

The Resignation of Metropolitan Afanasii in 1566¹

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Abstract: This article offers a new perspective on the relations between Ivan the Terrible and the Orthodox Church by examining the cultural and anthropological context of the resignation of Metropolitan Afanasii in 1566. Historians usually think that Afanasii, who headed the Orthodox church from 1564 to 1566, resigned because of his disapproval of the *Oprichnina* terror. Correspondingly, most historians are skeptical about the official reason for Afanasii's resignation, his illness. On the basis of a critical reassessment of existing sources from the perspective of Muscovite attitudes to illness, this paper argues that Afanasii's illness was genuine. At the same time, his illness and resignation included a performative component because Afanasii faced a dilemma: to stay in the metropolitan's office until his death as required by cultural conventions or to seek a spiritual cure for his illness through repentance and redemption. In his response to this cultural challenge, Afanasii evoked the themes of miraculous healing and glorifying God through creative work by resorting to the cults of his most venerated predecessors on the metropolitan's see.

Key Words: Ivan the Terrible, Metropolitan Afanasii, Orthodox Church, illness, ritual, *Oprichnina*

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Metropolitan Afanasii headed the Orthodox church from 1564 to 1566. His period in office coincided with the *Oprichnina*, but, unlike his successor, Metropolitan Filipp Kolychev, Afanasii never criticized the *Oprichnina* terror openly. Nevertheless, many historians tried to interpret Afanasii's actions as a silent protest against Ivan IV's persecutions. Afanasii's resignation on 19 May 1566, officially due to illness, is particularly suggestive in this respect. N. M. Karamzin was first to surmise that there were hidden reasons for Afanasii's retirement. According to Karamzin, the metropolitan suffered not only from illness, but also from "the pain of the soul" as he witnessed the transformation of Ivan IV into a tyrant. Successive historians became increasingly skeptical about Afanasii's illness. Most specialists, including R. G. Skrynnikov, believe that the metropolitan resigned because of his disapproval of the *Oprichnina*.² According to N. N. Pokrovskii, the real reason for Afanasii's departure was the tsar's encroachment into the metropolitan's taxation privileges and estate.³ V.

²) N. M. Karamzin, *Istoriia gosudarstva rossiiskogo*, 4 books (Moscow: Kniga, 1988-89), 3, 9: 53; P. A. Sadikov, *Ocherki po istorii oprichniny* (Moscow, Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo AN SSSR, 1950), p. 57; R. G. Skrynnikov, *Tsarstvo terrora* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1992), pp. 290, 291; A. A. Zimin, *Oprichnina* (hereafter *Oprichnina*) (Moscow: Territoria, 2001), p. 157; Andrei Pavlov, Maureen Perrie, *Ivan the Terrible* (Harlow: Pearson, 2003), p. 135; V. A. Kolobkov, *Mitropolit Filipp i stanovlenie Moskovskogo samoderzhavii: Oprichnina Ivana Groznogo* (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2004), p. 109. See also A. M. Sakharov, *Obrazovanie i razvitie Rossiiskogo gosudarstva v XIV-XVII vv.* (Moscow: Vysshaia shkola, 1969), p. 106; V. I. Koretskii, *Istoriia russkogo letopisaniia vtoroi poloviny XVI-nachala XVII v.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1986), p. 19. S. M. Kashtanov speaks about deteriorating relations between the tsar and Afanasii that resulted in his resignation. S. M. Kashtanov, *Finansy srednevekovoi Rusi* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), p. 166.

³) N. N. Pokrovskii, "Afanasii (v miru Andrei), mitropolit Moskovskii," in *Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi* (hereafter SKK): <http://www.pushkinskiydom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=3702> (accessed 19 July 2013). According to A. A. Zimin, B. N. Floria was of the same opinion. However, Zimin quotes no work of

V. Shaposhnik thinks that Afanasii was unhappy about Ivan IV's decision to build a residence outside the Kremlin, something which hampered regular communication between the tsar and the metropolitan.⁴ According to M. N. Tikhomirov and A. L. Khoroshkevich, Afanasii resigned under Ivan IV's pressure.⁵ Finally, some historians, like Karamzin (with some reservations), S. M. Soloviev, S. B. Veselovskii and more recently B. N. Floria, accepted the official explanation of Afanasii's departure, his illness.⁶

Afanasii's resignation is thereby usually seen in the context of the reaction of the Orthodox church to Ivan IV's policy of terror. In this paper I will provide a new anthropological approach to the problem of Afanasii's retirement by critically re-examining available sources about his illness and resignation from

Floria, only the royal privileges granted to Afanasii on 20 June 1564 in *Akty feodal'nogo zemlevladieniia i khoziaistva XIV-XVI vekov*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo AN SSSR, 1951-61), 3, no 11: 29-30. A. A. Zimin, "Mitropolit Filipp i Oprichnina," in *Voprosy religii i ateizma* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo AN SSSR, 1963), 11: 280; A. A. Zimin, *Oprichnina Ivana Groznogo* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1964), p. 240; Zimin, *Oprichnina*, p. 157.

⁴) V. V. Shaposhnik, *Tserkovno-gosudarstvennye otnosheniia v Rossii v 30-80-e gody XVI veka* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta, 2002), pp. 260-61.

⁵) M. N. Tikhomirov, *Rossiiia v XVI stoletii* (Moscow, Izdatel'stvo AN SSSR, 1962), p. 95. According to Khoroshkevich, Ivan was irritated by Afanasii's intervention in diplomatic affairs. Shaposhnik is rightfully skeptical about these speculations. A. L. Khoroshkevich, "Mitropolit Afanasii i tsar' Ivan Groznyi," in *In Memoriam. Sbornik pamiati Ia. S. Lur'e* (St. Petersburg: Atheneum-Feniks, 1997), pp. 282-91; Shaposhnik, *Tserkovno-gosudarstvennye otnosheniia*, pp. 257-60.

