

# Economic Reconstruction or Corporate Raiding?

## The Borisoglebskii Monastery in Torzhok and the Ascription of Monasteries in the 17th Century

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In spite of a recent revival of interest in medieval Russian monastic life, the administrative regime of Muscovite monasteries and hermitages and their political and economic aspirations are still incompletely understood. In seeking to counter the negative bias of Soviet-era studies of Russian monasteries, which focus primarily on monastic houses as landholding institutions that exploited their peasants, the Western and newer Russian scholarship has concentrated on the intellectual and cultural life of medieval Russian monasticism and rightfully stressed its spiritual aspects.<sup>1</sup> Due to the paucity of 17th-century sources, however, we still have only a vague understanding of how medieval Russian monasteries interpreted their various economic, political, and spiritual functions and resolved possible tensions among them. While scholars have investigated the role and function of some of Russia's largest monasteries, such as the Trinity–St. Sergius Monastery, the Volokolamsk Monastery, and the Solovetskii Monastery, we lack studies for smaller regional monastic

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<sup>1</sup> For examples of Soviet-era scholarship, see N. A. Gorskaiia, *Monastyrskie krest'iane tsentral'noi Rossii v XVII v.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977); A. A. Zimin, *Krupnaia feodal'naia votchina i sotsial'no-politicheskaia bor'ba v Rossii (konets XV–XVI v.)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), 189–208; V. S. Rumiantseva, *Narodnoe antitserkovnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v XVII veke* (Moscow: Nauka, 1986); V. I. Koretskii, "Bor'ba krest'ian s monastyriami v Rossii XVI–nachala XVII v.," *Voprosy istorii religii i ateizma*, no. 6 (1958): 169–215. Examples of Western and recent Russian works are Igor Smolitsch, *Russisches Mönchtum: Entstehung, Entwicklung und Wesen 988–1917* (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1953); N. V. Sinitsyna, ed., *Monashество i monastyri v Rossii XI–XX veka: Istoricheskie ocherki* (Moscow: Nauka, 2002); and Elena Romanenko, *Povednevaia zhizn' russkogo srednevekovogo monastyria* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2002).

institutions.<sup>2</sup> Our understanding of medieval Russian monastic life is particularly murky for the 17th century, since the Time of Troubles left many of Russia's monastic institutions with their physical infrastructure destroyed or damaged, their servant population killed or dispersed, and even the number of monks severely reduced. Soviet statistical studies testify to the gradual recuperation of Muscovite monasteries in the century following the Troubles in spite of efforts by the tsarist government to curtail the acquisition of new properties by these institutions.<sup>3</sup> Scholars, however, have as yet gained little insight into the day-to-day struggle of individual monastic leaders to rebuild their institutions and the methods they employed to promote the economic expansion of their monasteries. In this context, one of the glaring gaps in our knowledge relates to the economic interactions of medium-sized monastic houses and their even less wealthy counterparts. The following study of the economic activities of the Borisoglebskii Monastery in the provincial town of Torzhok, as evident in property deeds, donation charters, petitions, and royal and ecclesiastical decrees, suggests that after the Time of Troubles the head of this medium-sized Russian monastery employed all traditional means available to place his institution once again on a sound economic footing. In the later 17th century, the Borisoglebskii leaders often functioned as shrewd entrepreneurs who manipulated property deeds to receive sanction for their takeover of smaller monasteries and hermitages. Confronted with resistance from the inhabitants and sponsors of these institutions, at least one Borisoglebskii archimandrite, in his campaign to build a successful spiritual house, was not above twisting the truth and using his influence at the Muscovite court to silence complaints about his ruthless exploitation of newly acquired territories.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, David B. Miller, "Trinity's Brotherhood: The Origin of Social Administrative Structures at the Trinity-Sergius Monastery," *Russian History/Histoire russe* 34, 1–4 (2007): 255–62; Miller, "How the Trinity-Sergius Monastery Got Governance, Got Godunov's Wrath, and Got New Life," *Russian History/Histoire russe* 33, 2–3 (2006): 447–54; Tom Dykstra, *Russian Monastic Culture: "Josephism" and the Isofio-Volokolamsk Monastery 1479–1607* (Munich: Otto Sagner, 2006); Ludwig Steindorff, *Memoria in Altrusland: Untersuchungen zu den Formen christlicher Totensorge* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1994); Jennifer Spock, "The Solovki Monastery, 1460–1645: Piety and Patronage in the Early Modern Russian North" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1999); and Paul Bushkovitch, *Religion and Society in Russia: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 11–21, 35–41.

<sup>3</sup> Iu. V. Gautier, *Zamoskovnyi kraj v XVII veke: Opyt issledovaniia po istorii ekonomicheskogo byta Moskovskoi Rusi*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1937); Ia. E. Vodarskii, "Tserkovnye organizatsii i ikh krepostnye krest'iane vo vtoroi polovine XVII–nachale XVIII v.," in *Istoricheskaia geografiia Rossii XII–nachalo XX v.*, ed. A. I. Lukht (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), 70–96.



## The Borisoglebskii Monastery and the Time of Troubles

The first documentary evidence of the Torzhok Borisoglebskii Monastery, which seemingly dates back to the 12th century, appears in a charter by Ivan III from 6 April 1476, which assigns some of the Borisoglebskii lands to the archbishop of Novgorod. The monastery rose to prominence in the early 16th century when the Muscovite ruler granted it jurisdiction, except in matters of high crime, over the monastery's villages in the Torzhok region (*uezd*) and over a district in the Torzhok suburb (*posad*).<sup>4</sup> According to a royal charter dating from 30 January 1535, the grand prince's agents and soldiers were not allowed to enter the monastery's lands or take dues from it, and the monks were exempted from all obligations to provide hospitality or transport for them.<sup>5</sup>

The monastery's proximity to the town of Torzhok drew it into the town's politics and made the monks unintended targets during the raids the town experienced during the Time of Troubles. In February 1609, when the Tushinites sent troops with the Polish colonel Kernozitskii to Novgorod, Torzhok was destroyed, its churches and monasteries robbed, and its people beaten up. In the Borisoglebskii Monastery, Archimandrite Konstantin (1600–9) and his brothers were killed when the wooden Church of the Introduction of the Virgin into the Temple was set on fire.<sup>6</sup> In his 1625 survey of the town of Torzhok, *d'iak* Potap Dmitrievich Narbekov notes the survival of a stone cathedral in the Borisoglebskii Monastery along with its chapels dedicated to the monastery's patron saint, Saint Efreim Novotorzhskii, and Joachim and Anna.<sup>7</sup> Narbekov also mentions the existence of a new Church of the

<sup>4</sup> D. Malygin, *Drevnii Torzhok (istoriko-arkheologicheskie ocherki)* (Kalinin: Vserossiiskoe obshchestvo okhrany pamiatnikov istorii i kul'tury, 1990), 10–13; L. V. Cherepnin, ed., *Akty sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi istorii severo-vostochnoi Rusi kontsa XIV–nachala XVI v.*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Nauka, 1964), 3:36 (no. 20, 1476 charter).

<sup>5</sup> *Akty, sobrannye v bibliotekakh i arkhivakh Rossiiskoi imperii Arkheograficheskoiu ekspeditsiei Akademii nauk* (hereafter *AAE*), 4 vols. (St. Petersburg: V Tipografii II otdeleniia Sobstvennoi E. I. V. Kantseliarii, 1836), 2:274 (no. 161); E. A. Verigin, ed., *Gramoty Novotorzhskago muzhskago Borisoglebskago monastyria* (Tver': Tipografiiia M. Rodionova, 1903), 9–10.

<sup>6</sup> Kh. D. Sorina, *Rol' Verkhnevolzh'ia v obrazovanii i razvitiu russkogo tsentralizovannogo gosudarstva v XVI–XVII v.: Uchebnoe posobie* (Kalinin: Kalininskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1978), 64; Ieromonakh Iliodor, *Istoricheskostatisticheskoe opisaniie goroda Torzhka* (Tver': Tipografiiia Gubernskago pravleniia, 1860), 55; I. Kolosov, *Novotorzhskii Borisoglebskii monastyr'*, 3rd ed. (Tver': Tipografiiia N. M. Rodionova, 1913), 75–76, 78; Arkhimandrit Amvrosii, *Istoriia rossiiskoi ierarkhii*, 6 vols. (Moscow: Sinodal'naia tipografiiia, 1807–15), 3:419–20. Karmanov mistakenly dates the event to 1606; see D. I. Karmanov, *Sobranie sochinenii, otnosiashchikhsia k istorii Tverskago kraia*, comp. Vladimir Kolosov (Tver': Tipografiiia Gubernskago pravleniia, 1893), 139.

