

Heresy, Doubt and Identity: Late Medieval Friars in the Kingdom of Aragon

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The fourteenth-century Kingdom of Aragon enjoyed a reputation as a haven for religious dissidents, doubters, heretical refugees and malcontents. This is particularly true of those fleeing the upheaval that the Franciscan Order experienced early in the century, as debates over the nature of poverty within the order created serious conflicts within communities, between friars and superiors, and between the order and the papacy. These visitors operated at the highest levels of the royal court, as has been well documented in the recent surge of interest in figures such as Ramon Llull and Arnald of Villanova. But the effects were also felt in rural communities, arousing suspicion among local bishops. Court proceedings and other documents reveal the pervasive atmosphere of doubt and suspicion that focused on several Franciscan houses in the diocese of Barcelona as late as the middle of the fourteenth century.

In the twilight of an October evening in 1345, a group of Franciscan tertiaries stood arguing in the garden of their small house. A newcomer to the community, Francesc Joan, had reported to the local Franciscan lector that the group had heretical leanings. That evening two of the tertiaries, Domènec and Bartomeu, confronted him. The exchange became heated: soon each was accusing the other of heresy: ‘You’re a heretic’ – ‘No indeed, you’re a heretic!’ A fourth brother stepped in and suggested that each of the accused’s rooms be searched for ‘the writings of brother Peter John’, to settle the matter.¹ Two months of brawling, extortion and accusation followed, during which the entire group was imprisoned awaiting trial before the bishop. Despite their innocence of heretical leanings, the

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¹ Josep Perarnau i Espelt, *Beguïns de Vilafranca del Penedès davant el Tribunal d’Inquisició (1345–1346). De captaires a banquers?*, Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, Nuovi studi storici 85 (Rome, 2010), 49, lines 269–75. The manuscript of the depositions that are the focus of Perarnau’s excellent critical edition is Barcelona, Arxiu Diocesà, Processo 3.

controversy broke the little community, which had lived in relative peace for decades prior to Francesc Joan's advent. Such was the power of doubt and the suspicion to which it led. Even far distant in time and place from the Franciscan poverty controversy and the related heresies of Peter John Olivi (1248–98), the mere raising of doubts about heterodoxy could destroy the fabric of a community's life in rural Catalonia.²

Much of the literature on the Spiritual Franciscans has focused on the Italian groups of these rigorist and schismatic friars, or on the Provençal beguins. These beguins were the followers of Peter John Olivi, and not the loosely organized houses of penitential women known as beguines, whose communities were widespread in northern France, the northern German lands and the Low Countries. But for the purposes of this essay we turn further south and westward to another centre of beguinism and the cult of Olivi: the Crown of Aragon, straddling the Pyrenees to control both Catalonia and Montpellier. By the fourteenth century, the kingdom already had a reputation as a haven for religious dissidents, doubters, heretical refugees and malcontents. The mountainous region in the northern part of the kingdom bordered Languedoc, a hotbed of heretical activity most famous for the Cathars active there in the thirteenth century. In both Languedoc and northern Aragon, refugees and sympathizers might move freely among small communities, circulating texts and ideas over several generations. Amongst those seeking refuge in the rural mountain communities or safe passage to quieter situations in Sicily or the Kingdom of Naples were those fleeing the upheaval that the Franciscan Order had experienced in the early part of the century. The consequences of that conflict continued to affect Franciscan communities in the region for decades.³ Debates over the nature of poverty within the Order created serious conflicts within

² There is a vast and expanding bibliography on Olivi. Among others, see David Burr, *The Persecution of Peter John Olivi* (Philadelphia, PA, 1970); Alain Boureau and Sylvain Piron, eds, *Pierre de Jean Olivi (1248–1298)* (Paris, 1999); and the online resource 'Oliviana: Mouvements et dissidences spirituels XIII^e–XIV^e siècles', at: <<http://oliviana.revues.org>>.

