po graecum*, that is, for their sinnes. And if anie of them take some piece of sale ware from anie mans shop, as he passeth by, to give where he list, hee thinketh himselfe much beloved of God, and much beholding to the holy man, for taking it in that sort.

Of this kinde there are not many, because it is a very harde and colde profession, to goe naked in Russia, specially in winter. Among other at this time, they have one at Mosko, that walketh naked about the streetes, and inveyeth commonly against the stat, and government, especially against the Godonoës [the Godunovs], that are thought at this time to bee great oppressours of that common wealth. An other there was, that dyed not many yeeres agoe (whome they called Basileo), that would take upon

him to reprove the olde emperour, for all his crueltie, and oppressions, done towards his people. His body they have translated of late into a sumptuous church neere the emperour's house in Mosko, and have canonized him for a saint. Many miracles he doth there (for so Friers make the people to beleeve) and manie offerings are made unto him, not only by the people, but by the chiefe nobilitie, and the emperour and empresse themselves, which visite that Church with great devotion. But this last yeere, at my beeing at Mosko, this saint had ill lucke, in working his miracles. For a lame man that had his kimmes restored (as it was pretended by him) was charged by a woman that was familiar with him (being then fallen out) that hee halted but in the day time, and coulde leape merily when he came home at night. And that hee had intended this matter sixe yeers before. Now he is put into a monastery, and there rayleth upon the friers, that hyred him to have this counterfaite miracle, practised upon him. Besides this disgrace, a little before my comming from thence, there were eyght slaine within his church by fire in a thunder. Which caused his belles (that were tingling before all day and night long as in triumph of the miracles wrought by Basileo their saint) to ring somewhat sofler, and hath wrought no little discredite to this miracle-worker. There was another of great account at Plesko (called Nichola of Plesko) . . . Threatening the emperour with a prophecy of some hard adventure to come upon him, except hee left murdering of his people, and departed the towne, he saved a great many mens lives at that time.

This maketh the people to like very well of them, because they are as Pasquils, to note their great mens faults that no man els dare speake of.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> *The English Works of Giles Fletcher, 274–6.*

We can distinguish several layers in Fletcher's account. One layer has to do with his English background: thus the word *Pasquil*, as applied to a person and not a piece of writing, became widespread in England at the end of the sixteenth century. Another is related to Fletcher's classical education:<sup>51</sup> hence the analogy with gymnosophists (cf. p. 102). Others allude to Russian hagiographic texts—above all to Vasilii the Blessed. As we have seen, the devastation of Novgorod, with which he is said to have reproached Ivan the Terrible, in fact occurred many years after the saint's death. Yet this episode—which is mentioned in his 'folk' vita and not in his official biography<sup>52</sup>—somehow reached the English envoy. Fletcher's sceptical attitude to Vasilii is no surprise: his story of a fake cripple is much more striking. In all probability, this was the same Gerasim the Bear, whose miraculous healing was praised in the *Piskarevskii Chronicle*. What is of interest for us here is not the miracle which turned out to be the monks' machinations, but the source of the Englishman's information. Evidently he did not conduct an investigation of the 'cripple' himself. One of the Russians must have shared this information with the stranger.<sup>53</sup> Apparently there were sceptics among the Muscovites, too, and we may surmise that these men had their doubts not just about certain miracles, but about holy fools' *groza* both directly

<sup>51</sup> From 1573 to 1579, Fletcher taught Greek at Cambridge: *The English Works of Giles Fletcher*, 9.

<sup>52</sup> See I. Kuznetsov, *Sviatye blazhennye Vasilii i Ioann, Khrista radi moskovskie chudotvortsy* (Moscow, 1910), 285.

<sup>53</sup> Fletcher knew some Russian; see S. M. Seredonin, *Sochinenie Dzhil'sa Fletchera 'On the Russe Common Wealth' kak istoricheskii istochnik* (St Petersburg, 1891), 56–7.



and figuratively (the word *groza* combines the meanings of a thunderstorm and a threat). The tale of eight people killed by lightning in the church of St Vasilii is but a variant of the well-known legend of the omens that accompanied the death of the Big Cap, or Nikola's encounter with Ivan the Terrible (see above, pp. 278, 296). Here, however, this miracle is cited to emphasize the weakness of the holy fool, rather than his omnipotence.

Some of the evidence cited by Fletcher may be similar to hagiographic *topoi*, yet his account reflects his observations of real life. Such, for example, is his information that the *iurodivye* took goods free from the shops. Fletcher himself obviously suffered from the harshness of the Russian winter, and his horror at the nakedness of the holy fools seems too authentic to be dismissed as merely the regurgitation of a literary stereotype (even though such nakedness is indeed ubiquitous in the *vitae*). But nowhere else will we read of holy fools blaspheming; not even in the *vita* of Symeon of Emesa.

Fletcher equates holy foolery with prophesying. Indeed, from the very beginning the prevalent feature of early Russian *iurodstvo* as a hagiographical phenomenon—dominating all other manifestations of eccentric sanctity—was the ability to prophesy. For many holy fools the power to predict is virtually the only quality mentioned in the sources. For example: the mysterious and wholly undateable Onufrii the Fool was buried under the bell-tower of the church of the Kazan Mother of God in the town of Romanov on the Volga; but the only information we have about him, preserved in the *Tale of the Iaroslavl Icon of the Mother of God*, states that

he ‘suddenly came to a certain pious man, Sampson Bogomol, in the town of Romanov, and foretold the woes which were to happen to him, and for his family—tonsure.’<sup>54</sup> In the *Tale of the Journey of Ioann of Novgorod*, which was composed in the fifteenth century although it purports to relate events of the twelfth century, we read that in the monastery of St George in Novgorod ‘there was a certain man who made himself out to be a fool, and he had from God the gift of foresight; and this man rushed to the archimandrite’s cell and knocked on his door and said . . .’<sup>55</sup> Later on, holy fools’ unruly behaviour was, for all practical purposes, replaced by their prophetic practices. This was of little concern so long as the prophecies were about personal matters, but holy fools gradually acquired a taste for political prediction.

Meanwhile, by the late sixteenth century, holy foolery had become rationalized in Orthodox culture as a special ‘club’ of saints who stuck together and helped each other. *Iurodivye* are depicted jointly on icons,<sup>56</sup> are jointly commemorated in special services,<sup>57</sup> etc. Such collective treatment was scarcely beneficial to these essentially solitary figures. State authorities who tolerated individual *iurodivye* would not tolerate a ‘holy fools’ opposition’.

One can detect an ideological shift. While extolling select holy fools, the Church began gradually to constrict

<sup>54</sup> N. N. Teliakova, *Starina i sviatyni goroda Romanova* (Iaroslavl, 1991), 51.

<sup>55</sup> *Drevnerusskie predaniia (XI–XVI vv.)* (Moscow, 1982), 286.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. A. S. Preobrazhenskii, ‘Vasilii Blazhennyi: Ikonografia’, in *PE* vii (2004), 130.

<sup>57</sup> Kuznetsov, *Sviatye*, 223.

*iurodstvo* as an institution. The evolution of the text of the Moscow daily prayerbook reflects this process. The late-sixteenth-century version mentioned Andrew the Fool, Isidor of Rostov, Prokopii of Ustiug, and Maksim and Vasiliï of Moscow. However, as a student of the prayer-book has noted: ‘opposite all these names there is a note in the margin: “Tell the patriarch”...The order came to delete their names. They were struck out with red ink, and they do not appear in the subsequent edition in 1602.’<sup>58</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Kuznetsov, *Sviatye*, 388–9.

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## *Iurodstvo* in an Age of Transition

The seventeenth century was a peculiar period in the history of Russian holy foolery. The Church had clearly set its sights on the gradual ousting of *iurodstvo*. In a decree of 1636 Patriarch Ioasaf wrote:

Some pretend to be insane, and then are seen sane; others go about in the likeness of hermits, in black garb and in fetters and with hair unkempt; others crawl around and squeal in church during singing, and instil great agitation among ordinary people.<sup>1</sup>

An encyclical of 1646 even barred holy fools from going into churches:

since their shouting and squealing prevents Orthodox Christians from hearing the divine chanting; and they come into God's churches like robbers, carrying sticks...and they fight amongst themselves.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Akty, sobrannye v bibliotekakh i arkhivakh Rossiiskoi imperii*, iii (St Petersburg, 1836), 402, no. 264.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in I. Kovalevskii, *Iurodstvo o Khriste i Khrista radi iurodivnye vostochnoi i russkoi tserkvi* (Moscow, 1902, 2nd edn. 1992), 217.

Apart from the Church's disapproval, holy foolery itself was becoming eroded. This can be seen in the increasing number of mentally defective people regarded as holy fools. Nobody believed that they were sane, yet their very madness gave them an aura of sanctity. A new term, 'benign fool' was applied both to 'holy fools for God's sake'<sup>3</sup> and to harmless imbeciles. According to the 1646 census data for the town of Kashin, 'in a suburb [there lived] Isachko... with his son Grishka; also with him lives his wife's brother the benign fool (*blagourodlivoi*) Zinovko, son of Eustrat'. The same document mentions the 'household of Vlasko the Blacksmith, in which lives a fool (*urodlivoi chelovek*), Levka Ovechkin'.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing whether or how Zinovko and Levka differed from one another.

From the Dutch traveller Isaac Massa we learn that under Tsar Boris Godunov female *iurodstvo* made its first appearance.

[Godunov] used to go to a soothsayer (*vaersegster*), who in Moscow was considered a saint, and was called Olena the Fool (*Oerodliva*). She lives in a cave next to a certain chapel... This woman used to foretell the future, and she was afraid of nobody: not the tsar, not the king. But she always said what in her view was supposed to happen. And sometimes it did come to pass. The first time that Boris came to her, she would not receive him, and he had to return. When he visited her again, she ordered him to bring... a log... and to perform the burial service over that log. The tsar... went away aggrieved; but if I was the tsar I would order

<sup>3</sup> In one source, dated 1584, this word is applied to Symeon of Emesa and Isidor of Rostov: I. Shliapkin, 'Ukazets knigokhranitel'ia Spaso-Prilutskago monastyr'ia Arseniia Vysokago 1584 g.', in *Pamiatniki drevnei pis'mennosti*, fasc.184 (1914), 12, 16. A *blagoiurodivoi* Ioann is mentioned in the commemoration book of Peremyshl monastery: N. Z. Khitrov, *Opisanie Liutikovskago Troitskago Peremyshl'skago monastyr'ia* (Moscow, 1826), 8.

<sup>4</sup> 'Gorod Kashin', *ChOIDR* 4 (1903), 32, 39.

the last rite for her before it was my turn; but these Muscovites consider her holy; which is not surprising, since—alas—they are still mired in ignorance. May God enlighten them!

Massa goes on to relate how the same ‘satanic prophetess Olena the Fool’ began to predict the death of the next tsar, the False Dimitrii. Yet when he ‘was informed of it he laughed, for he paid no attention to the chatterings of demented and possessed old women’.<sup>5</sup>

This means that fortune-tellers could also be referred to as holy fools. Sometimes even hermits were reckoned among holy fools, despite the fact that they avoided human contacts, the very essence of holy foolery. For example, this was the case with Kiprian of Suzdal, who lived on an island where the river Viazma flowed into the Uvod, and who died in 1622.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the seventeenth century marks the start of the erosion of *iurodstvo* as a cultural institution.

This erosion is especially pronounced in the case of Marfa the Fool. In 1638 a ‘maiden Daria, or by her nun’s name of Marfa the Fool’ died in the Ivanovskii nunnery. After her death Marfa received great veneration. She was buried in the

<sup>5</sup> Isaac Massa, *Histoire des Guerres de la Moscovie*, i (Brussels, 1866), 87–8, 149. She is mentioned only once in Russian sources, in a marginal note in a liturgical book: ‘This book was bought from the priest Vasilii, who serves at the Church of the Nativity of the Most Pure Mother of God, where Olena the Fool used to be’; see I. V. Pozdeeva, V. I. Erofeeva, and G. M. Shitova, *Kirillicheskie izdaniia XVI v.–1641 g. Nakhodki arkheograficheskikh ekspeditsii 1971–1993 gg., postupivshie v Nauchnuiu biblioteku Moskovskogo Universiteta* (Moscow, 2000), 36. If Olena’s name is cited to help identify a church, then presumably she was very well known, though no information about her has survived. Already in 1591, a *iurodivaia* woman was entertaining the dowager tsarina Mariia in Uglich, but after Tsarevich Dimitrii’s death, this woman was assassinated as a sorceress, cf. *Delo rozysknoe 1591 goda pro ubivstvo tsarevicha Dimitriia . . .*, ed. V. Klein (St Petersburg, 1913), 10.

<sup>6</sup> M. V. Tolstoi, *Kniga glagolemaia Opisanie o rossiiskikh sviatykh* (Moscow, 1887), 212.

cathedral of the nunnery with her head on a rock—apparently the same rock that she had used to rest her head on—and two years later Tsar Mikhail Feodorovich ordered ‘to cover the coffin in which the elderly nun Marfa the Fool was laid in the Ivanovskii nunnery with black English cloth with a cherry-coloured silk cross upon it’.<sup>7</sup> Yet, her pious biographer fails to mention that she was assured of an even more generous allowance from the tsar while alive. According to the palace archives, ‘a warm fur coat of black German taffeta with squirrel fur lining and beaver trimming’ was made for Marfa in 1624, an exclusive cassock in 1629, ‘an azure coat with hare fur lining and beaver trimming’ in 1630, an azure *sarafan* in 1631, etc.<sup>8</sup> So, who was Marfa—a holy fool nun, or one of the ‘court fools’, who were quite numerous in the palace?<sup>9</sup> Evidence for holy foolery merging with buffoonery can be found in the journal of a Dutch traveller, Nikolaas Witsen. On 14 February 1665 he wrote: ‘I have seen several madmen during these days. They were walking almost naked, all they had on were little aprons around their waists, on these drunken days [of Shrove-tide] they played the buffoon (*potsen*); Russians regard them as saints (*heylig*), give them money and put them in places of honour at the table.’<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> V. Rudnev, *Blazhennaia skhimonakhinia Marfa* (Moscow, 2003), 18.

<sup>8</sup> I. E. Zabelin, *Domashnii byt russkogo naroda v XVI–XVII st.*, ii (Moscow, 2001), 266.

<sup>9</sup> After Marfa’s death her place in the same monastery was taken by an ‘elderly foolish nun Anna’, who also received boons from the palace (*ibid.*, 319).

<sup>10</sup> Nicolaas Witsen, *Moscovische Reyse, 1664–1665*, ii (The Hague, 1966), 135.

Returning to Olena and Marfa, we should note that the strictly male character of holy foolery is hard to explain, but the breaking down of this barrier is an important symptom of the blurring of distinct hagiographical categories. Another crucial feature of Marfa is that she practised monastic *iurodstvo*.

After Kirill Belozerskii and through the second half of the sixteenth century there is no evidence of holy foolery among monks. There must have been *iurodivye* in monasteries, however: not least because the state authorities incarcerated especially wild prophets there.<sup>11</sup> Yet, after a long interval, the earliest mention of a holy fool in a cloister is that of the monk Sergii of the Feodorovskii monastery in Pereiaslavl-Zaleskii. Sergii was locally venerated until the nineteenth century,<sup>12</sup> but there is no surviving evidence of his life. The second example is that of Iosif Zaonikievskii. Iosif's vita remains unpublished,<sup>13</sup> but a summary is available: a Vologda peasant named Ilarion was miraculously cured of blindness; in 1588 a miracle-working icon of the Mother of God revealed itself to him and he founded the Zaonikievskii monastery, in which he took monastic vows under the name of Iosif. The vita is rather vague on what prompted him to commit himself instantly to the feat of holy foolery. The reason may have been his resentment at being passed over in favour of somebody else as abbot of the newly founded convent. Whatever the cause, the monks scoffed at

<sup>11</sup> Cf. e.g. PSRL, 6 (1853), 228.

<sup>12</sup> V. V. Zverinskii, *Material dlia istoriko-topograficheskogo izsledovaniia o pravoslavnykh monastyriakh v Rossiiskoi imperii*, ii (St Petersburg, 1892), 395.

<sup>13</sup> RGB manuscript, col. 354, no. 74.



him, and his commemoration (Iosif died in 1612) provoked internal strife: the chapel erected over his grave was three times wrecked and rebuilt.<sup>14</sup> In this case the monastery obviously had a problem commemorating its own founder. There were instances, however, when the cloister made use of a popular holy fool's name. Let us return to the vita of Arsenii of Novgorod, mentioned above (p. 300). The style alone tells us that the hagiographer worked in the seventeenth century and wrote on the basis of first-hand observation of several anonymous contemporary holy fools.<sup>15</sup> More interesting, however, is the fact that the development of the image of Arsenii does not stop here: a second version was made, in which the protagonist figures as the founder of the Arseniev monastery.<sup>16</sup> These are two quite separate images: on the one hand, the town beggar running around the streets and being reckoned irascible by the citizens, and on the other hand the strict hermit living in his own monastery. Presumably the monastic brethren from Novgorod decided to exploit the popularity of the saint's name, while the Kargopol monastery of the Dormition traced its origin to a certain Iona the Hirsute.<sup>17</sup> Although *iurodivye* monks are occasionally mentioned in paterika (Vasilii of Spaso-Kamensk,<sup>18</sup> Gurii and the Ioanns of Solovki (see below, pp. 336, 341), and some others), a real monastery whose

<sup>14</sup> I. Veriuzhskii, *Istoricheskie skazaniia o zhizni sviatykh, podvizavshikhsia v Vologodskoi eparkhii* (Vologda, 1880), 593–601.

<sup>15</sup> M. D. Kagan-Tarkovskaia, 'Razvitie zhitiino-biograficheskogo zhanra v XVII veke', *TODRL* 49 (1996), 128.

<sup>16</sup> Andronik (Trubachev), 'Arsenii Novgorodskii', in *PE* iii (2001), 438.

<sup>17</sup> G. V. Alferova, *Kargopol' i Kargopol'e* (Moscow, 1973), 15, 86.

<sup>18</sup> A. A. Romanenko, 'Vasilii Kamenskii', in *PE* vii (2004), 203.

life was based on adherence to rules and regulations could scarcely venerate a saint whose life was all about violation. As a result it was hard for a holy fool to reveal himself fully in a monastery. His main venue was the city.<sup>19</sup>

The quantity of written sources sharply increases for the seventeenth century, so that we know of the existence of a mass of *iurodivye* whose predecessors are often lost to posterity. Some holy fools are mentioned in monastery calendars (Ilia of Danilov, for example)<sup>20</sup> some in icons (such as Trofim of Suzdal),<sup>21</sup> some in city chronicles. Thus in the local chronicle of the town of Solvychevodsk we read that ‘In the year 7100 [1592] Mikhail the Fool manifested himself, at a young age, at Sol[vychevodsk]; and he died on 5 May 7150 [1642] and was buried in the monastery of the Presentation of the Mother of God, with Foma and Rodion.’<sup>22</sup> Who Foma and Rodion may have been (and, indeed, who were the *iurodivye* Ioann and Vasilii of Solvychevodsk, also buried there),<sup>23</sup> we have no idea, yet all of them are entered as holy

<sup>19</sup> By contrast with urban *iurodstvo*, the Old Russian village had the potent tradition of ‘shrieking’ (*klikushestvo*). Ivan the Terrible wrote in his letter to the Stoglav Synod: ‘False prophets, men and women, and girls, and old women run from village to village, naked and barefoot, with their long hair unkempt, shaking and convulsing, and declaiming what St Anastasia and St Piatnitsa [Paraskeva] have told them [to do]’: E. B. Emchenko, *Stoglav: Issledovanie i tekst* (Moscow, 2000), 311. ‘Shriekers’ were predominantly women: see D. Worobec, *Possessed: Women, Witches and Demons in Imperial Russia* (De Kalb, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> K. D. Golovshchikov, *Gorod Danilov* (Iaroslavl, 1890), 2–3.

<sup>21</sup> (Hieromonk) Ioasaf, *Tserkovno-istoricheskoe opisanie suzdaľ'skikh dostopamiatnostei* (Chuguev, 1857), 121–2.

<sup>22</sup> *Problemy izucheniia traditsionnoi kul'tury severa* (Syktyvkar, 1992), 31.

<sup>23</sup> A. V. Pigin, ‘Vasilii Sol'vychevodskii’, in *PE vii* (2004), 218.

fools in various church calendars (cf. also p. 329).<sup>24</sup> The only difference between these characters and the aforementioned 'benign fool' Zinovii of Kashin may have been that for some reason this town did not have a tradition of venerating holy fools. The emergence of at least one local *iurodivyi* almost inevitably called forth a wave of imitators. Thus Ioann of Ustiug was followed by Prokopii and Leontii; Isidor of Rostov by Ioann, Artemii, Afanasii, and Stefan; Maksim of Moscow by Vasilii the Blessed, Ioann the Big Cap, Timofei, etc.; Ioann of Verkhoturie by Kozma and Simeon; Prokopii of Viatka by Antipa and Uar, of whom we know nothing at all.<sup>25</sup>

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In the more animated literary context of the seventeenth century, many vitae of holy fools appeared, whose authors were not concerned about smoothing over the extreme eccentricity of their protagonists, but, on the contrary, gave it maximum emphasis. This was what gave rise to the vita of Vasilii the Blessed which we have called the 'folk' version (see above, p. 307) and which certainly drew on popular religion, though the author was also capable of his own literary flourishes.<sup>26</sup> Vasilii's official vita survives in two

<sup>24</sup> Sergii, *Polnyi mesiatseslov Vostoka*, iii. 553, 559, 561, 577.

<sup>25</sup> *Uspenskii Trifonov monastyr' v g. Viatka* (Viatka, 1905), 15.