<sup>7</sup> Iliodor, *Istoricheskostatisticheskoe opisaniie*, 73–74. According to his *vita*, Saint Efreim founded the Borisoglebskii Monastery in the 11th century. The saint's local feast day was established in the late 16th century after the discovery of his relics; see N. F. Droblenkova, "Zhitie Efrema Novotorzhskago," in *Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi*, ed. D. S. Likhachev

Introduction of the Virgin into the Temple (the old one was destroyed in 1609), which served as a winter church and contained a refectory. According to the *d'iak's* account, the monastery housed only a few inhabitants, namely Archimandrite Iona, the cellarer Iosif, a treasurer named Levanid, ten brothers, a stableman, a deacon, and a cowherd. Four church deacons belonging to the monastery lived off its premises. Outside the monastery, the monks owned four stables and four cows. The monastery's treasury contained only six shirts, six vestments, two belts, and one staff.<sup>8</sup> The Time of Troubles had severely damaged the Borisoglebskii Monastery's economy.

### Reconstruction in the Early 17th Century

In response to the destruction, under Archimandrite Iona (1609–36) the Borisoglebskii monks pursued a vigorous policy of reconstruction. As many monastic leaders of his time did, Iona made it one of his priorities to seek the reissuing of charters that Tsars Ivan IV, Fedor Ivanovich, Boris Godunov, and the False Dmitrii had given to the monastery, but which had been destroyed during the Time of Troubles. In 1610, he got Tsar Vasilii Shuiskii to confirm the monastery's landed possessions and privileges according to previous royal charters.<sup>9</sup> Among the documents Shuiskii reconfirmed was the charter of 30 January 1535, which gave the monks extensive judicial rights and made them exempt from hospitality and transport obligations. Shuiskii also reissued a charter from the False Dmitrii to Archimandrite Konstantin, which had contained confirmations of charters by Fedor Ivanovich dating from 16 October 1588 and 19 March 1590. The latter granted the monastery the collection of various petty dues from traded or manufactured goods, *obrok* payments from villagers, and exemptions from various dues and obligations associated with their own estate.<sup>10</sup>

The confirmations continued in 1628, when Iona petitioned Mikhail Fedorovich and Filaret to endorse two charters by Shuiskii from 1610, as well as another royal charter from 1616 that described the monastery's possession of villages in the Torzhok region and a district in the Torzhok suburb, three mills on the Tvertsa River, a number of meadows, fishing rights in the Tvertsa, and the right to the collection of dues on wares in Torzhok.

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and D. M. Bulanin, 3 vols. (Leningrad: Nauka, Leningradskoe otdelenie; St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1987–2004), 1:148–49; Amvrosii, *Istoriia rossiiskoi ierarkhii*, 3:420; Iliodor, *Istoricheskostatisticheskoe opisanie*, 2–3, 73, 79; Kolosov, *Novotorzhskii Borisoglebskii monastyr'*, 10–18, 25; V. Gerasimov, "Sviatoi prepodobnyi Efrem, arkhimandrit Novotorzhskii, chudotvorets," *Zhurnal Moskovskoi patriarkhii* (March 1958): 51–52.

<sup>8</sup> Iliodor, *Istoricheskostatisticheskoe opisanie*, 74–78; Kolosov, *Novotorzhskii Borisoglebskii monastyr'*, 76.

<sup>9</sup> Verigin, *Gramoty*, 8–10; Shuiskii's charter was reissued on 16 August 1629 by Mikhail Fedorovich and confirmed by Fedor Alekseevich on 22 August 1677; see Verigin, *Gramoty*, 14.

<sup>10</sup> *AAE*, 2:275–76 (no. 161); Verigin, *Gramoty*, 11–13.



These three charters were renewed in a 16 August 1628 charter by Mikhail Fedorovich. This document added a clause that exempted new settlers in the monastery's villages and its district from dues and *korm* payments but not from deliveries of grain supplies for the musketeers and the performance of labor on the town's reconstruction projects.<sup>11</sup> The clause shows that like many other monasteries in the Tver' region after the Time of Troubles, the Borisoglebskii Monastery managed to attract new settlers.<sup>12</sup>

Beyond seeking confirmation of the Borisoglebskii Monastery's property rights and privileges, Archimandrite Iona successfully explored opportunities to increase the monastery's holdings by taking advantage of his monastery's patronage ties with the Semenov Monastery, located in Torzhok's suburb two versts outside the town. In the early 17th century, this monastery owned one monastic district, 19 wastelands, a village, and a number of meadows and fields.<sup>13</sup> In 1613, Iona petitioned the tsar for the lands of the Church of Saint John the Theologian, which was part of the Semenov Monastery's holdings but had fallen into disrepair, since nobody managed them any more. The archimandrite offered to rebuild the church in return for these lands, which were to be used for "candles and incense" in the Borisoglebskii Monastery and for the upkeep of Iona's house. His request was granted.<sup>14</sup> New income for Iona's monastery had been acquired.

Another opportunity to widen the Borisoglebskii Monastery's control over the Semenov house arose in 1615, when the donors of the Semenov Monastery and its monks petitioned the tsar to have the Borisoglebskii monks rebuild their monastery, which had been destroyed by the Tushinites in 1609. After a vivid description of their monastery's conflagration and the dispersal of their monks, the petitioners noted that the Borisoglebskii monks had always run the Semenov Monastery and therefore should continue to do so even though the relevant royal charter regarding this matter had been lost. On 30 August 1615, Mikhail Fedorovich ordered the Borisoglebskii monks to administer the Semenov house as before.<sup>15</sup>

Iona seems to have used this opportunity to reassert the Borisoglebskii Monastery's influence over other Semenov lands. In 1634, Iona successfully

<sup>11</sup> Verigin, *Gramoty*, 17–21. Mikhail Fedorovich's charter was confirmed by Fedor Alekseevich on 25 August 1679 and by his brothers Ivan and Peter on 9 February 1683; see *ibid.*, 21–22. For the royal confirmation of the monastery's fishing rights in the Tvertsa River, also see M. Rubtsov, *K materialam dlia tserkovnoi i bytovoï istorii Tverskago kraia v XVII veke* (Tver': Tipografiia Gubernskago pravleniia, 1900), 12–13 (no. 2).

<sup>12</sup> N. V. Sereda, *Tverskoi kraï v period stanovleniia rossiiskogo samoderzhavii (konets XV–XVII vv.): Uchebnoe posobie* (Tver': Tverskoi gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1991), 59–60.

<sup>13</sup> Verigin, *Gramoty*, 39. For the location of the Semenov Monastery, see Ilidor, *Istoricheskostatisticheskoe opisaniie*, 82.

<sup>14</sup> Verigin, *Gramoty*, 40 (charter by Mikhail Fedorovich to Iona from 17 May 1613).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 34, 40–41.

petitioned Metropolitan Kiprian of Novgorod to return the deserted Church of Joachim and Anna near the Semenov Monastery, with all the wastelands attached to it, to the Borisoglebskii Monastery.<sup>16</sup> The history of this church reveals Iona's tactics. In the 16th century, servants of the Borisoglebskii Monastery had attended services at this church, which later fell into a state of disrepair. In 1589, the archimandrite of the Borisoglebskii Monastery had petitioned Fedor Ivanovich for permission to rebuild the church in stone. The tsar had given the monastery the lands attached to the church and some additional wastelands to complete this task, but the metropolitan of Novgorod had subsequently appropriated these territories.<sup>17</sup> By having Kiprian rescind his decision, and regaining the territories attached to the Semenov church, Iona prepared the way for the eventual incorporation (i.e., ascription) of the Semenov lands by the Borisoglebskii Monastery.

