

## Catholic Confirmation Books in Czech Dioceses in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: An Unpublished Source for the Study of the Sacrament of Confirmation

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### ABSTRACT

Catholic confirmation books from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have survived in a number of Czech dioceses. They represent a valuable but thus far largely overlooked source of information about how the Tridentine form of the rite of confirmation was established in a predominantly non-Catholic environment. The qualitative and quantitative character of the surviving confirmation books varies considerably, depending on how the Tridentine form of this sacrament was introduced in the re-Catholicized territories and whether the rite of confirmation was a means or more an outcome of the re-Catholicization process. This article outlines the initial stages of research and deals with confirmation books in the territory of five Czech dioceses. It assesses how many confirmation books from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have survived, in what state, and what information they provide, before tracing the factors that influenced how confirmation was introduced into religious practice and spread in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

**KEYWORDS:** Catholic Church, Bohemia, re-Catholicization, confirmation, confirmation books

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As a symbolic milestone marking the transition from childhood to adulthood, the rite of confirmation plays a significant role in the religious life of the faithful. The Catholic Church recognizes confirmation as a sacrament, while Protestant churches consider its counterpart an important catechetical means of religious education. The Catholic Church classifies confirmation as a rite of passage alongside baptism, marriage, and death rites.<sup>1</sup> While research on most rites of passage began to develop in Western European countries as early as the 1960s, Europeans and Czech historians have generally addressed Catholic confirmation only tangentially at best. Older scholarship on this topic mostly assumed a theological point of view.<sup>2</sup> Only recently have historians begun dealing more thoroughly with the topic of Catholic and Protestant confirmation, publishing significant studies both in Czech and other languages.<sup>3</sup> These studies highlight this rite of passage, which, although it cannot be equated with

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- 1 German differentiates between the Catholic and Protestant ceremony: In the Protestant churches, it is called *Konfirmation*, while the Catholic Church uses *Firmung*. Likewise, in Czech, the Protestants version is called *konfirmace*, while *biřmování* refers to the Catholic sacrament.
  - 2 For examples of such studies, see: FRANZ-JOSEPH DÖLGER: *Das Sakrament der Firmung historisch-dogmatisch dargestellt*, Wien 1906; LUKAS VISCHER: *Die Geschichte der Konfirmation: Ein Beitrag zur Diskussion über das Konfirmationsproblem*, Zürich 1958; MARTIN HENNIG: *Die Einführung der Konfirmation im Gebiet der Hamburgischen Landeskirche*, Hamburg 1974; CHRISTINE BURCKHARDT-SEEBASS: *Konfirmation in Stadt und Landschaft Basel*, Basel 1975; WITTICH KARNER, PETER KARNER: *Das Konfirmationsverständnis in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Wien 1989; MANFRED HAUKE: *Die Firmung: Geschichtliche Entfaltung und theologischer Sinn*, Paderborn 1999.
  - 3 More recent works: ARDJAN LOGMANS, PAUL HERMAN: *Hercules at the Crossroads: Confirmation as a Rite of Passage in the Nineteenth-Century Netherlands Reformed Church*, in: *Church History and Religious Culture* 93 (2013), 3, pp. 385–408; EMILIA HANDKE: *Religiöse Jugendfeiern “zwischen Kirche und anderer Welt”: Eine historische, systematische und empirische Studie über kirchlich (mit)verantwortete Alternativen zur Jugendweihe*, Leipzig 2016; MICHAËL GASPERONI, VINCENT GOURDON (eds.): *Le sacrement oublié: Histoire de la confirmation XVIe–XXe siècle*. For studies by Czech authors, see: PAVLA STUČLÁ: *Prachatický vikariát 1676–1750* [Vicariate of Prachatice 1676–1750], Praha 2004, pp. 194–197; BOHUMIL TETOUR: *Udílání svátosti biřmování ve Strunkovicích nad Blanicí v 18. a 19. století* [Administering the Sacrament of Confirmation in Strunkovice nad Blanicí in the 18th and 19th Centuries], in: *Zlatá stezka: Sborník Prachatického muzea* 17 (2010), pp. 143–154; STANISLAVA JÍLKOVÁ: *Udělování svátosti biřmování pražskými světicími biskupy Janem Matoušem Schweibererem a Erasmem Divišem Kriegerem v letech 1779–1792* [Administering the Sacrament of Catholic Confirmation by Prague Auxiliary Bishops Jan Matouš Schweiberer and Erasmus Diviš Krieger in the Years 1779–1792], in: *Paginae historiae* 22 (2014), 2, pp. 286–298; BENEDIKT MOHELNÍK: *Pečeť daru Ducha Svátého: Teologie svátosti biřmování* [The Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit: Theology of the Sacrament of Catholic Confirmation], Praha 2012; HANA STOKLASOVÁ: *Katolické přechodové rituály v českých zemích v “dlouhém” 19. století* [Catholic Rites of Passage in the Czech Lands in the “Long” 19th Century], Pardubice 2017, pp. 143–152; MARKÉTA SKOŘEPOVÁ: *Une histoire sociale de la confirmation en Bohême (XVIIIe–XIXe siècle)*, in: GASPERONI/GOURDON, pp. 155–171.

baptism or marriage in its significance, has historically been seen as a crucial transitional moment between childhood and adulthood.

The Christian rite of confirmation has been shaped by 2,000 years of historical development, during which its liturgical form and meaning have evolved. Confirmation, like baptism, was an initiation rite and references to its practice are found in the Bible, specifically in the New Testament.<sup>4</sup> The rite of confirmation included the laying on of hands; it was meant to symbolize the bestowal of the Holy Spirit on the faithful.<sup>5</sup> In the early church, confirmation was administered at the same time as baptism. This custom still survives in some Eastern and Oriental Christian churches.<sup>6</sup> From the fourth century onwards, the process of separating baptism and confirmation began in the West, and the power to confirm gradually passed to bishops. Throughout the Middle Ages, the authority of priests to administer confirmation was increasingly challenged by church decrees rejecting priestly confirmation not only as illicit but also as invalid.<sup>7</sup> Many dioceses repeatedly prohibited priests from administering the sacrament of confirmation.<sup>8</sup>

In the Middle Ages, the prevailing view was that confirmation should be administered at an age when children could already understand its importance. The Roman Ritual (*Rituale Romanum*) published after the Council of Trent (1614) set the age for confirmation at eight to twelve years. The confirmand was supposed to know the basic postulates of the Christian faith and receive instruction in the sacraments, especially confirmation. Furthermore, candidates were to receive the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist before confirmation.<sup>9</sup>

