

## Isaakii of the Kiev Caves Monastery: An Ascetic Feigning Madness or a Madman-Turned-Saint?

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The ambiguity of Isaakii's hagiographic and canonical status is reflected in the debates over his ascetic identity. In a number of scholarly and ecclesiastical discussions of *iurodstvo*, or holy foolery, Isaakii figures as the first Russian holy fool.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to this opinion, however, a number of scholars view his holy foolery as problematic.<sup>2</sup> Not only has this ascetic been excluded from the church canon of *iurodstvo*,<sup>3</sup> his role in the developmental history of

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<sup>1</sup> This opinion is voiced in discussions and studies of foolery in Christ by Ioann Kovalevskii, *Iurodstvo o Khriste i Khrista radi iurodivye Vostochnoi i Russkoi tserkvi: Istoricheskii ocherk v zhitii sikh podvizhnikov blagochestiia* (Moscow: Pechatnia A. I. Snegireva, 1895), reprinted as Ioann Kovalevskii, *Podvig iurodstva* (Moscow: Lepta, 2000), 79, 161–67; Harriet Murav, *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky and the Poetics of Cultural Critique* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 3, 18; Ewa M. Thompson, *Understanding Russia: The Holy Fool in Russian Culture* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 7–8, 76–77; G. P. Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), 1: 147; Sergey A. Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, trans. Simon Franklin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 253.

<sup>2</sup> See Natalie Challis and Horace W. Dewey, "Divine Folly in Old Kievan Literature: The Tale of Isaakii the Caves Dweller," *Slavic and East European Journal* 22: 3 (1978): 259; G. P. Fedotov, *Sviatye drevnei Rusi (X–XVII st.)* (New York: Izдание russkogo pravoslavnogo Bogoslovskogo Fonda, 1959), 147; Marcia A. Morris, *Saints and Revolutionaries: The Ascetic Hero in Russian Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 71; and S. B. Chernin, "Povestvovatel'naia struktura slova o chernoreztse Isaakii v sostave PVL," *Vestnik Udmurtskogo universiteta*, no. 7 (2005): 85. These scholars consider Isaakii as an ascetic and not a *iurodivyi*.

<sup>3</sup> The matter of canonizations of Kiev Caves Monastery saints is complex and poorly documented. In the case of Isaakii, specific canonization documents and references are unavailable. Before Metropolitan Makarii's canonizations of 1547–49, Isaakii was venerated as a monk (Russ. *chernorizets*) of the Kiev Caves Monastery. As such he is mentioned in the fifteenth-century Kiev Caves Monastery sinodik along with nine other Kiev Caves Monastery saints; see Elena Vorontsova, *Kievskie peshchery: Putevoditel'* (Kiev: Amadei, 2005), 30. His relics are in part located in the Near Caves of the monastery; see Evgenii E. Golubinskii, *Istoriia kanonizatsii sviatykh v russkoi tserkvi* (Moscow, 1903; repr., Farnborough, UK: Gregg International Publishers, 1969), 205. In Makarii's *Chet'i Minei* Isaakii does not have a separate vita. His story appears together with other Kiev Caves Paterik texts under 13 May as an attachment to the vita of St.

the Russian paradigm of foolishness for Christ has been continuously denied.<sup>4</sup> Scholars voice the contention that in Russia the genre of the holy fool's vita fully evolved and came into its own only in the fourteenth–sixteenth centuries,<sup>5</sup> when the vitae of urban fools in Christ (e.g., Ioann Ustiuzhskii, Isidor Rostovskii)<sup>6</sup> were first created in the Novgorod and Moscow lands.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, first Novgorodian and then Moscow hagiographers were acclaimed as the initiators of the Russian tradition of holy fools' hagiography. Meanwhile the vita of St. Isaakii of the Kiev Caves Monastery has been seen as an abortive attempt at creating an indigenous Russian vita of a *iurodivyi*<sup>8</sup> and proof of the discontinuity between the Novgorod-Moscow and Kievan Rus' periods in the history of Russian *iurodstvo*.<sup>9</sup>

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Feodosii. In 1624–27 the archimandrite of the Kiev Caves Monastery, Zakhariia Kopystenskii, included several Kievan monks (one of them Isaakii) who had been venerated in Ukraine in the service books (Vorontsova, *Kievskie peshchery*, 31). Isaakii, together with other monks from Kopystenskii's list, was formally canonized in 1643 by Metropolitan of Ukraine Petro Mohyla (Golubinskii, *Istoriia kanonizatsii sviatykh*, 210). In Dmitrii Rostovskii's *Chet'i-Minei*, Isaakii received a separate vita. Yet it was only in 1762 that the Holy Russian Synod ordered the inclusion of Kievan saints into the all-Russian list of saints. See A. S. Khoroshev, *Politicheskaiia istoriia russkoi kanonizatsii* (XI–XVI vv.) (Moscow: Izd-vo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1986), 55.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Morris's as well as Challis and Dewey's discussions of Isaakii. Ivanov proposes to view Isaakii's vita as a reflection of the Byzantine tradition. See Ivanov, *Holy Fools*, 253–54. Ewa Thompson suggests that Isaakii exhibited shamanic behaviors. At the same time she does not include Isaakii in the list of Russian holy fools. See Thompson, *Understanding Russia*, 7–8, 76–77.

<sup>5</sup> See Fedotov, *Sviatye drevnei Rusi*, 191; Ivanov, *Holy Fools*, 258; V. O. Kliuchevskii, *Drevnerusskie zhitiia sviatykh kak istoricheskii istochnik* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), 112; Ioann Kologrivoff (Ieromonakh), "Les 'fous pour Christ' dans l'hagiographie russe," *Revue d'ascétique et mystique* 25 (1949): 243; Challis and Dewey, "Divine Folly," 258.

<sup>6</sup> See the discussion of the origins of Russian holy foolery in Ivanov, *Holy Fools*, 245–84.

<sup>7</sup> See Kliuchevskii, *Drevnerusskie zhitiia*, 112; and S. A. Ivanov, *Vizantiiskoe iurodstvo* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1994), 142. As Ivanov convincingly shows, the first recorded Russian urban holy fool was Isidor Tverdislov and not Prokopii of Ustiug, who had been traditionally listed as one (*Holy Fools*, 264). See also L. A. Dmitriev, *Povesti o Zhitii Mikhaila Klopskogo* (Moscow-Leningrad: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1958); and Svitlana Kobets, "The Russian Paradigm of *Iurodstvo* and Its Genesis in Novgorod," *Russian Literature* 48: 3 (2000): 367–88.

<sup>8</sup> Challis and Dewey, "Divine Folly," 258–60.

<sup>9</sup> A contention by Sergei Ivanov is representative of this view: "In fact Russian holy foolishness begins in the North and North-East of Russia. It would be wrong to assert that the holy foolishness of the Kievan period was entirely imitative in character while the 'Northern' variety was completely independent of the Byzantine model. On the one hand, in the image of Isaakii of the Kiev Caves Monastery there are enough indigenous traits. On the other hand, almost all Russian hagiographies of holy fools up to the nineteenth century are imitative. Nevertheless, it is impossible to overlook the fact that after Isaakii there was not even one holy fool in the South Russian lands, and the

This vita indeed considerably differs from Byzantine and Northern Russian vitae of *iurodivoye* both in style and composition and in its choice of topoi. Unlike both Byzantine and Northern Russian vitae, Isaakii's vita did not treat *iurodstvo* as the central issue. Thus, in stark contrast to St. Andrew of Constantinople (tenth century) or St. Vasilii Blazhennyi (the Blessed) of Moscow (sixteenth century), St. Isaakii of the Kiev Caves Monastery is not primarily a holy fool, nor is he devoted to the exploit of *iurodstvo* unconditionally. At some point in his ascetic career Isaakii leaves holy foolishness behind, which is highly unusual both for Byzantine and medieval Russian traditions, where *iurodstvo* tends to be a lifelong commitment.<sup>10</sup> St. Isaakii's hagiographer further deviates from the traditional hagiographic pattern (found, for example, in the vitae of Vasilii Blazhennyi and Isidor Tverdislov) when he neither openly extols *iurodstvo* as the most difficult and glorious Christian ascetic practice nor makes it central to the biography of his hero. As will be shown in this paper, the devotional, ascetic, and social goals that this saint pursues have a number of connotations that are in line with paradigmatic Byzantine holy foolishness, yet overall his *iurodstvo* does not conform to the canonical (Byzantine) models.<sup>11</sup> Contrary to them, his ascetic quest is not defined by holy foolishness and at some point of his life he even abandons foolery altogether. Arguably, his odd behaviors suggested madness and demon possession, which possibly posed a problem for his acceptance by the community and for the positive interpretation of his ascetic stance and person altogether. This situation accounts, at least in part, for the idiosyncrasies of Isaakii's portrayal. Furthermore, he was canonized as an ascetic and a reverend (Russ. *prepodobnyi*) and has never been listed in church records as a holy fool.<sup>12</sup> The

phenomenon of North Russian holy foolishness is separated from its Kievan counterpart chronologically. Evidently, it would be correct to claim that there were indigenous reasons for the emergence of holy fools in Novgorod, Ustiug, and Rostov. These reasons are characteristic of the Russian cultural and religious environment. It was the hagiographic canon that made them resemble Byzantine holy fools" (*Vizantiiskoe iurodstvo*, 142).

