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TIKHON OF ROSTOV, OR RUSSIAN
POLITICAL GAMES IN 1489*

In 1489 Archimandrite Tikhon of the Savior Monastery in Iaroslavl' became the second person in the Russian church's hierarchy, after the metropolitan himself, and was called the archbishop of Rostov and Iaroslavl'. The Rostov archbishop held a see very close to Moscow, participated in many court events and was able to influence crucial decisions taken by secular politicians. In this way Tikhon entered the inner circle of the Russian political elite during a notably turbulent time. Grand Prince Ivan III's family was going through the threshold of a dynastic crisis which became most vociferous in the 1490s, following the death in 1490 of Grand Prince Ivan the Younger, the elder son of Ivan III. Political life in Moscow was shaped by a struggle for power between two patrimonial camps—that of Ivan's oldest surviving son Vasilii and his grandson Dmitrii. In 1498 the Russian church, and Tikhon of Rostov among other bishops, gave its blessing to Dmitrii, who was proclaimed an heir-at-law of Ivan III.

While the biographical details of the most significant players in this conflict are well known, others have been given less attention. Few of these figures, such as Tikhon, could not be considered as central to the political crisis in the 1490s. Their interaction, however, with the major players could reveal the nature of political forces involved in the drama.

The person who elevated Tikhon was Metropolitan Gerontii, the head of the Russian church (1473-89), who was known to be a vehement opponent of Grand Prince Ivan III. Ivan could not tolerate Gerontii's independent behavior

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1. See, for example, Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei [hereafter PSRL], vol. 28 (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademiia nauk SSR, 1963), 148; PSRL, vol. 24 (Petrograd: Arkhieograficheskai komissiia, 2-ia Gosudarstvennaia tipografiia, 1921), 197 (concerning the conflict between Ivan III and Gerontii over the land holdings of the Kirillo-Belozerskii Monastery); see also the next note. For a critical review of various chronicle sources from this period, see B. M. Kloss and V. D. Nazarov, "Rasskazy o likvidatsii Ordynskogo iqa na Rusi v
but had no power to dismiss the Metropolitan. Under obscure circumstances (the chronicle does not provide sufficient information on this event), Gerontii had even demonstratively left his see (and his residence at the Chudov Monastery in the Kremlin) for several months as a protest against Ivan III's disobedience and neglect. In November 1483 he took the metropolitan's treasury and the crozier, symbols of office, and moved to a cell at the Simonov Monastery. While blatantly demonstrating his conflict with the grand prince before everyone, Gerontii sought firm support from his flock. Ivan did not wait long to retaliate—the grand prince sent the elder Paisii Jaroslavov to the monastery while trying to induce Gerontii to resign. Meanwhile, Gerontii was longing for the metropolitan see («и тужи много по митрополии»), according to the Moscow chronicle compilation of 1497), and devised his own plans. Gerontii would have preferred to go into hiding and attempted to escape from the Simonov Monastery many times, but he was repeatedly seized by the grand prince's servants («многажды и бегал из монастыря, и имаши его»).

Obviously, the church could not remain any longer without its head, and Ivan III had no choice but to negotiate with Gerontii the conditions of his return to the metropolitan throne. Gerontii's return to the Kremlin was celebrated by the appointment of several new bishops. On 4 September 1484, Sergii became archbishop of Novgorod; on 9 December 1484, Nifont was elevated to the see of Suzdal'.

Meanwhile, in October 1485, Ivan III occupied Tver', the last semi-independent center in northeastern Rus'. Ivan's fervor to eliminate all potential rivals to his heirs, and above all to support his elder son Ivan the Younger, focused on overpowering his own brother Andrei the Elder of Uglich. The relations between the two brothers had been regulated by an oath of loyalty and the kissing of the cross in the late 1481 when Ivan III promised to preserve the rights of Andrei and Boris of Volokolamsk.

Sergei M. Kashtanov pointed out that the head of the Rostov and Jaroslavl' archbishopric played an important role in the struggle for power in the 1490s. The Rostov archbishopric included Uglich, Andrei's capital city, and the arch-