During the crisis of the medieval church that culminated during the fourteenth century doubts were raised about the sacramental nature of confirmation since its administration was not necessary for salvation. Even before this, medieval heretics like the Albigensians had questioned confirmation, and John Wycliffe also expressed doubts about its sacramental character, although he did not reject it entirely.<sup>10</sup> Eventually, the Reformation brought an unequivocal re-

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4 *Confirmatio* as the name of the sacrament probably became established in the seventh century. It was consistently used already in the twelfth century, for example, by Peter Lombard. See: *biřmování* (confirmatio), in: *Český slovník bohovědný*. Vol. 2: *Bas-cath – církevní rok*, Praha 1916, pp. 253–259, here pp. 255–256; ADOLF ADAM: *Liturgika: Křesťanská bohoslužba a její vývoj* [Liturgy: Christian Worship and Its Development], Praha 2001, p. 253.

5 E.g. John 20:19, 20:22–23; Acts 2:4.

6 DÖLGER, pp. 123, 150–151.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 130.

8 E.g., in the diocese of Würzburg, in the mid-fourteenth century, priests were allowed to administer the sacrament of confirmation if death was thought to be imminent (*in articulo mortis*). *Ibid.*, pp. 129–130.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 152–153; *biřmování* (confirmatio), pp. 255–256; ADAM, pp. 175–177.

10 Wycliffe spoke of confirmation in such a way that it should be seen only in a broader sense (“oportet nos sic laxè loqui de sacramento”). *biřmování* (confirmatio), p. 254.

jection of the sacrament of confirmation; Martin Luther initially recognized its sacramental nature, but ultimately rejected it. While the Protestant liturgy retained the laying on of hands within the rite of Protestant confirmation, its conception changed. It was administered by local pastors instead of the bishop, and its catechetical character was emphasized. Young Protestants, having received instruction, made a personal profession of faith as part of the Protestant confirmation ritual; only then were they admitted to receive the Eucharist.<sup>11</sup> Like Luther, Calvinists and Anglicans rejected the sacramental nature of confirmation.<sup>12</sup> As a result, confirmation took on a primarily catechetical significance in the Reformation churches.<sup>13</sup>

Critics of the church in Bohemia reflected on the debate and the sacramental nature of confirmation but were not radical on the issue at first. Jan Hus was not against confirmation. In his treatise, *Jádro učení křesťanského* (The Core of Christian Doctrine), he listed it among the seven sacraments, second only to baptism.<sup>14</sup> The theologians of the Unity of the Brethren took a similar position on confirmation even though the spiritual father of the Unity of the Brethren, Petr Chelčický, refused to recognize confirmation as a sacrament instituted by

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- 11 Martin Luther rejected confirmation in his text *Von der babylonischen Gefangenschaft der Kirche* (1520). According to him, confirmation did not bring salvation, he understood it as a consecration based on prayer and personal subjective faith. MOHELNÍK, pp. 140–141. In the years that followed, Luther's writings continued to reflect an uncompromising stance on confirmation. "In particular, avoid that monkey business, confirmation, which is really a fanciful deception. I would permit confirmation as long as it is understood that God knows nothing of it, and has said nothing about it, and that what the bishops claim for it is untrue. They mock our God when they say that it is one of God's sacraments, for it is a purely human contrivance." MARTIN LUTHER: The Estate of Marriage, in: JAROSLAV JAN PELIKAN, HILTON C. OSWALD et al. (eds.): *Luther's Works: The Christian in Society II*, Philadelphia 1999, pp. 11–49, here pp. 24–25. I am grateful to Ellen Yutzy Glebe for bringing this quotation from Luther's work to my attention.
  - 12 bířmování (confirmatio), p. 254. Calvin argued that the laying on of hands practiced by the apostles was a limited practice only at their time. He promoted the rite of laying on of hands but saw it as a form of prayer concluding the catechetical teaching of children. Anglicans acknowledged the previous theological tradition associated with confirmation; its remnants could be recognized in the Anglican confirmation rite (e.g., the rite was administered by a bishop). However, the rite and its theological meaning was shaped primarily by Protestant influences. MOHELNÍK, pp. 142–143.
  - 13 Recent research suggests that Catholic confirmation was, to some extent, influenced by the emergence of Protestant confirmation, itself shaped by Anabaptist liturgy. Cf.: AMY NELSON BURNETT: *Martin Bucer and the Anabaptist Context of Evangelical Confirmation*, in: *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 68 (1994), pp. 95–122; ELLEN MARIE YUTZY GLEBE: *Anabaptists in Their Hearts? Religious Dissidence and the Reformation in the Landgraviate of Hesse*, PhD Diss., University of California, Berkeley 2008.
  - 14 JAN HUS: *Výbor z drobných českých spisů, české listy* [Selection of Czech Writings, Czech Letters], in: *Vokabulář webový*, p. 227r, <https://vokabular.ujc.cas.cz/moduly/edicni/edice/9cf43610-e9cf-400f-9e9a-b36db9bae362/plny-text/s-apatrem/folio/226v> (2023-01-30).

Christ.<sup>15</sup> His followers nevertheless favored the teaching of Jan Rokycana, who retained confirmation among the seven sacraments. In the same vein, in the early sixteenth century, the theologian Lukáš Pražský of the Brethren wrote about confirmation in detail in his works *Zprávy kněžské* (Priestly Reports) and *Katechismus bratrský* (The Catechism of the Brethren).<sup>16</sup> In the mid-sixteenth century, however, presumably as a result of Lutheran influence, the Unity of Brethren did limit the number of accepted sacraments to only two, baptism and the Eucharist.<sup>17</sup>

Confirmation was likely not practiced in the Calixtines' milieu at all in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, because the archiepiscopal see of Prague was not occupied between 1421 and 1561, and there was thus no archbishop who could confirm. It is not yet clear from existing research whether the powers concerning confirmation were transferred, for example, to the administrators elected from the members of the St. Vitus chapter to oversee the Prague archdiocese during the vacancy.