³ In the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, until the advent of the Inquisition, Languedoc and possibly Catalonia served as a Cathar refuge: Edward Peters, *Inquisition* (Oakland, CA, 1989), 76. In the fourteenth century, the area became a way-station for Franciscans fleeing the fallout of the poverty controversy: Thomas N. Bisson, *The Medieval Crown of Aragon: A Short History* (Oxford, 1991), 96; Jill Webster, *Els Menorets: The Franciscans in the Realms of Aragon from St Francis to the Black Death* (Toronto, ON, 1993). Further works on the Franciscans in Catalonia include Pedro Sanahuja, *Història de la serà-*

communities, between friars and superiors, and between the Order and the papacy. The effects of this conflict at the curia were keenly felt even in rural areas, arousing the reservations of local bishops and distrust among small communities.

Catalonia experienced an elevated level of wariness and suspicion in the first half of the fourteenth century regarding these issues, as is made clear by the ambiguity about 'beguins', tertiaries and penitential groups in the sources; the persecution of poverty rigorists, and even of those commenting on the poverty debates; and the increased anxiety caused by proximity to heretical preaching and writings. Court proceedings and other documents surrounding two inquests in Girona (1325) and an inquest twenty years later in Vilafranca del Penedès (1345–6) reveal the long reach of the poverty controversy, as it contributed to a pervasive atmosphere of doubt and suspicion that affected laity and friars alike. The spectre of suppressed heresies continued to haunt the order a generation later, driving friars and tertiaries in the diocese of Barcelona to legal and physical extremes. This essay will explore several views in the Aragonese experience of the Franciscan poverty controversy. Firstly, it will provide some context for the larger controversy, and simultaneously explicate the ambiguity that surrounds the Franciscan Third Order in this region's sources and in the minds of their contemporaries. Secondly, it will explore the consequences of papal prosecution and persecution of poverty rigorists. Friars, tertiaries and laymen alike were acutely aware of the poverty debates taking place across the Pyrenees at Avignon, held strong opinions on them, and even hosted heretical penitents from time to time. And thirdly, it will demonstrate that even for relatively orthodox communities, proximity to heretical preaching itineraries and larger heretical communities created the opportunity for bursts of accusatory hysteria. Years later, the reverberations of the poverty controversy had the power to tear apart sleepy, stable groups in the mountain towns around Barcelona. Although poverty debates at Avignon lasted only a generation, ending bloodily and swiftly, the inquests, anxieties and above all doubts which they set in motion continued to inflict collateral damage at the fringes of the Order for decades.

fica provincial de Catalunya (Barcelona, 1959); José Pou y Martí, *Visionarios, beguinos y fraticelos catalanes (siglos xiii–xvi)* (Alicante, 1996).

While doubt may be a positive agent of change, as the first step towards faith, or even towards conversion, it is the negative qualities of doubt which will be explored here. Doubt is inherent in the study of heretical groups: by their very nature, heretical beliefs often consist of the doubting, refusal or misbelieving of Church doctrine. But the mechanisms established by the Church to pursue and correct such errors, doubts and ‘stubborn’ heresies, also produced new forms of doubt within accused or suspect communities such as the tertiaries of Vilafranca del Penedès. To be tainted even by association with suspected heretics was cause for distrust, reservations, misgivings and suspicion. The Crown of Aragon is uniquely situated for an exploration of the effect of wider heretical movements and persecutions on local communities. Its rich archival holdings, close ties to the papal court and proximity to hotbeds of heresy in southern France and the western Mediterranean provide ample room for studying ‘doubt’ in the context of heretical activity. It was a major site for circulation of the works of Arnald of Vilanova, whose views have often been affiliated with the Spiritual Franciscans and beguin circles in Barcelona.⁴ Aragon’s geographical and political position put many levels of society – laymen, tertiaries, friars and the intellectual elite – in sometimes contentious opposition to the papacy and its policies. Much of this centred on the reception of the poverty controversy initiated by Peter John Olivi.

Although he died in 1298, Peter John Olivi cast a long shadow over tertiaries and beguins in the early fourteenth century. A Franciscan theologian and enthusiast for the apocalyptic writings of Abbot Joachim of Fiore, his doctrine of *usus pauper* strongly influenced the Spiritual Franciscans in the poverty debates of the early fourteenth century, despite the fact that many of his teachings had by that time been condemned. This doctrine was developed during the 1280s, and advocated a restricted use of goods without ownership: that is, even if a friar did not own the items he was using (such as foodstuffs, books, clothing) his vow of poverty should prevent him from using them more than strictly necessary. The Franciscan hierarchy, in Olivi’s first censure in 1283, argued that going beyond this and embracing an unrestricted use of goods owned by non-Franciscans

