

Tortured Body as the Location of the Self?

A Seventeenth-Century Russian Case

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The article aims to do four interrelated things: introduce a mid-seventeenth-century Russian self-testimony, its author and its time (I); give an account of what looks exceptional in this self-testimony (self as a tortured body) (II); re-read the self-testimony by placing it deeper within the historical and religious context (III); and finally suggest two spaces in which the authorial self functions in the text: sacred and profane (IV).

I.

Raskol and Old Believers (*Raskolniks*)

The time, which was later labeled as the *Raskol* (which means ‘split’ or ‘schism’), was a dramatic period in Russian history.¹ The *Raskol* is associated with religious reforms made by the head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Nikon (1605-1681), and supported by Tsar Aleksei Mihailovitch (1629-1676). The main idea of these reforms was to correct “corrupted” Russian church service books in accordance with their original Greek counterparts, and to correct some of the rituals as well. For example, the sign of the cross was to be made with three fingers instead of two; and “hallelujah” had to be pronounced three times instead of twice, etc.

Though these reforms affected mostly the external ritualistic side of the Russian Orthodox faith, their implementation raised strong discontent among many Russians causing a split in Russian Orthodoxy. Those who rebelled against the reforms (their spiritual leader was protopope² Avvakum) became known as the Old Believers (*starovery* or *raskolniki*). They viewed Nikon’s “innovations” as evil to the extent that Nikon himself was regarded as the Antichrist.

¹ Some general studies: MAKARIJ (BULGAKOV), mitr., *Istorija russkogo raskola, izvestnogo pod imenom staroobrjadstva*. Moscow 1855; AFANASIJ PROKOF'EVICH SCHAPOV, *Russkij raskol staroobrjadstva*. Kazan' 1859; ALEKSANDR KORNILOVICH BOROZDIN, *Protopop Avvakum. Oчерk iz istorii umstvennoj zhizni russkogo obschestva v XVII v.* Saint Petersburg 1898; PIERRE PASKAL, *Avvakum et les débuts du Rascol. La crise religieuse au XVIIe siècle en Russie*. Paris 1938; PETER HAUPTMANN, *Altrussischer Glaube. Der Kampf des Protopopen Avvakum gegen die Kirchenreformen des 17. Jahrhunderts*. Göttingen 1963; SERGEJ ALEKSANDROVICH ZEN'KOVSKIJ, *Russkoe staroobrjadchestvo: Duhovnye dvizhenija XVII veka*. München 1970; ROBERT O. CRUMMEY, *The Old Believers & The World Of Antichrist: The Vyg Community & The Russian State*. Madison 1970; ROBERT O. CRUMMEY, *Old Belief as Popular Religion: New Approaches*, in: *Slavic Review* 52. 1993 pp. 700-713; GEORG B. MICHELS, *At War With the Church: Religious Dissent in Seventeenth-Century Russia*. Stanford 2000; PETER HAUPTMANN, *Russlands Altgläubige*. Göttingen 2005.

² In the Orthodox Church – a priest of higher rank, corresponding to the Western archpriest or dean.

The Old Believers were severely persecuted throughout the country and in the times of Peter the Great their community shrank to a religious minority. Monk Epifanij, the author of the self-testimony under discussion, was among the leaders of these rebellious *raskolniki*.

Epifanij: Biographical data³

Little is known about Epifanij's early life. We know that he was born sometime between 1615 and 1620, afterwards became a novice of the remote Solovetsk monastery in the Russian North, and then a monk fourteen years later. In 1657, he left the monastery and settled in a hermitage at Lake Onega. Here he led a pious solitary life full of prayer and heavy physical labor for the next eight years, until 1665.

