

Demons, Spirits, Witches/3

Witchcraft  
Mythologies  
and  
Persecutions



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*Edited by*  
*Gábor Klaniczay and Éva Pócs*

## WITCHCRAFT MYTHOLOGIES AND PERSECUTIONS

# **Demons, Spirits, Witches**

Series Editors

GÁBOR KLANICZAY and ÉVA PÓCS

**Volume III**

# WITCHCRAFT MYTHOLOGIES AND PERSECUTIONS

Edited by

**Gábor Klaniczay and Éva Pócs**

in collaboration with Eszter Csonka-Takács



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## INTRODUCTION

GÁBOR KLANICZAY and ÉVA PÓCS

Our third volume is a collection of the studies on what could be called the most central theme of our conference, attracting perhaps the largest number of researchers, i.e., the topic of witchcraft beliefs and persecutions. The studies in this volume clearly show that there are plenty of unresolved questions on the theme of witchcraft, regardless of how much it has been researched and discussed in the past fifty years. For a renewed discussion of these questions, a conference, which gathered historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and folklorists, seemed especially appropriate; an interdisciplinary discussion frequently breathes new vigor into old controversies and opens up new issues which previously seemed to be resolved. Our volume reflects the multiplicity of approaches present at the conference: the relationships of the institutions, the social contexts, the ideologies and the belief systems related to witchcraft; the interplay, the coexistence, and the mutual transformation of the witch-concepts of elite and popular culture; witchcraft as a scapegoat mechanism and a social institution; the problem of “old” and “new” witchcraft, i.e., late antique—early medieval witchcraft concepts, their partial transformation into the late medieval and early modern “diabolic” version, their persistence in modern times, and their ongoing presence in the folklore.

The upshot of the discussions came down to two central questions: the historical formation of witchcraft mythologies and the social-judicial context of witchcraft prosecution. In the presentation of both of these themes the confrontation of the observations of history and anthropology has an important role, while folkloristic studies, coupled with an anthropological approach, became important in the studies collected in the third part of the book. We were also affirmed in another original goal of ours: by mak-

ing Budapest a convergence point of research on the “West” and on the “East,” we managed to explore some of the “white spots” on the map of witchcraft beliefs in East-Central Europe.

The first part of our book, entitled *Mythologies*, focuses on the much discussed theme of the witches’ Sabbath.

The analysis offered by *Martine Ostorero* is based upon the activities of the research group of Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, which recently published the critical edition of the most important treatises and chronicles related to the beginnings of witchcraft persecutions in Switzerland and in the Alpine regions, written by Claude Tholosan, Johannes Nider, Johann Fründ, Martin Le Franc, and the anonymous author of the *Errores gazariorum* (*L’imaginaire du sabbat* 1999). She confronts these fifteenth-century sources with other relevant judicial records from contemporary witch trials, and on the basis of these documents she provides a new synthetic account on how the concept of the witches’ Sabbath has emerged. She examines this process partly from the point of view of the varied intellectual and social context, the different mentalities of the authors, and partly on the basis of the local traditions which might have influenced emerging Sabbath concepts. As to this latter circle, she pays attention to the religious traditions of the Waldensian heretics; to the concept of the *Synagoga* formulated in anti-Judaic discourse; and to some characteristic elements of the Alpine folklore, such as ecstatic experiences related to the “furious army” of the dead, the belief in treacherous weather magicians who claim to travel in the clouds and send hail to the vineyards, and the motifs of lycanthropy. She attempts to explain the way these authors tried to adapt the concept of the Sabbath to their own mental categories, be they juridical, theological, literary, or political—and by assembling the data of recent research and recently discovered sources, she manages to find relevant answers to these questions.

