

Thesis review form

Title of the thesis: A computational analysis of inquisitorial language and relationship networks in the inquisition register of Bologna (1291-1310)

Author of the thesis: Katia Riccardo

Thesis Advisor and Reviewer

Thesis Advisor:	David Zbírál
Reviewer:	Reima Välimäki

Type of thesis

Underline the type of thesis to be reviewed.

Bachelor's thesis (Major), Bachelor's thesis (Minor), Master's thesis (Major), Master's thesis (Minor), Dissertation (Doctoral thesis)

Assessment criteria, allocated points and overall evaluation

Assessment criteria are divided into three groups: 1) fulfilment of the assignment, 2) formal requirements and language, and 3) content. Please allocate a number of points according to the allocation criteria for each of the groups and write them in the table. The number of points allocated by the assessor for a given criterion roughly corresponds to the ECTS rating scale as follows:

40 point criterion: A = 40-36, B = 35-31, C = 30-27, D = 26-23, E = 22-20, F = 19-0;

30 point criterion: A = 30-27, B = 26-23, C = 22-20, D = 19-17, E = 16-15, F = 14-0;

20 point criterion: A = 20-18, B = 17-16, C = 15-14, D = 13-12, E = 11-10, F = 9-0;

10 point criterion: A = 10-9, B = 8, C = 7, D = 6, E = 5, F = 4-0.

Please justify the score under the table, especially if you are assigning a low score according to any criterion. Specifically, please offer a detailed justification if the thesis scores less than 50 % of the maximum number of points in a given assessment-criteria group.

Finally, add up the points from all three assessment-criteria groups and convert the sum to your proposal for the overall evaluation of the thesis following the table in the section "Overall evaluation proposal". **It should be noted that if the thesis receives less than 50 % of the maximum number of points in any of the three assessment-criteria groups, the proposed overall evaluation must be F, regardless of the final score.**

Formally, the overall assessment has only three options: pass excellent, pass, fail. For a better idea, we also keep the appropriate (more detailed) original shadow assessment in points, in letters and in words.

Please note that the Czech evaluation system does not allow the option to "revise and resubmit". Instead, it applies a rating scale ranging from A to F, where A to E suggests that the thesis be accepted (with the corresponding grade from A-Excellent to E-Sufficient), while F suggests that the thesis is graded Fail and that the student is asked to revise and resubmit it if this is the first defence (the student can only defend the thesis twice).

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1) Assignment fulfilment

First, evaluate the degree to which the thesis fulfilled the official project. **Deviations from the initial proposal should be judged according to how they are justified.** Thesis assignments can be found at this address: <https://is.muni.cz/auth/rozpis/?lang=en> or requested by email from the thesis supervisor.

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Evaluation</i>	
	<i>maximum</i>	<i>assigned</i>
Assignment fulfilment. Does the thesis focus precisely on the topic specified in the official assignment? To what degree is it based on the theoretical background specified in the assignment? Does it use the methods specified in the assignment? Does it achieve the objectives specified in the assignment and does it answer the research questions that the assignment specifies? Does it make use of literature specified in the assignment?	40	40

Justification of the evaluation:

For comments, see below 2), 3) and the Free Commentary

2) Formal requirements and language

<i>Criterion</i>	<i>Evaluation</i>	
	<i>maximum</i>	<i>assigned</i>
Language. Academic writing and style.	30	30
Clarity and consistency of argument.	30	27
Structure, proportionality of the individual parts.	10	7
Bibliographic references. The accuracy, completeness and consistency of bibliographic data in the text and in the final bibliography.	10	9
Formal precision when dealing with sources of information. The accuracy of distinctions between the author's text and citations and paraphrases. The accuracy of quotations and paraphrases.	10	10
Typography and visuals. Typographical quality, quality of image attachments, charts, graphs, etc.	10	8
Overall score	100	91

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Justification of the evaluation: All in all, the thesis is of excellent quality in language and representation. Most of the parts have been published or accepted for publication in quality journals and publishers and thus fulfil the highest scholarly standards. Towards the end, the typography of the unpublished parts is not consisted with the beginning. Paragraph breaks are sometimes difficult to spot and image captions are with the same font size as the main text. These are, however, minor issues.