In that year, Epifanij started to write a book portraying Tsar Aleksei Mihailovitch's support of Patriarch Nikon and his reforms as betrayals of the "true" faith. The following year, when the book was finished, he set out for Moscow to expose the ruler of all Rus. Soon he was arrested and confined, then excommunicated by the Church Council; he was physically punished (his tongue was cut out), and then deported to the distant northern fort-town Pustozersk. Here Epifanij remained in exile for the last 15 years of his life along with protopope Avvakum and two other leaders of the *Raskol*.

Epifanij endured a second punishment while in exile after he again refused to accept the reforms. Again his tongue (according to some evidence, the tongue had regenerated after being cut out the first time) and now the four fingers of his right hand were amputated. Also during this time in exile, he wrote his autobiography known as *Life (Zhitie)*. On April 14, 1682 Epifanij and his companions-in-arms were burned in a wooden hut in a common auto-da-fé.

Epifanij's *Life* as textual evidence: formal characteristics, manuscripts, publications

Epifanij's autobiographical story is a text of about twelve thousand words, which consist of two parts. The first part illustrates briefly his early years and in greater detail his life as a hermit. Most of its episodes inform the reader of Epifanij's fights with demons, visions of the Blessed Virgin, and other miracles. The longer, second part deals mostly with the exiled Epifanij's experiences in Pustozersk, especially his corporal punishments and resultant suffering. Descriptions of his visions and miracles also constitute a significant amount of this part of the story.

The text of Epifanij's *Life* has long been known in scholarship, primarily to historians of literature. It was first published in print in 1889 from an eighteenth-century manuscript.⁴ The

³ Most of Epifanij's biographical data is provided by himself in his writings. For the details see bibliography in notes 4-7 and 9 below.

second edition, now based on Epifanij's autograph, appeared in 1912 in a collection of writings of Old Believers.⁵ The next breakthrough edition was a scholarly study of the text published by Andrei Robinson in 1963.⁶ The last publication of crucial importance, based on an autograph discovered in 1966, appeared in 1975.⁷

II.

Most historians of literature have treated Epifanij's self-testimony as a writing of minor importance: an epigone's work; an insipid imitation of the masterpiece of Old Russian literature, protopope Avvakum's *Life*.⁸ I am more inclined to agree with the minority of scholars who believe that this is not the case.⁹ For me, Epifanij's work is a unique example of bodily self-testimony.

Bodily self-testimony

Epifanij's *Life* is an account of an individual's bodily experience, especially the experience of physical suffering¹⁰; and this account has an extremely naturalistic physiological character. The principal corpus of the text is comprised of episodes in which Epifanij is punished for his "old beliefs" by having his tongue cut out and by the amputation of the four fingers of his right hand. We can read in detail about Epifanij's feelings during and after these punishments: about his bleeding truncated hand; about his difficulty with eating after the removals of his "tongues" (the author uses the plural form of the noun since the punishment was suffered twice) from his mouth, etc. Other episodes of physical suffering not related to his corporal punishments are

⁴ ALEKSANDR KORNILOVICH BOROZDIN, *Istochniki pervonachal'noj istorii raskola*, in: *Hristianskoe chtenie. Janvar'-fevral' 1889* pp. 211-240.

⁵ JAKOV LAZAREVICH BARSKOV, *Pmjatniki pervyh let russkogo staroobrjadchestva*. Saint Petersburg 1912 pp. 229-262.

⁶ ANDREJ NIKOLAEVICH ROBINSON, *Zhizneopisanija Avvakuma i Epifanija: Issledovanija i teksty*. Moscow 1963.

⁷ *Pustozerskij sbornik: Avtografy sochinenij Avvakuma i Epifanija*. Red. NATAL'JA SERGEEVNA DEMKOVA, NADEZHDA FEOKTISTOVNA DROBLENKOVA, LIDIJA IVANOVNA SAZONOVA. Leningrad 1975.

⁸ See the English translation in: *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*. Ed. SERGE A. ZENKOVSKY. New York 1963 pp. 399-448.