While the gradual takeover of the Semenov house by the Borisoglebskii Monastery under Iona was completely legal, and was in part initiated by Semenov monks and donors concerned about the survival of their institution, Iona's motivation for the property transactions cannot be characterized as a simple act of charity. Angelika Schmähling has recently argued convincingly that in contrast to later periods, Russian monasteries in the 17th century did not systematically practice charity.<sup>18</sup> Although monastic petitions for land, money, and privileges abound, as do charters by pious donors granting these items, there is little evidence of charitable giving by monastic houses in 17th-century documents. While Iona seems to have been serious about his promise to rebuild the Semenov infrastructure, the income from the Semenov lands was not destined to be used for the upkeep of the Semenov house but rather went into the coffers of its administrators. Although initially the income from the Semenov estates went toward the expenses incurred by the reconstruction projects, in the long run the Borisoglebskii Monastery freely enjoyed its benefits. As a result, even if one might argue that the Borisoglebskii house deserved the extra income because of its commitment to providing care for the economically nonviable Semenov Monastery, Iona's primary motive in this case was not altruistic. A 1644 royal charter by Mikhail Fedorovich to the *voevoda* of Torzhok, Sila Iakovlevich Vel'iaminov, reveals that in 1637 the Semenov steward (*stroitel'*) Arsenii Tarkhov petitioned the tsar to force the Borisoglebskii monks to manage the Semenov establishment as they had done in the past.<sup>19</sup> Apparently, in spite of Archimandrite Iona's promises, the Borisoglebskii

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 43–44.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Angelika Schmähling, *Hort der Frömmigkeit—Ort der Verwahrung: Russische Frauenklöster im 16.–18. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2009), 147–50.

<sup>19</sup> Verigin, *Gramoty*, 42.



leadership had not taken a nurturing stance toward the ailing Semenov house. Iona's search for new land grants may have reflected his goal of making the Borisoglebskii Monastery the wealthiest monastic institution in Torzhok. As Malygin points out, the monastery commanded 24 peasant homesteads in 1625, ranking second behind the Torzhok Rozhdestvenskii Monastery with 35 homesteads.<sup>20</sup> In his overall policies, Iona limited himself to reaffirming his monastery's legal property rights and explored opportunities to turn traditional ties with a smaller dependent house to the Borisoglebskii Monastery's economic advantage.

### Ascription in the Second Half of the 17th Century

Whereas Iona's economic pursuits were relatively conservative, in the second half of the 17th century the archimandrites of the Borisoglebskii Monastery embarked on a more aggressive policy of economic expansion. As Kolosov points out, some of the Borisoglebskii leaders successfully addressed the Muscovite ruler for additional funds.<sup>21</sup> Thus, in 1654, the tsars exchanged the monastery's privilege of collecting taxes from the taverns of Torzhok and tolls from traded goods for a wax factory in Torzhok, which increased the monastery's yearly income from these kinds of sources from 6 to 10 rubles.<sup>22</sup>

The success of the monastic leaders' economic pursuits is also evident in the substantial increase of the monastery's peasant households during this period. In 1625, the monastery had been a relatively land-poor institution. The number of peasant households jumped from 61 in 1653–61 to 88 in 1678. By comparison, the Voskresenskii Monastery in Torzhok increased its peasant households only from 21 in 1653–61 to 35 in 1678. The Torzhok Rozhdestvenskii Monastery, which was later ascribed to the Borisoglebskii Monastery, increased its peasant households from 29 in 1653–61 to 51 in 1678.<sup>23</sup> The growth of the Borisoglebskii Monastery also compared quite favorably to that of the monasteries in neighboring Tver'. The peasant households of the Zheltikov Monastery increased only from 40 in 1653–61 to 47 in 1678, and those of the Otroch Monastery rose from 70 in 1653–61 to 96 in 1678.<sup>24</sup> Although all the monasteries in question increased the size of their holdings in the later 17th century, and some of the smaller houses even exceeded the Borisoglebskii Monastery's growth rate in the span from

<sup>20</sup> The Devichii (Voskresenskii) Monastery ranked third with 14 peasant homesteads, followed by the Pustynskii and Vasil'evskii Monasteries with 8 homesteads each; see Malygin, *Drevnii Torzhok*, 48.

<sup>21</sup> Kolosov, *Novotorzhskii Borisoglebskii monastyr'*, 77.

<sup>22</sup> Iliodor, *Istoricheskostatisticheskoe opisanie*, 64.

<sup>23</sup> See Vodarskii, "Tserkovnye organizatsii," 88.

<sup>24</sup> For the statistics, see *ibid.*, 88 (Voskresenskii, Rozhdestvenskii monasteries), 92 (Zheltikov, Otroch monasteries).

1653 to 1678, in absolute numbers of peasant households the Borisoglebskii Monastery surpassed all its competitors.

The increase of peasant households of the Borisoglebskii Monastery in the second half of the 17th century is remarkable in light of the stipulations of the 1648 law code that prohibited further donations and sales of patrimonial estates by lay individuals to monasteries in the Muscovite realm.<sup>25</sup> The example of the Borisoglebskii Monastery suggests that Russian monasteries employed creative means to counter the provisions of the code that effectively froze the size of monastic estates. For example, the heads of the Borisoglebskii Monastery cleverly sought—and received—permission from Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich to exchange lands in Torzhok *uezd*.<sup>26</sup> These land exchanges presented an opportunity not only to consolidate the monastic estates but also to gain larger pieces of territory as well as the privileges and labor forces attached to them. If consolidation of territories was the primary goal, both parties could have benefited from an exchange. There is, however, also a possibility that the lay landowners intentionally exchanged a prime piece of property for one of a lesser economic value to gain the monastery's favor. Exchanges of this type take on the character of a layperson's donation in return for commemoration prayers. As Barbara Rosenwein points out in her study of property holding related to the Western medieval monastery of Cluny, land exchanges were rarely only economically motivated but rather were laden with complex social meanings.<sup>27</sup> While this subject still needs more detailed investigation in the case of medieval Russia, sporadic evidence, as in the case of the Danilov Monastery in Pereslavl'-Zalesskii, suggests that in 17th-century Russia, monasteries and laymen often engaged in land exchanges.<sup>28</sup>

The Borisoglebskii leaders' pursuit of the economic expansion of their monastery in the second half of the 17th century also fueled their interest in the permanent acquisition of the holdings of smaller dependent monasteries. The archimandrites of the Torzhok monastery seem to have followed the practice of taking over smaller houses that many of the largest monastic establishments, such as the Trinity-St. Sergius Monastery, the Kirillo-Belozerskii Monastery, and one of Patriarch Nikon's foundations, the Voskresenskii

<sup>25</sup> See chap. 17, para. 42–45, in *Sobornoe ulozhenie 1649 goda: Tekst, kommentarii*, ed. L. I. Ivina (Leningrad: Nauka, Leningradskoe otdelenie, 1987), 90–91.

<sup>26</sup> See Rubtsov, *K materialam dlia tserkovnoi i bytovoï istorii*, 17–18 (no. 11), 18 (no. 13) (charters by Aleksei Mikhailovich, 13 February 1660 and 20 June 1667).

<sup>27</sup> Barbara Rosenwein, *To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny's Property, 909–1049* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 78–98.

<sup>28</sup> M. Smirnov, "Ukazatel' rukopisnykh i izdannykh dokumentov (aktografii) Pereslavl'-Zalesskogo kraia XVII v.," *Trudy Pereslavl'-Zalesskogo istoriko-khudozhestvennogo kraevednogo muzeia* 5 (1928): 64.



