Paradox,” gives an extended close reading of Kirill’s Sermon for the Third Sunday after Easter, which Lunde regards as “perhaps Kirill’s most complex text.” (p. 254) The book concludes with a brief “Epilogue,” followed by a bibliography and index.

Lunde’s work has several strengths. She effectively responds to criticisms that Kirill’s sermons are either derivative or clumsy, showing how they use traditional techniques of Christian rhetoric in distinctive and effective ways. Her numerous close readings reveal many interesting aspects of Kirill’s work. (I was most struck by his sophisticated use of speech and dialogue.) The book is most impressive when Lunde succeeds in differentiating Kirill from other rhetoricians. At other times, one suspects that the techniques being analyzed are common to most Christian and some non-Christian rhetoric (though that does not make them inherently uninteresting). Still, to be fair, it would be hard to show that every technique in the book was unique or unusual without comparing Kirill to the entire corpus of Byzantine rhetoricians. For that matter, precisely because Kirill does work within a tradition, it would be unreasonable to expect all his techniques to be distinctive. Lunde’s extensive citation of modern literary theorists shows great erudition but is a bit excessive. The index (so unusual in revised dissertations, which this presumably is) doubles or triples the value of the book.

Francis Butler
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign


Scholars have paid great attention to court politics in pre-Petrine Russia including the role of women in forming marriage alliances. Most studies of royal women assumed that life in the royal terem, the women’s quarters, was one of seclusion, asceticism, and domestic tasks removed from the concerns of state. Between God and Tsar opens new vistas for historians of the Muscovite court and the roles of female royal family members. Building upon her impressive knowledge of pre-Petrine court history and the imagery of icons, Isolde Thyret’s deftly leads the knowledgeable Russian historian from the fifteenth through the late seventeenth centuries. She argues that the tsaritsa and tsarevny, wives and daughters of Moscow’s tsars, played an integral but gendered role in secular and spiritual leadership, encouraged by the Orthodox Church.

Thyret clearly contextualizes these women within the socio-cultural environment of their time and place, without imposing a modern analytic framework. She avoids the trap of using them as examples for generalized discussions of gender roles or monarchical power. Myth-making and role-affirming activities of Moscow’s tsaritsa are examined as they evolved through the use of religious ritual and imagery. Thyret’s thematic chapter approach leads readers up the staircase of female roles as they were shaped by successive tsaritsa building upon one another’s myths. Their steps culminated in religious and literary apologies for the regency of Sofiia (1682–89), sister of Peter the Great. The author sees the role of tsaritsa developing along two main lines:
as pious intercessor for the tsar and the Orthodox faithful and as an independent ruler when the tsar was incapacitated, absent, or under age.

The most creative and extensive source analyses examine the relationship between iconographic images and the expanding role of royal women in impressive and clear detail. Liturgical cloths and vestments with iconic representations that were created in the textile shops of the royal terem are important sources for Thyret. Other artifacts include icon paintings depicting the tsaritsy, scenes on the walls of the Golden Palace of the Tsaritsy and other symbolic visual compositions. Black and white illustrations of these artifacts are provided within the text. When possible, Thyret uses visual sources in conjunction with vitae, the chronicles, court poetry, testaments, oaths of allegiance, and a variety of state documents, letters, petitions, and foreigners’ accounts to trace the actions of and attitudes toward the tsaritsy. Set in time and place, all the sources are examined and understood as part of a social and cultural context. By complementing pious images with written documents, Thyret presents a wealth of information. To aid clarity, the volume contains a glossary, copious notes, and simple genealogical charts.

The first broad conclusion drawn is the intercessory nature of the tsaritsa’s image and activity. Thyret argues that tsaritsy constructed and encouraged the myth that they served as conduits between God and tsar in two fundamental ways. They adopted the part of vessels of divine activity beginning with Sofiia Paleolog and her imagery of the “blessed womb.” They also acted as intercessors on behalf of tsar and realm through prayer, pious works, and the granting of petitions. Thyret re-examines the life of the terem and its observances of fasts, prayers, and the enforced chastity of tsarevny in the seventeenth century. She suggests that in the context of medieval Orthodoxy these activities were important elements of pious activity that enhanced Muscovites’ images of royal women. Moreover, royal women “transcended” the confines of the terem through pious missions or correspondence with the tsar, ecclesiastical figures, and petitioners.

Her second conclusion, that royal mothers and wives built up their right to govern the realm in times of dynastic uncertainty, is also formulated from interpretations of iconography and court documents. Irina Godunova, sitting among images of independently ruling Orthodox empresses, received ecclesiastical delegations and granted pardons and charters during and after the reign of her husband. Precedents are traced to Elena Glinskia and also to Anastasia, wife of Ivan IV, during Ivan’s illness of 1553. Thyret thus presents Irina as a strong link in a chain of independently governing female regents considered viable alternatives for dynastic continuity in the absence of competent males.

Thyret concludes that the myth-building and role-making activity of royal wives and daughters paved the way for Sofiia Alekseevna to rule as regent and afforded her medieval precedents for assuming power. Sofiia capitalized on the notion of the pious and chaste tsarevny who supported traditions of Orthodoxy, and she could point to instances of governance by women of the royal family. Thyret demonstrates that the iconography of power and intercession used by Sofiia’s court, though modern and western in appearance, had precursors in the medieval period. She asserts that Sofiia’s attempt to transcend her traditional female intercessory role and adopt masculine