



CHAPTER 3

A Taste of Dissent: Experiences of Heretical Blessed Bread as a Dimension of Lived Religion in Thirteenth- and Early Fourteenth-century Languedoc

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INTRODUCTION

Nutrition is necessary for the growth, function, and survival of any living organism. *Homo sapiens*, however, has a huge variety of foodways conditioned by cultural formations. Food is seldom “just food” and often acquires meaning and significance that surpass its nutritive function. Food practices mark identity, and commensality facilitates the formation of

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bonds between individuals and cohesion within groups.¹ Most known religions ritualize and regulate the use of food and ascribe symbolic value to certain foodstuffs.² In the Middle Ages, food was of fundamental existential, economic, and religious concern, and eating could entail a heightened moral and spiritual charge.³ Central to communal religious life and the salvation of all medieval Christians was the sacrament of the Eucharist. This ritual commemoration of the Last Supper consisted of consuming consecrated bread and wine, in which Christ was believed to be present in body and in blood. Religious foodways were also a point of contention,⁴ and dissident groups often had their own food-related rituals and practices. Seen as perversions of orthodox practice,⁵ they were of special interests for inquisitors policing lay religiosity, which makes them an interesting object of research for examining conflicting interpretations of experience.

This chapter investigates experiences of allegedly heretical foodways as a dimension of lay lived religion in the context of religious dissidence in medieval Languedoc. Situated in modern-day southern France, Languedoc was deemed a particular hotbed for heresy.⁶ In the thirteenth century, papally mandated heresy inquisitors began work in Languedoc, attempting to eradicate heresy through means of legal persecution. They preached of the dangers of heresy and interrogated members of the local populace. An array of penances ranging from public acts of contrition to the

¹ Douglas, *Active Voice*, 124; Jones, *Feast*, 1–2; Kaplan, “Introduction,” 3–4; Lee, *Feasting the Dead*, 1–2, 9; McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists*, 1–7; Méndez-Montoya, *Theology of Food*, 1–3, 5–7, 10; Montanari, *Food Is Culture*, xi–xii, 29, 93–103, 115, 123–125, 133–134; Pilcher, *Food in World History*, 1–4; Tomasik and Vitullo, “At the Table,” xi–xii; Woolgar, *Culture of Food*, 124, 237, 239. On the history of food in general, see for example Fernandéz-Armesto, *Near a Thousand Tables*; Toussaint-Samat, *History of Food*. On food in the Middle Ages in general, see for example Adamson, *Food*; Carlin and Rosenthal, eds, *Food and Eating*.

² Boylston, “Food, Life, and Material Religion,” 257–263; Fernandéz-Armesto, *Near a Thousand Tables*, 29–33; Fieldhouse, *Food, Feasts, and Faith*, xxi–xxiv; Kaplan, “Introduction,” 4.

³ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 1–2; Woolgar, *Culture of Food*, 1, 6–11, 233–235, 239. On food and medieval religion in general, see for example Adamson, *Food*, 181–204; Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.

⁴ Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief*, 140, 216–217, 222–225.

⁵ Cf. Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies*, 379 for a translated passage from Dominican inquisitor Bernard Gui’s famous inquisitorial manual, in which he reflects on the heretical practice of blessing bread as a perverse imitation of the Eucharist, using language that does little to hide his contempt.

⁶ On medieval Languedoc, see for example Mundy, *Studies*; Paterson, “The South”; Paterson, *World of the Troubadours*.

possibility of being burned at the stake were given to those found guilty of religious transgressions. Inquisitors produced written records of their interrogations, many of which survive to this day.⁷ Languedocian inquisition records entail a lot of information about laypeople interacting with so-called good men, a group of ascetic, peripatetic, ritual-working preachers, whose exemplary lifestyle and religious teachings attracted lay devotion. The inquisitors simply referred to them as heretics (*heretici*) in their records. Historians have traditionally known them as the Cathars, but this term is now heavily contested in scholarship, as it was not used at the emic level. Persecution forced the Languedocian good men and their lay supporters to lead an outlawed, clandestine existence before succumbing to permanent extinction in the fourteenth century.⁸ Inquisition records contain many references to interactions revolving around food.⁹ The good men shared meals together with laypeople, during which bread was often blessed in a ritualized fashion and consumed by those in attendance. The article at hand engages with the history of experiences and lived religion through the vantage point of this phenomenon. What kinds of experiences did the ritualized blessing of bread afford to and impose upon the Languedocian laity? How did these experiences bring about the phenomenon of lived religion, understood here both as the space of religious activities and beliefs for people in the past and as the historical object analysed by historians?

Historical experiences can only be examined in mediated form.¹⁰ Legal records are often among the most promising sources for this pursuit, as long as their possibilities and inherent limitations are understood. This article is based on a wide reading of thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century inquisition records that deal with the heresy of the good men and

⁷ On medieval heresy and heresy inquisitions in general, see for example Deane, *History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*; Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*; Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*; Peters, *Inquisition*; Prudlo, ed., *Companion to Heresy Inquisitions*.

⁸ On the alleged heresy of the Languedocian good men in general, see for example Barber, *Cathars*; Lambert, *Cathars*. For an overview on the current debate about the historical existence of "Catharism," see Sennis, ed., *Cathars in Question*.

⁹ Biller, "Why no Food?," 127–129.

¹⁰ Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 12. Cf. Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*, 33 who note with optimism that "[t]he history of lived experience is possible. Experience is accessible. It is limited only in the same way that all histories are limited: by scarcity of sources, by partiality, by the limits of empiricism in the archives."

their lay supporters.¹¹ Inquisition records are approached from a perspective that understands these documents as selective abstractions of information that was produced through the spoken encounter between the deponents who gave testimony and the inquisitors who questioned them. After the interrogation, the authorities drew up a written record that contains their interpretation of the suspect's alleged transgressions and guilt that could be used as legal evidence. The extant information in these records was thoroughly conditioned and defined by the interpretations of multiple actors at multiple times, the memory of the deponents and their will to inform the authorities, the power wielded by the inquisitors and their ability to exert physical and psychological pressures on the deponents, the questionnaire used by the authorities to structure the interrogation, the shift from talk to writing, the selection of evidence based on the legal prejudice of the authorities, and the mode of representation used by the inquisitor's notaries who wrote the records. Historians interface with the end product of this elongated process of construction when attempting to interpret the past.¹²

In historical scholarship, the concept of experience is sometimes used in a simple, common-sense fashion.¹³ In a bid to increase the analytical value of this concept, the chapter at hand utilizes the conceptual language of complexity and emergence borrowed from the natural and social sciences. A complex system is any kind of a system that emerges from interactions and relationships among its constituent parts, but it is always *more than* and *different from* the sum of these parts. The essential properties of a

¹¹ Languedocian inquisition records are available to historians both as archival manuscripts and modern editions. This article cites MS 609 of the Bibliothèque municipale, Toulouse and MSS Doat 21–28 of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. Also cited are records edited in Biller, Bruschi and Sneddon, eds, *Inquisitors and Heretics*; Davis, ed., *Inquisition*; De Labastide, ed., *Registre de l'inquisition*; Douais, ed., *Documents*; Douais, ed., *Sources*; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* (volumes I–III); Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* (volumes I–II); Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Inquisiteur*.

