

Proces beginek świdnickich w 1332 roku: Studia historyczne i edycja łacińsko-polska [The 1332 Trial of the Beguines of Świdnica: Historical studies and a Latin-Polish edition], edited by Paweł Kras and Tomasz Gałuszka OP, translated by Adam Poznański, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 2017, 292 pp. + 5 ill.

Lay religious movements, including the communities of the Beguines and Beghards, are one of the most intriguing aspects of medieval piety. The number of publications and concepts explaining this social and religious phenomenon is huge. One of the most basic problems facing scholars is the limited and often quite one-sided source base. Municipal sources do contain numerous references to Beguine and Beghard houses, which shows the popularity and scale of the phenomenon, but there are far fewer sources providing an insight into the life of these communities. If such sources do exist, they usually pertain to court trials.

Their interpretation poses a fundamental question concerning the objectivity and determinants of the testimonies. One such source has been examined and edited by three scholars: Paweł Kras, Tomasz Gałuszka OP and Adam Poznański.

The book under review consists of two main parts. The first is a collection of studies, including a concise description of the whole phenomenon as well as several analytical studies focusing on the contents of interrogations of the Beguines of Świdnica/Schweidnitz. Part two is a new edition of the *Examination of the witnesses in the case of the Hooded Sisters of Świdnica* and its translation from Latin into Polish. The first five chapters of the first part have been written by Paweł Kras and the sixth by Tomasz Gałuszka. The manuscripts in the second part have been described by Gałuszka and Kras, while an analysis of both surviving manuscripts and their filiation has been provided by Gałuszka. This scholar has also prepared a Latin edition of the source. Its text has been translated by Adam Poznański, with a commentary to this part by Kras.

The previous edition, prepared and published in 1889 by Bolesław Ulanowski, was based on a fifteenth-century copy of the text kept in the Archives of the Cathedral Chapter of Cracow. The copy was later deemed to have been lost and was not rediscovered until 2016. In the 1950s a fair copy of a record of the interrogation of the Świdnica Beguines was found in the Vatican Library. The main reason behind this new editorial project was the conviction that the notarial instrument with the original record of the interrogation, preserved in the Vatican Library, should be used. The discovery of the fifteenth-century Cracow copy in the course of analysing the Beguines interrogation records must have been an important moment in the project, which was funded by the National Science Centre.

The chapter with the slightly misleading title 'Wstęp' (Introduction) contains a detailed and erudite discussion of research on the source in question, which has attracted the interest of scholars from many countries. In Chapter 1, '*Mulieres religiosæ* — beginki i nowy model kobiecej pobożności' (*Mulieres religiosæ* — the Beguines and a new model of female piety), Kras seeks to provide a fairly concise description of the Beguine movement which would match the nature of the book under review. Such an approach has prevented him from including many aspects of the very extensive research into the Beguine movement in the Middle Ages, but this outline is undoubtedly a well-structured overview of the main problems tackled in studies of this strand of female religiosity. The author presents the key stages in the development of the Beguine movement: its emergence in Brabant and Flanders, its spread into Rhineland and Thuringia in the 1220s and 1230s and subsequently through France from the mid-thirteenth century. He then focuses on the religious motivations behind the emergence of the new movement, pointing, first of all, to the desire to cultivate voluntary poverty and discussing the dominant principles governing the organization of life in beguinages. He devotes relatively little space, on the other hand, to social theories trying to explain the dynamism of this grassroots movement. We could refer to Karl Bücher's old theory linking the popularity of the movement to a demographic surplus of women in

