PREFACE

The late seventeenth century, like the early eighteenth in Russian history, has been dominated largely by the figure of Peter the Great. Other arresting personalities have crossed the political scene, but the towering figure of the Great Tsar has thus far successfully subordinated them and given them importance only in relation to the events and developments of his spectacular career. Although it has generally been admitted that the generation before 1689 saw notable changes in national culture and important developments in Russian foreign relations, the dozen years between the reigns of Tsars Alexis and Peter have been slighted by most historians. An impression has long prevailed that these years represented a twilight period in Russian history, an interim between the Muscovite Russia of the early Romanovs and the “new” Russia of Peter the Great. It was recognized that individual Russians showed remarkable intellectual energies and interests during this period, and that the government, under Ukrainian and Polish influences, attempted a series of moderate reforms. But in general, the feeling has been that this was a time of ineffective government and military failures. After the feeble rule of Tsar Feodor (1676–1682), a quarrel over the succession developed, which, after a military uprising, culminated in a palace revolution and the quasi exile of young Tsar Peter. Although the crown was nominally shared by Peter and his elder brother Ivan, actual power rested thereafter in the hands of their ambitious sister, the Tsarevna Sophia Alekseevna. The failures of Sophia’s regency, in turn, and her designs to remove Peter from the throne finally precipitated a coup d’état in which Peter, goaded to action through fear for his life, seized power and inaugurated the epoch which has brought him lasting fame.

These are over-all impressions formed from reading many accounts of Russian history of the late seventeenth century. Such impressions are misleading if not incorrect. The years 1682–1689 were of unusual interest in Russian history. In the realm of foreign affairs, a number of vital questions arose in connection with national boundaries and the advancement of Russian interests in both the eastern and western hemispheres. New trade and diplomatic relations were established with the nations of the East and the West. Internally, a number of reforms were effected. A strong impulse was given to education. The national propensity toward cultural isolation was attacked. Efforts were made to bring better order into internal trade and to landed property, and to free the state from an excessive dependence on foreign industry. Not
only the events themselves but their relation to the reforms of Peter's epoch, gave extraordinary significance to the regency of Sophia.

A number of nineteenth-century historians gave attention to Sophia's regency but few attempted to show it as a comprehensive political segment. In 1856, P. K. Shechebal'skii published a short monograph, *The Regency of Tsarevna Sophia*, which dealt imaginatively with the political events of the regime but largely omitted the cultural and economic changes of the period and neglected the Far Eastern issue entirely. In "Moscow Rebellions at the end of the 17th Century," published in 1887 in the *Journal of the Ministry of National Instruction*, A. E. Belov gave attention to the Strel'tsy Revolt of 1682 and to the relation of the Tsarevna's party to that event but proceeded no further. E. F. Shmurlo in an article published in the same journal a year later examined in great detail the events leading to the fall of the regent's government in 1689. Solov'ev, Ustrialov, Stählin, and Brückner also have dwelt at length upon the political aspects of the period, and recent historians like Rozhkov and Bogoslovskii have analyzed it from the standpoint of particular phases of later seventeenth-century history. But the tendency to minimize the importance of Sophia's regency by merging it with the history of the preceding or succeeding period has continued. The regime has thus been portrayed as a prelude to Peter's reign, a time of reaction and political bungling that chiefly served to make the achievements of the succeeding generation appear more brilliant.

In this study, an attempt will be made to eliminate some of the false notions about Sophia's regime and to show it for what it was—a government of unusual distinction and promise, which pursued with intelligence and imagination the interests of Russia abroad and introduced reforms at home that are usually believed to have originated in succeeding generations.

This monograph is an outgrowth of graduate work at the University of California, Berkeley, with Professor Robert J. Kerner, who many years ago first inspired my interest in Russian history. To him I am indebted for suggesting the topic of this investigation and for many favors in connection with its composition.

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