The presence of *Carlo Ginzburg* at our conference gave us the idea to organize a round-table discussion dedicated to his two groundbreaking books on the subject of the witches’ Sabbath: *Night Battles* (1983 [1966]) and *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches’ Sabbath* (1991 [1989]). These books spurred an interest in the theme of witchcraft mythologies unparalleled since the dubious sensationalism presented by Margaret Murray (1921). These books challenge the generally accepted historiographic view which held that the concept of the witches’ Sabbath is a pure invention of elite

demonologists—that is to say, injected into “popular culture” by ecclesiastical propaganda and judicial constraints. He unearthed several archaic traditions and belief systems which contributed to the formation of this mythology. His bold and often provocative statements stirred up a lively debate, which was still quite vigorous at the time of the conference. The contributors of the round-table engaged in a productive conversation with the author. Folklorists and anthropologists, *Giovanni Pizza*, *Gustav Henningsen*, and *Éva Pócs*, confronted his findings with their own research results on fairies, the possessed and the “soul-battles,” also providing new paths to develop the interpretations proposed by Ginzburg. *Gábor Klaniczay* addressed some enquiries to Ginzburg from the historian’s point of view: the relationship of diffusion to archaic local tradition, and the popular impact of some late medieval inquisitorial show-trials such as the trial against the Templars, in the formation of the concept of the diabolic witches’ Sabbath. Though his research concentrated upon fields quite different from his original central theme, Ginzburg received the interrogations with a lively interest. He refuted some of the criticisms and admitted the need for more refined statements and the legitimacy of further enquiries in other cases.

The theme discussed in the study written by Gábor Klaniczay is closely related to this same subject. He examines the structural similarities of heavenly and diabolic visions (a problem spurring considerable interest in current research: cf. Dinzlacher 1995; Caciola 2003; Clark 2007), and the mutual relationship of “popular” and “elite” narratives in both of these fields (another frequently discussed issue today: Gibson 1999; Clark 2001). He traces the historical evolution of (miraculous or diabolic) vision narratives from the times of late medieval canonization processes to seventeenth-century witch trials. As to medieval miracles and vision-accounts recorded in the canonization proceedings, he observes how a number of originally experience-based, realistic, “simple form” narratives get developed into quite complicated fables in the process of hagiographic elaborations by the learned ecclesiastical elite. Towards the end of the Middle Ages, this same elite started to question these influential visions and miracles, and in the process of the discernment of spirits they confronted heavenly visions with diabolical ones, often blurring the boundaries between the two. The emerging mythology of the witches’ Sabbath, as the author suggests, provides an opposite process to the one observed in

the case of medieval visions—a concept largely created by a learned elite was disseminated, augmented, embellished, and “digested” by the witch-hunting masses. Fable became reality in a kind of collective nightmare for some centuries.

A number of regional case studies provide further examples of this issue. *Adelina Angusheva* examines the presence of late medieval witchcraft mythologies in a territory—early modern Bulgaria—which we have so far considered more or less exempt from witchcraft beliefs and persecutions. She determines that the situation in Orthodox South-East Europe was quite similar to the one in Hungary. There was a series of writings against witches and even visual representations were created from the seventeenth century until the beginning of the nineteenth, to support Orthodox Christian propaganda against popular beliefs. The sermons and the treatises attempted to serve the spreading of a new and more rigorous type of Christianity in Greek and Bulgarian society. Although there were no witch trials during this period in the Balkans, the sermons and the treatises against them did manage to disseminate a new mythology concerning witches and sorceresses and the danger they could pose to Christians.

As to the northern peripheries of Christendom, the epidemic Scandinavian witch hunts have been well-noted since the research of Bengt Ankarloo (1971). Yet, as we learn from the essay by *Per Sörlin*, there is much to be gained from a renewed, thorough comparison with recent results of witchcraft research. The specific phenomenon of “child-witches,” and the massive involvement of children, allegedly carried away to the witches’ Sabbath, and the witchcraft accusations against their relatives, parents and grandparents, has subsequently been analyzed by *Gustav Henningsen* (1980) using the documents of the witch hunts in the Basque lands and *Wolfgang Behringer* (1989) who considered numerous German cases. *Sörlin* now undertakes the comparison of Scandinavian and Basque examples and observes that the Swedish Sabbath appears to be more dualistic, sometimes giving the impression of a “white” Sabbath. In addition to regional and cultural differences, he also investigates the psychological (individual and social) background of Sabbath accounts and the impact of courtroom hearings upon the narrative structures of the witches’ Sabbath, a phenomenon recently analyzed by *Lyndal Roper* (2004).

