

WHAT EARLY MODERN BOHEMIAN BOURGEOIS
LIBRARIES EXPLAIN ABOUT BOHEMIAN AND
EUROPEAN CONFESSIONAL TRADITIONS

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This study deals with the “consumption” of religious (in the broadest possible sense) literature during the period of confessional division and under pressure from re-Catholicization, and makes use of research work devoted to the history of printing, the book market, and bourgeois reading habits developing in urban Bohemian communities in the 16th and 17th centuries. It focuses on Prague and subordinated towns and is based predominantly on systematic analysis of comprehensive collections of estate inventories and testaments by citizens of Prague and Louny (Laun). In contrast to what Czech literary studies and ecclesiastical history have maintained until now, from about 1520 onwards reading consumption in those towns and cities was characterised by a massive influx of German reformatory literature, whereas interest in the locally established tradition waned. Works of local origin were supplanted in bourgeois libraries by new, reformatory titles which found their readership throughout Central Europe. This process had its fluctuations which were caused by overall economic developments and, more specifically, the evolution of the book market and

also by the ebb and flow of the process of reformation and counter-reformation in Europe. As a rule, works belonging to the more traditional Czech religious environment did not survive in the second half of the 16th and throughout the 17th century unless they had been altered and adapted in the course of a new wave of reformation and in this new guise “reimported” to Bohemia.