The Construction of Information in Medieval Inquisition Records: A Methodological Reconsideration

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Abstract

A sophisticated epistemological approach is essential to the use of inquisitorial evidence. Historians have proposed various reading strategies based on the idea that it is possible to distinguish excess elements from inquisitorial sources that can be attributed to the deponents. This article uses examples from Languedocian inquisition records to challenge such interpretations. The construction of deposition records is framed in terms of information flow influenced by variables such as selection, interpretation, abstraction, and the reconstructive nature of human memory. Inquisitorial documents are approached as materially embedded amalgamations of abstracted information co-constructed by the deponents, the inquisitors, and the notaries. The argument is that this information originating from multiple sources became entangled and blends seamlessly in the extant documents, due to which the idea of sifting through inquisitorial evidence in search of a distinct excess or surplus is untenable as a methodological guideline. Instead, an holistic and stratified approach is proposed.

Keywords**:** epistemology; heresy; inquisition; Languedoc; source criticism

Introduction

The rapid increase and intensification in the production and use of written documents in the high Middle Ages coincided with the emergence of heresy inquisitions in the first half of the thirteenth century.[1] Heresy inquisitors and their notaries were pioneers of information management and text-based governance. Inquisitorial efforts to police the religious beliefs and practices of the laity and eradicate various forms of dissent relied heavily on the active use of written records, which were both the practical foundation and a symbol of inquisitorial power. Every stage of an inquisitorial investigation was recorded in writing and meticulously archived. The records of denunciations, confessions, abjurations, and sentences were instruments of bureaucratic coercion: tools of an efficient investigative technology used on the operative, day-to-day level of heresy inquests

[1] Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 25−26, 50, 91. On the intensification of documentary culture in the Middle Ages, see e.g. Bertrand, *Les écritures ordinaires*; Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*; Friedrich, *The Birth of the Archive*, 17−28. On heresy and inquisition in the Middle Ages, see e.g. Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*; Kras, *The System of the Inquisition*; Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*.

to direct inquiries, review old cases, cross-check confessions, detect lies and contradictions, prove relapses, and sentence those deemed guilty.[2]

Most records related to medieval heresy inquisitions have been lost, but a fair amount of this material does survive.[3] Over the years, historians have made ample use of inquisition records as sources for religious and social history. One of the primary allures of inquisitorial evidence has been the access it seemingly grants to the daily life and religiosity of lay people otherwise invisible in the historical record.[4] While some have adopted an optimistic stance in relation to this material, there is also a long historiographical tradition of critical discussion concerning the epistemological possibilities and limitations of inquisitorial sources.[5]

This article builds on these methodological debates and strives to push the discussion forward. First, it presents a short historiographical overview of source critical approaches to medieval inquisition records, after which it uses two carefully selected case studies from early fourteenth-century inquisition records to explore the epistemological implications of the process through which inquisitorial sources were constructed. The central methodological question is framed in terms of information flow from the past into the extant documents. The goal is not to step into the past through the records but to understand how information about the past comes to be in them.[6] What kinds of epistemological affordances and constraints does the inherently constructed nature of inquisition records open to and impose upon the historian? This kind of methodological reconsideration seems necessary, as there remains a degree of ambiguity regarding how historians ought to tackle the epistemic predicament of attempting to know the past through the written traces produced by inquisitorial tribunals.

The empirical evidence used as a laboratory for this methodological investigation is drawn from the register of Geoffroy d'Ablis, the inquisitor of Carcassonne. The material extant in the register is a documentary fragment related to investigations into heresy in the county of Foix carried out by d'Ablis and his lieutenants in 1308–1309.[7] In early fourteenth-century Languedoc[8], heresy inquisitors were still primarily pursuing the so-called good men (*boni*

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[2] Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 29, 37–38, 79–90; Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 26–44, 50–51; Given, "The Inquisitors of Languedoc", 347–351; Kras, *The System of Inquisition*, 293–332; Pihko, *Information and Lived Religion*, 3–4; Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics*, 114–115; Scharff, "Erfassen und Erschrecken"; Sherwood, "The Inquisitor as Archivist".

[3] Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 27–28; Nieto-Isabel, *Communities of Dissent*, 57; Pihko, *Information and Lived Religion*, 5; Scharff, "Erfassen und Erschrecken", 263–264; Zbíral and Shaw, "Hearing Voices", 5.

[4] Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 1–7; Arnold, "Inquisition, Texts and Discourse", 63; Camphuijsen and Page, "Introduction", 2, 9; Zbíral and Shaw, "Hearing Voices", 2.

[5] Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 5–7; Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics*, 2–9; Zbíral and Shaw, "Hearing Voices", 1–12.

[6] Inquisitorial evidence constitutes a particularly advantageous context for developing these theoretical ideas, as it is possible to make well-reasoned assumptions about the actors, stages, and variables involved in the flow of information that brought these sources into being. For similar remarks, see Zbíral and Shaw, "Hearing Voices", 3; Zbíral, Shaw, Hampejs and Mertel, "Model the source first!", 4.

[7] Pales-Gobilliard (ed.), *L'inquisiteur* provides an edition and a French translation. On the d'Ablis register, see Molinier, *L'Inquisition*, 107–161; Pales-Gobilliard, "Introduction"; Sparks, *Heresy, Inquisition and Life Cycle*, 19–20.

[8] On medieval Languedoc, see e.g. Paterson, "The South"; Paterson, *The World of the Troubadours*.

homines). These good men, who were also known as good Christians and friends of God, and to whom historians have traditionally referred to as Cathars, were a group of ascetic ritual-working preachers, whose exemplary lifestyle of apostolic emulation, spiritual teachings with possible dualist connotations, vocal opposition to the Catholic church, and promises of salvation attracted considerable lay devotion and support. From the perspective of the church, they were dangerous heretics who could not be tolerated. Inquisitorial documents, including the d'Ablis register, usually refer to the good men simply as heretics (*heretici*). People who came under suspicion of involvement in the good men's dissident activities were interrogated by inquisitors, and those who were found guilty of transgressions were sentenced to various kinds of penances and punishments.[9] This article scrutinizes the deposition records of two such individuals, who were forced to face the d'Ablis tribunal in 1308 to answer for their contacts with the good men. Focus is on those sections of the records that deal with the deponents' exposure to allegedly heretical proselytizing, as this evidence provides an opportunity to discuss issues of methodological relevance.

