

Criminality in Early Modern Bohemia. The Case of Říčany (1667-1757)

This work is a contribution to understanding of criminality in Bohemia in early modern period, which is conceived as a part of social history by the Czech historiography of the last decades.

The main source comprises six volumes of court manuals that originated from the activities of the court for capital crimes in a serf town of Říčany u Prahy, and that cover time span of 1667-1757 and consist of 289 records of criminal trials. If we consider the structure of criminality analyzed by the established methodological schemes, the torts of property prevail unequivocally (37%), a considerable part is made up by the honour disputes (26%), and a lesser part is formed by offences against life and health (12%) and offences against morality (8%). Apart from the quantitative processing of the sources the attention is paid also to the characteristic features of the individual offences and the respective culprits in the perspective of historical anthropology.

The very functioning of the court in Říčany in relation to the patrimonial administration, which was very tight till the beginning of the 18th century is analysed, too. A boundary marker is the court reform of Josef I. in 1707 – from that time the determinant role of the court in Říčany was taken over by the court of appeal in Prague. The prevailing sentences are the imprisonment (25%) and suspended sentences (23%), on the other hand, the accomplished death penalties are marginal (8%). For the first part of the 18th century there is evidence about the expenses of the most trials. Analysis of these costs for the given period presents a first attempt of this kind: almost half of the costs were spent for the court expenses and the administration of the trial, expenses on the subsistence of the accused created only 40%, and only 10% was spent on interrogations and torture and executions.

With the respect to the fact that the issue of administration and keeping of the municipal books in the milieu of smaller serf towns in 17th and 18th century not sufficiently elaborated, the attention is paid also to the analysis of Říčany court materials from the perspective of diplomatics. Till 1718 the most part of the agenda recorded in the court manuals consists of the data of the economic-administrative character. The records of the criminal trials are prevailing only in the first book (1667-1675) and in the last two books (1719-1757).