¹² For discussion on source-critical issues concerning medieval inquisition records, see for example Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*; Arnold, "Inquisition, Texts and Discourse"; Bruschi, "Magna diligentia"; Bruschi, *Wandering Heretics*.

¹³ Kivimäki, "Reittejä kokemushistoriaan," 10. On the history of experiences as a scholarly field of focus in general, see for example Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*, 18–33; Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 11–14; Kivimäki, "Reittejä kokemushistoriaan."

complex system are properties of the irreducible whole.¹⁴ The proposal here is to understand historical experiences—in this case, experiences of allegedly heretical blessed bread—as complex phenomena that are emergent from more basic components like actions and interpretations. As a logical continuation, lived religion, too, is understood as a higher order phenomenon emerging from the interplay of more basic components, namely, individual experiences.¹⁵

An investigation into the intricacies related to blessed bread in medieval Languedoc can serve to illuminate wider dynamics that defined premodern experiences and lived religion. It is also one way to answer calls for more focus on laypeople involved in religious dissidence, as they have sometimes been ascribed only a passive role.¹⁶ Moreover, examining dissident foodways places emphasis on the material, sensory, and embodied aspects of living out one's religion in the Middle Ages. Claire Taylor has even argued that from the viewpoint of the good men, the blessing of bread was a compromise ritual catering to the expectations of their lay supporters, as the good men seem to have held a dualist ideology that regarded all created matter as evil and tainted.¹⁷ Despite these claims, no systematic treatment of the phenomenon that is based on a reading of all of the evidence in Languedocian inquisition records exists. Ultimately, the purpose of this article is to demonstrate the value of approaching medieval inquisition records from the viewpoint provided by the history of experiences and lived religion, as this can lead to deeper historical understanding and theoretical sophistication.

¹⁴ Capra, *Web of Life*, 29–30, 36–37; Morowitz, *Emergence of Everything*, 14, 20. For more detailed discussion on defining complex systems, see for example Mitchell, *Complexity*, 12–13.

¹⁵ This approach is inspired by the so-called Building Block Approach to human experience that has been developed by Egil Asprem and Ann Taves. However, the article does not adhere in any strict sense to their “reverse engineering” methodology. On the Building Block Approach, see Asprem and Taves, “Building Blocks.”

¹⁶ Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 120, 122–123; Arnold, “Cathar Middle Ages,” 77–78; Pegg, “Innocent III,” 289–290, 300; Pegg, “Paradigm of Catharism,” 35, 52; Sparks, *Heresy, Inquisition and Life Cycle*, 1–2.

¹⁷ Taylor, *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition*, 196. Taylor's argument seems to build upon Hamilton, “Cathars and Christian Perfection,” 16–17, who described the ritual of blessing bread shortly and noted that the good men attached no sacramental significance to the ceremony and “regarded bread as part of the evil creation, and one can only infer that they performed this ceremony because they had derived it from some more orthodox tradition of worship and believed it to be of apostolic origin.” Cf. Miller, “Materiality,” 1, who claims that an underlying principle found in many religions is that wisdom has been accredited to those who claim that materiality is merely an apparent façade behind which that which is real is hidden. Nevertheless, he notes that material culture is often the medium through which this conviction is expressed.

EATING BREAD BLESSED BY THE GOOD MEN

Medieval lived religion took place at the core of communal life where religious ideas and concepts were experienced and expressed through everyday participation in collective performance and ritual. Rituals were far from hollow ceremonies or superficial forms, but an essential dimension of living out religion that afforded affective experiences to participants and enhanced social cohesion between them.¹⁸ The sharing of food was often ritualized, and foodstuffs were routinely blessed in many contexts. Staple foods, like bread, were understood as having the potential of acquiring sacred qualities through the act of blessing.¹⁹ The ritualized foodways of the Languedocian good men can be seen as derivative interpretations of these wider cultural themes.²⁰

In the context of inquisitorial interrogation, the interaction between the deponents and the authorities was usually structured using a ready-made list of questions posed by the inquisitor to the deponent who testified under oath. These questions reflected the inquisitorial emphasis on suspicious actions and other external signs of religious non-conformity at the expense of deeper probing into dissident beliefs.²¹ The questions were standardized, but they varied according to the specific transgressions of which the individual deponents were suspected. When someone was confronted under suspicion of interactions with the good men, usually referred to as heretics in the records, questions about sharing food and eating bread blessed by them usually ensued.

¹⁸ Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 3–5.

¹⁹ Katajala-Peltomaa and Vuolanto, “Religious Practices and Social Interaction,” 21; Woolgar, *Culture of Food*, 61–65, 219. On bread and religion in general, see Fieldhouse, *Food, Feasts, and Faith*, 73–77. See also Camporesi, *Bread of Dreams*, 17–18 for reflections on the potential polysemy of bread in the premodern mindscape.

²⁰ Cf. Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 133 who notes that “[...] the rituals surrounding Catharism were not invented from thin air, but drew on existing interactions that performed a variety of symbolic meanings.”

²¹ Biller, “Deep Is the Heart of Man”; Bruschi, *Wandering Heretics*, 190; Pegg, *Corruption of Angels*, 45–51; Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics*, 134–135, 191.

Many of the deponents in Languedocian inquisition records denied having ever eaten bread blessed by the alleged heretics.²² Some claimed they did not remember doing so.²³ Nonetheless, amidst these blanket denials there are also a great number of references to deponents admitting they had indeed eaten of the bread blessed by the good men or that they were aware of other people doing so. Admissions can be found throughout the Languedocian material, but certain inquisitors seem to have been especially interested in gathering evidence about heretical blessed bread. Typical, and thus illustrative, is an entry found in the 1240 deposition of a certain Petrus Vinol given to the Dominican inquisitor Friar Ferrier. Among other things, the record reads that the deponent and another man ate with certain heretics at the same table and of bread blessed by them. They also ate other foods that were placed on the table and said “bless” when they first tasted each available food and drink. To each “bless,” the heretics replied “may God bless you.”²⁴ For someone who is confronted by information from inquisition records for the first time, a description like this may seem like a privileged glimpse into the foodways of the Languedocian good men, but a seasoned reader of this material knows that the cited passage is a ready-made textual apparatus used by the notaries who drew up these records. Similarly, even verbatim iterations of descriptions of eating blessed bread are repeated *en masse* in Ferrier’s records, and analogous versions can also be found in the records of other inquisitors.²⁵ In these cases, talk during the interrogation is almost