A Short Historiography of Source Critical Approaches to Medieval Inquisition Records

Source critical issues related to the use of inquisitorial documents have been extensively discussed and debated.[10] A unifying theme for engagement with inquisitorial evidence has for long been a stance that calls the veracity and trustworthiness of this material into question by emphasizing the distortions imposed upon it by the dominating inquisitorial perspective. In fact, suspicions of this sort were already voiced in the Middle Ages, when contemporary critics accused inquisitors of fabricating accusations and proof.[11] In modern historiography, the work of Herbert Grundmann[12] on the topos of the heretic in medieval texts and the mechanisms underlying the production of inquisitorial legal records was seminal for instituting this critical approach. The combined efforts of subsequent historians who have built on Grundmann's initial insights have established a standard of critical, deconstructive scrutiny regarding the ways in which the inquisitorial process shaped the textual material it created. Consensus now exists on the fact that scholarly use of inquisitorial evidence requires great care and source critical sophistication due to its inherent constructedness.[13]

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[9] Pihko, *Information and Lived Religion*, 17—18. On the alleged heresy of the Languedocian good men, see e.g. Barber, *Cathars*; Lambert, *Cathars*. See also Sennis (ed.), *Cathars in Question*.

[10] Cf. Zbíral and Shaw, "Hearing Voices", 18, who argue that the study of inquisition records "has served as a focal point for far-reaching reconsiderations of source criticism". On the historiography of premodern legal records in general, see Camphuijsen and Page, "Introduction", 6—16.

[11] Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 5; Friedlander, *The Hammer of the Inquisitors*; Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 42—44.

[12] Grundmann, "Heresy Interrogations"; Grundmann, "The Profile (*Typus*) of the Heretic". On Grundmann's influence, see Deane, "Introduction".

[13] Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 5—7; Arnold, "Inquisition, Texts and Discourse", 63—64; Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics*, 11—14; Bruschi and Biller, "Texts and the Repression of Heresy", 6—9, 15—17; Kras, *The System of the Inquisition*, 40—43; Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics*, 2—9, 123, 154, 198; Zbíral and Shaw, "Hearing Voices", 1—12. Cf. Bruschi and Biller, "Texts and the Repression of Heresy", 8—9, who note that texts produced in the context of persecuting alleged heresy "used to be only 'sources': glasses cleaned and polished and rendered distortion-free by source-criticism, *through* which

Whereas understanding the constructed and thus distorting nature of inquisitorial evidence has assumed centre stage in methodological exchanges, interpretations regarding the epistemological implications of this constructedness still vary among historians. In more recent scholarship, historians have invoked different versions of the idea that it is possible to find excess elements in inquisitorial documents. These approaches share some important foundations, and while their conclusions are not diametrically opposed, their methodological outlooks and epistemological stances differ to a significant degree.

At the more nuanced end of the spectrum on which these approaches have been situated, John H. Arnold has made an influential contribution by drawing on the ideas of Michel Foucault on discourse and power. He has suggested a shift of attention from questions of veracity to questions of power by emphasizing how inquisition records exist only as a result of the power mechanisms that demanded confession. He argues that inquisition records serve as elements within a highly specific inquisitorial discourse on heresy and transgression, which positions the inquisitor as a figure of authority and the deponents as textually constructed confessing subjects. According to Arnold, the historian cannot evade or strip away the discursive effects of inquisitorial language, nor gain epistemic access to the deponents as living and speaking individuals prior to the creation of the written records. He alleviates this bleak conclusion by borrowing literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of *heteroglossia*, which refers to the multiplicity of discourses at work within a given cultural context. Thus, Arnold argues that despite the dominance of inquisitorial discourse on heresy, inquisition records entail a necessary excess of language, which reproduces elements from other discourses that can be of interest to the historian.[14]

Compared to Arnold, Caterina Bruschi has been more straightforward in her approach. Instead of regarding deponents in inquisition records as confessing subjects constructed by inquisitorial discourse, she views them as real individuals and strives to identify with them through compassion and curiosity. Bruschi builds on the ideas of Carlo Ginzburg, who argued that historians engaging with inquisitorial documents can hear parts of the interrogation dialogue. Her methodological framework emphasizes the importance of understanding the sequential construction of inquisition records and the influence of various filters – for example, the number of people interrogated, the questions that were asked, selection and choices regarding what to say and what to record, the different linguistic and cultural translations that took place, and the agency and tactics of the historical actors involved – that affected the construction process. Her suggestion is that historians endeavour to strip away the layers of distortion imposed by these filters to uncover what she calls *surplus* – namely, the sections of the records which, "though filtered, appear to be genuine and authentic pieces of the original deposition".[15] Bruschi's

historians then peered at the past. There has been a seismic shift: the texts and the actions and mind-sets which produced them have slowly become *themselves* also elements of the past reality which historians need to describe".

[14] Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief*, 23—26; Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 2—3, 7—13, 76—77, 79, 110, 121 & passim; Arnold, "Inquisition, Texts and Discourse", 63—69, 80; Arnold, "Voicing Dissent", 8. See also Arnold, "Voices in Hostile Sources".

[15] Bruschi, "'Magna diligentia est habenda per inquisitorem'", 83—104; Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics*, 3—4, 11—44, 70. While Bruschi articulates her methodological outlook in clear detail, it is somewhat paradoxical that she also seems to contradict herself. Bruschi, "'Magna diligentia est habenda per inquisitorem'", 83; Bruschi, *The*

practical and optimistic approach has been influential. Among others, Claire Taylor and Paweł Kras have adopted similar methodological outlooks.[16]

It is easy to acknowledge the enduring importance of the work done by Arnold and Bruschi, and by those from whom they have drawn insight and inspiration.[17] Yet the noticeable discrepancy between Arnold's and Bruschi's epistemological conclusions illustrated by this brief overview makes it clear that these issues remain far from settled. In fact, the contrast between their respective positions is quite revealing of the more general ambiguity and lack of consensus that haunts the methodological *status quaestionis* concerning the possibilities of knowledge afforded by medieval inquisition records. Recently, Antonio Sennis has summarized this situation eloquently by asking: "[c]an we […] retrieve at all the voices and experiences of the local individuals? Or, on the contrary, are those voices audible only through the amplifier of the inquisitor, an amplifier that distorts them to the point of rendering their sound unrecognizable and their meaning elusive?"[18]

The ideas developed in this article build on the long tradition of critical discussion concerning the extent to which biased sources like inquisition records relate to the historical reality that they purport to depict. In my estimation, historians have been correct in emphasizing the constructedness of inquisition records, and proposed methodologies based on the idea of attempting to distinguish excess elements from inquisitorial documents have certainly been used successfully to answer various research questions. That being said, the debates and lack of consensus regarding the epistemological implications of the inherent constructedness of inquisitorial documents that are embodied in Sennis's question motivate the continuation of methodological engagements with these sources. Could it even be that we are caught within a false paradigm if the epistemological problem is framed as an either-or question? Perhaps epistemic access to the past is not binary but is better thought of as coming in degrees?[19] This article pushes the discussion forward and argues against the idea of focusing on excess elements in inquisitorial sources. Instead, it advocates an holistic and stratified approach based on understanding inquisition records as abstracted information[20] originating from several sources and entangled in the material

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Wandering Heretics, 13 state that the reading strategy she advocates for "does not involve us in striving to discover a 'truth' after stripping away all the 'filters' from the depositions". Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics*, 190 also states that inquisition records "should not be seen as crumbs of reality."