In Catholic settings in the sixteenth century, on the other hand, confirmation was probably practiced, albeit only to a limited extent and very irregularly. As Nicolas Richard points out, this is evidenced by the text of the Prague Synod from 1605, which states that the archbishop of Prague or his auxiliary bishops dispensed confirmation for three days at Pentecost and at other times.<sup>18</sup>

## Catholic Confirmation and the Council of Trent

At its seventh session in 1547, the Council of Trent responded to doubts about the sacramental nature of confirmation as part of addressing the sacraments more generally. Based on the resolutions of the church councils and church tradition up to the twelfth century, the council affirmed confirmation's status as a sacrament. The council defined confirmation in three short canons that mention the sacramental nature of confirmation and the substance of chrism and name the bishop as the provider of the sacrament.<sup>19</sup>

15 TABITA LANDOVÁ: *Liturgie Jednoty bratrské (1457–1620)* [Liturgy of Bohemian Brethren (1457–1620)], Červený Kostelec 2014, pp. 185–186.

16 PRAŽSKÝ LUKÁŠ: *Katechismus bratrský dvoji, první tak zvané Otázky dětské* [The Catechism of Bohemian Brethren Twofold, the First So-Called Questions of the Children], <https://aleph.nkp.cz/eod/stt/1002291024-004/108/> (2023-01-30).

17 LANDOVÁ, p. 80.

18 NICOLAS RICHARD: *La confirmation en Bohême à l'époque moderne*, in: GASPERONI/GOURDON, pp. 53–68, here p. 54. The Latin text of the Prague Synod reads: "Atque ut ad huiusmodi Sacramentum promptiores se reddant, eius excellentiam, et virtutem, ex Catechismi Romani doctrina, atque monitiones nostras hoc decreto comprehensas, tribus diebus Pentecostes, et alio etiam tempore, quo illud per nos, seu per Suffraganeum nostrum ministraturi erimus, fidelibus exponant."

19 HUBERT JEDIN: *Kleine Konziliengeschichte: Die zwanzig ökumenischen Konzilien im Rahmen der Kirchengeschichte*, Freiburg 1959, p. 93; IGNÁC ANTONÍN HRDINA, DOMINIK DUKA (eds.): *Dokumenty tridentského koncilu: Latinský text a překlad do*

Provincial and diocesan synods were to implement the council's resolutions as quickly as possible, but the post-Tridentine period also witnessed increasing pressure to control synodal decisions. The council's resolutions recommended that provincial councils be convened every three years. Still, fears of separatist tendencies eventually contributed to the establishment of the Sacred Congregation of the Council (*Sacra Congregatio pro executione decretorum concilii Tridentini*), which reserved the right to control and approve all synodal resolutions, thus reinforcing centralizing tendencies.<sup>20</sup> During the second half of the sixteenth century, provincial and diocesan councils were held in most Catholic countries, and the council resolution was gradually put into practice.

During the pontificate of Pope Pius V (1566–1572), documents were issued which put into practice the decrees of the Council of Trent. In 1566 the Roman Catechism (*Catechismus Romanus*) was published and in 1568 the Roman Breviary (*Breviarium Romanum*). The Bull *Quo primum tempore*, published in 1570, codified the new Roman Missal (*Missale Romanum*), which established a fixed form of the Mass. It was not until the end of the sixteenth century that the Roman Pontifical (*Pontificale Romanum*, 1596), a liturgical manual for rites celebrated by bishops, was published. And in 1614, fifty years after the council, the Roman Ritual (*Rituale Romanum*) followed. Unlike the missal and breviary, however, the *Rituale Romanum* was not binding and did not exclude local variations of the sacraments. In the following period, therefore, the pre-Tridentine ritual agendas continued to be used, but modified to conform to the Roman Rite.

In pre-White Mountain Bohemia and Moravia, putting the Tridentine reform into practice was associated with difficulties. Although the decrees of the Council of Trent were already evident in Catholic environments in Bohemia and Moravia by the second half of the sixteenth century, their impact was limited by the fact that more than 70 percent of the population was non-Catholic. Research by Tomáš Parma shows that the first attempt to introduce the Tridentine liturgy occurred in Moravia in the Olomouc diocese, where Vilém Prusinovský of Víckov (who served as bishop of the diocese from 1565 to 1572) convened a synod in 1568 to discuss the conciliar reform of the liturgy. Nevertheless, both the estates of the realm and the monarch opposed these efforts, and the statutes were never printed. In fact, the synod was subsequently practically forgotten.<sup>21</sup>

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čestiny [Documents of the Council of Trent: Latin Text and Translation into Czech], Praha 2015, pp. 63–64. On the incorporation of the conclusions of the Council of Trent into the body of canon law: JIŘÍ KAŠNÝ: Tridentský koncil a kanonické právo [The Council of Trent and Canon Law], in: *Studia theologica* 10 (2008), 2, pp. 50–59; TOMÁŠ PARMA: Olomoucké diecézní synody 16. století a přijetí dekretů Tridentského koncilu [The Synods of the Diocese of Olomouc in the 16th Century and the Reception of Decrees of the Council of Trent], in: *Studia theologica* 23 (2021), 4, pp. 51–72, here pp. 52–56.

20 Ibid., pp. 53–55.

21 Ibid., pp. 56–57.

Synods did eventually convene that more successfully incorporated the Tridentine reform into practice. In Moravia, this took place in 1591 at the behest of Bishop Stanislav Pavlovský, while in Bohemia, the archbishop of Prague, Zbyněk Berka of Dubá, called for a synod to be convened in 1605. The course of these synods was inspired by the synods organized in Milan under the leadership of Charles Borromeo. The statutes of the Olomouc and Prague synods were also issued according to the model of the Milan provincial synod.<sup>22</sup>

### Efforts to Promote Confirmation in the Bohemian Lands

The religious situation in the Bohemian lands in the early modern period was unique: A third of the population adhered to Utraquism and therefore most likely did not practice confirmation. The sources do not provide adequate information to estimate with certainty how widespread confirmation was among the Catholic minority. The re-Catholicization initiated by the Habsburgs in the post-White Mountain period gained momentum in the mid-seventeenth century after the end of the Thirty Years' War and included the concept of a new Tridentine liturgy, but consolidating the broken Catholic administration took more than half a century. The parish structures were hampered in general by a lack both of clergy and of discipline, and there were more particular difficulties in individual bishoprics depending on the attitude of the secular authorities, whether the estates of the realm or monarch.<sup>23</sup> Suffice it to say here that pastoral care of the population was problematic. During the second half of the seventeenth century, there were still areas where the population had been re-Catholicized only with difficulty or not at all. The administration of confirmation was also complicated because its providers were bishops. The re-Catholicization process was accompanied by the establishment of two new dioceses (Litoměřice and Hradec Králové), whose consolidation and material security took time, thus contributing to the neglect of confirmation.