⁶) Karamzin, *Istoriia*, 3, 9: 53; Sergei M. Soloviev, *History of Russia*, 50 vols. planned (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1976 to date), 10: 126; S. B. Veselovskii, *Issledovaniia po istorii oprichniny* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1963), p. 116; Boris Floria, *Ivan Groznyi* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1999), p. 206. Floria's opinion about the matter has apparently evolved, see above.

the perspective of Muscovite attitude to illness and cure. None of these sources contain medical information. It is therefore impossible to verify reports about Afanasii's poor health from a medical point of view. Furthermore, existing records about Afanasii's resignation are brief and already well known to historians. Nevertheless, I will demonstrate that they contain important evidence about the cultural context of Afanasii's retirement. This information sheds a new light on his motives for leaving the metropolitan's see.

Afanasii's resignation is mentioned in the Ambassadorial Chancellery's account of the reception of the Polish king's representatives headed by Jerzy (Yurii) Chodkiewicz in Moscow from May to September 1566. Speaking about the ambassadors attending the service in the Dormition cathedral, the account reports that at that time Afanasii left the metropolitanate due to illness (*dliia bolezni*) and retired to the Chudov monastery.⁷

The account has come down to us as part of the so-called ambassadorial book (*posol'skaia kniga*) no. 7. Generally speaking, ambassadorial books are thematic collections of copies of various documents related to particular diplomatic mission. The books also include narrative records about the details of diplomatic receptions (*zapisi sostavitelei posol'skikh knig*). These records bring together copies of assorted documents into a coherent account.⁸ The

⁷) *Sbornik Imperatorskogo Russkogo istoricheskogo obshchestva* (hereafter, *Sbornik RIO*), 148 vols. (St. Petersburg, Iur'ev, Moscow, Gel'singfors, Petrograd: Russkoe istoricheskoe obshchestvo, 1867-1916), 71: 364.

⁸) On the structure of ambassadorial books, see N. M. Rogozhin, "K voprosu o publikatsii posol'skikh knig kontsa XV-nachala XVII v.," in *Arkheograficheskii ezhegodnik za 1979 g.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1981), pp. 187, 192. Book no. 7 was compiled after 1569 which is the latest date of documents included in it. There is no direct reference to book no. 7 in the registry of the tsar's archive compiled between 1572 and 1575, but the registry is incomplete and describes some ambassadorial books without specifying their dates. The registry does list the original documents of Chodkiewicz's mission. Book no. 7 is mentioned in the 1614

reliability of information therefore varies in different parts of an ambassadorial book. Sections written on the basis of official documents, especially those intended for foreigners, may contain biased and deliberately distorted information. At the same time, the book's narrative records were accessible only to those Muscovite officials who had a privileged access to the Chancellery archives. It is precisely one of these narrative entries that mentions Afanasii's retirement due to illness. Given the restricted readership of the ambassadorial book, there are good reasons to believe its evidence about Afanasii's illness. One may also note that records of absence of members of the elite due to illness were not uncommon for ambassadorial books. Thus, diplomatic records report that V. M. Iur'ev was absent from court due to sickness in 1565.⁹

Another important source about Afanasii's resignation is the *Illustrated Chronicle Compilation* (*Litsevoi letopisnyi svod*, *LLS*), an illuminated chronicle, which was created probably in the 1570s and early 1580s on the basis of a hypothetical *Compilation of 1568*. *LLS* tells us that Afanasii left the metropolitan see for the Chudov monastery because of "great weakness" (*nemoshch' veliiu*) on 19 May 1566.¹⁰ Like diplomatic records, the chronicle quite often speaks about the illness of important historical figures. In particular, *LLS* features long dramatized accounts of the illness of Vasili III in 1533 and

registry of the archive of the Ambassadorial Chancellery. S. O. Shmidt, ed. *Opisi Tsarskogo arkhiva XVI veka i arkhiva Posol'skogo prikaza 1614 goda* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vostochnoi literatury, 1960), pp. 39, 42, 67, 70, 108. Cf. S. O. Shmidt, ed., "*Vypiska iz posol'skikh knig*" o snosheniakh Rossiiskogo gosudarstva c Pol'sko-Litovskim za 1487-1572 gg. (Moscow, Warsaw: Arkheograficheskii tsentr, 1997), pp. 224-61.

⁹ RGADA, F. 127, Op. 1, D. 7, ff. 70, 70v.

¹⁰) *Litsevoi letopisnyi svod XVI veka. Russkaia letopisnaia istoriia* (hereafter, *LLS*). 24 books (Moscow: Akteon, 2010), 23: 442. On *LLS*, see V. V. Morozov, *Litsevoi svod v kontekste otechestvennogo letopisaniia XVI veka* (Moscow: Indrik, 2005), pp. 116-19.

Ivan IV in 1553.¹¹ The poor health of some prominent member of the clergy is also mentioned in different part of LLS. Sometimes the chronicle just refers to illness without any details, like the illness of Metropolitan Simon in 1511, but occasionally even describes the symptoms of illness, like Metropolitan Philipp I's weakening arm and leg in 1473.¹² Closer to Afanasii's time, the chronicle reports that Bishop Akakii of Tver' and Kashin did not sign the Holy Synod's decision prescribing the metropolitan to wear a white cowl and to use red seals in February 1564 because he could not travel to Moscow due to "great age and illness" (*dliia velikia starosti i bolezni*). Akakii also failed to attend Afanasii's installation in February 1564 because the bishop was in great illness (*v velitsei bolezni*) then.¹³ It is easy to notice that the wording of both chronicle entries about the poor health of Akakii and Afanasii is quite similar. At the same time, the chronicler openly says that Metropolitan Ioasaf resigned in 1542 because he could not tolerate the dishonor inflicted on him by the boyars.¹⁴ As we can see, in this case the compiler of the chronicle does not try to conceal real reasons for the metropolitan's resignation with references to illness. It is thus safe to assume that both the diplomatic records and the chronicle report the actual reason for Afanasii's resignation in 1566, his deteriorating health.