²²For references to explicit denials in response to being questioned about heretical blessed bread, see for example Douais, ed., *Documents*, 293; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d’inquisition* I, 207, 372, 412, 423, 437, 445, 484, 505; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d’inquisition* II, 17, 18, 153, 339; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d’inquisition* III, 71, 80, 98, 102, 309, 367, 386, 405; MS609, 164^v; MS Doat 22, 207^r–207^v, 243^r–243^v; MS Doat 23, 87^r, 117^r, 118^r, 126^r, 143^r; 151^r, 153^v, 156^r, 219^v, 223^r, 225^r, 228^r, 232^v, 240^v, 247^r, 346^v; MS Doat 24, 11^r, 13^v, 14^v, 20^r, 20^v, 29^r, 49^r, 121^r, 124^r, 126^r, 174^r, 175^r, 177^r, 196^r, 208^r; MS Doat 25, 4^r–5^r; Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Inquisiteur*, 150, 326.

²³See e.g. Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d’inquisition* II, 470, 471, 474, 477.

²⁴MS Doat 22, 256^r: “ipse testis et dictus Bartholomeus comederunt cum dictis haereticis in eadem mensa de pane ab haeretico benedicto, et de aliis mense appositis, et in quolibet genere cibi, et in primo potu noviter sumpto dicebat quilibet per se benedicite, et haeretici respondebant in quolibet benedicite Deus vos benedicat.”

²⁵For standardized references—sometimes as standalone entries, sometimes embedded within longer narratives—to people eating of the bread blessed by the alleged heretics once or multiple times, seeing others eat of it, or simply seeing bread being blessed, see De Labastide, ed., *Registre de l’inquisition*, 334, 356; Douais, ed., *Documents*, 11, 12, 17, 19, 25, 27, 34, 39, 43, 50, 53, 56, 59, 60, 63, 71, 78, 79, 82; Douais, ed., *Sources*, 126, 128;

completely obscured as a result of standardization and abstraction. All that can really be known is that in response to inquisitorial questioning, many deponents admitted to having eaten bread blessed by the alleged heretics.

Regardless of the epistemic limitations imposed upon the historian by notarial techniques and the inquisitorial mode of representation that defines the bulk of the extant evidence, the sheer quantity of these references points towards the prevalence of experiences related to consuming bread blessed by the good men. A great number of deponents subjected to questioning recalled having participated in ritualized interactions that revolved around food and eating, and experiences like these seem to have been very common for those Languedocian laypeople who saw spiritual value in the good men despite their outlawed status. Experiences of sharing food with the good men and eating bread blessed by them were a tangible, material, and sensory dimension of the process through which people lived out their religion amidst their daily lives.²⁶ While standardized entries reveal nothing about the nuances of these ritual interactions, they serve as important quantitative evidence regarding the ubiquity of the phenomenon of blessing bread practised by the good men, which should be kept in mind when proceeding with a closer reading of more detailed cases.

Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* I, 318, 399, 472, 482; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* II, 458; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 117, 180, 251, 292; MS 609, 3^r, 26^r, 65^r, 95^v, 122^r, 141^v, 163^v, 184^v, 197^r, 220^v, 234^r & passim; MS Doat 21, 186^v–187^r, 197^v, 198^v, 200^r, 202^r, 202^v, 216^r, 217^r, 221^r, 226^v, 227^r, 233^v, 243^r, 256^r, 296^r, 307^v, 316^v, 317^v, 318^v, 319^r, 319^v, 320^r; Doat 22, 28^r, 141^r, 158^v, 173^r, 173^v–174^r, 174^r, 175^v, 182^v, 207^v, 208^r, 208^v, 215^r, 234^r, 244^r, 256^r, 261^r, 267^r, 276^v; MS Doat 23, 4^r, 9^r, 13^r, 23^v, 36^r, 42^v, 60^v, 71^v–72^r, 97^r, 122^r, 132^v, 147^v, 159^r, 167^r, 186^r, 195^v, 208^v, 235^v, 242^r, 258^v, 278^r, 283^v–284^r, 301^v, 318^v–319^r, 322^r, 340^v & passim; MS Doat 24, 32^r, 33^r, 38^r–38^v, 71^v, 72^v, 73^r, 80^r, 87^r, 129^v, 149^v, 174^r, 184^r, 199^r, 205^v, 211^r, 212^v, 213^r, 214^r, 214^v, 215^v, 220^v, 227^r, 230^v; MS Doat 25, 12^r–12^v, 30^r, 68^v, 83^v, 85^v, 92^r, 142^v, 144^r, 246^v, 299^r, 299^v, 302^r, 305^r, 311^v, 312^r, 313^v, 314^r, 315^r; MS Doat 26, 14^r, 16^v, 74^v, 290^r; MS Doat 27, 102^r, 198^v; Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Inquisiteur*, 124, 304; Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 212, 218, 234, 240, 244, 248, 264, 270, 274, 286, 292, 294, 296, 302, 346, 368, 370, 382, 386, 394, 406, 430, 516, 586, 638, 646, 696, 702, 706, 760, 792, 922, 948 & passim; Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* II, 996, 1000, 1100, 1104, 1478. Cf. MS Doat 24, 8^v; MS Doat 28, 150^r; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* II, 192, for references to deponents being uncertain whether bread given to them by the alleged heretics had been blessed. See also MS 609, 168^v, 249^v; MS Doat 21, 214^v, 231^r, 234^r, 234^v, 235^r, 241^v–242^r, 249^r, 254^r for references to bread blessed by the Waldensians.

²⁶ For reflections on eating as a spiritual experience, see for example Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 139; Méndez-Montoya, *Theology of Food*, 1–2.

THE RITUAL OF BLESSING BREAD

Rituals have the power of making the sacred real and visible to the senses amidst everyday life. Rituals were of central importance to medieval lived religion, which built upon ritualized corporeal experiences that entailed sensorimotor elements and bodily practices. While intimate and embodied, rituals are simultaneously social and interactive, as they tend to be culturally sanctioned and collectively performed. Oft repeated rituals can promote social cohesion and serve to enhance feelings of identification with one's group.²⁷ Witnessing the good men bless bread and then consuming it with them was one way to engage with the sacred that was available to the Languedocian laity.