[16] See e.g. Kras, "The hunt for the Heresy of the Free Spirit"; Taylor, "'Heresy' in Quercy".

[17] See Zbíral and Shaw, "Hearing Voices", 3—4, 11—12 for discussion on the differences and similarities of what they term as the classic (from Grundmann to Bruschi) and discursive (Arnold) source critical approaches, concluding that these "approaches probably need to coexist, since each of them has different possibilities and limitations, and each allows us to address a different set of questions." See Pihko, "The Construction of Information in the Records of Medieval Canonization and Heresy Inquests" for discussion on a similar division between source critical positions ranging from Ginzburgian optimism to postmodern pessimism that can be discerned among historians who study medieval canonization processes.

[18] Sennis, "Questions about the Cathars", 9—10. Cf. Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 7; Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*, 108.

[19] Cf. Kosso, *Knowing the Past*, 28.

[20] On information, see e.g. Floridi, *Information*; Floridi (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Information*.

medium of the extant documents.[21] The underlying message is one of cautious epistemic optimism – despite the inherently problematic nature of inquisitorial sources, it is possible to make more, rather than less, of them.[22]

The Abstraction of Information in Medieval Inquisition Records

In general, Languedocian inquisition records, such as the d'Ablis register, are written in a standardized manner using specialized inquisitorial terminology and a simple administrative Latin with occasional vernacular insertions. Despite the high degree of overall uniformity, the content of inquisitorial documentation varies, depending on the inquisitor in charge of the proceedings, the areas of investigative emphasis in a particular inquest, and the stylistic idiosyncrasies of the notary working for the tribunal. As a rule of thumb, the information content of inquisition records is thoroughly conditioned by the questions that inquisitors posed to the deponents during the interrogation, which reflect their legal prejudice and goal of finding and condemning those deemed guilty. Thus, inquisition records tend to emphasize transgressive actions at the expense of unorthodox beliefs and primarily document evidence about, for example, participation in illicit rituals and preaching, as well as material support provided by lay people to alleged heretics. Inquisitors also had a keen interest in legally relevant facts, such as the names of people involved in suspicious activities and the places where these activities took place, as this afforded an opportunity for wider investigations.[23]

One of the many individuals who found themselves before an inquisitorial tribunal answering for contacts with the allegedly heretical good men in the early fourteenth century was Guerau de Rodes[24]. In 1308, this Tarascon native residing in Pamiers at the time of his trial was interrogated by two Dominican friars, Guerau de Blomac and Johan du Faugoux, acting as lieutenants to Geoffroy d'Ablis, the inquisitor of Carcassonne. The record of his deposition, written by the notary Peire Raous, is quite representative of the material extant in the corpus of Languedocian inquisition records in general, as it lists an array of heavily standardized evidence about the suspect's involvement in dissident activities over the previous decade.[25]

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[21] Cf. Tucker, *Our Knowledge of the Past*, 261, who states that "[o]ur knowledge of history is limited by the information-preserving evidence that survived the obliterating ravages of time in the historical process that connects history with the writing of historiography."

[22] My stance of qualified and cautious epistemic optimism has been inspired by Currie, *Rock, Bone, and Ruin*.

[23] Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief*, 201–202; Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 98–107; Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics*, 14–19, 50, 190; Bueno, *Defining Heresy*, 88–118; Pegg, "Questions about Questions", 114–115; Pegg, *The Corruption of Angels*, 45–46; Pihko, *Information and Lived Religion*, 9–11; Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics*, 128–135, 142; Théry-Astruc, "The Heretical Dissidence of the 'Good Men'", 85–87.

[24] Instead of the Latin names extant in inquisition records, I have opted to use Occitan nomenclature for the Languedocian individuals mentioned in the article. The exception is the name of inquisitor Geoffroy d'Ablis, which is given in French, as he originated from the Île-de-France.

[25] For Guerau de Rodes's depositions, see Pales-Gobilliard (ed.), *L'inquisiteur*, 84–108. According to the evidence available, he was interrogated three times in May, July, and November of 1308, but the record of his third deposition is cut short due to reasons that

Among the body of written evidence based on information from Guerau's confession are several references to his alleged encounters with dissident proselytizing. For example, one of these references reads that the deponent had met the heretics Peire and Jacme Auter at a certain house in Tarascon. The record lists the names of seven other people who are claimed to have been present, including the deponent's sister-in-law. There, it is stated, they heard the words and preaching of the heretics and adored[26] them.[27] Several short, similarly worded entries can be found in the same deposition, all of which describe other occasions when the deponent, together with other named individuals, had been exposed to the words and preaching of the good men, or had heard them read from a book.[28] However, apart from one short reference to the deponent hearing the heretics read about saints Peter and Paul from a book written in the vernacular,[29] these concise entries imply nothing about the spiritual information that the deponent was exposed to during these interactions.

Spiritual ideas were heavily contested in medieval Languedoc, and heresy inquisitors were key players in the church's agenda of policing the religious behaviour and beliefs of the laity. Thus, they placed a high premium on documenting and disrupting the flow of illicit religious information in the Languedocian communities.[30] The *interrogatoria* used to structure inquisitorial questioning routinely entailed at least one generic question regarding the deponent's possible exposure to heretical preaching, and the notaries who produced the records of inquisitorial interrogations used a variety of means to document and describe phenomena related to dissident proselytizing. The initial impression upon reading Guerau's deposition is that the authorities reduced evidence of religious information transmission into standardized entries devoid of detail. This is typical for most of the evidence produced about phenomena that were of primary inquisitorial interest, such as heretical sermons.[31]

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remain unknown. It is also implied that he had already confessed to inquisitors around six years earlier, but no record of this prior confession survives.

[26] The *adoratio* (also known as the *melioramentum*) was a ritualized series of oral petitions and genuflecting gestures performed by lay sympathizers in the presence of the good men. On the *adoratio* in more detail, see e.g. Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 130—133; Duvernoy, *Le catharisme*, 208—211.

[27] Pales-Gobilliard (ed.), *L'inquisiteur*, 86—88: "Item dixit quod vidit alia vice predictum Petrum et Jacobum Auterii hereticos in domo dicti Arnaldi Piquerii apud Taraschonem et vidit ibi cum eis Petrum de Galhaco filium Petri de Galhaco de Tarascone et Blancam uxorem Guillelmi de Rodesio, fratris ipsius testis, et Gayam uxorem Ramundi Fabri, Na Lorda uxorem Guillelmi Bayardi et dictum Arnaldum Piquerii et uxorem eius de Tarascone et Esclarmundam, uxorem Ramundi Auterii de Ax et audiverunt verba et predicationes eorum omnes predicti et adoraverunt predictos hereticos secundum modum predictum, ipso teste vidente."

[28] Pales-Gobilliard (ed.), *L'inquisiteur*, 84, 86, 88, 90, 94, 98.

