

# THE BEGUINES OF MEDIEVAL ŚWIDNICA

The Interrogation of the  
“Daughters of Odelindis” in 1332



TOMASZ GAŁUSZKA and PAWEŁ KRAS

Heresy and Inquisition in the Middle Ages  
Volume 11

## THE BEGUINES OF MEDIEVAL ŚWIDNICA

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# The Beguines of Medieval Świdnica

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“Daughters of Odelindis” in 1332

Tomasz Gałuszka and Paweł Kras

Translated into English by Stephen C. Rowell  
with a preface by Robert E. Lerner  
and a contribution by Letha Böhringer



THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

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Cover image: the painting of Świdnica dated 1695 in the Cathedral Church of St Stanislaus and St Wenceslas in Świdnica (courtesy of F. Grzywacz)

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## Note from the Series Editors

To some greater or lesser extent, any study of medieval heresy makes visible not only religious nonconformity but also both the dynamics of orthodox repression and some broader contours of spiritual life and pious enthusiasm, particularly the enthusiasms of the laity. In the particular case of the current book, all three elements – heresy, repression, lay spirituality – are notably in play. The beguines were a loosely connected movement of laywomen who spontaneously took up a self-directed and quasi-monastic form of religious life. We find them from the very late twelfth century onward in the towns of Northern Europe, particularly in the Low Countries and in German-speaking lands. They are, among other things, a strong testament to a persistent strand of self-directed and apostolically inspired lay piety. While they initially received strong support from a variety of reformist ecclesiastics, by the early fourteenth century suspicions had arisen among some in the Church that strands of this self-directed piety had given rise to the so-called heresy of the ‘Free Spirit’ – the notion that a transcendent piety freed one’s spirit from any wrongdoing, no matter how shocking to normal Christian morality. Inquisitors gained testimony from certain witnesses that attested to shocking ideas and practices among certain groups of beguines and beghards (the male equivalents to the female communities), particularly in relation to sexual amorality. However, as Robert E. Lerner then demonstrated some decades ago, these fourteenth-century inquisitors were in large part generating the ideas and evidence by their own processes, constructing a heretical ‘sect’ of the Free Spirit by imposing the very language of papal condemnation: a perfect circle of suspicion, denunciation, and attestation.

The current book brings to an anglophone audience a tremendously important and absolutely fascinating set of trial records, those produced by the inquisitor John of Schwenkenfeld in trials conducted in 1332 in the Polish town of Świdnica, in which we find the testimonies of sixteen beguine women (‘Hooded Sisters’ as they seem to have been known locally). As Paweł Kras and Tomasz Gałuszka explain in their Preface, these records have been known by specialists for some long time, albeit understood in rather different ways, some interpretations distorting rather considerably what the trial evidence actually demonstrates. With this new scholarly edition and English translation, the detail of the material is now made accessible to all. Through their initial chapters, Kras and Gałuszka additionally provide wider scholarly context, giving us an overview of the beguine movement, a close study of the particular connections and inspirations of the Świdnica ‘Hooded Sisters’, and in Chapter Five – whose principal author was Gałuszka – a detailed analysis

*Note from the Series Editors*

of the orthodox theological context for John of Schwenkenfeld's inquisitorial enquiries.

An earlier version of the current book was originally published in Polish in 2017 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn 2018). This English edition has benefitted from some updating and emendations by Kras and Gałuszka, and from two new components: a Preface from Robert E. Lerner and an additional chapter contributed by Letha Böhringer that provides important detail regarding beguines in Cologne, and in particular Odelindis of Pyrzyce (Piritz), who seems to have inspired the Świdnica group. We, as series editors, are delighted to be able to bring this work to an anglophone audience, and we are most grateful to all who have contributed to the project.



## Acknowledgements

The idea of writing this book originated at the workshop on 'The Religious Movements in Medieval Poland', hosted in April 2013 by the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. During a round-table debate attended by a number of outstanding Polish scholars, including Jerzy Kłoczowski, Urszula Borkowska, and Hanna Zaremska, the records of the 1332 interrogations of the Świdnica (Schweidnitz) beguines attracted particular attention. All the participants agreed that the 1332 trial records constitute a unique source for studying the operations of the papal inquisition in Poland, established in 1318. They also offer a valuable insight into the doctrine, practice, and domestic life of a small beguine community whose members called themselves 'the Daughters of Odelindis' or 'the Hooded Sisters'.

The records of the 1332 interrogations carried out by a tribunal chaired by John of Schwenkenfeld, Dominican lector in Świdnica and papal inquisitor in Silesia, are preserved in two medieval manuscripts. The original record of the testimonies given by sixteen women was produced by Nicholas *de Pencwynsdorph*, Wrocław clerk and notary public, shortly after the end of the 1332 trial. In unknown circumstances, in the late fourteenth century, this notarial instrument was delivered to the Papal Curia, and later became part of the Vatican Library, catalogued under the shelf mark Vat. Lat. 13119. A fifteenth-century copy of the 1332 trial record was commissioned by one of the Cracow cathedral canons, and is currently preserved in the Archives of the Cracow Cathedral Chapter under the shelf mark LA 37.

For more than a century, the 1332 testimonies concerning the beguine community of Świdnica were available to scholars only in the Cracow copy which was published by Cracow historian Bolesław Ulanowski in 1889. The Vatican manuscript remained unknown until the 1950s, when it was catalogued for the first time and made accessible to researchers. Oddly enough, even though a couple of Polish and other scholars did draw attention to the Vatican manuscript, for the next sixty years no effort was made to research this unique source material systematically and produce its critical edition. Actually, only Robert E. Lerner, who examined the manuscript in the late 1960s, noticed that it differs significantly from the Cracow manuscript published by Ulanowski.

During the 2013 workshop, it was stressed that a critical edition of the 1332 interrogations based on the Vatican manuscript should become a research priority in the years to come. The primary stimulus to work on the edition came from Izabela Skierska (1968–2014), a great medievalist of our generation, who died prematurely before our research project was brought to fruition (the Polish volume published in 2017 was dedicated to her memory).

## *Acknowledgements*

In autumn 2013 we decided to work together on the history of the beguine community in Świdnica and study the two manuscripts in order to produce a Latin–Polish edition of the 1332 records. Our team was joined by Adam Poznański, who agreed to translate the Latin depositions of the protocol into Polish. In 2014 our research project was submitted to the Polish National Science Centre and granted funding a year later. During two years of research, we consulted the manuscripts in the Vatican Library and in the Archives of the Cracow Cathedral Chapter, and worked in various international libraries which provided us with access to abundant literature concerning the history of medieval beguines and their organization, doctrine, and spirituality.

During our work we experienced the amazing generosity of a number of Polish and foreign scholars who shared with us their expertise and supplied us with source materials. Without their friendly and very substantial assistance, the successful completion of our project would have been much harder or even impossible. Thanks to colleagues who responded to our detailed questions, we have been able to shed new light on the most intriguing problems related to the Świdnica community and have solved some mysteries concerning the origins and identity of ‘the Daughters of Odelindis’. First of all, we wish to extend our gratitude to Letha Böhringer, who enthusiastically supported our research and contributed significantly to some crucial findings. We are very grateful to our Polish friends, in particular Anna Adamska, Elżbieta Knappek, Marek D. Kowalski and Anna Zajchowska-Bołtomiuk, whom we consulted on a number of occasions. Among our international colleagues, we are much indebted to Frederik Felskau, Suzan Folkerts, Antonín Kalous, and Klaus-Bernward Springer, who responded to our queries and willingly shared their knowledge with us. Thanks to Marzena Górecka and Paul Michael, we were able to check the reading and understanding of some Middle-German terms recorded in the 1332 trial record. In addition, we are grateful to Halina Manikowska and all researchers of the Medieval Studies Department at the Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, who participated in discussions of our project and offered us valuable advice.