As mentioned above, the reform of the liturgy initiated by the Council of Trent was outlined in the *Rituale Romanum* of 1614. However, the text of the ritual was not binding, and the reception of the Tridentine liturgy was usually encouraged by adapting local ritual agendas to the Roman Rite. There were no manuals devoted to the Tridentine liturgy of the sacraments in the Bohemian

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22 Cf.: *Constitutiones et Decreta condita in Provinciali Synodo Mediolanensi, Mediolani 1566; Acta et Constitutiones Synodi Olomucensis, Olomutii 1592; Synodus Archiepiscopalis Pragensis, Pragae 1605.*

23 On the issue in detail: ELIŠKA ČÁŇOVÁ: *Vývoj správy pražské arcidiecéze v době násilné rekatolizace Čech (1620–1671)* [The Development of the Administration of the Prague Archdiocese during the Time of the Forced Re-Catholicization of Bohemia (1620–1671)], in: *Sborník archivních prací* 35 (1985), 2, pp. 486–560; EDUARD MAUR: *Problémy farní organizace pobělohorských Čech* [Problems of Parish Organization in Post-White Mountain Bohemia], in: *Traditio et cultus: Miscellanea historica Bohemica*, Praha 1993, pp. 163–176.

lands until the mid-seventeenth century; it was not until 1642 that Cardinal Archbishop Ernst Adalbert Harrach's *Rituale Pragense ad usum Romanum accommodatum* was published.<sup>24</sup>

The situation in Bohemia at the beginning of the seventeenth century was not favorable for liturgical reform. As a result of Rudolf's Letter of Majesty (*Majestätsbrief*, 1609), Catholics were on the defensive. In spite of this, Harrach, who was appointed to the archbishopric of Prague in 1623, did attempt to reform the liturgy. The defeat of the Bohemian Revolt in 1621 and the ensuing re-Catholicization radically changed the religious climate and the balance of power.

In the 1640s, Harrach attempted to introduce a new *Missale Romanum*, *Breviarium Romanum*, and directory of saints for the archdiocese of Prague.<sup>25</sup> Presumably it was because the approval process of the Sacred Congregation for Rites was very lengthy that the cardinal promulgated the proposed Prague Rite in 1645 without Roman approval. The old Prague ritual, which had been used in the Prague archdiocese since the Middle Ages, served as the basis for the reform of the ritual in the Roman spirit.<sup>26</sup> Since the *Rituale Romanum* was not binding, bishops could legitimately reform the liturgy in their own diocese without Rome's approval. Furthermore, Harrach's introduction of the new rite can be seen as a response to an urgent need, for the brevity and clarity of the text made the rite more usable in a country where the number of believers was growing rapidly as a result of re-Catholicization. Furthermore, because it had not undergone any revision by the Sacred Congregation for Rites, it presumably reflects the archbishop's ideas about the project of liturgical reform in Bohemia in its entirety.<sup>27</sup>

The distribution of the new liturgical books, Harrach's *Rituale*, took place between 1647 and 1649, and the introduction of the new Prague liturgy according to Roman custom encountered little resistance. It seems that this somewhat radical attempt at liturgical reform was carried out with such sensitivity that it led slowly but successfully to a unified liturgy within the Prague archdiocese.<sup>28</sup>

One chapter in Harrach's *Rituale* concerns the priest's duty to keep parish registers (*Formulae scribendae in libris habendis apud Parochos, ut infra notatur*). Diocesan regulations required that clergy keep five books in the parish: the book of the baptized (*Liber baptizatorum*), the book of the confirmed (*Liber confirmatorum*), the book of the married (*Liber matrimoniorum*), the book of

24 On Harrach's efforts to reassert confirmation in religious practice, see: RICHARD, La Confirmation, pp. 56–64; NICOLAS RICHARD: Entre normes romaines et réformes locales: Les tentatives de réforme de la liturgie pragoise par le cardinal Harrach (XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle), in: Italie et Méditerranée modernes et contemporaines 127 (2015), 1, <https://journals.openedition.org/mefrim/2061> (2025-05-26).

25 Proprium sanctorum s. Pragensis ecclesiae patronorum, Viennae 1643.

26 Obsequiale sive benedictionale, quod agendam appellant secundum ritum et consuetudinem s. metropolitanae Pragensis ecclesiae, Pragae 1585.

27 RICHARD, Entre normes.

28 Ibid.

the state of souls (*Liber status animarum*), and the book of the dead (*Liber defunctorum*).<sup>29</sup>

Such registers are known to have been kept in Christian communities from late antiquity. Relevant regulations are also mentioned in Christian normative sources from the early Middle Ages (*Sacramentarium Gelasianum*, *Ordo Romanus*) and in resolutions of medieval church councils (e.g., the Second Lateran Council, 1139).<sup>30</sup> The main goal was to record religious services. While the first parish registers in Western Europe appeared in some dioceses as early as the Middle Ages, their universal implementation was a very long-term task. The establishment of confirmation books was also part of this process. There are no known records of confirmands, whether in book form or simple lists, in European countries until the seventeenth century.<sup>31</sup>

In the Czech lands, the first parish registers did not appear until the first third of the sixteenth century, and confirmation books much later. Harrach's *Rituale* outlined a registration schema for documenting candidates' confirmation. Clerics in Bohemian dioceses of the mid-seventeenth century were, for the first time, given instructions on how to keep confirmation books. Regulations on the obligation to keep confirmation books also appeared in the legislation of the Prague archbishopric at this time.<sup>32</sup> Instructions for keeping confirmation books were reinforced by legislative orders of the dioceses.

Harrach's *Rituale* required parish priests to include detailed information in the confirmation books, including the year, day, and month of the entry, the date of the confirmation, the name of the confirmand and their parents (also the husband if a married woman was confirmed), the name of the confirming bishop, the church and the municipality where the ceremony took place, the name of the godparents and their fathers, and the name and the seat of the confirmand's parish. The formula also required that the names of the confirmands be entered separately by sex on separate pages in the book.<sup>33</sup> If there was uncertainty regarding the marital status of the parents of the confirmed person, the priest was obliged to verify this fact in the parish register.

Reading the regulations of the Roman Ritual, the question inevitably arises as to how they were applied in religious practice. What was the reality? When

29 *Rituale Pragense ad usum Romanum accommodatum*, Pragae 1642, p. 471.