⁹ In particular, Serge Zenkovsky has claimed that Epifanij's autobiographical account is "an unusual and thoroughly original phenomenon in old Russian literature". See: SERGE A. ZENKOVSKY [= SERGEJ ALEKSANDROVICH ZEN'KOVSKI], *The Confession of Epiphany a Moscovite Visionary*, in: *Studies in Russian and Polish Literature in Honour of Waclaw Lednicki*. Gravenhage 1962 pp. 46-71. See also: ID., *Der Mönch Epifanij und die Entstehung der altrussischen Autobiographie*, in: *Die Welt der Slaven* I,3. 1956 pp. 276-292. Besides the studies mentioned above, see also two important articles on Epifanij's *Life* by Andrej Robinson: ANDREJ NIKOLAEVICH ROBINSON, *Zhitie Epifanija kak pamjatnik didakticheskij avtobiografii*, in: *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoj literatury Instituta russkoj literatury (Pushkinskij dom) Akademii nauk SSSR*. T. XV. Moscow; Leningrad 1958 pp. 203-223; ID., *Avtobiografija Epifanija*, in: *Issledovanija i materialy po drevnerusskoj literature*. Moscow 1961 pp. 101-132.

¹⁰ For more details see: YURI PETROVICH ZARETSKY, *Telo i ego kazni (ob avtobiografizme Epifanija Soloveckogo)*, in: *Kazus. Individual'noe i unikal'noe v istorii – 2000 Verf./Hgg.?*. Moscow 2000 pp. 319-344.

treated with the same naturalistic descriptions: we read about Epifanij's eyes suffering from the smoke in his earthen prison, about the pain caused by ants attacking his genitals, and of his desperate unsuccessful attempts to get rid of the insects.

It is not a surprise that Epifanij's inner motions are frequently described as resulting from physical influences: first there is pain, then spiritual feelings and miracles which result from the pain. Even fighting demons in his story has a very naturalistic bodily character (demons torture Epifanij, he himself tortures them and even the Blessed Virgin helps him with this). It emerges that the monk's subjectivity itself has, contrary to what would be expected from a Christian monk, more a corporal rather than a spiritual character. Epifanij conceptualizes himself as a physical bodily being.

An exceptional case? Bodily language of Russian *Raskol*

The question follows: is Epifanij's case really unique for his times? It is known that "bodily language" is not a rare thing in other texts of the Russian *Raskol* (both of Old Believers and of their opponents including Patriarch Nikon himself). In these texts the body appears as quite a natural and legitimate form of human existence, the soul's depository and companion. There is no innate body-soul contradiction in these texts and the boundaries between body and soul are often quite unstable and vague. Protopope Avvakum claims that the collision takes place not between body and soul, but between mortal flesh and soul, which itself is "bodylike" (*telesnovidna*); the soul's desires are similar to those of the human body: it also wants to eat and drink, though not earthly but "holy food".¹¹

Naturalistic language full of bodily terms, images and metaphors is widely used by Avvakum in his commentaries and polemics on different dogmatic issues. For example, in discussing the Immaculate Conception he argues that it took place through the vagina or the "natural door" (*lozhesny*, *dveriu estestvennoi*). Likewise, in the Virgin Birth, it was through this "door" that baby-Christ emerged from the Virgin's womb. Speaking about the first months of the Savior's life, Avvakum gives a touching account of His bodily experience: Christ first suckled, then started to eat bread, honey, meat and fish, and finally to drink wine.¹²

This bodily language can be also found in Avvakum's *Life*, where he speaks of his own physical sufferings as a victim of persecutions. This element shows the resemblance of his self-

¹¹ Zhitie protopopa Avvakuma im samim napisannoe i drugie ego sochinenija. Red. NIKOLAJ KALLINIKOVICH GUDZIJ. Moscow 1960 p. 90.