The joint editors of York Medieval Press’s series ‘Heresy and Inquisition in the Middle Ages’ – John H. Arnold, Peter Biller and L. J. Sackville – have been the driving force behind the publication of the present volume. They appreciated the significance of the 1332 trial record, and when a copy of the book in its Polish form reached them in 2018, they encouraged us to produce an English version.

The production of the present volume has been made possible thanks to the financial support from the Polish Ministry of Education and Science, which within the framework of the Narodowy Program Rozwoju Humanistyki (NPRH – National Programme for the Development of the Humanities) Universalia Programme covered the costs of the English translation and additional editorial work. We are very grateful to Stephen C. Rowell, who translated into English both the 1332 Latin text and the collection of Polish

### *Acknowledgements*

studies. His extensive knowledge and expertise in medieval studies have left a particular imprint on the entire volume.

Last but not least, we are indebted to Caroline Palmer and the personnel of the Boydell & Brewer for their hard work on this volume.

## Foreword

*Robert E. Lerner*

Medievalists are seldom granted a gift as rich as the record of the interrogations of the beguines of Świdnica (Schweidnitz) in 1332. Here we have examinations of sixteen witnesses concerning life in a female community implicated in heresy, with responses numbering 183 articles. The document not only draws back a curtain on a secret society, but offers a trove of fascinating details and sometimes even allows us to hear authentic voices from the long-distant past. Half a century ago I touched upon the Świdnica beguines in my *Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*, but there I allowed myself only seven pages for consideration of the subject. Now Fr Tomasz Gałuszka OP and Paweł Kras offer an exemplary full-length study, together with a meticulous, unsurpassable edition. The appearance of this splendid book thus offers me an opportunity to refresh some points I had previously made and call attention to others that I had neglected.

To say that the document ‘draws back a curtain’ is not quite right, for the stage is still veiled by a skrim. By this I mean to refer to methodological issues that often leave uncertainty as to what we may really be seeing. The sixteen women spoke in German but their answers were translated by the notary into Latin, and we must rely on his choices. Then too, a substantial amount of the questioning was based on formularies – the papal decrees *Ad nostrum* and *Cum de quibusdam mulieribus* – meaning that examinees may have responded to leading questions with answers that the inquisitor wanted to hear. Thus in the case of a witness who stated that she heard another say ‘those women who are in such a state of perfection and freedom of spirit are not required to obey anyone’ (I.I.11), and ‘those women who have achieved perfection are not subject to human obedience’ (I.II.28), these are close repetitions of article 3 of *Ad nostrum*, which the witness most likely learned from the inquisitor or perhaps were based on independent German answers translated by the notary into Latin words that came from the formulary. Moreover, aside from such uncertainties come the facts that most of the witnesses told of things they only knew at second hand and that fourteen of the examinees were young women who had lived in the beguinage for only short periods of time and apparently bore grudges against their elders that inspired hostile or incriminating testimony.

Nonetheless, even through the skim we can see a remarkable panorama. Although the members of the Świdnica community referred to themselves as 'Hooded Sisters' (*Capuciatae*), we may call them 'beguines', for like beguines elsewhere, they were laywomen who lived together, reciting prayers, performing ascetic practices, earning their support through cloth production and striving for spiritual perfection. Not only did they believe that they could attain perfection (I.I.2) but one of the sisters said she heard from others that 'they had attained such a state that all their works were perfect' (I.II.18), and another that 'she had heard from the women that they were able to make such progress that they became incapable of committing a mortal sin' (I.IV.6). This was hearsay, to be sure, but very consistent hearsay, and it was obliquely confirmed by testimony of the older women. One of these stated that although her community was not licensed by the Church, 'we can be saved as well in our sect as a Friar Preacher or Minor can be saved in his' (II.2.2); asked whether she ever said 'I am God with God', she replied that she had heard it preached and 'had not taught much more' (II.2.7). Another swore she was told: 'Do what we command and you shall not sin because we do not command you to do anything sinful' (II.3.10). A certain 'Blind Anna', who had lived in the Świdnica community for twenty-six years, admitted to having said that 'just as there were saints in heaven there were other saints on earth', but, facing the inquisitor, conceded that 'if this is bad, I wish to reject it', and then 'immediately she changed her words, saying that she did not know whether she had ever said that' (II.V.2).

All told, then, despite the hearsay and evasions, we may fairly say that the Świdnica community was propelled by what is customarily called 'Free Spirit' belief – the conviction that it is possible to reach a state of perfection on earth that renders one sinless. This is consonant with the errors listed in *Ad nostrum*, but one finds a complement in the Świdnica record that is not specified in *Ad nostrum*, namely that the state of perfection can only be reached by extreme ascetic practices. In this regard the evidence presents no uncertainty whatsoever. To take one of numerous examples, one young witness swore that when she entered the community she had had her hair shorn and then was subjected to 'fasts, vigils, and other exercises so unreasonably that, whereas previously she had been a pretty girl, in a short time she was so destroyed that she could barely recuperate'; yet she was still made to eat carrion covered with flies: 'and if any one of them eats such meat and vomits they say this is a fast she must suffer' (I.VII.3).

We read of one horrific ascetic exercise after another. A girl was 'driven to an unhealthy state of mind due to indiscreet exercises and unreasonable castigations ... When asked why she did not eat and what had caused her affliction, she replied that she had reached such a state of perfection that she did not want for food and drink because Christ would feed her, and she was completely infatuated and mentally distracted' (I.II.6). The Świdnica women 'beat themselves with hedgehog pelts and scraped themselves with fullers'

combs' (I.IV.27). In neighbouring Wrocław, 'whenever several were in a room on the way out, the first would prostrate herself in the doorway and the second to leave would then tread upon her and lay down next to her and the third to leave would tread on the second and the first, and so it went' (I.I.9). The more horrible a thing might have been, the more a sister was forced to do it in order to break her will (I.II.7).

Such asceticism evidently was not compatible with sexual licence and consequently we must read of the latter *cum grano*. Reports of licentiousness came from two younger women who were no longer in the community and may have been resentful about the ascetic exercises they had been made to undergo. And even then, these reports came at second hand. Thus one said that 'all manner of the sins of Sodom and filthy acts [were] committed' and that she knew this 'from certain knowledge' (I.II.10). But we then learn that such 'certain knowledge' was based on 'what she had learned from others'. A second young woman, questioned about what the first had said, answered that 'she had heard such things from others but did not see them herself, although once she had had her own suspicions' (I.IV.30). Nevertheless, we have a report of a third young woman (I.III.19) who claimed that a certain beghard had taught her that indulgence in sexual practice was an indication of 'a coarse spirit' and that one must overcome any such inclinations so that one may become 'perfect and subtle of spirit'.