30 EDUARD MAUR: O počátcích a vývoji církevních matrik se zvláštním zřetelem k českým poměrům [On the Origins and Development of Church Registers with Special Reference to the Czech Situation], in: *Historická demografie* 3 (1969), pp. 4–19, here p. 4; closer to the issue of registers: EDUARD MAUR: Církevní matriky jako historický pramen (se zvláštním zřetelem k historické demografii) [Church Registers as a Historical Source (with Special Reference to Historical Demography)], in: *Sborník archivních prací* 20 (1970), 2, pp. 425–457.

31 GASPERONI/GOURDON, pp. 7–32.

32 E.g., § 6 of the Prague archbishop's patent of 1745, in: Národní archiv (NA) [National Archives], Prague, Archiv pražského arcibiskupství [Archive of the Prague Archbishopric], sign. I, B 20-6, Index patentes 1662–1728, entry "Confirm."

33 *Rituale Pragense ad usum Romanum accommodatum*, Pragae 1642, pp. 473–474.

did the first confirmation books appear in Czech dioceses, and how were they kept?

### Confirmation Books in Czech Dioceses (a Survey)

While ritual manuals outline an ideal concept and practice of confirmation, it is only through archival research that the actual situation becomes clear. There are several types of sources from which information regarding the contemporary practice of confirmation can be gleaned. The most comprehensive sources are confirmation books and lists of confirmands, but these are complemented by confirmation cards, an interesting but sporadically preserved source; archival material related to the general visitations of bishops in which they administered confirmation;<sup>34</sup> and, beginning in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, diocesan circulars, which frequently refer to the liturgy of confirmation and episcopal visitations. The present study focuses on the confirmation books and lists of confirmands for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the Catholic Church attempted to reinstate the sacrament of confirmation into religious practice and to give it a liturgical form in accordance with the decrees of the Council of Trent. Aside from Pavla Stuchlá's study of eleven confirmation books for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, scholars have not utilized these sources thus far.<sup>35</sup> Stuchlá's study, published in Czech, is a valuable addition, for the extant research has otherwise dealt with confirmation only for the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, usually from a local or onomastic point of view.<sup>36</sup>

When the re-Catholicization of the Bohemian lands began, and the first confirmation books were established, the entire Czech ecclesiastical province was subordinate to the archbishopric of Prague. As part of the efforts to streamline ecclesiastical administration during the period of re-Catholicization, however, the northwestern part of Bohemia was separated from the Prague archbishopric in 1655. The new diocese, named after its seat in the town of Litoměřice, included the territory of Šluknov Spur, the southwestern territory along the border with Saxony, and extended in the south to Mělník and in the west to Bílina. In 1664, the northeastern part of Bohemia was separated and became the diocese of Hradec Králové, bounded by the Krkonoše Mountains in the north, the

34 There were two kinds of visitations within the Catholic Church in Bohemia: During the general visitation the bishop or the auxiliary bishop (both of them have the right to confirm) visited the parish personally, while during the canonical visitation the vicar inspected the parish. Confirmation was always combined with the general visitation. Kanonický [Canonical], in: Ottův slovník naučný. Vol. 13: Jana–Kartas, Praha 1898, pp. 925–928.

35 STUHLÁ, pp. 194–197.

36 JÍLKOVÁ, pp. 286–298; TETOUR, pp. 143–154; MIROSLAV KAZÍK: Birmovné mená vo farnosti Moravany nad Váhom v 2. polovici 19. storočia [Confirmation Names in the Parish of Moravany nad Váhom in the Second Half of the 19th Century], in: Acta onomastica 61 (2020), 1, pp. 102–125; SKOŘEPOVÁ, pp. 155–171.

Orlické Mountains in the east, Pardubice in the south and Nový Bydžov in the west. A substantial part of Bohemia nevertheless still fell under the administration of the archbishopric of Prague, as the two new dioceses covered only about a quarter of its former territory.<sup>37</sup> It was only at the end of the eighteenth century that the diocese of České Budějovice was established (1785) to administer over southern Bohemia and the southwestern territory along the border with Bavaria, thus partially compensating for the disproportionate distribution of territory among the individual dioceses.

Confirmation books are found in parishes, vicariates, and deaneries collections and stored in the state district archives. Conducting any detailed search of confirmation books and lists of confirmands involves a number of challenges. The archival situation is complicated in particular because many church collections have not yet been processed and are still uncataloged. Even where this has ostensibly happened, the degree and reliability of processing of church collections varies: Whereas some district archives offer individual catalogs for all their parish collections, others have only combined inventories of parish collections from the 1960s to 1980s or provisional lists. In some places, almost nothing has been processed. Even when collections have been processed and are available, they do not always contain identifiable confirmation books, for in many places, these have not survived. Especially in border areas with significant population movements after World War II, confirmation books were prone to being destroyed or concealed during the state's forced confiscation of church documents in the 1950s, when the archival administration of the communist regime was being formed. In some cases, the parishes themselves are still in possession of their own confirmation books. Under these circumstances, it is practically impossible to compile accurate information on the number and condition of the surviving confirmation books. Despite these difficulties with the quantitative analysis, however, the considerable number of confirmation books and lists that are known and available provide a wealth of valuable qualitative information on contemporary confirmation practice. In fact, the volume of sources to be examined over a relatively large geographical area means that this article can only present the partial research results of a study still in progress.

The research was limited due to inconsistent levels of digitization of archival collections in Czech archives. For most areas, collection inventories are available online, but archives in central and eastern Bohemia still need to be visited

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37 The whole of southern Bohemia, western Bohemia (except Cheb region), the area of central Bohemia and the Frýdlant Spur with the area around Liberec and Mladá Boleslav. For the area of Czech dioceses in the seventeenth century, cf.: Český historický atlas: Víra a náboženství—Církevní správa do 1918, [menu item] Církevní správa Čechy 17./18. století [Czech Historical Atlas, Faith, and Religion—Church Administration until 1918, Church Administration Bohemia 17th/18th Centuries], <https://cha.fsv.cvut.cz/mapp.php?map=5Ca> (2023-08-08).

physically, which is time-consuming. For this reason, this case study does not address records held in district archives in central Bohemia.

As outlined above, synodal resolutions and archiepiscopal decrees in the first half of the seventeenth century increasingly called for the establishment of confirmation books as part of the re-Catholicization process that introduced the Tridentine reforms into the Czech lands. The confirmation books may have served a number of purposes. On the one hand, they were undoubtedly used to record acts of worship, just like the other parish registers. They may also have been intended to prevent the unwanted repetition of a sacrament that could be administered only once in a lifetime. But was this actually enforced in practice?

