

Hospodar, Blaise

Hungarian Catholic ex-priest, who became a Protestant Minister (Reformed Church in the US) returned to Cath. Church, then left it again. Later became an employee of the Library of Congress, Washington. (Married the daughter of Alexander Kövér-Cover, Alderman in Johnstown, Pa. and Pres. of the Hungarian Reformed Federation of America, later divorced her.)

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AN EARLY TRAVELLER IN PRAGUE. By Blaise Hospodar. (Printed by C. William Gray, Washington, D.C. 13 pages.)

The author of this privately issued booklet is a Czech-American student of mediaeval history who translated an old oriental text into English and supplied it with an introduction and some comments. The text itself is a fragment of the diary of Ibrahim ibn Ya'kub who visited Prague in A.D. 965 as an envoy of the Caliph of Cordova. It is difficult to discover who he was except that he was a person of distinction. Ibrahim spent about six months in Prague and in his description of Bohemia calls this country "the best among all the countries of the north." The text contains some interesting information about the life of Prague in the tenth century, such as the one that it was built "of stone and lime" and that trade, commerce and agriculture were highly developed in the country. Ibrahim mentions weaving, lace, saddle and shield making and other trades as being popular. He also writes about "light and small kerchiefs of very delicate weaving" which, according to him, the tenth-century Czechs used as money. Describing the appearance of the people he remarks: "It is worth noting that the people of Bohemia are brunette and have dark hair," and notes the fact that there was a wooden bridge leading to Prague. He calls Prague "the richest among the cities that are engaged in commerce," and says that Normans and Slavs, Turks and Jews came to the city with their goods and exported from the country "flour, zinc and various furs."

All this is quite interesting and it is a pity that Blaise Hospodar did not attempt to translate more of Ibrahim's text. In his comments on it he uses this old text as a proof that Czechs of the tenth century were

free of German influence, and goes to special pains in insisting that Ibrahim did not mention any German merchants coming to the markets of Prague. His anxiety is very comprehensible in present war-time conditions when the Germans are using all means to prove the opposite and do not despise propaganda directed at falsifying Czechoslovak (and European) history. But the Allied reader, for whom this booklet was written, hardly needs such a blitz of persuasion as the one Mr. Hospodar develops. He quotes Palacký as against Hauffen and does everything in his power to show that up to the eleventh century Bohemia was purely and solely a Czech land. It was—and we know it. Still, the translation of Ibrahim's text is an interesting contribution to the study of life and conditions of mediaeval Bohemia. It is a pity that Mr. Hospodar does not state what library possesses the manuscript of Ibrahim's diary.

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