Ceremonial meals of one kind or another, laden with ritualized gestures and symbolic significance, are a part of almost every culture and religion.²⁸ For the medieval inquisitors and other churchmen, the ritual practices of alleged heretics were perversions of orthodox rituals.²⁹ But what can inquisition records tell us about the ritual performance through which the Languedocian good men blessed bread? Reading through the evidence in search of descriptions of the ritual, one is confronted by a varying scale of abstraction regarding the level of detail and nuance. For example, Ramundus Fabri, a penitent sentenced in 1305 by the inquisitor Bernard Gui, is stated to have eaten of the bread that heretics hold in their hands while saying some words at the beginning of a meal.³⁰ Many references are even vaguer, as they resort to using ready-made notarial shorthand, simply stating that people had seen the way bread was blessed (*vidit modum*

²⁷ Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion*, 181, 183; Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, "Religion as Experience," 2–3; Katajala-Peltomaa & Vuolanto "Religious Practices an Social Interaction", 19; McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 13, 102.

²⁸ Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 136–137.

²⁹ Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 125. Cf. Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 318, for a unique entry stating that one of the sentenced individuals had often eaten of the bread blessed by heretics, or rather cursed by them, that they call bread of the holy prayer. See also Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies*, 305, 331, 368–369, 382, for purported descriptions of the ritual written by various orthodox churchmen.

³⁰ Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 290: "comedit de illo pane quem heretici tenent in manibus et dicunt aliqua verba in principio mense."

benedictionis dicti panis),³¹ or that the alleged heretics blessed bread according to their rite (*secundum ritum suum*),³² according to their way (*more suo*),³³ or in the heretical way (*modo hereticali*).³⁴ References like these, once again, tell nothing about the ritual, only that the deponents admitted it had taken place and that the authorities then chose to represent information about it in a thoroughly standardized manner. In some cases, the vagueness is attributed to the limits of the deponent's comprehension and memory.³⁵

Alongside these standardized entries, certain unique cases can be found, which afford more details about the ritual practice. For example, the record of the deposition given to the authorities in 1308 by Petrus de Lusenacho reads that at the beginning of a meal Petrus Auterii, who was one of the good men, took one half of a bread and standing on his feet held it using a cloth towel that he wore around his neck. He began saying the Lord's Prayer over the bread and then continued to speak softly between his teeth for a while. After this, he broke the bread into pieces with his knife and placed the pieces on the table, first before himself and then in front of all the others. According to the record, he also told the deponent that they call it the bread of holy prayer.³⁶ The deposition of de Lusenacho is exceptional in the sense that he was a cleric trained in reading and writing, and when he was cited to appear before the inquisitor Geoffroy d'Ablis, he came with a written confession—much of which was copied into the record of his deposition. Due to this unusual arrangement, the record affords information about the way in which the deponent himself chose to represent the ritual of blessing bread.

³¹ Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 228, 232, 260, 278, 374, 376, 380, 390, 410, 412, 416, 452, 464, 470, 672; Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* II, 1000.

³² Davis, *Inquisition*, 127; MS Doat 22, 51'.

³³ MS Doat 21, 316'; MS Doat 23, 203', 211'.

³⁴ Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 175, 177, 178, 183, 189, 190, 191, 199, 202, 208.

³⁵ See e.g. Davis, *Inquisition*, 256; Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Inquisiteur*, 268, 334.

³⁶ Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Inquisiteur*, 388: "in principio mense dictus Petrus Auterii accepit usque ad dimidiam placentam et stans pedes, tenendo dictum panem cum manutergiis que posuerat in collo suo, incepit dicere desuper 'Pater noster' et postea loquutus fuit suaviter inter dentes per unam pausam. Postea fregit dictum panem cum cutello suo et posuit in mensa coram se primo et coram quolibet nostrum et dixit tunc michi quod hoc vocabant ipsi panem orationis sancte." Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 298, 300, 318, also makes three distinct references to heretical blessed bread as the bread of holy prayer.

Details of the ritual can also be found in the long and nuanced records of multiple subsequent depositions given to the bishop-inquisitor Jacques Fournier in 1323 by Petrus Maurini, a long-time affiliate of the good men, who had often been present when bread was blessed. His records entail a description of the ritual very similar to that of de Lusenacho's.³⁷ Another entry describes how the lay participants stood up uncovering their heads when the bread was blessed, and how the bread was handed out to those in attendance. Moreover, the good man who blessed the loaf reminded them not to leave behind any crumbs.³⁸ Maurini also recalled multiple occasions on which bread was blessed in a secretive manner adapted to the situation at hand,³⁹ which implies situational flexibility to these ritual solemnities. Sometimes it also seems to be the case that once a longer description of the ritual was recorded, later references to similar activities could be represented using concise shorthand.⁴⁰ Less standardized entries like these found in de Lusenacho's and Maurini's depositions provide at least some notion of the way in which the rituals were described to the

³⁷ Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 173: "In principio etiam cene dictus hereticus sollempniter panem benedixit modo hereticali, ponendo unum caput tersorii super humerum suum, et cum alia parte tersorii tenendo panem benedicebat dictum panem, dicendo verba submisse, que ipse loquens non audivit. Deinde fregit dictum panem et dedit partem ipse loquenti et aliam dicte Ramunde; quam cum acceperunt dixerunt: 'Benedicite senher', et hereticus respondebat: 'Deus vos benedicat'; et comederunt de dicto pane ipse et dicta Ramunda et dicta Guillelma et cum hoc de carnibus." See also Davis, *Inquisition*, 124, for a shorter description of the ritual.

³⁸ Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 232: "[...] quando benedicebatur panis per hereticum modo supradicto, omnes credentes stabant pedes et deponabant capucium, quousque dictus panis fuisset benedictus. Et quando scinderat dictus hereticus dictum panem, primam cissionem dabat primo credenti, et secundam secundo, et sic successive; et quilibet quando recipiebat dictam cissionem dicebat dicto heretico: 'Benedicite, senher', et dictus hereticus respondebat: 'Deus vos benedicat et ducat ad bonum finem'. Et si de dicto pane benedicto credentes faciebant offas, oportebat quod extergerent cum alio pane scutellam vel cifum, sic quod nulla mica remaneret ibi de dicto pane."

³⁹ For example Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 165: "Et unus de dictis hereticis benedixit panem in principio mense modo hereticali secreta, non tamen sollempniter modo ponendo tersorium in humero." For similar references, see Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 148–149, 158, 164, 186, 187.

⁴⁰ The use of shorthand references was a standard part of scribal practice in the context of heresy inquisitions. For references to heretics blessing bread *modo supradicto* or with other similar shorthand, see for example Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* II, 32, 37, 41, 71; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 137, 153, 198, 231, 232.

inquisitors.⁴¹ While it cannot be known how much similar information was suppressed in cases where the authorities opted for a more standardized representation, these more unique descriptions do imply that laypeople were exposed to and actively engaged in these rituals and could later remember details about them when subjected to inquisitorial questioning. Participating in the ritualized blessing of bread and its consumption afforded laypeople embodied experiences that provided sensory input through vision, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. This multimodal nature of the sense experiences afforded by blessed bread underlines its prominence as a dimension of material lived religion in the context of Languedocian dissidence.