<sup>10</sup> Byzantine hagiographies claim the holy fool's unconditional commitment to his ascetic endeavor. Russian tradition, however, features a number of notable exceptions. The case of the holy fool Avraamii described in Protopop Avvakum's *Life Written by Himself* shows that the asceticism of holy foolishness could represent a distinct period in one's ascetic career. So do the cases of the representatives of the eldership (*starchestvo*) tradition, Avraamii Smolenskii and Kirill Belozerskii, both of whom briefly embraced *iurodstvo*.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of monastic, urban, and itinerant models of foolishness for Christ, see Ivanov, *Holy Fools*, chaps. 1–4.

<sup>12</sup> The Russian Church has tended to regard Isaakii as a conventional ascetic. See Arkhimandrit Leonid, *Sviataia Rus', ili svedeniia o vsekh sviatykh i podvizhnikakh blagochestii na Rusi (do XVIII veka) obshche i mestno chtimykh* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia M. Stasiulevicha, 1891); I. V. Vladyshevskaiia and V. L. Sorokina, eds., *Russkie sviatye, podvizhniki blagochestii i agiografy* (Moscow: Russkii mir, 1992); *Slovar' istoricheskii o sviata-*

question arises as to whether Isaakii was really a *iurodivyi*, i.e., a representative of the ascetic tradition of feigned madness. If he was, why does his vita differ so much from other hagiographic textualizations of holy foolishness? And what was his hagiographer's take on this form of ascetic devotion?

### The Text of Isaakii's Vita

The story about the life and deeds of St. Isaakii<sup>13</sup> (d. 1090)<sup>14</sup> was written in the eleventh century in the Caves Monastery, the leading monastery in Kievan Rus'. Initially, it was a part of *The Primary Chronicle* (*Povest' vremennykh let*)<sup>15</sup> where it was located under year 1074. Later on, in the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries, when the Kiev Caves Paterik<sup>16</sup> (KCP) was created, Isaakii's entry became a part of it. While the authorship of most of the Paterik is distributed

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*tykh, proslavlennykh v Rossiiskoi tserkvi i o nekotorykh podvizhnikakh blagochestiia, mestno chtimykh* (St. Petersburg, 1862; repr., Moscow: Kniga, 1991). In Dmitrii Rostovskii's *Chet'i-Minei*, Isaakii is listed as a reverend (Russ. *prepodobnyi*) and a recluse (Russ. *zavtornik*). See *Zhitiia sviatykh, na russkom iazyke izlozhennye po rukovodstvu Chet'ikh-Minei Sv. Dimitriia Rostovskogo. Fevral'* (Moscow: Sinodal'naia Tipografiia, 1903; repr., Kiev: Izdaniie Sviato-Uspenskoii Kievo-Pecherskoii Lavry, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> This saint's Russian names, Isaakii *Pecherskii* and Isaakii *Zavtornik*, have been rendered into English as St. Isaakii of the Kiev Caves Monastery, Isaakii the Recluse, and Isaakii the Caves-Dweller.

<sup>14</sup> In the Russian Orthodox Church calendar Isaakii's feast day falls on 14 February. Isaakii's Prologue entry is on 27 April. The Slavonic text of Isaakii's vita, in the Second Cassian redaction, can be found in the 1991 reprint of Dmytro Abramovych's critical edition of *Kyievo-Pechers'kyi paterik* (Kiev: Vseukrains'ka Akademiia nauk, 1930; repr., Kyiv: Chas, 1991), 185–89, part of the series *Pam'iatky movy ta pys'menstva davn'oi Ukrainy*, vol. 4. An English translation of this redaction of St. Isaakii's vita is found in *The Paterik of the Kievan Caves Monastery*, trans. Muriel Heppell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1989), 205–10. All the quotations are taken from these two editions. The English translation will be accompanied by the original citation. Each will be followed by the corresponding page number.

<sup>15</sup> This opinion was first advanced by A. A. Shakhmatov, who, together with Dmytro Abramovych, reconstructed the text of the first edition of the Kiev-Caves Paterik. See O. V. Tvorogov, "Povest' vremennykh let," in *Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi*, vol. 1, *XI–pervaia polovina XIV v.*, pt. 1, ed. D. S. Likhachev (Leningrad: Nauka, 1987), 337–43.

<sup>16</sup> The term *paterik* was given to the compilation only in the fifteenth century and initially was not found in its title. See Richard W. F. Pope, "O kharaktere i stepeni vliianiia vizantiiskoi literatury na original'nuiu literaturu iuzhnykh i vostochnykh slavian: Diskussiia i metodologiia," in *American Contributions to the Seventh International Congress of Slavists*, ed. Ladislav Matejka, 2 vols. (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), 2: 469–93. For a general discussion of the Kiev Caves Paterik, see L. A. Ol'shevskaia, "Paterik Kievo-Pecherskii," in Likhachev, ed., *Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi*, vol. 1, *XI–pervaia polovina XIV v.*, pt. 1, 308–13.

between Nestor, Simon, and Polikarp, the author of the chapter about Isaakii (Discourse 36)<sup>17</sup> largely remains a matter of dispute.<sup>18</sup> Besides attributing the possible authorship to the above three monks, some express the view that Isaakii's hagiographer is Abbot Feodosii's disciple, Silvestr, who arrived at the Kiev Caves Monastery at the age of 17 and who was supposedly the author of the entries for the years 1051, 1074, and 1091.<sup>19</sup> Yet another scholarly view posits that Isaakii's vita was written by none of the above hagiographers but by an anonymous author.<sup>20</sup> I side with the latter opinion.

As we approach the KCP entry about Isaakii's life and person we have to note its genre peculiarities. Within the great variety of hagiographic genres, which exhibit quite different structures and narrative modes, Isaakii's vita is representative of a paterik tale, which can be described as a short biography or an anecdote from a monk's or nun's life. A canonical hagiography is marked by formal structure, extensive citations from the scriptures, strong laudatory component, detailed account of the saint's biography, reliance on topoi,<sup>21</sup> and adherence to literary conventions characteristic of the historical period which it represents.<sup>22</sup> The paterik tale, on the other hand, is a much less formalized, more succinct, and often entertaining narrative. Most importantly, paterik stories do not target expression of the character's holiness but relate events from the monk's life regardless of the final verdict. The consid-

<sup>17</sup> Abramovych, *Kyievo-Pechers'kyi paterik*, slovo 36, 185–89; and Heppell, trans., *The Paterik*, Discourse 36, 205–10.

<sup>18</sup> For an overview of the scholarship on the subject of authorship of the tale about Isaakii, see O. V. Tvorogov, "Nestor," in Likhachev, ed., *Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi*, vol. 1, *XI–pervaia polovina XIV v.*, pt. 1, 274–78; and L. A. Ol'shevskaia, "Polikarp," in *ibid.*, 370–73. See also Fedotov, *Sviatye drevnei Rusi*, 49–55; Fedotov, *The Russian Religious Mind*, 1: 142–56; Muriel Heppell, "Isaakij the Caves-dweller and the 'Jurodstvo' Tradition," in Heppell, trans., *The Paterik*, 228–30; Heppell, "The Authors of the Paterik," in *The Paterik*, xxiii–xxix; and Chernin, "Povestvovatel'naia struktura," 82–95. Chernin offers a succinct up to date overview of scholarship on the authorship of Isaakii's tale and rightfully notes that scholars mostly concern themselves with the issues of this work's authorship and chronology.

<sup>19</sup> This opinion is voiced, for example, by the Russian scholar A. G. Kuzmin. See Iu. A. Isichenko, *Kyievo-Pechers'kyi Paterik u literaturnomu protsesi kintsia XVI–pochatku XVIII st. na Ukraini* (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1990), 26.

<sup>20</sup> Heppell, trans., *The Paterik*, xx.

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of the formal aspects of hagiographic works, see Joseph Patrick Manson, "Studies in Russian Hagiography during the Period of the Second South Slavic Influence" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1968). See esp. chap. 4, "Narrative Structure in the New Hagiography," 96–171.

