



Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond (Oxford Studies in Byzantium)

By Sergey A. Ivanov

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There are saints in Orthodox Christian culture who overturn the conventional concept of sainthood. Their conduct may be unruly and salacious, they may blaspheme and even kill--yet, mysteriously, those around them treat them with even more reverence. Such saints are called "holy fools." In this pioneering study Sergey A. Ivanov examines the phenomenon of holy foolery from a cultural standpoint. He identifies its prerequisites and its development in religious thought, and traces the emergence of the first hagiographic texts describing these paradoxical saints. He describes the beginnings of holy foolery in Egyptian monasteries of the fifth century, followed by its high point in the cities of Byzantium, with an eventual decline in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. He also compares the important Russian tradition of holy fools, which in some form has survived to this day.

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"The author's erudition is as amazing as the fascinating 'story' he tells, and we should appreciate the great efforts of the translator."--Ludwig Steindorff, *The Russian Review*

"Ivanov gives an impressionistic overview of similar forms of religious foolery in Islamic culture and in medieval Western Christianity. Ivanov's study presents a very broad and in-depth examination of the unique tradition of holy foolery in Byzantium and Russia, which makes it a must-read for anyone interested in this phenomenon and in the broader historical scope of Byzantine and Russian Orthodox religion and culture."
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About the Author

Sergey A. Ivanov is Senior Research Associate, Institute of Slavic and Balkan Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences.

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