<sup>26</sup> I. Kuznetsov, *Sviatye blazhennye Vasilii i Ioann, Khrista radi moskovskie chudotvortsy* (Moscow, 1910), 306. The 'folk' character of this vita does not, however, make it immune to imitateness. Like Symeon of Emesa the saint forgives and heals girls who 'laughed at his nakedness, and were instantly struck blind' (84), etc.

redactions and dates from the 1580s.<sup>27</sup> The folk vita took on its final form around the middle or the second half of the seventeenth century.

By contrast with the vast majority of Russian vitae of holy fools, whose authors seem almost embarrassed by their own protagonists and tend to blunt the provocative-ness of their actions, in his apocryphal (folk) vita Vasiliia the Blessed revives the atmosphere of extreme mutual aggression between the holy fool and the world. He:

broke all ties with this life of temptation, as if they were gossamer...and he despised earthly wisdom and cast off bodily clothing...and chose for himself the untrammelled way of life, humiliated by people, like Andrew of Constantinople and Prokopii of Ustiug and Isidor of Rostov and many others. Emulating their lives, he made himself a fool for Christ's sake, and he began to knock over some people's loaves of bread, and sometimes pour away their drink, and do a lot of other such improper and offensive (*pokhabnaia*) things, for which he was kicked and spat upon and dragged along the ground and pulled by the hair, and he bore savage beatings and blows and insults and calumnies and abuse from malicious people.<sup>28</sup>

This vita is especially valuable because it gives us a glimpse of important aspects of holy foolery which are not apparent in traditional hagiography. In the first place, the holy fool inspires horror. When the saint was still working as an apprentice to a cobbler, he predicted a client's death, and

<sup>27</sup> L. M. Orlova, 'K voprosu o vremeni napisaniia zhitiia Vasiliia Blazhen-nogo', manuscript (Leningrad, 1989), 4–8.

<sup>28</sup> Kuznetsov, *Sviatye*, 80.

the prediction came true. The cobbler ‘remembered Vasilii’s words and that they had thus come to pass, and he was amazed and horrified, and from that moment Vasilii’s master began to respect and fear him.’<sup>29</sup> After Vasilii had read the thoughts of Ivan the Terrible, who had secular rather than divine matters on his mind during the liturgy, the tsar ‘thenceforth began to fear him.’<sup>30</sup> Second, the holy fool does not stop short even of murder. When an avaricious crowd of people was acting out a game in front of Vasilii for their own selfish ends, and one of them pretended to be dead, the saint satisfied their greed, but ‘when [Vasilii] had gone away, they joyfully tried to wake their friend who was pretending to be dead, but they discovered that—by order of the saint and for his own deceit—he really was dead.’<sup>31</sup> Third, the holy fool behaves insolently to the tsar: ‘the blessed [Vasilii] poured out of the window a cup given to him by the tsar; the pious tsar gave him another, and this too he poured away.’<sup>32</sup> In imitation of Nikola of Pskov, he saves Novgorod from persecution (cf. above, p. 300).<sup>33</sup> Fourth—and crucially—this text presents in its most dramatic form the idea which lies at the root of holy foolery in general:

Vasilii . . . would walk about the whole city, and past certain houses . . . in which people lived piously and righteously, concerned for their own souls, assiduous in the chanting of prayers and in the veneration of the Holy Writ; and here the blessed one would stop and gather stones and throw them at the wall of the house, hitting it and making a great noise. Yet when he walked past a house

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 82–3.

where drunkenness and dancing and depravity were performed and where other foul and disgusting things were done, here the saint would pause and would kiss the wall of that house.<sup>34</sup>

The explanation given subsequently is that the demons flee from the house of the righteous (Vasilii's stones are aimed at the demons), but angels depart from the house of the sinful (Vasilii is kissing the angels).<sup>35</sup> This motif is further embodied in the *vita* in the extraordinary tale of how a certain deacon asked Vasilii to take him on as a pupil:

And whenever Vasilii ordered this deacon to commit some foolery (*iurodstvennoe*), he would obey the blessed [Vasilii]'s order and commit some highly offensive acts (*pokhabnaia*), and for these offensive actions he endured . . . many beatings.<sup>36</sup>

The *vita* then tells of how the Enemy of humankind bribed a certain icon-painter to paint his own (the devil's) likeness, but to overpaint it with an icon of the Mother of God. The icon was displayed at the St Barbara Gates, 'and through that newly painted icon of the Mother of God wonders and signs and healings occurred . . . in fact these wondrous things were worked through the icon by Satan's actions but with God's permission'. The icon's fame spread throughout Russia:

With the aid of the Holy Spirit Vasilii saw through the devil's scheming and actions and the way that the devil tempted the faithful with the wonders worked through the icon . . . And he

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. A. G. Barag *et al.*, *Sravnitel'nyi ukazatel' siuzhetov: Vostochnoslavianskaia skazka* (Leningrad, 1979), no. 795.

<sup>36</sup> Kuznetsov, *Sviaty*e, 86.

ordered his pupil to take a large stone and to strike the icon firmly with it, so as to smash the icon. But the saint's pupil had doubts about this, and was afraid to break the icon. So the saint himself took a large stone and hit the icon firmly . . . and split it in two.<sup>37</sup>

After being savagely beaten by the people, the holy fool was brought to court, where he declared: 'the wonders were worked through the devil's wiles, to tempt the faithful'. The depiction of Satan was revealed, the artist was executed, and Vasilii was released. But 'he sent his pupil away because of this disobedience'.<sup>38</sup>

In this curious story we can discern the familiar motifs of education through temptation, and of the inner vision which only the holy fool possessed, but here it achieves a level of intensity unknown in Byzantine hagiography. The reader, like the unfortunate deacon, is forced to make a choice between two of the most sacred things: an icon and a holy fool. Nor is there any way of verifying the presence the devil's tricks, since for unexplained reasons God himself has decided to complicate the choice by allowing the offending icon to work miracles. Nor, indeed, can the sanctity of the holy fool be verified by rational means. The diabolical icon is like the *iurodivyi* himself, turned inside-out. Here is a parable of the very essence of holy foolery and of Orthodox perception more broadly: as we said, not only is the world not what it seems, but its true essence is the diametrical opposite of its appearance.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>39</sup> See S. A. Ivanov, "Adopisnye ikony" v kontekste pozdnesrednevekovoï russkoi kul'tury, in A. Lidov (ed.), *Chudotvornaia ikona v Vizantii i drevnei Rusi* (Moscow, 1996), 385–91.



Fig. 11.1 Andrew the Fool (St Neophytos Hermitage, Cyprus, 1183). Cf. p. 202.

Nor, apparently, is the surviving text the most extreme version. There are allusions to another variant which was destroyed by the authorities because, in the reticent phrase



of the church historian, 'it exposed the improprieties and abuses of the contemporary clergy'.<sup>40</sup>

\* \* \*

The other seventeenth-century vitae of holy fools are not so extravagant. Moreover, their protagonists no longer inhabit a fairly-tale world, but an eminently recognizable context of down-to-earth everyday life. Almost all the holy fools are peasants who arrive in the nearest town, where they live a life of beggary. Such is the vita of Prokopii of Viatka. The first draft of this text was probably composed soon after Prokopii's death in 1628, although the final version dates from the late 1670s.<sup>41</sup> The author borrows a lot from previous hagiography, especially from the vita of Prokopii of Ustiug: the saint lived 'imitating the lives of the blessed men of old—I mean the wonder-workers Andrew of Constantinople, and Prokopii of Ustiug and Vasili of Moscow'.<sup>42</sup> This 'imitation' is presumably the fruit of the author's own erudition, since we can hardly suppose that the peasant boy Prokopii Plushkov from a remote village could actually read the texts listed. However, alongside passages copied from literary models, we also find details suggestive of an authentic reality: dozens of names of real inhabitants of Viatka, the names of churches and streets and districts,

<sup>40</sup> Kuznetsov, *Sviatye*, 29.

<sup>41</sup> S. A. Ivanov, 'Zhitie Prokopii Viatskogo: Editio Princeps', in *Florilegium: K 60-letiiu B. N. Flori* (Moscow, 2000), 71.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

references to events in local history.<sup>43</sup> In this context the life and miracles of the town idiot are, in a sense, even more striking.

On one occasion Prokopii kills a baby to resurrect it later on (see below, p. 402). Another episode from the *vita* is also intriguing. Like any self-respecting holy fool, Prokopii had a confidant—a priest called Ioann—who was the only person to whom he spoke ‘like a person and not like a fool’. This is a familiar hagiographical cliché. The peculiarity here is that the priest Ioann Kalashnikov of the church of the Ascension was a real person. How, then, should we respond to the following reported occurrence?

Once Prokopii came to his spiritual father, Ioann, and the two of them sat down to dine together. When they had eaten, the blessed Prokopii took a knife and began to brandish it, and he held the knife to [Ioann’s] head and to his chest, and everyone was horrified and thought he would stab the priest with that knife.<sup>44</sup>

Although on this occasion all ended well, the episode is a reminder of the price one might have to pay for excessively close relations with a madman. The priest Ioann seems to have taken upon himself the role of the holy fool’s confidant on the basis of his reading, without realizing that he was not in fact dealing with a literary figure. In a hagiographical perspective—regardless of how the hagiographer tries to explain it—aggression against the priest is semantically

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 84–6.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

significant as a sign of rebellion against the Church and against the very institution of the 'confidant'.

\* \* \*

The 1698 vita of Simon of Iurevets (d. 1594) is full of aggression. This text remains unpublished, and we have to make do with a paraphrase.<sup>45</sup> The saint was born in the village of Odolevo in the Kostroma province, and lived for fifteen years in the village of Elnat, and then in the town of Iurevets on the Volga. The hagiographer represents him as hyperactive:

Sometimes . . . he would come to the tavern so as to spend the long winter night there; but he did not come in order to fall asleep but in order to endure abuse and beatings and mockery. The local drunks, disturbed by him (he would not let them sleep) stripped him and drove him out. Often the blessed one would go to taverns with the intention that someone should abuse him as a fool. The people there would bring him vodka . . . From some he accepted it . . . and pretended to drink, but poured it over himself . . . Sometimes, if anyone in the tavern was drinking and did not offer some to him, he would take away [their] vodka forcibly and pour it out onto the ground. All this he did so as to conceal his voluntary foolery.<sup>46</sup>

The menacing character of the saint's foolery can be seen in the episode where he 'came to the house of the governor

<sup>45</sup> I. Pospelov, *Blazhennyi Simon Khrista radi iurodivyi Iur'evskii chudotvorets* (Kostroma, 1879). In collaboration with A. A. Turilov, I am currently preparing a new critical edition of this vita based on MSS: GIM, Muzeinoe, no. 1510; Iaroslavl, Drevlekhranilishche, no. 15199, 17108.

<sup>46</sup> Pospelov, *Blazhennyi Simon*, 9.

Tretiak Treguba and behaved indecently'; but when he was thrown out he predicted the death of his hostess, and this very soon came to pass. On another occasion Simon strangled the priest Alipii with his own hands (like Ioann in Viatka, Alipii seems to have behaved uncritically towards a real madman, as towards a hagiographical personage). The priest, incidentally, was subsequently revived.<sup>47</sup> The political aggression of the *iurodivyi* is amusingly illustrated in the episode (cf. above, p. 302) when Simon extinguished a fire in the city by slapping the governor on the cheek 'so firmly that many people standing nearby heard the sound of the blow'.<sup>48</sup> The holy fool's boldness eventually cost him his life: the governor Fedor Petelin and his servants beat him to death. Simon was buried in the Epiphany monastery in Iurevets, but there was no talk of his miracles until 1635, some forty years later; and his *vita* appeared later still, in 1698, when hagiography in this genre was fading away (cf. below, p. 350).

Not all holy fools were as bloodthirsty as these two. We have already seen that Solvychegodsk had a rich tradition of holy foolery. The last in the long list of local *iurodivye* turned out to be luckier than his predecessors: Ioann Samsonovich died in 1669, and his story was copied out in 1789 by Aleksei Soskin, a townsman of Solvychegodsk, as part of his local chronicle. The original anonymous hagiographer was clearly an eyewitness to the saint's life,<sup>49</sup> and the text includes non-standard details. Ioann Samsonovich's *vita* shows how

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 12, 16.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>49</sup> D. M. Bulanin, 'Zhitie Ioanna Samsonovicha', *SKKDR XVII v.*, iv. 394.

hagiographical discourse tries—not always with success—to ‘digest’ the authentic particulars of abnormal behaviour.

Ioann Samsonovich was of noble birth . . . While hurrying to the Teriushinskii forest, he used to make small rings out of small birch branches; making three at a time, he threw them away on the ground. And he ripped his shirt to shreds and also threw it away on the ground. People often saw the pieces. Stefan, priest at the church of the Transfiguration, gathered up from the ground those little ripped shreds of the blessed one’s shirt. Sometimes the blessed one wept, or made incomprehensible utterances that were impossible to understand. I think he was concealing his path, and hiding [it] from the priest, in front of whom he wanted to play the fool; but the priest revered him greatly . . . If ever he asked anyone for bread at their house or for a kopek at the market, they were only too pleased to give him the bread or the money . . . Sometimes if he received a kopek from somebody he would bend it with his teeth and break it in half and throw it on the ground and go away. Beggars would follow him and pick it up and divide it among themselves. I think this was the blessed [Ioann’s] way of giving alms, for this is what had been done by that ancient saint, the blessed Andrew of Constantinople. And the blessed Ioann used to go to the market traders and ask them for little bronze crosses, such as Christians wear on their breasts . . . And they were willing and highly delighted to give him what he wanted. And these crosses, too, he would bite in half and throw away. But I do not know his intentions. He also asked these people for wooden spoons, and he did the same thing: breaking them in two and throwing them on the ground. God alone knows what his purpose was.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Aleksei Soskin, *Istoriia goroda Soli Vyehodskoi*, ed. A. N. Vlasov (Syktyvkar, 1997), 165–7.

The *vita* also contains a number of tales of Ioann's prescience and of his predictions—given to various people—which came true.<sup>51</sup> In 1656, for example, he predicted a fire. The theme of the holy fool's independence from those in power is faintly echoed in the account of how Ioann Samsonovich refused to take money from the governor Bogdan Beshentsov. Such episodes are part of the traditional fabric of hagiography, and the authorial voice therefore sounds confident on such matters. But the intonation changes when the author has to deal with actions which everybody finds memorable but which do not fit any standard pious interpretation. Here a note of uncertainty creeps in. The hagiographer wants to assimilate Ivan Samsonovich to Andrew the Fool, though even he understands that Andrew did not bite through coins or crosses. In contemporary Solvychevodsk it was as if the air was heavy with the expectation of holy foolery, and neither churchmen nor the lay public could fail to be affected by it: future 'relics' of Ioann were collected while he was still alive, and he was given a home first in an 'old cell' and then in the kitchen of the monastery of the Presentation of the Mother of God:

The archimandrite asked him where his body should be buried. He prayed and said that they should bury him together with the holy fools... And [the archimandrite] buried his honoured remains in that house of our sacred Lady the Mother of God... in the church of the Ascension, near the sanctuary wall, together with the other, previously venerated saints Mikhail, Foma, and Irodion, on Friday 29 January [1669—S.I.].<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 167–8.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

The saints in this list (cf. above, p. 317) have been less fortunate than Ioann. However, Aleksei Soskin affirms that their veneration lasted at least until his own time, i.e. the second half of the eighteenth century: ‘There is a popular rumour that the saints listed here did actually exist... And some people still perform commemorations for them.’<sup>53</sup>

In the vita of Andrei of Totma (1639–73),<sup>54</sup> the contrast between the main parts of the text and the description of specific events is obvious. In the main sections nobody oversteps the bounds of hagiographic stereotypes: the saint ‘adopted foolery (*buistvo*), walked barefoot in winter... and when Christ-loving [people] brought him such food as he needed, the blessed one accepted a little from them and gave away the rest to the poor in secret, so that nobody would know of his almsgiving.’<sup>55</sup> On this basis we might even doubt whether Andrei really existed; but doubts are dispelled by the descriptions of the miracles which he performed in his lifetime. In one of them ‘barbarian people from the Siberian land met him and saw that the blessed one was barefoot in the snow... and they recognized him as a man of God. And their elder, Azhbakei, approached him and entreated him for a cure and gave him gold.’ The holy fool ran away, but the barbarian rubbed his eyes with snow from where Andrei has been standing, and he was restored to health.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, Andrei appears to be the only holy

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> A. A. Romanova, ‘Andrei Totemskii’, in *PE* ii (2001), 390–1.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Povest’ o zhitii Andreia Totemskogo’, in *Pamiatniki pis’mennosti v muzeiakh Vologodskoi oblasti* (Vologda, 1989), 268–9.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 269–70.

fool who did not wish to be mocked by children: 'he could not abide foul language, and he chased them away'. Where is the holy foolery in this? By now it had become simply a modish 'brand'.<sup>57</sup>

Apart from the vitae of holy fools as such, in the seventeenth century 'ordinary' saints sometimes acquired a smattering of the equivalent attributes, since hagiographers were now less concerned with the purity of the genre than with entertainment value, less with liturgical function than with the interests of individual readers. Examples include the vitae of Ferapont of Monzensk (who speaks in riddles and refuses to tell the citizens of Kostroma his name) and Trifon of Viatka ('the blessed [Trifon] was of strange appearance and wore poor and threadbare garments which barely covered his flesh, but his manner was plain and meek...and he was continually lamenting and he often wept', on account of which he endures the mockery of the inhabitants of the town of Orel).<sup>58</sup>

\* \* \*

In the seventeenth century the theme of holy foolery spilled over from hagiography into related genres. Such,

<sup>57</sup> Another Totma saint, Maksim, led the same way of life for forty-five years. He died in 1650 and was buried in the church of the Ascension in Varnitsa. No vita of him was written, and two early versions of an account of his graveside miracles were lost in 1676 and 1680 respectively. Only fragments survive, from a redaction dating from the early eighteenth century: A. A. Romanova, 'Chudesa Maksima Totemskogo iurodivogo', *SKKDR XVII v.*, iv. 240–1.

<sup>58</sup> M. D. Kagan-Tarkovskaia, 'Razvitie zhitiino-biograficheskogo zhanra v XVII veke', *TODRL* 49 (1996), 127–8.



for example, is the tale by Nikodim Tipikaris about the misfortunes of a monk whom the Archangel Michael helps to escape from his sinful life. On his order, ‘suddenly there appeared nearby the blessed Timofei who lived in Kulishki in Moscow and was standing there playing the fool for God’s sake. The Lord’s Archangel told him: “God’s slave Timofei, go to Solovki with him”.’<sup>59</sup> It is noteworthy that in the original version of this tale, the spiritual guide of the sinner’s soul around the holy places was not the holy fool Timofei, but ‘somebody by the name of Elisei who went around Moscow for God’s sake.’<sup>60</sup> Apparently, editors replaced names with those that were current and familiar to the Moscow reader of the tale at any given moment.

Even more important for us is the *Tale of the Appearance of the Icon of the Mother of God on Sinichia Hill*. The protagonist is a peasant boy from the Pskov region named Timofei: ‘many called him an *urod* and said he was foolish.’<sup>61</sup> The author gives no hint as to whether or not he shares this view. The *Tale* relates how in 1563, Timofei had a vision of an icon of the Mother of God, as a result of which he fell into a peculiar state, and after a second such vision he began to

<sup>59</sup> O. A. Belobrova, “‘Povest’ dushepoleznaia” Nikodima Solovetskogo’, *TODRL* 21 (1965), 209–10.

<sup>60</sup> A. V. Pigin, ‘K izucheniiu povesti Nikodima Tipikarisa Solovetskogo o nekoem inoke’, *Knizhnye tsentry Drevnei Rusi: Solovetskii monastyr’* (St Petersburg, 2001), 308, cf. 287.

<sup>61</sup> V. I. Okhotnikova, ‘Novye materialy po literaturnoi istorii Povesti o iavlennii ikon na Sinich’ei gore’, *TODRL* 49 (1996), 381. The version which contains a passage in praise of holy foolery seems to have emerged after 1650: see V. M. Kirillin, ‘Novye materialy dlia istorii knizhno-literaturnoi traditsii srednevekovogo Pskova: Sviatogorskaia povest’’, in *Knizhnye tsentry Drevnei Rusi: XVII vek* (St Petersburg, 1994), 161.

prophecy. 'He went to the town and announced these things to the clergy and to the people. But they did not listen, but called him *urodiv*, and some abused him greatly... Most inattentive and unbelieving of all was a priest named Nikita, who abused him and called him an *urod* and a madman.'<sup>62</sup> Miracles were wrought, however, so the people believed in the truth of Timofei's words, and they built a chapel over the spot where the icon had manifested itself:

Concerning the blessed Timofei, they say that he went to Novgorod and began to preach... that the archbishop of Great Novgorod and the people should make a pilgrimage to the region of Pskov, to Sinichia hill. And some of the people believed in him, and others did not believe him but mocked him and abused him as with the prophets of old and the *salloi*, the blessed fools for Christ's sake, as happens now: the mad mock God's servants and do not believe what they say... And the archbishop was told about Timofei, and the boy was brought to him and interrogated. As before, Timofei told him about all that God had ordered; and [the archbishop] did not believe him; for many people who believe themselves wise, puffed in pomp and glory, claimed that what God's servant said was a lie, and they sent him to prison where he died after martyr-like suffering.<sup>63</sup>

The author points to no specific 'holy foolish' features of Timofei's behaviour. Nor is Timofei ever actually called a holy fool (he is compared more to the prophets); yet images of *salloi* creep into the narrative nevertheless. The motif becomes stronger as the tale progresses:

<sup>62</sup> Okhotnikova, 'Novye materialy', 382–3.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 385–6.