LLS reveals that Afanasii's illness also included a ceremonial aspect. According to the chronicle, Afanasii returned to the Chudov monastery on the

¹¹ LLS 19: 227-372; 21: 505-509, 535-562, 574-579.

¹² Simon: *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei* (hereafter, *PSRL*), 43 vols. to date (St. Petersburg-Petrograd-Leningrad-Moscow: Arkheograficheskaia komissiiia, Nauka, Arkheograficheskii tsentr, Dmitrii Bulanin, Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 1841-2004), 13: 14; LLS 18: 185; Philipp I: *PSRL* 12 (St. Petersburg: I. N. Skorokhodov; Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 2000): 153; LLS 15: 435.

¹³ LLS 23: 325, 332.

¹⁴ *PSRL*, 13: 141; LLS 20: 196-198.

eve of the memorial service in honor of the founder of the monastery, Metropolitan Aleksii.¹⁵ This service commemorates the discovery of Aleksii's relics which is celebrated with an all-night vigil (*bdennaia*) on 20 May.¹⁶ Afanasii thus reappeared at the Chudov at the moment when the monks were celebrating the memory of their patron.

Muscovites believed that the cult of Aleksii had the ability to heal. Aleksii himself allegedly cured a Tatar elite woman; his shrine was also considered a source of miraculous cure.¹⁷ It would be unreasonable to assume that Afanasii

¹⁵) *PSRL*, 13: 401; *LLS*, 23: 442.

¹⁶) A. A. Turilov, "Aleksii," in *Pravoslavnaia entsiklopediia*: <http://www.pravenc.ru/text/81755.html> (accessed 11 April 2013). On the cult of Aleksii in the sixteenth century, see also A. G. Mel'nik, "Praktika pochitaniiia sviatogo Alekseia, mitropolita Moskovskogo, v XVI veke," *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2014), 53-69.

¹⁷) N. N. Pokrovskii, G. D. Lenhoff, eds., *Stepennaia kniga tsarskogo rodosloviia po drevneishim spiskam* (hereafter SK), 3 vols. (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskikh kul'tur, 2007-12), 2: 7, 18, 31. See also Turilov, "Aleksii;" Gail Lenhoff, "The Chudov Monastery and the Stepennaia kniga," *Forschungen zur Osteuropäischen Geschichte* 76 (2010), p. 105. The Chudov monastery operated a cottage industry of marketable commodities, first of all honey, which allegedly had curing power originating from the shrine of Metropolitan Aleksii. See S. N. Bogatyrev, ed., *Khoziaistvennye knigi Chudova monastyria 1585/86 g.* (Moscow: Arkheograficheskii tsentr, 1996), p. 25. On the belief in the healing power of relics in Muscovy, see Gail Lenhoff, "The notion of 'Uncorrupted Relics' in Early Russian Culture," in *Christianity and the Eastern Slavs*, ed. Boris Gasparov and Olga Raevsky-Hughes, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 265-266; M. P. Odesskii, "'Chelovek boleiushchii' v drevnerusskoi literature," in *Drevnerusskaia literatura: Izobrazhenie cheloveka*, ed. A. S. Demin (Moscow: Nasledie, 1995), p. 161; Eve Levin, "From Corpse to Cult in Early Modern Russia," in *Orthodox Russia: Belief and Practice under the Tsars*, ed. Valerie A. Kivelson, Robert H. Greene (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), p. 86.

cynically manipulated these beliefs and abused the venerated cult of Metropolitan Aleksii to conceal his fake illness. Apparently, Afanasii's medical condition was genuine and he resorted to the cult of Aleksii as a spiritual remedy.

The cultural context of Afanasii's resignation was defined by two factors: the historical memory of the resignation of his predecessors from the metropolitan's office and the attitudes of cultured Muscovites to illness. The most significant literary project commissioned by Afanasii, the *Book of Degrees of the Royal Genealogy* (*Stepennaia kniga*, hereafter SK) provides an interesting insight into these issues. Afanasii supervised the compilation of SK during his reign as metropolitan and possibly after his resignation.¹⁸ Historians still argue about the purpose of this innovative history of Rus' princes and

¹⁸) The dating of SK to Afanasii's tenure fits watermark evidence and is corroborated by the text of SK, whose latest entry about the taking of Polatsk dates to February 1563, by a gloss in one of SK's manuscripts and by their textual connections with the Compilation of 1560 (C1560), which was compiled after 1564. Sergei Bogatyrev, "The Book of Degrees of the Royal Genealogy: The Stabilization of the Text and the Argument from Silence," in Gail Lenhoff, Ann Kleimola, eds., *"The Book of Royal Degrees" and the Genesis of Russian Historical Consciousness* (Bloomington IN: Slavica, 2011), pp. 51-68; S. N. Bogatyrev, "Datirovka Stepennai knigi," *Drevniaia Rus'. Voprosy medievistiki* (hereafter, DR) 4 (50) (2012): 77-94. A proponent of an earlier dating of SK, A. S. Usachev has recently reconfirmed that the Nikon chronicle was one of SK's main sources, but this does not mean that there were no direct textual connection between SK and C1560. In his rejection of such connections Usachev is compelled to assume imagined sources and to constantly multiply them. He originally spoke about one hypothetical common source of SK and C1560, now he speculates about as many as three (a chronicle and two letters). These unverifiable speculations are unconvincing because SK is too close to C1560 to assume lost common sources. Usachev also ignores codicological and paleographic evidence when he claims that the entry about Polatsk in SK is a later addition. A. S. Usachev, "Vremia sozdaniia Stepennai knigi: v prodolzhenie diskussii," DR 1(51) (March 2013): 115-24.