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed discussion of hagiographic typology, see Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography*, trans. V. M. Crawford, ed. Richard J. Schroeck (1907; repr., Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1961).

erable oral aspect of paterik stories allows for their qualification as monastery folklore.<sup>23</sup>

It is unknown why the story about Isaakii, which in *The Primary Chronicle* comprises part of a chapter about four early Kievan monks (Damian, Eremita, Matfeii, and Isaakii), got separated from the other three accounts (Discourse 12) in the Kiev Caves Paterik.<sup>24</sup> Chernin rightfully points to the thematic unity between these four stories,<sup>25</sup> identifying their central theme as the strange, remarkable nature of the described ascetics, who are miracle workers, clairvoyants, and prophets. The scholar further notes that Isaakii's strangeness is expressed by the outstanding rigors of his ascetic pursuits. He indeed shares a number of traits with other representatives of ascetic strangeness found in the Kiev Caves Paterik. They may be arrogant, overly meek, fallen ascetics, or ones who found their individual forms of asceticism by trial and error.<sup>26</sup> Yet we cannot overlook an even more consequential aspect of Isaakii's strangeness. He is called a *iurodivyi* and to some extent presented as one. In this regard he is unique in the Kiev Caves Paterik. It is very likely that it was Isaakii's uniqueness as a *iurodivyi* that brought about the dissociation of his story from those of other "strange" ascetics. His portrayal as a *iurodivyi*, however, is far from paradigmatic.

### Isaakii the Ascetic

In his vita, Isaakii is first introduced as an ascetic and not as a holy fool. Yet it is noteworthy that the very first line declares that Isaakii's vita exemplifies humility, the cornerstone of *iurodstvo*: "Just as gold is tried in fire, so men are tested in the crucible of humility" (Iako v' ogni iskushaetsia zlato—chelovetsi priiatni v peshchi smirenia; 185/205). This opening mention of humility provides a thematic link to the ensuing story about holy foolery.

Isaakii, formerly a rich merchant named Chern',<sup>27</sup> takes the first step toward humility when he fulfils the evangelical mandate to rid oneself of one's wealth (Luke 18: 22, Matt. 19: 21).<sup>28</sup> He strips himself of the power secured by

<sup>23</sup> Chernin, "Povestvovatel'naia struktura," 85.

<sup>24</sup> For a comprehensive textual analysis of the cluster, which comprises the tale about Feodosii's death and accounts about the above Kievan monks, see Tvorogov, "Povest' vremennykh let," 318–21.

<sup>25</sup> Chernin, "Povestvovatel'naia struktura," 83.

<sup>26</sup> See Morris, *Saints and Revolutionaries*, 43; and Fairy von Lilienfeld, "The Spirituality of the Early Kievan Caves Monastery," in *Christianity and the Eastern Slavs*, vol. 1, *Slavic Cultures in the Middle Ages*, ed. B. Gasparov and R. Hughes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 69.

<sup>27</sup> It must be noted that Isaakii comes from the northern city of Toropets, which, at least textually, connects him with the future Northern Russian fools for Christ.

<sup>28</sup> This hagiographic topos is an important first step in an ascetic life, e.g., the vita of Antony. For a discussion of this topos, see Martin Dimnik, "Sviatosha—the First

money and becomes the first in a line of Russian holy fools who come from high positions and wealth.<sup>29</sup> The text, however, implies that he did not completely humble himself by absolute poverty, as can be seen in the hagiographer's choice of the word *povele* (commanded) in the description of Isaakii's preparation for his ascetic life: "He ... told someone to buy him a goat and to skin it, and put the skin on his hair shirt, so that the raw hide dried on him" (i povele kupite sobe kozlishch' i odrati ego mekhom", i vozvleche na vliashnitsiu, i os"she okolo ego kozha syra; 186/206). Thus, Isaakii does not buy the goat and prepare the skin himself but employs someone else's services.

In the first part of his vita, Isaakii's asceticism is extreme and extravagant rather than humbling. Even as a neophyte he pursues the utmost rigors, sealing himself in a cave and remaining there for seven years in prayer and fasting. His self-mortification, however, does not bring the desired results of ascetic *apathea* and enlightenment, but, quite to the contrary, leads him into the sin of pride, which Christianity regards as the most alienating from God. As the hagiographer relates Isaakii's failure, he employs imagery and topoi found in the vitae of failed ascetics—the ascetics who were tricked, overpowered, and abused by demons—whose stories were abundantly represented in ascetic compilations from the translated Byzantine corpus.<sup>30</sup> For example,

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Prince-Monk of Kievan Rus'," in *Love of Learning and Devotion to God in Orthodox Monasteries*, ed. Miroljub Joković, Daniel Collins, M. A. Johnson, and Predrag Matejic (Belgrade: Raška škola; Columbus: Ohio State University, Resource Center for Medieval Slavic Studies, 2006), 1: 260.

<sup>29</sup> Such a transition looks especially drastic in the vita of a holy fool and was widely employed in this genre. In Byzantine hagiography, Symeon of Emesa comes from a wealthy family, while Andrew of Constantinople leaves behind the comforts of life in the family of an appreciative and sympathetic master. The Russian hagiography of holy foolishness reiterates this topos. Its representatives include Mikhail of the Klopsk monastery, who was formerly a nobleman; Prokopii of Ustiug, who was a wealthy merchant; Nikola Kochanov, who was from a well-off family; and Vasilii Blazhennyi, who was from a well-to-do family.

<sup>30</sup> For discussions of the translated Byzantine Pateriks, see Francis Thompson, "The Nature of the Reception of Christian Byzantine Culture in Russia in the Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries and Its Implications for Russian Culture," in *Belgian Contributions to the 8th International Congress of Slavists, Zagreb, Ljubljana, September 1978*, Slavica Gandensia, vol. 5 (Blandijnberg, Belgium: Department of Slavonic Philology, 1978), 107–31; Pope, "O kharaktere i stepeni vliianiia," 469–93; Zlatar Zdenko, "The Transmission of Texts and Byzantine Legacy to Kievan Rus' (a Re-Examination of the Typology of Culture)," *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies* 2: 2 (1988): 1–27; and E. P. Eremin, "K istorii drevne-russkoi perevodnoi povesti," *Trudy otdela drevnerusskoi literatury* 3 (1936): 37–57. See also the following entries by N. I. Nikolaev in *Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi*: "Paterik Azbuchno-Ierusalimskii," 1: 299–302; "Paterik Egipetskii," 1: 302–08; "Paterik Sinaiskii," 1: 316–21; and "Paterik Skitskii," 1: 321–25.

Palladius's *Lausiac History* (Russ. *Lavsaik*) relates the tale of Ptolemy,<sup>31</sup> who wandered and, like Isaakii after his failure, estranged himself from the Church; about a nun who fell,<sup>32</sup> and about Valens<sup>33</sup> who, like Isaakii, saw the Devil disguised as the Savior. Palladius also mentions the failed ascetics Stephen, Ecarpius, and Heron, who "fell into shameful libertinism."<sup>34</sup> In addition to Palladius's works, the *Prologue*<sup>35</sup>—which was translated into Old Church Slavonic specifically for the Kiev Caves Paterik, whose rule assigned readings from this compilation<sup>36</sup>—contained a number of such stories as well. For example, a *Prologue* entry for 9 January is called "About how the devil easily conquers those who are prideful,"<sup>37</sup> and an entry for 10 July is called "An edificatory story about the pride-stricken ones." Other *Prologue* entries address this issue from another angle, showing how the ascetic can confront demons and the Devil. For example, the 1 December story is "About the monk Iora (who defeated the Devil on a chariot)."<sup>38</sup> The theme of ascetic failure and the dangers of demonic temptations is also prominent in a number of important individual hagiographies, including those of St. Antony of Egypt

<sup>31</sup> Robert T. Meyer, trans., *Palladius: The Lausiac History* (New York: Paulist Press, 1964), 87.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 150. Entry 69, "The Nun Who Fell and then Repented," relates the tale of a nun who fornicated, got pregnant, gave birth to a baby, and then prayed to God for this child to be dead (cf. the vita of Pelageia Ivanovna Serebrennikova, a nineteenth-century fool for Christ, who also prayed for her children to be taken by God). Nevertheless, after this nun had repented she, according to her vita, became very pleasing to God.

<sup>33</sup> The personality of Valens, as well as events of his life, reveal a number of parallels with those of Isaakii. For a discussion of those parallels, see H. C. Kozak, "Litopysna opovid' pro prepodobnoho Isakiiia Pechernyky v konteksti stanovlennia 'Zhyttia obshchoho' v Kyivo-Pechers'kii obyteli," in *Mohylians'ki chytannia: Zbirnyk naukovykh prats'*, ed. V. M. Rekada and V. M. Kolpakova (Kyiv: Pul'sary, 2001), 167–68.

<sup>34</sup> Meyer, *Palladius*, 126.