Even thus, now, in the last days before the destruction of the land of Rus, many blessed men and women, holy fools, have appeared throughout the cities; and whenever any of them have foretold the destruction of a city, it has come to pass . . . As in olden times the prophets of God, so in the new [age of] Grace the blessed fools for Christ's sake, Andrew and Symeon, appeared in the East among the Greeks; as Andrew himself said, there is no city or country on earth without a *sallos*. Happy is the town in which a *sallos* has been, and woe to the town where there has been no *sallos*, since it has nobody to predict what will happen to the town, be it famine, pestilence or fire or revolt or an attack by the enemies, by God's will, so that sensible people may hear of God's punishment and may repent, as people repented when they heard from the prophet Jonah of the destruction of Nineveh. So also in our land of Rus, God has not left His people without such as these, but they exist in many towns and after their deaths they are glorified by God; just as here, in the renowned city of Pskov, not many years before the ruin of the Rus Land and the conflagration in Pskov and civil strife and the attacks of the pagans—there were blessed holy fools for Christ's sake: men about whom I will tell a little. When the great tsar Ioann Vasilevich entered Pskov, Nikola assuaged his fury. Mark, the blessed dweller in the wilderness, [foretold] fire and civil strife; Ioann the Recluse, who was silent and who ate no bread but only fish, predicted the city's deliverance from the pagan foreigners; [these people] are buried at the Holy Trinity. These are the people—these who live as God wills and who prophesy about our future—who should be believed; and it is not right to trust pagans, as many of us who are called Christians now go and consult pagan Latins.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Okhotnikova, 'Novye materialy', 386–7.

Here we see that, as far as this hagiographer is concerned, holy foolery has become virtually synonymous with prophecy, and hagiography itself has turned into public advocacy. In the *Tale*, holy foolery is invoked as a symbol of opposition to the 'Latins'. It is likewise clear that the ecclesiastical authorities were deeply hostile to eccentric prophets: Timofei paid for his preaching with his life.

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In the seething social and ecclesiastical ferment of the mid-seventeenth century, the role of holy foolery was also changed. Religious dissidents began to exploit the familiar image of the *iurodivyi* for their own purposes. In 1643, for example, after impassioned outbursts in the Sejm, Afanasii Filippovich, an opponent of the Uniate Church in Poland, was imprisoned. When he managed to get out, he played the fool: running naked in the streets, wearing a cowl, beating himself with a rod, and so on; on account of which he was stripped of his office.<sup>65</sup> But the most famous instances of political holy foolery are provided by the behaviour of the Old Believers, the archpriest Avvakum and his circle. Avvakum's own writings are remarkable for the way in which his highly naturalistic representations of ordinary, everyday behaviour are intertwined with hagiographic topoi.

And when I had prepared the letter . . . I sent it to the tsar with my spiritual son Feodor the Fool (who was later strangled by the apostates, who hung him on a gallows at Mezen). He boldly

<sup>65</sup> I. G. Moroz, 'Afanasii', in *PE* iii (2001), 705.

approached the tsar's carriage with the letter... and then, in the church, he appeared again before the tsar and began to play the fool (*uchal iurodstvom shalovat'*). The tsar was angry and ordered him to be sent to the Chudov monastery. There the archimandrite Pavel put him in irons, but by God's will the fetters fell apart on his feet... And he... climbed into the hot stove after baking and sat bare-buttocked on its floor and gathered the crumbs and ate them. And the monks were horrified.<sup>66</sup>

Clambering into a hot stove reminds one of the vita of Ioann of Ustiug and, through him, of Symeon. Yet Feodor's bare buttocks breathe—in a manner of speaking—fresh life into the hagiographical stereotype. Feodor's boldness in front of the tsar reflects the established Russian tradition that the *iurodivyi* enjoys special political immunity, but to test its effectiveness a person had to risk his own life.

By Avvakum's time holy foolery had turned into a worn cliché, a symbol merely of itself; yet despite this tendency the

<sup>66</sup> N. K. Gudzii (ed.), *Zhitie protopopa Avvakuma*, (Moscow, 1997), 120–1. At about the same time, the *iurodivyi* Gurii of Solovki was engaged in similar experiments. Gurii 'lived in a bakery and, after bread had been taken out, would get inside the intolerable heat of the bread-baking furnace, close the mouth of the furnace and stand there as if enjoying the coolness' ('Povest' ob osade Solovetskogo monastyrja', in *Pamiatniki literatury Drevnei Rusi: XVII vek*, i (Moscow, 1988), 158). This Gurii appears in a number of texts; in one of them he gives his blessing to the monks of the Solovki monastery to resist the tsar's troops (the monastery refused to obey Nikon's decree introducing new rituals). 'He was asked this question: "You are not a priest, are you, so why do you bless us with your hand?" He responded: "I may not be a priest, but I mean well, and what Christ our Father gives, nobody can take away"' (E. M. Iukhimenko, "O vremeni napisaniia Semenom Denisovym "Istorii o ottsakh i stradal'tsakh solovetskikh", in *Knizhnye tsentry Drevnei Rusi: Solovetskii monastyr'* (St Petersburg, 2001), 488 n. 16).

archpriest over and over again revitalizes the stereotype with the earthy, grisly prose of life:

This Feodor laboured hard indeed: playing the fool by day, and all night long in prayer and tears . . . As the two of us lay in the back room, he would often lie for an hour or two and then stand up, make a thousand prostrations and sit on the floor; or stand weeping for three hours or so. He was ill, poor fellow, with the strain. Once three *arshins* long [= approx. 2 m] of his gut issued out of him; and another time five *arshins* [= approx. 3.5m]. And in his sickness, there he was measuring his intestines! With him you laugh, you cry! In Ustiug for five years without a break he went barefoot in the frost, wandering around in just his shirt. I saw it myself . . . He'd knock his feet on the bricks like cabbages, and in the morning they'd stop hurting . . . He had such fervent faith in Christ!<sup>67</sup>

While the hagiographical persona can have no existence beyond that with which he is endowed by his author—and while the fastidious outsider, be he Niketas Choniates or Giles Fletcher, would rather not delve into the nuances because he is predisposed to suspect deceit where others see holy foolery—in Avvakum's depiction, sympathetic but not insipid, Feodor becomes not just a persona but a person. He protrudes from the flat surface of hagiography like a relief carving from the flat surface of the stone. And this gives us a unique opportunity to look at the life of the *iurodivyi*, perhaps not fully from within, but at any rate 'sideways on'. And what do we find? Feodor's foolery is 'for real', yet he also plays at it. He is simultaneously both sincere

<sup>67</sup> Gudzii, *Zhitie protopopa Avvakuma*, 127–8.

and calculating. In Ustiug his feet really did freeze; but Feodor, himself from Ustiug, also chooses his specific type of foolery with a view to convention, geared to the expectations of locals who were well acquainted with the vitae of previous Ustiug saintly fools: Prokopii, Ioann, Leontii. Avvakum tells us what prompted Feodor to adopt holy foolery:

His father was a very rich man in Novgorod... And his foolery derived from a vow to God... While at sea in a boat... he fell into the sea, and his feet were ensnared in a noose... and the vow came to mind... and thenceforth he began his wandering. On arriving home he spent his life in chastity... There were many struggles with depravity, but the Lord preserved him.<sup>68</sup>

Here we catch just a glimpse of another aspect of holy foolery, about which Avvakum is obviously reticent. Princess Fedosia Morozova, the famous supporter of the Old Believers and Avvakum's spiritual daughter, bitterly complains, in letters to her mentor, about Feodor the Fool, who apparently abused her hospitality with a display of sexual aggression towards herself or her sister Evdokiia Urusova. Morozova complains that, in the ensuing scene, she also was insulted by Feodor, in a way which 'not only cannot be set down in writing, but cannot even be stated in words'.<sup>69</sup> In his reply, Avvakum supports Feodor.<sup>70</sup> Apparently he 'reads' the latter's behaviour as a normal form of holy foolery. Yet

<sup>68</sup> Ia. L. Barskov, *Pamiatniki pervykh let russkogo staroobriadchestva, Letopis' zaniatii imp. Arkheograficheskoi komissii za 1911 g. 24* (St Petersburg, 1912), 201.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>70</sup> Gudzii, *Zhitie protopopa Avvakuma*, 313–15.

Morozova (who was also well acquainted with the hagiographical canon) would scarcely have risked a rift with Feodor, her spiritual comrade-in-arms, nor would she have risked incurring the displeasure of Avvakum, her revered teacher, unless she had solid grounds for so doing. Something untoward must have happened. Perhaps Feodor was motivated less by his vow than by the odd way of life which holy foolery demanded, in which excessive mortification of the flesh compensated for moments of carnal indulgence.

Pavel, bishop of Kolomna, used holy foolery as a form of political propaganda (and probably also as a way of acquiring the traditional immunity). The Old Believer deacon Fedor wrote that '[Patriarch] Nikon abused [Pavel] criminally, stripped him of his office and exiled him to the Khutyn monastery . . . But that blessed bishop Pavel began to act the fool "for Christ's sake". Nikon heard of this and sent his servants to the Novgorod region where Pavel roamed. They found him walking in a deserted place, and they seized him like wolves seizing the meek lamb of Christ, and they beat him to death and burnt his body with fire.'<sup>71</sup>

Another holy fool, the little-known Ioann the Second of Solovki, 'came to Archangel, was arrested . . . as a thief and a spy and was asked where he came from and who he was . . . after many tortures and wounds he was sentenced to burning'. It would seem that this tale is reminiscent of the vitae of Basil the Younger and Cyril the Phileotes (cf. pp. 154, 208), yet in this case the end is tragic: 'As he was placed at the

<sup>71</sup> L. V. Titova, 'Poslanie diakona Fedora synu Maksimu', in *Khristianstvo i tserkov' v Rossii feodal' nogo perioda* (Novosibirsk, 1989), 100.



stake, he turned east and began to pray; he was enveloped in flames and fell to the ground.<sup>72</sup> It is never explained why the holy fool was executed, but it may be suggested that the reason was his adherence to the Old Belief. Less tragic is the case of another holy fool, Afanasii: first he played the fool, later he entered a monastery under the name of Avraamii, and he went on to become a fairly well known poet in his time.<sup>73</sup> In this instance ‘holy foolery could be a form of intellectual criticism.’<sup>74</sup> Thereby, of course, *iurodstvo* ceased to function as itself.

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Both Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich<sup>75</sup> and patriarch Nikon were initially fond of holy fools. Paul of Aleppo, who came to Moscow as part of an Antiochene (i.e. post-Byzantine) patriarchal embassy, describes his reception by the patriarch thus:

That day the patriarch seated next to himself at table a new *salos*, who continually walks the streets naked. People put great faith in him and revere him above all measure as a saint and a virtuous man. His name is Kiprian. They call him a ‘Man of God’. The patriarch [Nikon] was always giving him food with his own hands,

<sup>72</sup> (Hieromonk) Nikodim, *Vernoie i kratkoe ischislenie prepodobnykh otets Solovetskikh* (St Petersburg, 1900), 20.

<sup>73</sup> A. M. Panchenko, *Russkaia stikhotvornaia kul'tura XVII veka* (Leningrad, 1973), 82–102.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>75</sup> He had by his side his ‘personal’ holy fool, Vasiliï the Barefoot, who was highly influential, see: *Sobranie pisem tsaria Alekseia Mikhailovicha* (Moscow, 1856), 167, 198–9.

and giving him drink from the silver goblets from which he himself drank; and he even drained the final few drops himself, for the blessing. He carried on like this until the end of the meal. We were surprised.<sup>76</sup>

The Antiochene hierarchs evidently expressed their ‘surprise’ to Nikon. For them this was the antipathetic vestige of a popular Christianity.<sup>77</sup> It is surely ironic that Makarios, Patriarch of Antioch and thereby a distant successor to Theodore Balsamon, should have engaged in the same struggle as Balsamon (cf. p. 213)—six centuries later, and in remote Moscow rather than in Constantinople.

The upshot was that Nikon distanced himself from Kiprian, who was later exiled and executed. The very fact that holy foolery was so detested by the ‘Greeks’ made it a kind of badge of honour for the Old Believers,<sup>78</sup> especially in view of its mass popular appeal. And this, in turn, ensured that *iurodstvo* was relegated to the margins as a form of protest.

At the 1666/7 Council the Church issued a special canon officially condemning ‘pseudo-*iurodstvo*’; the canon could obviously be applied to any sort of holy foolery. The rule introduced by the Moscow Council only partially conforms

<sup>76</sup> *Puteshestvie antiokhiiskogo patriarkha Makariia v Moskvu v XVII veke* (Moscow, 2005), 509.

<sup>77</sup> See A. S. Lavrov, ‘Iurodstvo i “reguliarnoe gosudarstvo” (konets XVII–pervaia polovina XVIII v.)’, *TODRL* 52 (2001), 433.

<sup>78</sup> A. M. Panchenko, *Russkaia istoriia i kul'tura* (St Petersburg, 1999), 400. In addition to above-mentioned Gurii, the ‘Old-Believing’ defenders of Solovki monastery were inspired by a certain Ioann the Holy Fool who seems to be the one referred to as ‘the First’ (see (Hieromonk) Nikodim, *Vernoie i kratkoe ischisleniie*, 19) as well as Ioann Pokhabnyi (see E. M. Iukhimenko, ‘O vremeni napisaniia’, 487, 489)—unless the two are in fact the same person.

with the earlier regulation of the Trullo Council. The specific nature of *iurodstvo* is well summarized in it: 'those... who repudiated the world and sought to scoff at the world and thus assume a holy fool's image, like Andrew and Symeon and other fools for God's sake, did not live and act the way today's [holy fools] do: for they did not seek the world's glory. Nor did they frequent the households and chambers of noble and distinguished people.'<sup>79</sup> As we see, the Council did not regard social protest as the main feature of *iurodivye*; rather its ruling condemned sponging on noble people and staying in their households. One should recall that even Vasilii the Blessed, whose *vitae* emphasized his homelessness, in fact, according to the *Piskarevskii Chronicle*, 'lived in [the Moscow district] Kulishki in the home of a noble widow Stepanida Iurlova'.<sup>80</sup> It is noteworthy that the veneration of this saint, who had been the official patron of the tsar's family and coffers, steadily declined in the course of the second half of the seventeenth century: in 1659 his commemoration on 2 August was discontinued in the Kremlin Dormition Cathedral; from 1677 the patriarchs no longer officiated at the Church of the Intercession (*Pokrov*) on the Ditch, and from 1682 this remained the only venue where Vasilii was commemorated at all.<sup>81</sup>

Nevertheless, the cult of holy fools had its own momentum and could not be closed down instantaneously.<sup>82</sup> Yet

<sup>79</sup> *Deianiia Moskovskikh Soborov 1666 i 1667 g.* (Moscow, 1893), fo. 28.

<sup>80</sup> *Piskarevskii Letopisets*, ed. O. A. Iakovleva (Moscow, 1955), 200.

<sup>81</sup> K. Iu. Erusalimskii, 'Vasilii Blazhennii', in *PE* vii (2004), 129.

<sup>82</sup> In the tale of the plot of the tsarevna Sofia in 1691 we come across a certain *iurodivyi*, Ivashka Grigor'ev, whose punishment was comparatively

because of the persecutions, holy fools whose cults only began to emerge in the seventeenth century did not manage to acquire biographies. In many cases we know nothing but the names: Georgii of Novgorod, Konstantin of Torzhok, Ioann of Mozhaisk, Kiprian of Karachev, Kozma of Verkhoturie, Leontii of Ustiug, and others. Even less evidence is left of some others: in 1708 a Dutch traveller, Cornelis de Bruin, made a drawing and a description of an Archangel holy fool, 'who is believed to be a saint by his compatriots. He . . . wandered stark naked about the country as far as Vologda, often appeared this way at markets, in churches, and even in the governor's courtyard. He seemed . . . insane . . . to me, yet at the same time, I am sure that his only goal was to make a living by pretending that he is a saint . . . His hair and beard were tangled, he never used a comb . . .'<sup>83</sup> The foreigner, unfamiliar with the paradigm of holy foolery, does not notice that his tale is contradictory: if this man is insane, he can scarcely be mercenary, and if he is mercenary, then it is unclear why, after the first drawing session, 'all my attempts to lure him again to my place were vain. This surprised me, for I generously rewarded him the first time.' Apparently this nameless holy fool firmly adhered to the rules of a game of which de Bruin was unaware.

Despite the absence of *vitae*, we still have quite vivid scraps of information about a few of the *iurodivye*. For

mild and who was not blamed for his gloomy predictions: see D. S. Likhachev, A. M. Panchenko, and N. V. Ponyrko, *Smekh v Drevnei Rusi* (Leningrad, 1984), 141–5.

<sup>83</sup> Cornelis de Bruin, *Reizen over Moskovie* (Amsterdam, 1714), 467 and drawing no. 253.

example, Afanasii (Stakhii) of Rostov (d. 1690) was immensely popular in his city: he gave prophecies and wore fetters; in his chapel visitors were subsequently allowed to pick up two of his weights, each of 65 kg, and a 24 kg iron undershirt; yet we have no vita.<sup>84</sup>

We might note in passing that the wearing of heavy fetters became an almost obligatory attribute of holy fools in the seventeenth century.<sup>85</sup> A contemporary prayer-book beseeches: 'Lord, remember the souls of them that labour for Your sake in holy foolery and in the wearing of fetters.'<sup>86</sup> The 1666 Council, in its regulation against *iurodstvo*, focused in particularly on the following peculiarity: 'Some are bound in irons... The blessed fathers of former times did not live thus... Then, any monk or hermit who wore fetters in his toils for God would certainly never have revealed this to anybody... Our modern hermits and fetter-wearers are fakes and are not fools for God.'<sup>87</sup> The Fathers of the Council were right. Except for a few marginal cases (see above, p. 221), Byzantine holy fools did not wear fetters. That fetters came to seem necessary is a measure of the fading of that special aura which had earlier surrounded indecency and hooliganism in themselves. Thus later holy foolery sought new forms of legitimation.

<sup>84</sup> Andronik (Trubachev), 'Afanasii', in *PE*, iii (2001), 707–8.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. *Zapiski Stanislava Nemoevskogo (1606–1608)* (Moscow, 1907), 242.

<sup>86</sup> 'Sinodik Kolesnikovskoi tserkvi', *Obshchestvo liubitelei drevnei piśmenosti* 110/1 (1896), f. 107.

<sup>87</sup> *Deianiia Moskovskikh Soborov* fo. 28–28<sup>v</sup>.

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*Iurodstvo* Meets Modernity

‘Official’ holy foolery was struck a heavy blow by Peter the Great, who loathed the *iurodivye*:

Any sensible person can see how many thousands of such lazy beggars can be found in Russia . . . who devour the labour of others with their impudence and their feigned humility . . . and who drive ordinary simple people insane. . . . They slander high authorities, yet they themselves take on no Christian responsibilities. They go into church but think it has nothing to do with them, so long as they can carry on their shrieking in front of the church.<sup>1</sup>

The ‘Pledge given by senior clergy at their promotion to this rank’ (1716, item 6) states: ‘I pledge those feigning insanity, dishevelled, barefoot, and walking around in undershirts not just to punish, but also send them to the town court.’<sup>2</sup> But even if a *iurodivyi* conducted himself peaceably, the authorities still regarded him with suspicion. Thus, on 14 March 1722, ‘the peasant Davyd Kostiantinov’ was arrested:

<sup>1</sup> *Polnoe sobranie postanovlenii i raspriazhenii po vedomstvu pravoslavnogo ispovedaniia Rossiiskoi imperii*, i (St Petersburg, 1879), 30.

<sup>2</sup> V. M. Zhivov, *Iz tserkovnoi istorii vremen Petra Velikogo* (Moscow, 2004), 204.

he had on the Saviour's cross, copper crosses, chains and an iron staff... Even though he... did not appear of high importance in the course of secret investigation, it seemed important, however, that suchlike spend all their life wandering among people... and nothing good emerges from them, but they disseminate rumours and do other inappropriate deeds under the guise of their simplicity or sanctity... (Davyd) should be locked permanently in the monastery, so that no temptation for such parasitism will be spread among laymen.<sup>3</sup>

Feofan Prokopovich, through whom Peter conducted his ecclesiastical reforms, was particularly unsympathetic to holy fools. In 1726 a complaint against him was lodged at the Supreme Privy Council, alleging that he 'calls all of Moscow's wonder-working Fools for Christ's Sake "fornicators" because of "their idleness and fornication with noblewomen and [because] their tombs are built by their lovers, through whose money and veneration they are ranked among saints"'.<sup>4</sup> It is no coincidence that in the early eighteenth century the word *pokhabnyi* was reinterpreted: instead of 'holy foolish' it acquired the meaning of 'extremely indecorous', 'scandalous'. In 1731 holy fools were forbidden to show themselves in churches:

They act like fools... and create a disturbance for the congregation, above all on account of their improprieties they provoke a deal of laughter and agitation; with the result that instead of the expected forgiveness of sins... they who stand in God's churches actually multiply their sins.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Polnoe sobranie postanovlenii*, ii (St Petersburg, 1872), 130, no. 477.

<sup>4</sup> 'Delo o Feofane Prokopoviche', *ChOIDR* 1 (1862), 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Polnoe sobranie postanovlenii*, vii (St Petersburg, 1890), 529, no. 2600.

In 1737 the Synod ordered that those who 'feigned holy foolery and those barefoot and dishevelled' be found, seized, and 'sent to the secular court'.