The last article included (Kotzé, Riccardo, Zbíral) brings some imbalance to the whole. It is the longest article with least to contribute to the general argument. It also has the smallest contribution by the dissertation author.

The introduction is relatively short for an article-based dissertation, and it could have included a more thorough description of heresy and inquisition in medieval Bologna in general, as each of the studies included treat a particular aspect of it. The introduction would have been the right place for a more comprehensive literature review on the studies on Italian and in particular Bolognese heresy and inquisition. Now this information has to be pieced together from the different studies included in the dissertation.

The acknowledgements/preface should have included a bit more detailed explanation of the author's contribution to the studies included, especially unpublished ones.

The work addresses most of the relevant literature, and the author masters literature in all the relevant languages for the topic: Italian, English, German and French. However, a major recent study is missing: A. Cadili, *Problematische Prozesse. Kritik und Reflexion der Entscheidungspraxis der mittelalterlichen Ketzerinquisition in Italien (ca. 1230-1350)*. V&R 2024. Especially in Chapter 6 (anti-inquisitorial unrest in Bologna) the author(s) should have addressed this book, which discusses the same cases and phenomenon (inquisitorial decision-making) as they do. In many ways, Riccardo and her co-authors surpass Cadili's completely qualitative work, but it has valuable insights on the historical aspects of the unrest and more generally criticism of the inquisitions in Italy.

3) Content

Criterion	Evaluation	
	maximum	assigned
Level of the thesis as an academic text. The clarity and accuracy of the expression of the research objectives. The clarity with which research questions are addressed and the level of unnecessary digression. The persuasiveness, originality and contribution of the results. The achievement of the objectives of the thesis.	40	36

Theoretical level. The clarity of the theoretical foundations offered. The degree to which they are directly and competently employed in solving the research problem. Definition of the used terminology.	20	20
Methodological level. Methodological clarity. The appropriateness of the methods used to resolve the research questions according to the relevant data. The degree of consistency with which methods are used. The quality of their usage. The depth of the analysis.	20	20
The quality of sources of information and the quality of their use. The relevance and adequacy of the resources used, and the use of the most significant resources (please specify below). The degree to which work with resources is critical, nuanced and accurate. The quality of their use in the solution of the research problem.	20	20
Overall score	100	96

Justification of the evaluation:

A common problem with article-based dissertations is that there is either overlap between the articles or neglected topics, sometimes both. This is not the case with Katia Riccardo's work. The studies included in the dissertation complement each other, covering both the dissident community and the inquisitorial process. Riccardo has a clear understanding that the inquisitorial process, its textual end products and the topic of investigation, i.e. dissidents, must be studied together. The study proceeds from the socioeconomic status of the dissident community in Bologna to the social network of the Apostles movement, incrimination and punishment patterns and finally to stylometric analysis of the notarial and inquisitorial style. Only the final, stylometric study stands out from the rest, but it is a significant scholarly contribution, which justifies its inclusion in the thesis. Together, the studies included revise, complement and challenge the prevailing image of heresy and inquisition in medieval Bologna.

In addition to the published/accepted studies, the dissertation has three data supplements/applications: Data on the Bologna anti-inquisition tumult; Incriminations in the inquisition register of Bologna (1291-1310); and the interactive map Heresy and occupation in Bologna around 1300. Riccardo thus demonstrates competence in the best practices of open science, data management and data publication.

My points of criticism are minor compared to the merits of Riccardo's work:

In the introduction, or in the conclusions, the author could have reflected the published articles and the development of her and her co-author's argument a bit more. Although the articles are written and published/accepted within a relatively short timeframe, for example the definition

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of economic and social status is more nuanced in the first study than in the published PLOS ONE article. This is entirely fine and to be expected in an article-based thesis, but could have been explained better.

I slightly disagree with the author's classification of the source-critical schools of heresy studies (Introduction, pp 24–26), especially the characterization of James Given as part of the linguistic turn inspired scholarship. Given is theory-oriented, but Gramscian more than post-structuralist. Likewise, the author classifies Caterina Bruschi “classical” in her source criticism, contrasted to Ginzburg (linguistic turn). Of the active scholars of heresy, Bruschi is the most explicitly Ginzburgian, and has further developed Ginzburg's methods of reading and interpreting inquisitorial sources.

