At the end of the sixteenth century 220 monks lived at the Trinity-Sergius Monastery along with a large contingent of elite and ordinary slaves (slugy). They were at the center of an empire of monks and nuns who populated other houses under its jurisdiction and, with a cadre of lay officials, administered its urban yards (dvory) and salt works, and rural estates. By then the core brotherhood was dominated numerically and politically by monks from landowner families – from 49 to 54 percent of those whom I have been able to identify in the two decades 1571-1590 – that had donated property or cash to Trinity in order to provide commemorative prayers or feasts for their selves, their families and their ancestors, or to secure tonsure. Although hegemony at Trinity nominally was vested in its abbot (hegumen) – from 1561 its archimandrite, a declaration of its council of elders in 1584 leaves no doubt that this body controlled the monastery’s economy and the appointment of its officers. It even dictated which prayers and feasts the archimandrite might undertake and determined his portion of fees for tonsure and burial, and incomes from which he was excluded. Monks from landowner-benefactor families – and predominately provincials of middling wealth – were even more heavily weighted among Trinity’s officers and elders. Of the eighteen elders, including officers, who signed the declaration of 1584, at least fourteen represented the landowning elite that had built Trinity as a national institution. Among the signers, Varsunofii Iakimov, who held the title of head elder (bol’shoi starets) was atypical only in his longevity as a monk, 1570-1601, and in his prestige. Varsunofii was from a family of benefactors in Galich and managed a considerable private fortune. While a monk he gave Trinity 1,089 rubles and valuable artifacts; he also owned estates in his


own name for which he requested and received immunity charters from Tsars Fedor and Boris Godunov. With Trinity’s archimandrite and cellarer (kelar’) he consoled Tsar Ivan IV when he journeyed to Trinity in 1583 to find solace after killing his son and later baptized Tsar Fedor’s daughter. The monastery was very much a part of the wider world. It was already blessed with richly decorated masonry churches of the Holy Trinity (1427), the Procession of the Holy Spirit (1486), the gate Church dedicated to St. Sergius (1512), a large masonry refectory and sturdy stone walls, and a sacristy overflowing with lavish service articles and vestments, when in 1585 the brotherhood consecrated the large Church of the Dormition as its ceremonial center. Lay visitors, from the ruler and his court down to peasant on its lands, visited Trinity or its subsidiary houses to celebrate Sergius’s feast days, September 25th and July 5th, and to bury and commemorate deceased relatives and ancestors. Its commercial and industrial enterprises were large and wide ranging.

These characteristics of Trinity’s life and governance were the result of a combination of distinct factors. Chief among them was the emergence of a “culture of commemoration” at Trinity which made the monastery rich in land and cash and augmented the relative number of monks in the brotherhood from landowning families of donor-benefactors. Inevitably, the brotherhood had to find ways of accommodating well born and affluent monks and managing its assets. At the same time it had to contend with Grand Prince Ivan III’s development of a governmental apparatus capable of regulating rival institutions and preserving the land fund that underlay Moscow’s tax base and service class. Much of what I have to say about how Trinity met these challenges and, in so