¹² ROBINSON, Zhizneopisanija Avvakuma i Epifanija (see n. 6). pp. 344, 620, 636, 643. The bodily character of Avvakum's language was noticed by his contemporaries. One of his opponents charged the protopope with "carnal reasoning" (*rassuzhdaet "plotskim smyslom"*), with thinking by perceptive (*po-chuvstvennomu*) and not by spiritual reasoning (*"po duhovnomu razumu"*). – Ibid. p. 50.

testimony to that of Epifanij, though there are at least two essential dissimilarities between them. First, in Avvakum's *Life* there is little correlation between the narrator's self and his physical body. Second, Avvakum's self carries on a dialog with the world which is not limited to the experience of a hermit; in fact, it is enormous in space and time.¹³ He shows himself as the main opponent of Patriarch Nikon, a great fighter for the true Christian Faith, a theologian, and even a martyr-saint.

An exceptional case? Recent reevaluation of body-soul-self relationships in the Western Middle Ages

Epifanij's bodily self-account raises another question: to what extent is the text similar or dissimilar to self-testimonies of the Western Christian tradition? Current views of medievalist studying Western autobiographical texts help to answer this question.

In recent years Western texts of this type have attracted the special attention of scholars. As a result, in the last two or three decades a substantial reevaluation of the body-soul-self relationships in the culture of the Medieval West took place. In particular, scholars began to question the widely accepted notion that medieval Christian tradition fully supported the antagonism between body and soul, and that in this tradition the body was something to be subdued.¹⁴

Some scholars pointed out that the idea of this opposition is based not so much on historical data but on Western man's world view known as "Cartesian dualism" (i.e. the Cartesian view of the world as consisting ultimately of two different kinds of substance, namely mind and matter).¹⁵ This shift in their understanding of medieval anthropology was likely inspired by two factors: by the increased interest in the human body within the

¹³ In a letter to Tsar Aleksei Mihailovich he documents one of his visions in which this extraordinary self-body correlation is most vividly seen: "And by the will of God on Thursday night of the second week my tongue expanded and was very great and then my teeth became large, and then I became very broad and spacious, and spread out under the heaven over the whole earth, and then God placed in me heaven and earth and the whole creation". – *Zhitie protopopa Avvakuma im samim napisannoe i drugie ego sochinenija* (see n. ??). p. 200. Here quoted from: PRISCILLA HUNT, Avvakum's 'Fifth Petition' to the Tsar and the Ritual Process. in: *Slavic and East European Journal* 46,3. 2002 p. 483.

¹⁴ *I discorsi dei corpi* (Micrologus 1993. Vol. 1). Hg./Verf.? Turnhout 1993; CAROLINE WALKER BYNUM, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*. New York 1991; EAD., *The Resurrection of the body in Western Christianity, 200-1336*. New York 1995; EAD., *Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective*, in: *Critical Inquiry* 22,1. 1995 pp. 1-33; ROY PORTER, *History of the Body*, in: *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*. Ed. P. BURKE. Cambridge, Mass. 1991 pp. 206-232; *Medieval theology and the natural body*. Ed. PETER BILLER/ ALASTAIR J. MINNIS. Rochester 1997; JACQUES LE GOFF/ N. TRUONG, *Une histoire du corps au Moyen Âge*. Paris 2003. See also a general survey: BARBARA DUDEN, *Body History: A Repertory = Körpergeschichte. Ein Repertorium*. Wolfenbüttel 1990.

¹⁵ As Roy Porter remarks, "scholars typically work within interpretative traditions for which meanings that are mental, spiritual and ideal assume an automatic priority over matters purely material, corporeal and sensual". PORTER, *History of the Body* (see note 14). p. 206.

humanities in general, and by the Foucauldian concept of the body as a social construct crucial for understanding human society.