Monastery in Istra, engaged in at that time.<sup>29</sup> The large number of takeovers in the later 17th century may be connected with the ecclesiastical policies of Patriarch Nikon, who strove to build large monasteries as consolidated centers of Orthodox culture and spiritual life, as V. S. Rumiantseva points out.<sup>30</sup> In her discussion of this phenomenon, this author maintains that Nikon's policy not only eliminated the financial independence of smaller houses to ensure their economic survival but also aimed at rooting out the spiritual dissent that was pervasive in these places.<sup>31</sup>

In pursuing their ascription goals, the Borisoglebskii archimandrites seem to have enlisted the support of the administrators of smaller monastic houses. In 1637, the Semenov steward Arsenii Tarkhov petitioned the tsar to force the Borisoglebskii monks to manage the Semenov establishment as it had done in the past, since he was too old and sick to carry out his duties. In response, the tsar had the Semenov buildings and grain registered in the Borisoglebskii Monastery's name in 1644.<sup>32</sup> Sometime during that same year, according to Mikhail Fedorovich's 1644 charter to the *voevoda* of Torzhok, Arsenii promoted the formal ascription of his monastery to the Borisoglebskii Monastery.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, in 1657 Arsenii aided the Borisoglebskii archimandrite Feodosii (1657–60) in gaining assurances from Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich that the Semenov Monastery would continue to belong to the Borisoglebskii Monastery. The actual ascription of the Semenov Monastery to the Borisoglebskii Monastery at the request of both Feodosii and Arsenii seems to have happened in 1659, according to a document from the Monastic Chancellery (*Monastyrskii prikaz*) from May 1665 that is cited in the cadastral books (*pistsovye knigi*) of Torzhok.<sup>34</sup> In 1665, Archimandrite Kirill (1662–69) obtained a written charter from the Moscow government for the permanent ascription of the Semenov house.<sup>35</sup>

Although one might interpret Tarkhov's request for the ascription of his monastery as just another plea for help to the traditional Borisoglebskii patrons of the Semenov house, the implication of the proposed ascription can hardly be interpreted as a purely charitable activity on the part of the

<sup>29</sup> For examples, see Vodarskii, "Tserkovnye organizatsii," 79–94. Vodarskii's list, however, is by no means complete.

<sup>30</sup> V. S. Rumiantseva, "Monastyri i monashestvo v XVII veke," in Sinitsyna, *Monashestvo i monastyri*, 175.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 175. For the receptiveness of small monasteries to religious dissent, see Georg B. Michels, *At War with the Church: Religious Dissent in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 121–62.

<sup>32</sup> Verigin, *Gramoty*, 42.

<sup>33</sup> Rubtsov, *K materialam dlia tserkovnoi i bytovoï istorii*, 16 (no. 6).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 (no. 31); 30 (no. 58).

<sup>35</sup> Verigin, *Gramoty*, 42, 43; also see Rubtsov, *K materialam dlia tserkovnoi i bytovoï istorii*, 29 (no. 31).

Borisoglebskii monks. Clearly, the Semenov monks continued in their desperate financial situation despite Archimandrite Iona's promises earlier in the century. In the end, the Semenov monks had no choice but to initiate their own takeover, which effectively entailed the annexation of the Semenov estates by the Borisoglebskii Monastery. While the Semenov monks preserved the separate identity of their institution, in all administrative manners they would be subject to the authority of the Borisoglebskii leaders.

More evidence that the ascription of their lands provided little economic or spiritual relief for the Semenov Monastery can also be gleaned from the fate of the Church of the Birth of the Virgin on its territory. Nearly a decade after the ascription, on 2 December 1674, a priest and former hegumen of the Torzhok Rozhdestvenskii Monastery named Iona voiced his own concern about the upkeep of this church in a petition to Kornilii, metropolitan of Novgorod (1674–95).<sup>36</sup> Iona noted that earlier in 1646, he had received permission from the previous metropolitan of Novgorod, Afonii, to build a new church in place of its delapidated predecessor. He had celebrated the liturgy there, but the new church did not possess any icons, books, or bells. Later, sometime after 1655, when Iona became a monk, he could not find a successor to perform services in the church. At that point, Iona stated in his petition, he had vowed to give the church to the Borisoglebskii Monastery before his death to assure the continued maintenance of the church and the performance of the liturgy there. A priest, however, was then found, but although the new cleric took Iona's money, he refused to hold services and led a dissolute life. Iona concluded his narrative of the plight of the church with a plea for the metropolitan's help. Kornilii eventually decided that in return for looking after the Church of the Birth of the Virgin, the Borisoglebskii archimandrite Evstafii (1669–80) should take over the church and collect all the dues from the lands and shops belonging to it.<sup>37</sup>

Iona's petition shows that in the later 17th century, the Borisoglebskii leaders displayed little interest in the economic and spiritual conditions of the Semenov house. Like the Semenov monks before him, Iona assumed that forcing the Borisoglebskii monks to assume the burden of the administration of the church would solve its problems. The fact that Kornilii's reply does not mention any specific obligations on the part of the Borisoglebskii Monastery but rather focuses on the monastery's financial rights, suggests that Iona's expectations were misplaced. Kornilii, just like Iona, could not imagine a different solution, although as ecclesiastical leader he had the authority and means to alleviate the financial and spiritual malaise of the church on his own.

<sup>36</sup> Stroev registers a hegumen Iona under the date 3 December 1674; see Pavel Stroev, *Spiski ierarkhov i nastoiatelei monastyrei rossiiskiiia tserkvi* (1877; Cologne: Böhlau, 1990), col. 474.

<sup>37</sup> Verigin, *Gramoty*, 44–45.



The ascription of the Semenov Monastery and its various churches shows that the Borisoglebskii Monastery profited from the economic and administrative plight of the smaller institution. The leaders of the smaller establishments were willing to trade the independence of their houses for economic security and order in their monasteries. Even if the Church of the Birth of the Virgin had to be looked after, the addition of new lands attached to it gave the Borisoglebskii leaders a sizable budgetary boost. An archimandrite with the right administrative, financial, and political skills could turn this acquisition of new lands and privileges into a veritable goldmine for his institution.

### Monastic Entrepreneurialism and Archimandrite Tarasii

In the late 17th century, the Borisoglebskii Monastery's pursuit of economic expansion culminated in the leadership of Archimandrite Tarasii (1682–95). Endowed with ambition and good political instincts, Tarasii strove to exploit every opportunity to make the economic progress his monastery had so far achieved permanent. He accomplished this through an intensive letter-writing campaign involving his superior, Metropolitan Kornilii, and the Muscovite tsars Peter and Ivan. A careful reading of this correspondence suggests that Tarasii's economic goals for his monastery were closely linked to his overall aspirations to make the Borisoglebskii Monastery the most successful spiritual institution in the region.

Tarasii's ambitions required a secure financial base for his monastery. In 1684, Tarasii asked Tsars Ivan and Peter for confirmation charters for villages and lands that his monastery controlled but for which it no longer possessed any deeds.<sup>38</sup> Two years later, Tarasii successfully petitioned the tsars that instead of the monastery's traditional allotment of moneys for liturgical purposes, a lucrative wax factory in Torzhok be given to the "house of Efrem, the Torzhok miracle worker."<sup>39</sup> The archimandrite further acquired uninhabited land in Torzhok *uezd* with the tsars' blessing. In addition, he strongarmed the wife of a landholder, who was away in the tsars' service, to turn some of her husband's service land (which had been the subject of a disputed property exchange) over to the Borisoglebskii Monastery for cultivation. In the ensuing battle of petitions, Tarasii managed to persuade the Muscovite government that she had made her claims in bad faith. Tarasii eventually received a charter for the property in question.<sup>40</sup>

Tarasii also continued the efforts of his predecessors to consolidate his monastery's estates. The Torzhok land registers mention ten property

<sup>38</sup> Rubtsov, *K materialam dlia tserkovnoi i bytovoï istorii*, 19 (no. 17).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 19–20 (no. 30).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 23–24 (no. 19); 20–23 (no. 18).

exchanges involving the Borisoglebskii Monastery during his tenure.<sup>41</sup> The Torzhok *otkaznye knigi* document 9 additional property exchanges and 15 property acquisitions involving the ambitious Borisoglebskii archimandrite.<sup>42</sup> In 1689, Tarasii cleverly used a recent land exchange that involved the acquisition of a church by the Borisoglebskii Monastery to petition Metropolitan Kornilii for church land and meadows registered to the nearby village of Seliostrovo to cover the upkeep of the church, which Tarasii argued was expensive. To persuade the metropolitan, Tarasii promised to institute regular services at the church, with a priest, deacon, and sacristan. The archimandrite's support for the institution of a new parish prompted Kornilii to issue a charter for the Seliostrovo lands in January 1690.<sup>43</sup> While Tarasii's request was perfectly reasonable in light of his promise of liturgical services, the proposed deal was not simply an altruistic act but brought more lands under his control.

