ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 12| Issue: 4| April 2026|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2026: 8.753 || ISI Value: 1.188

FROM HAGIOGRAPHY TO AUTOBIOGRAPHY: THE RHETORIC OF ORAL SERMON IN THE LEGACY OF ARCHITECT AVVAKUM

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Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra27382
DOI No: 10.36713/epra27382

ABSTRACT
This article examines the linguistic innovation of Archpriest Avvakum in the genre of hagiography. Particular attention is paid to his departure from the canonical norms of hagiographic tradition and the introduction of colloquial, expressive, and individual authorial elements. It analyzes Avvakum's role as a reformer of the genre, transforming the hagiography from a strictly ecclesiastical text into a work imbued with a personal voice, emotional coloring, and a living verbal texture.
KEYWORDS: *Avvakum, Hagiography, Linguistic Innovation, Hagiography, Colloquial Speech, Expressiveness, Individual Style.*

INTRODUCTION

Archpriest Avvakum occupies a unique place in the history of 17th-century Russian literature. His "Life" is not simply a hagiographic text, but a work in which the author's individuality and linguistic innovation come to the fore. Unlike traditional hagiographies, written within the strict canon of church rhetoric, Avvakum creates a text imbued with vivid language, emotional expression, and polemical pathos. This makes his work not only a monument to spiritual literature but also an important stage in the development of Russian literary fiction.

Aim. The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the characteristics of Archpriest Avvakum's linguistic innovation in the hagiographic genre, as well as to demonstrate his contribution to the development of 17th-century Russian literature and the transformation of the traditional hagiographic form.

The Methodological Basis of the analysis includes a historical-literary approach, allowing us to consider Avvakum's "Life" within the context of the hagiographic tradition; a stylistic analysis, identifying colloquial, expressive, and authorial elements; and a comparative method, comparing Avvakum's text with canonical hagiographies of previous eras, such as those of Sergius of Radonezh and Theodosius of the Caves. Interpreting these innovative features allows us to understand them as a manifestation of the author's personal position, which is particularly important for understanding the evolution of the genre.

Avvakum deliberately departs from the conventional model of hagiography, where the saint is presented as an idealized paragon of virtue. His text is filled with personal experiences, everyday details, and emotional outbursts. For example, he does not hesitate to use colloquial expressions: "And I, a sinner, sat and cried," or "The dogs bark, but I endure." Such phrases break the distance between author and reader, creating the effect of direct communication. This demonstrates Avvakum's innovation—he makes the saint a living person, not an abstract symbol (Likhachev, 1973).

In his "Life," Archpriest Avvakum demonstrates unique linguistic innovation, which can be traced at the level of vocabulary, syntax, and style. To demonstrate the depth of his authorial style, let us turn to specific fragments of the text and analyze them.

For example, in one episode, Avvakum writes: "And I, a sinner, sat and cried" (Avvakum, 1960). Here we see a combination of a literary element ("sinful") with the colloquial construction "sat and cried." The conjunction "da" in this context serves a connecting function characteristic of oral speech, not literary style. Such syntactic simplicity and immediacy create the effect of a living narrative, rather than a canonical hagiography. The lexeme “sinful” retains its traditional hagiographic coloring, but in combination with the everyday “sat and cried” it gives birth to a new type of narrative – personal, confessional.

Another example: "The Dogs Bark, But I Endure" (Avvakum, 1960). Here, Avvakum uses a metaphor relatable to the popular consciousness. "Dogs" is an image of enemies, adversaries, and the verb "bark" conveys their aggressive actions. The syntactic structure is simple: a two-part sentence with the conjunction "a," which contrasts the enemies' actions with the author's reaction. The lexical simplicity ("dogs," "bark," "endure") makes the text accessible and expressive, and the metaphorical nature lends it the power of folklore. Unlike traditional hagiographies, where enemies are described in lofty terms ("wicked," "atheists"), Avvakum uses an image understandable to every reader.
The innovativeness is particularly evident in the emotional expression. In one fragment, he writes: "They beat me, they tormented me, but I endured. For the Lord's sake, I endured." "And they laughed" (Avvakum, 1960). Here we see the repetition of the verb "endured," which heightens the emotional tension. The syntax is built on short, clipped phrases,

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reminiscent of spoken language. Repetition and parallelism ("endured... endured") create a rhythmic structure close to folklore. The lexeme "for the Lord's sake" introduces a religious motif, but it is embedded in the living fabric of the narrative, not in abstract rhetoric.