⁴ Clifford Backman, ‘Arnau de Vilanova and the Franciscan Spirituals in Sicily’, *FS* 50 (1990), 3–29; Joseph Ziegler, *Medicine and Religion c.1300: The Case of Arnau de Vilanova* (Oxford, 1998).

was not breaking the vow of poverty.⁵ Rehabilitated, Olivi continued to write and expound his theories on the Book of Revelation and on Franciscan poverty, but after his death in 1298 the Franciscan General Chapter of 1299 condemned several of his teachings and burned his writings.⁶ Olivi's tomb in Narbonne nonetheless became the centre of an active regional cult.⁷ The following developed quickly: in 1299, only a year after his death, the provincial council at Béziers that condemned his writings also expressed suspicion of 'beguins', described in its acts as persons who wore distinctive clothing, practised penitence and preached on the coming apocalypse, all of which were resonant with both the tertiary movement (members of which were known as brothers and sisters of penitence) and Olivi's writings.⁸

The terms 'beguin' and 'Spiritual Franciscan' each present their own difficulties of interpretation and layered meanings. Historians have retroactively applied the term 'Spiritual Franciscan' to a hotch-potch of reformers and schismatics whose own self-description was '*fratres spirituales*'. These Spiritual Franciscans, both friars and tertiaries, sought more stringent observation of poverty as part of the *vita apostolica*, but they did so in ways that were broadly divergent from each other. It is clear from many sources, including the Girona inquests of 1325 (see below), that the Franciscan friars in Aragon were no strangers to the poverty controversy unfolding across the Pyrenees, and even educated laymen show awareness of the issues it raised.⁹

The issue of Franciscan poverty first became prominent in the 1280s, when several Franciscan theologians had called for more rigorous observance of poverty in the Order. During the short-lived pontificate of Celestine V in 1294, a group of friars in the March of Ancona briefly formed their own schismatic order. When this

⁵ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century after Saint Francis* (University Park, PA, 2001), 53–4.

⁶ Ibid. 88; David Flood, 'Pierre Jean-Olivi et la règle franciscaine', in *Franciscains d'Oc. Les Spirituels (ca 1280–1324)*, Cahiers de Fanjeaux 10 (Fanjeaux, 1977), 139–54; Yves Congar, 'Les positions ecclésiologiques de Pierre Jean-Olivi', *ibid.* 155–64.

⁷ Louisa A. Burnham, *So Great a Light, So Great a Smoke: The Beguin Heretics of Languedoc* (Ithaca, NY, 2008), 20–23.

⁸ Malcolm Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty* (London, 1961), 155–6; Burr, *Spiritual Franciscans*, 51, 58, 62–5.

⁹ Josep Perarnau i Espelt, 'Noves dades sobre beguins de Girona', *Annals de l'Institut d'Estudis Gironins* 25 (1979), 237–48; *idem*, 'Una altra carta de Guiu Terrena sobre el procés inquisitorial contra el franciscà fra Bernat Fuster', *Estudis Franciscans* 82 (1981), 383–92.

was dissolved on Celestine's abdication, the friars were returned to their former communities, where they were harshly treated by their superiors. The reformist and schismatic friars continued to press for reform, and hopes of a final settlement with the Order were raised by Clement V and the Council of Vienne c.1311–13, only to be dashed following his death in 1314. Events for the Spirituals unravelled rapidly thereafter: disobedient friars in Provence ejected their superiors by force, they were summoned before the new pope, John XXII, for trial, and those few who refused to obey their superiors and papal pronouncements on their poverty were burned in the spring of 1318.¹⁰

At the same time, from 1317 to 1323 John XXII was issuing decisive bulls in favour of the Franciscan hierarchy's position on *usus pauper*, which effectively ended the Spirituals' hopes of achieving reform through official channels. Many of them, already elderly, left the papal sphere and lived quietly in hermitages and refuges in the Kingdom of Naples or elsewhere. Among the papal bulls was *Sancta romana* (30 December 1317), condemning those identified as '*fraticelli*, *bizzocchi* or beguins' found in Narbonne, Toulouse, Provence, Sicily and parts of Italy.¹¹ Interestingly, John XXII does not mention Aragon, though we know beguins to have been active in Catalonia from the early 1300s. Nevertheless, those possessing, preaching on or otherwise involving themselves in rigorist poverty views came under scrutiny from Catalonian bishops and inquisitors for many decades after *Sancta romana*. The poverty controversy and its aftermath created, sustained and gave force to effective and punitive expressions of doubt and suspicion within Franciscan communities throughout the first half of the fourteenth century.