metropolitans, which abandoned the traditional chronological format of Muscovite chronicles. Rather, SK provides a parallel account of individual rulers and metropolitans with each generation of the dynasty representing a step in an imagined ladder similar to the *Divine Ladder* of St. John Damascus. The main interpretations of the aims of SK include the glorification of Ivan IV's dynasty and his autocracy and the praise of eternal symphony between the princes and the metropolitans in the history of Rus'. Gail Lenhoff has correctly noted that none of these views explains why the compiler of SK employed a new format for his account.¹⁹ At the same time, the format of SK allowed Afanasii to bring forward topics that were especially relevant to him in his capacity of metropolitan. The issue of close cooperation between the tsar and the metropolitan was particularly topical during Afanasii's tenure as metropolitan. The establishment of the *Oprichnina* resulted in physical separation of the tsar and the metropolitan. Parallel treatment of individual princes and metropolitans in SK highlighted the idea of historical unity between the crown and the church, something which was threatened by the establishment of the *Oprichnina*.

SK also provides an ideal model for conducting the metropolitan's duties. According to SK, the most famous Muscovite metropolitans, SS Petr (d. 1326), Aleksii (d. 1378) and Iona (d. 1461) remained on their post until their death. These pillars of Muscovite Orthodoxy departed peacefully, blessing on their deathbed the ruling prince, his seed (*semia*) and all Orthodox people and dying

¹⁹ Gail Lenhoff, "Politics and Forms in the *Stepennaia kniga*," in Lenhoff, Kleimola, "*The Book of Royal Degrees*", pp. 157-174; G. Lenhoff, "Uchrezdenie Kazanskoi eparkhii i proekt sozdaniia Stepennoi knigi," *DR* 4(50) (2012): 95-107. Lenhoff asserts that the aim of SK was to glorify the conquest of Kazan and the establishment of the Kazan archbishopric in 1555. One may note that in the 1550s Muscovite bookmen successfully treated these subjects in different versions of the *Little Chronicle on the Origin of Tsardom* (*Letopisets nachala tsarstva*), which is a traditional Muscovite chronicle.

while praying. SK employs here the main deathbed topoi which include anticipating demise, summoning spiritual children and admonishing them to practice Christian virtues.²⁰

However, the successors of Peter, Aleksii and Iona usually did not fit this ideal of the metropolitan's death in office. A number of metropolitans were removed from their position or resigned due to illness. To minimize discrepancies with the exemplar cases of SS Petr, Aleksii and Iona, the compiler of SK had to rework the accounts of the departure of practically all metropolitans after Iona. SK does mention three forced removals from the metropolitan's office after Iona (the removal of Zosima in 1494, Daniil in 1539 and Ioasaf in 1542), but keeps the details of these events to a minimum. In particular, the compiler silenced the evidence of his chronicle sources that Zosima was removed because of his excessive drinking and negligence of the church by substituting it with a vague reference to "some stumbling" (*nekoie predknovenie*). The names of boyars responsible for the ousting of Daniil and Ioasaf are also missing from SK.²¹

Like forced removal from the metropolitan's office, illness also posed an interpretative problem for the compiler of SK. Muscovite Orthodox culture reveals conflicting approaches to illness. On the one hand, illness is a warning or punishment sent by God. The *Domostroi* reminds us that the Lord sends

²⁰ SK 1: 577; 2: 29, 207. Petr passed on his blessing to Prince Ivan I Danilivovich, who was away at the time of Peter's death, via the prince's agent. Daniel E. Collins, "Early Russian Topoi of Deathbed and Testament," in *Medieval Russian Culture*, eds. Michael S. Flier and Daniel Rowland, vol. 2 (California Slavic Studies, vol. 19, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 134-59.

²¹ SK is also very laconic about the departure of Metropolitan Varlaam, who left the see (*sviatitel'stvo ostavl'shu*) in 1521. SK 2: 268, 313, 352; PSRL 12: 238; 13: 43, 127, 141.

afflictions and diseases to turn us to repentance.²² SK contains a classic example of such providential illness, St. Vladimir I's sudden blindness, which was cured by his baptism. St. Efrosinia of Polatsk even glorifies God for sending her terminal illness.²³ Physical suffering reminds us of sins and opens a path to salvation, as revealed by numerous accounts of the last days of pious princes in SK.²⁴ One of the miracles performed by St. Nikita of Pereiaslavl' included curing Mikhail Vsevolodovich of Chernihiv so that the prince could fulfill his ultimate destiny, martyrdom.²⁵ On the contrary, wicked characters, like Tamerlane (Temir Aksak) fail to see illness as an opportunity for moral improvement and became even crueler after their recovery. The physical and mental illness of the evil protagonist of dynastic mythology, Sviatopolk the Cursed heralds his undignified death.²⁶

²² Carolyn Johnston Pouncy, ed., *The Domostroi: Rules for Russian Household in the Time of Ivan the Terrible* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 114; Odesskii, "Chelovek boleishchii," 165, 169, 170.

²³ Vladimir: SK 1:179, 180, 276, 277; Efrosiniia: SK 1: 445, 446.