In my previous account of the Świdnica evidence I omitted one of its greatest rewards: its frequent introduction of direct speech. Here now are some examples: 'you only think of yourself' (I.I.5); 'old dogs cannot be tamed' (I.I.8); 'we see in the book of life, whereas priests and preachers see in the hides of cows' (I.I.14); 'Oh God, they are taking such a long time' (I.I.17); 'you vile woman' (I.II.3); 'I have such a grasp of the Holy Trinity that I ride on it like a saddle on a charger' (I.II.9); and '[she] must needs have a pig's mouth to be able to eat anything, a crane's neck so she can look around cautiously ... and the skull of an ox so she can bear everything with an even temper' (I.IV.17). Whether such things were really said in the contexts in which they were reported or invented by witnesses in the course of their examination is irrelevant, for in either case we are offered a rare chance to listen to lively speech uttered by late-medieval women.

More fundamentally, when I wrote about the Świdnica community in *The Heresy of the Free Spirit*, I failed to state that the members referred to themselves as belonging to the 'union of the daughters of Odelindis' (*unio filiarum Udyllindis*). The authors argue persuasively that the 'Odelindis' in question was one Odelindis of Pyrzyce, a woman who founded a house for 'poor beguines' in Cologne in 1291. The identification is noteworthy because it establishes a continuity of beguinal organization for three decades from 1291 until our trial of 1332, and also because it supports clues in our text that the centre of the 'union' of beguines was the Rhineland: one of the Świdnica witnesses (I.II.34) knew of the activities of a beghard of Cologne, and another

(I.IV.20) had been in Cologne for a time herself. (We also know independently of a certain John of Brünn, who professed beliefs similar to those imputed to the beguines of Świdnica and who left his home in Moravia to live as a beghard in Cologne for twenty-eight years.) The use of the term '*unio*' in our document points to another observable circumstance: beguine houses such as the one in Świdnica were in contact with others. We read of 'sisters in Aachen' (I.II.21), of knowledge of events in Strasbourg (I.II.8), and of German-speaking houses in Erfurt, Leipzig, and Wrocław (Breslau).

My book also did not call attention to an aspect of the evidence now exposed by Gałuszka and Kras: reverberations of the theology of Meister Eckhart. Thus, for one example, the record reports a statement that 'after a person has left behind, abandoned, and put beneath her feet all things below in this world, then she gives herself to making herself like God, naked, pure and alone; and she no longer cares what she suffers from forces below because her soul henceforth stands in its citadel and cannot be attacked or afflicted' (I.IV.18). As Gałuszka and Kras observe, this statement is replete with terms used by Eckhart: the image of the 'citadel' (*castellum*) and the entire statement is a version of Meister Eckhart's doctrine of *Abgeschiedenheit* – union with God as the product of seclusion and detachment. The authors pursue this and several other related propositions, wondering about the degree to which the examinees reported them on their own or responded to the inquisitor's promptings. At least we can assume that the inquisitor, John of Schwenkenfeld OP, would have been well-informed about Eckhart's teachings, for the two were contemporaries who belonged to the same Dominican Order, came from the same home base of Cologne, and might plausibly have known each other. Moreover, it is very likely that the inquisitor had before him the papal decree, *In agro dominico*, issued in 1329, just three years before the Świdnica trial, which condemned many of Eckhart's propositions. Yet we should also remember that the Świdnica beguines themselves descended from a house founded in Cologne and had contacts with Cologne. The authors of this book therefore do well to treat this problem thoroughly and point out that it justifies further study.

All told, then, this superlative book bears comparison to a 'saddle on a charger' and to do it justice, one needs 'a crane's neck' to look at its many sides.

## Abbreviations

AASS	J. Bolland <i>et al.</i> , <i>Acta sanctorum</i> , third edition, 68 vols. (Paris, 1863–1925)
AFP	<i>Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum</i> 1 (1930–)
AHVN	<i>Annalen des Historischen Vereins für den Niederrhein</i>
BF	<i>Bullarium Franciscanum</i> , ed. J. Sbaralea <i>et al.</i> , 7 vols. (Rome, 1759–1904)
BHL	<i>Bibliotheca hagiographica latina antiquae et mediae aetatis</i> , 2 vols. (Brussels, 1898–1901)
BJ	Biblioteka Jagiellońska, Cracow
BN	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis (Turnhout, 1953–)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina (Turnhout, 1954–)
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Salzburg and Vienna, 1864–)
DHGE	<i>Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques</i> (Paris, 1912–)
Döllinger	<i>Beiträge zur Sektengeschichte des Mittelalters</i> , ed. I. von Döllinger, 2 vols. (Munich, 1890)
DW	Meister Eckhart, <i>Die deutschen Werke</i> , ed. J. Quint, vols. 1–3 and 5 (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1958–76)
HAStK	Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln
KH	<i>Kwartalnik Historyczny</i> 1 (1887)
LMA	<i>Lexikon des Mittelalters</i> , 9 vols. (Munich and Zurich, 1980–98; CD-ROM-Ausgabe, 2000)
LThK	<i>Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche</i> , 11 vols. (Freiburg, 1993–2001)
MGH SS	Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores (Hanover, 1826–)
MGH SS rer. Germ.	Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum (Hanover, 1871–)
MPH	Monumenta Poloniae Historica, 6 vols. (Cracow, 1864–93; rpt. Warsaw, 1960)
PSB	<i>Polski Słownik Biograficzny</i> (Cracow, 1935–)



### *Abbreviations*

Tanner	<i>Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils</i> , ed. N. Tanner, 2 vols. (Ann Arbor, 1990)
TRE	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i> , 35 vols. (Berlin and New York, 2003)

All geographical names, unless they have an English equivalent, are given in the language of the country in which they are currently located. In the case of towns and villages located in Silesia, contemporary Polish names are used, although each time they are entered for the first time, a German name is also given in brackets, eg Świdnica (Schweidnitz). The reader should find a map (p. 2) on which all places are listed in this way.

## Part One: Historical Studies



The network of the Daughters of Odelindis in central Europe  
in the first quarter of the fourteenth century

## Preface

In 1778 Sigismund Justus Ehrhardt, the Lutheran scholar of Silesian religious history, described the persecution of beguines and beghards in the fourteenth century and remarked briefly on the activities of the papal inquisitor, John of Schwenkenfeld. The source of his knowledge of this matter was an inscription located in the Dominican Church of the Holy Cross in Świdnica (Schweidnitz). From this it transpired that John of Schwenkenfeld, an inquisitor in the dioceses of Wrocław (Breslau) and Lubusz (Lebus), conducted 'a famous trial against the Hooded Sisters, women belonging to the beghard sect'.<sup>1</sup> In 1862 Ehrhardt's brief comment regarding the trial of the Świdnica *moniales Capucinae* ('Hooded Nuns') was repeated by Wilhelm Wattenbach, the eminent publisher of sources relating to the medieval history of Silesia.<sup>2</sup> However, neither of the German historians was familiar with any material concerning Schwenkenfeld's inquisitorial activities or connected directly with the case against the Świdnica beguines.