<sup>35</sup> See E. A. Fet, "Prolog," in Likhachev, ed., *Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi*, vol. 1, XI–pervaia polovina XIV v., 376–81.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>37</sup> For a detailed discussion of Prologue composition and themes, see N. Petrov, *O proiskhozhdenii i sostave slaviano-russkogo pechatnogo prologa (inozemnye istochniki)* (Kiev: Tipografiia Eremeeva, 1875).

<sup>38</sup> See my discussion of this issue in "The Paradigm of the Hebrew Prophet and the Russian Tradition of *Iurodstvo*," in *Canadian Contributions to the XIV International Congress of Slavists (Ohrid, Macedonia)*, ed. Oleh Il'nytsky, special issue, *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 50: 1–2 (2008): 1–16.



by Athanasius<sup>39</sup> of Alexandria and St. Symeon the Stylite, which were among the earliest translated vitae.<sup>40</sup>

Isaakii's ascetic failure is in line with this genre. When one night Isaakii is visited by demons disguised as angels, he neither questions nor discerns the diabolic nature of his visitors and, without crossing himself, hurries to accept "the honor" of worshiping with them the Lord Jesus Christ, another disguised demon. Thereby Isaakii demonstrates vainglory, his prideful conviction of his righteousness, and his need for appreciation. As soon as the monk prostrates himself before the "Lord," he is seized by the demons, who start shouting, "Isaakii, you are ours!" (206). They begin playing musical instruments, inducing Isaakii to dance, which he does until dawn, when he collapses in exhaustion. In the morning he is found near death:

In the morning, at daybreak, the time drew near for him to eat some bread, and as usual Antonij came to the window and said to him, "Give me a blessing, Father Isaakij!" But he heard nothing. Antonij spoke several times, but there was no reply, and he said to himself, "Can he have passed away?" He sent to the monastery for Feodosij and the brethren. The brethren came and dug out an opening where the entrance was stopped up, and took hold of him. Thinking he was dead, they carried him out and put him down in front of the Caves. They saw that he was alive, and Feodosij said that this was the demons' work. They laid him on a bed, and the holy Antonij looked after him. (207)

Заутра же бывшую дѣни и приспевшую вкушению хлеба, прииде Антоніе по обычаю въ оконцю и глагола ему: «благослави, отче Исакие», — и не бе гласа, ни послушанія. И многажды глагола Антоніе, и не бысть гласа, и рече в себе: «егда преставиль ся есть»? и посла въ монастырь по Феодосіа и по братію.

<sup>39</sup> D. M. Bulanin, "Zhitie Antoniiia Velikogo," in Likhachev, ed., *Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti*, vol. 1, XI-pervaia polovina XIV v., 135.

<sup>40</sup> The motif of an ascetic's temptation and failure is prominent in the Kiev Caves Paterik in general. Among the fallen ascetics are Nikita, Ioann, and Fedor. These tales, however, were written later than Isaakii's and were probably modeled on or oriented to Isaakii's story. See the discussion of Isaakii's story as one of the models for the later Kiev Caves Paterik entries in Dmytro Chyzhevskii, *History of Russian Literature from the Eleventh Century to the End of the Baroque* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 95–96. Thus, Isaakii's excessive self-confidence is reiterated in the vita of Nikita. The structural and thematic similarities between these vitae are many: both ascetics initially have overly ambitious goals and both are tempted by the demons. Finally, in both vitae the ascetic's fall is followed by the recovery through a different task or a form of asceticism, which facilitates his personal fulfillment as a holy person. It is noteworthy that while neither Nikita nor Isaakii abandon asceticism, they do adjust their ascetic goals and means.

Пришедши же братия и откопаша, идеже бе заграждено устие, и взяша его, мняще его мертва быти, и изнесше, положиша его пред печерою, и видеша, яко живъ есть. И рече игумень Феодосій, яко от бесовскаго действа сие бысть ему. И положиша его на одре, и служаше ему святыи Антоніе. (186)

However, Antonii's care of Isaakii is short-lived, since after that fateful night Antonii flees to Chernigov, trying to escape the wrath of Prince Iziaslav. At that time, the monastery's new abbot, Feodosii, starts taking care of the failed recluse Isaakii.

Learning that Antonii had gone to Chernihiv, Feodosii went out with the brethren, took Isaakii, carried him to his own cell, and looked after him there. For Isaakij was weakened in mind and body and could not turn over on his side, stand up, or sit down; he just lay there on one side. (207)

Феодосій же, уедавъ, яко Антоній отшелъ есть к Чернігову, ишедъ съ братією и изъ Ісакія, и принесе его в келію свою, і служаше ему, бе бо раслаблень умом и телом, яко не мощи ему обратитися на другую страну, ни въстати, ни седети, но лежаще на единой стране. (186)

Isaakii's transition from the care of Antonii to that of Feodosii provides a demarcation line between the two periods of his ascetic venture, his failure as a recluse and his success as a fool for Christ. These two periods mirror two different ascetic models embraced by Isaakii's spiritual mentors, the anchorite Antonii and Feodosii, the father of Kiev as well as of Russian communal monastic living.<sup>41</sup> In the Kiev Caves Paterik, Antonii has a number of followers or like-minded ascetics, including brethren Afanasii, Nikita, Lavrentii, and Ioann, as well as Isaakii and to some extent Marko, whose vitae feature different degrees of solitary living.<sup>42</sup> Ascetic seclusion has always been considered an advanced step in a monk's career, which one undertakes only after having distinguished oneself as a cenobite. However, Isaakii must have re-

<sup>41</sup> See Fedotov's discussion of ascetic models, represented in the Kiev Caves Paterik by Antonii and Feodosii (*Sviatye*, 152–57). Also see Kozak's discussion of the strife in early Kievan Christianity between these ascetic tendencies, which were represented by conventional monastic collective living and the individualistic asceticism of anchorites (*"Litopysna opovid'"*, 161–69). Chernin seconds the above opinions as he calls Isaakii's vita a pamphlet championing communal living (*"Povestvovatel'naia struktura"*, 92).

<sup>42</sup> It is noteworthy that all these vitae offer either explicit criticism of solitary living (tales about Isaakii and Nikita) or deemphasize it, thereby offering implicit criticism (tale about Lavrentii). Further criticism of Antony the anchorite can be seen in the implication of his faulty mentorship.

ceived Antonii's blessing for his venture as a recluse, even though he was just a neophyte. Thus his mentor both misguided him and violated the rule of gradual advancement in the individual's ascetic life and practices.

Antonii's fear of Prince Iziaslav's wrath and his decision to flee in order to save his life can also be seen as implied criticism of the practice of hermetic seclusion. As Peter Brown convincingly argued in his famous article "The Rise of a Holy Man in Late Antiquity," the paradigmatic holy man exhibits a state of grace by being fearless in the face of the world's threats and persecutions.<sup>43</sup> Antonii's fear, however, runs counter to this topos of grace as power. Antonii's flight can be seen against the backdrop of not-yet-quite-Christian Rus', where the princes do not yet acknowledge the holy men's authority.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, Christian awareness about the holy man's authority is prominent in those parts of the Kiev Caves Paterik which deal with the vita of Feodosii. He, as an archetypal saint,<sup>45</sup> is a staunch defender of justice and truth. As the leader of the Kievan monastic and lay communities, Feodosii is not only fearless but also defiant. He gives spiritual counsel to Prince Iziaslav and challenges Prince Sviatoslav as a usurper of the throne.

It is under the care of Feodosii that Isaakii starts his recovery two years later. During this period Isaakii relies on Feodosii to regain and relearn the skills of everyday living and return to normal life. The hagiographer carefully describes Feodosii's actions and strategies, showing close familiarity with the situation to which he was, most likely a witness.<sup>46</sup> His detailed description of how Feodosii taught Isaakii to eat is an example:

They sat him down apart from the brethren and put some bread in front of him, but he did not want to take it, so they put it in his hand. Feodosij said, "Put the bread in front of him, but do not put it in his hand. Let him eat it himself." For a whole week he did not eat but after some time he looked around and put the bread in his mouth and thus learned how to eat. (207–08)

... и посажаху его кроме братиа, полагаху пред нимъ хлебъ, и не хотяше взяти его, они же влагаху въ руку его! Феодосій же рече:

<sup>43</sup> Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80–101.

<sup>44</sup> Later on in Russian history and culture, the holy man, and especially the fool for Christ, acquired great authority over the rulers. The vitae of such influential saints as Sergii of Radonezh or such holy fools as Nikola Salos and Vasilii Blazhennyi portray them as figures of power.

<sup>45</sup> See Fedotov's discussion of Feodosii as Russia's archetypal saint (*Russian Religious Mind*, 2: 121).

<sup>46</sup> Scholars agree that Isaakii's hagiographer renders first-hand information. See, for example, Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind*, 2: 147; and Chernin, "Povestvovatel'naia struktura," 90.