\* \* \*

The 'well-ordered state' of the eighteenth century increasingly displaced the holy fool from social life, so that he found refuge either under the aegis of Old Believer communities and ecstatic sects or under the protection of aristocratic households.<sup>6</sup> More than anybody else he was affected by the cultural polarization of post-Petrine Russian society. Without its mutual support of official piety, holy foolery as it were lost its own identity and its inner nerve. Henceforth, in order to be identified as a holy fool one no longer had to meet any standards: canonizations were terminated, and if one was suspected of being a 'pseudo-holy fool' (the authorities used the prefix 'pseudo' so as to avert possible accusations of blasphemy) police measures were immediately taken. Persecutions continued throughout the first half of the eighteenth century.

Police archives preserve much fascinating evidence of holy fools in the eighteenth century. Extraordinary vitae surface in the form of investigative reports or witness statements. For example, a certain Vasilii:

<sup>6</sup> A. S. Lavrov, *Koldovstvo i religiia v Rossii: 1700–1730* (Moscow, 2000), 257–66; *idem*, 'Iurodstvo i "reguliarnoe gosudarstvo" (konets XVIII–pervaia polovina XIX veka)', *TODRL* 52 (2001), 432–47.



used to go about barefoot in winter, in nothing but a shirt, making himself out to be a pious fool, but not as demented in his answers and in his words... And people called him holy, because he endured the winter colds as if for the sake of salvation. And, living thus, he carried around an iron rod, a pood [about 16kg] in weight, so that he would be acknowledged as a labourer for salvation. The priest... Semenov refused to confess him ('because', he said, 'you have not fasted in preparation'); and he—Vasilii—... struck this priest dead with his iron rod... With his heresy he charmed the soldiers on guard, and he walked off... A new bride called him an idiot, and asked why such a fool [*urod*] was given a place at table; and for this with his heresy Vasilii broke up their marriage... He corrupted about twenty girls in fornication... Demons themselves asked him for work... He ordered them to carry a hoard of money... and the demons carried a full sack of this money... but if anyone took any with a prayer, it turned to coal.<sup>7</sup>

Or another example: the peasant Filip Ivanov:

testified under interrogation that he... lived next to the church of Vasilii the Blessed in a guard tent... and he used to walk around Moscow in iron fetters and with an iron staff with a cross on top... and he would collect money—ten *altyn* a day and more—but he said he bound himself in iron fetters by his own choice and not for the salvation of his soul, but merely so as to receive greater donations from the people... His fetters were on hooks, and he took them off when he came home.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Opisanie dokumentov i del, khraniashchikhsia v arkhive Sviateishego Pravitel'stvuiushchego Sinoda. t. 3. 1723 g.* (St Petersburg, 1878), 175–9.

<sup>8</sup> *Polnoe sobranie postanovlenii*, vii. 124.

Among the acts of the Commission on the Old Believers of 1745–57 we find a lot of information on ‘the fake *iurod Andreian Petrov*’, who:

had a vision in Iaroslavl, and adopted the practice of holy foolery. After torture and the rack he testified that the vision which purportedly inspired him to take up holy foolery had not in fact occurred, and that he had taken up holy foolery... deceitfully, so that people of all ranks would confess him a saint and so that he would thereby receive a wealth of donations. In his holy foolery he had no magic means for enduring extreme cold, but he endured because of the strength of his nature... At gatherings he would beat himself across his bare back... and he prophesied about fires and drought... which he confirmed in 1749 after three tortures and fire. After punishment with the knout, he was exiled.<sup>9</sup>

Holy fools with clerical titles were treated more leniently. ‘The sexton of the Nativity monastery in Rostov, Aleksei Stepanov,’ one documents reads, ‘on 18 January 1749, for foolery committed out of stupidity, was sent to the Borisoglebsk monastery, to be detained until he regains his senses.’<sup>10</sup> In Borisoglebsk, Stepanov was held in high esteem as a holy fool until he passed away in 1781.<sup>11</sup>

Persecution of contemporary holy fools went hand in hand with the eradication of the cults of holy fools who

<sup>9</sup> ‘Dela sledstvennykh o raskol’nikakh kommissii’, *Opisanie dokumentov i bumag, khраниashchikhsia v moskovskom arkhive Ministerstva iustitsii: Kniga 6, otd. 2* (Moscow, 1889), 157–8; see also 102, 104–5, 108, 121–3, 139–42, 144–5, 156. Unfortunately, the originals of Acts nos. 67 and 96, which were specifically devoted to Petrov, appear to have been lost from the archives.

<sup>10</sup> E. Poselianin, *Russkaia tserkov’ i russkie podvizhniki XVIII veka* (St Petersburg, 1905), 301.

<sup>11</sup> *Iaroslavskie ugodniki Bozhie, (s.l. s.a.)*, 42.

had not gained adequate recognition. For example, the blessed Kiprian of Suzdal (see above, p. 313), even though he had never been seen engaging in any practices characteristic of a holy fool, was nevertheless declared a *iurodivyi* on his death in 1622. In the eighteenth century he paid for this dubious designation when his icons were confiscated by ‘inquisitioners’.<sup>12</sup> The veneration of the suspicious and aggressive Simon of Iurevets (see above, p. 327) was banned in 1722. The ban, however, turned out not to be very effective. One vigilant priest enquired of the Synod ‘whether this holy fool Simon is truly a saint, for nothing is written about him in the church calendar’.<sup>13</sup> The ban was repeated in 1767.<sup>14</sup>

Catherine the Great generally put a stop to the persecutions, yet for a long time local authorities continued to treat holy fools in their usual way. In the second half of the eighteenth century, two Tver *iurodivye*, Makar Goncharov and Grigorii Emelianov, were tortured in the consistory to reveal whether ‘they kept any sort of harmful and impious secret spells’, even though they had nothing sinful on their records, except ‘walking barefoot in winter and summer and thus leading people into temptation’.<sup>15</sup>

All this time, however, popular veneration of holy fools continued, such as the cult of the well-known transvestite

<sup>12</sup> ‘Istoricheskoe sobranie (skazanie) o grade Suzhdale’, *Vremennik Imperatorskogo Obshchestva istorii i drevnosti Rossiiskikh* 22 (1855), 190–1.

<sup>13</sup> *Opisanie dokumentov i del*, xxi (1913), 531.

<sup>14</sup> M. D. Kagan, ‘Zhitie Simon Iur’evetskogo’, *SKKDR XVII v.*, iv. 406–9.

<sup>15</sup> M. Petrov, ‘Tverskoi arkhiv: Istoriiia o iurodivom tverskom posadnike Makare’, *Diadia Vania* 3 (1992), 19.

saint, Ksenia of St. Petersburg.<sup>16</sup> It is highly significant that she emerged in the Empire's new capital, which obviously did not have its own tradition of holy foolery.

From the late eighteenth century clinics for the mentally ill began to appear, and this gradually led to a calmer and more indulgent attitude to *iurodivye*. The situation was reminiscent of that which had existed in Western Europe two centuries earlier. *Iurodivye* disappear from police reports<sup>17</sup> and come to be regarded by senior officials as a sign of general 'disorder' in the realm under their supervision. For example, in the early nineteenth century a holy fool Andrei, who wandered around the streets of the town of Meshchov, was sent back to his home village when the Kaluga governor was expected to visit.<sup>18</sup>

In the Romantic age Russian 'freedom-lovers' looked back on holy foolery as an expression of unfettered freedom. 'Indeed, I should rather become a holy fool; hopefully I will be more blessed!'<sup>19</sup> says Pushkin ironically with regard to his *Boris Godunov*. In another letter he writes: 'Zhukovskii says the tsar will forgive me for my tragedy [*Boris Godunov*]. Hardly... I couldn't possibly hide all my ears under the holy fool's cap. They stick out!'<sup>20</sup> In real life, however, the

<sup>16</sup> See: D. G. Bulgakovskii, *Raba Bozhiia Kseniia ili iurodivyi Andrei Fedorovich* (St Petersburg, 1890). Early Byzantine transvestite saints hid their sex, which is then discovered only after their deaths; Ksenia, however, did not seek to mislead anyone in this respect.

<sup>17</sup> Lavrov, 'Iurodstvo', 437.

<sup>18</sup> S. Arkhangel'skii, *Zhizn' Andreia Khrista radi iurodivogo Meshchovskogo* (Kaluga, 1891), 13.

<sup>19</sup> A. S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, x (Moscow and Leningrad, 1949), 181.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

tradition was fading away.<sup>21</sup> When in 1839 Marquis de Custine said about Russia, 'Here every revolt seems lawful, even the revolt against reason,'<sup>22</sup> there was no one to respond to his call.

But even when it ceased to be regarded as sinister, holy foolery continued to play a significant role in Russia. A phenomenally large number of 'fools' and people playing the fool, of beggars and hangers-on, lived in the towns or loitered around the places of pilgrimage.<sup>23</sup> There can be no doubt that this form of sanctity remained particularly popular. Writers discussed holy fools angrily (Saltykov-Shchedrin, Gorkii), respectfully (Nekrasov, Tolstoi, Dostoevskii), or nostalgically (Leskov, Bunin). The one thing they could not do was ignore them, for in holy foolery people saw something profoundly significant for Russian culture. Nor were the *iurodivye* limited to the lower orders: Ivan Iakovlevich Koreisha, who became the subject of heated debate in the press and in books,<sup>24</sup> was a relatively educated

<sup>21</sup> S. A. Ivanov, 'Holy Fools and Political Authorities in Byzantium and Russia', *Acts of the XVIIIth International Congress of Byzantine Studies: Selected Papers: Main and Communications*, ed. I. Ševčenko, G. Litavrin, and W. Hanak, i (Shepherdstown, 1996), 270.

<sup>22</sup> A. De Custine, *Rossiiia v 1839 g.* (Moscow, 1930), 225.

<sup>23</sup> See I. G. Pryzhov, *Skazaniia o konchine i pogrebenii moskovskikh iurodivykh* (Moscow, 1862); M. I. Pyliaev, *Staroe zhit'e* (St Petersburg, 1897), 214–85; S. V. Maksimov, *Brodiachaia Rus'*, ii (St Petersburg, 1907), 47–8; 'V poiskakh Sviatoi Rusi: Iz pisem A. N. Rudneva k V. I. Leonovoi', *Nadezhda* 6 (1980–1), 320–3, 354, etc.

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. A. S. Bukharev, *O sovremennykh dukhovnykh potrebnostiakh mysli i zhizni* (Moscow, 1865), 549–51; A. F. Kireev, *Iurodivyi Ivan Iakovlevich Koreisha* (Moscow, 1898); E. Poselianin, *Russkie podvizhniki XIX veka* (St Petersburg, 1901), 501–10; I. G. Pryzhov, *Zhitie Ivana Iakovlevicha, izvestnogo proroka v Moskve* (St Petersburg, 1860), etc.

person. We even have the unpublished memoirs of a school teacher who became a *iurodivyi* in 1856.<sup>25</sup>

The numerous quasi-clerical vitae of holy fools published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were highly diverse. Some of their protagonists, like Solomonina and Efrosinia,<sup>26</sup> Asenefa,<sup>27</sup> or Pasha of Diveevo,<sup>28</sup> were nuns; others were city beggars like Andrei of Meshchov<sup>29</sup> or Andrei Il'ich;<sup>30</sup> and some were village beggars like Iulita of Ufa<sup>31</sup> or Terentii.<sup>32</sup> Hagiographers admitted that some of the *iurodivye*, such as Nikifor Belevskii,<sup>33</sup> were believed to be sorcerers, and others, such as Ivan of Sarapul,<sup>34</sup> were thought of as malingerers evading the military draft. Their conduct, too, was diverse: Antonii of Murom spoke in

<sup>25</sup> Iu. D. Rykov, 'Piotr Iurodivyi—novootkrytyi staroobriadcheskii pisatel' XIX v.', in *Istoriia i geografiia russkikh staroobriadcheskikh govorov* (Moscow, 1995), 113–30.

<sup>26</sup> *Zhizneopisaniia otechestvennykh podvizhnikov, knigi dopolnitel'nye*, i (Moscow, 1912), 5–12.

<sup>27</sup> Bishop Neofit, *V dar Khristu* (Troitse-Sergieva Lavra, 1917).

<sup>28</sup> V. Maksimov, *Iurodivaia Pasha v Diveevskom monastyre* (St Petersburg, 1903).

<sup>29</sup> Arkhangel'skii, *Zhizn' Andreia Khrista radi iurodivogo Meshchovskogo*.

<sup>30</sup> Gerasim, bishop of Revel, *Blazhennyi Andrei Il'ich* (St Petersburg, 1865).

<sup>31</sup> *Zhizneopisaniia otechestvennykh podvizhnikov... Avgust* (Moscow, 1909), 30.

<sup>32</sup> *Zhizneopisaniia otechestvennykh podvizhnikov... Oktiabr'* (Moscow, 1909), 797.

<sup>33</sup> *Zhizneopisaniia otechestvennykh podvizhnikov, knigi dopolnitel'nye*, i 261–4.

<sup>34</sup> *Zhizneopisaniia otechestvennykh podvizhnikov... Fevral'* (Moscow, 1907), 202.

rhymes;<sup>35</sup> Natalia Meliavskaia sidled;<sup>36</sup> Vania the Blessed always closed open windows.<sup>37</sup> Hagiographers frequently created a somewhat ominous halo around the holy fool: he was not simply throwing dirt, breaking glass, beating people with his stick, and cursing—he also forecast misfortunes and death. And, as in the old days in Emesa, his blasphemous conduct did not diminish the sanctity of the holy fool: for example, the blessed Domna Karpovna ‘acted like a holy fool... also during church services.... she sang, put out candles... picked up some of them and put them in her bundles’.<sup>38</sup> ‘Golden Grits’ ate forbidden food during the fast,<sup>39</sup> etc.

The clergy, especially the higher ranks, held in contempt the grass-roots veneration of holy fools. When the Kievan Metropolitan Philaret gave shelter to Ivan Barefoot (*Bosoi*) and he stripped to his skin, the metropolitan muttered, showing good knowledge of Byzantine hagiography: ‘So you stripped naked? You want to show your impassiveness?’<sup>40</sup> The feigned saints also display good skills in drawing on the authority of their great predecessors. For example, when ‘father Andrei’ was caught as he was eating sausage, he referred to Symeon of Emesa, and when he was found

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>36</sup> *Zhizneopisaniia otechestvennykh podvizhnikov... Avgust*, 520.

<sup>37</sup> *Zhizneopisaniia otechestvennykh podvizhnikov... Oktiabr'*, 453.

<sup>38</sup> N. Mitropol'skii, *Iurodivaia Domna Karpovna: O podvige iurodstva voobshche* (Moscow, 1897), 18.

<sup>39</sup> *Zhizneopisaniia otechestvennykh podvizhnikov... Sentiabr'* (Moscow, 1909), 444.

<sup>40</sup> *Zhizneopisaniia otechestvennykh podvizhnikov... Avgust*, 590.

having sex with a maid, he said ‘This is not mischief, this is temptation.’<sup>41</sup>

When the Bolsheviks came to power, the State naturally took measures to eradicate holy foolery. As the blessed Mariia of Diveevo used to say: ‘It was fine to play the idiot (*blazhit'*) under [Tsar] Nicholas. Just you try playing the idiot under Soviet power!’<sup>42</sup> And yet some ‘pre-Revolutionary’ holy fools did manage to stay in business. One such was Mariia Shudskaia:

Some people she'd hit, others she'd scold, and she'd smash others' windows. Sometimes she'd do what would inevitably get her beaten. She could climb into somebody's stove and pour the broth from the pots. The plainness with which she accused people got her arrested. But there she once smeared the whole wall with filth and said: ‘like power, like muck’. They had to let her go.<sup>43</sup>

As has often been pointed out (see above, p. 335), persecution raised holy foolery to the status of social protest, thereby making it something other than itself. For example, in 1928 Aleksei Voroshin, a peasant from a Volga village, adopted insane conduct (or indeed turned mad); he was arrested in 1937 and died under torture in the prison infirmary.<sup>44</sup> Thus holy foolery, which for many centuries had substituted for martyrdom, was once again replaced by it.

In 1988, a local synod of the Russian Orthodox Church confirmed the canonization of several saints, including

<sup>41</sup> I. Pryzhov, *25 moskovskikh prorokov, iurodivykh i durakov* (St Petersburg and Moscow, 1996), 58.

<sup>42</sup> Hieromonk Damaskin (Orlovskii), *Mucheniki, ispovedniki i podvizhniki blagochestiia Rossiiskoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi XX stoletii*, i (Tver, 1992), 126.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 218–19.

<sup>44</sup> *Idem*, ‘Alexii’, in *PE* i (2000), 659–60.



Ksenia of St Petersburg. This could imply that the religious authorities decided to confer institutional legitimization on holy foolery. Yet the explanatory part of the Synod's decision<sup>45</sup> portrayed a somewhat toned-down version of this form of spiritual endeavour. Symeon of Emesa would not have qualified to become a saint under these conditions. In August 1993 local veneration of Aleksei Voroshin was established, and in August 2000 this holy fool was canonized as a new martyr. In 1997 a *iurodivyi* from Ryazan, Vasiliï Kadomskii, was proclaimed a local saint,<sup>46</sup> and in 1998 the same happened to another holy fool, Andrei Ogorodnikov from Simbirsk.<sup>47</sup> The veneration of holy foolery continues to this day in Russia, irrespective of shifts in the Church's official position. The tomb of the celebrated Ivan Iakovlevich in the church of Elijah the Prophet in Moscow continues to attract pilgrims. Rumours about contemporary holy fools circulate in Moscow: for example, the *iurodivaia* Olga Lozhkina is believed to have predicted Chernobyl.<sup>48</sup> However, the current condition of holy foolery is not the subject of the present book.

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<sup>45</sup> Metropolitan Iuvenalii, 'Kanonizatsiia sviatykh v russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi', in *Pomestnyi Sobor russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi*, i (Moscow, 1990), 134.

<sup>46</sup> 'Zhitie sviatogo blazhennogo Vasiliia Kadomskogo', *Vyshenskii Palomnik* 3 (1997), 16; cf. *PE* vii. 62–3.

<sup>47</sup> I. Nikol'skii, *Andrei Il'itch Ogorodnikov blazhennyi, simbirskii iurodivyi* (Simbirsk, 1902).

<sup>48</sup> R. Bagdasarov, 'Tekhnologiia iurodstva', in *Za porogom* (Moscow, 2003), 165–6.

Why has holy foolery enjoyed such popularity in Russia? According to one theory, in the Russian perception there was a fortuitous fusion between the holy fool and the folkloric figure of Ivanushka the Fool (*Ivanushka-Durachok*). Ivanushka is indeed distinct from his European literary cousins in one important respect: he is not a 'wise fool', but a completely genuine and authentic fool, yet still he is revered rather than mocked. Somehow everything works out right for him—somehow he manages to succeed where clever people do not. And in the end he turns out to be Ivan-Tsarevich. This analogy, which was first elaborated by E. Trubetskoi,<sup>49</sup> is only partially justified. Of course the collective consciousness which created the image of Ivanushka might find it easier to assimilate the holy fool, who also puts rationality to shame. But there is also a fundamental difference between the two characters. Part of the essence of the folkloric fool is his idleness: he 'lies on the stove', the world keeps pestering him with one thing after another, but Ivanushka cares not a jot for the world. In this sense he is closer to the European 'holy simpleton'. With the holy fool the roles are reversed: the world would rather have nothing to do with this madman, but he keeps on imposing himself on the world. The holy fool is unremitting, restless, aggressive. Viewed rationally, his activities are absurd, but that is quite another matter.

<sup>49</sup> E. Trubetskoi, "Inoe tsarstvo" i ego iskateli v russkoi narodnoi skazke', *Literaturnaia ucheba* 2 (1990), 112, 115; repeated by E. M. Thompson, 'The Archetype of the Fool in Russian Literature', *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 15 (1973), 256–8; Likhachev, Panchenko, and Ponyrko, *Smekh*, 101.

Insofar as one can speculate at all about why *iurodstvo* should have acquired its peculiar resonance in Russia, one might link it to Russian culture's preoccupation with the Absolute concealed behind reality's deceptive façade. Inner truth can only be revealed to one who inhabits the 'other' world, and hence he is bound to appear strange to inhabitants of 'this' world. Hence, on the eve of the Revolution, the intense popularity of Grigorii Rasputin, who was seen as a *iurodivyi*, a holy fool.<sup>50</sup> But hence also the Revolution itself, perceived as forcing open a path to the Absolute. It is no coincidence that the poet Maksimilian Voloshin, when attempting to define the condition of Russia in 1917, found the most apt image in the following lines:

How can I presume to cast a stone?  
 Can I condemn your Passion's furious [*buinyi*] fire?  
 Should I not bow and grovel in the mire,  
 Blessing the imprint of your naked sole?  
 You, homeless, drunken, dissolute, inspired,  
 Foolish in Christ—*iurodivaia*—Rus!

<sup>50</sup> N. D. Zhevakhov, *Vospominaniia*, i (Moscow, 1993), 200–3.

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## The Eastern Periphery

As we have seen, holy foolery emerged in Christianity's eastern borderlands, in the crucible of Middle Eastern spirituality which also gave rise to the various encratite heresies. Here the ideas of humiliation as vocation and of sanctity as a secret gift were common currency.

It is worth pausing to consider a transitional phenomenon: rabbinical holy foolery. This is typically expressed through tales of 'secret servants' (cf. above, pp. 43–8), although the earliest of them can already be found in the Palestinian Talmud (*Taanit*, 64bc), which might suggest that they originated earlier than their Christian counterparts.<sup>1</sup> However, in the earliest such Jewish legend the name of the secret righteous man is Pentakaka, or 'Five Woes' in Greek. Pentakaka's behaviour reminds one of future Byzantine holy fools: he hires prostitutes (though not for himself), dances with them, and washes their clothes, and he secretly sells off

<sup>1</sup> B. Heller, 'La légende judéo-chrétienne du compagnon au Paradis', *Revue des études juives* 55 (1908), 216–17.

all his possessions so as to save a poor woman from turning to prostitution as an escape from debt.<sup>2</sup> And yet, however many of Pentakaka's qualities may have been inherited by, say, Symeon of Emesa, he differs fundamentally in his lack of manifest aggression towards the world. This aggression only appears later, in medieval Hasidic culture. The *Sefer Hasidim*, created among the Jewish communities in the Rhinelands in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, contains many tales of 'secret righteous men', and in these tales we find features which had been lacking in their Talmudic predecessors: self-abasement, and balancing on the brink of sin.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the similarity with Byzantium is merely typological, but—however we choose to explain it—the Hasidic tales are more closely reminiscent of Byzantine stories of holy fools than are any early medieval sources that we have hitherto examined.