<sup>1</sup> Es wird allerdings, in der alten Inscription auf den Inquisitor von Schwenckfeld in der Kreuß Kirche, auf diese Sache gezieht, mit diesen klaren Worten: Beatus Johannes de Swenkinfelt, Magister in Theologia, de Conventu Suidnicensi, per Wratislaviensem et Lubicensem Diocesin Inquisitor, Processus fecit egregium contra Cappuciatas Moniales que Sectam struebant Beckhuardarum. Hic tempore Nanceri Episcopi Wratislaviensis, propter expulsionem Cleri de Wratislauia et dissensionem inter Regem et Episcopum sedandam, Pragam abiit, ubi propter officium, quod gerebat, Martyrio coronatus est Anno Domini M.CCC.XLI. In vigilia S. Michaelis (Blessed John of Schwenkenfeld, Master of Theology, from the Świdnica friary, the inquisitor in the dioceses of Wrocław and Lubusz, conducted the illustrious trial of the Hooded Nuns who formed the sect of beghards. During the pontificate of Bishop Nanker of Wrocław, because of the expulsion of the clergy from Wrocław and in order to settle the dissent between the King [John of Luxembourg] and the Bishop [Nanker], he set out for Prague, where in the year of the Lord 1341, on St Michael's eve [28 September] he received the crown of martyrdom because of the office [of inquisitor] he performed); S. J. Ehrhardt, *Abhandlung vom verderbten Religions-Zustand in Schlesien vor der Evangelischen Kirchen-Reformation: als eine Einleitung zur Schlesischen Presbyterologie* (Breslau, 1778), pp. 166–7. The description of this inscription was found in a seventeenth-century manuscript containing the so-called *Excerpta ex Chronico Świdnicensi* (Wrocław University Library, MS R 622 in), and also in the Klose Collection (Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu, MS 150, fols. 13–44). Cf. J. Szymański, *Ruchy heretyckie na Śląsku w XIII i XIV wieku* (Katowice, 2007), p. 130, n. 73.

<sup>2</sup> *Das Formelbuch des Arnold von Protzan*, ed. W. Wattenbach, *Codex diplomaticus Silesiae*, 36 vols. (Breslau, 1857–1933), V, 60, n. 1.

A quarter of a century after Wattenbach's publication, the Cracow Chapter archivist and director of the episcopal archive, Fr Ignacy Polkowski (1833–88), happened upon a copy of the records of John of Schwenkenfeld's 1332 interrogations during his cataloguing of the collections of the Cracow Cathedral Chapter, a task which he had been carrying out since 1878.<sup>3</sup> He shared his discovery with Dr Bolesław Ulanowski (1860–1919), who soon identified the material he had been shown as a record of the trial mentioned by the inscription that had existed at one time in the Świdnica Church of the Holy Cross. In the introduction to his edition of the Cracow text, Ulanowski wrote: 'at the time I managed to find the complete text of a notary record of the interrogation of witnesses by John of Schwenkenfeld in Świdnica in 1332. At that time John was an inquisitor of heretical depravity and naturally also a member of the Dominican Order'. The learned Cracow historian informed his readers concisely of the circumstances in which the text was discovered, writing that 'the codex is the property of the Cracow Chapter and for the opportunity to use it I am grateful to the exceptional kindness of Canon Polkowski who, as he brings order to the library entrusted into his care, is forever finding something new within his treasure house'.<sup>4</sup> Ulanowski's edition of the examination of witnesses concerning the life and customs of the Hooded Sisters of Świdnica appeared in the fifth volume of *Archiwum Komisji Historycznej* [Archive of the Historical Commission], published in 1889.<sup>5</sup>

Dr Bolesław Ulanowski was at the beginning of his academic career when he worked on this edition. After studying in Cracow and Paris, he obtained his second 'qualifying' doctorate or *Habilitation* in 1886, and two years later became supernumerary professor and lecturer in law at the Jagiellonian University.<sup>6</sup> The palaeographic skill he acquired during his years of study and his great diligence made him one of the most skilled editors of medieval

<sup>3</sup> For more on his activity as a bibliophile, see J. Nowak, 'Książd Ignacy Polkowski – kolekcjoner i "książkołap" w latach 1872–1888', *Nasza Przyszłość* 89 (1998), 245–72; J. Linetty, 'Badania archeologiczne i historyczne księdza Ignacego Polkowskiego (1833–1888) w Wielkopolsce', *Analecta. Studia i Materiały do Dziejów Nauki* 23:2 (2014), 7–53.

<sup>4</sup> B. Ulanowski, '[Introduction]', in *Examen testium super vita et moribus Beguinarum per inquisitorem hereticae pravitatis in Sweydnitz anno 1332 factum*, in *Archiwum Komisji Historycznej* 5, *Scriptores Rerum Polonicarum*, 22 vols. (Cracow, 1872–1917), XIII, pp. 235–9, at p. 235.

<sup>5</sup> Ulanowski, *Examen testium*, pp. 239–55. A typesetter's error means that in the title of this text the word 'pravitatis' was printed as 'pranitis'.

<sup>6</sup> *Bolesław Ulanowski* (Cracow, 1920); M. Barański, 'Ulanowski Bolesław', in *Słownik historyków polskich* (Warsaw, 1994), pp. 537–8; W. Uruszczak, 'Bolesław Ulanowski (1860–1919)', in *Ludzie, który umiłowali Kraków. Założyciele Towarzystwa Miłośników Historii i Zabytków Krakowa*, ed. W. Bieńkowski (Cracow, 1997), pp. 199–207; W. Uruszczak, 'Bolesław Ulanowski (1860–1919)', in *Uniwersytet Jagielloński. Złota Księga Wydziału Prawa i Administracji*, ed. J. Stelmach and W. Uruszczak (Cracow, 2000), pp. 197–201.

Polish sources. As his friend, Władysław Abraham, wrote in a memoir published after Ulanowski's death, he 'gave what he alone, of all Polish scholars, was able to achieve concurrently, namely excellent and broad publications of sources'. Underlining his services, he stated that:

he [Ulanowski] possessed special abilities and qualities for editorial work in particular, unlike any other of our scholars. He was a palaeographer able to compete in world-class palaeography of his day with the best experts in the subject and was endowed with an exceptional gift for scholarly criticism and intuition, commanding the best scientific methods and an excellent knowledge of all source publications and the most important foreign libraries and archives, which he visited himself and searched. And moreover, without sparing labour or expense, he examined all our collections throughout Polish territory and brought to light a whole multitude of sources of first-rate value, gathering all that, in accordance with his great specialist knowledge, he recognised as being worthy of publication.<sup>7</sup>

To this day the name of Bolesław Ulanowski is linked with many editions of sources, especially the three-volume edition of *Acta capitulorum necnon iudiciorum ecclesiasticorum*,<sup>8</sup> which for following generations of Polish and foreign medievalists became the starting point for research into the history of the late-medieval Church and its organization and legal practices, as well as the life and customs of Polish society.<sup>9</sup>

At the time he set about working on the records of the 1332 interrogations of the Świdnica beguines, Ulanowski was still a relatively young researcher who had already chalked up a number of highly valued source editions to his credit.<sup>10</sup> During the years 1884–6 he published the fourteenth-century records of the Cracow Land Court,<sup>11</sup> and a year later a diplomatic codex containing

<sup>7</sup> W. Abraham, 'Świętej pamięci Bolesław Ulanowski', *KH* 33 (1919), 17–24, at p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> *Acta capitulorum Cracoviensis (1438–1523) et Plocensis (1438–1523) selecta*, in *Archiwum Komisji Historycznej* 6 (Cracow, 1891); *Acta capitulorum necnon iudiciorum ecclesiasticorum selecta*, *Monumenta Medii Aevi Historica Res Gestas Poloniae Illustrantia* 13, 16, and 18 (Cracow, 1894–1918).

