Citation:
Eugene Smelyansky: Self-Styled Inquisitors: Heresy, Mobility, and Anti-Waldensian Persecutions in Germany, 1390–1404, in: Mittelalter. Interdisziplinäre Forschung und Rezeptionsgeschichte, 18. November 2015, http://mittelalter.hypotheses.org/6979.

Self-Styled Inquisitors: Heresy, Mobility, and Anti-Waldensian Persecutions in Germany, 1390–1404

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1000 Worte Forschung: *Dissertation, History, University of California, Irvine, completed in June 2015*

The 1390s and early years of the fifteenth century saw an unprecedented intensification of religious persecution targeted primarily at Central and Eastern Europe's most numerous heretical movement, Waldensianism.[1] Members of a religious movement that believed in lay preaching, simplified forms of worship, and apostolic poverty, Waldensians attracted relatively little inquisitorial attention in the previous decades. During the last decade of the fourteenth century, however, Waldensian communities from the Baltic to the Swiss Alps and from the Rhine to the Danube were targeted in a series of inquisitions that uprooted and apprehended their members and religious leaders, and disrupted their religious practice. With many towns and regions experiencing anti-Waldensian inquisitions during this period, the usual tactic of fleeing persecution by migrating to another town or even region proved likely less effective. Moreover, an inquisition in one place in the German lands could have a "domino effect" on areas far away, as news of or refugees from one inquisition served as catalysts for other persecutions. For example, a refugee from Donauwörth in 1394 caused the inquisition against a former Waldensian

[1]Robert E. Lerner, "Waldensians," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Joseph A. Strayer (New York 1989), 12:508; Gordon Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages: The Relation of Heterodoxy to Dissent, c. 1250 – c. 1450* (London 1999), 449.

couple in Regensburg, while the news of the inquisition in Bern pushed the magistrates in Fribourg and Strasbourg to investigate Waldensians communities in their own towns in 1399-1400.[2]

The most important factor that distinguishes the inquisitions of 1390-1404 is the role of a particular group of individuals, the so-called itinerant inquisitors. Much of what we can learn about the place of late medieval Waldensians in society is incomplete without a study of their persecutors: their careers, methods, and motivations.[3] For instance, I demonstrate that these mobile persecutors were reacting in part to the internal fissures and spiritual problems within Waldensian communities across the German-speaking lands, as well as to the relative absence of stable institutions charged with repression of heterodoxy in Central Europe. These mobile heresy-hunters with a talent for aligning themselves with powerful ecclesiastical and secular patrons often initiated inquisition in regions that lacked the will or infrastructure to persecute local Waldensians. The semi-independent status of late medieval inquisitors, men like Peter Zwicker, Heinrich Angermeier, and Martin of Amberg, played a particularly crucial role. Unlike inquisitors in Southern France and Northern Italy in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, these persecutors were not tied to any particular region or diocese. Unlike their predecessors in Germany, the Dominicans Gallus of Neuhaus (d. 1355) and Walter Kerlinger (d. 1373), these "freelance" heresy-hunters were

[2]Richard Kieckhefer, *Repression of Heresy in Medieval Germany* (Philadelphia 1979), 66-67; Kathrin Utz Tremp, "Der Freiburger Waldenserprozeß von 1399 und seine bernische Vorgeschichte," *Freiburger Geschichtsblätter* 68 (1991), 57-85; Georg Modestin, *Ketzer in der Stadt: der Prozess gegen die Strassburger Waldenser von 1400* (Hannover 2007), 11-12.

[3]Only one of the three inquisitors active during the period, Peter Zwicker, received scholarly attention. See, Peter Biller, *The Waldenses, 1170-1530: Between a Religious Order and a Church* (Aldershot 2001); and more recently: Georg Modestin, "The Anti-Waldensian Treatise *Cum dormirent homines*: Historical Context, Polemical Strategy, and Manuscript Tradition," in *Religious Controversy in Europe, 1378–1536: Textual Transmission and Networks of Readership*, ed by Michael Van Dussen and Pavel Soukup (Turnhout, 2013), 211-29.

not affiliated with the mendicant orders, and thus were favored by local clerical elites who had come to distrust or compete with the mendicants during this period.[4]

The first two chapters of my dissertation provide an overview of inquisitorial activity during this period and examine social structure of German Waldensian communities. The following chapter compares two urban inquisitions in Augsburg and Rothenburg ob der Tauber, and the role of inquisitor Heinrich Angermeier and regional bishops in shaping the outcome of both campaigns. Chapter Four provides context for persecutory "zeal" attributed to itinerant inquisitors by reconstructing the life and career of the most prolific of them, Peter Zwicker. Finally, the last chapter analyzes the long-distance networks formed by the itinerant inquisitors, which consisted of persecutors, informers, and recent converts. These networks facilitated the inquisitors' mobility and helped them to secure patronage.

Mobility of both the persecuted and the persecutors remains among the most important factors that enabled the inquisitions of 1390-1404. Reacting to the existence of complex networks of heretical communities throughout Germany, these inquisitors followed leads from one community to another, acting as persecutors, consultants, expert witnesses, and authors of anti-heretical treatises. The freelance status of the itinerant inquisitors allowed them to serve as external agents of persecution, often in places that did not have the incentive to pursue heresy otherwise. This demonstrates that itinerant inquisitors, ecclesiastical authorities, and their urban counterparts operated in a complex web of affiliations and rivalries (religious and political), of resistance and consensus.

[4]Richard Kieckhefer, *Repression of Heresy*, 55; Robert E. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Los Angeles 1972), 134-35; Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*. 3rd ed (Malden, MA 2002), 169.

The inquisitorial campaigns of that long decade—each rooted in its local political, social, and religious context—were nevertheless part of a larger wave of persecutions (*Verfolgungswelle*, to borrow the term from Kathrin Utz Tremp) that shared mobile agents and victims and sent shockwaves across the network of Waldensian communities in the German lands.[5] The ensuing inquests ushered in a number of uses for German Waldensians, as they began to face systematic persecution. In the environment of weakened ecclesiastical authority, political disarray, and urban strife of the 1390s, the persecutors instrumentalized their Waldensian victims. Real or imagined, they were used as pawns in a conflict between cities and bishops, as "good Christians" led into heresy by clerical neglect, as dangerous and seditious subjects, or simply as useful polemical straw figures that could be used as to promote orthodoxy. These political, social, religious, and cultural perceptions of German Waldensians came together to underpin a period of intense obsession with Waldensianism followed by relative disinterest in the following decades.

[5]Kathrin Utz Tremp, "'Multum abhorrerem confiteri homini laico'. Die Waldenser zwischen Laienapostolat und Priestertum, insbesondere an der Wende vom 14. zum 15. Jahrhundert," in *Pfaffen und Laien - ein mittelalterlicher Antagonismus? Freiburger Colloquium 1996*, ed by Eckart Conrad Lutz and Ernst Tremp (Fribourg 1999), 166.