

Cosmos and Materiality in Early Modern Prague. By Suzanna Ivanič. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021, xii, 244 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Chronology. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. \$100.00, hard bound.
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In recent years the history and culture of early modern Bohemia have undergone a major revisionist reassessment. The nineteenth-century nationalist Czech historian František Palacký interpreted the development of pre-modern Bohemian history as a struggle between Germans and Czechs, Catholicism and Protestantism. For Palacký, the 1620 defeat of the Protestant Estates at the Battle of White Mountain near Prague by the Catholic armies of the Habsburg Emperor Ferdinand inaugurated a period of “darkness” (*temno*) during which thousands of Protestants fled Bohemia and many others were forcibly converted to Catholicism. Howard Louthan’s ground-breaking study *Converting Bohemia: Force and Persuasion in the Catholic Reformation* (2009) rejected this nationalist model by showing that the recatholicization of Bohemia was less one of violence and force than of negotiation and persuasion. Instrumental in this process was the role played by architecture, art, literature, music, philosophy and hagiography. Czech was not replaced by German but harnessed, through songs and prayers, to bring the population of Bohemia back to the Catholic fold, a process that was completed around the year 1700.

Suzanna Ivanič’s study *Cosmos and Materiality in Early Modern Prague* proceeds along the same lines as Louthan by examining the material artefacts and inventory lists of the Prague nobility and burgher class that have survived from the period 1600–1700. She argues that the evidence provided by such artefacts as amulets, rosaries, clocks, prayer books, and Bibles points to a complex amalgam of confessional beliefs in which a Lutheran Bible could coexist alongside a beaded rosary in the same household. Ivanič interprets these lists of religious objects as evidence of a complex interplay of confessional beliefs as well as the trickle-down influence of the court culture of Rudolf II whose philosophy was not sectarian—as in Catholic Spain or Protestant England—but fluid and ecumenical.

Beginning with a comprehensive overview of Rudolfine Prague, Ivanič goes on to examine the evidence provided by material objects and inventories of household objects such as amulets and materials (books and rings) that solidified and gave meaning to kinship relations. Her overall argument is that these objects transcended confessional boundaries between Protestantism and Catholicism. The Utraquist accommodation of Hussitism to traditional Catholicism helps to explain why the Habsburg recatholicization of Bohemia did not require widespread force and violence. Analyzing the lapidary treatise *Gemmarum et Lapidum Historia* (1609) by Rudolf II’s physician-in-ordinary Anselmus Boetius de Boodt (1550–1632), Ivanič highlights the healing and magical qualities of precious stones, which she sees as consistent with the inventories of Prague burghers. She also argues that the evidence of the value of healing properties inherent in stones and amulets complicates Keith Thomas’s thesis in his *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971) that the “‘analogous reasoning’ based on an understanding that God was the Creator of all nature had been lost by the seventeenth century” and that “‘through the processes of disenchantment the sacred had been eradicated from the natural world’” (57). In fact, Thomas argued that the transformation from a sacred to a secular understanding of natural matter was gradual and

was only completed in the eighteenth century when science and reason finally displaced the central role of religion and magic in the lives of English men and women.

Crucially, Thomas's thesis applies not to central Europe but to England, which witnessed the destruction of medieval Catholicism during the Reformation and the gradual emergence of a Calvinist ideology by the end of the seventeenth century. As Ivanič herself points out, the arrival of the Calvinist Frederick V of the Palatinate as elected King of Bohemia in Prague in 1619 coincided with the attempt of his court preacher Abraham Scultetus to destroy the *modus vivendi* established by the Utraquists through the destruction of religious objects, starting with those in the St. Vitus Cathedral. Such iconoclasm, typical of Edwardian and Elizabethan England, was roundly condemned and rejected by the burghers of Prague. In other words, confessional politics played a more significant role than Ivanič is prepared to acknowledge in her insistence on a holistic and harmonious "cosmic" link between the material and sacred spheres. Religious politics played a crucial role in the very survival of the objects that she analyzes so carefully. The fact that so few religious artefacts have survived from medieval England confirms that history consists not only in what has survived but also in what has been obliterated by the forces of iconoclasm.

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Environmental Cultures in Soviet East Europe: Literature, History and Memory.

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The central challenge of environmental history has always been that our sources are inevitably composed by humans: embedded in culture and communicated in our languages. We do not have access to an unmediated nature, and cannot access its perspective directly. The obvious response has been to turn to scientific findings, but these (despite their rigor and robustness) are also of course the products of human interpretation, remaining mutable and fallible. A tremendous amount of creativity has gone into devising strategies to let nature speak, and the excitement of this field lies in negotiating the mismatch and developing new approaches.

In *Environmental Cultures in Soviet East Europe*, literary scholar Anna Barcz of the Polish Academy of Sciences suggests that we lean into the problem of human mediation with the hope of coming out the other side. The book is composed of five parts, each containing three to four relatively short chapters. Part One, "Unknownland," offers an astute critique of the anthropocentrism of much writing in the environmental humanities, especially relating to the region of eastern Europe, particularly during the period of Soviet rule. The scholarship in this subfield that focuses on nature concentrates, for reasons of political salience and heightened drama, on the ecological catastrophes that accompanied Soviet modernization projects. According to Barcz, this overvalues the agency of humans (especially the state) and minimizes that of nature. But how does one get at nature's perspective?

She proposes that we draw on a resource that is especially abundant across the region: the literary imagination. Beginning with collectivization, she strives to put history in dialogue with close readings of literary works: fiction, memoir, and the particular genre of Svetlana Aleksievich (in Part Four, chapter 3). One advantage of this approach is that it does not treat cultural memory as an afterthought. History, she