

The logo for the journal 'Mirator' is displayed in a stylized, red, cursive font. The word 'Mirator' is written in a flowing, elegant script. The logo is set against a light beige rectangular background.

Mirator 1/24 (2024)

eISSN 1457-2362

Glossa ry - Keskiajan tutkimuksen seura / Sällskapet för medeltidsforskning /

Society for Medieval studies in Finland

<https://journal.fi/mirator>

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

A book review

Peter Biller & L. J. Sackville (eds)

Inquisition and Knowledge 1200–1700. (Heresy and Inquisition in the Middle Ages 10.)

Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2022.

Saku Pihko

Tampere University

saku.pihko@tuni.fi

ORCID: 0000-0002-7176-0715

To cite this book review:

Saku Pihko, "Inquisition and Knowledge 1200–1700. Eds. Peter Biller & L. J. Sackville", *Mirator* 1/24 (2024), 81–83.

Peter Biller & L. J. Sackville (eds)
Inquisition and Knowledge 1200–1700. (Heresy and Inquisition in the Middle Ages 10.)

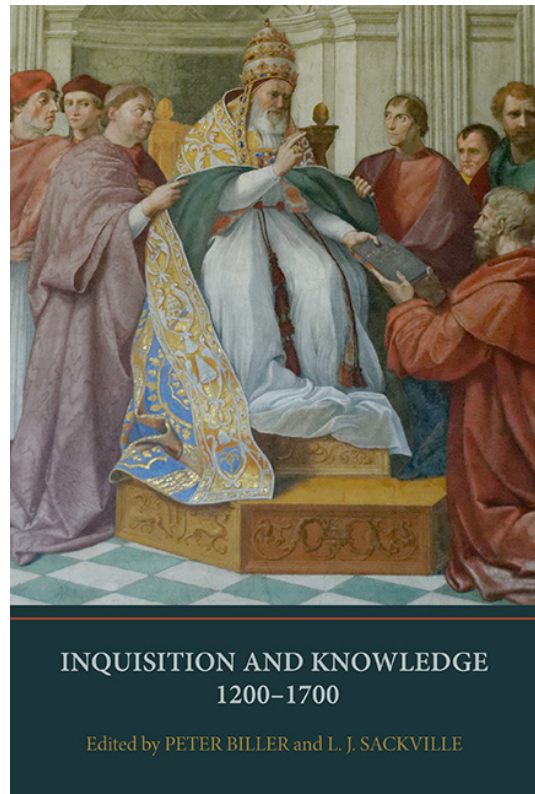
Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2022. xi + 346 pp.

The field of study devoted to research on premodern heresy and inquisition continues to expand. *Inquisition and Knowledge 1200–1700*, edited by Peter Biller and L. J. Sackville, is a manifestation of this productive expansion. The volume is one of the latest additions to the series *Heresy and Inquisition in the Middle Ages* by York Medieval Press, which has become a prominent venue for publishing anglophone scholarship on related themes. The majority of the volume's chapters are based on papers presented at the Inquisition and Knowledge conference held at the University of York in 2018, with additional chapters by invited contributors. The volume as a whole is concerned with how medieval inquisitors and other churchmen constructed and propagated specific types of knowledge about people who were condemned and persecuted as heretics, and how early modern intellectuals discovered this knowledge and reused it to various ends in their own context.

The volume is divided into two parts: the first part (chapters 1–8) deals with the Middle Ages, whereas the second part (chapters 9–13) focuses on the Early Modern period. Many of the chapters do, however, highlight continuities over this traditional period boundary, which is always commendable. The introduction, co-authored by the editors, opens and closes with stories of inquisition-related manuscripts lost and re-discovered – stories which, in many ways, encapsulate the overarching theme of the volume. The introduction also presents the individual chapters in intricate detail and draws connections between them, making it a useful tool for approaching the volume.

Jessalynn Lea Bird (chapter 1) studies the anti-heretical sermons of Paris master, cardinal, and papal legate Jean Halgrin d'Abbeville (c. 1180–1237). She explores the ways in which d'Abbeville's sermons distinguished true and false forms of piety and in doing so worked to authorize, rationalize, and justify inquisitorial activities. Bird's study adds to her previous work that has drawn attention to the previously overlooked anti-heretical preaching activities of pre-mendicant Paris-trained theologians.

Alessandro Sala (chapter 2) scrutinizes the textual representation of heresy and heretics in the



letters of Pope Gregory IX (1227–1241). He demonstrates how information about heretics was reported to the papal curia by churchmen in the field, after which it was appropriated by Roman officials and transformed into an official papal interpretation on the issue of heresy. This information, then, circulated back into the field through papal correspondence and had further influence through incorporation into anti-heretical treatises, inquisitorial handbooks, and Canon law. The exchange of information between the centre and the periphery resulted in the progressive accumulation of papally sanctioned knowledge of heresy.

Jörg Feuchter (chapter 3) draws together fragments of evidence to reconstruct the professional life of lawyer and judge Nepos of Montauban (died c. 1283). Nepos's career is of interest due to its somewhat contradictory nature. In the 1240s, he was employed by heresy inquisitors and worked as a scribe and a witness during their investigations. Despite his earlier service to the faith, he later wrote a redaction of an Italian legal treatise known as the *Liber fugitivus*, which provided legal advice for defendants looking to avoid charges. Feuchter's microhistorical case study of Nepos adds to our knowledge of the various peripheral actors who were involved in inquisitorial activities.