The answer is provided by the catechisms that were published for the laity. They all consistently point out that confirmation is a sacrament that cannot be repeated. One of these catechisms goes even further: Its author, Jan František Beckovský, recounts the story of an old woman who, upon leaving her confirmation, declared, “Well, praise be to God, I have been confirmed for the seventh time!”<sup>38</sup> Even as far back as the nineteenth century, authors in theological journals suggested that confirmations were held at such long intervals in remote areas of Bohemian dioceses that many people there no longer remembered whether they had been confirmed or not.<sup>39</sup> It seems, therefore, that confirmation books were maintained not only to record the administration of the sacraments but also to prevent their undue repetition.

The surviving confirmation books and lists of confirmands were primarily kept in Latin, but also in the later period in German and Czech, depending on which language prevailed locally. They are most often called *Liber confirmatorum*, *Matricula confirmatorum*, *Matrica confirmatorum*, *Liber personarum confirmatorum*, *Firmungsbuch*, *Verzeichnis der gefirmten Personen*, *Buch der Gefirmten*, *Kniha biřmovanců*, *Kniha biřmovaných*, or *Seznam biřmovanců*. Once a confirmation book was established in a parish, the names of the confirmands were usually entered continuously or whenever a confirmation ceremony was held in the parish; many of them stretch up into the twentieth century. In addition to the books, lists of confirmands were kept on separate sheets. Since the names listed are usually also found in the confirmation books, it seems that these documents primarily served the clergy as auxiliary or preparatory lists before confirmation, and the names of the confirmands were then transcribed into confirmation books. In many cases, however, the priest did not transcribe the names from the list but merely inserted these lists into the confirmation book as separate sheets.

Most of the confirmation books examined in my research were begun in the nineteenth century; of those established in the eighteenth century, the majority date to the 1740s and 1750s, with only a few having begun before 1740. A

38 JAN FRANTIŠEK BECKOVSKÝ: Třetí sloup nepohybnelného základu katolického živobytí [The Third Pillar of the Immovable Foundation of Catholic Livelihood], Praha 1708, p. 365.

39 E.g.: PROKOP HOLÝ: Ku svátosti sv. biřmování [On the Sacrament of Holy Confirmation], in: Časopis katolického duchovenstva 13 (1872), 4, pp. 297–298.

certain turning point can be seen around 1760, when parishes began conducting mass confirmations and the establishment of confirmation books gained momentum. Only two confirmation books stem from the seventeenth century; they are both from eastern Bohemia and dating from the 1690s. These are currently the two oldest confirmation books in Bohemia.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, confirmations were performed mainly in the bishops' towns of residence. Therefore, it can be assumed that lists and books recording confirmands may also be found in the episcopal archives. Nicolas Richard states that Archbishop Harrach kept records of confirmations in his diary as early as the 1630s, including dates, places of confirmation, and numbers of confirmands.<sup>40</sup> This is undoubtedly one of the first records relating to confirmations during the re-Catholicization. According to Stanislava Jílková, the archives of the archbishopric of Prague contain the books of the functions of ordaining bishops (*Liber functionum*) from the middle of the eighteenth century; these include records related to confirmations and visitations.<sup>41</sup> The oldest confirmation book as such is the book of the confirmed (*Kniha biřmovaných*) kept by the auxiliary bishop Antonín Vokoun from 1749 to 1754.<sup>42</sup>

Even before it became common practice to hold mass confirmations in parishes during visitations, individuals from different areas of the Bohemian lands were confirmed in the bishops' towns of residence or at their summer residences or estates, as evidenced by entries in confirmation books established in the first half of the eighteenth century. These books sometimes contain parishioners who were confirmed even before the first mass confirmation in the parish took place. For example, the parish priest Jan Nepomuk Schupp from the parish of Nová Ves v Horách, located on the border with Saxony, kept a book of confirmands after the first mass confirmation in 1773. He noted therein, however, that he had inquired of the parishioners after he arrived in the parish about those who had already previously received the sacrament of confirmation. He listed these parishioners in the first pages of the book. They had most often been confirmed in Prague or in Eisenberg in Thuringia.<sup>43</sup> There is evidence of a similar approach in other parishes, as well. Nearly all the books begun before the mid-eighteenth century examined thus far recorded confirmations that had taken place outside the parish before the first mass confirmation. When these records mention the place where they received this sacrament,

40 RICHARD, *La Confirmation*, p. 57.

41 JÍLKOVÁ, p. 286.

42 *Kniha biřmovaných světicím biskupem Antonínem Vokounem 1749–1754* [Book of Confirmation by Auxiliary Bishop Antonín Vokoun 1749–1754], in: NA, Archiv pražského arcibiskupství, sign. B 10/5.

43 The book is signed by Jan Nepomuk Schupp Cadanensis. The original of his inscription in Latin: "In ingressu ad beneficium indagavi in confirmatos et reperi ex parochianis sequentes, qui sacramentum confirmationis susceperunt." *Kniha biřmovanců, 1774–1933* [Confirmation Book 1774–1933], in: Státní okresní archiv Most (SOkA Most) [State District Archives Most], Farní úřad Nová Ves v Horách 1747–1946 [Parish Office Nová Ves v Horách 1747–1946], no. 1, not pag.

it is most often the bishop's residence, usually Prague, and in the case of border regions, Vienna, Passau, or Wrocław. Future research on confirmation might benefit from examining the bishops' archives, especially the diocesan archives of Hradec Králové and Litoměřice, which might be of particular interest because these dioceses were established to foster the re-Catholicization of areas with a majority of non-Catholics.

As mentioned, many confirmation books commence in the second half of the eighteenth century. It was probably at this time that the legislation concerning confirmation intensified because; Stuchlá points out that the vicariate of Prachatice was ordered to keep a register of confirmands in 1745, and this obligation was extended to parish offices in 1746. A regulation concerning confirmation at general visitations was issued in 1761.<sup>44</sup> This would explain why the first confirmation books appeared in many Bohemian parishes before the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>45</sup> The second wave of the establishment of confirmation books came in the 1760s and 1770s, when confirmation began to be administered *en masse* at general visitations. Whereas up to this time, in the vast majority of cases, the faithful had gone to the bishops' residence towns (or their summer residences) for confirmation, now the practice was reversed, and bishops began visiting the faithful and confirming large groups at general visitations in parishes. It thus seems that the very concept of confirmation underwent a fundamental change in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

Many of the confirmation books examined here associate the first mass confirmation in the parish with the name of Bishop Jan Ondřej Kaiser of Kaisern (1716–1776),<sup>46</sup> who served as the auxiliary bishop of the Prague archdiocese from 1760 to 1775 and would thus have been responsible for dispensing confirmation. Rather incredibly, his name appears in most confirmation books established before 1775. Jan Ondřej Kaiser came from a simple rural background, which was perhaps one of the reasons why he turned his attention to intensive pastoral work. The entries in the confirmation books prove that this hard-working clergyman contributed significantly to the spread of confirmation in Bohemia in the second half of the eighteenth century.