Medievalists convincingly showed examples in Western Christian thought in which the body-soul dichotomy was overcome, and in which the body's capacity to know God (for instance, through mystical experience) was legitimized. Caroline Bynum argued that by the thirteenth century the understanding of a person as a psychosomatic unity prevailed in Western Christianity. She documented this statement in particular by the words of Thomas Aquinas: "Anima [...] non est totus homo et anima mea non est ego."¹⁶ Historians also stressed the importance of the notion of the body for Western medieval understanding of the self. Furthermore, they demonstrated that modern ideas about the holistic self are in many ways derived from the medieval notion of the material, corporeal body. The most lucid examples of the importance of this idea, as well as of body-soul-self unity, are given in recent studies of women-mystics: Angela of Foligno, Catherine of Siena, Brigitt of Sweden, Margery Kempe and others. Thus, in the studies of recent decades the medieval Christian concept of the person has been largely reconsidered, and this reconsideration generally rejects body/soul antagonism as a crucial idea of medieval Christian anthropology.

Examples of Epifanij's bodily self-account

Turning back to Epifanij, I argue that these recent developments notwithstanding, the way the Russian monk speaks about his self appears extraordinary. Whenever he speaks about his self, he speaks about his tortured body.

Some stories that constitute Epifanij's *Life* vividly illustrate this bodily self in a specific body-centric construction of the text. For example, the punishment in Pustozersk – the cutting out of Epifanij's tongue and the amputation of the four fingers of the right hand (the narrator returns to this episode three times) – is given in the text in reverse chronological perspective: first Epifanij describes his physical pain during the punishment, and ensuing miracles; it follows the account of the punishment itself, which had taken place earlier; and finally – the explanation of the initial reasons for Epifanij's persecutions and punishment.

The physical body, its feelings and motions are central to Epifanij's narrative in many other senses. The hero's visions (of the Blessed Virgin, of the Devil, of a deceased old monk) are often described after detailed indication of his physical conditions: "got tired" (*ustal*)¹⁷, "fell into a light sleep" (*svedohsia v son tonok*)¹⁸, "went to sleep" (*vozleg opochinuti*)¹⁹, "crept onto

¹⁶ Com. I Cor. 15, lect. 2. – Cit. from: BYNUM, *Fragmentation and Redemption* (see note 14). p. 228.

¹⁷ ROBINSON, *Zhizneopisanija Avvakuma i Epifanija* (see note 6). p. 185 et passim.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 185 et passim.

the bench and laid down on my back” (*vspols na lavku i leg na spine*).²⁰ Of great importance for this hero is the sense of touch, for it allows him to understand what has actually happened to him. Epifanij relates that he touches the truncated hand with the unharmed one, to make sure that the fingers on his right hand are really gone. In the same manner, after losing his tongue he speaks in detail about his feelings resulting from the loss (incommodities with getting food, plentiful saliva, etc.) and describes a vision in which he fixes his tongue (*ispravljaet*) with his unharmed hand.²¹

One of the characteristic features of Epifanij’s story is frequent and detailed accounts of his body (and of its parts) position in space. For example, before going to sleep:

“I laid down as usual at my usual place, on a bare board, my head directed to the icon of the Blessed Virgin, two or three spans from the icon”.²² Or “[...] and I am laying on my left side, and look at my right hand, and see on the muscle of the right arm the icon of the Blessed Virgin on a copper ingot. I, a sinner, even wanted to take it with the left hand, but it vanished.”²³

Another remarkable feature of Epifanij’s self-narrative, which is recognizable throughout his writing, is the lack of clear-cut distinction between soul and bodily parts. This may be illustrated in the episode about a peasant who came to ask him to make a wooden cross “for the glory of God”. Epifanij reacted as follows: “This word touched my heart (*pade na serdce moe*) and inspired with divine flame my soul and heart, and all my belly, and all my limbs.”²⁴ Here he uses such notions as heart (*serdce*), soul (*dusha*), belly (*utroba*), internals (*vnutrennjaja moja*) and limbs (*udy*) as equally important.