The problem of defining these groups of pious laypersons living in common was a source of confusion for their contemporaries and for the inquisitors, and has also long been one among scholars. This is due in part to some confusion of terms, but more problematically to

¹⁰ Burr, *Spiritual Franciscans*, 196–206.

¹¹ Conrad Eubel, ed., *Bullarium Franciscanum Romanorum Pontificum*, 5 (Rome, 1898), 134–5. All three terms were used to refer to errant Franciscans or poverty rigorists who opposed the papal position on Franciscan poverty. *Fraticelli* is now commonly used to refer to the Franciscans who opposed later papal proclamations on the nature of Christ's poverty: in the past they were often and confusingly conflated with the Spiritual Franciscans. *Bizzocche* was one of the terms used to describe beguin-like persons in regions of Italy.

the fluid nature of their own identities. One group might be referred to by many terms, some of which could be pejorative. For example, many of the Spiritual Franciscans and beguins who were tried and even executed in the early fourteenth century were found guilty of holding 'Olivian' heretical views or possessing his banned writings. When used as a pejorative, the term 'beguin' therefore carried the stigma of association with his suppressed cult, and the taint of heresy, but it could also be used simply to refer to penitential groups without heretical leanings. The problem of terminology is exacerbated when different sources use different terms for the same group: for instance, when founding a hospital to be run by tertiaries in Valencia in 1346, the king of Aragon and other donors referred to the hospital community variously as the women of the Third Order of St Francis, as brothers and sisters of penitence, and as beguins.¹² These terms were frequently used interchangeably, sometimes in the same document, and the different emphases of these identifications overlap and blur, even in the minds of those who had contact with these groups and their individual members.

Franciscan affiliation, intense penitential asceticism, devotion to the heretical doctrines of Peter John Olivi and lay apocalypticism were common to some but not all these groups, and even to a few members of otherwise unconnected communities. In some cases these were well-organized groups, such as tertiaries who were closely supervised and joined to local Franciscan houses. Others had a looser affiliation to the Franciscan Order, with little or no oversight and ad hoc local support.¹³ Not all houses of penitents adhered either to Franciscan devotions or to heretical Olivian views. Some beguins were followers of Olivi's cult, but did not practise the penitential lifestyle. But often these identities overlapped, and orthodox tertiaries were brought under suspicion of heretical beguinitism by

¹² Burr, *Spiritual Franciscans*, 91 and n. 66. The term *beguin* or *beguinos* as used in Aragon was certainly blurred between tertiaries, female beguines of the kind also found in the Low Countries or referred to elsewhere as *pinzocchere* or *bizzoche*, and followers of Olivi: it was used both to identify heretical Olivians at Vilafranca and elsewhere, and in the same period to describe an apparently perfectly legitimate hospital '*dels beguins*' established in Valencia for male and female penitents (though admittedly the hospital was also connected with the circle of Arnald of Villanova, himself connected with Olivians): Webster, *Els Menorets*, 247.

¹³ Webster, *Els Menorets*, 241–59; Clément Schmitt, 'La position du Tiers-ordre dans le conflit des Spirituels et de Fraticelles en Italie', in Mariano d'Alatri, ed., *I frati penitenti di S Francesco nella società del due e trecento* (Rome, 1977), 179–90, at 180–1.

association, or penitential houses confused with tertiaries. Uncertainty and the doubt it could foster were thus inherent in the blended identities of loosely defined lay pious. These uncertain identities could generate doubt about their orthodoxy which presented an implicit danger to the group. Indeed, in northern Europe the prohibition against heretical beguins was also used by opportunistic guilds and clerics to rid themselves of houses of beguines, penitential women wholly unaffiliated with the beguin heresy, who happened to share their name with Olivi's followers.¹⁴ And at the same time that the king was founding a hospital for 'good' beguins south of Barcelona, to the north of the city his bishop was investigating the Franciscan tertiaries of Vilafranca del Penedès on suspicion of their being 'beguinized tertiaries', Olivian heretics.