Overall evaluation proposal

The overall evaluation of the thesis shall be determined according to the following table, based on the sum of scores of all three assessment-criteria groups. If the thesis receives less than 50 % of the maximum number of points in any of the three assessment-criteria groups, the proposed overall evaluation shall be F (Fail), regardless of the final score. In this case, do not add up the scores. Instead complete the table “Sum of scores of sections 1-3” with “failed to satisfy”. Although the evaluation follows from the sum of points, please type it explicitly in the appropriate box.

Sum of scores	New rating	Old Overall evaluation	In Words (old version)
240-214	Passed with distinction	A	Excellent
213-184	Pass	B	Very good
183-158	Pass	C	Good
157-132	Pass	D	Satisfactory
131-120	Pass	E	Sufficient/Acceptable (passed)
119-0	Fail	F	Fail

Sum of scores of sections 1-3:	40+91+96 = 227
Overall evaluation proposal:	Passed with distinction

Free commentary

Reviewers' comments (overall impression of the thesis, strengths and weaknesses, suggestions for further development, etc.). In the case of **doctoral theses**, please state explicitly **(1) whether (or not) the thesis demonstrated the student's “research and creative capacities in the field”, and (2) whether (or not) “you recommend the thesis for defence”**. These two statements are necessary for the reviews of doctoral theses to be valid.

The thesis, completed as a part of the DISSINET project and research team, is of the highest academic quality. Especially the use of the sources, application of methods and theoretical justification of the chosen approach are well documented, consistent and, above all, produce scholarly results beyond the state of the art. The contributions of the dissertation for the study of medieval heresy and inquisition in Italy are significant and way above an average dissertation. In particular, the reassessment of the socioeconomic status as an explanation of dissidence, and the conclusion that dissidence and the criticism of inquisition in Bologna were above all a community- and parish-rooted phenomenon, has wider implications on how scholars should approach urban heresy in the future.

The work done on the modelling of the Bologna inquisition registers immense and deserves a separate praise.

The dissertation succeeds in its goal to make methodological contributions for the study of medieval heresy and inquisition. Historians are often suspicious of computational methods, but Riccardo and her co-authors demonstrate that the combination of data modelling, methodologi-

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cal competence in network analysis and natural language processing, and sensitivity to historical context are a combination that produces significant, non-incremental results that move the field forward. In all studies, the authors go beyond the usual application of e.g. network visualizations and descriptive statistics in historical studies, successfully applying methods such as exponential random graph model and logistic regression on historical data.

I have commented on the content of the dissertation, and its merits, in more detail above in 3) Content.

There are no significant weaknesses or omissions in Riccardo's study. The choices of topics, methods and data are entirely justified and more than enough for a PhD dissertation. One prevalent aspect of dissidence, holiness and urban community in medieval Italy is, however, almost completely absent: politics, both inside the urban community and in relation to papacy and other powers. While difficult to model based on the data used in the dissertation, the inclusion of the urban politics and conflicts is a suggestion for future studies.

I conclude by stating that Katia Riccardo's dissertation thesis "A computational analysis of inquisitorial language and relationship networks in the inquisition register of Bologna (1291-1310)" **demonstrates the students research and creative capacities in the field.** With utmost pleasure, **I recommend the thesis for defence.**

Suggestions for discussion

Please provide at least two areas for discussion regarding the thesis.

- (1) Typically, one's views on the subject matter develop in the course of an article dissertation, and sometimes one ends up refuting some observations of the earliest published articles in later publications. Which aspects of Bolognese dissidence, social order and inquisition you now understand differently than in the earliest published article (PLOS ONE on incrimination)?
- (2) One feature almost completely absent in the analyses is the political affiliation (Guelf vs Ghibelline, ruling class vs not, etc.). Would it have been feasible to include the political aspect somehow in the analyses? Is the politics relevant for the studied phenomena?

Date, reviewer, signature

Place, date:	Turku, Finland, 22 May 2026
Name (including titles) and the department of the reviewer:	Doc., Dr. Reima Välimäki. Department of Cultural History, University of Turku
Signature:	

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