Details about the ritualized gestures and speech acts that formed the core of these dissident solemnities are certainly interesting. However, it should not be forgotten that the lived experience of attending a ritual performance emerges from the totality of the situational context in which it is embedded. One aspect of this ambient situation that by necessity contributed to the experiences of participation in the blessing of bread was talk about the ritual and its meaning. Turning again to Petrus Maurini's deposition, there is a unique entry related to oral propagation in the context of blessing bread. After describing the ritual in a familiar fashion, the record purports to represent information about a discussion concerning the meaning of blessed bread. It reads that the good man told the deponent that he blessed bread in the same manner as God had blessed it and that he had blessed it in representation of the significance given by God to this blessing. He also said that those who are of the Roman church say that bread becomes the body of God, which it nevertheless was not. He added that the heretics themselves say that it is blessed bread and that it was so, because God had instituted it thus. Giving some of the bread to the deponent and another man, he told them that when receiving bread from him, they ought to say "bless, *senher*," to which he would reply "may God bless you." After this, he broke the bread into pieces and told them to say "bless, *senher*" when they began eating it, and to eat the bread at the beginning of their meal. Moreover, he warned them not to leave behind any crumbs of this bread as it was a great sin and claimed that believers should always carry with them some of the bread and eat it at the beginning of each meal, saying "bless." The record states that the deponent did

⁴¹ For more discussion on the details of the ritual, see for example Duvernoy, *Religione dei Catari*, 185–186.

as he was told to by the heretic.⁴² This didactic dimension is usually obscured in the records,⁴³ but it seems that at least on some occasions the ritualized blessing of bread was accompanied by teachings regarding the significance of the act and its juxtaposition with Catholic practices. There seem to also have been prescriptions regarding how laypeople were expected to behave and participate, and how the bread was to be treated and utilized after it had been blessed.

Moreover, it seems that laypeople, too, sometimes contributed to the interpretative context of the ritual situation by talking about blessed bread. One unique entry, found in the 1321 deposition of Arnaldus Cicredi, presents a nuanced but familiar description of the ritual blessing and distribution of bread during a shared meal. However, the record also reads that a laywoman called Guillelma told the deponent that the bread had been blessed. Afterwards, when the deponent had seen the same heretic frequently bless bread in a similar manner at the beginning of meals, he asked Guillelma about the virtue of the bread. According to the record, Guillelma replied that the bread had a hundredfold the virtue of the bread

⁴²Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 133–134: “dictus Iacobus Auterii hereticus benedixit panem modo infrascripto; posuit enim partem cuiusdam tersorii super collum suum, et postea cum manu dextra involuta cum dicto tersorio accepit placentam, et dicens aliqua verba submisit que non audivit ipse loquens, ut dixit, dictus hereticus modo hereticali benedixit dictum panem. Dixit ipsi loquenti quod illo modo Deus benedixerat panem sicut ipse benedixerat eum, et in representationem significationis quo Deus panem benedixerat, hereticus benedixerat dictum panem; et quod illi qui sunt de Ecclesia romana in illa significatione dicebant quod panis efficiebatur corpus Dei, quod tamen non erat. Set ipsi heretici dicebant quod erat panis benedictus, et ita etiam erat, quia sic Deus instituerat de pane benedicto. Dedit ipsi loquenti et dicto Petro Montanerii dictus hereticus, et dixit eis quod dum dictum panem recipiebant ab eo, debebant dicere: ‘Benedicite, senher’, et dictus hereticus respondebat: ‘Deus vos benedicat’. Deinde dictus hereticus dictum panem fregit, et postea dixit eis quando inceperent comedere dictum panem dicerent: ‘Benedicite, senher’, et quod dictum panem in principio comestionis comederent, et etiam quod si non haberent appetitum comedendi, non ponerent ipsum in scutella vel cifo quod ibi remanere posset aliquid de dicto pane benedicto, set quod ipsum comederent siccum; si vero appetitum comedendi haberent, tunc dictum panem possent ponere in scutella vel cifo cum alio pane, et precaverent tamen sibi quod nulla mica vel pars dicti panis in scutella vel cifo remaneret, dicens quod magnum peccatum erat dimittere aliquid de dicto pane. Dixit etiam eis dictus hereticus quod credentes semper debebant portare de dicto pane et comedere de eo in principio cuiuslibet comestionis, semper dicendo ‘Benedicite’, et ipse loquens predicta fecerat ut dixerat dictus hereticus.” Duvernoy, *Religione dei Catari*, 187, also notes this case.

⁴³For somewhat similar cases that entail information about teachings related to the ritual and peripheral activities, see for example Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* II, 41–42; MS Doat 23, 211^r.

that was blessed by priests in church on Sundays, even though the bread was not signed with a cross nor sprinkled with holy water.⁴⁴ This implies that experiences of dissident rituals could also entail a dimension of lay interpretations and communication about the value of blessed bread. The meaning of ritual performances was not handed down to laypeople from above. Rather, acts and ideas were interpreted by their audience, who then formulated their own interpretations and spoke about them to other people in their communities. This information could subsequently influence the meaning attributed to future experiences. Guillelma's alleged words also imply that even the laity sometimes juxtaposed dissident rituals with their perceived orthodox counterparts. This reminds us that while inquisitorial sources frame information about lay experiences in light of their allegedly transgressive qualities and thus perhaps twist the evidence to emphasize conscious dissidence at the expense of fluidity and nuance in religious ideas and practices, the option to dissent really was a choice some laypeople were confronted with at the level of lived experiences prior to inquisitorial interpretations and categorizations.

While inquisition records seldom contain information about the details and practicalities of the ritualized blessing of bread, a few rare but evocative cases suggest that participating in ritual dining with the good men offered laypeople a dynamic context of engagement with religious practices and teachings. This dimension of lived religion was delineated, in part, by peripheral talk and propagation that ascribed potential meaning to the experiences of the participants, affording them with information and opportunities for interpretation and agency.

⁴⁴Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* II, 27: "ibidem dixit dicta Guillelma ipsi loquenti quod dictus panis erat benedictus [...]. Et cum ipse postea frequenter videret quod dictus hereticus taliter panem benedicebat in principio mense, interrogavit dictam Guillelman quam virtutem habebat ille panis sic benedictus, que respondit ei quod dictus panis maiorem virtutem cencies habebat quam panis quem benedicatur per sacerdotes in ecclesia in die dominica, licet non fiat signum crucis super dictum panem nec spergatur aqua benedicta."

