

The Beguines of Medieval Świdnica: The Interrogation of the “Daughters of Odelindis” in 1332. By Tomasz Gałuszka and Paweł Kras. Translated by Stephen C. Rowell. Heresy and Inquisition in the Middle Ages 11. York: York Medieval Press, 2023. xvi + 298 pp. \$125.00 cloth.

The status of beguines, pious women who lived communally and generally supported themselves through their own labor, perplexed medieval authorities, both secular and religious. Many admired these women’s spirituality and their material productivity, while others worried about their independence and unregulated lifestyle. Many beguine communities placed themselves under clerical guidance, especially that of the mendicant orders, but even these tended to preserve a large degree of autonomy. Despite attracting some suspicion, this form of female religiosity proved extremely popular. The first communities appeared in the Low Countries in the twelfth century and then quickly spread across much of northern Europe. In the great city of Cologne, for example, there were over 150 beguine houses and close to 1,200 beguines by the mid-thirteenth century.

As the volume under review notes, the women who lived in such communities were widely regarded as a “model of doctrinal orthodoxy and obedience” throughout the first half of the thirteenth century (27). Thereafter, however, attitudes began to harden, and by the early fourteenth century suspicion became codified. Two decrees first developed by the Council of Vienne (1311–1312) and subsequently promulgated by Pope John XXII (1316–1334) came to target beguines. *Ad nostrum*, which originally addressed only the male counterparts to beguines, known as beghards, eventually applied to women as well and branded them as practicing the antinomian heresy of the Free Spirit. *Cum de quibusdam mulieribus* addressed beguines directly, forbidding their lifestyle, although then, through the insertion of an “escape clause,” allowing and indeed encouraging women who were deemed to live in an appropriate manner to continue in their chosen lifestyle.

Gałuszka and Kras’s excellent study concerns the investigation of a community of women who were never explicitly called beguines but who obviously fit the model in the Silesian city of Świdnica, southwest of Wrocław, in the crucial period after the Vienne decrees had begun to circulate. Members of the community were interrogated by a Dominican inquisitor, John of Schwenkenfeld, who was deeply informed by *Ad nostrum* and sought to link the women to the heresy of the Free Spirit. An original notarial copy of the interrogation has been preserved in a manuscript in the Vatican Library, but it was not known to scholarship until the 1950s, and it was only used extensively for the first time by Robert E. Lerner in his foundational study *The Heresy of the Free Spirit* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972). Meanwhile, a later fifteenth-century copy of the trial record had been preserved in the Kraków cathedral archive. An edition of that manuscript was published in the 1880s, but then the manuscript itself went missing and was only rediscovered in 2016. Thus this study, originally published in Polish in 2017, was the first to be able to compare the two known manuscript records of the Świdnica inquisition.

Gałuszka and Kras agree with Lerner’s earlier conclusion that the elements of Free Spirit heresy in the trial record are untrustworthy, a result of inquisitorial pressure. They note an interesting generational divide among the beguines themselves, however,

with older members of the community clearly showing pride in their strict ascetic practices – a pride which could have been interpreted by a suspicious inquisitor as antinomian arrogance. A younger generation of sisters, including some who had left the community, appear to have resented the strict practices of their seniors. Gałuszka and Kras argue that this resentment could have been the basis for the allegations of sexual libertinism that some of the younger sisters lodged against the community as a whole, perhaps after being pushed in that direction by the inquisitor's leading questions. The result is a valuable study of how inquisitorial imperatives could mesh with preexisting tensions in a local context.

Another important conclusion that emerges from this study draws on the work of Letha Böhringer, focusing on Cologne, and reveals potentially much broader connections. As noted, the members of the Świdnica community were never referred to as “beguines.” They called themselves “sisters,” “hooded sisters,” or sometimes, obscurely, “daughters of Odelindis.” Gałuszka and Kras wanted to know who Odelindis may have been, so Kras contacted Böhringer, who had developed an extensive database of beguines in Cologne. She identified an Odelindis, originally from Pyrzyce (Piritz), south of Szczecin (Stettin) in what is now western Poland, who in 1291 purchased one half of a house in Cologne and established a community of pious women there. Other research then identified another “beguine” community thriving in Augsburg in the mid-1300s that also appears to have regarded Odelindis as at least its spiritual if not actual founder.

As Böhringer notes in a chapter newly appended to this English translation of Gałuszka and Kras's study, “the quadrilateral of Pyrzyce, Cologne, Augsburg, and Świdnica surrounded a huge part of the Holy Roman Empire” (270). The exact nature of the connections remains uncertain. It is unclear, for example, if Odelindis herself ever went to either Augsburg or Świdnica, or if others carried her particular form of pious female communal life there from Cologne. Nevertheless, the “daughters of Odelindis” appear to demonstrate just how far the influence of pious women and specific forms of female religiosity could extend in the later Middle Ages.

Prior to Böhringer's appended chapter, the latter half of this book consists of an edition and translation of the trial record, based on the Vatican manuscript, with all Kraków variants carefully noted. What we have here, then, is wonderful trifecta: an important primary source made available to a wide audience, a detailed case study of one incident of “beguine” persecution stemming from the Vienne decrees, and the revelation of the far-flung networks that may have connected communities of pious lay women to one another across much of medieval Europe.

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***Andrey Rublev: The Artist and His World.* By Robin Milner-Gulland. London: Reaktion Books, 2023. 152 pp. \$22.50 cloth.**

Milner-Gulland has produced a tight, contextualized account of the life, insofar as it is known, and the works, insofar as they can be identified, of Russia's greatest icon painter