To strengthen his monastery's economic base, Tarasii also resolved to make sure that the Semenov Monastery, which the Borisoglebskii monks had traditionally administered, would be under his institution's control in perpetuity. To assert the Borisoglebskii Monastery's claim to the Semenov house and its churches visually, early in his tenure as archimandrite Tarasii obtained the consent of Metropolitan Kornilii to transfer the Semenov Church of Saint John the Theologian to the Borisoglebskii Monastery's complex and have it rebuilt there in stone as a chapel over the Holy Gate. Tarasii used the occasion to have the boundaries of the lands belonging to this church and those of the Semenov Church of Joachim and Anna confirmed.<sup>44</sup>

In 1689, Tarasii petitioned the government in Moscow for the permanent ascription of all the estates of the Semenov Monastery and the privileges attached to them, along with the churches on these estates, to the Borisoglebskii Monastery. Although the Semenov takeover in 1659 had been initiated by one of its own leaders, and no objections had been raised in the matter, Tarasii seems to have been driven to seek guarantees that the ascription of the Semenov Monastery to his own institution was permanent. Rather than following the customary procedure of submitting the previously issued

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 31–32 (no. 70); 32 (no. 76); 33 (no. 67); 33 (no. 86); 33–34 (no. 42); 34 (no. 72); 34 (no. 38); 35 (no. 75); 35 (no. 74); 35 (no. 73).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 37 (no. 44); 38 (no. 36); 38–39 (no. 48); 39 (no. 53); 41 (no. 50); 42 (no. 61); 44 (no. 82); 45 (no. 63); 45 (no. 84) (exchanges); 38 (no. 55); 39 (no. 54); 39 (no. 77); 40 (no. 68); 40 (no. 59); 40 (no. 43); 41 (no. 71); 41 (no. 46); 42 (no. 79); 42 (no. 60); 43 (no. 87); 43 (no. 49); 44 (no. 52); 44 (no. 39); 45 (no. 40) (acquisitions).

<sup>43</sup> Verigin, *Gramoty*, 1–3.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 46–47. The Church of the Elevation of the Cross with chapels to John the Theologian and Saint Nicholas was erected in 1684; see Kolosov, *Novotorzhskii Borisoglebskii monastyr'*, 69; Iliodor, *Istoricheskostatisticheskoe opisanie*, 79; A. K. Zhiznevskii, *Opisanie Tverskago muzeia: Arkheologicheskii otdel* (Moscow: Sinodal'naia tipografiia, 1888), 47 n. 1.



ascription charter for confirmation, Tarasii ordered his servant Ivan Prokof'ev to present a battery of deeds to the Land Chancellery (Pomestnyi prikaz) that documented the historical rights of the Borisoglebskii Monastery to the Semenov lands.<sup>45</sup> Tarasii's hard work on the Semenov project paid off: in a charter from 10 August 1689 to the "monastery of the holy martyrs, the pious princes Boris and Gleb, and our blessed father Efrem, archimandrite and miracle worker of Novyi Torzhok," Tsars Ivan and Peter and Tsarevna Sofia granted all of Tarasii's requests in perpetuity.<sup>46</sup>

Tarasii's territorial ambitions also revealed themselves in his clever handling of the permanent acquisition of the lands of the Torzhok Rozhdestvenskii Monastery. In the early 17th century, this monastery had experienced difficulties in attracting followers. In 1625, its inhabitants consisted of only a hegumen, a cellarer, a treasurer, and six monks.<sup>47</sup> By the 1650s, however, the monastery had gained control over 29 peasant households, about half the number the Borisoglebskii Monastery possessed then.<sup>48</sup> About the same time as it achieved this economic recovery, the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery was ascribed to the Iverskii Monastery, one of the personal foundations of Patriarch Nikon.<sup>49</sup> The Iverskii Monastery's dominance did not last long, however, because after Nikon's fall from power, the former patriarch's foundation had to broker new power relationships. Under Russia's new patriarch, Ioasaf (1667–72), the Iverskii Monastery lost its rights to the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery. At that time the Borisoglebskii archimandrite Kirill took advantage of the situation, and to impress on the Iverskii monks the rising influence of his monastery, sent the previous *stroitel'* of the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery to deliver an icon of Saint Efrem to the Iverskii monks. Kirill received a pleasing response. In a letter dated 14 September 1667, Archimandrite Filaret of the Iverskii Monastery thanked the Borisoglebskii archimandrite for the gift and humbly asked for help with the return of a monk from the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery.<sup>50</sup> Kirill had established his monastery's increased prestige and influence over the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery.

In the late 1670s, the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery controlled over 50 peasant households and thus threatened to rival the Borisoglebskii Monastery

<sup>45</sup> See Verigin, *Gramoty*, 32–34, 40–43.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 32–33, 47, 32 (quotation). In 1721, the Semenov Monastery was returned to the status of a parish church in Semenov *pogost*; see Iliodor, *Istoricheskostatisticheskoe opisanie*, 82.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 67. Zverinskii mentions that the monastery was run by a hegumen named Kornilii in 1615; see V. V. Zverinskii, *Material dlia istoriko-topograficheskago izsledovaniia o pravoslavnykh monastyriakh v Rossiiskoi imperii (s bibliograficheskim ukazatelem)*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia V. Belobrazova, 1890–97), 2:293 (no. 1118).

<sup>48</sup> Vodarskii, "Tserkovnye organizatsii," 88.

<sup>49</sup> *Russkaia istoricheskaia biblioteka* (hereafter *RIB*), 39 vols. (St. Petersburg/Leningrad, 1872–1927), 5, no. 86, col. 223.

<sup>50</sup> *RIB*, 5, no. 259, cols. 713–15.

with its 88 peasant households.<sup>51</sup> For Tarasii, who himself had been a monk at the Iverskii Monastery and thus must have been aware of the value of the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery, the latter represented an unacceptable impediment to his own institution's economic growth in the region.<sup>52</sup> On 31 January 1690, he made a brazen attempt to persuade the Muscovite government to ascribe the institution with all its mills, estates, and privileges to the Borisoglebskii Monastery. In his petition to the tsars, Tarasii told a compelling story of how the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery had fallen into a state of disorderliness. With only one priest and three brothers living in the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery, the peasants and servants there were often changing hegumens and were ruining the institution with their arbitrariness and lack of obedience. In addition, royal officials were making the monks' lives even more difficult with their requests for food and hospitality. To cover the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery's expenses and, coincidentally, to solve the problem of the Borisoglebskii Monastery's alleged lack of homesteads, Tarasii suggested the integration of the Rozhdestvenskii institution into his own. To bolster his claim, the archimandrite referenced petitions by the Rozhdestvenskii monks, priest, deacon, and servants, and a separate petition by Gerasim, one of the monastery's hegumens, and the Rozhdestvenskii donors, who all supported Tarasii's idea because of their perceived need for protection and their desire for the reestablishment of order.<sup>53</sup> The archimandrite's scheme worked; in a charter from 12 March 1690, Tsars Ivan and Peter ascribed the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery with all its possessions to the Borisoglebskii Monastery in return for the Borisoglebskii monks' commitment to keeping up the monastery, making peace among its inhabitants and protecting them from outside oppression.<sup>54</sup>

The royal decision represented a sizable increase of the Borisoglebskii Monastery's holdings, since it added 51 new peasant households to the institution's estates. At the same time, the takeover of the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery also represented an opportunity for ready cash. In a petition to Tsars Ivan and Peter from 1690, the monks and estate peasants of the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery complained that after the ascription of their monastery, Tarasii had raided their monastic treasury, sold their horses, imprisoned the elder in charge of the monastery's grain, and oppressed and starved the peasants.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Vodarskii, "Tserkovnye organizatsii," 88.

<sup>52</sup> For Tarasii's background, see *RIB* 5: no. 259, cols. 714–15.

<sup>53</sup> Verigin, *Gramoty*, 49–50 (Tarasii's story), 50–51 (supporting petitions). For the Borisoglebskii Monastery's supposed lack of homesteads, see *ibid.*, 49. Stroev notes the existence of Gerasim in 1690; see Stroev, *Spiski*, col. 475.