DISTRIBUTING BLESSED BREAD IN THE LANGUEDOCIAN COMMUNITIES

Lived religion was and is a way for people to interact and participate in their communities.⁴⁵ The bread blessed by the Languedocian good men seems to have provided opportunities for such participatory interactions, as inquisition records imply that it was often distributed on a person-to-person basis in local communities. When the authorities found out that laypeople had taken it upon themselves to supply others with blessed bread, they seem to have favoured documenting it in above average detail. For the historian, this amounts to interesting evidence about lay initiative and agency in the context of lived religion.

Coming into contact with laypeople distributing blessed bread was one way of encountering dissident proselytization. The highly standardized and often repetitive record of a mass-inquisition conducted in 1245–1246 reads that one day, the deponent Willelmus Andrea had met another man identified as Willelmus de Vilarsel on the street in the village of Laurac. According to the record, the man asked the deponent if he wanted blessed bread, to which the deponent responded that he did. The man gave the deponent some of the bread and afterwards the man told the deponent that the bread he had given him was bread blessed by heretics.⁴⁶ Variations on the same theme can also be found in other records. For example, a certain Johanna, one of the penitents sentenced by Bernard Gui in 1312, had allegedly received a small piece of bread from a woman who told her that it was the bread of God and that it was sent to her by Petrus Auterii (who was one of the good men) so that she could eat it. Johanna had accepted the bread and placed it in a certain unspecified location.⁴⁷ Many such entries are quite terse,⁴⁸ but it is worth turning, once again, to the depositions of Petrus Maurini, in which an entry states that Maurini had

⁴⁵ Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, “Religion as Experience,” 2.

⁴⁶ MS 609, 76v: “quada(m) die obviavit W(ille)mo de Vilarsel i(n) quada(m) carreria apud Laurac et tu(n)c d(i)c(tu)s W(ille)m(u)s dix(it) ip(s)i t(esti) si volebat de pane b(e)n(e)d(i)c(t)o et ip(s)e r(espon)dit q(uo)d sic et tu(n)c d(i)c(tu)s W(ille)lmus dedit ip(s)i t(esti) de illo pane et postea ip(s)e W(ille)m(u)s dix(it) ip(s)i t(esti) q(uo)d ille panis q(ue)m ip(s)e ded(er)at erat panis b(e)n(e)d(i)c(tu)s ab her(eti)cis.”

⁴⁷ Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 616: “[...] quadam vice dicta Petrona portavit dicte Johanne unam parvam petiam panis, dicens quod erat panis de Deo et Petrus Auterii mittebat eum sibi ut comederet et ipsa accepit et posuit in quodam loco.”

⁴⁸ See for example Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* I, 284–285; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* II, 422, 479–480; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 270; MS

gone to a certain village bringing with him bread that had been blessed by a heretic. On behalf of this heretic, he gave the bread to a woman saying that *le senher* had sent her blessed bread. The woman accepted the bread, said “bless” and kissed the bread. The record also describes how she then broke the bread and gave some to her daughter, telling her that it was blessed bread.⁴⁹ It seems that the role played by Languedocian laypeople who distributed blessed bread in their communities could be of vital importance, as it allowed for participation by proxy for those who had not attended the ritualized meals. It is likely that the perceived importance of such options even increased towards the end of the thirteenth century, as inquisitorial persecution intensified and drove the good men and their lay supporters more and more towards a clandestine existence. For those who stepped up and took initiative, the experience of participating in the upkeep of these dissident structures in the face of persecution was a concrete, practical way to live out religious choices.

Nonetheless, while the evidence concerning the social practicalities of distributing blessed bread implies some sense of communality among those who saw spiritual value in the good men and their bread, it is quite possible that these communities were fluid and situational in lived reality. For the authorities, participation in the distribution of blessed bread was clear evidence of religious transgression, and thus a sign of the suspect belonging to a heretical sect. The inquisitor’s perspective emphasized heretical depravity as the driving force of such activities, effectively obscuring other underlying motives. The motives that brought about experiences of distributing blessed bread in one’s community are irretrievably lost to us and may not always have been clear to the historical actors themselves. Nonetheless, it seems pertinent to attempt seeing these activities from a wider perspective and to remember that they were embedded in the general dynamics of social life. Collaboration of all kinds is typical to

Doat 25, 5^r, 7^r–7^v, 210^v–211^v; Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 396, 444, 610–612, 684, 690, 892, 900, 904; Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* II, 1480.

⁴⁹Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d’inquisition* III, 177: “Et in crastinum mane dictus hereticus benedixit modo hereticali unam placentam et dedit ipsi loquenti, ut ipsam portaret supra dicte Mersendi apud Beysetum ex parte eius [...]. Et ipse loquens ivit apud Beysetum, et portavit dictam placentam per dictum hereticum benedictum, quam dedit ex parte dixti heretici dicte Mersendi, dicens ei quod le senher mittebat ei de pane benedicto; quam placentam accepit dicta Mersendis dicendo ‘benedicite’, et osculata fuit dictam placentam. Deinde fregit eam et dedit panem dicte Iohanne filie, dicens ei quod panis benedictus erat [...] et tunc dicta Mersendis et dicta filia eius comederunt de dicto pane benedicto.”

humans and people tend to be helpful to each other in a variety of ways.⁵⁰ We are often driven by an innate aspiration to be relevant, and in order to appear as such, we must be in possession of something that can be shared with others for their benefit. Even risks and other costs to the individual are not always enough to limit such activities. This inherent drive to be relevant can be seen as essential for understanding all human communication.⁵¹ It necessarily acquires historically specific avenues of manifestation and can arguably be interpreted as influencing a whole variety of social actions. Looking at our evidence, it seems that distributing blessed bread to others, informing them of what it was and what it was worth, and prompting them to eat it for spiritual benefit are examples of ways in which people in medieval Languedoc could be relevant in their communities. This is not a call for the biological reductionism of these experiences nor a denial of possible sectarian loyalties and conscious dissent as motivating factors. Rather, it is an acknowledgement of the myriad ways in which experiences were embedded in their wider context. These subtle entanglements illustrate the irreducible complexity of these emergent phenomena.

INTERPRETATIONS AND BELIEFS CONCERNING THE VALUE OF BLESSED BREAD

The world is not first experienced and then interpreted, as experience itself emerges as a result of an on-going interpretative process, without which reality would appear as chaos. Experiences cannot exist without meaning, as they reflect the ways in which people make sense of and explain reality from their own contextualized and spatiotemporally situated position. Religion-as-lived revolves around the interpretation of religious ideas and practices. As an analytical framework, the history of experiences draws attention to these interpretative processes and ascribed meanings.⁵² When investigating baked goods of spiritual worth, it should be noted that while meaning per se is something that material things do not inherently possess but is something ascribed to them by people, it is also the case that the material world influences historical actors through its sheer physicality,

⁵⁰Tomasello, *Origins of Human Communication*, 5–7, 13, 72–73, 82–88, 185–186. See also Tomasello, *Why We Cooperate*.