<sup>9</sup> I. Skierska, 'Źródła do badania praktyk religijnych w średniowiecznej Polsce: akta sądów kościelnych i kapituł', *Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne* 87 (2007), 175–95, at pp. 185–94; P. Kras, 'Jak czytać protokoły inkwizycyjne? Sprawy husyckie w acta episcopalia Andrzeja Bnińskiego – uwagi wstępne', in *Kultura pisma w średniowieczu: znane problemy, nowe metody*, ed. A. Adamska and P. Kras, *Colloquia mediaevalia Lublinensia* 2 (Lublin, 2013), pp. 193–240, at pp. 216–18.

<sup>10</sup> Stanisław Kutrzeba presented his scholarly achievements in *Bolesław Ulanowski*, pp. 25–35; cf. J. Sawicki, 'Bibliografia prac prof. dra Bolesława Ulanowskiego (1882–1926)', *Prawo Kanoniczne* 14:1–2 (1971), 309–24.

<sup>11</sup> *Antiquissimi libri iudiciales terrae Cracoviensis*, ed. B. Ulanowski, *Starodawne Prawa Polskiego Pomniki* 7 (Cracow, 1884); *Inscriptiones clenodiales ex libris iudicialibus palatinatus Cracoviensis*, ed. B. Ulanowski, *Starodawne Prawa Polskiego Pomniki* 8 (Cracow, 1888).

thirteenth-century Cuyavian and Mazovian documents appeared.<sup>12</sup> The inquisition records of John of Schwenkenfeld belong to a group of minor works which he published in the series *Archiwum Komisji Historycznej*. Ulanowski prefaced his edition of the interrogation text with a concise description of the manuscript, which was held in the collection of the Cracow Cathedral Chapter. He wrote that the document he was publishing 'is preserved in an accurate fifteenth-century copy bound together with over a dozen copies of letters from that period in one small-sized codex'.<sup>13</sup> Almost certainly working at great speed and preparing several other editions for publication at the same, Ulanowski lacked the time to carry out more systematic studies of this interesting relic. *En passant*, we should remember that for more than 120 years after this, scholars studying the trial of the Świdnica beguines made no effort to seek out the Cracow manuscript. The codex which Ulanowski used was not described in the catalogue of chapter manuscripts published by Fr Ignacy Polkowski in 1884, and for a long time it was regarded as being lost.<sup>14</sup> However, in June 2016 archivists managed to come across this manuscript and Tomasz Gałuszka OP made the first inventory description of it.<sup>15</sup>

Bolesław Ulanowski was perfectly well aware what a valuable source the record of the 1332 case of the Świdnica Hooded Sisters was. The edition he made was an excellent editorial achievement, although it was accompanied by only a short introduction barely five pages long, in which reference was made to two constitutions of the Council of Vienne, *Ad nostrum* and *Cum de quibusdam*. As Ulanowski noticed accurately, 'the *examen testium* conducted by the Świdnica inquisitor' was based on these two documents. This valuable observation became an essential lodestar for later historians researching the content of the records and the interrogation techniques employed by the inquisitor, John of Schwenkenfeld. At the end of his editorial commentary, Ulanowski drew attention to three elements which made the Świdnica court records 'a very significant and valuable document'. Firstly, he indicated that although this text does not refer directly to Poland, 'the details it contains about the beguines and beguards have an obvious connection with certain members at least of that sect, which spread across Polish dioceses'. Secondly, he noted accurately that it is an exceptional document, since we know of no other 'such accurate and extensive comments' on Silesian beguines. Thirdly and finally, as an experienced specialist in medieval canon law, Ulanowski noticed in these records an important source for researching the reception

<sup>12</sup> *Dokumenty kujawskie i mazowieckie przeważnie z XIII wieku*, ed. B. Ulanowski (Cracow, 1887).

<sup>13</sup> Ulanowski, '[Introduction]', in *Examen testium*, XIII, p. 235.

<sup>14</sup> I. Polkowski, *Katalog rękopisów Katedry Krakowskiej*, Archiwum do Dziejów Literatury i Oświaty w Polsce 3 (Cracow, 1884).

<sup>15</sup> We would like to thank Prof. Jacek Urban, Director of the Cracow Cathedral Chapter Archive and Library, for providing us with photographs of this manuscript.

of the constitutions of the Council of Vienne which were directed against the beguines and beghards.<sup>16</sup> Examining from today's perspective the development of studies on the court record published by Ulanowski, we may assert that he set out the main boundaries for academic exploration with great insight and that his remarks established the main directions for later research.

In Polish and foreign scholarship devoted to the subject, Ulanowski's edition is known by the name *Examen testium*, which derives from the title under which it was published in *Archiwum Komisji Historycznej*. The title given to the source by the Cracow scholar appears in neither the Cracow copy nor the 1332 notarial instrument preserved in the Vatican Library (MS Vat. Lat. 13119a).<sup>17</sup> In the title Ulanowski put forward, the editor made use of a formulation existing in the record itself which described the purpose of the interrogations carried out in 1332. On several occasions the notary stresses that the main task of the inquisition proceedings led by John of Schwenkenfeld was to obtain information 'about the life, behaviour and customs of the Hooded Sisters' (*super vita, conversatione et moribus Capuciatarum*).<sup>18</sup> With his characteristic knowledge of legal questions, Bolesław Ulanowski established that the record he published contained the interrogations of witnesses in a case against a group of women from Świdnica, whom he identified as being beguines. In fact, as we shall discuss in more detail below, the records also contain evidence from witnesses (*testes*) as well as women who were themselves members of the Świdnica community and were examined as suspects (*suspectae*) in the case.<sup>19</sup> The *a priori* recognition of the women, in whom John of Schwenkenfeld was interested, as beguines was a fully justified conjecture on the part of the editor, deriving from the previously mentioned inscription from the Dominican Church of the Holy Cross in Świdnica. It is interesting that throughout the trial records the women are described consistently as *moniales Capuciatæ* or simply, *Capuciatæ*; we shall return to this in more detail in a later chapter. The question of their name is a matter of importance, since the women themselves who belonged to the Świdnica religious community did not describe themselves as 'beguines', but the papal inquisitor adopted this name without reservation when he made use of the constitutions of the Council of Vienne.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Ulanowski, '[Introduction]', *Examen testium*, XIII, pp. 237–8.

<sup>17</sup> For further details see below, pp. 151–2.

<sup>18</sup> *Examinatio*, pp. 170, 180, 198, 208, 228, 230, 236, 238.

<sup>19</sup> Kazimierz Dobrowolski was the first to draw attention to this matter, writing of the 'testimonies of witnesses and the accused', which were recorded in 'select acts from the 1332 trial'. However, this was only a casual remark, since he was interested in neither the inquisition procedure nor the technique for reporting interrogation documentation. K. Dobrowolski, 'Pierwsze sekty religijne na ziemiach polskich', *Reformacja w Polsce* 3 (1924), 161–202, at p. 199.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 4.