Accounts of Epifanij’s bodily feelings, especially pain, make up the main part of his autobiography. Let us look at one of these accounts – his sufferings after the punishment at Pustozersk. The author begins with a description of the pain after the amputation of his fingers: “And my heart and all my internals became enflamed with great fire, and I fell on the ground sweating heavily, and started to die, and three times I was about to die, though I survived and my soul did not leave my body.”²⁵

This pain was so intolerable that Epifanij makes an attempt to commit suicide. The “mechanics” of this attempt is given in striking detail:

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 182 et passim.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 194.

²¹ Ibid. pp. 196-197.

²² Ibid. p. 185.

²³ Ibid. p. 184.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 189.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 193.

“And raised from the ground, I laid on the bench, groveled with my truncated hand on the ground, and thinking to myself in this way: ‘Let the blood flow out of me, this is how I will die.’ And much blood flowed out, and it became wet in the pit, and the guards covered the blood with hay, and I was shedding blood for five days to cause death in this way.”²⁶

Despite these efforts, Epifanij did not die and spiritual unrest began to accompany his physical sufferings: “And I, a sinner, was lying on the ground alone in the pit, rolling in every possible direction on my belly and on my back and on my sides, out of great anguish and bitter melancholy.”²⁷

Finally, a heaven-sent vision came in the image of the Blessed Virgin who started to cure the sufferer. Unsurprisingly, Epifanij’s narrative describes this cure in a bodily manner, which very much resembles a session of manual therapy: “[A]nd I hear that the Blessed Virgin is touching my wounded hand with her hands, [...] as if her hands are playing with my hand, and it seems to me as if the Blessed Virgin restored the fingers to my hand.”²⁸

III.

Clearly, the preceding examples of the monk’s bodily experience speak about his own individual sufferings. However, if we place these examples (and Epifanij’s life-story as such) more deeply into the historical (primarily religious and political) context of his times, their meanings become transformed, turning our attention from the monk’s bodily self to superpersonal objects and goals.

First of all, such placement makes it obvious that Epifanij’s stories – and certainly his *Life* as a whole – comprise strong propaganda messages. These messages may be read as encouraging appeals to other Old Believers: one must be firm in the devotion to the old (true) faith; those who stay firm in their faith are helped by God; devotion and prayers to the Blessed Virgin is the best way to obtain divine protection; one must be patient and try hard to avoid sin. Keeping these messages in mind, we may assume that both for the author and for his readers, the bodily sufferings and miraculous healings so strikingly exposed in the *Life* are of key importance, not as manifestations of Epifanij’s individual pain, but as a part of a larger sacred story.

Sacred topography of Epifanij’s body

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 194.

²⁸ Ibid.

The superpersonal significance of the monk's self-testimony can be clearly seen by the manner in which his body is revealed in the text. Its association with Heavenly forces through miracles (the Virgin's healing of the monk's arm and others) has been discussed above. It is important to focus on another type of association, attributing symbolical meanings to different bodily parts.

A careful reader of the *Life* notices such attributions quite easily and sees that the tongue is given to Epifanij to say prayers and to blame his religious opponents (correspondingly, amputation of the tongue is aimed at preventing these activities); that his fingers are destined to make the sign of the cross and also to manufacture wooden crosses (this was the main handicraft of the monk throughout his life); that his eyes are for reading his prayer book and, again, for manufacturing crosses; and that his genitals, as the weakest and most sinful part of the human body, are most vulnerable to the temptations of the Devil.