<sup>54</sup> Verigin, *Gramoty*, 48–53; also see Iliodor, *Istoricheskoe-statisticheskoe opisanie*, 67.

<sup>55</sup> Recently Georg B. Michels has shed some light on the rough treatment some members of the Muscovite clergy afforded their parishioners: see his "Ruling without Mercy: Seventeenth-Century Russian Bishops and Their Officials," *Kritika* 4, 3 (2003): 515–42; and "Rescuing the



They further claimed that they had been forced to sign the petition for the ascription of their monastery composed by their hegumen Gerasim, who, as Tarasii's spiritual father, collaborated with the Borisoglebskii archimandrite. Moreover, they alleged that they had been tortured and chained. In their desperation, they pleaded that the tsars free the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery from its Borisoglebskii overlordship. Although the claims of the Rozhdestvenskii monks and peasants cannot be substantiated, they do corroborate Tarasii's intention of establishing order in this monastery, albeit by force. Moreover, Tarasii's countercharge in response to the complaint—that the petitioners were known thieves and rebels who lied and had even killed their hegumen's cell mate—suggests that the takeover of the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery had indeed been heavy-handed and served only the economic interest of the Borisoglebskii monks.<sup>56</sup> The tsars, however, sided with Tarasii without ordering an investigation and affirmed the ascription charter in 1692.<sup>57</sup>

Tarasii's aggressive approach to the acquisition of new monastic lands also emerges in the manner in which he executed his plan to take over the property of the Hermitage of Saint John the Theologian in Udomlia, which was experiencing an economic revival. This hermitage was located northeast of Vyshnii Volochok, about one hundred versts from Torzhok in the Bezhetskaia *piatina* of Novgorod.<sup>58</sup> According to M. Rubtsov's study of the hermitage, the Church of Saint John the Theologian had burned down in the 16th century. Thereafter, few brothers and servants lived in the hermitage, which according to the cadastral register of the Bezhetskaia *piatina* possessed ten homesteads, a sizable amount of plowlands, and fishing rights in Lake Udomlia. The hermitage's church lands were exempt from dues.<sup>59</sup> According to a 1651 charter by the Novgorodian *voevoda* Iurii Petrovich Buinosov-Rostovskii, the Udomel'skii Monastery as late as 1626 was run by one of

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Orthodox: The Church Policies of Archbishop Afanasii of Kholmogory, 1682–1702,” in *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*,” ed. Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 19–37. Michels includes an occasional example of violence inflicted by monks on their peasants: see, for example, “Ruling without Mercy,” 529–30; and “Rescuing the Orthodox,” 29–30. While the rough-and-tumble environment of 17th-century Russia quite likely affected monastic life, the veracity of peasant accusations is sometimes difficult to establish.

<sup>56</sup> See Rubtsov, *K materialam dlia tserkovnoi i bytovoii istorii*, 24–25 (no. 21).

<sup>57</sup> The Rozhdestvenskii Monastery was dissolved in 1764; see Iliodor, *Istoricheskoe-statisticheskoe opisaniie*, 67.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 83; Zverinskii, *Material*, 2:380 (no. 1291); M. Rubtsov, *K istorii Udomel'skago Troitskago Ioanno-Bogoslovskago monastyria v XVII veke* (Tver': Tipografiia Gubernskago pravleniia, 1903), 1.

<sup>59</sup> Rubtsov, *K istorii*, 2. Zverinskii states that in 1581, one hegumen and two brothers lived in the monastery, which contained a summer and a winter church equipped with all liturgical decorations, books, and vessels (*Material*, 2:380 [no. 1291]).

its own monks named Aleksandr.<sup>60</sup> In the later 17th century, however, the monastery was first attached to the Torzhok Troitskii Monastery and then to the Kirillov Monastery.<sup>61</sup> The result of these takeovers proved disastrous for the Udomel'skii Hermitage, since the new owners drove away its monks and raided its food supplies, livestock, and workshops.<sup>62</sup> A monk named Nikon, who in the 1680s persuaded Metropolitan Kornilii to grant the Udomel'skii house independence, eventually revived the hermitage, which had stood deserted for years.<sup>63</sup> Nikon tried to stem the tide of takeovers of the hermitage's lands by its neighboring landholders and energetically rebuilt its infrastructure. An investigation into the boundaries of the properties of the house under Nikon's stewardship showed that the Udomel'skii Hermitage commanded a significant amount of arable, meadows, and uninhabited lands.<sup>64</sup>

The revival of the Udomel'skii house did not go unnoticed by Tarasii, who in the 1690s embarked on a protracted effort to have it attached to his own institution. To achieve the ascription of the Udomel'skii Hermitage, the Borisoglebskii archimandrite was prepared to play a risky political game in which he pitted the monks of that monastery, their lay neighbors, and governmental and ecclesiastical authorities against each other. In 1691, Tarasii sent a monk to the Udomel'skii Hermitage to ask its inhabitants to sign a petition to ascribe their institution to the Borisoglebskii Monastery. A similar request was sent to the donors of the hermitage and its neighboring landholders. Tarasii's opening move, however, met with resistance. Nobody wanted to sign the petition, and the hermitage's steward, Nikon, petitioned Metropolitan Kornilii and Patriarch Adrian to impede the transfer of his house to the Borisoglebskii Monastery. As a result, Kornilii sent a letter to Tarasii forbidding him to petition for the ascription without his metropolitan's permission. Brazenly ignoring his superior's orders, the Borisoglebskii archimandrite formally asked Patriarch Adrian on 4 February 1693 to approve the transfer of the hermitage.<sup>65</sup>

Adrian's answer on 11 March 1693 makes clear that Tarasii had pre-empted any protest by his ecclesiastical superiors by previously gaining permission from Tsars Peter and Ivan for the ascription of the Udomel'skii Hermitage. Tarasii had apparently persuaded agents of the tsar in Novgorod,

<sup>60</sup> Rubtsov, *K istorii*, 3.

<sup>61</sup> Vodarskii mentions that the Troitskii Monastery owned 11 peasant households in 1678, but none during the period from 1653 to 1661 and none in 1700. The homesteads may well have originally belonged to the Hermitage of Saint John the Theologian; see Vodarskii, "Tserkovnye organizatsii," 88.

<sup>62</sup> Rubtsov, *K istorii*, 5–6.

<sup>63</sup> Stroev dates Nikon's stewardship from 1683 to 1698; see Stroev, *Spiski*, col. 478.

<sup>64</sup> Rubtsov, *K istorii*, 6–10.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 10–13.



the donors of the Udomel'skii house, and its landholders to send a petition to the tsars in support of its ascription to the Borisoglebskii Monastery. The petitioners had argued that the Udomel'skii Hermitage was poor and in need of protection on account of its lack of brothers and the frequent change of its stewards.<sup>66</sup> When, on 16 February 1693, the tsars informed Adrian of their decision to grant the petition for the ascription of the Udomel'skii house "to your Borisoglebskii Monastery and to the miracle worker Efrem," the patriarch had no choice but to go along.<sup>67</sup> Nikon had pleaded that Adrian ignore the tsars' order, but Tarasii had countered by accusing the steward of lying to advance his cause. After recounting the correspondence, Adrian told the Borisoglebskii monks to take control of the monastery in accordance with the tsars' order and the request of the donors of the Udomel'skii house. The ascription was to include all the hermitage's peasants with and without lands, all arable, forests, meadows, fisheries, and privileges.<sup>68</sup>

The tsars' answer to the Borisoglebskii archimandrite regarding the ascription of the Udomel'skii Hermitage shows that they were easily persuaded by Tarasii, who without qualms had introduced new allegations into his argument to further his scheme. The royal charter naïvely repeats his claim that the Borisoglebskii Monastery had few estates compared to other monastic institutions and that its large number of brothers (over 50), servants, and workers lived in great poverty. In addition, it states that due to the Borisoglebskii Monastery's location on the trade route from Moscow to Novgorod and Pskov, the tsars' agents and soldiers caused its monks frequent expenses.<sup>69</sup> Even if the Borisoglebskii's obligations were sizable, the growing number of landholdings of the Borisoglebskii Monastery and the drastic increase of its peasant holdings by 84 percent from 1678 to 1700 clearly contradict Tarasii's claim that his institution was poor. As a result of that increase, the ratio of peasant households per monk in the Borisoglebskii Monastery jumped from 1.85 in the year 1625 to 3.24 in 1700.

