

František Šmahel. *Die Prager Universität im Mittelalter: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (*Charles University in the Middle Ages: Selected Studies*). Education and Society in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007. xii + 636 pp \$218.00, cloth, ISBN 978-90-04-15488-9.



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Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher

This volume collects articles on Charles University during its earliest decades published by the renowned historian of Hussitism, František Šmahel. The articles, in German and English, were written and published at different times and in different places. Bringing them together in one volume is a great service to both the students and researchers of the history of universities. Each chapter has its own strengths and depths. In the preface, Šmahel expresses concerns about the volume's overall coherence, but readers need not worry: although the articles are diverse in topic and method—some chapters emphasize interpretation and analysis and others statistics and biographical data—they also complement one another.

The book is divided into three sections. The chapters in the first section deal with various aspects of the university's historical significance, from the establishment of the university and the purpose(s) for which Emperor Charles IV may have intended it, up to the medical faculty and the university's role in Hussitism and humanism. An

important sub-theme runs through these chapters, for they consistently come back to the issue of how the students, faculty, and others with a vested interest in the university tried to steer it onto certain paths, or how they reacted to the path the university was taking. Attempts to influence the institution were deeply involved both with internal issues, such as relationships among the faculty, and external ones, such as the withdrawal of students subsequent to the Kutná Hora decree. The first section provides Šmahel's interpretation of the larger problems associated with these issues, but researchers will also find the detailed information he presents about the role of master's degree students, regular students, and the faculty particularly useful.

The second section of the book concentrates on the faculty of liberal arts. The same sub-theme emerges in these chapters, but more light is shed on the significance of internal issues for the development of the university. Insights into pedagogy and curricula, students' academic lives, and university resources are offered. Again, researchers

will find the detailed, mostly biographical, information useful. The third section of the book focuses on "Universalialia Realia"; that is, realism. It includes material on John Wyclif's influence on Hussitism, the vibrancy of debate at the university, and exchange with other universities, as well as evidence for the possibility that not every academic pursuit at Charles University involved Jan Hus.

The book offers material for many audiences. Researchers will appreciate Šmahel's subtle interpretations of various aspects of the university's significance and plentiful hints for future research; scholars interested in universities will profit from introductions to issues particular to Prague University in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as well as to issues that many late medieval universities faced; and historians interested in Prague are given multiple opportunities to learn about the impact of the university on the city and kingdom. Novice readers may be better served by a more general history of the university, such as the detailed but accessible two-volume *A History of Charles University* (2001), edited by František Kavka and Josef Petráň, but nonetheless may find more than one article and the bibliography useful.

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