The second part of the book is entitled *Legal Mechanisms, Social Contexts*. The different approaches of the folklorists and the historians are

combined here as well, often in the work of the same person, as in the case of the first two studies: the ones by Péter G. Tóth and Ildikó Kristóf—both related to the study of judicial rituals. The investigations of legal rituals and their symbolic meaning is one of the currently unfolding research directions which promise a number of innovative insights (cf. Gauvard and Jacob 1999).

The study of *Péter G. Tóth* provides a full-fledged panorama of the water ordeal of witches by combining the viewpoints of legal history, historical anthropology, and folklore studies. His historical overview is not limited to East-Central Europe—he also considers territories both to the west and to the east of this region. As to the time frame of his study, he traces the origins of this ritual back to Ancient Mesopotamia, to the Sumerians, Acadians, and the Code of Hammurabi. He also considers Christian antecedents related to rituals of baptism, which also contained a kind of life-and-death test for the newborn babies. He subsequently provides an overview of the legal practice of the ordeal by water in early medieval societies. All these historical precedents allow him to approach, with a multilayered set of considerations, the rich set of data on the early modern resurrection of the ritual of the water ordeal as “swimming of the witches.” He comes to the conclusion that the swimming of witches formed an organic part of the institutionalized system of inflicting pain in early modern societies. In addition, he formulates some interesting hypotheses of interpretation, such as the one referring to Mesopotamian antecedents, which relate the water ordeal to rainmaking rites and weather magic. This could make sense in the case of witches if we consider their alleged negative role in bewitching the rain and bringing draught and sterility to the lands.

*Ildikó Kristóf* approaches legal rituals from another angle. On the basis of a close textual analysis of witchcraft confessions made in front of urban and feudal courts of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Hungary, in sensational and fable-like confessions extorted from the witches on the devil’s pact, she tries to detect the traces of actual existing rituals and customs related to contemporary legal practice. She puts together a set of eloquent examples which document that a fair number of “realistic” elements made their way into the delirious fantasies describing the act of consorting with the devil and into the narratives created under the ultimately constraining conditions of the interrogation and torture of the witches. These are

stereotyped elements referring to current social-judicial practice in towns and villages such as the rituals of handshaking, or the display of bodily proofs (“blood-showing,” “blue-showing”), rituals related to concluding a contract on the one hand and joining a corporation or a secret society on the other.

The essay written by *Anna Brzezińska* addresses another central element in the history of witchcraft: the history of healing practices. She combines it with an interesting socio-cultural dimension: her theme is the practice of court doctors, especially “nonprofessional” ones, in the early modern Polish royal court. She refutes the accepted opinion that there would have been a fundamental difference and an adverse relationship between “popular healing” and the medical practices of the “elite.” Examining the data on “popular” healers who were active in the court in this period, she concludes that there was a complex cooperation, a frequent communication and routine interaction between these two strata of healers. Consequently their methods of treatment and the medicines they recommended were similar and overlapped as well. “Magical” remedies were applied by both, and this could lend a “diabolic” quality to the practices of healers and doctors alike. Therefore, the occurrence of the healers in the royal court should be perceived as a combination of what we used to distinguish as popular/learned, rural/courtly, or magic/medicine, and which seems to have created a much more powerful opposition according to the twentieth-century historians than within early modern society.

*Polina Melik Simonian* examines the witch trials of early modern Russia which are only beginning to be researched. She approaches the documentation of seventeenth-century trials of “sorcerers” from a specific point of view: what was the proportion of foreigners among those accused, were these trials also motivated by a kind of xenophobia? Based on the records from the Archives of the Ministry of Justice in Muscovy, which cover investigations carried out in the Central Region of Russia, she illustrates the overall fear of foreign influence and relative acceptance of local beliefs. Records of the criminal investigation of alleged sorcery cases frequently reflect the suspicion of Russians towards foreign magic and an overall understanding of sorcery as an illicit knowledge coming from abroad. At the same time, the individual cases allow some glimpses in the microhistory of cultural, ethnic, and social animosities which underlay the background of these “magical” conflicts.