Tarasii's conscious use of hyperbole to bolster his claim is also evident in his description of the conditions of the Udomel'skii Hermitage. Painting the situation of the hermitage in the darkest colors—it supposedly was devoid of brothers, servants, and peasants and was populated by only a monastic steward, an elder, and a priest—Tarasii reasoned that a takeover of the hermitage by the Borisoglebskii Monastery would end the poverty in the hermitage and

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 13. The latter claim seems odd, given that Nikon had been steward at the hermitage for over a decade.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 14 (letter by Adrian from 11 March 1693); also see Rubtsov, *K materialam dlia tserkovnoi i bytovoï istorii*, 27 (no. 22).

<sup>69</sup> Rubtsov, *K istorii*, 15.

help travelers in the region.<sup>70</sup> The statement is clearly at odds with the assessment of the Udomeil'skii Hermitage's properties that had occurred under its steward Nikon. To get around this inconvenient fact, Tarasii pointed out that the landholders and donors of the Hermitage of Saint John the Theologian had petitioned the Prikaz Bol'shogo Dvortsa themselves on behalf of the ailing place and favored the Borisoglebskii Monastery's intervention. To prove the poverty of the hermitage, Tarasii also cited a letter by Torzhok officials earlier that year that itemized the remaining movable property of the hermitage.<sup>71</sup> Since the hermitage's wealth lay in its land, the letter hardly provided any proof for Tarasii's position, but it demonstrates his strategy to bolster his claims with as much paperwork as possible.

Finally, to rationalize the Borisoglebskii Monastery's intervention in the affairs of the hermitage, Tarasii resorted to an argument based on spiritual grounds.<sup>72</sup> Tarasii continued to insist that in comparison to other monastic institutions, his own, which had to feed more than 50 brothers, servants, and workers, had few estates and no fishing rights in any lakes. The monks allegedly lived in great poverty because of hospitality rights they had to render to the tsar's agents on a regular basis. This situation was intolerable, according to the archimandrite, since the Borisoglebskii Monastery was a unique institution that had been founded by its own miracle worker more than 600 years earlier and featured the saint's relics in the very church Saint Efreim had built himself. These relics had remained uncorrupted and were giving cures to the pilgrims that came to his tomb. From this perspective, the integration of the hermitage in Udomeilia was only fair, since it righted a long-standing wrong suffered by the Borisoglebskii Monastery.<sup>73</sup>

Tarasii's repeated references to the patron saint of his monastery, Saint Efreim of Torzhok, to buttress his property claims are striking. In 1686, Tarasii had petitioned the tsars for a wax factory for Saint Efreim. The saint's name was also invoked in the royal charter of 1689 granting the Borisoglebskii Monastery all Semenov lands in perpetuity. Such language is sufficiently rare in the Borisoglebskii documents and in Muscovite petitions and charters in general that it demands an explanation. A close look at all of Tarasii's activities as archimandrite shows that he pursued not only an aggressive economic agenda but also a vigorous policy of increasing the spiritual status of his monastery by raising the visibility of the cult of its patron saint. While

<sup>70</sup> Verigin, *Gramoty*, 27.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 29–30.

<sup>72</sup> For Tarasii's role in the translation of Saint Efreim's relics, see Isolde Thyret, "The Politics of Relics in Tver' and Its Environs in the Seventeenth Century," paper presented at the 37th National Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Salt Lake City, 3–5 November 2005; on the discovery of Efreim's relics in general, see Amvrosii, *Istoriia rossiiskoi ierarkhii*, 3:420; Iliodor, *Istoricheskoe-statisticheskoe opisanie*, 79.

<sup>73</sup> Verigin, *Gramoty*, 28.



an active cult of the saint seems to have emerged in the late 16th century, it rose only gradually out of its immediate local context. In the late 17th century, the Borisoglebskii leaders managed to increase its visibility—and with it, that of the saint's monastery—by attracting wealthy patrons who donated liturgical gifts to the saint. In an elaborate scheme in which he manipulated Patriarch Ioakim of Moscow, Tsars Peter and Ivan, and Metropolitan Kornilii of Novgorod, Tarasii managed to accomplish both the translation of Saint Efrem's relics and the establishment of the feast honoring the event on 11 June 1690. The translation symbolized the Borisoglebskii Monastery's outstanding spiritual position in the Torzhok region and simultaneously sent the message that its economic success was divinely sanctioned.<sup>74</sup>

Relatively few among the large number of medieval Russian monastic houses and hermitages could boast their own patron saint. In spite of the church hierarchy's concern with controlling new saints' cults in the late 17th century, the royal government and members of the church hierarchy were mostly well disposed to the cults of established holy figures, whom they considered intercessors for the Russian realm, and supported them with generous donations.<sup>75</sup> Tarasii clearly knew that a refusal of his petition for the ascription of the Udomeľ'skii Hermitage would have signified disrespect for Saint Efrem on the part of the tsars. Not surprisingly, the charter issued by Tsars Ivan and Peter on 20 March 1693 to the Borisoglebskii Monastery and the "blessed father Efrem" ascribed the hermitage with all its estates and privileges to the monastery in Torzhok.<sup>76</sup> The charter attests to the fact that the tsars responded to Tarasii's promotion of the cult of Saint Efrem by honoring the saint with financial gifts.

Two years later, Tarasii petitioned Metropolitan Kornilii to free the hermitage in Udomeľia from all dues connected with its lands and from tithes its peasants had been paying, because according to the archimandrite, there were not enough productive lands and people to raise the money. In spite of Tarasii's previous disagreement with the Novgorodian hierarch about the ascription of the Udomeľ'skii Monastery, he received approval for his request in a charter issued by Kornilii in January 1695.<sup>77</sup>

Not surprisingly, the ascription of the Udomeľ'skii Monastery to the Borisoglebskii Monastery brought destruction to the former. After the takeover, Nikon and his brothers were driven from their institution. Only after Tarasii's death and Kornilii's retirement did Nikon manage to persuade the

<sup>74</sup> See Thyřt, "Politics of Relics in Tver'."

<sup>75</sup> See Isolde Thyřt, "Whose Cults Are They? The Local and Central Contexts of the Veneration of Saints Arsenii and Mikhail of Tver'," in *Religion und Integration im Moskauer Russland: Konzepte und Praktiken, Potentiale und Grenzen. 14.–17. Jahrhundert*, ed. Ludwig Steindorff (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 413–46.

<sup>76</sup> Verigin, *Gramoty*, 31, 27 (quotation); also see Iliodor, *Istoricheskoe-statisticheskoe opisanie*, 83.

<sup>77</sup> Verigin, *Gramoty*, 3–5; Rubtsov, *K istorii*, 17–18.

new Novgorodian metropolitan, Iov (1697–1716), to intercede with the tsars for the Udomel'skii Hermitage's independence. The resulting charter by Peter the Great, dating from 16 March 1698, mentions a bitter struggle between Tarasii's successor, Varlaam, and the Udomel'skii donors, who supported Nikon's request and accused the Borisoglebskii Monastery of ruining their institution by exacting exorbitant dues. The matter was eventually settled in Nikon's favor after he pointed out that Tarasii's petition to Adrian in 1693 over Metropolitan Kornilii's head had been unlawful. Nikon ultimately won his argument on procedural grounds, not because the Muscovite government displayed a compassionate attitude toward the oppressed hermitage. The decision to grant independence to Nikon's monks, however, did not prevent the Borisoglebskii monks from continuing to exert influence in the area by acquiring lands near the Udomel'skii Hermitage.<sup>78</sup>

The success of Tarasii's economic policies can be gleaned from the limited available statistics. The number of peasant households of the Borisoglebskii Monastery jumped from 88 in 1678 to 162 in 1700. In comparison, at the Voskresenskii Monastery in Torzhok, the number remained stable at 35. The peasant households of the Tver' Zheltikov Monastery increased only from 47 in 1678 to 52 in 1700, and those of the Otroch Monastery rose from 96 in 1678 to 132 in 1700.<sup>79</sup> According to Vodarskii's analysis of the number of peasant households owned by all Russian monasteries, the Borisoglebskii Monastery ranked in the bottom 77 percent in 1653. Rumiantseva's study of the 1661 data places the monastery in the bottom 73.5 percent. Both scholars have the monastery ranked in the second-lowest of four categories of landed monasteries. By 1700, however, the number of peasant households in the Borisoglebskii Monastery had increased to such a degree that Vodarskii ranked it in the second highest group of all four tiers, that is, among the top 29 percent of landholding houses.<sup>80</sup> Clearly Tarasii's ascription policy had a profound impact on the economic status of his monastery.