⁵¹Dessalles, *Why We Talk*, 276–281, 290–293, 325, 350, 354.

⁵²Chandler, *Semiotics*, 2, 8, 11; Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 11–13; Lehtonen, *Merkitysten maailma*, 16.

which cannot be completely reduced to language. Material things, in this case blessed bread, are by no means passive, meaning-bearing vessels, but a vibrant, tangible part of historical experiences.⁵³

Dissident rituals were given a highly specific interpretation by the authorities who documented information about them as proof of heresy. But what can inquisition records tell us about the beliefs and meanings that laypeople ascribed to bread blessed by the good men? Based on the evidence, it seems that many individuals in medieval Languedoc saw spiritual value in the bread blessed by the alleged heretics, even though details about lay interpretations are often obscured under the standardized façade of the records. For example, a woman identified as Guillelma Molceria, who was sentenced for her religious transgressions in 1309, is stated to have eaten once of the blessed bread of the heretics, and the record adds that she had great devotion towards it.⁵⁴ An earlier deposition from 1243 reads that a man gave the deponent certain bread to eat and told him he ought to value it as if St Peter had blessed it, because the good men had eaten from it and it survived them.⁵⁵ There is also a longer, more detailed entry that suggests similar sentiments. The 1324 deposition of Bernardus Martini (son of the above-mentioned Petrus Maurini) reads that together with his brother Arnaldus, he met two good men who were hiding in their father's dovecot. When they were leaving, Arnaldus allegedly told the deponent to fetch bread from their house and to bring it to him. The deponent did as he was asked but remained outside while his brother re-entered the dovecot with the bread. According to the record, the deponent did not see what was done with it, but after a while his brother came out bringing him a piece of bread and a cup of wine, telling the deponent to drink the wine and eat the bread because the holy men had blessed them. The deponent admitted doing as he was told and believing that it

⁵³ Immonen, "Sotkuinen aineellisuus," 194–196. For discussion on the growing scholarly emphasis on material religious practices, see for example Jones, "Introduction"; Kvalicova, *Listening and Knowledge*, 5–6.

⁵⁴ Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 462: "comedit semel de pane benedicto hereticorum et habebat in eo namam devotionem.

⁵⁵ MS Doat 23, 91^r: "dedit eidem testi de quadam panada ad comedendum dicens eidem testi, quod tamen vobis valebat quod si sanctus petrus benedixisset eam, quia boni homines comederant de ea, et illud quod superfuerat eis." The passage is noted and translated in Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 267 n.197. Cf. MS Doat 25, 302^r for a deposition stating that the deponent would have willingly induced his own son to eat of the blessed bread of the heretics if he had been able to.

was holy bread, because it had been blessed by the heretics.⁵⁶ Not everyone seems to have agreed on the spiritual value of blessed bread, as there are also a few cases that refer to critical or indifferent attitudes,⁵⁷ but it does seem that devotion towards it was a part of the experiences and lived religion of at least some Languedocians.

The ideas and beliefs that people appropriated were always selectively received, reproduced, and reinterpreted. Sometimes religious teachings and demands could be interpreted in idiosyncratic ways.⁵⁸ In the context of the meanings ascribed to bread blessed by the alleged heretics, there is an especially intriguing case in a deposition given by Raymundus Basserii, a Caraman resident who appeared spontaneously before inquisitors in 1276. According to the record he denied all knowledge of heresy with the exception that when he was living with lady Nichola, he saw a dry and old piece of bread in a casket that belonged to Nichola's sister Navarra. The deponent asked his wife Lombarda, who was also the niece of Nichola and Navarra, what kind of bread it was. His wife told him that she did not know, but that Navarra had instructed her from prison via Nichola to be sure to keep the bread with her, like the eye in her head, or to send it to her. According to the record, the deponent's wife also told him that when Navarra was released from prison, she had come to the house asking to have the bread back, and that she told her that the bread was as good to a person as the good men at the moment of death if one was unable to have them present. Navarra also told her that it was the bread of the good men,

⁵⁶ Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 256: "Arnaldus dixit ei quod in quadam fenestra que erat in solario dicte domus iuxta ignem, in quodam doblerio inveniret IIIor placentas quas ipse emerat apud Taraschonem, et quod dictas placentas acciperet et deportaret ei, quod et ipse loquens fecit. Quas placentas cum dedisset dicto fratri suo in dicto boali iuxta hostium dicti columbarii, dictus Arnaldus intromisit in dicto columbario dictas placentas, ipso loquente remanente extra, et non vidit illud quod factum fuit de dictis placentis. Set post pausam dictus Arnaldus, frater eius, exivit ad eum de dicto columbario, et portavit ei unum modicum cancellum de una placentam et unum cifum vini [...], et dixit ei quod biberet dictum vinum ibidem, et quod comederet dictam placentam, quia dicti sancti homines benedixerant eam, ut dixit. Quod ipse loquens fecit, credens quod dicta placentam erat panis sanctus, quia erat benedictus per dictos hereticos."

⁵⁷ For cases referring to critical or indifferent attitudes towards blessed bread, see for example Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* I, 383–384; Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* III, 199.

⁵⁸ Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 160; Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief*, 28–29; Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo, *Lived Religion and Gender*, 3; Sparks, *Heresy, Inquisition and Life Cycle*, 110. Ammerman, "Introduction," 6–8, who notes that religious traditions almost always entail a certain level of plurality, hybridity, and bricolage.

which the deponent understood to mean that it was the bread of the heretics.⁵⁹ One of the central tenets of being a good man was providing salvation to followers through the performance of a ritual administered to willing laypeople on their deathbeds.⁶⁰ Evidence for this ritual was highly sought after by the authorities and thus piles up in the records. However, the reference regarding Navarra's faith in the salvatory value of the blessed bread is unique—similar interpretations cannot be found elsewhere in Languedocian inquisition records. While the entry does not grant access to her beliefs, only information about talk reported to the deponent by his wife and later recalled by him in the interrogation, it does imply that at the level of individual lived religion, people had the prerogative to interpret and adapt teachings about the sacred, including the functions of blessed bread.