[29] Pales-Gobilliard (ed.), *L'inquisiteur*, 86: "P. de Luzenaco portavit eis quendam librum scriptum in romane sine postibus in quo libro erat scriptum de sanctis Petro et Paulo, sicut audivit ipse testis legere dictum Jacobum Auterii hereticum". On the use of written materials in the context religious dissent in medieval Languedoc, see Biller, "The Cathars of Languedoc".

[30] Pihko, *Information and Lived Religion*, 129, 234. On the relational nature of inquisitorial documents, which makes evidence on dissident communication networks visible, see e.g. Nieto-Isabel, "Beguines", 2, 9—11; Nieto-Isabel, *Communities of Dissent*, 3, 18, 24, 27, 50—61, 87, 249; Nieto-Isabel and López-Arenillas, "From inquisition to inquiry", 195—197, 202—204, 207, 209; Zbíral and Shaw, "Hearing Voices", 12, 15.

[31] Arnold, "Inquisition, Texts and Discourse", 71; Arnold, "The Preaching of the Cathars", 185, 193; Pihko, *Information and Lived Religion*, 131, 142; Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics*, 128—129; Théry-Astruc, "The Heretical Dissidence of the 'Good Men'", 91—92.

This tendency to standardize and compress information was probably opted for in the name of efficiency when the notaries worked to put the deponents' confessions into their official written form. From the perspective of the inquisitors, for whom these records were a tool of investigation and persecution, it sufficed to produce a simplified statement of guilt and transgression, and it was often superfluous to document further details.

Inquisition records do not grant direct or unmediated access to the deponents or to their talk during the interrogation.[32] An epistemologically important feature of the sequence through which these documents were constructed is that information was selectively replicated and discarded by all those involved.[33] In this regard, the most obvious selector of information was the inquisitor. During the interrogation, the inquisitor usually utilized a standardized questionnaire, asking about certain aspects of the suspect's past and ignoring others, thus shaping the information content of the interrogation dialogue and the subsequent record.[34] Alongside the inquisitor, the deponents selected information passively and actively, and the inquisitor's information gathering capabilities depended to a large extent on the ability of the deponents to divulge information to the tribunal. Moreover, the deponents were active agents in the interrogation and chose how they wanted to respond to questioning, depending on situational circumstances, survival tactics, and their will to resist the inquisitorial authorities.[35] In addition to the inquisitor and the deponent, an influential, yet often somewhat overlooked selector and processor of information was the notary in service of the tribunal. He made choices regarding what information was important enough to record in the minutes of the interrogation and imposed further selection and standardization on this information later when compiling the official record. He also transformed and translated the vernacular dialogue of the interrogation, processing it into a coherent, past-tense third-person narrative written in Latin and relying heavily on specialized inquisitorial terminology.[36]

In retrospect, it is often impossible to know at which stage or by whom a given piece of information was discarded, but the

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[32] Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief*, 23; Arnold, "Voicing Dissent", 8.

[33] Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics*, 14; Bueno, "*Dixit Quod Non Recordatur*", 370; Nieto-Isabel and López-Arenillas, "From inquisition to inquiry", 200−201; Pihko, *Information and Lived Religion*, 44−46; Zbíral and Shaw, "Hearing Voices", 4, 7−8.

[34] Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief*, 23; Arnold, "Inquisition, Texts and Discourse", 69−71; Biller, "'Deep is the Heart of Man, and Inscrutable'", 267−269; Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics*, 17−19; Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics*, 123; Théry-Astruc, "The Heretical Dissidence of the 'Good Men'", 85−86; Zbíral and Shaw, "Hearing Voices", 5−8, 10. For discussion on inquisitorial questions and *interrogatoria* in general, see e.g. Biller, Bruschi and Sneddon, "Introduction", 65−76; Hill, *Inquisition in the Fourteenth Century*, 126−132; Kras, *The System of the Inquisition*, 233−251; Pegg, "Questions about Questions".

[35] Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics*, 5−7, 15−17, 21−24, 46−47, 49, 145, 180, 191−192; Bruschi, "'Magna diligentia est habenda per inquisitorem'", 107−108, 110; Zbíral and Shaw, "Hearing Voices", 7.

[36] Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 5, 75−76; Arnold, "Inquisition, Texts and Discourse", 63; Biget, "I catari di fronte agli inquisitori", 236−237; Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics*, 18−23; Burnham, *So Great a Light*, 5−6; Fois, "Interpretazione, trascrizione o traduzione?"; Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 28; Pegg, *The Corruption of Angels*, 57; Zbíral and Shaw, "Hearing Voices", 4, 8−10. Cf. Lett, "La langue du témoin sous la plume du notaire". The production of summarized extracts of guilt (*culpae*) used during inquisitorial sentencing constitutes a further stage of notarial information processing. For methodological discussion on the use of inquisitorial sentences as sources, see Pihko, *Information and Lived Religion*, 48, 95.

epistemological implications of this selective process of replication are all-encompassing, as it thoroughly conditioned all the information that is extant in inquisition records. Reading on in Guerau's deposition, however, it is revealed that in this case the reduction of detail was the result of choices made by the deponent during the interrogation, not the choices of the authorities indifferent to the content of heretical proselytizing. In a later section of the record, it is explicitly stated that the deponent was questioned about the preaching that he had mentioned several times earlier. More specifically, he was asked what the heretics preached and what they said. To this, the deponent replied that they had spoken about Peter, Paul, and the other apostles, and had said many words that he could not remember.[37]

The record also includes an itemized list consisting of the deponent's responses to further questioning about errors that the heretics proclaimed. On a general level, the themes of the errors that are recorded – that God had not created the material world, that the consecrated host and baptism were worthless, and that only the good men could grant absolution – are standard issue and can be found in variations throughout Languedocian inquisition records. However, in contrast to the common, thoroughly standardized lists of errors often repeated verbatim from one deposition to the next, each item in the list of errors in Guerau's deposition seems to be supplemented with further information that the deponent reported to the tribunal. For example, the section concerning penance and absolution claims that the deponent heard the heretics say that only they, not members of the Catholic clergy, could pardon and absolve sins. It also reads that they said that however gravely one had sinned, whether one was a usurer or murderer or in the state of any sin, they would immediately absolve them at no cost. Following standard inquisitorial practice, the deponent was also questioned about his own beliefs regarding the listed errors, and he admitted to having believed what the heretics said and preached.[38]

According to the evidence available, it seems that Guerau first only mentioned his exposure to the preaching and teachings of the good men in passing, due to which the notary opted to represent these references with concise and standardized formulations. The

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[37] Pales-Gobilliard (ed.), *L'inquisiteur*, 104: "Interrogatus de predictis predicationibus de quibus supra pluries fecit mentionem ipse testis, quid predicabant dicti heretici et quid dicebant, dixit quod loquebantur de beato Petro et beato Paulo et aliis apostolis et dicebant multa verba de quibus ipse testis non recordatur."