There is no evidence for any direct influence of the Byzantine paradigm on its Islamic equivalent. Indirect associations, such as one finds in wandering motifs, are therefore particularly valuable here. Tales of a pseudo-madman and a king are widespread in the Islamic world. At first the hero has no name, and is introduced simply as 'the madman from al-Kufa'.<sup>4</sup> According to one of the sources, '[In 810] at Kufa Rashid was met by the madman Bahlul, who imparted a tradition of the Prophet to him and refused a proffered

<sup>2</sup> T. Alexander-Frizer, *The Pious Sinner* (Tübingen, 1991), 101.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 87–8, 118.

<sup>4</sup> *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, iv (Leiden, 1978), 1328.

stipend.<sup>5</sup> This is the only documentary reference to Bahlul, though he is associated with a substantial and diverse folklore tradition. In all variants of the legend the caliph wants to speak with him, but Bahlul displays no interest.<sup>6</sup> The relations between these two are somewhat reminiscent of the relations between Alexander and Diogenes (*Diogenis Laertii Vitae*, VI. 38). Bahlul's affinity with the Cynics is even more apparent in another of the stories: somebody says to him 'Aren't you ashamed to eat in the street?', to which Bahlul replies, 'God was not ashamed to make me hungry in the street, so why should I be ashamed to eat there?'<sup>7</sup> This is a direct borrowing from the tale of Diogenes of Sinope, derived from Diogenes Laertius: 'One day they reproached him for eating in the square. He answered: "but I became hungry in the square"' (*Diogenis Laertii Vitae*, VI. 58).<sup>8</sup> Sometimes the role of the ruler is played by Diogenes the Cynic's own most illustrious antagonist, Alexander the Great.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the sage unfailingly demonstrates the ruler's insignificance, by very Diogenes-like devices such as

<sup>5</sup> H. F. Amedror, 'An Unidentified Manuscript by Ibn-al-Jauzi', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (January, 1907), 35. In some variants the name of the 'madman' is Abu-Nasr.

<sup>6</sup> P. Loosen, 'Die Weisen Narren des Naisaburi', *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 27 (1912), 207–8.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>8</sup> The legend of Bahlul and Harun-ar-Rashid was played out in real life, as it were, in the episode of the meeting between the dervish Sheikh-Saclu the Long-Haired and Sultan Mehmed on the Galata bridge in 1837; see A. Ubicini, *Lettres sur la Turquie*, I (Paris, 1851), 115.

<sup>9</sup> H. Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele: Mensch, Welt und Gott in den Geschichten des Fariuddin Attar* (Leiden, 1955), 107–21, esp. 109.

asking him not to block the light.<sup>10</sup> Since Cynicism had been one of the sources of Christian holy foolery, one might suppose that it also had some influence on Muslim tradition.

The familiar motif of the 'secret servant of God' is also found in Islam. According to a Muslim legend, a righteous man, Abd al-Wahid ibn-Zeid asked a wise madman who would be his (ibn-Zeid's) neighbour in heaven, and it turned out to be the mad Mimuna from Kufa. When ibn-Zeid came to look at her, he saw that she was herding a flock where lambs and wolves lived peaceably together.<sup>11</sup>

It is hard to tell how much of the basic hagiography of holy foolery was known among Muslims. R. Hartmann notes that saints Ahmad bin Hidruja or As-Sulami (10–11c.) conceal their sanctity for the same reasons as Isidora or Theophilos and Maria.<sup>12</sup> The distinguished Islamist M. Molé also mentions the 'mummers' from Amida, suggesting that their story presents an embryonic version of the concept of the unseen hierarchy of God's friends: the Syrian idea of humiliation (*shitūtha*) as a form of vocation.<sup>13</sup> This idea was most fully realized in Sufism—Islamic mysticism. Muhammed bin Ali Al-Termezi (d. 907), the earliest theorist of Sufism, divides the friends of God into two categories, of which the higher contains those who accept opprobrium

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>11</sup> E. Dermengham, *Vies des saints musulmans* (Paris, 1981), 243.

<sup>12</sup> R. Hartmann, 'As-Sulami's Risalat al-Malamatiya', *Der Islam* 8 (1918), 198.

<sup>13</sup> M. Molé, *Les mystiques musulmans* (Paris, 1965), 10–12.

(*malama*).<sup>14</sup> The twelfth-century historian of Sufism, Ibn al-Jawzi, describes the nineteen ‘wise madmen’ (*‘uqalā u-l-majānīn*) of the earliest period. For the most part, these were vagrants living in the cities of Iraq, Syria, and Palestine. By comparison with Byzantine holy fools, the Sufic pseudo-madmen devote a great deal less attention to concealing their sanctity and a great deal more to mystic communion with God.<sup>15</sup>

The clearest manifestation of ‘holy foolery’ is in the Muslim idea of *Malamatiyah*.<sup>16</sup> This doctrine was developed by the theologians Abu Salih bin Ahmad al-Kassar (d. 884) and Abu Yazid Tayfur al-Bistami (d. 874). Typical of the latter, for example, is an episode when a certain ascetic asked him what further perfection could be achieved after thirty years of fasting and prayer: Abu Yazid advised him to shave off his hair and beard, dress in felt, take a sack of nuts on his back, go to the market—or, better still, to an area where he was known—and promise the youths a nut for every time they hit him. The ascetic decided not to subject himself to such a test.<sup>17</sup>

The word *malamati* means ‘blameworthy’. Adherents to the doctrine took to its logical extreme the Sufic principle ‘become hateful, seek humiliation’.<sup>18</sup> *Malamatiyah* became

<sup>14</sup> A. J. Wensinck, *New Data Concerning Syriac Mystic Literature* (Amsterdam, 1923), 16–19.

<sup>15</sup> M. W. Dols, *Majnun: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* (Oxford, 1992), 376–9.

<sup>16</sup> Molé, *Les mystiques musulmans*, 10–12.

<sup>17</sup> R. Nicholson, *The Tadhkiratu’ l’-Awliya of Shaykh Faridu’-d-Din Attar*, i (London, 1905), 146.

<sup>18</sup> I. Goldziher, *Le dogme et le loi de l’Islam* (Paris, 1920), 140.



the slogan for many wandering dervishes seeking to embody Sufic principles in practice.<sup>19</sup> By contrast with the Islamic *ulema* (the learned men; men of the law), who insisted on the ‘objectivity’ of Muslim precepts, ‘the Malamati must not be concerned with observing the laws of morality... The lives of the saints show that they stand above any moral code.’<sup>20</sup>

The Malamati are compared with holy fools in many scholarly studies.<sup>21</sup> The parallels are striking: for example, Farid al-Din Attar relates how a certain righteous man was instructed by God to go to a tavern, for there he would find a true friend of God. That friend turned out to be an old man who had carried wine for the tavern all his life, but had never drunk a drop of it. His sanctity was revealed immediately after his death.<sup>22</sup> This is an example of ‘incipient’ holy foolery, but in other stories one can find sacrilegious motifs remarkably similar to those associated with Symeon of Emesa. For example, a certain dervish threatens God: ‘I will take a stick and smash every lamp in Your mosque.’<sup>23</sup> The thirteenth-century ‘fool of God’ (*muwallah*) Ali al-Kurdi threw apples at the mosques in Damascus, just as Symeon had thrown nuts at the churches in Emesa (above, p. 117).

Ibn al-Arabi (d. 1241) in his treatise *Al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyya* summarizes the ‘holy foolish’ tradition of Islamic

<sup>19</sup> J. S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford, 1971), 13.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>21</sup> Ritter, *Das Meer*, 166; A. Bausani, ‘Note sul “Pazzo sacro” nell’Islam’, *Studi e materiali di storia della religione* 29 (1958), 99; R. Brunel, *Le monachisme errant dans l’Islam* (Paris, 1955), 165.

<sup>22</sup> Ritter, *Das Meer*, 287; Dols, *Majnun*, 366–422.

<sup>23</sup> H. Ritter, ‘Muslim Mystics’ Strife with God’, *Oriens* 5 (1952), 13.

mysticism, but the most vivid parallels between the Malamati and the holy fool are to be found in an eleventh-century Persian work, the *Kashf al-Mahjúb*, by Ali b. Uthman al-Hujwiri.<sup>24</sup> According to this treatise, ‘the blame of mankind is food for the friends of God, because it is a token of Divine approval’ (63). The Malamati is the man who ‘purposely incurs people’s blame by committing some act which is offensive to them’ (64). For example: Abu Yazid, on being met by a crowd at the gates of Kufa, took a loaf and began to eat, even though it was the time of the fast (65). Al-Hujwiri notes, however, that such exploits belong to the past: ‘in those days it was necessary, for incurring blame, to do something disapproved or extraordinary; but in our time, if anyone desires blame, he need only lengthen a little his voluntary prayers... at once everybody will call him a hypocrite and impostor’ (65).

In Islam, as in Orthodoxy, this scandalous mode of asceticism seems to have met with growing resistance. In the extract cited above, it is curious that the author not only implies criticism of people in general for being too sceptical, but also of the Malamati themselves for being too offensive. And if the criticism of people is somewhat guarded, the criticism of the Malamati is extensive and explicit: ‘He who abandons the law and commits an irreligious act and says he is following the rule of “blame” is guilty of manifest wrong and wickedness and self-indulgence. There are many in the present age who seek popularity by this means, forgetting that

<sup>24</sup> R. A. Nicholson (transl.), *The Kashf al-Mahjúb: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism* (London, 1976) (references to this edition henceforth in the main text).

one must already have gained popularity before deliberately acting in such a way as to make people reject him; otherwise, his making himself unpopular is a mere pretext for winning popularity' (65).

The problems that might arise in connection with holy foolery were, it must be said, formulated far more succinctly in Islam than by Byzantine theologians:

'[There is a danger of] committing some act for which the people will blame him and thereby fall into sin. Accordingly... he must commit some act which, legally, is neither a great sin (*kabira*) nor a trivial sin (*saghira*), in order that the people may nevertheless reject you. (66–7).

In my opinion to seek blame is mere ostentation, and ostentation is mere hypocrisy... The dervish, on the contrary, never even thinks of mankind. (67).

Once I said to a Malamati of Transoxania,<sup>25</sup> 'O, brother, what is your object in these perverse actions?' He replied: 'To make people non-existent in regard to myself.' (67)

The author is not satisfied with this response. He thinks the ascetic ought not to look at himself through others' eyes. He is, however, prepared to accept humiliation as one mode of the mortification of the flesh:

Ibrahim bin Adham was asked, 'Have you ever attained your desire?' He answered, 'Yes, twice; on one occasion I was in a ship where nobody knew me. I was clad in common clothes and my hair was long and my guise was such that all the people in the ship

<sup>25</sup> Transoxania was 'a breeding ground for ecstatic spirituality and communal religious life': F. Täschner, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Achis in Anatolien', *Islamica* 4 (1929), 14.

mocked and laughed at me. Among them was a buffoon, who was always coming and pulling my hair and tearing it out... My joy reached its high pitch one day when the buffoon rose from his place and urinated on me.' (68)

We can conclude, therefore, that Malamatiyah was a type of asceticism quite closely analogous with holy foolery. Similar holy men existed throughout the Islamic world: Ash-Shudzi, for example, was a judge in twelfth-century Seville, who abandoned everything and went to the Magrib, where he pretended to be mad.<sup>26</sup> Yet Malamatiyah was most popular in Iran, and its birthplace is reckoned to be Nishapur.<sup>27</sup> Individualism and a rejection of Muslim orthodoxy were characteristic of Persian Islam in general.<sup>28</sup> Persian Sufism also spread to India, among whose dervishes the idea of Malamatiyah also became popular: Lal Shahbaziya (d. 1324) led a dissolute life, never prayed, and was always drunk (his followers claimed that wine turned to water when it touched his lips); Musa Shah-i Suhag used to dress up as a woman and keep company with dancing eunuchs (yet in a drought it emerged that he was the only person who could pray successfully for rain);<sup>29</sup> the well-known poet Kabir (1425–1505) wanted to bring opprobrium on himself, so he pretended to be drunk and cavorted through the streets embracing a prostitute,<sup>30</sup> and so on.

<sup>26</sup> Dols, *Majnun*, 387.

<sup>27</sup> F. Meier, review of Abu' l-Ila Afifi, *Al-malamatiyya* (Cairo, 1945), in *Oriens* 1 (1948), 373–5.

<sup>28</sup> Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders*, 67.

<sup>29</sup> T. S. Rastogi, *Islamic Mysticism: Sufism* (New Delhi, 1982), 27–8.

<sup>30</sup> S. A. A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, i (New Delhi, 1978), 379.

The theologian Safi d-Din wrote that the 'holy madman' often goes naked, because he has liberated himself from all feeling and has become like Adam in the Garden of Eden. This was also a well known motif in Byzantine holy foolery; but Islam, unlike Christianity, had no doctrine of Original Sin, so that it was in theory easier for a Muslim to achieve an Adam-like impassivity.<sup>31</sup> This, presumably, helps to explain why the Islamic 'secret saint' lacks the fretfulness that besets his Christian confrère.

The Malamati continued to perform the principal religious rites, but many dervishes would stop at nothing in their quest for abnegation. The term for them was Qalandari. In theory there was no difference between Malamatiyah and Qalandariyah as religious movements, yet the theoreticians of Sufism acknowledged the former and condemned the latter. In the words of As-Suhrawardi (1097–1168), 'the Malamati strives to conceal his mode of life, whilst the Qalandari seeks to destroy accepted custom'.<sup>32</sup> The Qalandari lived on charity, took no part in religious rituals, shaved themselves smooth, dressed in provocative clothing, and wore iron rings on their genitals (cf. p. 251). The Qalandari claimed that for them anything was permissible. Their behaviour was so antisocial that Qalandariyah was often banned by the secular authorities. Scholars have noted here the influence of the Indian ascetic tradition,<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Dols, *Majnun*, 407–8.

<sup>32</sup> Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders*, 267.

<sup>33</sup> T. Yazici, 'Kalandariyya', *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, vol. iv, cols. 493–5; M. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims* (London, 1967), 303, etc.

and it is perhaps no accident that the Qalandariyah movement was little known to Western Islam.

The closer we come to the end of the Middle Ages, the wilder become the forms of Islamic 'holy foolery'. Pero Tafur, who visited Egypt in the fifteenth century, wrote of people who 'shave the head, the beard, the eyebrows and the eyelids, and they appear to live like mad people, saying that they do this out of holiness... Some go about wearing horns, others bedaubed with honey and feathered, and others carrying poles with lanterns and lights hanging from them... The Moors show them great reverence.'<sup>34</sup> In the Ottoman period there is a sharp increase in the number of such accounts. The Egyptian judge, Abd al-Wahhab-as-Sarani (d. 1565), compiled a collection of biographies of famous 'holy fools'. His protagonists drink wine, smoke hashish, kiss women and boys, and even blaspheme—all in the name of victory over hypocrisy. Even As-Sarani himself urges us to admire their holiness but not to follow their example.<sup>35</sup> In the fifteenth century, Muslim 'holy fools' turned up in recently conquered Constantinople, as if symbolically replacing 'real' holy fools there.<sup>36</sup> By this time, however, there was already a huge gap between the two. We recall that initially Byzantine holy foolery was characterized by its ambivalence: one could not tell whether a man

<sup>34</sup> Pero Tafur, *Travels and Adventures, 1435–1439*, transl. M. Letts (London, 1926), 71.

<sup>35</sup> M. Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt* (New Brunswick, 1982), 113–16.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Rastogi, *Islamic Mysticism*, 56.

was a saint or a scoundrel until his death, and such doubts could only be resolved by posthumous miracles. The Muslim ‘holy hooligans’, by contrast, were swathed in universal reverential veneration during their lifetimes and thus resemble later Russian *iurodivye* (cf. above, p. 352). The scale of this phenomenon became particularly grand in the later period. Leo Africanus, Prosper Alpin, Edward Lane, and other travellers describe in astonishment and horror how the ‘wali’ were allowed to perform any obscenity including rape.<sup>37</sup> The tradition of wandering dervishes, or *fakirs* (the semantic development of this word in European languages is culturally indicative) continued in the Ottoman world at least until the nineteenth century. A Turkish official complained to a European traveller:

Not a day passes without some minister being regaled with insults by a dervish . . . In Baghdad, Arabia, Egypt, their cynicism knows no bounds. In Cairo I myself have seen how, in broad daylight, one of those dreadful people who run about the streets half-naked stopped a woman and quenched his savagery on her in full view of the passers-by, who turned away: some of them in deference as if in the presence of some sacred mystery, others in disgust yet not daring to call the police. I do not know whether these bandits are more hypocritical or more fanatical, though the two are mutually exclusive.<sup>38</sup>

As we see, the Ottoman official produced, albeit unwittingly, a fairly accurate definition of holy foolery.

<sup>37</sup> See Dols, *Majnun*, 413–15.

<sup>38</sup> Ubicini, *Lettres sur la Turquie*, i. 117.

Moving still further to the east, in Tibetan tantrism we find saints (particularly notable in the sixteenth century) named *bla-ma smyon-pa*, who feign insanity and act in an unruly manner in order to mock superficial piety.<sup>39</sup> Many forms of Indian spirituality are also reminiscent of holy foolery, but the closest resemblance is displayed by followers of the *Pasupatas* sect. This was at its most influential in the twelfth century, with practitioners in Balouchistan and Afghanistan as well as in India.<sup>40</sup> No direct links with holy foolery can be traced, but the typological similarities are self-evident. In Pasupata teaching, the ascetic must cultivate dishonour (*avamane*).

A wise man should seek lack of honour like ambrosia . . . ill-treatment should be regarded as a coronation . . . [Let people say], 'He is an outcast, he is a madman, he is a lunatic, he is a fool'. . . One should bring upon oneself dishonour . . . He should appear as though mad, like a pauper, his body covered with filth, letting his beard, nails and hair grow long, without any bodily care . . . [Entering a village] he should sit down and enact the symptoms of sleep . . . Then the common people will mistreat him. By this false accusation whatever good karma they possess passes to him and whatever bad karma he has goes to them. He should take up his stand by a group of women . . . Turning his attention to one of them that is young and pretty he should stare at her and act as though he were setting his desire upon her. When she glances at him he should act out the symptoms of love. Then every one,

<sup>39</sup> J. Arduss and L. Epstein, 'The Saintly Madman in Tibet', in *Himalayan Anthropology: The Indo-Tibetan Interface*, ed. J. F. Fisher (The Hague and Paris, 1978), 327–38.

<sup>40</sup> *Pasupata Sutram*, transl. Haripada Chakraborti (Calcutta, 1970), 8–15.



women, men and eunuchs will say, 'This is no man of chastity; this is a lecher'... He should speak improperly, speaking nonsense or repeating himself or speaking unclearly.<sup>41</sup>

At first sight this looks like classic holy foolery, yet the resemblance is purely superficial, for the Pasupatas is not motivated by any instructive or edificatory purpose.<sup>42</sup> From the Christian point of view, his provocation is thoroughly insidious: he deliberately seeks humiliation so as to pass his bad karma on to others and to receive their good karma for himself.<sup>43</sup> 'He gives them sin (*Papam cha tebhyo dadati*). He receives their virtue (*Sukrtam cha tesam-adatte*).'<sup>44</sup> By comparison with such stark consistency, the holy fool's interstitiality, his 'in-betweenness', stands out particularly clearly. The holy fool does indeed have a great deal of contempt for the base material world, which is mere deception and illusion. Yet the holy fool cannot entirely abandon himself to such feelings, because for him the incarnation of the Word is no fiction. The holy fool cannot wholly repudiate any distinction between subject and object, higher and lower, good and evil.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> D. Ingalls, 'Cynics and Pasupatas: The Seeking of Dishonour', *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962), 286–91.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 293. The author contrasts the Pasupatas with Cynics and derives both from shamanism.

<sup>43</sup> The 'deliberate immorality' of Indian ascetics is a fairly well recognized phenomenon: see F. Holek, 'Some Observations on the Motives and Purposes of Asceticism in Ancient India', *Asiatische Studien* 23 (1969), 45.

<sup>44</sup> *Pasupata Sutram*, 126–7.

<sup>45</sup> A. Syrkin, 'On the Behavior of the "Fools for Christ's Sake"', *History of Religions* 22/2 (1982), 161–71; cf. G. Feuerstein, *Holy Madness: The Shock Tactics and Radical Teachings of Crazy-Wise Adepts, Holy Fools, and Rascal Gurus* (New York, 1990), 205–6.

For the holy fool, sexual provocation, for example, is truly provocation, because he acknowledges the existence of human physiology. When in close proximity to sin, he displays, like a circus act, his virtuosity at not succumbing to it. Yet at the same time he must let the public convince itself that there is no deception. In order to refute accusations, Symeon of Emesa and Andrew of Constantinople demonstrated the extent of their sexual imperviousness. For the Indian ascetic the trick is different: for example, some yogis—masters of asceticism—even allowed themselves to have sexual intercourse, which in no way diminished their status in the eyes of their followers, for their intercourse, too, was emotionless. This was Greek ‘impassivity’ (*apatheia*) taken to its logical extreme, completely detached from any objective, earthly criteria. A holy fool may emerge only where the existence of the body is unquestioned and has to be dealt with. If there is no dividing line between the earthly and the divine,<sup>46</sup> holy foolery is meaningless.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. S. N. C. Lieu, ‘The Holy Men and Their Biographers in Early Byzantium and Medieval China’, in *Maistor. Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for R. Browning*, ed. A. Moffatt (Canberra, 1984), 124–5.

