

What emerges most strikingly from the data is the persistence of a great variety of social groups and considerable internal social flux within the towns of Great Russia. Repeated attempts by the central government and local officials as well as by the self-administering agencies of the *posad* to stabilize, control, and homogenize the population must be considered a dismal failure. In addition, the author offers a clearer understanding of the social conflicts among these various groups and other estates outside the *posad* community than has heretofore been possible. His interpretation of the *nakazy* demonstrates that the aspirations of the merchants in particular were linked to their strict adherence to a system of closed estates in which their obligations were clearly defined, their privileges vigorously defended, and their status duly acknowledged. There is no evidence here of a desire to transform the administrative or economic life of the towns, but rather a deep concern over the need to preserve and strengthen the hierarchical corporate structure administered by self-regulating mechanisms which are orderly, regular, and predictable. Unfortunately, the author does not always take the opportunity to expand on these larger themes, even when it is both appropriate and desirable.

Knabe's style is heavy and convoluted. One is hardly aware that behind the formidable apparatus of schemata and tables there is a vigorous society struggling to survive under harsh natural conditions, and to build an urban environment which guarantees them a modicum of comfort and security. These caveats aside, Knabe has provided such abundant material that future historians of Russian society will be able to mine it extensively on a variety of topics. For this we can be grateful to him.

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CATHERINE, EMPRESS OF ALL THE RUSSIAS. By *Vincent Cronin*. New York: William Morrow, 1978. 349 pp. + 30 pp. photographs. \$12.95.

Despite the dust jacket's hyperbolic statement—"the most detailed, the most authoritative narrative of her life, public and private, to appear in *any* language"—this biography amounts to another facile popularization. It draws heavily and uncritically upon Catherine's so-called memoirs, devotes half of its treatment to the period before she became empress, and presents a superficial account of her long reign. Russian works are largely neglected and a number of recent English publications are ignored (for example, monographs by Alan Fisher, Robert Jones, and Isabel de Madariaga, Anthony Lentin's translations, and the anthologies by Anthony Cross and Marc Raeff). The book is apologetic in tone and surprisingly prudish in discussing Catherine's sexuality: "the sexual element in her character was not very pronounced" (p. 304). This dictum contradicts the usual reading of Catherine's autobiographical writings, explicated most recently in Joan Haslip's biography (New York, 1977). There is little discussion of Catherine's policies toward the nobility—a central, fiercely debated problem of her reign—and scant treatment of other social or economic policies. Yet Cronin constantly depicts Catherine as a determined foe of serfdom. The structure of the book is mainly chronological, but the reign is presented in an episodic manner that often obscures lines of development. No continuities with the reigns of Elizabeth and Peter III are mentioned. Enthralled by descriptions of clothes and physiognomy, the author also indulges a penchant for sudden transitions and odd digressions. Even the prose style stumbles from awkward and slangy usages. For serious students of Russian history this book delivers far less than it promises.

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