[38] Pales-Gobilliard (ed.), *L'inquisiteur*, 104: "Interrogatus de erroribus quos dicebant et asserebant dicti heretici, dixit quod audivit eos loquentes de creatione rerum visibilium et dicebant quod Deus non fecerat carnem humanam nec faciebat florere nec granare, ponentes instanciam dicti heretici et dicentes quod si homo poneret granum bladi super lapides, non nasceretur set istud provenit ex putritudine terre sicut dicti heretici asserebant. Item dixit quod audivit eos loquentes de hostia sacrata quod non est nisi purus panis et quod si dimitterentur ibi mures comederent, ergo dicebant dicti heretici comederent corpus Christi si illa ostia esset corpus Christi. Item audivit eos loquentes de babtismo quod nichil valebat, babtismus qui sit cum aqua, set ille babtismus quem ipsi heretici faciunt de Spiritu Sancto. Item audivit eos loquentes de penitencia, dicentes quod presibiteri nec prelati nec religiosi possunt absolvere peccata set solum ipsi heretici possunt indulgere peccata, dicebant enim quod quantumcumque homo sit in magnis peccatis, sive sit usurarius vel murtrerius vel in quibuscumque peccatis, incontinenti, absque quacumque pecunia et emenda, ipsi absolverunt eos. Interrogatus quid credebat ipse de predictis, dixit quod credebat ita esse sicut dicti heretici dicebant et predicabant." For discussion on lists of heretical errors in inquisition records, see e.g. Pihko, *Information and Lived Religion*, 135—141; Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics*, 131—132, 199.

inquisitors, however, were not satisfied and adapted their questioning to press the deponent to disclose additional details regarding what he had heard the heretics say, making some aspects of the information reported by the deponent visible to the historian. These details could have easily been left unknowable had it not been for the inquisitors' decision to circle back and delve deeper.

The process through which the information found in medieval inquisition records was constructed was a sequence of information-based interpretations. The deponents interpreted the environment in which they lived, and then later in the inquisitorial interrogation they were required to reinterpret their past from the perspective of their present legal predicament. Once the deponent had voiced an interpretation of something heard or witnessed, it was the prerogative of the inquisitorial tribunal to interpret the content of the oral confession from their own legal and religious perspective and to further process this information during multiple rounds of subsequent writing by the notary.[39] An epistemologically sophisticated reading of inquisitorial documentation acknowledges that it is often impossible to clearly differentiate what information in a given entry is from the deponent and what is from the authorities. The case at hand implies that Guerau was questioned about what he had heard the good men preach about, but the use of the standardized framework to represent information from his confession effectively obscures the details of both what he heard and how the issue was discussed and negotiated during the interrogation. This does not necessarily imply that the good men had not preached about these themes, only that there is no accountable way of knowing the extent to which the record corresponds with the information content of their sermons or the interrogation dialogue through which information about these sermons was reported to the tribunal. It is worth noting that the record does not make it transparent whether an itemized list of assumed heretical errors was used to question the deponent, or if this structure was imposed on the information that he reported in retrospect when the record was produced. This observation highlights the subtleties of the influence that ancillary texts and notarial formulae exerted on the creation of inquisitorial evidence.

Stepping back and looking at the references to dissident proselytizing in Guerau's deposition, it becomes clear that they are informational abstractions shaped and conditioned by the deponent's confession, the inquisitor's questions, and the notary's textual practices. Abstraction, simply put, refers to the decrease in the informational overlap between consecutive stages in the process through which inquisitorial documents came into existence. The superimposition of abstraction was the inevitable consequence of information moving through selective replication from the world of the past to the deponent, and from the deponent to the inquisitorial authorities – that is, from Guerau's encounters with dissident preaching to his memory, from his memory to talk in the interrogation, and from the interrogation dialogue to writing in the extant record.

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[39] Cf. Scharff, "Auf der Suche nach der ‚Wahrheit'", 161, who argues that "[d]ie Wahrheit wird im Verhör gesucht, und ihretwegen, um sie zu finden, entwickeln die Inquisitoren komplizierte Methoden der Befragung. In jedem Fall aber wird sie auch gefunden, oder besser gesagt: konstruiert. Denn wahr im Sinne der Inquisitoren ist, was am Ende in den Akten steht".

While inquisitorial documentation can in no way be taken to be equal to the deponents' talk in the interrogation or to the described events, it is also clear that in terms of the information it contains, the documentation is not completely severed from what preceded it. Despite radical notarial intervention that imposed structural and terminological reformulations on the evidence, abstracted entries in deposition records arguably retain a degree of accountable and necessary informational overlap with the deponents' talk, as the information content of these entries was, at least in part, afforded and constrained by the deponents' confessions that were prompted by the questions posed by inquisitors. The information reported to the tribunals by the deponents was, in turn, afforded and constrained by information they were privy to based on their earlier experiences. Thus, even heavily abstracted entries arguably carry evidentiary value. At a very minimum, they serve as important quantitative and contextual evidence demonstrating the prevalence of certain types of historical phenomena – for example, dissident proselytizing – that can then be investigated in more qualitative detail through the reading of less abstracted entries, such as the itemized list in Guerau's deposition.[40] Understanding the epistemological implications of this fleeting but necessary informational overlap between the records and the stages through which they were created is foundational for the historian's epistemic engagement with the past.

A methodologically useful conceptualization that can be developed from the axiom that inquisition records are informational abstractions is that the information extant in them adheres to a spectrum of abstraction ranging from the extreme to the minimal. This means that all the information that these sources entail is subject to abstraction, but that the correlative degree, intensity, and extent of this abstraction varies from record to record and from entry to entry. This is a general feature of medieval inquisition records that becomes evident even from the individual example provided by Guerau's deposition, which fluctuates between concise, thoroughly standardized entries and more detailed sections. Taking this variety of abstraction into account facilitates the analysis of a given set of inquisitorial evidence and obviates the need to make value distinctions between its parts. Instead of only focusing on especially detailed cases, the argument developed in this article is that an exhaustive exploration of the evidence available on a given theme requires the historian to take the entire spectrum of abstraction into account and to calibrate knowledge claims accordingly.[41]

The Entanglement of Information in Medieval Inquisition Records

The deposition of Guerau's sister-in-law, Blanca de Rodes, also permits methodologically useful observations about the epistemological implications of the process through which inquisitorial evidence was constructed. In 1308, Blanca, the wife of

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[40] Cf. Zbíral and Shaw, "Hearing Voices", 5, who note that even short and dry records carry "at least a faint echo" of the interaction between the deponent and the inquisitor.
[41] Cf. Zbíral and Shaw, "Hearing Voices", 19, who note that there is promise in working out new ways to treat dissimilar depositions "both in detail and as part of the same continuum, and to handle qualitative subtlety as well as quantitative bulk." Ibid., 12 also note that focus on excess elements in inquisition records that are deemed more authentic "leaves much of the material outside the scope of analysis." See also Smail, "Witness Programs", 230, 248.