Furthermore, beliefs are often deployed in actions and social practices,⁶¹ which allows the inclusion of additional evidence into the discussion: references to the practice of treasuring pieces of blessed bread. In a previous case there was already an indication of people sometimes being told to do so, and it seems that these prescriptions were taken seriously. For example, a woman called Geralda, sentenced for heresy in 1312, is stated to have been in possession of bread blessed by a heretic due to the devotion and faith she had regarding the possibility of salvation in the faith of the heretics. She had eaten some of it, but also saved the rest, conserving it for

⁵⁹ Biller, Bruschi and Sneddon, eds, *Inquisitors and Heretics*, 648–651: “vidit in quadam caxia dominae Navarrae, sororis dictae Nicholauae, quoddam frustrum panis siccum et consumptum prae nimia antiquitate, et quaesivit a Lombarda uxore ipsius testis, nepte dictarum dominarum, cuiusmodi panis erat. Quae respondit ipsi testi quod nesciebat, sed quod domina Navarra mandaverat ei de muro per Nicholauam praedictam, quod dictum panem bene reservaret sibi sicut oculum capitis, vel mitteret eidem Navarrae. Dixit insuper quod postmodum, cum praedicta Navarra esset educta de muro, venit ad domum praedictam de Belaval, ubi fuit morata, et audivit ipse testis dici a supradicta Lombarda, uxore ipsius testis, quod dicta Navarra repetiit dictum panem ab eadem Lombarda, et quod dixit ipsi Lombardae quod tantum valebat ille panis ei, qui vellet habere bonos homines in obitu et non posset habere eos, et quod erat panis bonorum hominum, quod ipse testis intellexit haereticorum.” Duvernoy, *Religione dei Catari*, 188, also notes this case.

⁶⁰ On this deathbed ritual (referred to as the *consolamentum*) in general, see for example Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 124–130; Barber, *Cathars*, 90–94.

⁶¹ Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 170. Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 162, also argues that medieval laypeople perhaps understood belief differently from how inquisitors and historians understand it, suggesting that performing certain religious activities did not necessarily indicate, but rather constituted belief. For discussion on belief in the context of Languedocian heresy in general, see Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, 116–163.

many years only nibbling on it from time to time. The summary of her transgressions also states that she had been given a pair of gloves that were said to have been made by a heretic. Out of devotion, she also saved the gloves and kept the blessed bread inside them, conserving the package in a coffer.⁶² This case, together with other similar entries,⁶³ attests to the practical and material side of lay devotion towards the bread blessed by the good men. The experience of treasuring this bread as a relic and slowly consuming it over time was one potential way to interface with the sacred.

Lived religion is a dynamic social process emergent from an amalgam of concrete practices and processually changing beliefs.⁶⁴ According to Ann Taves, people draw on three core processes when they perceive and categorize things as religious: imagination that allows for the generation of novelties and alternate realities; the process of setting apart that distinguishes certain things as more salient than others; and the process of valuation that assesses and orders the significance of things and phenomena.⁶⁵ All three of these processes can arguably be seen at work in the context of lay interpretations concerning the meaning and value of the bread blessed by the good men. These interpretations were manifest in the past as talk and deed, now visible in abstraction through inquisition records. Religion-as-lived can be viewed as an affective, experiential dimension that works to address the deep-seated human desire for meaning.⁶⁶ In medieval Languedoc, the ritualized transformation of cooked dough into something so much more could afford laypeople with objects of devotion, and for some, like the aforementioned Navarra, even the perceived means to salvation.

⁶² Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 778: “fecit fieri de pane benedicto per dictum hereticum propter devocionem et fidem quam habebat, quod posset salvari in fide dicti heretici et accepit de dicto pane et comedit et partem reservavit et multis annis conservavit et aliquando de illo pane comedit [...]. Item ibidem fuerunt date dicte Geralde cirotece, de quibus dictum fuit sibi quod fecerat eas quedam heretica, quas devotione multis annis conservavit et in eis de pane benedicto heretici tenebat et conservabat in archa sua.”

⁶³ For more similar references to people conserving and treasuring bread blessed by the alleged heretics, see for example Duvernoy, ed., *Registre d'inquisition* II, 75; Pales-Gobilliard, ed., *Livre des sentences* I, 784, 924.

⁶⁴ Katajala-Peltomaa, *Demonic Possession and Lived Religion*, 2; McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 3–5, 12–17, 67, 98, 118, 185, 208–213; Rüpke, *On Roman Religion*, 4–5, 42–43.

⁶⁵ Taves, “Reverse Engineering,” 202–203.

⁶⁶ Cf. Chandler, *Semiotics*, 11; Park and McNamara, “Religion, Meaning, and the Brain,” 67–75.

CONCLUSIONS

Experiences of participating in activities related to the allegedly heretical practice of blessing bread constituted a potential and seemingly common dimension of lived religion for laypeople in thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Languedoc. Many deponents participated in meals shared with the good men, during which bread was often blessed and consumed in a ritualized fashion. These communal, multisensory experiences were a tangible and apparently memorable way to live out religious beliefs together with others. The interactions in which bread was blessed sometimes entailed oral teachings about the significance of the ritual, and the bread could be extracted from the ritual situation and diffused around the local community, which allowed for a wide sphere of participation. Moreover, the evidence points to the potential variety of lay beliefs concerning the value of blessed bread and the apparent devotion towards it, emphasizing the prerogative of medieval people to creatively interpret and selectively appropriate religious ideas. The active role taken by at least some laypeople in distributing blessed bread and speaking about it to others reminds us that religion-as-lived cannot be a passive affair. Evaluating Claire Taylor's audacious claim that the blessing of bread was a mere compromise ritual for the good men proved difficult based on the content of inquisition records. What is clear, however, is that experiences related to it were a prominent dimension of material religion and that the good men themselves seem to have made efforts to assure proper belief and conduct. During interrogations, deponents were forced to reinterpret past experiences in a new light, and the inquisitorial perspective frames information about encounters with blessed bread in rigid categories and language that stress the heretical nature of these experiences. While perceptions concerning the boundaries between licit and illicit religious practices may have been more flexible at the level of lived reality, inquisition records do imply that at least for some, indulging in bread blessed by the good men was a conscious taste of dissent.

Evaluating the implications of this case study concerning blessed bread in medieval Languedoc from a more general standpoint, it seems fair to argue that medieval inquisition records, when approached with adequate epistemic diligence, are an exceptionally promising source for studying the history of experiences and lived religion. For this endeavour, a stratified perspective utilizing the concepts of complexity and emergence can prove useful. According to this view, lived religion emerges from but is never reducible to the blooming variety of experiences related to engaging with

the numinous in daily life. These experiences, taken as events that prompt reflective perceptions and afford the spatiotemporally situated subject with mental and embodied qualia, are also phenomena that emerge from the on-going act of the brain-body interfacing with the world through actions and interpretations. Thus, both experiences and lived religion can be understood as emergent and complex phenomena located on distinct but interacting levels of the processual unfolding of reality. Deployed as a theoretical context for specific historical investigations, this approach allows for the shifting of attention back and forth between these strata,⁶⁷ which can help us extrapolate their components and understand the dynamic interplay driving these simultaneous emergences.

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⁶⁷ Cf. Capra, *Web of Life*, 37.

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