²⁴ SK 1: 532 (Aleksandr Nevskii), 549 (Dmitrii Aleksandrovich of Pereiaslavl'), 550 (Andrei Aleksandrovich), 554 (Fedor Rostislavich of Smolensk); 2: 59 (Dmitrii Donskoi), 151 (Vasilii II Vasil'evich), 281 (Ivan III), 375 (Dmitrii, son of Ivan IV). The compiler of SK added a reference to Dmitrii's illness, which allegedly caused his death. At the same time, the chronicle sources of SK do not provide any explanation for Dmitrii's death. Cf. PSRL 13:232; 20: 541. Later sources report that he accidentally drowned during a pilgrimage. G. Edward Orchard, ed., *A Short History of the Beginnings and Origins of These Present Wars in Moscow under the Reign of Various Sovereigns down to the Year 1610* by Isaac Massa (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 7; V. P. Adrianova-Perets, ed., *Vremennik Ivana Timofeeva* (Moscow, Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1951), 20; PSRL 34 (Moscow: Nauka, 1978), 229.

²⁵ SK 1: 389.

²⁶ Temir Aksak: SK 2: 94-95; Sviatopolk: SK 1: 355.

On the other hand, good health was a precondition for fulfilling someone's responsibilities which were defined by God. This is especially true for those occupying the highest positions in the social hierarchy, first of all rulers. This is why in Muscovite literature the princes of Moscow, to whom God entrusted the Orthodox people, often seek cure by resorting both to prayer and to the professional help of physicians.²⁷ The prince's health is social capital which has to be preserved by any means. This theme is fully developed in SK's tale about the illness of Vasiliï III. In the tale, Vasiliï receives a temporary relief not thanks to his court physicians, who proved to be useless, but through his "inner prayer" (*umnymi molitvami*). The remission allows Vasiliï to fulfil his last spiritual and dynastic obligations by taking communion, passing on power to his son Ivan IV, and taking monastic vows.²⁸

It was the metropolitan's duty to help the prince and other members of society to preserve their health through prayer and charity work. The *Domostroi* urges good Christians to resort to the priests who can heal ill and offer spiritual help. Similarly, SK praises Metropolitan Efrem (11th century) for establishing first hospitals in Rus' and Metropolitan Iona for curing the grand prince's daughter and one of his boyars.²⁹

Like the prince, the head of the church had to perform his spiritual and administrative duties until his death despite ill health. So, according to SK, Metropolitan Kiprian remained in his office defying his numerous illnesses. Poor condition even prevented him from signing his farewell message, but he

²⁷ Odesskii, "Chelovek," pp. 172-173.

²⁸ SK 2: 323-327. The topoi of helpless physicians and a short relief, which allows the prince to make final preparations for his departure, allude to the vita of St. Vladimir I. Cf. SK 1: 279, 328-329. On a spiritual approach to medicine, which prioritized prayer over professional medical help, see Pouncy, *The Domostroi*, pp. 50, 115.

²⁹ Pouncy, *The Domostroi*, p. 70; Efrem: SK 1: 389; Iona: SK 2: 200-202.

did not resign. Similarly, Metropolitan Fotii remained with his flock until his death and piously accepted physical suffering from illness and spiritual torments caused by the division of the Kyivan see.³⁰ SK's account of Metropolitan Iona's last hours also stresses that prior to his death he was sick only for a short time, never defected from the church and was gladly awaiting the departure of his soul from his body (*i malo boleznuia i ot'' tserkvi ne otluchashesia, i nadezhda otshestvia radostno priblizhashesia emu, izhe ot'' tlennago sego i malovremennago zhitia dushi razluchenia ot'' telesi s'' upovaniem'' ozhidashe*).³¹

Following this cultural model, the compiler of SK preferred to ignore cases when metropolitans resigned because of ill health. Four out of eight individuals occupying the metropolitan's see from the death of Iona in 1461 to the resignation of Ioasaf in 1542 (the last metropolitan whose departure is described in SK) evoked health problems as a reason for resignation. However, none of these instances is mentioned in SK. The illness of two metropolitans, Feodosii Byval'tsev (resigned in 1464) and Gerontii (temporarily resigned due to sickness in 1484, died in 1489) may be omitted in SK because their medical condition is also ignored in SK's main chronicle sources (Sofia I Younger Redaction, Voskresensk and Nikon chronicles).³² Still, both the Voskresensk and Nikon chronicle mention the poor health of Metropolitan Filipp I (died in 1473) and Metropolitan Simon (died in 1511) at the end of their tenures, but

³⁰ Kiprian: SK 2:108-111; Fotii: SK 2:162-164.

³¹ SK 2: 207.

³² Feodosii: SK 2: 219; PSRL 5 (St. Petersburg: Eduard Prats, 1851): 274; 8 (St. Petersburg: Eduard Prats, 1851): 151; 12: 116. Gerontii: SK 2: 266; PSRL 8: 218; 12: 221. Feodosii's and Gerontii's illnesses are mentioned in the Sophia II and L'vov chronicles. PSRL 6 (Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 2001), 2: 160, 319; 20 (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskikh kul'tur, 2005): 277, 351.

SK remains silent about this evidence.³³ SK therefore deliberately omits references to the illness of metropolitans as a reason for their resignation.