Guilhem de Rodes, was arrested under suspicion of heresy. Held imprisoned at the Mur of Carcassonne, she was interrogated in the gaoler's chambers by lieutenant inquisitor Johan du Faugoux, who had previously questioned Guerau. The long record of her confession describes her various contacts with the allegedly heretical good men, who, for example, had visited her house on several occasions over the previous decade.[42]

As was the case with Guerau's deposition, the record concerning the first of Blanca's two interrogations, written by the notary Guilhem Raimon, makes several references to her encounters with heretical proselytizing. Interestingly enough, the first of these references describes the deponent's husband asking the good men Peire and Guilhem Auter whether they were heretics, and when they replied that they were of those who were called such and had been made perfected heretics in Lombardy, he asked them to convert to the Christian faith. They declined to do this, however, saying that they had chosen and held a better faith and way to salvation. They also said that they held fast to the way of God and the apostles and that no one but those of their faith and sect had the power of the saints Peter and Paul and the power to save souls and that no one could be saved but through them and in their faith.[43] The second reference describes the deponent going to meet the good men at a certain house together with her brother-in-law, Guerau. It is the same house in Tarascon where Guerau admitted having met the good men with Blanca, but it is unclear whether the records refer to the same occasion. The inquisitor pressed her for details about what the heretics said, and it is recorded that she admitted hearing from them that there was no other church but theirs, that the church of Rome was worthless, and that only those who were of the church of God had the power to save souls.[44]

Right away, Blanca's deposition stands in contrast to much of the evidence found in the previous case. It contains more details about the information content and interactive dynamics of dissident proselytizing, as it does not reduce these details under standardized blanket statements about, for example, someone simply hearing the heretics preach or expound their errors. This, again, highlights the variety of abstraction that defines inquisitorial evidence, which was alluded to in the previous section of this article.

After these more detailed entries, in a kind of reverse version of what was seen in Guerau's deposition, the level of abstraction in Blanca's deposition increases. The third reference describes the deponent and her daughter going to meet the good man Guilhem Auter at a house where they had been informed that he was residing.

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[42] For Blanca de Rodes's depositions, see Pales-Gobilliard (ed.), *L'inquisiteur*, 212—240. She was interrogated on two occasions, first in July of 1308 and subsequently in April of 1309.

[43] Pales-Gobilliard (ed.), *L'inquisiteur*, 214: "Item dixit quod Guillelmus de Rodesio maritus suus predictus interrogavit, ipsa audiente, dictos P. et Guillelmum Auterii si erant heretici, qui dixerunt quod erant de illis qui sic vocantur et quod in partibus Lumbardie fuerant facti heretici perfecti seu tales qui sic appellantur. Tunc, dictus maritus suus dixit eis quod converterentur ad fidem nostram christianam. Et ipsi responderunt quod non facerent quia meliorem fidem et viam salvationis elegerant et tenebant et dicebant quod ipsi tenebant viam Dei et apostolorum et nullus alius nisi esset de fide et secta eorum et habebant potetstatem sanctorum Petri et Pauli et potestatem salvandi animas et quod nullus poterat salvari nisi per eos et in fide eorum."

[44] Pales-Gobilliard (ed.), *L'inquisiteur*, 220: "Item dixit interrogata quod audivit a dictis hereticis quod dicebant quod non erat alia ecclesia nisi sua et quod ecclesia Romana nichil valebat et quod ipsi soli qui erant, ut dicebant, ecclesia Dei, habebant potestatem salvandi animas."

Asked if she had heard the admonitions or preaching of this heretic, the deponent answered in the affirmative, stating that he spoke much ill about the church of Rome and lauded his own as above.[45] It is unclear whether this kind of highly concise reference to what she had already confessed to earlier is the result of choices made by the deponent or the notary, but it is clear that the level of abstraction varies from entry to entry, and that evidence regarding the information content of dissident proselytizing that the deponent had purportedly encountered on various occasions begins to blend in the extant record.

Just as was the case in Guerau's deposition, the fourth reference to hearing the heretics in Blanca's deposition is reminiscent of memory as an influential variable affecting the construction of the evidence. Here, the record reads that the heretics Felip and Raimon de Talayran had been in her house and when the inquisitor asked her what she and those who visited them there had done with them, the deponent replied that they heard the preaching and admonitions of the heretics, who spoke of the apostles and the Gospels saying many words that she did not remember.[46]

The fifth and final section of Blanca's deposition dealing with her exposure to the religious ideas of the good men is longer and more detailed. She had met the Auter heretics at a certain house and the inquisitor inquired as to whether she had heard them speak against the Roman church or the Catholic faith. She was also asked whether they said anything against the sacraments, especially regarding baptism, matrimony, or the consecration of the host in the mass. According to the record, the deponent admitted to having heard many things from them that confirmed the inquisitor's suspicions. Her answers are represented in the record as a loosely itemized list similar to that found in Guerau's deposition, but in this case, it is more explicit that the list corresponds with the structure of the interrogation. Pertaining to the spectrum of abstraction, the list constitutes a fusion of standardized and more anecdotal information. For example, the item on the consecrated host not being the body of Christ but dough made by hand is quite standard,[47] whereas the next item is more colourful, stating that the heretics said that no one ought to cross themselves or have faith in the cross being of help to anyone, but should rather spit upon it and despise it because God had been crucified, spat on, and perished upon it.[48] Like Guerau, Blanca, too, was questioned about her beliefs regarding the aforesaid and she admitted to having believed what the heretics said but repented, asking the inquisitor for absolution and grace.[49]

On this occasion, the inquisitorial authorities chose to further process details of what Blanca reported to them and placed this

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[45] Pales-Gobilliard (ed.), *L'inquisiteur*, 222: "Interrogata si audivit monitionem vel predicationem dicti heretici, dixit quod sic et loquebatur, dicendo omnem malum de ecclesia Romana et laudando suam ut supra."

[46] Pales-Gobilliard (ed.), *L'inquisiteur*, 222: "Interrogata quid fecerunt cum dictis hereticis, dixit quod audiverunt predicationem et monitionem eorum, loquendo de apostolis et de Euvangeliis multa verba de quibus non recordatur".

[47] Pales-Gobilliard (ed.), *L'inquisiteur*, 228: "ostia consecrata per capellanum, ut dicebant, non erat corpus Christi, ymmo erat pasta et nullus debebat credere quod illa pasta seu illa ostia esset corpus Christi quia opus manuum erat et non opus Dei."

[48] Pales-Gobilliard (ed.), *L'inquisiteur*, 228: "Item dicebant, ut dixit, quod nullus debebat se signare nec habere fidem in cruce quod posset juvare hominem, ymo homo deberet spuere contra eam et facere omnem vilitatem quia Deus fuit ibi positus, clavellatus, sputus et mortuus."