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44 STUHLÁ, p. 195.

45 Confirmation books founded during this period appear in the collections of parish offices in the state district archives of Prachatice, Český Krumlov, Tachov, Sokolov, Louny, and Most.

46 Jan Ondřej Kaiser of Kaisern came from humble circumstances from the countryside, studied philosophy and theology, and was ordained in 1739. He worked as a parish priest in Klecany, dean in Frýdlant, canon of the Metropolitan Chapter of St. Vitus in Prague, and vicar general of the Prague archdiocese. In 1760, he was appointed an auxiliary bishop of the Prague archdiocese, and from 1775 to 1776, he was a resident bishop in Hradec Králové. ERWIN GATZ, STEPHAN JANKER (eds.): *Die Bischöfe des Heiligen Römischen Reiches 1648 bis 1803: Ein biographisches Lexikon*, Berlin 1990, pp. 214–215.

Table 1

| State regional archives (SOA)           | State district archives under the regional archives (SOkA)                                                                                  | The oldest confirmation books (up to the 1740s)                                                                                  | Number of confirmation books from the 17th and 18th centuries |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Třeboň (southern Bohemia)</b>        | České Budějovice, Český Krumlov, Jindřichův Hradec, Písek, Prachatice, Strakonice, Tábor                                                    | 1723 (PO Čimelice) <sup>47</sup><br>1724 (DO Vodňany) <sup>48</sup><br>1725 (PO Ledenice)<br>1733 (PO Hroby)<br>1735 (PO Svěráz) | 74                                                            |
| <b>Plzeň (western Bohemia)</b>          | Domažlice in Horšovský Týn, Cheb, Karlovy Vary, Klatovy, Plzeň in Blovice, Plzeň-North in Plasy, Rokycany, Sokolov in Jindřichovice, Tachov | no extant books                                                                                                                  | 23                                                            |
| <b>Litoměřice (northern Bohemia)</b>    | Česká Lípa, Děčín, Chomutov in Kadaň, Jablonec nad Nisou, Liberec, Litoměřice in Lovosice, Louny, Most, Semily, Teplice                     | no extant books                                                                                                                  | 21                                                            |
| <b>Hradec Králové (eastern Bohemia)</b> | Hradec Králové, Chrudim, Jičín, Náchod, Pardubice, Rychnov nad Kněžnou, Svitavy in Litomyšl, Trutnov, Ústí nad Orlicí                       | 1691 (DO Polička)<br>1694 (PO Bystré)                                                                                            | 34                                                            |

Tab. 1 Number of Confirmation Books. Information on the state regional archives in Třeboň, Plzeň, and Litoměřice was obtained from their databases. The number of confirmation books stored in the state regional archive in Hradec Králové was tabulated during personal visits to the archives. Based on this information, a set of the oldest confirmation books was created and analyzed. Their inventory is given in the list of unpublished sources (pp. 370–371)

The number of confirmation books mapped so far is shown in the table above. For clarity, the table is divided according to the regional and district archives that belong to each state archive and in whose collections the confirmation books are stored. The third column of the table shows the oldest surviving confirmation books (up to the 1740s), with the district archive and

<sup>47</sup> The abbreviation PO denotes a parish office.

<sup>48</sup> The abbreviation DO denotes a dean's office (a higher administrative unit uniting several parishes).

the parish collection in which they are kept in brackets. The fourth column gives the number of confirmation books traced for the eighteenth century. All district archives that fall under the four Czech state regional archives (in Třeboň, Plzeň, Litoměřice, and Hradec Králové) were examined. The regional archive whose district archives have not yet been surveyed is the one in Praha, which is not listed in the table. A survey of its collections is expected to yield additional information on confirmation practice since the parishes located in central Bohemia were closest to the seat of the archbishop, and one might reasonably hypothesize that this corresponded with a higher number of confirmands and a more frequent appearance of confirmation books. It is worth reminding that research is limited because some regional archives have not yet inventoried all the parish collections deposited there. For this reason, this overview is, unfortunately, rather indicative.

Table 1 shows that the number of extant confirmation books for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is highest in southern Bohemia (SOA Třeboň) and that some of these books were created in the first third of the eighteenth century. Southern Bohemia was ecclesiastically subordinated to the archbishopric of Prague. Most of this territory belonged to the noble family of Schwarzenberg, who owned a number of large and small estates. As adherents to a traditional Catholic hierarchy, the Schwarzenbergs were concerned with the strict administration of the religious affairs of their subjects. All the southern Bohemian confirmation books that date back into the first half of the eighteenth century—meaning that they are among the oldest confirmation books for all of Bohemia—originated in parishes located on the Schwarzenberg estates. The outskirts of the Schwarzenberg dominion were lined with territories belonging to the archbishop of Prague, who often spent the summer there.<sup>49</sup> The parishioners recorded in the oldest southern Bohemian confirmation books often received confirmation from the archbishop at these summer residences. Furthermore, the archbishops of Prague were also frequent guests of the Schwarzenbergs and conferred the sacrament of confirmation in their parish churches during these visits.

The oldest Czech confirmation books are not, however, from southern but rather from eastern Bohemia (SOA Hradec Králové). While the appearance of a more significant number of confirmation books in southern Bohemia can be attributed to the stability of the church administration on the Schwarzenberg estates, an explanation in the case of eastern Bohemia is more elusive. The parish districts of Polička and Bystré, where the oldest confirmation books are found, were adjacent to each other and were under the administration of the Prague archbishopric, but they were not governed by the same manorial lords; in the late seventeenth century, Polička was a dower town under the royal chamber, while Bystré belonged to the Liechtensteins (namely Hans-Adam I of Liechtenstein). Both estates bordered the Olomouc diocese, and according to a census tallying subjects by faith taken in 1651, they were inhabited exclu-

49 E.g., Červená Řečice, Pelhřimov, Vyskytná, and Týn nad Vltavou.

sively by Catholics. In their immediate vicinity, however, especially to the south, there were areas belonging to the Olomouc diocese with a sizable non-Catholic population.<sup>50</sup> As evident from the census of residents by religion (and from the marriage registers), the Catholic and non-Catholic populations were coexisting here, and the parishes of Bystré and Polička played an active role in the re-Catholicization process, which included the propagation of the sacrament of confirmation. The fact that these manors were in the hands of strictly Catholic lords may have contributed to this.