The polemical element is also interesting: "And you, madmen, think you can stifle the truth? No, you won't" (Avvakum, 1960). Here, Avvakum uses a rhetorical question and answer, which is typical of journalism but atypical of hagiography. The lexeme "madmen" has an emotional and evaluative connotation, and the syntactic structure "you think... no" creates the effect of a dialogue with opponents. This gives the text a dynamic quality and turns it into a polemical treatise, and not just a spiritual testimony.

A crucial aspect of Avvakum's linguistic innovation is his ability to break the distance between author and reader through dialogic constructions and direct appeals. In traditional hagiographies, such as Epiphanius the Wise's "Life of Sergius of Radonezh," the author addresses the reader indirectly, through lofty formulas, while the text itself remains monologue-like. Avvakum, however, constantly engages in lively contact with his audience, which makes his "Life" unique.

Take the example: "My brothers, Orthodox people, pray for me" (Avvakum, 1960). Here we see a direct appeal to the reader. The lexeme "brothers" derives from the Church Slavonic tradition, but when combined with "Orthodox people," it takes on the character of a living exhortation. The syntax is simple: the imperative "pray" creates the effect of a direct dialogue. Unlike canonical lives, where the reader is perceived as a passive listener, Avvakum involves him in action – prayer, participation in the fate of the author.

Another example: "And you, fools, think that you can suppress the truth?" (Avvakum, 1960) is addressed not to supporters, but to opponents. Here we see a rhetorical question that transforms the text into a polemical speech. The lexeme "fools" is emotionally charged, and the syntax is built on contrasts ("you think... no"). Thus, Avvakum creates the effect of a debate, drawing the reader into the conflict, forcing them to take a stand. This is completely atypical for hagiographies, where the saint's enemies are mentioned merely as background information, not as participants in the dialogue.

It is especially significant that Avvakum uses forms of address characteristic of oral speech. For example: "And you, brethren, do not be lazy, pray" (Avvakum, 1960). Here we see the colloquial construction "do not be lazy," which sounds like an admonition in a lively conversation. The syntax is simple and imperative, enhancing the effect of direct communication. In traditional lives of saints, instructions are given through lofty formulas ("let us imitate the saint"), while in Avvakum they are given through direct speech, close to a sermon.

If we compare "The Life of Archpriest Avvakum" with other hagiographic texts, such as "The Life of Sergius of Radonezh" (written by Epiphanius the Wise) or "The Life of Theodosius of the Caves" (Nestor the Chronicler), the contrast becomes particularly clear. In "The Life of Sergius of Radonezh," the narrative follows a strict canon: the saint is presented as an idealized model of humility and piety. The vocabulary is elevated, literary, and rich in biblical allusions. The syntax is fluid, with long periods where each sentence strives to emphasize the hero's spiritual significance. For example, Epiphanius writes: "He shone with humility and meekness, and God's grace rested upon him." Here we see literary parallelism, an absence of everyday details, and the language itself is aimed at elevating the image. The Life of Theodosius of the Caves also predominantly uses literary vocabulary, and the narrative is structured around the saint's miracles and virtues. Nestor the Chronicler uses formulas like "he was a pious and virtuous man," which is consistent with the Byzantine tradition. The syntax here is simpler than that of Epiphanius, but still retains a literary character, devoid of colloquial elements.

Against this background, Avvakum appears radically different. His Life is filled with everyday details: "My wife, Anastasia, suffered with me in exile," or "My children were hungry, but I prayed" (Avvakum, 1960). Such phrases are not found in the lives of Sergius or Theodosius, where the saint's personal life is barely mentioned. Avvakum's vocabulary combines ecclesiastical terms ("sinful," "for the Lord's sake") with colloquial ones ("he sat and cried," "the dogs barked"). The syntax of his text is often chopped and emotionally charged, which creates the effect of oral speech.