[49] Pales-Gobilliard (ed.), *L'inquisiteur*, 228−230.

information within a standardized framework concerning the assumed errors of the heretics. These differences in the level of abstraction that define the different sections of the deposition are a telling example of the potential effects of the different variables that influenced the construction of inquisition records. While the record arguably contains ample information on the way in which the deponent described what she had heard, it is still an inquisitorial representation of her confession. This is noticeable, for example, in the structure and vocabulary of the text, as well as in the way that the level of abstraction alternates fluidly between more and less standardized elements that highlight certain details and obscure others. This subtle fluctuation of the degree to which information in a given deposition or individual entry within a deposition is abstracted is something that the historian should remain alert to when formulating knowledge claims about the past based on inquisitorial evidence.

The record of Blanca's confession makes it clear that when questioned by the inquisitor, she was able to recall and report a great deal of religious information she had heard from the good men, and that some of this information is also visible to the historian. The level of detail varies from entry to entry, based on the fluctuating ability and willingness of the deponent to report information and the authorities' choices in what lines of inquiry to pursue and what information to record. The pervasive themes of dissident evangelism – for example, apostolic ideals, salvation, and a generally critical stance towards the Roman church and its sacraments – are familiar to those who have read extensively in Languedocian inquisition records, but the entries that go well past the usual readymade formulations make explicit the information the deponent contributed to the record. While the extent to which the recorded information corresponds with the ideas Blanca heard from the good men during her numerous interactions with them remains unknowable, a case such as this – just as Guerau's – arguably reveals something of the variety of religious information that the good men imparted to their lay supporters. This adds to the pool of available evidence concerning the content and dynamics of heterodox information transmission in medieval Languedoc, which so often elude the historian, hiding just beneath the surface of the laconic references to heretical preaching and errors that abound in inquisitorial documents.

While it is easy to see the process that created the information found in medieval inquisition records as an epistemological constraint, the evidence to which the historian is privy exists not despite its construction but as a direct result of it. Thus, the sequence of information flow from the past into the present simultaneously constrains and affords the historian's epistemic activities. Inquisitorial evidence was created through the combined efforts of the inquisitor, whose desire for information drove the questioning, the deponent, whose ability and will to divulge information constrained and afforded the evidence desired by the inquisitor, and the notary, who was responsible for recording a selection of the reported information during the interrogation and later processing this information into its official written form. The information that has come down to the historian is thus conditioned by each of the historical actors involved in the creation of the records. That we are ultimately dealing with a materially embedded amalgamation of information is especially clear in the last section of Blanca's deposition, which presents the errors that she heard in the form of an itemized list, as the record shifts back and

forth between standard inquisitorial language and more particular details. This results in a seamless blend of information originating from both the deponent and the authorities, and the boundaries between information sources become blurred due to their entanglement.

Memory and the Construction of Information in Medieval Inquisition Records

An epistemologically important aspect of inquisition records warranting further discussion is that they are always retrospective. When people were confronted by inquisitors, they were prompted or even forced to remember and reinterpret their past from the perspective of the present. Thus, the inquisitors' investigative capacities depended to a significant degree on the memory of the deponents.[50]

One of the shortcomings of the long source critical tradition concerning medieval inquisition records is the lack of explicit consideration for the epistemological implications of memory formation. Perhaps because it is such an obvious variable affecting the construction of inquisitorial evidence, memory is often noted in passing but has been seldom taken into account systematically. An exception to this is an article by Irene Bueno, which discusses the topic of memory in the context of inquisition trials. Bueno focuses on the ways in which the principles, demands, and objectives of the inquisitorial legal process, and the tactical forgetfulness of the deponents all worked to impose selection on the reported and recorded memories. In doing so, she largely sidesteps the psychological dimension of memory.[51] Mnemonic processes, however, are a major contributor to the abstraction of information in trial records. Because of this, historians who use inquisitorial documents or other types of legal records as sources ought to incorporate the results of psychological research on memory into their epistemological toolbox.[52]

Memory is one of the most thoroughly researched areas of human psychology.[53] Empirical studies show that memory operates in a reconstructive manner, which makes it malleable and prone to distortions. Memories of past events and occurrences, such as those recalled when facing an inquisitorial tribunal, are always constructed anew at the moment of recollection from the perspective of the

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[50] Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics*, 13; Bueno, "*Dixit Quod Non Recordatur*", 369−370, 372, 378, 381−382, 391−393; Pegg, "Questions about Questions", 124; Pegg, *The Corruption of Angels*, 51; Taylor, *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition*, 13−14; Zbíral and Shaw, "Hearing Voices", 8. On medieval ideas concerning memory, see Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*.

[51] Bueno, "*Dixit Quod Non Recordatur*".

[52] Cf. Cubitt, "History, psychology and social memory", 19, who notes the significant memory-dependence of historical scholarship, as historians often rely on information that has travelled into source material via memory and states that "[a] critical awareness of memory's strengths and weaknesses is therefore an important part of historical method." Following Boddice, "The Cultural Brain as Historical Artifact", I fully acknowledge the human brain to be a highly plastic, historically situated biocultural entity subject to change over time. Even so, it seems implausible for a psychological phenomenon as central to human life as memory to have changed so drastically since the Middle Ages that historians could simply dismiss the findings of psychological research on memory. For discussion on potential avenues for interdisciplinarity between psychology and history, see Tileagă and Byford (eds), *Psychology and History*.

[53] Foster, *Memory*, 2.

present. Memory processes and subsequent reports are also extremely sensitive to cues and contextual influences, such as the inquisitor's questions and the pressures of the interrogation. Moreover, memories, such as those concerning encounters with dissident proselytizing recalled by Guerau and Blanca, are simplified syntheses that rely on schema-based generalization and selection. People are much better at combining information from many sources, rationalizing it, and abstracting the general structure of similar events than at remembering an individual event in exact detail. Memories of different events often merge, and this only increases when recalling recurring events. These observations apply especially strongly to memories of talk. Research indicates that the capability to reproduce verbatim recollections of talk one has heard in the past is weak, and that this even applies to words spoken by the person doing the remembering. Memories of past conversations – or, in this case, heretical sermonizing – are virtually never word for word, and their accuracy remains quite low even when evaluated at the level of general idea units. People tend to remember the gist of what was spoken rather than the details.[54]

Inquisition records usually cite memory explicitly only on those occasions when it imposed a hard limit on the information gathering capabilities of the inquisitor. This was evident in the depositions of Guerau and Blanca, both of which refer to their limited ability to recall what they had heard the good men say.[55] However, it is of fundamental importance to understand that the memory of the deponents was not only a negative filter that worked to selectively discard information from the records. Rather, memory functioned as an omnipresent variable in the process through which inquisition records were constructed. Through subtle transformations, memory worked to impose a varying degree of abstraction on all the information reported to the authorities by the deponents, thereby conditioning inquisitorial evidence at large. The effects of memory cannot be expunged from the records, nor is it possible to determine the veracity of a given recollection – an epistemic predicament only exacerbated by the surprising rarity of multiple deponents giving testimony about the same event. Nonetheless, drawing on psychological research that facilitates understanding the inner workings of human memory allows us to see memory as an important element in the process of information flow through which inquisition records as informational abstractions came into existence, thereby contributing to increasing the sophistication of our source critical capabilities.