The poverty controversy was followed with interest by the members of Catalanian intellectual circles, friars and laity alike. As the debate evolved, twin enquiries in the cities of Girona and Mallorca illustrate clearly the scepticism with which the papal 'solution' to Franciscan poverty rigorists was viewed. In 1325, the secretary of the town of Girona and a Franciscan friar in Mallorca were the subject of linked inquests.¹⁵ The subjects of the inquest were Fra Bernat Fuster, descended from several generations of heretical beguins, and the notary Guillem des Quer. They were regular correspondents, and exchanged at least sixteen letters of pointed commentary and critique on Franciscan poverty theology, including critiques of papal bulls by Nicholas IV and John XXII.

These letters express their authors' close attention to a fresh and vital issue: the poverty debate constantly evolving in the heyday of the controversy, the late 1310s and early 1320s. The rich letter collections at the Archive of the Crown of Aragon make it clear that the Aragonese court was uniquely well situated to gather detailed intelligence on public and private information at the papal court.¹⁶ This

¹⁴ Mario Sensi, *Storie di bizzeche tra Umbria e Marche* (Rome, 1995); Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the medieval Low Countries (1200–1565)* (Philadelphia, PA, 2003); Elizabeth Makowski, *'A Pernicious Sort of Woman': Quasi-Religious Women and Canon Lawyers in the Later Middle Ages* (Washington DC, 2005), 44–9. While John XXII clarified his position in *Ratio recta* (1318), this clarification did not circulate widely.

¹⁵ Josep Perarnau i Espelt, 'Opere di Fr Petrus Johannis in processi catalani d'inquisizione della prima metà del xiv secolo', *AFH* 91 (1998), 505–16, at 506–7; idem, 'Noves dades'; idem, 'Una altra carta'.

¹⁶ Much of the correspondence is published in Heinrich Finke, *Acta Aragonensia*, 3 vols (Berlin and Leipzig, 1908–23).

included almost daily reports from their envoy and spymaster, from friendly cardinals, and from other well-placed agents, often Franciscans and local ecclesiastics.¹⁷ Friars are not infrequently identified as messengers, bearing written and verbal communications. Add this to the region's relatively active beguin communities, with networks stretching to Languedoc, and it is apparent that the Catalan tertiaries, friars and laymen had access, interest and means to closely follow and develop strong opinions on the poverty debate.

The twin inquests situated in this information-rich sphere present a clear picture of the role of doubt among close observers of the debate. In a period of deeply imperfect communication, when doubt and confusion arose often from too little or imprecise information, this is a situation in which the intellectual middle strata of society – its educated laymen and friars outside the royal orbit – were led into more doubt, not less, by the regular availability of detailed information. And when that privately expressed doubt regarding papal pronouncements was identified by the authorities, it in turn caused them to doubt the orthodoxy of the correspondents' beliefs and teachings.

This informed epistolary discourse had grave consequences for its authors. The notary Guillem des Quer's case was prolonged for most of a year, and eventually referred to the papal court for further action if the pope so wished. To the best of my current knowledge, no documentation in the Vatican archives confirms that it was taken up at Avignon, although further work is needed to confirm this. The Franciscan friar, Bernat Fuster, was condemned by the papal court and imprisoned there for more than two years.¹⁸

Misgivings and suspicion surrounding Olivian heresy and the poverty issue affected not just individuals such as Bernat and Guillem, but also whole communities. Doubts might lie dormant for decades before an agitating factor brought underlying insecurities to the surface. The second example of the long reach of the poverty debate took place twenty years after the Girona inquests, in the neighbouring diocese of Barcelona. As observed at the beginning of this essay, in the autumn and winter of 1345–6 a tertiary known as Francesc Joan took less than a year to fragment the Franciscan tertiaries of Vilafranca del Penedès, with disastrous consequences for

¹⁷ Stéphane Péquignot, *Au Nom du roi. Pratique diplomatique et pouvoir durant le règne de Jacques II d'Aragon (1291–1327)* (Madrid, 2009).