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## The Western Periphery

West and East had differing perceptions of righteousness. From the very beginning Western Christianity put the emphasis on humility and even self-deprecation. Westerners were liable to express a sense of their own sinfulness even more dramatically than was common in the East. Overdone repentance often led to excesses, such as flagellation, that could look shocking to an observer. Such asceticism was generally alien to Byzantine culture: ‘the West could not develop insanity other than in the framework of repentance, which in the East played a subsidiary role’.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, ‘Latins’ saw no particular merit in paradoxical holiness. The Byzantine righteous man might choose, on his own initiative, to go to a brothel, yet fear no sin; his Western counterpart tended to avoid such eccentricity. Just once, ‘during the persecutions under Diocletian, Bishop Narcissus [of Augsburg] ran to the prostitute Afra, not knowing where he was going,’<sup>2</sup> and quickly persuaded her to convert to

<sup>1</sup> J.-M. Fritz, *Le discours du fou au Moyen Age (XIIe–XIIIe s.)* (Paris, 1992), 316.

<sup>2</sup> *Conversio s. Afrae*, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, ed. B. Krusch, ii (Hanover, 1896), 55.

Christianity. However, apart from Afra (who achieved a martyr's crown) the Western Church did not canonize repentant prostitutes and thieves.<sup>3</sup> But this in itself is not the main issue. The Western saint could commit sins, even sins as grave as incest or parricide;<sup>4</sup> but he could only do so *before* his repentance, *before* the grace of God came down upon him. His subsequent sanctity eclipsed his initial sinfulness, and thus demonstrated that the mercy of the Creator knew no bounds, but in Western Christianity there could be no question of sanctity and sin overlapping with each other, as was the case in holy foolery.

A certain affinity between Byzantium and the West can be observed in a specific type of ascesis which may be called 'sacred shamelessness'. In Byzantium many holy fools simulated licentiousness, but there were also instances when a saint who was not, strictly speaking, a holy fool, might engineer a compromising situation. Examples include Elias the Cave-Dweller, Luke the Younger, Phantinos the Younger, Neophytos the Recluse, and others. Such saints also existed in the West: the fifth-century Scottish saint Kentigern, Bishop Aldhelm of Sherborne (d. 709), and others, particularly the Irish saints.<sup>5</sup> Gerald of Wales writes that St Aldhelm used to lie for nights on end with a girl on either side of him, 'in order to subject himself to abuse from men and in the

<sup>3</sup> F. Graus, *Volk, Herrschaft und Heiliger im Reich der Merovinger* (Prague, 1965), 103–4.

<sup>4</sup> See E. Dorn, *Der sündige Heilige in der Legende des Mittelalters* (Munich, 1967), 74–90.

<sup>5</sup> L. Gougaud, 'Mulierum consortia: l'étude sur le syneisaktisme chez les ascètes celtiques', *Uriu* 9 (1921), 148–50; R. Reynolds, 'Virgines Subintroduc-tae in Celtic Christianity', *Harvard Theological Review* 61 (1968), 552–63.

future to receive more abundant reward from God who knew his modesty and restraint'<sup>6</sup> (although the author also condemns such excesses). Robert d'Arbrissel attracted even greater opprobrium from his contemporaries for his experiments in testing his own impassivity:<sup>7</sup> he was accused of self-righteousness and, more importantly, of leading the world into temptation. Here lies the main difference with Byzantium: Paul of Hellas thought that such experiments were harmful since the devil will inevitably win and the experimenter's soul will suffer great detriment (cf. p. 93). As for medieval Latin moralists, they were concerned for social decency. In this they followed the injunction of Caesarius of Arles, who taught that one should seek not to struggle against temptations but to avoid them.<sup>8</sup> Obviously, no holy foolery could emerge from this kind of approach.

Nevertheless, Greek legends of the early holy fools were translated into Latin.<sup>9</sup> Several Western legends were

<sup>6</sup> Giraldu Cambrensis, *Gemma ecclesiastica*, II. 15, ed. T. S. Brewer, vol. III (London, 1863), 235; cf. William of Malmesbury, *De gestis pontificum Anglorum*, PL 179, col. 1654.

<sup>7</sup> Goffrid, *Epistula* 47, PL 157, cols. 182–3; Marbodius, *Epistula* 6, PL 171, cols. 1481–3. Cf. J. Dalarun, 'Robert d'Arbrissel et les femmes', *Annales ESC* 39 (1984), 1140–6.

<sup>8</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Sermones*, pt. 1, ed. G. Morin (Turnhout, 1953), 180–4.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. PL 73, cols. 661 ff., 967 ff.; A. Wilmat, 'Les rédactions latines de la Vie d'Abraham Erémite', *Revue Bénédictine* 50 (1928), 222–45; T. Dunn (ed.), 'The Facetiae of the Mensa Philosophia', *Washington University Studies* NS 5 (1934), 59; R. Köhler, *Kleinere Schriften zur Erzählenden Dichtung des Mittelalters*, II (Berlin, 1900), 389–93. Note that Vincent de Beauvais attributes the tale of Isidora not to its true author (Palladius) but to an otherwise unknown 'sanctus Heraclides'. In 868/9 Anastasius Bibliothecarius translated the vita of John Kalybitis: P. Chiesa, 'Le Vitae Romanae di Giovanni Calibita', *AB* 121

modelled on the widespread Byzantine stories of ‘secret servants of God’:<sup>10</sup> legends such as *The Fable of the Aquileian Judge*,<sup>11</sup> and *The Pious Butcher, or a Neighbour in Heaven*.<sup>12</sup> Several of these are straightforward translations from Byzantine originals (some of which have been lost).<sup>13</sup> Others were adapted using Greek material. Thus the fifth-century writer Sulpicius Severus tells of a righteous man who was so successful in casting out demons that he became possessed by vainglory (*vanitas*) and was unable to overcome it:

They say that he prayed to God, asking Him that for five months the Devil might be given such power over him as the Devil had had over those whom this righteous man had cured . . . He, mighty as he had been, he who had been renowned throughout the *East* [my emphasis—S.I.] for his signs and his exploits, he to whose door people had previously thronged—he became possessed and was confined with a chain. He endured all that is usually endured by the possessed, and only in the fifth month was he finally purified, not so much from the demon as from his vainglory, which was both more useful and more desirable.<sup>14</sup>

Here we have some initial attributes of holy foolery, but not yet the thing itself. The righteous man brings madness upon

(2003), 46; and he also translated the legend of Vitalios from the vita of John the Almsgiver: PL 73, cols. 367–72.

<sup>10</sup> See S. A. Ivanov, ‘From “Secret Servants of God” to “Fools for Christ’s Sake” in Byzantine Hagiography’, in *The Holy Fool in Byzantium and Russia* (Bergen, 1995), 5–17.

<sup>11</sup> Köhler, *Kleinere Schriften zur Erzählenden Dichtung*, 442–3.

<sup>12</sup> R. Köhler, *Kleinere Schriften zur Märchenforschung* (Weimar, 1898), 32–6.

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. PL 73, col. 1006.

<sup>14</sup> Sulpicius Severus, *Libri quae supersunt*, ed. C. Holm (Vienna, 1866), 173.

himself, rather than simulating it. However, we do have a couple of original Latin tales of ‘classic’ holy foolery with a Greek flavour. One is a story of a Western priest who was excommunicated on account of his sins. It is revealed to him that he can be forgiven only by visiting an Egyptian hermit, but when he reached Egypt on his pilgrimage the elder declared that he had no power to lift the excommunication:

[But] after three days he recalled a certain holy man from *Alexandria* [my emphasis—S.I.], who reckoned the wisdom of the world to be foolishness and who had been deemed worthy of such favour by... the Virgin Mary that he would be able to help this man in his misfortune... ‘Go to Alexandria... and there seek out the fool (*stultum*).’ [After searching for a long time, the sinner found] a man of God, in the visage and garb of a madman (*insensati... hominis*). Many people ran after him and spat at him... though he had once been a rich and eminent man.<sup>15</sup>

This man’s parents had bequeathed to him all the ‘province of Alexandria’ (the action thus takes place before the Arab conquest of Egypt in the seventh century), but he had given away his wealth to the poor.

It is impossible to relate how much evil, how much mockery this man endured, not only from strangers but from his own household and even from his kin... But in the evenings he would leave the city... and go to a church of Holy Mary, Mother of God, that had been abandoned by the townspeople because it was

<sup>15</sup> A. Mussafia, ‘Über die von Gautier de Coincy benutzten Quellen’, *Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Classe* 44 (1896), 26–7.

dilapidated,<sup>16</sup> and there he would stay for nights on end, singing hymns and giving praise. As dusk fell the excommunicated man followed [the fool] at a respectful distance, and he reached the church. For a long time the sinner watched him praying. Deciding that this must be the very person of whom the elder had spoken... he prostrated himself before him and began to kiss his feet.<sup>17</sup>

At the sinner's request, the holy fool interceded for him with the Mother of God, who lifted the curse. The saint warned him not to tell anybody about what had happened until after his (the saint's) death, which occurred a week later.<sup>18</sup>

This legend became very popular in the West. In the early thirteenth century it was translated into Old French by the monk Gautier de Coincy,<sup>19</sup> and in the fourteenth century Gautier's text was used as the basis<sup>20</sup> for one of the mystery plays *The Virgin's Miracles*.<sup>21</sup> Although the original Greek legend has never been found, there is no doubt that it was derived from a Byzantine vita. This is confirmed not just by the place of action, but also by the manner in which the

<sup>16</sup> It is not certain which church this was, among Alexandria's several churches of the Mother of God: see A. J. Butler, *The Arab Conquest of Egypt* (Oxford, 1902), 372, 385. The most likely candidate is the church by the walls at the city's eastern extremity (*Chronique de Jean, Évêque de Nikiu*, ed. H. Zotenberg (Paris, 1883), 524, 548).

<sup>17</sup> Mussafia, 'Über die von Gautier de Coincy benutzten Quellen', 27.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>19</sup> Gautier de Coincy, *Les Miracles de Sainte Vierge* (Paris, 1857), 573–92. Gautier de Coincy seems to be the author of the Old French term for holy fool, 'fu por Dieu'.

<sup>20</sup> H. C. Jensen, *Die 'Miracles de Notre Dame par personnages' untersucht in ihrem Verhältnis zu Gautier de Coincy* (Bonn, 1892), 16–25.

<sup>21</sup> *Miracles de Nostre Dame par personnages*, iii (Paris, 1878), 8 ff.



subject unfolds. The figure of the condemned priest could be a Western innovation, however.

Another Latin legend with no surviving Greek source, and similarly associated with Egypt, is the tale known as 'The Fool'. Three clerics from an Egyptian church set off on their journeys: one of them, Dieudonné (presumably from the Greek Theodotos), to Antioch; the second, Bonifacius (originally Eupraxios?), to Jerusalem; and the third, Felix (Eutychos?), to the West. The rest of the story relates only to Felix. He arrives at the town of Besançon, where he starts pretending to be mad and deliberately provoking the crowd to maltreat him. In time the rumour spreads that his insanity is simulated and that he is in fact a saint. In order to avoid being treated with reverence, Felix withdraws to a monastery.<sup>22</sup>

These two legends indicate that in the Western popular religious consciousness holy foolery was regarded as a highly efficacious and somewhat exotic form of Eastern sanctity.<sup>23</sup> Even here, however, we still sense important differences between Western and Eastern perceptions of holy foolery: the Byzantine saints tended to end their lives in the city, as practising holy fools; Felix sets out along the path of holy foolery but nevertheless eventually withdraws to a monastery.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> J. Chaurand, *Fou: Dixième conte de la vie des Pères* (Geneva, 1971), v, 992–5.

<sup>23</sup> Note that the traces of an 'Eastern' provenance in the story of Felix were later erased: in the fourteenth-century version by Jean de Saint-Quentin, the hero is French and ends up as archbishop of Besançon.

<sup>24</sup> See J.-M. Fritz, *Le discours du fou au Moyen Age (XII–XIII s.)* (Paris, 1992), 314.

One authentically Byzantine *vita* did enjoy huge success in the West: the legend of Alexios the Man of God. In 977 archbishop Sergios of Damascus fled to Rome. Apparently, he brought with him the *vita*, which was then translated into Latin and was broadly disseminated in European languages, from Old Spanish to Old Czech.<sup>25</sup> Yet this is probably not evidence of the popularity of holy foolery as such. Western versions focus on, so to speak, the opposite end of the story: not the moment of Alexios' return (as a holy fool), but his departure,<sup>26</sup> since this was an age of widespread ideals of voluntary poverty and wandering.<sup>27</sup>

Thus far we have considered stories and heroes borrowed by the 'Latin' world from the Orthodox. We should now consider whether the West created its own tales of holy fools.

An obvious candidate for this category is the famous legend of Robert le Diable.<sup>28</sup> He longs to redeem his terrible sins, and an anchorite orders him to 'pretend to be mad (*fatuum se faceret*) and to endure with patience all the insults

<sup>25</sup> See M. F. Mur'anov, 'Aleksii Chelovek Bozhii v slavianskoi retsenzii vizantiiskoi kul'tury', *TODRL* 23 (1968), 109–26; A. V. Murav'ev and A. A. Turilov, 'Aleksii, chelovek Bozhii', in *PE* ii (2001), 8–12.

<sup>26</sup> B. de Gaiffier, '“Intactam sponsam reliquens”: A propos de la Vie de s. Alexis', *AB* 65 (1947), 161–84.

<sup>27</sup> A. Gieysztor, 'Dobrowolne uboŝtwo, ucieczka od ŝwiata i ŝredniowieczny kult sw. Aleksego', *Polska w ŝwiecie* (1972), 21–40. The motif of celibacy was also important, cf.: H. Sekommodau, 'Alexius in Liturgie, Malerei und Dichtung', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 2 (1956), 180.

<sup>28</sup> The legend is preserved in many variants and languages: K. Breul, *Sir Gowther, eine englische Romanz* (Oppel, 1886); *idem*, 'Le Dit de Robert le Diable', *Abhandlungen Herrn Prof. Dr. A. Tobler* (Halle, 1895), esp. 487–90; K. Borinski, 'Eine ältere deutsche Bearbeitung von Robert le Diable', *Germania* 1892, esp. 49–51; *Robert le Diable*, ed. P. E. Loserth (Paris, 1903), 44–67, etc.

that would be hurled at him'.<sup>29</sup> Eventually his anonymity was breached and the emperor offered him his daughter's hand in marriage, but Robert refused and became a pilgrim.

Although the legend was not derived from a Byzantine prototype,<sup>30</sup> some of its details are remarkably reminiscent of the lives of holy fools. For example: Robert spends the night among dogs, just like Andrew of Constantinople;<sup>31</sup> the motif of being abused and beaten by the boys in the city streets is more or less standard for all vitae of holy fools.

Is Robert a holy fool in the strict sense? No, he is not. Typically for medieval Western Christianity,<sup>32</sup> Robert breaks with decorum and provokes humiliation because he was aware of his own sinfulness, not because of the sinfulness of the world around him. For the Orthodox holy fools, the more dazzling their virtues, the greater the humiliations they bring upon themselves, for their virtue must be hidden from onlookers. Never in Byzantine literature are the blows and the abuse, which the holy fool provokes, represented as a direct consequence of his dissatisfaction with himself. Proper holy foolery may be practised only by those who have achieved perfection (the sole exception being Mark the Horseman (see above, p. 99), while Hierotheos in the vita of Symeon the New Theologian (above,

<sup>29</sup> Etienne de Bourbon, *Anecdotes historiques, légendes et apologues...* (Paris, 1877), 146–7.

<sup>30</sup> T. U. Holmes, *A History of Old French Literature* (New York, 1937), 146.

<sup>31</sup> *The Life of St Andrew the Fool*, ed. L. Rydén. ii (Uppsala, 1995), ll. 275–9.

<sup>32</sup> In particular, a special type of ancient Irish sainthood, the so called *geiltah*, has nothing in common with holy foolery, since it was merely an extreme form of penitence; see T. A. Mikhailova, *Irlandskoe predanie o Suibne bezumnom ili vzgliad iz XII v. v VII* (Moscow, 1999), 322–7.

p. 175) is—tellingly—an immigrant from the West). However curious their methods, holy fools are supposed to be concerned with the souls of others; Robert le Diable was concerned for himself.

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Thus far we have looked at secular or at best semi-religious narrative. Let us turn to official Latin hagiography. Perhaps this is where ‘real’ holy fools are to be found? We should stress at the outset that the motif of *sancta simplicitas*, which was fairly popular in the Catholic world (especially from the eleventh century onward), has nothing to do with holy foolery: a holy simpleton may act strangely, but his oddity originates from his simple-heartedness, whereas the holy fool is anything but simple.<sup>33</sup>

Many scholars insist that holy foolery was indeed known within Western Christianity,<sup>34</sup> and it is true that a certain number of figures in the Catholic synaxarion do resemble holy fools in some of their features. In the *vita* (*BHL*, 8371) of the eighth-century saint, Ulphia the Virgin, we read:

<sup>33</sup> Fritz, *Le discours*, 189.

<sup>34</sup> Hieromonk Lev, ‘Une forme d’ascèse russe: La folie pour le Christ’, *Irènikon* 2 (1927), 15, 18–19; E. Behr-Sigel, ‘Les “fous pour le Christ” et la sainteté laïque dans l’ancienne Russie’, *Irènikon* 15 (1938), 555; I. Kologrivov, *Essai sur la sainteté en Russie* (Bruges, 1953), 264–73; R. W. Pope, ‘Fools and Folly in Old Russia’, *Slavic Review* 39 (1980), 480; L. Kretzenbacher, ‘Narren am heiligen Orte’, in *Wallfahrt kennt keine Grenzen* (Munich and Zurich, 1984), 34–6. Cf. S. Kobets, ‘Foolishness in Christ: East vs. West’, *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 34 (2000), 337–54.

She would feign insanity of the mind ( *fingit mentis amentiam*) . . . and would run this way and that, her face pale from fasting, her head uncovered and her hair unkempt and tousled about her shoulders, as if she was insane (*velut amens*), in order that, by acting in a way that provoked contempt (*ludo contemptibili*), she might as far as possible disfigure her own beauty and repulse those who felt physical desire for her.<sup>35</sup>

In the tenth century St Romuald (*BHL*, 7324) ‘strove to provoke annoyance, and considered himself great when . . . he managed to bring opprobrium on himself’.<sup>36</sup> Later he diverted his efforts into missionary activity. The awareness of the immensity of their sins prompted saints such as Peter (Pierre) Urseol (d. 987) in France or Heimrad (d. 1019) in Germany<sup>37</sup> to commit bizarre acts; but those were isolated examples. The main reason why holy foolery did not emerge in the West was that Western saints shared a kind of ‘social responsibility’. For example, in the *vita* of the thirteenth-century Belgian, Beatrix of Nazareth, the saint felt a desire to feign madness (*semetipsam insanam fingere*), but she decided first to consult Henry, her spiritual instructor, and he forbade her to do so, mainly because she would thereby bring sin upon those around her (*non tam in tuum quam in proximorum gravamen et dampnum*). The saint instantly abandoned her plan.<sup>38</sup> This sounds like a decisive

<sup>35</sup> *Vita s. Ulphae Virginis*, in *AASS Januarii*, iii (1863), 738.

<sup>36</sup> Bruno, *Vita quinque fratrum*, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores*, xv. ii (Hannover, 1888), 719.

<sup>37</sup> F. Vandenbroucke, ‘Fous pour le Christ: II: En Occident’, in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, v (1964), col. 763.

<sup>38</sup> *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth* (Kalamazoo, 1991), 240–4. St. Christina also demonstrated ‘social responsibility’. When she understood that her

condemnation of the Byzantine understanding of holy foolery.

Other, more eminent saints might be suspected of engaging in holy foolery. For example, the great St Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) once

entered the cathedral church naked but for a loincloth and a cord around his neck, and he demanded that he be publicly dragged to the stone where criminals were taken for punishment. Sitting on the stone and trembling like a sick man with a fever, he began to preach... He averred that he was a man of carnal passions and a glutton, and that all should despise him... The onlookers were astonished at such a great spectacle. Since they had already become aware of this man's self-restraint, they were overcome with reverence. They declared that such humility was to be admired rather than imitated (*magis admirabilem, quam imitabilem*). They regarded such behaviour more as a sign, like biblical prophecy, than as an example [for others]... Francis performed such acts often and in abundance.<sup>39</sup>

Then there was the time that Francis suggested to his friend Ruffino that he go into the city and preach. Ruffino refused, claiming to be an ignorant simpleton (*sono simplici e idiota*). Francis was annoyed and repeated his instruction, adding that Ruffino should preach naked except for a loincloth. And this was how Ruffino presented himself at church. People laughed and said that the Franciscans had become

extravagant conduct might tempt people, she ran away to the woods; see M. H. King, 'The Sacramental Witness of Christina Mirabilis', in L. Th. Shann (ed.), *Medieval Religious Women*, ii (Kalamazoo, 1987), 151–2.