Two chapters deal with trial records. Paweł Kras (chapter 4) studies the records of Dominican inquisitor John of Schwenkenfeld's 1332 inquest into the Świdnica (Lower Silesia, now Poland) Beguine community known as the "cowled nuns" and the "Daughters of Odelind". Participating in the tradition of methodological discussion in the field of inquisition scholarship, Kras strives to uncover three distinct voices from the records: the voice of the inquisitor, the voices of the younger, disillusioned sisters of the community, and the voices of the older, more steadfast sisters. The chapter complements the edition and translation of these records made by Kras and Tomasz Gałuszka, which has also been recently published in the same series.¹ Richard Kieckhefer (chapter 8) re-assesses his earlier work on late medieval witchcraft trials and works to take steps forward by considering the convergence of different types of narratives in the records. His detailed treatment of the material is a thought-provoking attempt to discern the intermingling, sometimes conflicting narratives in trial records and thus stands as an important contribution to the study of premodern legal records in general.

Irene Bueno (chapter 5) examines the representation of the alleged errors of Eastern Christians in late medieval anti-heretical treatises and places these polemical views on Eastern Christianity into the context of efforts to construct systematic, universal, and encyclopaedic knowledge of heresy. She emphasizes the influence of the papal court of Avignon, which was an important intellectual hub in its time, and argues that post-Reformation polemics relied heavily on the long heresiological tradition that stretched back to late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Two chapters deal with texts utilized in the persecution of Waldensian heretics. Reima Välimäki (chapter 6) compares different versions of the 1390s text *De vita et conversacione*, which describes the religious practices and lifestyle of the Waldensians. He argues that the text in its various iterations draws on multiple sources and hovers uneasily between sober description and polemical condemnation. This is because inquisitors and other churchmen needed both accurate information about dissidents to pursue them and polemical information that could be used for propagandistic

¹ Tomasz Gałuszka & Paweł Kras, *The Beguines of Medieval Świdnica. The Interrogation of the "Daughters of Odelindis" in 1332* (Heresy and Inquisition in the Middle Ages 11), translated by Stephen C. Rowell, York Medieval Press: York 2023.

purposes. The appendix entails an edition and an English translation (by Shelagh Sneddon) of one version of *De vita et conversacione*, adding to the ever-growing corpus of edited sources on medieval heresy. Adam Poznański (chapter 7) applies argumentation theory to study the means of rhetorical persuasion employed by the 15th-century Celestine inquisitor Petrus Zwicker in his anti-Waldensian treatise *Cum dormirent homines*. He draws out a typology of the various modes of argumentation used by Zwicker in his attempts to refute Waldensianism and supplies the reader with an ample number of examples of Zwicker's rhetorical practices.

Two chapters deal with the use of knowledge of medieval heresy in the confessional debates of the post-Reformation period and highlight how this knowledge was recycled and put to use in new contexts. Harald Bollbuck (chapter 9) explores the knowledge working practices of 16th-century Protestant historian Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520–1575) by tracing the networks through which he acquired his sources, built his library, and compiled his *Catalogus testium Veritatis* (1556). This catalogue of witnesses of the truth was a counter-church history that situated medieval Waldensians and Hussites as forebears of the Lutherans. Luc Racaut (chapter 10) studies the emergence of the myth of Cathar heretics as Protestant ancestors and places these imaginative discussions into the intellectual context of the 16th-century French Wars of Religion.

Two chapters deal with the 17th-century Doat commission tasked with copying archival holdings from Southern France. Shelagh Sneddon (chapter 11) takes a closer look at the often-ignored French introductory summaries that preface the copies of medieval inquisition records in Bibliothèque nationale de France's Collection Doat. She compares these inserts to the actual records and strives to understand how the scribes working for the Doat commission understood the inquisitorial material they were working with. Peter Biller (chapter 12) attempts to reconstruct the visit of the head of the Doat Commission, Jean de Doat, to the Dominican convent of Toulouse. He sheds light on the practicalities of the work carried out by the commission – especially the selection of documents to be copied. The appendix entails an edition and translation of excerpts from Antonin Réginald's *Chronicon inquisitorum* that were used in Jean-Jacques Percin's 17th-century history of the Toulouse Dominican convent. Both chapters leave the reader longing for a book-length treatment of the Doat commission and its various actors.

Michaela Valente (chapter 13) ends the volume with her study of the myth of the Early Modern Roman Inquisition. She explores the construction of this mythical image and its use by both defenders and critics of inquisitorial activities.

All in all, the collection is a welcome contribution to the field. The rich and highly learned case studies in the individual chapters work well as standalone pieces, but together also constitute a coherent volume. The reader walks away with an improved understanding of how multifaceted the production and use of knowledge of heresy was both in the Middle Ages and in the Early Modern period. While the volume will be required reading for anyone pursuing studies or research on heresy and inquisition for a long time, a more explicit engagement with on-going discussions and debates in the field of (premodern) history of knowledge could have increased the volume's impact beyond its own field.