



# Between God and Tsar: Religious Symbolism and the Royal Women of Muscovite Russia

*Isolde Thyret*

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# Between God and Tsar: Religious Symbolism and the Royal Women of Muscovite Russia

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Challenging traditional interpretations of the roles of royal women in patriarchal Muscovite society, *Between God and Tsar* opens a new approach to understanding medieval Russia. Drawing upon a wide range of sources in anthropology, sociology, art history, and literature, it sheds light on the lives of the tsaritsy, about which little has been known, and on the culture surrounding them. This pioneering study demonstrates that the wives of the early tsars played complex roles in government, especially during times of crisis, and shows how religious culture perpetuated the expressions of their legitimacy as female rulers.

Muscovite Russia's values were sanctioned by religion, and it is through religious images that the royal women's claims to rulership can be seen most clearly. Thyret explores Orthodox iconography—such as that of the Golden Palace of the Tsaritsy, which proclaims Irina Godunova's right to act as an independent ruler—and shows how the Muscovite court used gendered images to reveal the spiritual power of female rulers. Myths and legends adapted from one generation to another also underscore royal wives' claim to authority based on their great spiritual power.

Illuminating medieval Russia's art, literature, and culture, *Between God and Tsar* opens new ways to understand the tsaritsy. Students of Russian history have often wondered how and why, under the Romanovs, female rulers governed so often. Thyret's broadly researched study provides an answer. *Between God and Tsar* offers stimulating insights into the power of Russia's royal women and how it was manifest in Muscovite culture.

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