Daniel E. Collins persuasively argues that deathbed topoi reflected “the social and religious obligation that had to be fulfilled during the transition from earthly to eternal life.” According to Collins, these literary themes corresponded to actual social practices because they are corroborated by relatively reliable biographies and non-literary sources.³⁴ The *Domostroi* openly calls for following the examples of holy men who patiently bore many pains and illnesses with gratitude to God.³⁵ The assumption that the metropolitan had to remain in his office until his death despite his illness was apparently widely spread among cultured Muscovites. This is apparent from the farewell message of Afanasii’s predecessor on the metropolitan’s see, Metropolitan Makarii. In December 1563, Makarii wrote on his deathbed that he was suffering from numerous diseases resulting from injuries he received during the fire of Moscow in 1547. Because of these ailments, Makarii wished on many occasions to leave his office and to spend his remaining days in silence venerating Christ as his priest. However, Makarii was precluded from retirement by the “wise retention and merciful disposition” (*liubomudrym” uderzhaniem” i milostivnym” blagoprivetiem”*) of Ivan IV as well as by the compulsion (*ponuzheniem*) of all the hierarchs of the Russian land and the Holy Synod.³⁶ Ivan thus shared the view of the compiler of SK that a good shepherd should remain with his spiritual flock despite his illness.

³³ Filipp I: SK 2: 236; PSRL 8: 177-178; 12: 152-153; Simon: SK 2: 293; PSRL 8: 252; 13: 14. Cf. PSRL 24 (Petrograd: Vtoraia gosudarstvennaia tipografiia, 1921; Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul’tury, 2000): 217.

³⁴ Collins, “Early Russian Topoi,” p. 158.

³⁵ Pouncy, *The Domostroi*, pp. 115-116.

³⁶ PSRL 13:375.

In this cultural context Afanasii's retirement from the metropolitan's office on purely medical grounds may have looked inappropriate. This is why his illness included a certain performative quality. Paul E. Brodwin notes that illness or pain itself is not a performance which the sufferer can control. However, illness generates dramaturgic expressions and "impression management" that help "sufferers communicate their wants and needs in crucial social relationship, especially when the use of other languages is not sanctioned."³⁷ Afanasii's illness may thus have been genuine, but he resorted to the commemorative ritual practiced at the Chudov monastery because his mode of expression was limited by cultural conventions. By retiring on the eve of the day commemorating the discovery of Metropolitan Aleksii's relics, Afanasii staged his resignation as a symbolic pilgrimage to the shrine of Aleksii. The theme of the feast celebrated by the Chudov monks on 20 May, the symbolic return of Metropolitan Aleksii to the congregation through the discovery of his relics, worked perfectly with Afanasii's return to the monastery where he was previously tonsured (he was a monk at the Chudov monastery from 1562 to 1564).

The cult of Metropolitan Aleksii therefore helped Afanasii to find a spiritual cure through repentance and to reunite with the brethren of the Chudov monastery headed by Archimandrite Levkii. In his capacity of archimandrite of the Chudov (1554-1569/70), Levkii was Afanasii's superior during his staying in the monastery from 1562 to 1564. A. A. Zimin has noticed that the would-be metropolitan joined the monastery at the time when many other prominent court clerics left their offices and became monks. However, unlike them, Afanasii managed to retain good connections at court and eventually became

³⁷) Paul E. Brodwin, "Symptoms and Social Performances: The Case of Diane Reden," in Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good and others, eds., *Pain as Human Experience: An Anthropological Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 78, 92.

metropolitan.³⁸ Apparently, Afanasii's succeeded thanks to the patronage of Archimandrite Levkii. By the time Afanasii appeared in the Chudov monastery in 1562, Levkii had developed particularly close connections with the tsar. The archimandrite blessed the tsar's campaigns and accompanied Ivan IV in the victorious campaign against Polatsk in 1562-1563. Together with Archbishop Pimen of Novgorod, Levkii acted as a mediator between Metropolitan Afanasii and Ivan IV during the establishment of the *Oprichnina* in December 1564-January 1565 (I am going to discuss Afanasii's role in this important event in a separate piece).³⁹ The fact that Afanasii chose the Chudov monastery as the place of his resignation indicated that he still counted on Levkii's support in 1566.

Afanasii also carefully chose the time of his resignation. On the one hand, it coincided with Ivan IV's absence from Moscow.⁴⁰ Afanasii apparently knew that Ivan did not agree to Metropolitan Makarii's resignation several years earlier. Now due to his absence the tsar was unable to hinder the metropolitan's plans of resignation. At the same time, by evoking the venerated cult of Aleksii, Afanasii demonstrated that his retirement had a divine sanction, an idea that helped Afanasii to persuade the tsar to accept the metropolitan's decision to retire. The date of Afanasii's resignation also offered him perfect opportunities for impression management. The Chudov monks celebrated the discovery of Aleksii's relics with a communal feast on 20 May. The event could be attended by as many as fifteen guests, whom the monks treated to fish

³⁸ A. A. Zimin, *Ivan Peresvetov i ego sovremenniki: Ocherki po istorii russkoi obshchestvenno-politicheskoi mysli serediny XVI veka* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1958), p. 129.

³⁹ On Levkii, see Lenhoff, "The Chudov Monastery," 113-114.

⁴⁰) Ivan inspected southern fortresses from 29 April to 28 May; his family left Moscow for Aleksandrova Sloboda on 1 May. *PSRL*, 13: 401; Skrynnikov, *Tsarstvo*, p. 290.

soup with cloves.⁴¹ The prestige of the monastery and its location in the Kremlin guaranteed the high social status of its guests. Members of the elite attending the banquet at the Chudov on 20 May 1566 could therefore witness the re-appearance of Afanasii among the brethren. Common meal symbolically reaffirmed the new status of the former metropolitan.