The publication of the court record and testimonies from the 1332 case of the Świdnica beguines opened the way to research on this valuable source. In 1903 a large summary of this document based on Ulanowski's edition was published in a volume of *Regesten zur schlesischen Geschichte*. The publishers of the German text managed to identify the places from which several of the persons mentioned in the record originated.<sup>21</sup> It would be more than thirty years after Ulanowski's publication before the first study of the Świdnica beguines appeared. In 1924 Kazimierz Dobrowolski published an article about the first religious sects on Polish territory in which he analysed the court records of John of Schwenkenfeld.<sup>22</sup> On the basis of the contents of the 1332 documentation, he made quite succinct comments on beguine organization and religion and also their connections with the so-called Heresy of the Free Spirit. According to his assessment, the Świdnica beguines belonged to a much broader community known as the Free Spirit whose ideas 'spread throughout Germany in beguine and beghard convents' and 'represented a consistent system [of thought] that still appeared generally unchanged in sources during the second half of the fifteenth century'.<sup>23</sup> Accepting the findings of German and French scholars uncritically, especially those of Herman Haupt<sup>24</sup> and Felix Vernet,<sup>25</sup> Dobrowolski was convinced that a strong religious movement possessing a crystallized religious doctrine and its own system of organization appeared in the mid-thirteenth century. According to him, the basis of this doctrine was a:

credence that the whole world and all that lives therein is permeated by a divine substance ... Everything comes from God and returns to Him. The final purpose of Man lies in his melting into union with God. People are divided into the ordinary and the perfect (*boni homines, perfecti*). A person may reach a state of perfection, the idea of which derives from the Gospel, over a period of time filled with asceticism and contemplation. A person who joins himself to God, to the Holy Ghost, himself becomes God.<sup>26</sup>

According to Dobrowolski, the Heresy of the Free Spirit was an anarchic movement and the views propagated by its members had 'excessively

<sup>21</sup> *Regesten zur schlesischen Geschichte 1327–1333*, ed. C. Grünhagen and K. Wudtke, *Codex diplomaticus Silesiae*, 36 vols. (Breslau, 1857–1933), XXII, pp. 161–2, no. 5146.

<sup>22</sup> Dobrowolski, 'Pierwsze sekty', 198–201.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>24</sup> H. Haupt, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sekte vom Freien Geiste und des Beghardentums', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 7 (1885), 504–76; H. Haupt, 'Zwei Traktate gegen Beginen und Begharden', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 12 (1891), 85–90; H. Haupt, 'Brüder des Freien Geistes', in *Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 22 vols. (Leipzig, 1896–1909), III, pp. 467–8.

<sup>25</sup> F. Vernet, 'Frères du libre esprit', in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, 15 vols. in 19 parts (Paris, 1899–1950), VIII, 803–4.

<sup>26</sup> Dobrowolski, 'Pierwsze sekty', 197.

anti-ecclesiastical and anti-social consequences'.<sup>27</sup> Some of the Silesian convents, including the Świdnica community, were supposed to belong to a dangerous sect understood along such lines. The record of the interrogations from the case of the Świdnica beguines came to be known as an excellent source for researching 'the religious life of an heretical convent during the fourteenth century' in the Polish lands. As Dobrowolski argued, the Świdnica beguines were permeated by the ideology of the Free Spirit and their religious life was subordinated to the goal of attaining spiritual perfection and mystical union with God.<sup>28</sup>

The next Polish scholar to set about analysing the interrogation records from the case of the Świdnica beguines, albeit in a more systematic manner, was Jerzy Wyrozumski. This Cracow medievalist was interested primarily in the social structure of the beguines, the organization of their community, and their part in cloth production. In an article from 1971, being a published version of a paper delivered four years previously at a meeting of the Cracow branch of the Polish Historical Society, Wyrozumski attempted to solve several basic questions which had escaped the notice of Kazimierz Dobrowolski. Among other things, he was interested in the membership of the Świdnica beguines in a wider international community, and the internal structure of their group.<sup>29</sup> Assessing the exceptional informative value of the testimonies of the Świdnica Hooded Sisters, Wyrozumski stressed that the 'Beguine houses put into effect the idea of a common life, and the documents from the Świdnica trial allow us to analyse the details of their community's organisation'.<sup>30</sup> He also drew attention to the significance of physical labour for the religious formation of the beguines, which was 'not only a means of rendering aid to their fellows but also had, in itself, a sanctifying character'.<sup>31</sup>

We may be surprised by the fact that despite the 1889 published edition which appeared in one of the major Polish publication series, for a considerable time the records of the interrogations from the case of the Świdnica beguines did not arouse the interest of foreign scholars. This source was not used in the classical general studies devoted to the beguines and medieval religious movements penned by Herbert Grundmann in 1935,<sup>32</sup> Ernest

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 199–200.

<sup>29</sup> J. Wyrozumski, 'Beginki i begardzi w Polsce', *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego* 261 (1971), *Prace Historyczne*, no. 35, 7–22. When he wrote his article, he did not yet know of the existence of the notarial instrument with the testimonies from the 1332 trial in the Vatican Library.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> H. Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter. Untersuchungen über die geschichtlichen Zusammenhänge zwischen der Ketzerei, den Bettelorden und der religiösen Frauenbewegung im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert und über die geschichtlichen Grundlagen der deutschen Mystik* (Berlin, 1935; 2nd revised and expanded edn, Darmstadt, 1961;

McDonnell in 1954,<sup>33</sup> and Norman Cohn in 1957.<sup>34</sup> Grundmann did pay attention to the records and testimonies from the case of the Świdnica *moniales Capuciatae* in a later account of medieval heresies from 1963.<sup>35</sup> According to him, the Świdnica trial confirmed the penetration of certain beguine communities by the doctrine of the Free Spirit, which was inspired by mysticism. For him, the Świdnica Hooded Sisters were yet another milieu following on from the Strasbourg beguines, sharing a belief in the possibility of attaining spiritual perfection in the present life without resorting to the sacraments of the Church. The German scholar also drew attention to the practices of the Świdnica beguines, which he considered to be similarly linked to the doctrine of the Free Spirit. He stressed that the Hooded Sisters claimed that it did not matter what they did, but who they were. The most important aim of their strict lives was to attain perfection, and the road to this lay in fasting, flagellation, and other bodily mortifications. Thus, they understood perfection to be a state of freeing the spirit from the restrictions of sinful carnal urges, and considered that this state could be achieved through committing to a life of poverty and subjection to strict discipline.<sup>36</sup>

In 1967 Gordon Leff came across the published edition of *Examen testium* and carried out a detailed analysis of the interrogations from the 1332 case of the Świdnica beguines.<sup>37</sup> This British scholar was greatly impressed by the testimonies and regarded them as a first-class source for researching the Heresy of the Free Spirit and its spread among the beguines. He considered that thanks to this text, 'we are able to pose vital questions' about the functioning of beguine communities that preached ideas of the Free Spirit.<sup>38</sup> Making use of Ulanowski's edition, which lacked explanatory notes, and

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later reprints are of this 1961 edn). English translation of 2nd edition: *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, trans. S. Rowan, Introduction by R. E. Lerner (Notre Dame, 1995).

<sup>33</sup> E. W. McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture with Special Emphasis on the Belgian Scene* (New Brunswick NJ, 1954).

<sup>34</sup> N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium. Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London, 1957; 3rd edn, London, 1970, used here in 1993 rpt.).