towns,¹ a theory often explored by other scholars, also as part of 'feminist' studies,² and often as a matter of fact criticized,³ or to research pointing in this context to a growing differentiation of urban society in the Middle Ages.⁴ Just as interesting is the discussion of the very term 'female religiosity' and its juxtaposition with male religious movements and emphasis on the futility of such analyses. Discussing the theories of the origins of the name 'Beguines', the author mentions only some of them, those most often cited and have the greatest number of advocates. This issue is debated particularly frequently and is complex, as not only did the very term 'Beguines' appear in numerous variants (for example, *begginen*, *beoginen*, *begianen*, *beniaginen*, *begghen* or even *begutten*), but also the houses operating within this strand of female religious life were described differently in different regions of Europe and even within a single city. Sometime the name pointed to a specific character, relating, for example, to social status (for example *Wittwenhaus*, house of widows) or dominant occupation (like sewing/weaving: *Kloppelnonnen*). The women of Świdnica were described in the trial records a *moniales Capuciatæ* or *filix Udyllindis*. Sometimes a house would be described by different names in different periods, despite the fact that its nature did not change. On other occasions two words were used to describe a house in a single text (for example, *convendt oder beginenhausz*), which suggests that there were problems with terminology even when the communities were still in existence. Nevertheless, all the houses were part of the religious movement of lay women. The chapter ends with remarks concerning the Beghards, who sparked controversy in society much more frequently. Church dignitaries were convinced that their views reflected the Free Spirit heresy.

The next chapter is devoted to the 1311–12 Council of Vienne and the sanctions its constitutions introduced against the Beguines and the Beghards as well as Free Spirit sects. The author also points to the problem of the reception of these regulations. The work of the papal inquisitor John of Schwenkenfeld in Świdnica was a direct consequence of these decisions. As the author indicates, in Polish dioceses the traces of the reception of decisions taken at the

¹ Karl Bücher, *Die Frauenfrage im Mittelalter*, Tübingen, 1910.

² Uta C. Schmidt, "... que beginen appellantur", oder: Die Beginen als Frauenfrage in der Geschichtsschreibung', in *Lustgarten und Dämonenpein*, ed. Anette Kuhn and Bea Lundt, Dortmund, 1997, pp. 54–77; Claudia Opitz, 'Die "religiöse Frauenbewegung" des Mittelalters und ihre Auswirkungen in der Region des heutigen Ruhrgebiets', in *Vergessene Frauen an der Ruhr*, ed. Bea Lundt, Cologne, 1992, pp. 175–93; Rebekka Habermas, 'Die Beginen — eine "andere" Konzeption von Weiblichkeit?', in *Die ungeschriebene Geschichte: Historische Frauenforschung: Dokumentation des 5. Historikerinnentreffens in Wien*, ed. Beatrix Bechtel et al., Vienna, 1984, pp. 199–207.

³ Edith Ennen warned against following modern thinking patterns in this case, *Frauen im Mittelalter*, Munich, 1994, p. 11.

⁴ For example, in old Marxist-oriented studies; cf. Ernst Werner and Martin Erbstöcker, 'Die Beginen- und Begardenbewegung — Eine Erscheinung mit verschiedenen sozialen Inhalten', in *Ideologische Probleme des mittelalterlichen Plebejertums: Die freigeistige Häresie und ihre sozialen Wurzeln*, ed. iidem, Berlin, 1960, pp. 23–46, 106–30.

Council of Vienne are quite modest. In Silesia they were implemented by Bishop Henry of Wierzbna, which was reflected also in the trials held there. After Henry's death the process was discontinued, only to be revived in Bishop Nancker's time. The 1332 trial of the Beguines of Świdnica was most likely the first presided over by John of Schwenkenfeld.

Chapter 3 is an analysis of the trial. Kras discusses the composition of the inquisition tribunal, the conduct of the trial and the order of interrogations; he mentions the people who were interrogated, the structure of the recorded testimonies, and finally examines the contents of the various statements in detail. The source provides a rare insight into the relations within the convent under trial, its internal structure and the rules governing the womens' lives. At the same time his analysis of the source enables the author to reconstruct the inquisitor's methods of working and the way he conducted the interrogations. Kras provides a balanced assessment of the reliability of the testimonies, pointing to those charges that may have been the results of the inquisitor's efforts as well as the aversion of younger or former sisters towards older members of the order.