«положите пред нимъ хлебъ и не влагайте в руку его, да сам ясть». И не ядыше всю неделю, и по малу оглядався и вкушаше хлеба, и тако научися ясти. (187)

Isaakii is taught anew how to eat, walk, and speak, which is emblematic of rebirth and initiation into a new life. It will be a life of asceticism marked by strangeness and foolishness bordering on madness. At this stage of his life, Isaakii pursues humility with the determination of the *iurodivyi* fighting demons by means of self-denigration. In line with the paradigm of foolishness for Christ, he purposefully attracts abuse and scorn both from his brethren and the laymen, engaging audiences far beyond the monastery walls:

As he did not wish to be praised by men, he began to act like an idiot and make mischief, sometimes to the superior, sometimes to the brethren, and sometimes to laymen. Some even beat him. He began to behave like an idiot outside the monastery. (208)

Он же, не хотя славы человеческыа, нача уродство творити и пакостити нача: ово игумену, ово же братии, ово мирьским человеком. Друзии же и раны ему дааху. И нача по миру ходити и тако урод ся творити. (188)

In his new role, Isaakii, makes a classical move toward ascetic humility when he finds his place in the kitchen, a typical locale for a holy fool.<sup>47</sup> There he does the most menial work, and, like a *iurodivyi*, is continuously mocked and teased by his brethren. Some of Isaakii's actions are eccentric (e.g., his obsession with dressing lay children in monk's garb), but all in all his holy foolishness is very mild and basically amounts to the pursuit of asceticism with an emphasis on humility. Isaakii's miracle-working ability testifies to the success of his venture. Thus he evokes his brethren's awe when he catches a

<sup>47</sup> In Pateriks this motif is illustrated by Ephrem the Syrian's Isidora, whose story later reappeared in Palladius's "The Nun Who Feigned Madness," as well as by the tale about Euphrosynos the Cook. Their lowliness and humility are defined by their position in the kitchen. These personages and saints are considered within the monastic paradigm of *iurodstvo* and secret sanctity. See Ivanov, *Holy Fools*, 51–52, 53–55, 56–59. It is noteworthy that Palladius's work was available in Old Church Slavonic translation as early as the eleventh century. Euphrosynos's (Russ. Efrosin) story was translated later. It is probable that these texts were known to the author of Isaakii's vita in their Greek originals. At the same time, the kitchen or the bakery traditionally served as "rehabilitation facilities" for fallen monks. This trend is illustrated in a number of Prologue stories (see, for example, Prologue entries for 9 January and 4 April). Another Kiev Caves Paterik story that engages the kitchen as a humbling locale is the story about Abbot Feodosii, who as a youth assumed the humble (in his mother's opinion, humiliating) job in a bakery.

raven with his bare hands.<sup>48</sup> He also walks barefoot on a flaming stove, thereby extinguishing the fire, and endures suffering by extreme cold whilst praying. As he describes these feats, Isaakii's hagiographer further develops themes of ascetic humility and "strangeness" and coins Isaakii's image as a fool for Christ.

### Topoi of Holy Foolery

Presumably, the entire range of topoi of holy foolery was available to Isaakii's hagiographer through the translated Byzantine corpus, which contained accounts about monastic and urban holy fools, stories about eccentric ascetics, wanderers, and beggars as well as stories about the clandestine holiness of secular individuals.<sup>49</sup> Understandably, Isaakii's hagiographer chose not to reiterate the extremes of folly as featured in the vitae of the archetypal urban holy fools St. Symeon of Emesa (seventh century) and St. Andrew of Constantinople (tenth century). For example, such outrageous deeds as gorging on sausages during Lent and in front of a church (Symeon) or congregating openly with prostitutes (Symeon, Andrew), blasphemous mischief in the church (Symeon) or attacks against clergy (Symeon, Andrew) are not in Isaakii's repertoire. In the recently baptized Kievan Rus', where the process of Christianization was still at the stage of inception, such accounts would have been seen as subversive rather than edifying, if not by the monks then at least by the wider reader and listener. Only in the fifteenth–seventeenth centuries, when Russian Christian consciousness became sufficiently sophisticated to expect edificatory messages in the holy fool's subversion, the vita of the archetypal holy fool St. Andrew of Constantinople and arguably the vita of Symeon the Fool of Emesa<sup>50</sup> began to serve as hagiographic models for—and became instrumental for the emergence of—the vitae of Novgorodian and Moscow *iurodivye*. Yet in eleventh-century Kievan Rus', urban holy foolery could not but be rejected by Isaakii's hagiographer in favor of the monastic model.

<sup>48</sup> The raven, a bird associated with death and mediation with the other world, is symbolic of both the *iurodivyi* and the monk.

<sup>49</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the Byzantine repertoire of stories about holy foolery and adjacent motifs and phenomena (e.g., secret sanctity, wandering), see Ivanov, *Holy Fools*, 11–173.

<sup>50</sup> The question of availability to Eastern Slavs of this holy fool's vita remains open, so is the question of this vita's impact on the Russian tradition of holy foolishness. The sole study in this important field of enquiry is an article by Iokhanes Rainkhart [Johannes Reinhart], "Staroblgarskiiat prevod na zhitieta na Symeon iurodivi: Tekstologija i leksika," in *Srednovekovieto v ogledaloto na edin filolog: Sbornik v chest na Svetlina Nikolova*, Kirilo-Metodievski Studii 18 (Sofia: Kirilo-Metodievski Nauchen Tsentr, 2009), 309–22.

The monastic model of holy foolery supplied the author of Isaakii's vita with topoi necessary to fulfill his twofold task: to describe Isaakii's life and edify its reader.<sup>51</sup> The hagiographic themes and models evident in Isaakii's vita include the perils of ascetic life, ascetic failure, sickness as grace, combat with demons and feigned foolishness. Thus Isaakii shares numerous features with Egyptian and Palestinian playful and unconventional ascetics and monks. Like Isidora's holy foolishness, his own folly is associated with the kitchen; like Serapion Sindonite, Makarii the Great, and numerous desert abbas, Isaakii is an eccentric ascetic, and, as was typical of the monastic fool, he assumes the exploit of *iurodstvo* after having found conventional asceticism inadequate (cf. the vitae of Symeon and Isidora). All these models were available through the translated pateriks, which included the *Lausaik History*, the *Spiritual Meadow*, the *Egyptian Paterik*, and the *Prologues*. Isaakii's hagiographer liberally drew on the stock elements of ascetic and holy fool's vitae (e.g., work in the kitchen; walking barefoot; bizarre, unpredictable behaviors and adverse reactions of the community), aptly adopting these building blocks for his purposes.

The presence in Isaakii's vita of a strong demonic component reflects his hagiographer's indebtedness to Egyptian demonology, where vices were personified as demons whereas ascetic pursuits, achievements, and failures were presented as encounters with them.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Isaakii's conversations with demons, which explain to the reader his reasons for undertaking *iurodstvo*, have models in the Egyptian tradition.<sup>53</sup> There are also Egyptian hagiographic precedents for the scene of Isaakii's ascetic fall to the vices of pride and vain-glory, presented as his unwitting worship of the demons. Holy foolery allowed Isaakii to overcome his failings and achieve complete humility, thereby defeating demons and attaining holiness.

To show this progress, Isaakii's vita engages the topos of holy foolery as the most efficient means against the demons. This feature is representative both of monastic and urban hagiographic patterns. Yet only the latter type of vita explicitly makes it the domain of foolery for Christ. Thus, in Leontius's vita of Symeon of Emesa, the *iurodivyi* declares that one can become a fool for Christ only after completely vanquishing his demons, or, in ascetic terms,

<sup>51</sup> Chernin, "Povestvovatel'naia struktura," 86. In his analysis of the structural and genre peculiarities of Isaakii's vita, the scholar rightly argues that the hagiographic glorifying of the saint's holiness was not a goal for Isaakii's hagiographer nor for the genre of paterik tale in general. The latter pursues the edification of the reader rather than the glorification of the saintly protagonist.

<sup>52</sup> See David Brakke's discussion of Egyptian demonology in Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 127, 131, esp. 134–45.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

after having achieved a complete *apathia*.<sup>54</sup> In the vita of St. Andrew of Constantinople, the protagonist is crowned by Christ and initiated to the path of holy foolishness only after having vanquished demons. The vitae of Symeon and Andrew establish the paradigmatic image of the holy fool as the perfect ascetic, making the topos of the holy fool's victory over demons his ascetic prerogative.<sup>55</sup> In the Kievan and Russian traditions, Isaakii's vita is the first to reflect this convention.