A survey of the confirmation books from western and northern Bohemia (SOA Plzeň, SOA Litoměřice) reveals no volume begun before 1740. For several reasons, the total number of confirmation books here is meager compared to southern Bohemia. The main factors were the complex consolidation of the church administration in the post-White Mountain period and the slow progress of re-Catholicization (especially in the border areas with Protestant Prussia and Saxony). In the twentieth century, many confirmation books were destroyed during the forced displacement of the German population in 1945 and the confiscation of church documents by the communists in the following period. The uncertainty about the number of surviving confirmation books is also due to the inadequate processing of archival collections.

In many parishes in northern and western Bohemia, the books of confirmands only began to appear during the 1740s, when the church authorities ordered their keeping. Furthermore, in areas governed by the Catholic authorities who felt responsible for the religious education of their subjects, these lords also supported this process. The research so far shows that the influence of the upper class on the establishment of confirmation books is not negligible, as many confirmation books established in the mid-eighteenth century are found in the vicinity of towns belonging to the royal chamber (e.g., Louny, Most) or on estates where the Catholic upper class was especially zealous (e.g., Jičín).

## The Form of Confirmation Books

The precise form of the confirmands' entries in confirmation books varies depending on how closely the clergy followed the regulations of the Prague Rite issued by Archbishop Harrach. In all the books analyzed, the entries differ from the set instructions. Usually, only the essential details were noted: the date and place of confirmation, the name of the confirming bishop, the name of the confirmand, the chosen confirmation name, and the place of residence, sometimes even with the house number. Although the thoroughness of the registration of parishioners depended to some extent on the diligence of the clergyman, it is clear that the form of the entries fell far short of the ideal set by the church. The

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50 These included the municipalities of Jimramov, Veselí, Rovečné, Prosetín, and Vanovice. The first evangelical congregations were established in these areas after the promulgation of the toleration patent (1781), and secret non-Catholics survived there for almost two hundred years.

entries often vary, but general tendencies are evident: The very early entries in all the books appear in the form of columns or boxes, and the names of the confirmands and their chosen confirmation names are rarely missing. Although the instructions clearly required recording the godparents' names, these are often completely missing in the registers. The regulations dictated that godparents must also have been confirmed, but finding a confirmed godparent in post-White Mountain Bohemia was quite difficult, especially in the countryside. As a result, the records often contain the names of just a few individuals who served all the confirmands. These were frequently manorial officials or village leaders who had received confirmation at the bishop's residence. Over time, however, the situation gradually improved, and the number and variety of godparents increased by the nineteenth century.

This initial survey suggests that these confirmation books contain a great deal of data, the analysis and comparison of which could provide interesting information about contemporary confirmation practice. In combination with other sources, it would then be possible to map the role of bishops in the propagation of this sacrament and the process of preparing confirmands. Given the large number of surviving confirmation books and the variable quality of information they provide, such a study must first face the critical task of selecting a sufficient representative sample of sources.

## Conclusion

The confirmation books preserved in the Czech dioceses have been a completely neglected ecclesiastical source, even though they provide a lot of valuable information about the process of re-Catholicization in Bohemia as well as about the incorporation of the decrees of the Council of Trent into church practice. Until the beginning of the seventeenth century, only a few Bohemian sources mention the form and process of the rite of confirmation. The extant writings of Jan Hus or Lukáš Pražský suggest that neither the Calixtines nor the Bohemian Brethren rejected confirmation. Confirmation as a sacrament was, however, not considered necessary for salvation, and, although the Utraquists did not reject it in their theological writings, it is very likely that the religious and political situation precluded the practice during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. With the advent of re-Catholicization, confirmation gained a firm place among the sacraments. Still, it took a long time before it became a normal part of the life of parish communities in Bohemia.

The confirmation books surveyed here from throughout Bohemia show an uneven level of preservation. The beginnings and course of the introduction of confirmation are evidenced by the establishment of confirmation books, which began to appear in Czech dioceses very sporadically from the end of the seventeenth century.

Only bishops could administer the sacrament of confirmation, and the faithful initially came for this sacrament to the bishops' towns of residence and

episcopal manors. In the mid-eighteenth century, however, a change took place, and bishops began to administer the sacrament of confirmation as they traveled from parish to parish during general visitations, which included both parish inspections and confirmations. This change is mainly associated with Jan Ondřej Kaiser of Kaisern, who was the auxiliary bishop of Prague from 1760 to 1775. During his tenure in this office, he provided confirmation to thousands of believers in the parishes he visited. Parish archives preserve confirmation books documenting this rite's provision to the faithful.

Many different factors influenced the appearance and frequency of confirmation books, but probably the most important was church legislation, which encouraged both the establishment of books and also the spread of the sacrament of confirmation. Another important variable, however, was the support of the manorial lords. In the Czech context, the nobility's influence is clearly evident, especially in southern Bohemia on the Schwarzenberg estate. Traditionally, the Catholic nobility strongly supported the introduction of the rite of confirmation, and this is probably the reason confirmation books from this area are most numerous. Although these new regulations were a crucial factor driving the creation of confirmation books, they nearly always deviated from prescribed form, as has been shown. The entries usually contain only a few basic details and are kept differently.

The present paper has aimed merely to map the current state of research and outline possibilities for further research. A thorough analysis of confirmation books might provide answers to several key questions about how individuals prepared to receive this sacrament, how often individual parishes generally celebrated confirmation, how old the confirmands were, and what influenced their choice of confirmation names. In this respect, the biggest drawback is that many books do not record the names of the confirmation godparents and the ages of the confirmands, as this information would undoubtedly shed light on some hitherto unexplored aspects of the confirmation rite. However, future research should provide answers to the most important questions, i.e., whether this sacrament represented a symbolic transition between childhood and adulthood, and finally whether confirmation gradually became a fixed part of religious practice and a specific disciplinary element in the process of re-Catholicization.

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