¹⁸ Webster, *Els Menorets*, 250–1; Perarnau i Espelt, 'Una altra carta'.

tertiaries throughout the diocese of Barcelona. While the case of the twin inquests of 1325 illustrates the doubt and suspicion easily fostered in the immediate aftermath of new definitions of ‘acceptable’ beliefs and practices, the Vilafranca case deals with an entirely different, later generation, and clearly illustrates that the social and legal anxieties associated with these ideas had a long afterlife, which far outlived the viability of the ideas themselves.

In a detailed inquest on this controversy, carried out by the local bishop and an inquisitor, Vilafrancan tertiaryaries testified to heretical activities and strong suspicions of Olivian beliefs circulating in the community. While awaiting trial they were imprisoned for six months, along with a local priest who died in gaol. Unlike the tertiaryaries, who were eventually found innocent and returned, albeit to shattered lives, the priest was posthumously condemned and his goods confiscated. The inquest testimony is littered with references to the doubts, misgivings and distrust sown by the community members’ ongoing relationships with those who continued to spread or embrace condemned texts, and is evidence of the atmosphere of Olivian views that still lingered in the region.

The protocols of the inquest of the Vilafranca tertiaryaries, which took place from October 1345 to January 1346, bring to life the prolonged impact of the diaspora of interested parties from the poverty debates: ageing friars with small collections of banned Olivian books, and preachers seizing on local alms-related disputes to hark back to John XXII’s bulls on Franciscan poverty. The passage of these figures, or the slight interest stirred by their teachings, had occasioned no comment for several decades. It was only in the presence of official accusations and inquest, infused with new suspicion about the community’s orthodoxy, that these began to be woven into a tapestry of doubt. The Vilafranca trial presaged a resurgence of attention and subsequent begun trials and burnings in Barcelona, Carcassonne and Toulouse in 1347, and in Avignon as late as 1354.¹⁹ It can thus be placed within the larger context of renewed suspicion and doubt which fuelled interest in stamping out a second generation, or ageing first generation, of Olivian followers throughout the region.

The extant record of the inquest is almost certainly incomplete, but includes the testimony of some nine witnesses, most of them women, and nearly all tertiaryaries. Several were close relatives of the

¹⁹ Burnham, *So Great a Light*, 82 n. 94.

Franciscan friar Bernat Fuster, who had been condemned in the 1325 process in Mallorca. The community was, by its members' own account, host to a variety of beguined travellers from southern France and as far distant as Naples, but there are no records to indicate that officials had previously suspected them of heretical leanings.²⁰ The depositions communicate a clear sense of the community's internally heightened sensitivity, if not paranoia, regarding the possibility of heresy among them and its potential consequences for the group. The argument in the garden with its aspersions and mutual accusations, the immediate suggestion that any heresy must involve the possession of Olivian writings, and the detailed retellings of decade-old events including the offer of hospitality to beguined figures such as Fra Guillem Escriba, a known disciple of Olivi, represent minor, or long past, occurrences infused with sinister new meaning by the doubt and suspicion engendered in an inquisitorial context. Despite very occasional contacts with slightly heterodox figures, the tertiaries appear to have been a relatively peaceful small community, well integrated into the social strata of Vilafranca, with a strong relationship with the local friars, who are frequently mentioned in roles overseeing, preaching to and caring for the community.²¹ The town was not entirely without religious conflict: the Franciscan friars themselves had a contentious relationship with the local parish clergy, and the bishop's register records recurring clashes with the parish clergy over burial rights and other sinecures as early as 1306.²² There is also evidence that they had some connections with travelling friars with Olivian leanings (see below). However, there is no evidence to suggest that the tertiaries were under suspicion of heresy, or had any reason to anticipate an inquest. But then, in the spring of 1345, the

²⁰ The Kingdom of Naples was then under the rule of Robert of Anjou and his wife Sancha, a Mallorcan princess related to the Aragonese royal family. Like Aragon, it has been identified as a destination for religious dissidents and refugees: Ronald Musto, 'Franciscan Joachimism at the Court of Naples, 1309–1345: A New Appraisal', *AFH* 90 (1997), 419–86, at 422, 483.

²¹ Perarnau i Espelt, *Beguins de Vilafranca*, 27–41.

