

# **Between Defence and Resistance: Destinies of Eighteenth-Century Protestant Communities in Eastern Bohemia and Haut-Languedoc**

## **Abstract**

Based on archive research and literature the thesis compares the religious life of illegal Protestant communities in the 18th century Eastern Bohemia and Haut-Languedoc. From macroanalytical perspective it assesses the strategies of protestant minorities used to resist the disciplining efforts of the absolutist state. The confessional homogeneity, economic background and social stratification of Protestants in Eastern Bohemia and Haut-Languedoc differed. Yet, the contrasting comparison opens up the way to analyse the divergent resistance strategies. Further, the thesis examines the existence and nature of attempts to simplify the religious doctrine and to modify the liturgy undertaken by the lay and ordained priests and the worshippers.

The structure combines the thematic and chronological approach, while keeping a broad perspective that encompasses also the economic and cultural context. First three chapters outline and conceptualize the problem of prohibited Protestantism in both regions during the 17th and most of the 18th centuries. While in Languedoc the Presbyterian-synodic structure was revived (albeit illegally), in Eastern Bohemia and in whole Bohemia and Moravia Protestantism (stimulated by the Saxon Pietism) existed only at the domestic level. Following three chapters focus on the forms of religious resistance. The most prominent were the clandestine meetings of the worshippers (with or without religious services), readings of the Bible and other religious texts, and an endeavour to preserve the 'rites de passage'. These rites included religious services such as baptisms, marriages and funerals performed by the ordained priests as well as non-liturgical rituals performed by the laymen. Chapters seven and eight examine to what extent the socio-professional and geographic determinants influenced the everyday life of the Protestant communities before the legal recognition. In both Haut-Languedoc and Eastern Bohemia a specific form of 'mountain spirituality' can be recognized which stemmed from the nature of the landscape and from projecting the biblical symbols and excerpts in the everyday religious imagination of Reformed communities. The final chapter analyzes the prophetic and sectarian elements of the cult. Apart from the lack of the priests, these factors contributed significantly to a partial loss of a doctrinal purity among the worshippers. In turn, this hindered the achievement of religious toleration for the Bohemian non-Catholics.