At the same time, Isaakii's vita deviates from the Byzantine models of holy foolery in several important ways. After having vanquished the demons, Isaakii stops playing the fool and resumes his life as a conventional monk. He thus trespasses against the topos of *iurodstvo* as a life-long commitment:

They (the demons) said, "You have beaten us, Isaakii!" ... Henceforth, as he himself said, he had no more trouble with them, although they had fought with him for three years. Then he began to live even more austere, fasting and keeping vigils. (209)

И рекоша: «Исаакые, победилъ ны еси» ... И оттоле не бысть ему пакости никоея же от бесовъ, яко же и сам поведаше, яко ее бысть ми, рече, за 3 лета брань. (189)

Another departure from the Byzantine hagiographic pattern of foolery for Christ can be seen in the absence of the explicit explanation of the fool's endeavor, which is indispensable in the later hagiography of a holy fool. In the vitae representative of the early monastic model of holy foolishness, the explanation of the holy fool's asceticism is usually very succinct. Thus, in the vita of the "nun who feigned madness,"<sup>56</sup> Palladius explains that she feigned madness to follow the Apostle Paul's dictum from 1 Corinthians.<sup>57</sup> When the genre of the holy fool's vita comes into its own in the vitae of SS. Andrew and Symeon,<sup>58</sup> the explanation of the meaning of holy foolishness becomes an indispensable hagiographic component. Thus, when in Leontius's vita, St. Symeon of Emesa expresses determination to undertake the asceticism of holy foolishness, he explains that such was God's and not his own choice, states his resolve to share his grace with people, goes to Jerusalem for the blessing and

<sup>54</sup> Derek Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's "Life" and the Late Antique City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 148.

<sup>55</sup> See the above examples from the vitae of Symeon and Andrew. This understanding of foolery for Christ can also be traced to its early representations found in the *Syrian Book of Steps* and the *Ecclesiastical History* by Evagrius Scholasticus.

<sup>56</sup> In Ephraem the Syrian's writings this character is identified as Isidora.

<sup>57</sup> Meyer, *Palladius*, 96–97.

<sup>58</sup> In the Northern Russian tradition of fools for Christ, the explanation of holy foolishness becomes an indispensable hagiographic component (e.g., Vasilii Blazhennyi of Moscow, Prokopii of Ustiug).

only then begins playing the fool. Leontius makes a point of explaining why to successfully achieve his impersonation as a madman, Symeon spends time with real lunatics and emulates their actions. Isaakii's vita, on the other hand, states that he played the fool (*nachal iurodstvovati*), yet it does not dwell on the ascetic meaning of his foolery. Nor is Isaakii called a fool for Christ. Isaakii's *iurodstvo* proceeds from his actions and behaviors and not the other way around. Quite to the contrary, the text emphasizes his identity as an ascetic, whose vita has an episode of holy foolery.<sup>59</sup>

In line with Isaakii's interpretation as an ascetic, his death is devoid of the holy fool's drama of non-belonging. A paradigmatic Byzantine holy fool dies the dramatic death of an outcast. Then his role as a secret saint becomes revealed to the community, which repents its blindness to his holiness and starts revering the new saint. At that time, however, his corpse disappears as it is taken to heaven following the path of Jesus Christ's ascent. The congregation, therefore, is left to atone for its blindness to and repent its mistreatment of the *iurodivyi*, while remembering and relating the stories of his/her marvelous life, miracles, and death.<sup>60</sup>

Isaakii's death drastically deviates from this pattern. It neither reveals his incognito as an ascetic who was feigning madness, nor does it have anything to do with his holy foolery! In the end, his holy foolery is not even mentioned, which implies yet again that it was limited to a distinct period of his life. Isaakii dies as an ascetic recognized for his righteousness and as a well-regarded member of the monastic community:

He was ill for seven days and then departed to the Lord in the fullness of faith, without ever deviating from the path. The superior, Ioann, and all the brethren laid out his body and gave him an honorable burial in the Caves with the holy fathers. (209)

Разболевся в пещере, и несоша его в манастиръ больна суща, и тако поболе до осми дъни, и не преминушим путем к Господу отъиде въ добре исповеданіи. Игумень же Іоанъ и вся братіа опрятивше тело его, погребоша честно съ святыми отъци в пещере. (189)

<sup>59</sup> Morris, *Saints and Revolutionaries*, 43; Challis and Dewey, "Divine Folly," 259; Chernin, "Povestvovatel'naia struktura," 92.

<sup>60</sup> This pattern is represented, for example, in the vitae of Saints Symeon and Andrew. On the secret saint model, see Ivanov, *Holy Fools*, 108–12. Also see Rydén's discussion of the Byzantine hagiography of the holy fool, including his discussion of the paradigmatic ending, in "The Holy Fool," in *The Byzantine Saint: University of Birmingham Fourteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, studies supplementary to *Sobornost* 5, ed. Sergei Hackel (London: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1981).



While Isaakii's death and funeral—those of a monk—differ from the Byzantine hagiographic pattern of holy foolery, they also anticipate the future Russian model, which does not embrace the holy fool's post-mortem disappearance. In a number of Novgorodian and Muscovian vitae of urban fools, the *iurodivyi's* recognition and veneration as a living saint often culminates in an honorable funeral. This topos amounts to a Russian hagiographic innovation, which was exemplified in a great number of vitae of monastic (Michael of Klopsk, Feofil of the Kiev Caves Monastery, Pelageia Ivanovna Serebrennikova of Diveevo) and urban *iurodivye* (Basil the Fool of Moscow and Ioann the Big Cap)<sup>61</sup> as well as in iconographic tradition.

### Mad, Possessed, or Faking It? Facts or *Topoi*?

Thus, Isaakii's vita significantly differs from the established Byzantine models of holy foolery, evoking the question whether Isaakii was a *iurodivyi*. As we discuss this question we will turn to the second—holy foolish—part of the tale about Isaakii and venture to assess the factual material that it offers.

As a rule, hagiographic *topoi* remove actual historical reality from the narrative, stripping the saint's vita of concrete details and rendering it hackneyed. They would often make the *iurodivyi* look like a generalized formula and a symbol rather than a real-life individual. Yet, notwithstanding its overall indebtedness to stock hagiographic models, and unlike those hagiographic models (e.g., the vitae of Isidora, Andrew, and Symeon), Isaakii's vita cannot be reduced to a literary concoction.<sup>62</sup> Written by an eyewitness, it brings the reader into contact with the real life of a personalized and rather unique character. In contrast with hagiographic convention revealing the truth about the fool's saintly identity, Isaakii's vita retains the ambiguity characteristic of holy foolish phenomenology. It challenges the reader, just as if he were in front of a real *iurodivyi* and not an image whitewashed by the hagiographer's brush. On the one hand, the text views Isaakii's foolish, odd behaviors (e.g., tireless work for the cooks and the brethren; motionless standing in the church) as an ascetic exploit of holy foolery as well as a strategy in the ongoing combat with demons:

<sup>61</sup> In the vitae of Northern Russian holy fools, the *iurodivyi's* death and funeral acquire a completely new meaning and significance. They become the triumph of the fool's holiness, the time of his recognition as a saint and the time of acquisition of his relics, which play an important role in the holy fool's cult. The holy fool's funeral was explicitly described in eulogies and vitae as well as in iconography.

<sup>62</sup> According to Ivanov, the Byzantine fools for Christ Symeon of Emesa, Isidora, Andrew of Constantinople, and Alexis the Man of God, are "literary fictions" (*Holy Fools*, 147). Arguably, their vitae are loosely based on the lives of real individuals, yet legendary, hagiographic components eventually took over and in the final editions became overwhelming. The final versions of these vitae are extremely formulaic and formalized pieces.

Isaakij said, "Devil, you have already deceived me once, when I was sitting in a solitary place. Henceforth I shall not shut myself up in the Caves, but by God's grace I shall vanquish you in the monastery." He again put on a hair shirt, with a tight tunic over it, and he began to act like an idiot. He began to help the cooks and work for the brethren. At matins he would enter the church before everyone else and stand firm and motionless. (208)

Исакий же рече: «се уже прельстил мя еси, діаволе, сидяща на едином месте, отседе уже не имамъ в пещере затворитися, но имамъ тя победити благодатию божією ходя въ манастири». И паки облечеса въ власяницу и на власяницу свиту тесну, и нача уродство творити, и нача помогати поваром и работати на братию и на заутренюю преже всех входя и стоаше крепко и неподвижимо. (187)

On the other hand, the narrative portrays Isaakii as a madman who is perceived and treated as such both by his monastic brethren and laymen. Indeed, they mock, beat, and abuse him as a madman rather than respect him as an ascetic. The interpretation of Isaakii's antics as madness acquires great plausibility if we put this behavior in the wider context of his other health problems, of which mental derangement is an integral part.

