

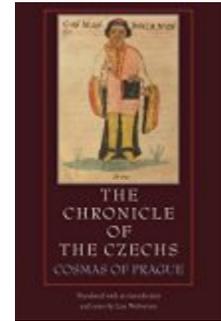


Lisa Wolverton, trans. and introduction. *The Chronicle of the Czechs*, by Cosmas of Prague. Medieval Texts in Translation. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009. xviii + 274 pp. Maps, bibliography, index. \$34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8132-1570-9.

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The Chronicle of Cosmas in Prague in Political Lighting

Lisa Wolverton has made an important medieval chronicle more accessible to English-speakers with a highly readable translation of Cosmas of Prague's *Chronicle of the Czechs*. Cosmas (d. 1125), a dean of the see of Prague and thus witness to many important events, records in his chronicle the stories surrounding the introduction of the Czechs to the lands all the way to his own time. The translation is not only readable, but also reveals the highly engaging narrative found in the chronicle and will undoubtedly prove very useful to instructors, with many potential pedagogical applications. For example, instructors could use it in an introductory course as a primary source in translation or with advanced students in conjunction with the edited version published in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*.^[1]

The introduction and notes throughout the text point to ways historians today might interpret the chronicle's purpose and consequences, tracking perhaps unintended ones. The introduction in particular presents a political, primarily secular, roadmap to Cosmas's chronicle. Who Cosmas understood to be "the Czechs" and whether he intended to "define the Czechs as a nation through history[-telling]" (p. 3) is debatable, but Wolverton has provided the reader with tools and clues to such an interpretation and she has done this without overburdening the text of the chronicle. The political focus, found in the introduction, derives logically from Wolverton's work in medieval Bohemian history.^[2] As she points out in the introduction, Cosmas's chronicle offers "rich mate-

rial" on a wide array of subjects, not just political history. The excellent index allows readers quick access to those subjects. That it does is extremely fortunate for Cosmas's chronicle constitutes almost the only source from c. 1100 from Bohemia about Bohemia.

Cosmas focused on political events and employed references to many ancient authors, which the footnotes Wolverton supplies make clear,^[3] and yet his chronicle begins as many medieval chronicles did, with what medieval Christians understood as the "beginning"—that is, the biblical account of Creation. Thus the chronicle can and should be read as a somewhat typical medieval universal history with all the religious connotations, lessons, directives, and allusions that implies, and Wolverton has done a great service by providing a translation that allows for nuanced readings and interpretations.

Notes

[1]. Bertold Bretholz and Wilhelm Weinberger, eds., *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum, Nova Series. Tomus II, Cosmae Pragensis Chronica Boemorum* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1923). This was, in fact, the critical edition that Wolverton used. MGH has been digitized and can be accessed at the following URL: http://bsbdmgh.bsb.1rz-muenchen.de/dmgh_new/.

[2]. Lisa Wolverton, *Hastening toward Prague: Power and Society in the Medieval Czech Lands* (Philadelphia:

University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

[3]. On page 10 in footnote 17, Wolverton lists the

books Cosmas “clearly had before him in their entirety,” including ancient classics by Virgil, Lucan, Sedulius, and Sallust.

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