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Professor Lucjan LEWITTER

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Historian whose pithy prose exemplified a deep understanding of Russian modern history and of Russo-Polish relations.

Though he contributed two chapters on Poland to the New *Cambridge Modern History,* Lucjan Lewitter, Professor of Slavonic Studies at the University of Cambridge between 1968 and 1984 and Fellow of Christ's College, will be remembered primarily as an historian of Russia in the reign of Peter the Great.

His principal publication was a critical edition of *The Book of Poverty and Wealth* (1987), a memorandum on public finance by Ivan Pososhkov incorporating unsolicited proposals for wider reform which led to the author's arrest in 1725. Lewitter's commentaries on the text, which he translated into English with his Cambridge colleague A. P. Vlasto, are prefaced by a lengthy introduction distilling a lifetime's reflection on the incipient modernity of Russia in Peter's reign. The leading American reviewer, James Cracraft, writing in *American Historical Review,* commented that this was "really his book, and hence-forth anyone investigating any aspect of that crucial period will have to consult it".

Lewitter had already explored part of the context of Pososhkov's treatise in articles charting the development of Russia's commercial and diplomatic interests in the Baltic. This was technical work, displaying the fruits of research in the European archives open to him before the collapse of the Soviet Union and an unrivalled command of the published sources in the relevant Slavonic, Scandinavian and Western languages. Yet the argument was presented in elegant, pithy prose, bristling with confident (and sometimes controversial) generalisations.

The same was true of his essays on the relationship between Russian Orthodoxy and Baroque Latinity, which emphasised the interplay between religion, literature and politics long before it became fashionable to do so. The cultural dimension of his work contributed a distinctive

richness of texture to *Eclipsis Poloniae,* the important study of Russo-Polish relations that was practically complete at the end of his life.

Had he not been restrained by an innate perfectionism, it might have been published much earlier, since this was a subject for which he was exceptionally well qualified, by both background and intellectual formation.

The son of a barrister, Lucjan Ryszard Lewitter was born in Cracow in 1922 and moved to Warsaw at the age of 12. Among his contemporaries at school in Poland was the medievalist Ihor Sevenko, subsequently director of the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard. In the face of the Nazi menace, Lewitter was sent in 1938 to Cambridge, where he made a courageous new start until his parents were able to follow him to England.

Educated at the Perse School, he entered Christ's College in 1943 to read French and Russian, graduating with a first in both parts of the modern languages tripos in 1946. In 1951 he was awarded a doctorate for a dissertation on the academic drama in the 17th and 18th centuries, with special reference to its Polish origins. Two years later he was appointed to a university lectureship in Slavonic studies, a post he held until his election to the chair in succession to Dame Elizabeth Hill.

In marked contrast to the driving energy of his predecessor, Lewitter was by temperament a reticent scholar who could sometimes seem distant even to colleagues who liked and respected him. Far from modern in manner, he nevertheless took an advanced view of relationships with students in his department, instituting a liaison committee in the troubled year of 1968 to consult them about their needs and aspirations.

Though he was not a charismatic teacher, and sometimes discouraged undergraduates who contemplated research, those inspired by his unobtrusive methods included Robert Service, now Professor of Russian History at Oxford. Lewitter disliked administration and was not entirely happy with the system of headships of departments within his faculty. But he was meticulous in fulfilling his duties as head of the

department of Slavonic studies and served as a valuable member of the faculty board, where his concern was especially with maintaining high academic standards.

Indeed, concern with high standards was characteristic of all his activities - his scholarship, his courteous relationship with colleagues, his sartorial elegance. Completely bilingual in English and Polish, he was perfectly at home in his adopted country, cultivating a sort of old-world English charm to match his natural dry wit and sense of humour.

An intensely private man, he was not easy to know and not often willing to talk about himself and his background. He was at his most genial and relaxed in the college, which he served as director of studies in modern languages, 1951-64, tutor, 1960-68, and vice-master, 1977-80, inspiring affection among pupils and colleagues alike.

He particularly enjoyed presiding at high table throughout his long retirement, when his urbane company and lasting commitment to the values of collegiate society earned the fond admiration of the fellowship across the generations.

Twice married, he is survived by son from his first marriage and daughter from his second.

Professor Lucjan Lewitter, historian, was born on June 1, 1922. He died on September 19, 2007.