<sup>39</sup> *Vita altera s. Francisci Confessoris*, in *AASS Octobris*, ii (1866), 757, cf. 698. Cf. also John Cassian, *Collationes* xiv. 7.

unhinged through so much penitence (*costoro fanno tanta penitenzia, che diventano stolti e furi di se*). Meanwhile Francis, conscience-stricken, himself came naked to the same church and stood beside Ruffino. The parishioners were won over by their spiritual example, and Francis and Ruffino departed, having shown everybody how useful it was to despise the world (*dispregiare il mondo*).<sup>40</sup> Later another Franciscan, Ginepro, also walked the city streets naked and incited mockery like a madman (*fuori del senso*).<sup>41</sup> Aspects of these stories are obviously reminiscent of holy foolery: Francis' deliberately provocative instruction to his disciple; the provocative behaviour in church. But the resemblance is superficial. In the first place, Francis suffers at the thought that Ruffino is being mocked 'like a madman' (*como uno pazzo*), whereas a real holy fool would be pleased by such a turn of events. Secondly, the Franciscans were not upstart strangers. Their exotic behaviour was viewed against the background of—as an extension of—their previous asceticism: that is, it had a known interpretive context. They raised no doubts about themselves (as to whether they were holy or insane), whereas such ambivalence is fundamental to the perception of the real holy fool. Thirdly, the very nature of the religious atmosphere in the Latin West made any 'game' more acceptable: because of his 'holy foolery', Francis earned the nickname of 'God's jester', unimaginable in Orthodox piety.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> *I Fioretti di San Francisco* (Turin, 1974), 90–1.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 292–3, 297–8.

<sup>42</sup> S. Averintsev, 'Vernost' zdravomysliiu', *Novyi mir* 12 (1993), 274.

Yet the greatest difference between the Franciscan and the holy fool is revealed in the social activity of the former. Even though towards the end of his life Francis was dismayed by the degree to which his followers had formalized the rules of his community, nevertheless there was no escaping the fact that he himself had actually created the order of Franciscans. By definition the holy fool cannot create anything in the social domain (cf. p. 301).

In the post-Franciscan period a tradition reminiscent of holy foolery emerged in central Italy. One who appears to come close to holy foolery (as understood in the present work) is Jacopone da Todi (1230–1306).<sup>43</sup> At first he carried on disgracefully in his own home, forcing his family to blush on his behalf.<sup>44</sup> Then, after he became a monk in 1278, he continued to act in the same manner. For example, he kept a piece of meat in his cell until it rotted and gave off a dreadful stink. When the furious monks discovered the source of the smell, they shut Jacopone into the lavatory, shouting that this was the place for him if he liked stench; but the saint was overjoyed to be thus humiliated.<sup>45</sup> This closely echoes early Byzantine tales of holy foolery, but still with a crucial difference: Jacopone embarked on this escapade in order to overcome the sinful desire to eat meat. Here, too, therefore, the Western saint plays the fool out of his awareness of his

<sup>43</sup> I. Gagliardi, *Pazzi per Cristo: Santa follia e mistica della Croce in Italia centrale (secoli XIII–XIV)* (Siena, 1997), 136–59; G. T. Peck, *The Fool of God: Jacopone da Todi* (Alabama, 1980).

<sup>44</sup> *Le vite antiche di Jacopone da Todi*, ed. E. Menestò (Florence, 1977), 229–30.

<sup>45</sup> N. Cavanna (ed.), *La Franceschina, testo volgare umbro del secolo XV scritto del P. G. Oddi di Perugia*, ii (Florence, 1931), 111–12.



own deficiencies,<sup>46</sup> whereas in Byzantium the opposite is the case.

Soon after Jacopone, near Todi, in the town of Foligno, another scion of a wealthy family, Pietro Crisci (c.1243–1323), also turned mad and went around wearing rags (*BHL*, 6709). ‘Everyone thought he was like a madman (*ab omnibus quasi fatuus putaretur*).’<sup>47</sup> The devil visited Pietro and suggested that he should reject his asceticism because ‘you are accused, and deservedly so, of insanity (*fatuus (et merito) . . . appellaris*).’<sup>48</sup> However, the saint’s *vita* (of which only a small part is preserved) does not report any aggressive manifestations; it depicts only his begging and his wanderings. Nevertheless the Inquisition grew interested in this extravagant ascetic and accused him of heresy. Twice the saint underwent interrogation, and he managed to prove his innocence.<sup>49</sup>

The Italian saint (*BHL*, 4384–6) Giovanni Colombini (1300–67) was from a rich and noble family in the city of Siena.<sup>50</sup> We will summarize his *vita* in more detail, so as to give a better idea of this phenomenon of Italian hagiography.

Giovanni devoted himself to piety and began to go about in public poorly dressed and bare-headed, and would cover

<sup>46</sup> After Jacopone’s death he was finally fully assimilated to the holy fool paradigm: in 1596 the relics of the saint were reburied in San Fortunato church. On his gravestone was written: ‘A fool for God’s sake, he fooled the world in a new way and reached Heaven’: M. A. Screech, *Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly* (London, 1980), 185.

<sup>47</sup> ‘De s. Petro Confessore Fulginii in Umbria’, in *AASS Julii*, iv (1868), 666c.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 667E.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 668.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Gagliardi, *Pazzi per Cristo*, 172–214.

his body scantily even in a harsh winter. ‘Being higher than all that is transient, he reached out towards the strange and unaccustomed things (*fortia et insolita*), as the spirit within him dictated.’<sup>51</sup> As if in imitation of Isidora, Colombini found work in the kitchen of the very household where he had formerly commanded respect. Instead of the proud steed on which he had previously pranced around the city, he borrowed a donkey from a friend and:

mounted this beast and rode straight to the square... thus this noble citizen turned himself into an eccentric drover... and he rode across the square several times, so that the laughter of the gawping crowd might be longer and heartier... and he accepted with great pleasure the sneering and giggling of the people who had gathered, ... the mockery and abuse of the many, especially of the merchants, to whom he seemed pathetic and insane (*vile et insanum caput*). (367)

Colombini said to the people:

‘You laugh at me boisterously... but it is I who laugh at you. I am indeed considered a fool (*stultus*), for I follow Christ; but I count you among the unwise, for you are wise only about that which belongs to this world. Concerning our wisdom, let it be judged by him who said: “We are fools for Christ’s sake (*stulti propter Christum*)”... Be as mad (*insanite*) as you can be, for the love of Christ, and you will be wise. Contempt for this world is a sensible insanity (*sobria insania*), but desire for the worldly is a senseless wisdom (*ebria sapientia*).’ (367)

<sup>51</sup> *Vita s. Joannis Colombini*, in *AASS Julii*, viii (1868), 366 (references to this edition henceforth in the running text).

Colombini made his followers ride around sitting back to front on donkeys, chase each other through the city half naked and cursing all the while, solicit charity, and such like. And the tasks that he set for himself were even more degrading. He told his disciples to lead him around the villages on a rope, to beat him, and to shout: 'Gather round, beat this merciless villain and rogue who deserves the rack and execution!' (380). By such means Colombini not only humbled himself but also forced his followers into sin: 'sometimes he requested them, but sometimes he ordered them sternly to obey... And the crowds of people were horrified by this sad and terrible spectacle. Nobody joined in, and many wept' (ibid.).

Again this looks in many ways like a case of pure holy foolery. But we should not forget that pure holy foolery is a secret. The holy fool does not declare his holy foolery, he simply practises it. In this respect Giovanni Colombini is closer to the *iurodivye* than to Symeon of Emesa. And the gap between them is widened by what we discover as the narrative unfolds: the saint begins to preach and to attract followers; he is exiled as a trouble-maker; but everywhere he incites people to join him (376–7). He preaches and distributes epistles throughout Italy (379–80). This kind of social activism is fundamentally alien to the Byzantine holy fool.

Furthermore, Colombini kept a vigilant eye on the propriety of his proselytes. Nicholas of Nardo wanted to achieve still greater degradation by stripping naked, but Colombini forbade it. On another occasion, Francesco Vincenti:

was not satisfied with the normal spiritual exploits, so he began to flaunt long and unkempt hair, a thick and dishevelled beard, and disgusting nails, like a wild man or mountain-dweller who had just crawled out of a cave. In the towns he was met with whistles and jeers. But Colombini found nothing to approve of in this obnoxious appearance... he condemned the long hair and nails... And [Francesco] immediately cut them and made himself look human again. (384)

Despite such moderation, the Church could not endorse the 'excessively negligent and poor' appearance of Giovanni and his disciples (391). The Pope was displeased that they 'protected neither their feet nor their heads from the vagaries of nature', and the zealous Colombini instantly agreed to submit to Rome's demands, whereupon, in 1367, Pope Urban V withdrew the most damaging accusation—that Colombini was a member of the proscribed sect of 'fraticelli' (392). Such conformism is the 'flip side' of Colombini's social activism: quite consistent with his role as founder of the society of Gesuati.

Although these central Italian saints resembled the Greek holy fools, they could not have drawn directly on the latter's vitae, which were still unknown to the Latin world at the time. Indirect influence of the early Byzantine texts cannot entirely be ruled out,<sup>52</sup> but mostly the similarity here is typological.

Catholic 'quasi-holy fools' could be found not only in Italy. The Spanish saint Francis Solano (b. 1349) provides a curious example of a Western attitude to holy foolery:

<sup>52</sup> Gagliardi, *Pazzi per Cristo*, 76–7, 216–17.

The foundation of his virtue was . . . boundless humility. Sometimes he would even appear in the refectory with a cord or an item of clothing tied to his neck and with a pipe between his teeth, so as to incite still greater contempt towards himself and to beg humbly for the forgiveness of the sins which—in his view—he had committed. He would put himself in front of the clergy's feet, hoping to be kicked. He achieved the highest level of humility: in his own eyes he was a sinner and of no significance, and he desired that all should see him as such . . . These words of his are worthy of eternal memory: 'When I see brethren with cowls thrown carelessly back, or with rumpled sleeves, skipping or otherwise walking indecorously, I think that this is because they want people to despise them and to consider them fools (*stultos reputari*), so that in fact they may be good and righteous before God.'<sup>53</sup>

We should note that when Francis sees other monks breaking with decorum, he ascribes to them the 'classic' holy foolish motives; but when he does the same thing himself, it is explained as authentic self-abasement. Presumably the saint's own holy foolery could have become an obstacle to his canonization.

In the early sixteenth century two more 'quasi-holy fools' emerged. One of them was in Siena, in the homeland of Colombini. This was Bartolomeo Carosi (*BHL*, 1440–4) nicknamed Brandano (1488–1554). He turned blind at the age of thirty-eight, grew foul-mouthed and slovenly, and went around making prophecies.<sup>54</sup> What sets him apart from holy fools is his strong political engagement and his

<sup>53</sup> *Vita s. Francisci Solani*, in *AASS Julii*, v (1868), 883–4.

<sup>54</sup> P. Misciattelli, 'Brandano, il pazzo di Cristo', *Nuova Antologia: Rivista di lettere, scienze ed arti* 46/955 (1911), 426–37.

ardent preaching.<sup>55</sup> The other eccentric saint, John of God (Joao da Deus), was born in Portugal in 1495, took part in several wars, spent many years travelling, and in 1538 settled down in Granada and opened a bookshop. On 20 January of the following year he listened to a sermon by a famous preacher and repented so deeply that he ‘went insane’ and ripped out his beard, hair, and eyebrows; leaping and shouting, he conducted a purge of his own hut: ‘secular books he ripped with his teeth and nails, and the pious and useful books he gave away free to whoever wanted them; and he did likewise with the icons’. John also tore off his clothes, intoning: “‘the naked Christ one should follow naked’”.<sup>56</sup> The saint cavorted through the city, crying out incoherently and pursued by mockery and a hail of stones. He would dig himself into rubbish heaps, dip his face in puddles, and repent of all the sins he could think of. In brief, ‘so diligently did he simulate insanity (*simulabat insaniam*) that everybody thought him mad’.<sup>57</sup>

Thus far, John’s behaviour precisely matches that of model holy foolery. But let us read on.

Two noblemen of the city, reckoning that John’s behaviour was too indecent to be tolerated, plucked him out of the crowd and committed him to the royal hospital, where madmen were treated cruelly. In the spirit of European

<sup>55</sup> J. Leclercq, *Témoins de la spiritualité occidentale* (Paris, 1965), 346–7.

<sup>56</sup> This formula (*nudum Christum nudus sequere*) derives from St Jerome, but usually it served as a rallying-call to Christian poverty, not to Christian nudism; see S. Trawkowski, ‘Vita Apostolica et la désobéissance’, in W. Lourdaux (ed.), *The Concept of Heresy in the Middle Ages* (Leuven and The Hague, 1976), 158–9.

<sup>57</sup> *Vita B. Ioannis de Deo*, in *AASS Martii*, i (1865), 820–1.

humanism, John began to protest against the maltreatment of the sick. Nor did this quench his appetite for social improvement, and he decided to set up his own hospital.<sup>58</sup> Several years later the hospital that he had founded had as many as two hundred beds; in order to support the hospital, the saint went to see Philip II of Spain. Again we see the Western, Catholic ‘holy fool’ divided from his Byzantine equivalent by his concern for constructive social involvement.

An incident of ‘holy foolery’ is sometimes attributed to Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556). He performed miracles of humility and on occasions his behaviour was distinctly odd;<sup>59</sup> and yet he, like many other Western saints, was restrained from over-indulgence in this direction by his sense of social mission.

He longed to be a laughing-stock for all, and if he had followed the bidding of his own soul, he would have wandered through the villages naked, despised, and smeared in dirt, like a madman (*insanus*). However, this passion for humility was conquered by his love and concern for the good of those around him.<sup>60</sup>

Scholars have often declared Philippo Neri (1515–95) a holy fool. Neri was indeed renowned for his many scandalous actions: he drank wine in public view; he put on his clothes inside-out; he walked around Rome with a dog on a lead (which was at the time thought madness); he danced in

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 821–2. Cf. A. Malvy, ‘Saint Jean de Dieu a-t-il simulé la folie?’, *Études* 191/10 (1927), 427–38.

<sup>59</sup> *De s. Ignatio Loyola*, in *AASS Julii*, vii (1868), 590, 625–6, etc.

<sup>60</sup> *Vita altera s. Ignatii*, *ibid.*, 766–7.

front of the cardinal; he made his pupils provoke abuse, and so on. But for Neri all of this was a deliberately adopted role: he had read the *vita* of Giovanni Colombini, the mystic works of Jacopone da Todi,<sup>61</sup> and probably the newly translated vitae of Byzantine *saloi*.<sup>62</sup> He is an eccentric paradoxalist<sup>63</sup> rather than a holy fool: even while transgressing the norms, he does not hide the fact that he knows what the norms are. His contemporaries defined his main quality as *festività* (cheerfulness); the humour of the holy fool is gloomy. At first sight this might appear to be a very holy fool-like rebellion against the Church's monopoly on sanctity, but in fact we are here dealing with two fundamentally different phenomena. For the holy fool the Church is too tolerant of the world's weaknesses, but for Neri it is, on the contrary, too inflexible. In essence, the figure of Filippo Neri represents the penetration of the spirit of the Reformation into Italy.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> L. Ponnelle and L. Bordet, *Saint Philippe Neri et la société romaine de son temps* (Paris, 1928), 156.

<sup>62</sup> Gagliardi, *Pazzi per Cristo*, 217. A special 'Encyclopedia of holy fools' was compiled in the sixteenth century in Styria; yet the only real holy fool there is 'Simeon seu Salus': L. Kretzenbacher, 'Bayerische Barocklegenden um "Narren in Christo"', in *Volkskultur und Geschichte: Festgabe für J. Dünninger zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. D. Harmening et al. (Berlin, 1970), 464; cf. M. Kendler, *P. Jacob Schmid S.J. Ein bairischer Hagiograph des 18 Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1974), 54, 68.

<sup>63</sup> One historian of holy foolery shrewdly notes that in the Western 'holy fool' there is always more eccentricity than feigned madness; see V. Rochceau, 'St Syméon Salos, ermite palestinien et prototype des Fous-pour-le-Christ', *Proche Orient Chrétien* 28 (1978), 214.

<sup>64</sup> H. Joly, *Psychologie des saints* (Paris, 1898), 64.



In this survey of holy foolery in the West, we have not included followers of the many sects,<sup>65</sup> although much in their behaviour (like the behaviour of the Messalians—see p. 191) may appear to fit the right pattern. However, the heretics reckoned themselves to be the only true Christians, so that psychologically this is a quite different phenomenon.

Although in the West there were few ‘practising’ holy fools, theoretical proponents of ‘deviant behaviour’ were far thicker on the ground there than in Byzantium. From the Orthodox and Muslim context we already know that it is in the utterances of mystics that one is most likely to find a semblance of holy foolery.<sup>66</sup> Thus it was also in Catholicism. For instance, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) called on Christians to be ‘the Lord’s jesters’ (*joculatores Domini*). He encouraged them:

‘A game is good, if it offers a spectacle that makes people laugh (*ridiculum . . . spectaculum praebet*) and is pleasing to angels, in the manner of buffoons and jugglers (*ioculatorum et saltatorum*) who, contrary to human ways, stand on their hands, with their heads down and their legs pointing upward, and thus capture everybody’s gaze. This is not a children’s entertainment . . . this is pleasant and honest play, earnest and worthy of attention (*iucundus, honestus, gravis, spectabilis*), it may please the celestial viewers. He who said “We are made a spectacle . . . to angels and to men”

<sup>65</sup> See M. Guillaumont, ‘Un mouvement des “spirituels” dans l’Orient chrétien’, *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 189/90 (1976), 129.

<sup>66</sup> M. Laharie, *La folie au Moyen Age (XIe–XIIIe siècle)* (Paris, 1991), pp. ix, 91–104.

(1 Cor. 4:9) played this pure and pious game. Let us play it too, so that we may be laughed at, confounded, humiliated (*illudamur, confundamur, humiliemur*).<sup>67</sup>

Symeon of Emesa would be talking this way if he were not a literary character but a theoretician of holy foolery. Even the quotation from Corinthians is picked so that it will directly precede the famous words about ‘fools for God’s sake’. However, neither Symeon nor Andrew emerged as apologists: only Sabas the Younger both played the holy fool and, at the same time, justified his behaviour. As for Bernard, there is every reason to suppose that he himself could not walk on his hands.

Many theologians in the Early Modern period challenged scholasticism by championing the idea of madness as a means of direct contact with God. The most vivid examples are the theologians associated with the *devotio moderna* movement (Meister Eckhart, John Tauler, and others). Sometimes they are actually described as holy fools,<sup>68</sup> though with little justification. Theoretical outrageousness and practical obstreperousness are quite different things, with no necessary link between the two. In the fifteenth century, philosophers such as Thomas à Kempis or Nicholas of Cusa revived Western interest in the teachings of St Paul concerning the foolishness of God, leading eventually to

<sup>67</sup> See: PL 182, cols. 211–12; cf. J. Leclercq, ‘Le thème de la jonglerie chez S. Bernard et ses contemporaines’, *Revue d’histoire de la spiritualité* 48 (1972), 395–6.

<sup>68</sup> M. Slowiński, *Blazen* (Warsaw, 1993), 65.

Erasmus' famous 'Praise of Folly',<sup>69</sup> but none of this had anything to do with holy foolery.<sup>70</sup>

Although medieval Catholicism produced an approximation of the paradigm of holy foolery, it could not recreate it fully within the parameters established in Byzantium. Through his escapades, the Western *stultus per Christum* mocks a paucity of piety; but the holy fool mocks piety as such. As Jean-Marie Fritz observed, 'The fool for Christ has never become acclimatized in the West: he was never accepted.'<sup>71</sup>

A West European saint cannot qualify as a genuine holy fool, since he is excessively psychological, on the one hand, and too social, on the other.

<sup>69</sup> W. Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 8–12, 84–8; *idem*, 'Wisdom of the Fool', in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, iv (New York, 1974), 5115–20; cf. M. A. Screech, *Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly* (London, 1980), 185.

<sup>70</sup> The closest resemblance to a holy fool in the modern period is shown by the seventeenth-century French Jesuit Jean-Jacques Surin: see M. de Certeau, 'Folie du nom et mystique du sujet', *Folle Vérité* (Paris, 1979), 301–4; cf. M. Dupuy, 'Surin', in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, fasc. 95 (1990), 1322.

<sup>71</sup> Fritz, *Le discours*, 314. Cf. the attempts to find contemporary Western analogies to holy foolery: J. Leonhardt-Aumüller, 'Narren um Christi willen: Eine Studie zu Tradition und Typologie des "Narren in Christo" und dessen Ausprägung bei Gerhard Hauptmann', *Kulturgeschichtliche Forschungen* 18 (1993), 45–54.

## Conclusion

In the late summer of 1825, when Aleksandr Pushkin was working on his drama *Boris Godunov*, he sought, through friends, the advice of the distinguished historian Nikolai Karamzin concerning his treatment of the facts. On the specific subject of holy fools the reply, as relayed in a letter from Petr Viazemskii, was that Pushkin would not find much nourishment ('that is, lice') there, because 'all holy fools are alike'.<sup>1</sup> We can assume that the remark about lice is Viazemskii's own barbed contribution, but was Karamzin's underlying point correct? Are all holy fools really alike?

The insane, if left entirely to their own devices (that is, if one can imagine them in an 'a-cultural' state), are indeed likely to behave in more or less comparable ways in any society. However, the culture which gives birth and semantic form to the concept of holy foolery notes and endows with meaning only those features of insane behaviour which are conceptually relevant to it, while ignoring the rest. Every

<sup>1</sup> A. S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, xiii (Moscow and Leningrad, 1937), 224.

society appoints as its own accuser the madman who meets its particular unacknowledged, unstated inner needs. Byzantine culture was very different from early Russian culture, and their types of holy foolery ought to differ accordingly.