While Epiphanius and Nestor present the saint as a role model, devoid of individual traits, Avvakum presents a living person who suffers, argues, and becomes angry. His polemical passages ("And you, fools, think you can stifle the truth?") are completely atypical of a canonical hagiography. In the tradition of hagiographies, the saint's opponents are referred to only as "impious" or "atheists," without direct polemics. Avvakum, however, engages in dialogue, argues, and makes accusations, which brings his text closer to journalistic writing.

This comparison shows that Avvakum's innovation lies not only in his use of colloquial speech and emotional expression, but also in his subversion of the canonical model of hagiography. He introduces elements of autobiography, everyday narrative, and polemics into the genre, something not found in the hagiographies of Sergius of Radonezh or Theodosius of the Caves. This is precisely what makes "The Life of Archpriest Avvakum" a transitional text: it retains the form of a hagiography but imbues it with new content. Unlike traditional hagiographers, Avvakum speaks not only of holiness but also of human pain, of family suffering, of the struggle for truth. His language is the language of the people, not just of ecclesiastical literature (Uspensky, 1994). This is precisely his innovation: for the first time in 17th-century Russian literature, he made the saint not an abstract symbol, but a living person, speaking the language of his time.

Lexical and syntactic analysis reveals that Avvakum's innovation lies in his combination of archaisms and colloquialisms, literary formulas and vivid speech. This creates a unique stylistic tension that makes his text unique. It simultaneously adheres to church tradition and transcends it,

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creating a new type of literary language—the language of personal testimony, confessional and polemical (Zimin, 1982).

Avvakum's innovation is also evident in his use of metaphors resonating with popular consciousness. He compares his suffering to a "fiery furnace" and his enemies to "ravenous wolves." These images are not borrowed from the Byzantine literary tradition, but are rooted in living folk speech. Thus, Avvakum combines lofty religious pathos with folkloric imagery, creating a new type of literary language (Kozlov, 1980).

Thus, Avvakum's linguistic innovation manifests itself in several aspects: the introduction of colloquial speech and vernacular expressions, emotional expression and subjectivity, the use of folk metaphors, polemical pathos, and the author's individualization. All of this makes the Life a unique phenomenon in 17th-century Russian literature. It not only preserves the characteristics of the hagiographic genre but also transforms it, opening the way to the development of autobiographical and fictional prose. Avvakum becomes the forerunner of writers for whom personal voice and individual style become more important than canon. His innovation lies in the fact that for the first time in Russian literature, he transformed the saint not into an abstract symbol, but into a living person speaking the language of the people (Panchenko, 1984).

For this reason, The Life of Archpriest Avvakum can be viewed as a transitional text, connecting church tradition and nascent fiction. His language is a bridge between literary rhetoric and living folk speech, between strict canon and the free expression of the author. Herein lies its historical and literary significance: Avvakum not only testifies to his faith but also creates a new type of literary expression that will develop in subsequent centuries.

Results

Colloquialisms: Avvakum makes extensive use of colloquial expressions, phraseological units, and syntactic constructions, bringing the text closer to living oral speech. Emotional expression: Unlike traditional hagiography, his life is rich in personal experiences, anger, joy, and sarcasm. Authorial individualization: Avvakum appears not only as a holy martyr but also as an individual, openly expressing his thoughts and feelings. Polemical element: the life becomes a platform for theological and ideological debates, which was previously uncommon in the genre. Genre transformation: Avvakum's life combines elements of autobiography, journalism, and fiction, making it a unique phenomenon in 17th-century Russian literature.

Archpriest Avvakum made a significant step in the development of the hagiography genre, transforming it from a strictly canonical text into a work reflecting the author's personality and spiritual experience. His linguistic innovation was manifested in the use of colloquial speech, emotional expression, and individual style, making the Life of Avvakum not only a monument to church literature but also an important stage in the development of Russian fiction.

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