When Epifanij speaks about his sufferings as the ants are attacking his genitals and the ensuing miraculous escape from the invaders²⁹, he states the sacred symbolical meaning of this part of his body quite evidently. First, he begins the episode with a direct reference to the Devil, who, after unsuccessful attempts to burn out the monk's hut, declares to harm him in another way: by sending a swarm of ants into his hut. Then, Epifanij metaphorically calls these ants "worms": in Christian eschatology this word is directly associated with the death of the body and with Hell. Finally, he repeatedly points to the selectivity of the insects: "And they eat nothing – neither hands, nor legs, nor anything else, but the secret part of the body."³⁰ It is not a surprise, that his own desperate attempts to rid himself of the attackers were unsuccessful, and that only after his prayer to the Blessed Virgin did the insects quit attacking his body and soon disappeared never to return. The moral of the episode is clear: without Heavenly help all human efforts to defeat the Devil are doomed to failure.

Intertextuality of the *Life*

Sacred superpersonal meanings of Epifanij's body and self are also observed in intertextual connections between the *Life* and literary works available to its author, the overwhelming majority of which constitute established religious writings of his time.³¹ It is not an exaggeration to say that Epifanij shapes his bodily self through the language of sacred books.

²⁹ Ibid. pp. 186-187.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 186.

³¹ Sometimes Epifanij quotes these writings directly, sometimes he makes allusions – either to the writings themselves or to a number of authoritative religious figures (both mythical and historical) these writings tell about.

In most cases he refers to liturgical books which were widely used by the Russian clergy in the seventeenth century: *Trebnik* (Small Euchologion), *Sluzhebnyk* (Hieratikon), *Psaltir* (Psalter). Sometimes, in support of his statements, Epifanij also refers to popular collections of religious texts such as *Pchela* (Bee)³² and *Margarit*.³³ Epifanij's autobiographical story also demonstrates his familiarity with at least two collections of lives of "holy fathers" (*Paterikon*): one, composed at Solovetsk monastery (*Solovetskii paterik*), and the other, a Slavic translation of the 4-5th century, *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (*Egipetskii paterik*). The author refers to the New Testament (Jn 16:20; Eph 3:9) at least twice and to the Old Testament at least once (Deut 32:7). What is remarkable about Epifanij's *Life*, and what gives the reader a feeling of spontaneity and frankness in the descriptions of the author's pain is the absence of references to such popular Christian genres as martyrs' lives and passion literature. Even such a common theme of religious writings as Christ's suffering on the cross is not touched in the monk's life-story.³⁴ The few quotations and allusions to other texts in the *Life* are mainly taken from prayers and Psalms.³⁵ As a result, Epifanij's self-testimony bears very little resemblance to a certain type of *vita* of the Christian martyr and, instead, only provides a combination of such general topoi of Christian anthropology as sin, faith, suffering, healing and miracle.

Is Epifanij speaking about himself?

Deeper reading of the *Life* may lead to the difficulty of its author's subjectivity as such. On the one hand, there is little doubt that Epifanij's narrative is about himself: it follows (more or less) the events of his life, includes descriptions of the "inner" motions of his soul, begins (after a short introductory statement) with the traditional autobiographical formula ("I was born ..."), and – last but not least – the author himself labels this narrative as "life" (*zhitie*).³⁶ On the other hand, the story contains declarations that contradict such individualistic interpretation.

³² Slavic translation of the 11th century Byzantine collection of aphorisms, didactic stories and extracts from the Bible.

³³ Slavic translation of aphorisms by Ioannes Chrysostomos (344/354-407).

³⁴ Though in one place, summing up his literary background, Epifanij, after pointing to the *Gospels* and the *Aposol* (readings from the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles for the whole year), briefly mentions his familiarity with passions of saints: "*Prochitah ubo i az Evangel'skaja, i Apostol, i inyja svjatyja knigi o istinnom zakone hristijanstem, ktomuzh i zhitija svjatyh, i strastoterpcheskaja borenija, i podvigi o blagochestii*" (EPIFANIJ, *Zapiska*, in: *Materialy dlja istorii raskola za pervoe vremja ego suschestvovanija*. Red. NIKOLAJ IVANOVICH SUBBOTIN. Moscow 1885. T. 7. p. 62).