Let us compare those two luminaries of holy foolery, Symeon of Emesa and Vasilii the Blessed. Both display a similar level of aggression—which is why the differences in the respective Byzantine and Russian modes of holy foolery are so striking. Symeon simulates sexual activity, whereas Vasilii never does. Why? In sexual matters, despite the indignation of Christian moralists, Byzantium preserved residual traces of classical freedom. In the Christian empire brothels remained legal (legend has it that in Constantinople they were opened by order of St Constantine the Great himself). The authorities occasionally worked themselves up into a rigorist rage, but they nevertheless proceeded from the tacit assumption that Christian principles cannot be converted into daily life precisely. The holy fools' cultural antennae picked up this compromise, and their own sexual escapades were read by their contemporaries as *reductio ad absurdum*, as a demonstration of the absurdity of such a tolerant attitude to sex. In Rus, the situation was different. On the one hand, the secluded life of the women's quarters in the boiar household allowed no sexual freedom; and the State allowed no prostitution. Vitalios of Alexandria, if he had found himself in Moscow in mid-sixteenth century, would not have been able to enter brothels to convert fallen women, since there were no brothels in Rus. On the other hand, popular culture was wholly unconstrained: if Symeon of Emesa, in his turn, had been in Moscow, he would not

have been able to cause indignation by visiting women's baths, because all baths were unisex. In the eighteenth century, with the spread of social prudishness, Russian *iurodivye*, too, were liable to be spotted in the bath-house. Nor could he have shocked anybody with indecent gestures, since foreign travellers were already shocked by how uninhibited Muscovites seemed in their ordinary behaviour. Here such provocation by the *iurodivyi* would have provoked nobody.

Second, Symeon infuriates onlookers by defecating in the open; Vasilii does nothing of the kind. Why? Byzantine towns had public toilets, and a refusal to use them was taken as an affront to decency. In Moscow, by contrast, right up to the early eighteenth century people discharged their bodily wastes all over the place, so that the holy fool would hardly have stood out from the throng by doing likewise.

Third, Symeon disrupts the course of the liturgy and the rules of the fast, whereas no such sacrilege is ascribed to Vasilii by his hagiographer. Why? Was the Muscovite collective imagination (which generated the local forms of holy foolery) simply not bold enough? Yet this imagination gave rise to a far bolder dream—to expose the vices of the tsar himself. Or perhaps we should seek the explanation in the fact that in Rus, far more than in Byzantium, the secular rulers had appropriated sacral functions for themselves. Wherever he may be, the holy fool exposes the artifices of the worldly structures which serve as guarantors of the divine order. In Byzantium this means, primarily, the Church; in Rus, the Tsar.

In other areas, too, Vasilii's foolery goes beyond that of Symeon. In the first place, the Muscovite *iurodivyi* always walks around completely naked (which is how he is depicted

on icons), whereas the fool of Emesa undresses only occasionally. In a cold country such as Rus, nakedness was less a sign of sexual provocativeness than of voluntary suffering. Second, Vasilii smashes an icon which he perceives to be diabolical, whereas Andrew the Fool (Symeon is not relevant here, since the issues were different in the pre-iconoclast age) does no damage, even when convinced that an icon is the work of the devil.<sup>2</sup> Evidently, strength of aggression is proportional to strength of faith, and the Russian icon-fetish was far more potent than any Byzantine post-iconoclast precedents. Third, and most importantly, Vasilii arouses religious awe (cf. above, p. 000), while Symeon and Andrew elicit merely contempt.

Here there was no way back: once breached, the holy fool's anonymity could not be restored. Therefore, the *iur-odivyi* appeared not as psychologically deranged, but as an embodiment of Mystery. He was an ominous person. We can cite an example:

Early one morning the blessed Prokopii [of Viatka] came to the house of the burgher Danil Kalsin... and he lay down on the stove. Danil and his children were then at matins, but his youngest was still asleep, as is proper for infants. Prokopii picked up the child and hurled it down from the stove onto the floor, and it died instantly. And Danil and his [other] children came back from

<sup>2</sup> The vita of Andrew the Fool contains an episode in which the saint opens a woman's eyes to the fact that 'at present there is nothing in your icons but paint and excrement and wood, and the ghosts of demons (*δαιμόνων φαντάσματα*), for the grace of God has withdrawn, unable to stand the awful smell and diminution of the demons': *The Life of St Andrew the Fool*, ed. L. Rydén, ii (Uppsala, 1995), ll. 2512–15.

church and he saw his dead infant, and he wrapped it in a burial robe, and he did the blessed [Prokopii] no harm, for he saw that he was a holy man. And they brought priests and deacons and began to perform the usual funeral rites. But the blessed Prokopii saw this and climbed down from the stove and set about pushing the priests and their clergy out of the room. Then he took the infant out of its coffin and it started shrieking and squealing as normal.<sup>3</sup>

There must be hundreds of *vitae* in which saints raise the dead. Dozens of them, perhaps, name real people whose existence is known from independent sources: ‘Danilko Kalsin’, a store-keeper on Chernyshevskaiia Street in Viatka, figures in a government register for 1615.<sup>4</sup> But in no other *vita* anywhere, any time, does the saint kill a child for the purpose of subsequently resurrecting it. We should bear this episode constantly in mind when discussing the relatively modest behaviour of the Russian *iurodivyi* by comparison with the Byzantine *salos*. By and large the Russian *vita* is indeed more chaste than its Greek counterpart: thus Vasillii the Blessed does not kiss the girls whom he has blinded, unlike Symeon of Emesa (from whose *vita* almost the whole episode is borrowed—see above, pp. 318); he merely ‘laid his hand on her eyes’.<sup>5</sup> Yet at the same time the *iurodivyi* is prepared to transgress far more terrible taboos: he offends not just against decency but against the very foundations of

<sup>3</sup> S. A. Ivanov, ‘Zhitie Prokopiiia Viatskogo: Editio Princeps’, in *Florilegium: K 60-letiiu B. N. Flori* (Moscow, 2000), 80–1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>5</sup> See I. Kuznetsov, *Sviatye blazhennye Vasillii i Ioann, Khrista radi moskovskie chudotvortsy* (Moscow, 1910), 84.



Christian morality. We do not know what actually took place on Chernyshevskaja Street in Viatka; but it is important that this is how witnesses wished to tell it, or this is how the hagiographer wished to record it.

\* \* \*

The need for holy foolery develops within a given culture; it ripens and at a given moment it breaks out into the open, and is articulated in the form of its hagiographic genre. Was there really a town idiot called Symeon in Emesa? We cannot know. Right from the start the hagiographic discourse submerges any clear evidence of real history, even though the *vita* might at some level be rooted in fact. We should also keep in mind that hagiographers were themselves clerics, and thus represented ecclesiastical order; holy foolery emerged as a non-verbal protest against this very order, and therefore even the earliest *vitae* appear in an already 'censored' form.<sup>6</sup> From the beginning we are dealing with *personae*.<sup>7</sup>

The hagiographical protagonist (Isidora, Serapion, Symeon, etc.) lives within the text. We cannot walk round him and look at him from behind, just as we cannot look at an image on an icon 'in the round'. We recall the death-scenes in the narratives of Alexios the Man of God and Theodore of Serrae: on the corpse of each of them is found a scroll containing

<sup>6</sup> H.-G. Beck, *Theodoros Metochites* (Munich, 1952), 142–3.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. A. Cameron, 'On Defining the Holy Man', in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. J. Howard-Johnston and P. A. Hayward (Oxford, 1999), 37–9.

the very text in which we are reading about it. This is a closed, self-sufficient system.

Holy foolery embodies a cultural need in the form of a *vita*; yet by their reception and perception of the *vita*, readers return holy foolery to life as an institution. As it opens out into the world, the text is no longer self-contained. Non-hagiographic sources intrude, such as the canons of the Council in Trullo, the commentaries of Nikon and Balsamon, the catechesis of Theodore the Stoudite, the verses of Symeon the New Theologian, the utterly secular treatise of Kekaumenos, the historical narrative of Niketas Choniates, and so on. And it is by no means clear what weight should be attached to their respective utterances on holy foolery: if its existence becomes common knowledge, then what is to prevent somebody from succumbing to the temptation to simulate it? Here we must make a clear distinction. One thing is the hagiographic, textually constructed persona who is actually 'normal' but who feigns insanity for pious purposes (neither his normality nor his piety can be verified, of course); quite another thing, however, is the non-hagiographical or quasi-hagiographical persona, about whom one might, for example, find several different and conflicting texts, and who might turn out to be any one of a range of 'real' people: a normal person simulating insanity either for pious purposes or in order to make a profit; a real madman who is mistaken for a holy fool; a vain man desperate to be honoured as a holy fool, etc. Do Staurakios Oxeobaphos, Basilakios, Luke of Anazarbos or even Symeon the Pious count as holy fools? There are no criteria for deciding. It is clear that they behaved like holy

fools; but beyond the bounds of hagiographic convention, in real life, holy foolery becomes whatever people consider it to be. Some acknowledge it, others do not; in one age it is accepted, in another—not. In this respect one of the favourite questions asked in studies of holy foolery<sup>8</sup>—what was the total number of holy fools in Byzantium or Rus?—becomes meaningless. In the Orthodox world even canonization, because of its informal character, is no guarantee that any given saint will be universally acknowledged precisely as a holy fool (this is particularly evident in the case of the Russian *iurodivye*).

Having become a recognized social institution (that is, as something which is bound to occur, if not at a regular time or place), holy foolery re-enters hagiography, but in an entirely new way: no trace remains of the self-contained text; the generic conventions are breached by life itself. The hagiographer takes the existing ‘mould’ and tries to fit it to real people: for some it turns out to be too big, for others too small. For example: Makarios Chrysokephalos has no difficulty in decoding the behaviour of his protagonist, Leontios of Jerusalem, when the latter puts on an accomplished show of holy foolery in Constantinople, obviously in full knowledge of the literary precedents (see above, p. 210). The author and the hero both understand the rules of the

<sup>8</sup> See P. Hauptmann, ‘Die “Narren um Christi Willen” in der Ostkirche’, *Kirche im Osten* 2 (1959); M. B. Petrovich, ‘The Social and Political Role of the Muscovite Fools-in-Christ’, *Forschungen zur osteuropäische Geschichte* 25 (1978), 283–5; N. I. Tolstoi, ‘Russkoe iurodstvo kak forma sviatosti’, in *Folklor, Sacrum, Religio*, ed. J. Barmiński and M. Jasmińska-Wojtkowska (Lublin, 1995), 32; T. A. Nedospasova, *Russkoe iurodstvo XI–XVI vv.* (Moscow, 1997), 110–17, etc.

game. However, the moment a real madman (Constantine Skanthos) walks onto the page, the author is at a loss. The fool mutters a great deal more than Chrysokephalos can make sense of: that is, than he can reduce to a known hagiographical stereotype or can decipher as an intelligible prophecy or admonition. And yet he notes down Skanthos' mutterings—which are most likely authentic—just in case the latter really is a genuine holy fool. Thus, when 'real' insanity intrudes into literature from life, it destroys the very genre which originally emerged precisely out of an artistic conceptualization of insanity. Subsequently, a vast multitude of mutterings litters the pages of the vitae of Russian *iurodivye*, while the authors cautiously express the hope that some kind of meaning may nevertheless exist, hidden in the incoherent words which they convey.

By definition, holy foolery should be an anonymous form of sanctity, which is revealed only after the righteous one's death. Yet this conventional construct was inevitably undermined once holy foolery turned into a social institution. If anybody begins to suspect, while the holy fool is still alive, that there might be some meaning in his madness, then in theory he should lose his sanctity. To avoid this outcome, over the centuries the holy fool's extravagant behaviour becomes decreasingly aggressive and increasingly prophetic: his indecorum alone is no longer sufficient proof that he brings spiritual benefits to society; he needs something else. This tendency, too, is particularly pronounced in Rus, where in its later stages *iurodstvo* was indeed transformed into a form of self-torture, of social protest or polemic.

Byzantine holy foolery could not have arisen had there not already existed, in the Greek world, a developed tradition of medicine which regarded insanity as a distinct malaise, not necessarily linked to demonic possession. No such tradition ever existed in Rus. Here, therefore, conditions were much more propitious for what might be called the ‘pathologization’ of holy foolery. In this process, Rus society gradually came to see any madness as sacred, and thus any madman as a holy fool. Hence the following specific provision—unthinkable in Byzantium—in the 1666 Council’s article against holy foolery: ‘As regards the person who is a *iurod* from birth, on account of his feeble-mindedness, he is neither to be praised nor abused, but for pity’s sake he should be shown charity.’<sup>9</sup>

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Our first glimpse of what a person who has adopted the holy fool’s persona might be thinking comes from several mid-seventeenth-century texts. The earliest document authored by a *iurodivyi* emerges in the town of Galich. Stefan Trofimovich Nechaev left farewell letters addressed to his mother, wife, and uncle<sup>10</sup> before setting out on his wanderings. If you are leaving, it seems that you should go ahead and leave; if you have come to hate the entire world, don’t engage in long argument with it, especially since we learn from Stefan’s letter that this is not the first time he has departed. In the

<sup>9</sup> *Deianiia Moskovskikh Soborov 1666 i 1667 gg.* (Moscow, 1893), fo. 28<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> D. S. Likhachev, A. M. Panchenko, and N. V. Ponyrko, *Smekh v Drevnei Rusi* (Leningrad, 1984), 205–13.

text, which is arranged as Stefan's answers to his family's questions, we find the enquiry: 'Why did you first leave us and then came back again to us as though you loved the world, and took a wife?'<sup>11</sup> The author replies: 'Because of my mother's sorrow.' This is an understandable answer coming from a man not immune to human weaknesses. But then another question follows: 'Why then did you upset your young wife? You should not have got married in the first place.'<sup>12</sup> The answer here is totally different, and supremely aloof: 'This was God's will... Whom God loves, He punishes.' Each answer is logical in its own way, but coming from the same mouth they sound totally inconsistent. Self-forgiveness hand in hand with self-deification: this is what *iurodstvo* is about.

In his letter, Stefan Nechaev explains at length how much harm is done to a man's soul by this vain world which he wants to abandon: 'You may', he tells his family, 'since you are skilful helmsmen, ... navigate the vessel of (your) soul... Sinful as I am, I am not a skilful helmsman and I am frightened in the sea of this world... For you know that I am coarse and simple.'<sup>13</sup> The position seems clear: the author believes that, because he is so weak, it is too dangerous for his soul to stay in the world; his loved ones, meanwhile, are resistant to temptations, and therefore will remain unharmed. Yet all turns out to be quite different. Stefan writes: 'If I loved this world and its chambers full of vanity, I would care about them, as other people do.' 'Other people' are, first and foremost, his family, and Stefan is leaving not

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 208.

because he is weak ('Look at me: I did not abandon this world out of simplicity'), but because he is strong: 'Why, mother... can you not stop crying! Look at me as I walk to the alien unknown land, abandoning you... but not crying like you.'<sup>14</sup> The same 'oscillation of meaning between the baring... of his own soul and the denunciation of... others' is detected in Stefan's penitential verse, which N. Ponyrko has recently identified.<sup>15</sup>

As soon as the holy fool finally finds his own voice, the first thing we notice is this stylistic incongruence: either he is sinful and should be more concerned with saving his own soul than with judging others, or he is perfect and should care for humankind which is mired in sin. Here we have a combination of these incompatible roles: limitless self-abasement hand in hand with the greatest pride: this is what *iurodstvo* is about.

In his letters Nechaev seems to be bidding his last farewell: 'I don't want your vain weeping and do not come back to you. I am as if dead to this ephemeral world... Do not think of me as alive... My bones will be laid to rest in a foreign land.'<sup>16</sup> But he does not keep his promise. From the 'Note on the Burial of the Holy Fool Stefan', found among his letters, we know that even though he 'had abandoned his father and mother, his wife and his only child and went around committing holy foolery for many years', yet he came back to his

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>15</sup> N. V. Ponyrko, 'Avtor stikhov pokaiannykh i raspevshchik iurodivyi Stefan', *TODRL* 54 (2003), 228.

<sup>16</sup> Likhachev, Panchenko, Ponyrko, *Smekh*, 211–12.

hometown once again. On 14 May 1667, 'he was buried in the Church of the Epiphany in Galich, under the refectory on the left side behind the stove, where he had dug out his own grave'.<sup>17</sup> As in the case of Alexios, the holy fool goes away, only to come back later (cf. p. 84). Contrary to the conventions of the genre, according to which the Man of God is not supposed to be recognized by his family until the day of his death, Stefan returns to a small town, where he is bound to be noticed by his relatives. It is likely, in other words, that his purpose is less to reproach the sinful world than to cause pain to his family. Tormenting others mixed with self-torture: this is what *iurodstvo* is about.

Stefan wanted to vanish, to remain unknown in an alien land, but instead, he became famous in his own land. He was surrounded by admirers, he prepared his own grave in a prominent place and, in all likelihood, he saw to it that as many people as possible would learn about his feat: 'as he was buried, upon advice from his worshippers, a portrait of his image was painted. Archimandrites of the Galich monasteries attended his funeral... together with the brethren and priests and deacons from all over Galich.'<sup>18</sup> Modesty turning into vanity: this is what *iurodstvo* is about.

Stefan's life project turned out to be a great success. In a cautious remark made by the author of the 'Note on the Burial', '[people] were invited to the funeral [of the holy fool] by a young man. As it turned out, nobody had called him and he was believed to be God's angel.'<sup>19</sup> This was a way to substantiate the sanctity of the deceased. Not that his

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 212–13.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 213.



sanctity needed confirmation. It was quite enough that ‘the funeral was attended... by the secular ranks, the Galich voivode... and the former voivode... the gentry and nobility and many tradespeople and people from the surrounding places, with wives and children. This blessed Stefan was a poor man, yet many distinguished people gathered at his funeral.’<sup>20</sup> Society wanted to have such a saint. The author omits to mention whether Stefan’s family was at the funeral.

It should be noted that Stefan Nechaev is by no means a ‘typical holy fool’. Only a purely literary character may claim such a title. If Stefan does represent a type, it is that of somebody ‘playing the holy fool’.

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In modern Russia it has become fashionable to discern elements of holy foolery in, for example, the behaviour or the authorial stance of certain writers, or even in the provocative challenge to conventional meaning as posed by postmodernism. Such parallels are rarely accurate. With regard to the latter, for example, we can agree with the view that ‘the art of postmodernism is diametrically opposed to holy foolery; it is utterly contrary to the latter’s “monologism”, for it judges nobody and even warns against judgement’.<sup>21</sup> The ‘real’ holy fool is indeed monologic and rigidly authoritarian. What is the meaning of what he ‘says’ (whether or not he actually utters any words)? His denun-

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>21</sup> E. A. Gorobinskaia and L. M. Nemchenko, ‘Simuliatsiia iurodstva’, in *Russkaia literatura XX veka*, iii (Ekaterinburg, 1996), 188.

ciation—implicit or explicit—is aimed not only against the sins of men and the neglect of Christian precepts. His main task is to serve as a reminder of Christianity's eschatological core. The holy fool wants to shake up the world because it is 'lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot' (Rev. 3:16). In holy foolery, culture operates like a man who presses on an aching tooth only when it begins to ache a bit less, preferring the simple certainty of pain to the deceptive hope of recovery. The need to cope with life in an imperfect world is just such a 'toothache'. Subsidence of the pain would mean an imperceptible (and very tempting) reconciliation with the world as it is, while the masochistic urge to scratch the sore is equivalent to the continual preparedness to shatter, over and over again, the shackles of human existence.

The holy fool has his own view of the problem of good and evil. For him the 'good' has nothing to do with commonplace, mundane notions of what is right and proper. He demonstrates to an astonished mankind that for him even murder need not always be reckoned a sin.<sup>22</sup> He denies people the right to make their own ethical judgements,<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> As a recent scholar notes: 'It is assumed that God participates in the concealment of the Holy Fool's true nature, and that He forgives in advance sins which are mere accessories to the fool's way of life': V. Déroche, *Étude sur Vie de Syméon d'Emèse par Léontios de Néapolis* (Paris, 1991), 275; cf. Kallistos of Diokleia, 'The Fool in Christ as Prophet and Apostle', *Sobornost* 6 (1984).

<sup>23</sup> This fundamental feature of holy foolery was acutely sensed by A. Dugin, a proponent of so-called 'neo-Eurasianism' and of an anti-Western 'conservative revolution': 'We Russians are a God-bearing people. Therefore all that we do is endowed with deeper meaning... In this overabundance of national Grace, good and evil are blurred... As in the case of holy fools, humiliation can be a sacred rite... For the Orthodox, the observance of the Ten Commandments is not of decisive significance': A. Dugin, *Tampliery proletariata* (Moscow, 1997), 291, 294.

for such judgement is fraught with pride and, ultimately, with atheism.

Holy foolery makes manifest an integral feature of sanctity in general, as a cultural phenomenon. As Thomas Mann noted in one of his letters: 'You and your Catholic Christianity are too often shocked by the word "idiot" when applied to a saint. Yet this is the title of one saint's vita (*Heiligengeschichte*), perhaps the most profound novel of a certain Byzantine psychologist (*eines byzantinisches Psychologen*) . . . If we take "saint" not just to mean a pious person, but to imply something more sinister (*etwas unheimlicher*), then there was a fair amount, an arresting amount (*eingreifend viel*), of the saint in Nietzsche . . . [In him] all became grotesque, drunken, full of the pain of the Cross, criminal (*grotesk, trunken, kreuzleidvoll, verbrecherisch*) . . .'<sup>24</sup> Mann's 'Byzantine psychologist' is not Leontios of Neapolis or Symeon the New Theologian, but Fedor Dostoevskii, and his 'idiot' is not Symeon of Emesa or Andrew the Fool, but Prince Myshkin. Yet the words which Mann applies to Nietzsche characterize with remarkable precision the phenomenon which has been the subject of the present book.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Mann, *Briefe*, ed. Erika Mann (Berlin, Weimar, 1965), 618.

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