## Evaluation

The history of Russian monasticism in the 17th century still leaves us with many unanswered questions regarding how monasteries recovered after the destruction wreaked by the Time of Troubles. Scholars also continue to seek plausible explanations of why monastic landownership increased in the second half of the 17th century in spite of the restrictions imposed by the 1648

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 20–28; Rubtsov, *K materialam dlia tserkovnoi i bytovoï istorii*, 25–26 (no. 25). The Monastery of John the Theologian was turned into a parish church in 1764; see Ilidor, *Istoricheskoe-statisticheskoe opisanie*, 83.

<sup>79</sup> For the statistics, see Vodarskii, "Tserkovnye organizatsii," 88, 92.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 76, table 1; Rumiantseva, "Monastyri," 174, table 1.



law code. Although a detailed explanation of these questions is beyond the scope of this study, an examination of the economic policies of the Torzhok Borisoglebskii Monastery in the 17th century gives a rare glimpse of the financial aspirations of the leaders of a small to mid-sized monastic house, their administrative expertise, and their solid commitment to their institution's growth and success. The Borisoglebskii Monastery is certainly not representative of all 17th-century Russian monastic institutions. Not all monasteries could boast of possessing their own patron saint, which earned them extraordinary spiritual prestige that facilitated access to the court. Nor did all monasteries have a string of competent administrators who devoted themselves to the economic expansion of their monastery. Still, a look at the financial and legal maneuvers of the Borisoglebskii archimandrites answers a number of questions about the means that leaders of 17th-century Russian monasteries employed to promote the growth of their institutions and their interactions with other regional monastic houses, their ecclesiastical superiors, and the Muscovite government in the process.

In the aftermath of the destruction wreaked by the Time of Troubles, the heads of Russian monasteries faced enormous challenges in their efforts to rebuild their monastic communities and place them on a sure economic footing. Although there was no master plan of aggressive expansion, the economic policies of the Borisoglebskii archimandrites in the 17th century suggest that many Muscovite monastic leaders were shrewd administrators who used both conservative and creative means to maintain and augment their landed estates. Immediately after the Time of Troubles the Borisoglebskii archimandrites followed time-honored traditions by asking the Romanov government to confirm all previous property deeds of their monastery with the privileges attached to the lands they described. They also gained access to the lands of smaller houses in return for offering them economic and administrative assistance. Later in the 17th century, the Borisoglebskii archimandrites became more creative in pursuing the expansion of their estates by taking over smaller monasteries. The participation of the Borisoglebskii Monastery in the policy of ascriptions practiced by large monastic houses is striking. Possibly the ascriptions of less wealthy houses were one means by which the more viable monastic establishments overcame the legal impediments regarding the acquisition of new lay properties by monasteries.

The ascriptions pursued by the Borisoglebskii archimandrites raise a number of questions about the assumptions underlying the practice. Both the tsars and the ecclesiastical authorities clearly were supportive of ascriptions in the later 17th century. Possibly, a fear of the religious dissent and lack of religious order that were associated with smaller monasteries and hermitages led them to curtail the independence of these houses. The ascriptions may have been viewed as a natural outgrowth of traditional property arrangements,

as is apparent from confirmation charters that contained not only financial obligations on the part of the lesser party but also duties on the part of the landholder to keep the property intact. The willingness of some members of distressed houses to seek the ascription of their own institutions suggests that at least in principle the practice contained a caritative aspect. Archimandrite Iona's economic activities show that initially, the ascriptions carried the promise to be beneficial to these institutions. Nevertheless, as the economic conditions of the targets of takeovers improved over time, the Borisoglebskii leaders faced greater difficulties in making this argument. Moreover, their treatment of the absorbed monasteries suggests that they did not fulfill the original expectations of the members of these houses and instead viewed them primarily as new sources of income.

Among the Borisoglebskii leaders who pursued the economic expansion of their institution in the 17th century, Archimandrite Tarasii clearly stands out for his aggressive and sometimes brazen approach to the takeover of client monasteries. Tarasii, who had been a monk at the Iverskii Monastery, one of Patriarch Nikon's foundations, most likely gained familiarity with the takeover process there. As Borisoglebskii archimandrite, he cleverly lobbied the heads and sponsors of smaller monasteries to agree with his takeover plans by promising them protection from economic ruin as well as efficient administration, the establishment and decoration of churches, and the institution of regular church services. Tarasii used letters from the priests, stewards, and patrons of the smaller monastic houses to make a successful case for their houses' takeover by the Borisoglebskii Monastery. In dealing with the royal and ecclesiastical authorities, he was not above ignoring the wishes of his immediate ecclesiastical superior by appealing over his head to the tsar. Faced with complaints by the inhabitants of the ascribed monasteries that the Torzhok house ruthlessly exploited the resources of the newly acquired lands, the archimandrite launched attacks on the plaintiffs and accused them of lying. By engaging in a slander campaign against his socially weaker opponents, he managed to gain the sympathy of the Muscovite government, which sided with the Borisoglebskii archimandrite even when he did not keep the terms of the takeover deals.

As a result of Tarasii's activities, the Borisoglebskii Monastery had more than recovered from its economic woes by the end of the troubled 17th century. The economic policy of its archimandrites, which originally had aimed at the revitalization of their institution, in the end encompassed the incorporation and subsequent exploitation of smaller monastic houses within the Borisoglebskii Monastery's reach regardless of the human cost. Nevertheless, as ruthless as Tarasii's ascription methods were, they do not simply validate the Soviet notion of scheming, greedy monks exploiting their peasant subjects. In the struggle for or against the ascription of monastic houses, Tarasii



faced a multitude of competing interests that were only in part determined by social background. Simple monks and peasants could ally themselves against Tarasii and suffered the harshest consequences of the takeovers, but the success of his policies ultimately depended on his ability to manipulate members of the monastic, clerical, and governmental elites.

While it would be easy to dismiss this flamboyant monastic administrator, who acted like a Muscovite equivalent of a modern corporate raider, as a rare anomaly and a bad apple in an otherwise intact Orthodox spiritual culture, such an approach to the colorful Tarasii might obscure some of the most intriguing aspects of 17th-century Russian monasticism. Descriptions of medieval Russian monasteries that were published in the 19th century but remain little explored suggest that many of these institutions were occasionally headed by individuals who shared Tarasii's aggressive leadership qualities and used them to shape the character of their monasteries. While historians still await detailed studies of these monastic entrepreneurs, Tarasii, his predecessor Iona, and the Udomel'skii steward Nikon testify to the existence of monastic leaders who distinguished themselves by intense loyalty to their own communities and a selfless commitment to their well-being and growth. As in the case of the monastic institution of Cluny, the acquisition of landed estates did not represent a spiritual problem for Russian monasteries, and economic expansion went hand in hand with the development of the liturgical and spiritual aspects of monastic life, with each trend reinforcing the other. The nexus of the spiritual and economic aspects in Tarasii's policies is evident in his frequent references, in his petitions for new properties, to the Borisoglebskii patron saint Efrem, whose cult Tarasii helped promote. Thus the Borisoglebskii archimandrite gives evidence of a contingent of medieval Russian monastics who were tough entrepreneurs who did not shy from dubious methods to promote the financial interests of their institutions but who, simultaneously, were pious promoters of the Orthodox faith. By studying the intersection of the spiritual and economic aspects of medieval Russian monks, scholars may find that these men neither represented the corrupt, bloodthirsty demons conjured up by Soviet scholars nor led the angel-like existence claimed by those who romanticize Russian monasticism. Perhaps scholars should be content to discover the truly human element of Tarasii and his fellow monks.

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