

Russian combination of mysticism and *sobornost'*, he emphasizes the common Christian elements in Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism. Indeed, he points to distinctions between Russia and Europe, drawn by nineteenth-century historians, as less a consequence of unique social institutions and culture than as the result of the survival in Russia of more archaic forms which had disappeared in Europe with the collapse of the old regime.

Undoubtedly Wittram's most telling point concerns the multiple Europes with which Russia came into contact. Thus, Petrine absolutism, Marxism, and even Slavophilism were to some extent European. Even the expansion into Asia, which inspired so many nineteenth-century observers to see Russia as a Eurasian society, was part and parcel of the European drive for colonies and empire. Ironically, the Russian state, from which Catholic Poland claimed to be saving Europe, was more European than the ramshackled *Rzeczpospolita*. And yet, the interaction between native elements and European forms tended to produce results that were hardly intelligible to the parents—for example, the infusion of the cult of the *mir* and *artel'* into Russian populist ideology. In his discussion of the October Revolution and the Soviet regime, Professor Wittram asks rhetorically the very question central to his theme: "Was Russia too European and at the same time not European enough?" (p. 156).

Many will not agree with Professor Wittram's provocative conclusion that, in spite of efforts to cut Russia off from Europe culturally, the Soviet regime is undoubtedly European in its utilization of the technology of power. In posing his final question about the invalidity and obsolescence of the traditional confrontation between Russia and Europe, he raises an issue with which not only many Western critics of the Soviet system but also Russian neo-Slavophile dissidents would take exception. But, precisely because Professor Wittram argues his thesis with originality, balance, and sound scholarship, this volume should enlighten debate upon the relationship between Russia and Europe and the general place of Russia in the world.

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PIERRE LE GRAND. By *Simone Blanc*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974. 128 pp. Paper.

This book, apparently directed at French university students, is of limited interest to the English-speaking world, which is blessed with several more or less adequate works of a similar kind. But as the work of a leading French specialist on eighteenth-century Russia, the book also deserves a wider audience. The introductory essay—by turns shrewd, fresh, metaphysical, wrong (or outmoded), subtle, and romantic (even melodramatic)—is undeniably two things: stimulating, and short on hard facts (evidently Professor Blanc can assume more background in her students at Paris-Nanterre than we can in ours). These features also characterize the rest of the book, for the section of commentary and interpretation excerpted from a wide range of writers outweighs, by a ratio of three printed pages to one, the section of original documents (most of them extracts newly translated from Russian). This preference for debating rather than presenting the evidence is probably attributable to more than stylistic choice. Behind the shifting "points de vue," the frequent *bons mots*, the intelligently selected and occasionally

quite unexpected readings, one detects something less than a sure grasp of what is admittedly a complex, much disputed period. One misses, above all, a firm sense of the actual Russian setting—physical, cultural, social, historical—in which Peter the Great operated and in which he is fairly judged. But such, undoubtedly, was nearly impossible to convey in this book, already rich in imagination, nuance, and allusion to the point of indigestibility.

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THE POLITICS OF CATHERINIAN RUSSIA: THE PANIN PARTY. By David L. Ransel. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975. x, 327 pp. \$17.50.

This book is about court politics. The term brings to mind: titillating gossip about the empress and her lovers, a confusing series of names as “outs” replace “ins,” and, finally, a feeling that despite frequent changes in personalities nothing of real significance has happened. So much of the literature about Catherine II and her reign has had these qualities that we have come to expect it. Professor Ransel, however, has done something else by trying to find out how things really worked. We have the same panorama of intrigue and shifting positions of the major characters but, for the first time, we get a serious attempt to explain not only what happened but what it meant.

The author's assertion that, in the absence of a “legal administrative system and corporately organized social estates,” the government was dominated by “familial and personal patronage networks” is by no means startling. We all know that is the way it must have been. What Ransel does is to give that abstract notion flesh and blood by tracing over a period of twenty years the rise and fall of the familial network that centered on Nikita Panin. By showing how things worked at court, Ransel is frequently able to say why individuals took certain positions on specific issues. His answers, consequently, differ from the received wisdom in several instances, the most important being the notion of Panin as the representative of the “gentry opposition” to the centralizing monarchy.

For Ransel, Panin's Imperial Council project was an attempt to assure that he would continue to be consulted by the empress when it appeared that rival factions were in the ascendancy. When his “party” was sure of the empress's favor, Panin no longer favored proposals to institutionalize the function of advising the sovereign, because he could not count on controlling such a body. As Ransel suggests, the analysis goes a long way toward explaining why, despite numerous proposals for political “reform,” the political system remained essentially unchanged for so long.

The limited power of the eighteenth-century “absolute” monarch in Russia is another of the issues lucidly explained in the book. Catherine could manipulate the competing factions, but for many years she did not dare to permit one to completely eliminate the other. The Orlovs could hint that the Panin party was preparing to place Paul on the throne, but Catherine could not disband the guards regiments, the presumed instruments of such an attempt, nor was she in a position to judge whether or not there was any truth to the allegations made against Panin, long her most valued adviser.

A brief review cannot do justice to the sophistication and detail of Ransel's