<sup>35</sup> H. Grundmann, *Ketzergeschichte des Mittelalters*, Die Kirche in Ihrer Geschichte 2 (Göttingen, 1963), pp. 55–6.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> G. Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages: The Relation of Heterodoxy to Dissent c.1250–1450*, 2 vols. (Manchester and New York, 1967), I, 386–95.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., I, p. 386: 'We have reserved until last the one mass testimony – namely, by the Beguine women of the community of Sweydnitz in the diocese of Warsaw. It was the result of an enquiry into their life and morals made by the inquisition in 1332 under Henry Schammonis. There were sixteen witnesses; together their evidence depicts the Free Spirit at work within a Beguine community. For the first time we are enabled to form some firm answer to the two vital questions, of who were the Free Spirit and how it operated'.

with no broader historical or geographical knowledge, Leff made a range of errors in his analysis of the records, some as obvious as mistaking Wrocław for Warsaw, or incorrectly referring to the parish priest, Henry of Mościsko, as the papal inquisitor who carried out the inquiry.<sup>39</sup> Leff was convinced that the testimony of the women from the Świdnica community confirmed the reception of the doctrine of the Free Spirit among the beguines.<sup>40</sup> Based on such a premise, Leff cited the responses of the women placed on trial in 1332 uncritically, ignoring the interrogation techniques and the technology used to compose the trial documentation. Summarizing his research, he claimed that in their quest for perfection, so vital for the doctrine of the Free Spirit, the Świdnica beguines attempted to follow Christ and His Apostles, subjecting their flesh to mortification and treating the clergy of their day with contempt. Their views and practices stemmed from their conviction in their own perfection, and were stamped with pantheism and anti-clericalism as well as libertinism and antinomianism. Gordon Leff did not question the credibility of the profligate sexual practices described by two women in their testimony which, in his opinion, were based completely on the doctrine of the Free Spirit.<sup>41</sup>

The works of Herbert Grundmann and Gordon Leff brought the records of the testimonies from the case of the Świdnica Hooded Sisters into international medieval studies.<sup>42</sup> Five years after Gordon Leff's general study, the American medievalist Robert E. Lerner published an extensive account in which he interpreted the Heresy of the Free Spirit in a new way. Like Grundmann and Leff, Lerner was in no doubt that he was dealing with a text of exceptional value for researching the Heresy of the Free Spirit. However, unlike his predecessors, he questioned unequivocally the very existence of a Free Spirit as a 'sect', understood as a separate movement of heterodox religion which possessed a common doctrine and its own organizational structure. Analysis of the Świdnica records allowed him to place a question mark over the credibility of the information obtained during the inquisition inquiry.<sup>43</sup> He challenged the more controversial answers recorded, regarding them as the product of the morbid ravings of women who had been

<sup>39</sup> In effect, the whole analysis of the testimonies carried out by Gordon Leff was based exclusively on Ulanowski's edition and lacks any scholarly apparatus. The citations in this part of his work are confined to the Świdnica court records.

<sup>40</sup> Leff, *Heresy*, I, p. 394: 'The value of the Sweydnitz evidence is that it makes the presence of the Free Spirit among the beguines a reality, depicting their interaction and the forms it took.'

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pp. 394–5. See the critical remarks of R. E. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1972), p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> E. L. McLaughlin, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit and Late Medieval Mysticism*, *Medievalia Humanistica: Studies in Medieval and Early Renaissance Culture* n.s. 4 (Lanham MD, 1973), pp. 37–54.

<sup>43</sup> Lerner, *Heresy of the Free Spirit*, pp. 112–19.

mistreated physically and psychologically during their stay in the Świdnica community. He considered that the women's testimony illustrated well the interrogation techniques of the case in which the main role was played by the papal inquisitor. It was he who set the form and themes of the inquiry, and in many cases he obtained the answers he wanted through the way he posed his questions. Lerner also drew attention to the techniques of drafting trial records by which witness answers were repeated frequently and underwent deformation. According to him, John of Schwenkenfeld was responsible for demonstrating that the Świdnica beguines expressed views attributed to the Free Spirit Sect which were recorded in the text of the *Ad nostrum* constitution. For this reason, he made use of the Council constitution during interrogation, as the notary sometimes stated *expressis verbis* in the record.<sup>44</sup>

According to Robert E. Lerner, the Świdnica beguine community was not, as would emerge from the contents of the record, a depraved sect operating secretly, in which negation of Christian norms and depraved sexual practices were a matter of everyday life.<sup>45</sup> He approached with great scepticism the testimony of the younger sisters who felt animosity towards their elders and treated the inquiry as an excellent occasion to get their sisters back for any humiliations they had endured. He also drew attention to the fact that most of the most shocking information about the sexual excesses which were supposed to have taken place in the beguine houses in Świdnica and Wrocław came from the younger sisters. Moreover, none of them had been a direct witness to the events they described, and their knowledge of such matters was exclusively secondhand.<sup>46</sup> Lerner likewise noted that pathological relations reigned among the Świdnica beguines, and this allowed the elder sisters to terrorize their juniors and impose strict acts of mortification on them. The strictness of life in the Świdnica community, the exhausting fasts, regular floggings, and psychological humiliations ensured that some sisters experienced serious harm to their health, while others became mentally ill. Robert E. Lerner was in no doubt that the group of Świdnica beguines did not form a conspiratorial Sect of the Free Spirit, and the court record of their interrogation cannot be taken as proof to confirm the existence of such a heresy. His conclusions, which indeed were not only in relation to the Świdnica

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 116: 'Modern examiners might have been satisfied with these insights, but the Dominican Inquisitor wanted to show that the women were exponents of errors condemned by the pope and therefore confronted them with the decree *Ad nostrum*. But the notary only occasionally indicated this fact.'

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 117–18.

community, were accepted by international scholarship<sup>47</sup> but did not meet with unequivocal acceptance among Polish specialists.<sup>48</sup>

It is worth stressing that Robert E. Lerner was the first historian to make use of the notarial instrument containing the original record of the interrogations from the 1332 case of the Świdnica beguines in his research.<sup>49</sup> In the 1950s this document was discovered in the Vatican Library in the collection known as *Vaticana Latina* (Vat. Lat.). In 1955 the Dominican historian Vladimír Jozef Koudelka announced the manuscript's existence when, in a work devoted to the medieval history of the Bohemian province of the Order of Friars Preachers, he placed a brief note about a parchment roll containing the original records of the testimonies from a trial conducted by John of Schwenkenfeld.<sup>50</sup> Two years later, the next volume of the catalogue of Vaticani Latini manuscripts was made available to readers in the Vatican Library in a typescript which included a short description of this manuscript with the shelf mark 13119. From this it emerges that the manuscript contains two separate documents, namely a fourteenth-century parchment roll with its own text of the 1332 testimonies, known as MS Vat. Lat. 13119a, and a paper collection with the title *Historia interfectionis fr. Iohannis Swenkenfelt*, catalogued as Vat.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. A. Patschovsky, *Die Anfänge einer ständigen Inquisition in Böhmen. Ein Prager Inquisitoren-Handbuch aus der ersten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts*, Beiträge zur Geschichte und Quellenkunde des Mittelalters 3 (Berlin and New York, 1975), pp. 74–8. Robert E. Lerner's interpretation was also accepted by Malcolm Lambert, author of the classical general history of medieval heresy. Basing himself on Lerner's research, he stated that: 'In an interesting case at Schweidnitz in Silesia the inhabitants of a beguinage were shown to be followers of a fiercely ascetic life, with much flagellation, fasting and hard work, believers in their superiority, despite outward humility, and despising church attendance for which they were inclined to substitute their own prayers. Free Spirit beliefs in union with God did exist among them, but not libertinism, though they were accused of it.' M. Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation* (2nd edn, Oxford, 1992), p. 214; in the 3rd edn (Oxford, 2002), this is at p. 234.