Ivan IV's attitude to Afanasii after his resignation shows that Afanasii's plan worked. Ivan's immediate reaction to Afanasii's departure was very calm. Nothing indicates that Ivan interpreted the resignation of the metropolitan as a hostile political act. Upon returning to Moscow from an inspection trip on 28 May, the tsar placidly left the capital for the Trinity monastery of St. Sergii in just two days. This was a regular royal pilgrimage celebrating the Pentecost, and Ivan apparently saw no reason for changing his routine despite Afanasii's retirement.⁴²

Furthermore, a year after Afanasii's departure, in July 1567, Ivan commissioned him to renovate the most venerated icon in Muscovy, the Vladimir Mother of God in the Dormition Cathedral in the Kremlin.⁴³ The fact that the tsar entrusted Afanasii with work in the Dormition, which was the metropolitan's cathedral, suggests that Afanasii's resignation did not compromise his reputation as former metropolitan in Ivan's eyes.⁴⁴

⁴¹ The number of guests is evidenced by the number of spoons the monastery purchased for guests attending the celebrations on 20 May 1586. See Bogatyrev, *Khoziaistvennye knigi*, p. 103.

⁴²) *PSRL*, 13: 402; *Sbornik RIO*, 71: 346, 347.

⁴³) *PSRL*, 13: 408; *LLS*, 23: 506. This is the last mentioning of Afanasii as a living person. He died before 1575. Makarii (Veretennikov), *Iz istorii russkoi ierarkhii XVI veka* (Moscow: Podvorie Sviato-Troitskoi Sergievoi lavry, 2006), 116.

⁴⁴) Afanasii's respectable status after his resignation is also attested by the colophon of the 1568 Psalter printed by the royal press in Moscow. The colophon favorably mentions Afanasii as a patron of printing. Iu. A. Labyntsev, *Tipografiia Nikifora Tarasieva i Nevezhi*

According to Kolobkov, Afanasii's acceptance of the commission means that his illness was a ploy. It is more likely that Afanasii's health improved and he regained his intellectual and creative abilities. Despite very limited efficiency of medical remedies available in Muscovy, recovery was possible, as evidenced by the chronicle account of Metropolitan Feodosii Byval'tsev, who became ill during his conflict with the clergy in 1464, but then recovered, entered a monastery and lived for another 10 years.⁴⁵ A. S. Usachev notes that staying at a monastery with its strict dietary requirements and organized daily routine resulted in the longer life of monks compared to the laity.⁴⁶ One may also note that icon-painting is less physically demanding than the metropolitan's regular duties, which required long periods of standing up during services, something which would be difficult, for example, in the case of gout.⁴⁷

From a cultural perspective, the royal commission offered Afanasii, who was an experienced icon painter, an opportunity to highlight his association with one of the most important religious objects in Muscovy. Afanasii's ability to undertake the project may also be seen as the triumph of the cult of Aleksii, whose miraculous power helped Afanasii recover. Afanasii's work on the icon

Timofeeva (Svodnyi katalog i opisaniie staropechatnykh izdaniy kirillovskogo i glagolicheskogo shriftov. Opisaniie staropechatnykh izdaniy kirillovskogo shrifta, 19 (Moscow: Gos. biblioteka im. V. I. Lenina, 1984), pp. 29-30; A. S. Usachev, "Mitropolit Afanasii i Psaltir' 1568 g.," *Vestnik arkhivista*, no. 3 (2013): 20-29.

⁴⁵ PSRL 6 (Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 2001) 2: 160; 20: 277; Ia. S. Lur'e, "Fedor Byval'tsev," in SKK <http://www.pushkinskiydom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=4679> (accessed 21 March 2014).

⁴⁶ A. S. Usachev, "'Starost' glubokaia' v XIV-XVI v.: Demograficheskie realii i ikh vospriiatie sovremennikami (na materiale pis'mennykh istochnikov)," *DR* 1 (55) (2014): 61-62.

⁴⁷ On gout (*kamchug*) affecting elite Muscovites, see *PSRL*, 28: 154, 320

also echoed the cult of Metropolitan Peter, who is praised in SK as the creator of several icons, including that of the Mother of God.⁴⁸

Recollections of Afanasii's retirement became topical after another unauthorized departure, that of Metropolitan Philipp Kolychev, who moved from the metropolitan's court to a monastery during a conflict with Ivan over the *Oprichnina* in March 1568.⁴⁹ The *Life* of Metropolitan Philipp emphasizes the fact that Afanasii also left the metropolitanate without authorization.⁵⁰ A miniature depicting Afanasii's resignation in *LLS*, which was created after Philipp's departure, presents Afanasii as a lonely figure wandering across a large city (Moscow); an empty altar with a crosier lying on it symbolizes the abandoned metropolitan's see. The controversial character of Afanasii's decision is emphasized by the lack of inhabitants in Moscow, which usually appears in the miniatures as a populous place inhabited by numerous citizens, who accept the actions of their dynastic and spiritual leaders; now only monks meet Afanasii by the tomb of Metropolitan Aleksii in the Chudov monastery, clearly a reference to the vigil celebrating the discovery of his relics (Figure 1).⁵¹ Similarly, the chronicle entry about Afanasii's absence from the meetings of the Assembly of the Land in June 1566 due to his retirement to the Chudov monastery is illustrated with a miniature presenting Afanasii in the monastery, completely isolated from the tsar, the clergy and other members of the

⁴⁸ SK 1: 569, 572; 3: 176.

⁴⁹) *Novgorodskie letopisi* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, 1879), p. 98 (Novgorod II Chronicle).

⁵⁰) Kolobkov, *Mitropolit*, p. 109. A late sixteenth-century chronicle originating from Vologda reports that Afanasii left the metropolitan's see for the Chudov monastery without mentioning his illness. M. N. Tikhomirov, *Russkoe letopisanie* (Moscow: Nauka, 1979), p. 229.