³⁵ Reconstruction of Epifanij's textual competence through analysis of his other writings does not make this picture much different: in addition to the works mentioned we learn that he was most likely familiar with Ioann Zlatoust's commentaries on the Jesus Prayer (see: EPIFANIJ, *Zapiska* (see note 34). p. 60).

³⁶ Concluding his story Epifanij addresses his "spiritual son": "Now, my son and my beloved brother Athanasius, my poor and sinful life has been told to you for the love of Christ." (*Nu, chado moe Afonasie i brate moj*

From the very beginning, Epifanij underlines that he himself did not initiate his writing. He claims that it is undertaken first, in obedience to Christ; second, on his confessor's command and in expectation of his blessing; and finally, in response to a request of one of Epifanij's spiritual sons. Moreover, addressing his readers Epifanij announces that his story is not about himself at all but about things divine: "I will not refuse telling you about Jesus Christ [...]." From this point of view his narrative may be read not as a story about his *self* but about something else, most likely about Almighty God and the divine miracles Epifanij witnessed. As for his own individual self and his life, they are of little importance, rather they are the means for the implementation of God's will.

It is worth noting that protopope Avvakum who wrote his own autobiography concurrently with Epifanij, addressed his readers with the same thing:

"Then I beg every true believer's pardon; it is likely that in another case I should not speak about my life, but I have read the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's Epistles – the Apostles announced it when God worked through them: this is not our glory but God's glory. As for me, I am but naught."³⁷

IV.

The undertaken reading of the *Life* allows suggesting that Epifanij's self is simultaneously located in two intertwined spaces: one is his body, the other one is the Divine Cosmos. This reading also hints at the idea that these two spaces, one profane and the other divine, interact in miracle. The story Epifanij entitles "The miracle of my eyes for the sake of Christ's cross" may serve as a vivid illustration of this self-body-heaven mix.³⁸

The author begins by telling about his persecution at the hands of his religious opponents, who once again have attempted to convert him to the "reformed" Orthodoxy. It follows a detailed description of new bodily sufferings the prisoner has experienced: his earthen cell was so full of smoke that he was close to death several times. Above all the smoke affected his eyes: they became filled with pus, and the monk began to lose his vision. He vainly attempted to tear the pus off his eyes with his hands and in the end he was unable to read his prayer book. This disability was especially difficult for Epifanij and drove him to despair. In such physical and moral conditions, he once lay down on his bench and appealed "with a heavy breath and tears" for help to the Lord, the Blessed Virgin, his guardian angel, and all the saints. After this he had a dream in which he saw a warder approaching him and

ljubimyj, za ljubov' Hristovu skazano tebe zhitie moe bednoe i greshnoe.) – ROBINSON, Zhizneopisanija Avvakuma i Epifanija (see note 6). p. 202.

³⁷Ibid. p. 171.

³⁸ Ibid. pp. 198-200.

asking him to make several wooden crosses. When Epifanij objects that he is no longer capable of doing this handicraft anymore due to the loss of eyesight and right hand fingers, the warder replies: “Do, for God’s sake, do! Christ will help you.” After these words the warder disappears. Three days later, now in reality, he comes up to Epifanij with the same request as in the dream. After some hesitations, prayers, and obtaining his spiritual father’s blessing, Epifanij decided to try to resume his handicraft. At this time a miracle occurs: “for the sake of Christ’s Cross” the pain in his eyes stopped immediately and he was able to see, and his truncated hand became able to manufacture crosses.

Hence, the story makes clear that the final goal of the miraculous healing of the monk’s body is superior to his individual self: it is producing crosses for the glory of Christ, and thus serving God and all “true believers.” The “miracle of my eyes for the sake of Christ’s cross” also serves as a lucid example of the hierarchical relations between the two spaces, profane and divine, that shape the self-representation in Epifanij’s *Life*.³⁹

³⁹ I am grateful to Anne Julian for her precious help in editing this paper.