<sup>48</sup> Recently Jarosław Szymański has expressed a polemical view of Robert E. Lerner's questioning of the very existence of a Free Spirit heresy. After summarizing the views of the American medievalist, he observed that 'researchers taking up this problem [the Free Spirit Heresy] repeat in agreement with Lerner that bishops and inquisitors ... broadly speaking just impute to them the contents of that document [the Bull *Ad nostrum*]' In a further part of his work he attempted to refute the view that the Świdnica is 'the creation of an inquisitorial conspiracy, as Lerner claims, according to which the inquisitor "extracted" testimonies from those he interrogated in accordance with the text of the constitution *Ad nostrum*.' Szymański, *Ruchy heretyckie*, pp. 114–15.

<sup>49</sup> Lerner, *Heresy of the Free Spirit*, p. 112 and n. 15: 'The original is Ms Vat. Lat. 13119, unaccountably overlooked by all historians of heresy. The published version is from a copy in Krakow ... I quote from the Vatican Ms whenever its text differs significantly from the Krakow version.'

<sup>50</sup> V.J. Koudelka, 'Zur Geschichte der böhmischen Dominikanerprovinz im Mittelalter', *AFP* 25 (1955), 75–99, at p. 92.

Lat. 13119b, which was identified as being an excerpt from *Kronika książąt polskich* [Chronicle of the Polish Dukes].<sup>51</sup>

It was thirteen years after the catalogue became available that news of the notarial instrument containing the record of testimonies from the case of the Świdnica beguines reached Polish scholars. The first Polish historian to have the chance to work with this manuscript was Paweł Kielar OP. In 1970 he published the results of his research, noting the existence of 'the original acts of the Świdnica Beguine trial in the form of a parchment scroll almost two metres long'. The Dominican historian also asserted that the '*Examen testium*' published by Ulanowski was based on an incomplete and imperfect copy.<sup>52</sup> Two years later, in a long article devoted to beguines on Polish territory, Danuta and Bohdan Lapis drew attention to 'the original acts of the Świdnica trial' which were held in the Vatican Library. They claimed that they had consulted the manuscript catalogued as Vat. Lat. 13119 from a microfilm produced by the Vatican Library, but the examination they claim to have made of this manuscript is not reflected in their study at all. In their introduction they claimed that the text of the testimonies in the Vatican manuscript did not differ fundamentally from the Cracow copy which was the basis for Bolesław Ulanowski's edition.<sup>53</sup> This concise reference allowed them to base their research on the beguines on Polish territory exclusively on the 1889 edition of the *Examen testium*. It is worth recalling that the opinion expressed by the Lapises differs from the assessment of Robert E. Lerner, who noted essential differences between the two versions and included *twelve* variant readings from Vat. Lat. 13119 in his footnotes.

Despite Lerner's observations, the opinion of Danuta and Bohdan Lapis was accepted uncritically by Polish historians, to the effect that the Cracow copy of the Świdnica records published by Ulanowski does not essentially differ from the notarial instrument preserved in the Vatican. Subsequent researchers dealing with the trial of the Świdnica beguines relied exclusively on the 1889 edition, noting at most that the original version of the testimonies was held in the Vatican Library. No one set about conducting a systematic study of the Vatican manuscript, or at least there is no trace of such a study in publications dedicated to the trial of the Świdnica beguines or the papal

<sup>51</sup> H. Laurent, *Inventario dei codici Vaticani Latini 12848–13735* (typescript, Vatican City, 1957), p. 52.

<sup>52</sup> P. Kielar, 'Traktat przeciw beghardom Henryka Havrera', *Studia Theologica Varsoviensia* 8 (1970), 231–52, at p. 231, n. 1.

<sup>53</sup> 'A comparison of both texts is possible thanks to our having obtained a microfilm of the Roman record ... and this has allowed us to state certain differences between them consisting primarily in different spellings of many words, which do not, however, have any influence on the contents of the document that interests us'; D. Lapis and B. Lapis, 'Beginki w Polsce w XIII–XV wieku', *KH* 79 (1972), 521–44, at p. 534, n. 129.



inquisition.<sup>54</sup> This was the case for the next two scholars to publish important studies of the Świdnica beguines in recent years. In 2007 Jarosław Szymański produced his doctoral dissertation on the subject of heretical movements in Silesia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which contains a long chapter devoted to 'hypocritical maidservants'.<sup>55</sup> Without going into more detailed analysis of the two preserved versions of the interrogation records, Szymański limited himself to stating that 'the records of the Świdnica inquisition from 1332 were published from the Cracow Chapter codex by B. Ulanowski'. He went on to add that the papal inquisitor 'sent the trial records to the pope in Avignon' without mentioning the source of his knowledge.<sup>56</sup> The chapter devoted to the Świdnica beguines includes many long quotations from the sources which are translated into Polish, and a range of valuable remarks by the author were included in footnotes explaining the excerpts quoted in the text. Five years later, in a study of beguines in the Holy Roman Empire, the German scholar Jörg Voigt acknowledged the testimony records to be the most valuable source for study of beguine communities during the first half of the fourteenth century. He considered that the particular value of this document lay in the fact that the 1332 record contains the responses of women who belonged to the Świdnica beguine community. In quite concise source references, Voigt noted that 'the testimony records survive in two versions, the original of which is in the Vatican Library, while a fifteenth-century copy is held in the Cracow Diocesan Archive [sic!]'.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> See, among others, Z. Mazur, 'Powstanie i działalność inkwizycji dominikańskiej na Śląsku w XIV wieku', *Nasza Przeszłość* 39 (1973), 181–91, at pp. 183–4; Patschovsky, *Die Anfänge*, p. 61, n. 237; P. Kras, 'Inkwizycja papieska w średniowiecznej Polsce. Zarys problematyki badawczej', *Almanach Historyczny* 5 (2003), 9–48, at pp. 26, 34–5; P. Kras, 'Dominican Inquisitors in Mediaeval Poland', in *Praedicatores, Inquisitores – I: The Dominicans and the Mediaeval Inquisition. Acts of the 1st International Seminar on the Dominicans and the Inquisition. Rome, 23–25 February 2002*, ed. A. Palacios Bernal, *Dissertationes Historicae* 29 (Rome, 2004), pp. 249–310, at pp. 260–2, and in the appendix, 'The Catalogue of Dominican Inquisitors in Medieval Poland (1318–1500)', no. xv, *ibid.*, pp. 301–2.

<sup>55</sup> Szymański, *Ruchy heretyckie*, p. 98: 'Let us move on to the trial conducted in Świdnica in 1332 by the inquisitor, John of Schwenkenfeld against beguines from the local community accused of heresy. After the trial an inquisition record was drafted which is a multifaceted source presenting that convent as permeated by the ideology of "the Free Spirit".'

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 118.

<sup>57</sup> J. Voigt, *Beginen im Spätmittelalter. Frauen Frömmigkeit in Thüringen und im Reich* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna, 2012), p. 315 and n. 1348: 'Ein Verhörprotokoll aus Schweidnitz (Diözese Breslau) aus dem Jahre 1332 ist die einzige erhaltene Quelle aus der ersten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts, in der Aussagen mehrerer Mitglieder einer religiöser Frauen ohne Ordensanbindung im Rahmen eines Inquisitionsprozesses überliefert sind. ... Dieses Verhörprotokoll ist in zwei Fassungen überliefert. Das Original befindet sich in der Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, eine Abschrift des 15.