⁵¹) *LLS*, 23: 442. While the text of *LLS* is based on an earlier chronicle (see above), the miniatures of *LLS* depicting Afanasii were created later, at the end of Ivan IV's reign.

assembly (Figure 2).⁵² It is important to remember that the *Life* of Metropolitan Philipp and the miniatures of *LLS* reflect a later reinterpretation of Afanasii's resignation influenced by the conflict between Ivan IV and Metropolitan Philipp.

To commemorate the renovation of the icon of the Vladimir Mother of God by Afanasii, the masters of *LLS* depicted Afanasii restoring the icon with a brush and paint: with a monastic cowl thrown back to his shoulders, Afanasii's head is bare, a sign of respect to the holy image. The tsar appears next to Afanasii with an open hand, a gesture of royal approval of the cleric's work (Figure 3).⁵³

Whether intentionally or not, the master of this miniature captured the essence of Afanasii's relations with Ivan in the 1560s. The tsar generally respected the decisions made by Afanasii in his capacity of metropolitan, including his somewhat controversial resignation. How can we explain such royal benevolence, which is quite surprising in the context of the *Oprichnina*? One may assume that Ivan honored Afanasii's former role as royal confessor and participant in the victorious Kazan' campaign. But sentimental memories did not prevent Ivan from terrorizing other former associates during the *Oprichnina*. It is also conceivable that Ivan had limited control over the metropolitan see. Still, he was able to impose his terms on Afanasii's successor Metropolitan Philipp Kolychev and eventually to depose him.

⁵²) *LLS*, 23: 452.

⁵³) *LLS*, 23: 506. *LLS*'s somewhat contradictory image of Afanasii is attributable to the fact the chronicle is a collective effort of many people, including possibly Afanasii's former associates. On the latter, see A. S. Usachev, "Mitropolit Afanasii i pamiatniki russkogo letopisaniia serediny-tret'ei chetverti XVI v.," in *Letopisi i khroniki. Novye issledovaniia. 2011-2012* (Moscow, St. Petersburg: Al'ians-Arkheo, 2012), pp. 253-74.

There must be therefore something special about Afanasii's position. One factor was his good relations with Archimandrite Levkii, who was close to the tsar and acted as a mediator between him and the metropolitan starting from the establishment of the *Oprichnina*. But most importantly, Afanasii's resignation was carefully staged, though it was not a political demonstration. Historians often too readily suspect a political agenda in the activities of pre-modern historical figures that were not intended to be political in our modern sense. W. Gareth Jones reminds us that Catherine II's *Instruction* to the Legislative Commission was a work of literature prompted "by the European literary culture as it was understood in her day, rather than by any political imperative." The Commission itself may have been intended to act more like a literary salon fostering a conversational discourse rather than practical legislative initiatives.⁵⁴

Similarly, Afanasii's resignation was not a political, but a cultural act. It addressed the dilemma between his duties as metropolitan and his moral obligation to seek a spiritual cure from illness in sincere repentance and prayer. As metropolitan, Afanasii had to remain in his office until his death, an idea that was reflected in many Muscovite literary texts, including SK. But his illness prompted him to look for a path to true repentance. Unlike his predecessor Makarii, who did not dare to contradict the tsar in the question of resignation, Afanasii adopted a proactive stance by leaving the metropolitan's see without Ivan IV's permission.

To justify his action in the eyes of the tsar, Afanasii mobilized the historical memory of the most venerated metropolitans in the history of the Rus' church. SK contains, among other stories, a separate account of the discovery of Aleksii's relics and their healing power. A. V. Sirenov seems to be correct

⁵⁴ W. Gareth Jones, "The Spirit of the 'Nakaz': Catherine II's Literary Debt to Montesquieu," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 76 (1998), 4: 669, 670.

when he argues that texts about Aleksii were introduced into *SK* gradually as the project progressed.⁵⁵ Afanasii's interest in the cult of Aleksii apparently grew as Afanasii was contemplating his resignation. The cult of Aleksii's memory helped Afanasii to arrange his resignation as a symbolic pilgrimage to the shrine of Aleksii. Afanasii's intention to be buried in the Chudov also followed the example of Aleksii, who decided to be buried in the monastery rather than in the metropolitans' mausoleum in the Dormition cathedral.⁵⁶ Afanasii's engagement with icon-painting after his resignation also evoked the cult of another prominent metropolitan, Petr. Despite retiring to a monastery, Afanasii continued to perform valuable service to the tsar and his realm by praising the cult of the Mother of God and imitating the lives of the most prominent Muscovite hierarchs.⁵⁷

Like his literary project of *SK*, Afanasii's resignation capitalized on the cult of Rus' metropolitans. His involvement in the promotion of the historical memory of his predecessors on the metropolitan's see thus included a considerable personal element. Afanasii staged his resignation after literary models associated with the themes of repentant pilgrimage, spiritual reunion, and miraculous healing leading to regaining the ability to glorify God through creative work. By turning his illness into a performative act, Afanasii removed cultural obstacles for his departure from the metropolitan's office, retained

⁵⁵) *SK* 2: 32-34; 3: 204; A. V. Sirenov, *Stepennaia kniga. Istoriia teksta* (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskikh kul'tur, 2007), p. 212. Cf. Lenhoff, "The Chudov Monastery," p. 100.

⁵⁶) On Aleksii's burial, see Lenhoff, "The Chudov Monastery," p. 104.

⁵⁷ Afanasii's cultural behavior after his resignation is reminiscent of that of Solomonia Saburova, who, in spite of her removal to a monastery, continued to perform the cultural functions of an elite Muscovite woman by interceding with God for the well-being of the Russian ruler and his realm. Isolde Thyrêt, *Between God and Tsar: Religious Symbolism and the Royal Women of Muscovite Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001), p. 36.

working relations with the tsar and secured his personal salvation in the tense climate of the *Oprichnina*.