²² The incident is recorded in the episcopal register for the diocese of Barcelona: Barcelona, Arxiu Diocesà, Register Communium VI, fols 122^{r-v}, 140^{r-v}. For details of the heretical preaching of local Franciscan Pere Mercer, see *ibid.*, fol. 122^v. On conflict between Catalonian parish clergy and Franciscan houses, including those of Vilafranca, see Jill Webster, 'Unlocking Lost Archives: Medieval Franciscan Catalan Communities', *Catholic Historical Review* 66 (1980), 537–50, at 540–3.

Italian tertiary Francesc Joan arrived at the house, and within a year, everything had changed.

On 13 June 1345, the bishop of Barcelona prohibited the community from receiving pecuniary alms.²³ That same year, on the feast days of St Louis of Toulouse (19 August) and St Francis of Assisi (8 October), a Franciscan friar addressed this pressing issue of the right to collect alms, referring to one of the final papal bulls of the poverty controversy, *Cum inter nonnullos*.²⁴ A week after the October sermon, the newest member of the group, Francesc Joan, approached the lector of the Franciscan convent, who supervised the tertiaries. At the inquest, the lector testified that Francesc Joan had expressed concern over what he perceived to be an Olivian tone in the two sermons' treatment of the topic of alms and poverty, raising the spectre of heretical teaching. The day after Francesc Joan's complaint, the lector gathered the tertiaries to warn them regarding the heresy of Olivian teachings: the aftermath of that meeting was the explosive brawl in the community garden with which this essay began. In his testimony Brother Raymond Cuch provided a vivid description of the conflict, and also described how afterwards Francesc Joan demanded money in exchange for leaving the tertiaries' house.²⁵

Clearly fed up with the entire affair, the brawling brother Domènec denounced Francesc Joan to the local authorities for robbery.²⁶ Not one to back down from a fight, Francesc Joan in turn denounced the entire community, and the case was forwarded to the bishop. Moving the conflict into the legal realm does not appear to have cooled tempers – or perhaps this community, like the local friars and parish clergy, was particularly given to outbreaks of violence. During the first week of depositions, at the beginning of December, Sister Francesca was charged with physically assaulting Francesc Joan: the

²³ Perarnau i Espelt, *Beguins de Vilafranca*, 149–52, contains an excellent chronological summary of events, with corresponding document references.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 28–30, 44, 149. Louis of Toulouse, a relative by marriage of the Aragonese royal family, spent part of his youth as a hostage at the Aragonese court. He subsequently renounced the throne of Naples and became a Franciscan, and his family made him a bishop and later promoted his rapid canonization. Despite his royal connections, his ascetic lifestyle was reminiscent of the goals of the Spiritual Franciscans: Margaret Toynbee, *S. Louis of Toulouse* (Manchester, 1929); Edith Pasztor, *Per la storia di S. Ludovico d'Angio* (Rome, 1955); Jacques Paul, 'Saint-Louis d'Anjou, franciscain et évêque de Toulouse (1274–1297)', in *Les Évêques, les clercs et le roi (1250–1300)*, Cahiers de Fanjeaux 7 (Fanjeaux, 1972), 59–90.

²⁵ Perarnau i Espelt, *Beguins de Vilafranca*, 49–50.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 44.

charges were serious enough that she was imprisoned for some days, bailed in mid-December, and only cleared after the end of the proceedings in March.²⁷ Over the course of the depositions, details from previous decades emerged that show the tertiaries were not entirely without interest in the poverty controversy, or Olivi's teachings. A sibling pair from the community testified that they had intended to travel to Naples and seek more 'free and intensely Franciscan' communities, almost certainly a reference to the same hermitages and refuges to which the defeated Spiritual Franciscans had fled in the 1320s. Together with their apparent knowledge of the writings of Olivi, this suggests an interest in heretical beguin circles at least on the part of a few members of the community, but no concerted effort to learn or teach his doctrines.²⁸

Even though the majority of the community were cleared of the charges, and Francesc Joan was presumably expelled from the community, the exposure of their internal convulsions and doubts regarding each other's orthodoxy had major consequences. The bishop of Barcelona issued a ruling, couched in strong language, that from Passion Sunday, 2 April 1346, male and female beguins or tertiaries within the diocese were no longer to hold houses in common, gather in private or beg.²⁹ The decision broke the little community: several of the female tertiaries are soon afterwards found entering local convents.³⁰

It is clear from the testimonies that, despite the eventual verdict of innocence, there was cause to believe that some in the community

