The origins of this book lie in two reviews of my previous book, *A Bride for the Tsar* (2012). In one, Daniel Rowland wrote that he “would love to have read more of the highly complex wedding rituals . . . and how these rituals functioned within the court culture.” In the other, Valerie Kivelson lamented the book’s avoidance of “any consideration of gender.” I decided they were right. Wedding rituals and the essential role of royal women in them were regrettable (albeit necessary) omissions from my book on bride-shows, but ones that I had the means to address. Although other projects intervened, the observations of Rowland and Kivelson weighed on my mind until I could get back to this book, where ritual and women (and other themes) are the center of attention. So my first word of thanks goes to these two esteemed colleagues and friends, who bear no responsibility for the arguments to follow beyond their genesis.

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