In Chapter 4 the author focuses on the origins of the Świdnica Beguines as well as an analysis of phrases used in reference to their community. It turns out that the term *moniales Capuciatæ* was not used to refer to other Beguine communities in Europe. The name came from the sisters' distinctive hood. An exception can be found in the term *Kapuzen* sometimes used in Saxony. The word *moniales* however was frequently used with reference to the Beguines, although numerous objections were raised to this respect. It is possible that in Świdnica, where they were the only community of women, they may have been perceived as nuns. This would not be unusual. The Beguines of Świdnica themselves described their community as that of 'sisters'. On the other hand, John of Schwenkenfeld used the term 'Beguines' among others. The most intriguing term, however, is *filiæ Udyllindis*. Kras considers several possible explanations of this appellation. Two suggestions have been formulated in earlier studies. One equates Udilinda with St Odile, who lived in the late seventh/early eighth century, and whose cult was apparently popularized by Jacobus da Varagine. Another possible explanation is that the name referred to Odile of Liège, who lived in the late twelfth/early thirteenth century and was part of a religious movement associated with new forms of female devotion. She was regarded as one of the first Beguines. Both theories provoke considerable doubts. In the case of the first, Kras notes that the oldest among the Świdnica sisters, blind Anna, knew nothing about this saint as a patron of the Beguines. Yet this is without doubt an argument *ex silentio*. The scholar proposes another explanation. He has concluded that when describing themselves as 'daughters of Udilinda', the Beguines may have been referring to Odelinda of Pyrzyce, who was the mistress of the Cologne beguinage. It was founded around 1291 — but there is no direct evidence that would substantiate such an assertion. The author tries to justify it by pointing to the similar organizational structure of the Świdnica and Cologne

convents. What may arouse some doubts is the chronology. The blind Anna referred to earlier, when asked whether the Świdnica community had been approved by the Church, said that she knew nothing about this, and if this indeed had happened, then, according to Anna, the sister sent to obtain such approval must have done so a long time ago. The Świdnica community was certainly founded before 1304. Anna joined it in 1306, when its mistress was Geza. We cannot be entirely certain, whether this was the first mistress of the convent. She is regarded as such by the editors of this particular source. If we take into account blind Anna's statement, we can assume that the convent had existed long before she entered it. It is therefore possible that it existed already in the 1290s. If the Cologne origins of the houses of the 'daughters of Udilinda' be accepted, the expansion of the model created by the Cologne Beguines would be remarkable, as they appear to have quickly spread (after 1291) as far as Silesia. This may arouse certain doubts. Any meeting between Geza and Odelinda must remain only a matter of conjecture, given the current state of research. On the other hand, however, we know from the trial records that the Beguines did stay in other, distant houses; for example, Adelaide is known to have spent some time in Aachen. The activity of this community of Beguine houses has already been analysed by Johannes Asen. The existence of such a community is beyond any doubt. Kras also points to the use of the terms *Einung* and *Einung zum Einhorn* within the community. We do know quite why one fragment features the phrase *Einung zum Einhorn*, with the two terms being treated as separate a bit later. Nevertheless, the Latin term *unio* used by the Świdnica sisters may be translated into German as *Einung*. Perhaps an analysis of Latin terminology used within the community's other houses would yield new arguments. Despite many doubts, at this point the theory formulated by Kras seems to be the best documented and the most likely. The chapter ends, rather unexpectedly for the reader, with a description of physical work done by the sisters. The fragment might be better suited to the following chapter, entitled 'In search of spiritual perfection', in which the work of the Beguines is analysed as an element of self-improvement.