²⁷ Ibid. 128, referring now to Barcelona, Arxiu Diocesà, NC 14, fol. 14^v (16 December 1345): 'Petrus de Pocha sanch, civis Barchinone, manulevavit a reverendo in Christo patre, domino episcopo ... sororem Franciscam, de terciã regula, que capta detinebatur pretextu cuiusdam violencie, quam, uti dicitur, intulit fratri Francisco Iohannis, de dicta regula' ('Peter of Pocha sanch, citizen of Barcelona, freed by surety from the reverend in Christ father, the lord bishop ... sister Francesca of the Third Order, who was held on the pretext of some sort of violence which, it is said, she inflicted upon Francesc Joan, of the said Order'); *ibid.* (4 March 1346): 'Fuit cancellata predicta manleuta de mandato dicti domini episcopi, de voluntate predicti fratris Francisci Iohannis' ('The aforementioned surety was ended by the order of the said lord bishop, by the wish of the aforementioned brother Francesc Joan').

²⁸ Perarnau i Espelt, *Beguins de Vilafranca*, 93–103, 115–17, 154–5, 160. On Naples, see n. 22 above.

²⁹ Ibid. 135–6.

³⁰ Josep Perarnau i Espelt, 'El bisbe de Barcelona fra Bernat Oliver (1345–1346) i els framenors de Vilafranca del Penedès. Un episodi de la "Questió franciscana" a Catalunya', *Estudios Franciscanos* 83 (1982), 277–306.

held Olivian views, an example of how blurred the lines could be between beguins, tertiaries and penitents. But the circumstances of the inquest also illustrate how larger events might encourage lingering doubts, providing ground for fear of heretical identification to be fertilized by common conflict. Here heated words, spat out in the course of more mundane events and then taken too far, were more the result of pervasive doubt that took easy hold than of deep-rooted heretical beliefs.

The story could conclude here, and one would be forgiven for chalking up Francesc Joan's accusations and his extortion demands to the actions of an overzealous and greedy troublemaker, or a dedicated and orthodox tertiary troubled by his new surroundings. But other sources present a different possible reading. Only a few short months after the Vilafranca inquest concluded, the episcopal register in the neighbouring diocese of Girona recorded an accusation of heresy made against that city's tertiaries, by a newcomer named Francesc Joan.³¹ Girona was a known site of beguin activity, and the town where one of the twinned inquests into the correspondents Bernat and Guillem had been held in 1325. Together with the more complete records of Vilafranca, this evidence throws the use and abuse of doubt in the poverty controversy aftermath into even starker relief.

The source from Girona is very brief, only a dozen lines of text, but it presents a rough version of events eerily similar to those that had occurred in Vilafranca the previous winter. A tertiary and priest named Francesc Joan entered the local group and was soon refusing them the sacraments, accusing them of heresy. The similarities are striking: an accuser with the same name, making the same accusations against two identical groups in relatively close proximity, within the space of only a few months. It could very well be a coincidence: after all, Francesc Joan is not an uncommon name, and Girona was a known site of beguin activity. But I suggest an alternative reading: Francesc Joan found it either ideologically or financially profitable to exploit anxieties left over from the poverty controversy. He was able to manipulate events by joining vulnerable tertiary groups, ratcheting up internal tensions by pointing out possible heresies, and then threatening to expose them for prosecution unless they paid him off. The more detailed inquest records in Vilafranca lay out his scheme in full, including his demands for bribery, and the fact that he made

³¹ Girona, Arxiu Diocesà, Lletres Episcopals, U-10, fols 69^r-v (26 June 1346).

himself so abhorrent to his fellow tertiaries that several physically assaulted him on more than one occasion: recall the unlucky Sister Francesca.

The interloper who accused the Girona and Vilafranca tertiaries of heresy may have been one and the same person, or two persons with a rather common name. But it is the reverberations of the reactions of both the tertiaries and the bishops which tell us most about the potency of doubt in the long aftermath of a heretical movement. With the memories of beguin trials and burnings still fresh, it is no wonder that the Vilafrancon tertiaries were determined to fight to defend their reputation. Even twenty-five years after *Sancta Romana* had blackened the reputation of beguins and pious penitents, tertiaries were willing to sue, to pay, or even to commit acts of physical violence to rid themselves of the taint of doubt.