If we examine health-related aspects of Isaakii's story and evaluate his symptoms, we see that, most likely, as a recluse he had a stroke followed by a coma and that he bore marks of these afflictions for the rest of his life. A stroke, which is caused by the interruption of blood flow to the brain, usually leads to the death of the brain cells in the affected area.<sup>63</sup> While there are a number of causes leading to a stroke, stress is a major factor.<sup>64</sup> The situation in which Isaakii put himself as a recluse was eminently stressful. His ascetic self-limitations, including constant fasting, lack of sleep, lack of physical activity and exercise, as well as lack of fresh air and water could have caused significant physical stress, which could compromise and endanger his health. Moreover, Isaakii's excessive zeal implies that he sought quick results and anticipated a state of grace. This subconscious expectation of success could cause considerable mental stress, which could have been the final catalyst to the onset of the stroke.

Isaakii's ensuing coma is believable and probable, as it is one of the well-known consequences of a stroke.<sup>65</sup> As a result of a stroke, a number of vital

<sup>63</sup> See the information available on the site of the Heart and Stroke Foundation, <http://www.heartandstroke.com/site/c.ikiQLcMWJtE/b.3483933/> (accessed 23 July 2010).

<sup>64</sup> On stress as a major risk factor for stroke, see the following article: <http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=87585> (accessed 23 July 2010)

<sup>65</sup> See John. Nolte, ed., *The Human Brain: An Introduction to Its Functional Anatomy*, 5th ed. (St. Louis: Mosby, 2002), 262–90. In medicine, a coma (from the Greek κῶμα *kōma*,

physical and mental functions are usually interrupted and the victim can lose the ability to move, speak, see, remember, and reason.<sup>66</sup> Isaakii's disabilities, which include all of the above, continue challenging him when he reemerges from his prolonged comatose state (he spent two years unable to move lying down on his back!) and his rehabilitation starts. As medical research shows, complete recovery from a stroke is unusual and, quite in line with this scenario Isaakii, who eventually regains all his bodily functions, deviates from the behavioral norm for the rest of his life.<sup>67</sup>

Isaakii's vita presents his affliction as a truly humbling experience (he completely relies on his caretakers) and a facilitator in his ascetic quest.<sup>68</sup> It literally puts and keeps Isaakii down, signifying defeat and lowliness, which facilitate his pathway to God. His hagiographer relies on the hagiographic topos of illness as a blessed state, which precludes adequate participation in the life of the world and thereby brings one closer to God. Hence it is viewed as a path to salvation. This meaning of illness is found in another Kiev Caves Paterik vita, the vita of Pimin,<sup>69</sup> whose sickness is the foundation for his righteousness ("Because of his sickness, he was free from every kind of impurity from his mother's womb and was a stranger to sin" [Pimin "bolen" rodilsia i v"zraste, i togo radi neduga chist byst' ot vsiakya skverny i ot utroby materiia ne pozna grekha; 200/179]) and who opts to cherish rather than get rid of it ("He was not praying for recovery but for his illness to get worse" [ne proshashe zdravia, no prilozhnia bolezni; 200/180]).

Pimen's and Isaakii's cases are paralleled as their Kiev Caves Paterik entries are placed side by side. Pimen's illness fits the hagiographic canon and

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meaning "deep sleep") is a profound state of unconsciousness. A comatose person cannot be awakened, fails to respond normally to pain or light, does not have sleep-wake cycles, and does not take voluntary actions. A coma may result from a variety of conditions, including intoxication, metabolic abnormalities, central nervous system diseases, and acute neurologic injuries such as stroke and hypoxia. Cited from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coma> (accessed 23 July 2010)

<sup>66</sup> See the website of the Heart and Stroke Foundation, <http://www.heartandstroke.com/site/c.jklQLcMWJtE/b.3483933/> (accessed 23 July 2009).

<sup>67</sup> Some of his behavioral abnormalities can be seen as psychosis, which Wikipedia defines as a generic psychiatric term for a mental state involving a "loss of contact with reality." People experiencing psychosis may report hallucinations or delusional beliefs, and may exhibit personality changes and disorganized thinking. This may be accompanied by unusual or bizarre behaviour, as well as difficulty with social interaction and impairment in carrying out the activities of daily living.

<sup>68</sup> The humbling experience of a sick or disabled person can be visually rendered through his nakedness, which is symbolic of vulnerability and parallels the deliberate nakedness of the fool for Christ. See, for example, scenes of healing of the sick in the frescoes of *The Life of St. Peter* in Cappella Brancacci, Florence.

<sup>69</sup> Discourse 35. The venerable and long-suffering father Pimin and those who wish to be tonsured before their death. Heppel, *The Paterik*, 200–05; Abramovych, *Kyievo-Pecherskii paterik*, 179–84.

therefore was presented in the KCP as a legitimate path to Christian perfection. However, Isaakii's handicap and ascetic failure were apparently considered outside of either medical or hagiographic context. The demonic nature of Isaakii's affliction was never questioned by the community, even though his presumed encounter with demons was neither witnessed, nor related by Isaakii who at that time was unconscious. The demonic version of his failure was voiced by Feodosii, who put Isaakii's fall in hagiographic terms: "and Feodosij said that this was the demons' work" (I reche igumen" Feodosii, iako ot besov" skago deistva sie byst' emu; 207/186).

Subsequently the hagiographer authenticated Feodosii's words in a detailed story about Isaakii's diabolic encounter and defeat.

[H]e put out his candle, as was his habit. Suddenly, a light shone in the Caves, like sunlight, bright enough to blind a man. Two very handsome youths came up to him, with their faces shining like the sun, and said to him, "Isaakij, we are angels, and there is someone coming who is Christ, with His angels." Isaakij got up and saw a host of demons, whose faces were brighter than the sun. One of them was shining in their midst more than the others, with rays issuing from his face. They told him, "Isaakij, this is Christ! Fall down and prostrate yourself before Him."

Isaakij did not understand that this was demonic activity, nor did he remember to cross himself. He came out of his cell and prostrated himself before the demons' handiwork as though before Christ. The demons shouted and said, "Isaakij, you are ours!" They led him into his cell and made him sit down, and they sat round him. The cell became full of demons, and the gallery of the Caves too. One of the demons, the one they called Christ, said, "Take pipes and lutes and drums and strike them, and Isaakij will dance for us!" They struck their pipes and lutes and drums and began to play. Having exhausted him, they left him almost dead, and having mocked him, they cursed him and went away. (206)

Единою же ему сидящу, по обычаю, и свещю угасившую, внезапно светъ восья, яко отъ солнца восья, в пещере, яко зракъ вынимая человеку, и поидоста 2 уноши к нему красна, и блистаща лице ею акы солнце, и глаголюща к нему: «Исакие! Ве есве ангела, а се идетъ к тебе Христосъ, падъ, поклонися ему». Онъ же не разуме бесовьскаго действа, ни памяти прекреститися, выступя и поклонися, акы Христу, бесовьску действу. Беси же клукнуша і реша: «нашь еси, Исакие, уже». Введше и в кельицю, и посадиша и, и начаша садитися около его, и бысть полна келья ихъ и улица пещерская. И рече единъ отъ бесовъ, глаголемый Христосъ: «възмете сопели, бубны и гусли, и ударяйте, ать ны Исакий спля-

петь». И удариша в сопели, в гусли и в бубны, начаша имъ играти; и утомивше и оставиша и оле живного, и отъидоша, поругавшися ему. (202)

The accusation of demon possession<sup>70</sup> by an unenlightened profane-minded crowd is integral to the holy fool's ambiguous stance. In the *vita*, however, the hagiographer lifts this accusation as he informs the reader about the fool's hidden ascetic goals, feigned madness, and saintly identity. Isaakii's hagiographer does not make any of these statements, but assimilates Isaakii's behavioral peculiarities to hagiographic *topoi*.

The first *topos* is expressed as Isaakii's apathy to church, which is in line with the common belief about the impossibility of the possessed (and the *iurodivyi*) to enter church buildings. According to tradition, a demon hinders his "hosts," the possessed ones, from entering the sacred domain of the church, hence the *iurodivyi*'s marginality to the church and his traditional position on the church steps. Isaakii's behavior is in line with this *topos*: "He would not bother to go to church, and one could hardly drag him there by force, but after a while he began to go to church" (*I nebrezhashe v'' tserkov'' iti, i nuzheiu edva privlaachakhu ego v'' tserkov'', i tako po malu nacha khoditi v'' tserkov''*; 187/207).

The fact that later on he was taught to go to church (207) achieves his rehabilitation in the reader's eyes and at the same time points to the peculiarity of Isaakii's mental condition—as he is recovering, he is relearning lost social skills.<sup>71</sup> In fact, the entire *vita* can be seen as the hagiographer's attempt to rehabilitate Isaakii as a possible possessed madman. The initial attempt to dissociate Isaakii's still noticeable mental derangement from demonic possession is the statement that at the time of his recovery Feodosii "delivered him from the devil's snares and trickery" (*I tako izbavi Feodosii ot'' kozni d'iavolia*; 203/208).