Chapter 5 is devoted to the practices in which the Beguines apparently engaged towards seeking spiritual perfection. The main question discussed in this part is the relation of the Beguines' teachings to the Free Spirit doctrine. Kras concludes that in the Świdnica case there was no reception of the doctrine; what emerged instead was a distinct ascetic path that was to lead to a union with God. The main elements of these religious tendencies included extreme asceticism, mortification, negation of earthly life — hence the similarities to the Free Spirit doctrine. However, this does not mean that they were interlinked.

The last chapter contains a description of actions undertaken with regard to the Beguines by the Dominican inquisitor John of Schwenkenfeld. Gałuszka points to analogies between views expressed in the Beguines' testimonies and some views of the Franciscans. For example, he raises the question of deliberations about the possible incarnation of God if man had not sinned. Another

question, present since the beginning of Christianity and often intensely debated by the Dominicans, concerned the nature of Christ. John of Schwenkenfeld was in this case a classic Thomist, adhering to the concept of *unum esse in Christo*. One of the Beguines, Adelaide, spoke of Christ's divine and human natures. Gałuszka notes analogies to the assertions of some younger Dominicans or, in a slightly different respect, to the ideas of the Franciscan John Duns Scotus, who, unlike the Dominicans, strongly emphasized the human incarnation of Christ. The assertions of the Beguines in their testimonies were deemed heretical by John of Schwenkenfeld. Another controversy concerned the question of whether Christ took his cross to heaven with him, as was claimed in her testimony by Adelaide, who had apparently heard it from Margaretha de Lychenow. Gałuszka points to the differences between the Dominicans and the Franciscans in this matter in the context of Christ's resurrection and the cross that was to appear at the Last Judgement. In this case, too, the Beguines were closer in their views to the Franciscans. According to Gałuszka, the Beguines may have been deliberately challenging the cult of the Holy Cross, to which the Dominican Church in Świdnica was dedicated. This part of the book seems extraordinarily ingenious despite the fact that some hypotheses are debatable.

It ends with a brief summary pointing to three perspectives on the life of the community, perspectives revealed by the trial records. They express the views of younger sisters, who were critical of practices imposed by older sisters, views of older sisters who were convinced that their path to perfection was correct and finally, the perspective of the inquisitor, John of Schwenkenfeld.

The editorial part of the book begins with a description of the surviving manuscripts as well as an analysis of the texts which seek to establish the filiation of the manuscripts and the links between them. It has been demonstrated that the original text came from notes which were compiled by the inquisitor and inquisitorial notary, and on the basis of which a draft was prepared. The draft became the basis for the fair copy currently kept in the Vatican Library. Gałuszka's findings suggest that there was another fair copy which has not survived and which later became the basis for a copy of the manuscript kept in the Archives of the Cathedral Chapter of Cracow. An analysis of omissions suggests that the content of the lost second fair copy may have been in some parts more critical with regard to the Świdnica Beguines. The basis for the current edition is the Vatican copy. The introduction to the edition does not mention any editorial instructions, but the rules followed in it are described in some detail. The editors have sought to preserve medieval spelling, which seems entirely appropriate. However, the practical implementation of this rule raises some questions. The miniscule 'u' is written in accordance with the sound and content of the manuscript, but in some words 'u' is changed into 'v', if the letter 'v' is found in the medieval original (for example, in the word *vir*). Such corrections

of the text seem debatable. Most editorial instructions recommend that the letters 'w', 'v' and 'u' be changed in accordance with their phonetic value. Control of the editing and spelling of the various words is facilitated by a facsimile of the Vatican and Cracow manuscripts published at the end of the book, which should be regarded as a major asset. Adam Poznański's Polish translation of the entire source is remarkably careful, maintaining a balance between faithfulness to the original and stylistic correctness. Perhaps for stylistic reasons it would have been better to avoid some excessively long sentences or repetitions of the conjunction 'że' (that) in one sentence (for example in IV, 6; V, 2).

We have now at our disposal a comprehensive study of a very interesting source as well as its modern edition with a translation, which should provide another incentive to carry out research into religiosity in the Middle Ages.

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