That being said, it is worth noting that there is also a productive and epistemologically optimistic side to understanding how memory works. While a legal tribunal seeks facts about individual events as

[54] Blandón-Gitlin, Fenn and Paquette, "True and False Memories"; Brown and Craik, "Encoding and Retrieval of Information", 98, 100; Bueno, *Dixit Quod Non Recordatur*, 370, 391—393; Conway, *Autobiographical Memory*, 60, 98, 101, 104, 141; Cubitt, "History, psychology and social memory", 21—22, 31—32, 37; Davis and Friedman, "Memory for Conversation"; Davis and Loftus, "Internal and External Sources of Misinformation", 196—207, 212—219, 223—224; Foster, *Memory*, 6—8, 13—14, 23—26, 17, 50—51, 63, 68—83; Gallo and Wheeler, "Episodic Memory"; Gisli Gudjonsson, *The Psychology of Interrogations*, 83—91, 99—100, 326; Koriat, "Control Processes in Remembering", 333—336; Laney, "The Sources of Memory Errors"; Mitchell and Johnson, "Source Monitoring", 179, 182—184; Neisser and Libby, "Remembering Life Experiences", 315—321; Rubin, "Introduction", 4.
[55] Pales-Gobilliard (ed.), *L'inquisiteur*, 104, 222.

they really happened in as much detail and accuracy as possible, historians might prefer to dispense with such aspirations and embrace the effects of reconstructive, schema-based generalization that influences the formation of witness testimony. This is because once the inevitability of these effects of memory processes are acknowledged, evidence extant in inquisitorial sources and other similar documents can be seen as revealing an abstraction of the general dynamics of the world of the past as they were perceived and remembered by those giving testimony. From this generalized perspective, we might, in fact, gain more knowledge of the past than from an accurate individual anecdote. In this sense, the generalizing tendency of memory can actually be seen as a blessing in disguise.

Conclusions

Analysing two carefully selected cases from the early fourteenth century, this article has suggested that medieval inquisition records can be understood as informational abstractions – that is, materially embedded information shaped and conditioned by a multi-stage sequence during which several historical actors acquired, processed, and transmitted information. This sequential flow of information from the past into the extant documents began prior to the interrogation, when people encountered and perceived events and occurrences in their environment and formed memories about them. Then, usually years or sometimes even decades later, people were interrogated by heresy inquisitors whose questions, threats, and pressures prompted deponents to reinterpret what they remembered about certain aspects of their past from the perspective of the emotionally loaded situation of the inquisitorial interrogation. During and after the interrogation, the authorities appropriated the information reported by the deponents. Notaries in the service of inquisitors drew on textual models derived from ancillary legal material and transformed selected elements from the deponents' vernacular talk into standardized written Latin evidence that served the juridical objectives of the tribunal. At each stage, available information was selectively replicated (and discarded), and moved from one material modality to another – the paradigmatic examples being the shifts from memory to talk and from talk to writing. While it was the inquisitor's investigative and persecutory agenda that drove this process, the deponent's (often involuntary) participation also exerted influence on the creation of the evidence. Thus, inquisitorial documents can be thought of as amalgamations of abstracted information afforded and constrained by the deponents' earlier experiences and reconstructive memory processes, talk during the interrogation, and the act of textual appropriation performed by the inquisitorial authorities. This information originating from multiple sources became entangled, and blends seamlessly in the material medium of the extant documents.

Acknowledging the epistemological implications of this inherent abstraction and entanglement, the impossibility of retrospectively unravelling the weave of information becomes apparent. These difficulties render problematic the idea of attempting to distinguish some kind of excess or surplus from inquisition records. Looking at the records analysed in this article, how might one decide whether their individual elements are surplus survivals from the deponents' confessions or mere inquisitorial impositions? Where might one draw such boundaries? Thus, relying on an excess approach when selecting

evidence for analysis seems untenable as a methodological principle, as it would inevitably lead to arbitrary value judgements that ultimately diminish the pool of potential evidence available to the historian.

Thinking in terms of a spectrum of abstraction is an effective antidote to implicit hierarchies of epistemic value, as it allows the historian to bypass the need to attempt to differentiate which elements in inquisitorial sources are worth analysing. Instead of attempting to distinguish between authentic and corrupted sections of a given record, or focusing solely on those sections of the records that have been subjected to the least amount of abstraction, recognizing the inherently abstracted nature of inquisitorial sources enables the historian to use the entire range of evidence available in an holistic fashion and to make carefully calibrated knowledge claims based on an understanding of its complex process of creation. While the intensity of the abstraction imposed by the construction of the records varies from case to case, all entries found in inquisitorial documentation are ultimately abstractions conditioned by the sequence of information flow through which they came into being. However much this information was transformed along the way, the information found in inquisition records was constrained and afforded by the information that the deponents were privy to and divulged to the tribunals.

This subtle informational layeredness of inquisitorial evidence calls for a stratified epistemic approach. The idea is not to peel away layers of inquisitorial distortion in the hope of revealing any kind of authentic kernel possibly concealed beneath them. Rather, the historian's task is to make stratified knowledge claims in relation to the three distinct but connected levels of the inquisition record, the interrogation, and the wider world of the past in which the deponents and inquisitors were situated. Working out the extent of accountable informational overlap between writing in the records, talk in the interrogation, and the historical phenomena that precede them is a, if not *the*, central methodological question, as it is this informational overlap that provides the historian with an avenue of epistemic access to the past. At the level of the extant record, we are privy to the inquisitor's interpretation and selective representation of information reported by the deponent. At the level of the interrogation, we can know at least something about information discussed during questioning. The extent of this knowledge depends on the amount of abstraction imposed by notarial processing. At the level of the world, it is not possible to know the extent to which the evidence corresponds with the individual events and occurrences depicted in the records. This may seem discouraging, but we can overcome these limitations by conducting an holistic reading of inquisitorial evidence on a given theme of interest through which it is possible to discern an abstraction of the general patterns and dynamics of historical phenomena.[56] While the degree of induction involved increases the further back we reach, the inferences made remain empirical because the extent of

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[56] Cf. Smail, "Pattern in History", 156—159, 166—167, who argues that historians who read medieval legal records and other similar sources are not privy to knowledge about the individual events and occurrences depicted in them – rather, the historian gains knowledge of what he calls patterns (e.g. networks, processes, customs, and probabilities), which come to light not from any single documentary entry but through an inductive and cumulative reading of evidence.

accountable information delineates the space of warranted interpretations.

Mutatis mutandis, these epistemological insights drawn from the study of inquisitorial evidence can also be applied to other documentary contexts.[57] Any reading of trial records or other types of historical sources created through chains of testimony can benefit from understanding the nature of information, its transmission through sequences of selective replication, and the ways in which the actors, variables, and material modalities at play influenced the evidence ultimately available to the historian.

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[57] For a comparative methodological analysis, see Pihko, "The Construction of Information in the Records of Medieval Canonization and Heresy Inquests".

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