Indeed, the implication of insanity and possession would have had significant consequences for Isaakii, disqualifying him from eligibility for a saintly *vita* altogether. Alternatively, it could have turned his *vita* into that of a failed ascetic. These looming threats could have caused the hagiographer to conceptualize Isaakii's *vita* in terms of holy foolishness, a legitimate paradigm of asceticism that embraced madness. By making this choice, Isaakii's hagiographer was hardly voicing his personal opinion. Most likely, he was reflecting the reality of the monastic and lay communities' problems with the accep-

<sup>70</sup> For the discussion of various aspects of the phenomenon of possession, see Christine D. Worobec, *Possessed: Women, Witches, and Demons in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001).

<sup>71</sup> As was stated earlier, stroke victims are taught anew all their physical and social functions.

tance of Isaakii's person and quest.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, both the hagiographer's work and the later compilers' inclusion of Isaakii's vita into the Kiev Caves Paterik testify to efforts to understand and embrace an ascetic and hagiographic model of *iurodstvo* by the monastic community.

In the tale about Isaakii the topoi of holy foolery were arguably employed for the interpretation of Isaakii's mental derangement. In medical terms, Isaakii's obsession with dressing children in monastic garb qualifies him as a psychotic, yet the hagiographic framework interprets the same behavior as a holy fool's cryptic message and his ascetic provocation of audience abuse. Isaakii's predilection for solitude as well as his unconditional commitment to his daily routine can be seen both as ascetic prerogatives and as evidence of obsessive compulsive disorder. Isaakii's success in catching a raven brings to mind the symptoms that result from damage to the right hemisphere of brain, which include judgmental difficulties, impulsive behavior, and failure to realize one's own limitations. However, when Isaakii's hagiographer relates this, most likely real life event, he conceptualizes it along the lines of Old and New Testament hagiographic topoi, evoking the imagery of the prophet Elijah's raven and the prophet Daniel's lions.<sup>73</sup> Yet even more this episode is reminiscent of the Egyptian desert tradition, which relates how an abba once mockingly told his disciple to go to the desert and catch a hyena, which the obedient disciple did.<sup>74</sup> The abba's awe before his disciple's deed is comparable to the brethren's awe as they see Isaakii catch the raven. Strange as these "catchers'" actions are, in the ascetic and hagiographic context they are seen as superhuman and saintly. They amount to a miracle-working topos, which is further linked to the topos of the saint's harmony with or control over nature, including the taming or overpowering of wild animals.<sup>75</sup> It goes without saying that in his efforts at Isaakii's rehabilitation, the hagiographer most of all needed a miracle, i.e., a statement of Isaakii's holiness. The episode with the raven provided one.

<sup>72</sup> Abramovych argues that Isaakii's treatment by the hegumen and brethren testifies to the dubious status of the exploit of holy foolery among the Kievan monastic community: "Отношение к нему игумена и братии показывает, что подвиг уродства не понимали и не одобряли" (Abramovych 192 n. 22).

<sup>73</sup> See my discussion of the holy man's communion with nature as a sign of grace in Svitlana Kobets, "From Fool to Mother to Savior: Poetics of Orthodox Christianity and Folklore in Svetlana Vasilenko's Novel-Vita *Little Fool (Durochka)*," *Slavic and East European Journal* 51: 1 (2007): 87–110.

<sup>74</sup> This apophthegma is found in *Patrologiae ursus completes. Series Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, vol. 65, col. 240, quoted in Ivanov, *Holy Fools*, 38.

<sup>75</sup> Examples can be found in the vitae of the prophet Elijah, who was helped in the desert by a raven, and the prophet Daniel, who was unharmed by lions. See also numerous paterik stories about tamed lions and Makarius's story about the inner desert ascetics who lived in harmony with animals.

Other peculiarities of the madman, specifically notorious disregard for bodily harm (which makes him a danger to himself) and high tolerance for pain,<sup>76</sup> occur in the episode which relates how Isaakii extinguished the fire:

One night he lit a fire in a stove in the Caves. The stove was full of holes, and when the fire started to burn, flames began to come through the cracks. He had nothing with which to cover the holes so he put his bare feet against the flames until the fire burned out. Then he got down quite unharmed. (209)

Въ едину же ноць въжегъ печь в пещере, и яко разгореся печь, бе бо утла, и нача пламень исходити горе углизнами: оному же нечим скважни покрыти, и въступи босыма ногама на пламень, дондеже изгоре печь, и сниде ничим же неврежень. (188)

By emphasizing Isaakii's invulnerability, the hagiographer interprets his bizarre behavior and possible madness in the language of ascetic and holy foolish hagiography, martyrdom, and saintliness.

Thus, we can argue that in order to account for Isaakii's behavioral anomalies, his hagiographer merged the initial meaning of the term *iurod* or *urod* as a person with congenital damage and/or mental health issues with its secondary ascetic meaning. The same tendency is discernible in the cult of fools for Christ in early modern and modern Russia, when ascetics were venerated along with the mentally deranged and differentiating between the two was often unimportant.<sup>77</sup> Isaakii's case, however, is different. His subsequent veneration by the community regardless of his mental condition does not reflect the cultural predilection for the downtrodden as was later the case in Russian culture. In the eleventh century, Isaakii's hagiographer ventured to compose an account which would adequately render events of Isaakii's life in a way that did not incriminate him of possession.



In conclusion: the *Tale of Isaakii* was written at the time when recently baptized Kievan Rus' was reinventing its religious and cultural identity and monks relied in this process on the translated legacy of Byzantium. A variety of forms of asceticism were emulated and textualized, among them the ascetic

<sup>76</sup> See the discussion of how mental pathologies were interpreted in Russia in the light of holy foolishness in Natalie Challis and Horace W. Dewey, "The Blessed Fools of Old Russia," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, n.s., 22: 1 (1974): 1–11.

<sup>77</sup> The vita of Ivan Koreisha exemplifies such a case. Koreisha was institutionalized and most of his life "played the fool" in the mental institution, where he did not have a lack of visitors. See A. F. Kireev, *Student khladnykh vod: Zhizni i deianiia moskovskogo blazhennogo Ioanna Iakovlevicha Koreisha* (Moscow: Lestvitsa, 1996).

feat of holy foolishness for Christ's sake. The first Kievan hagiographic portrayal of an ascetic practice of holy foolery is found in a structurally complex and thematically diverse Paterik tale about Isaakii the Recluse of the Kiev Caves Monastery, which later on served as a model for other Kiev Caves Paterik stories of ascetic search, failure, and success. The distinctive circumstances under which this work was created determined its idiosyncratic character as well as deviations from existing Byzantine patterns. Isaakii's hagiographer was most likely dealing with a case of real mental derangement rather than with an ascetic feat of feigned madness. However, he successfully dealt with this problem as he interpreted Isaakii's bizarre personality and aberrant behaviors, as well as public reactions to them, in terms of the intentional provocation of abuse and the voluntary martyrdom of a holy fool. By presenting Isaakii's life and ascetic quest as a success story of combat with demons, he not only legitimized holy foolery as an ascetic model, but also reiterated its claim to superiority among other ascetic practices. To this end, he brought into play several hagiographic patterns, and used ascetic activity as a framework for presenting holy foolery. Isaakii's ascetic progress culminates in victory over the demons by foolery for Christ. In this sense Isaakii's tale restates the Byzantine hagiographic convention. Yet Isaakii's hagiographer's concern with actual events determined his decision to considerably restrict the pool of holy foolish topoi, bringing about a truly original account of *iurodstvo*. This account firmly puts Isaakii in the line of Kievan—and later on Ukrainian and Russian—fools for Christ and marks the start of these traditions by the eleventh century.

Статья «Исаакий Печерский: Аскетическая симуляция сумасшествия или канонизация безумного?» поднимает вопрос агиографического образа черноризца Киево-Печерской Лавры Исаакия и правомерности причисления его к юродивым. Автор статьи рассматривает этот вопрос в свете текстуализации аскетических практик Исаакия и византийского наследия, на которое опирался его агиограф. Разобрав структурные и тематические особенности этой первой в Киевской Руси — а также в русской и украинской культурных традициях — текстуализации образа юродивого, автор показывает, что не агиографический шаблон, а реальная ситуация определила особенности повести об Исаакии, а также ее отличия от византийских образцов. Анализ текста повести показывает, что по всей вероятности Исаакий перенес инсульт, после которого его ментальное здоровье так никогда и не восстановилось. Странности поведения Исаакия могли бы быть истолкованы как бесноватость, но такая трактовка исключила бы Исаакия из рядов успешных аскетов и кандидатов в святые. Агиограф Исаакия разрешил эту проблему, интерпретировав странности поведения своего героя в свете добровольного мученичества святого юродивого.