Microhistory remains a fruitful approach for understanding the complexity of the situations in which witchcraft accusations arise—a recent example is the story of Anne Gunther analyzed by James Sharpe (1999). The investigation presented by *Judit Kis-Halas*, which has the folklore of Hungarian witchcraft beliefs as its starting point, also develops into the microhistory of a single very well documented witchcraft case in a town once belonging to Hungary, Nagybánya (Baia Mare, Romania). Following the life and career of Márton Szappanos, and how this “honest citizen” was accused of witchcraft and “devilish arts,” she presents a fascinating insight into how witchcraft accusations could have been constructed and what could have been the historical, social, and cultural background of the charges. She presents us with the individual history of this person and how it was intertwined with the institutional history of two neighboring towns, and his career ambitions in urban governance. She shows that the construction of the suspicions of witchcraft around him was closely related to his having lost the higher citizen status he had in his former domicile, Felsőbánya, which he had to leave partly because of local religious and factional struggles. After having moved to Nagybánya, his frustrated ambitions lead to unruly behavior: swearing, dancing, and juggling in public, and showing off with a kind of magical expertise which soon got him into trouble. We get an instructive glimpse into the social networks and the multiple animosities among the accusers who were efficient in ruining the career of Márton Szappanos and styling him as the “master” of the local horde of witches.

With the historical and ethnographic study of *Daniel Ryan* we get an insight into an aspect of witchcraft persecution which is more and more the focus of recent witchcraft research: that of “late witch hunts” occurring long after the age of witchcraft persecutions was over, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Blécourt and Davies 2004, Behringer 2004, pp. 196–228). Ryan analyzes witchcraft conflict in Estonian villages at the end of the nineteenth century. These cases show that the same problems which caused accusations of witchcraft in most early modern countries—the breakdown of neighborhood cooperation and solidarity, the envy developing in a situation of “limited good” and the “refusal of charity” once analyzed by Alan Macfarlane (1970) and Keith Thomas (1971)—still persist in our age, and lead to symbolic, verbal, and physical aggression against the alleged witches. Estonian beliefs and practices suggest that confrontations



with witches—verbal and physical—such as the practice of bloodying a witch to remove a spell, were widely believed to lead to recovery and protection from witchcraft. The author pays special attention to the mutual menaces and curses, and the role of aggressive, obscene speech in such witchcraft conflicts.

The last part of the book, entitled *Witchcraft and Folklore* concludes our three-volume series. Symbolically these studies of varied themes provide a precious supplement, based upon current folkloric and ethnographic research, to the broad phenomenon of “global witchcraft” (Behringer 2004) emerging from historical and anthropological investigations. In the discussions on twentieth-century witchcraft beliefs, public attention has focused either on the “new witchcraft” of modern occultism and the revivalist movements emerging from the counterculture and the New Age (Luhmann 1989), or the exotic worlds of contemporary African, or to Latin-American witchcraft beliefs. It is worthwhile stressing that various forms of “traditional” European witchcraft also survive to this day. If carefully investigated, an anthropological, psychological, and folkloric study of these rural accusations of witchcraft and the beliefs related to them can lead to very illuminating conclusions, as one could see, for instance, in the works by Jeanne Favret-Saada (1977 and 1981).

A Portuguese folklorist, *Francisco Vaz da Silva* analyzes here present-day beliefs in the werewolf in his country. This is an important contribution also to the understanding of historical witchcraft beliefs, since werewolf beliefs formed an important part of the archaic context from which early modern witchcraft mythologies have emerged, and we frequently encounter werewolves in the acts of witch trials as well. The author examines how the figure of the werewolf coincides in contemporary folklore with the beliefs concerning the special abilities of the “seventh child” or the ill fate and marginal existence of illegitimate, irregularly born children. Recalling the related motifs of fairy tales, he poses the question of how the marginality ascribed to werewolves relates to the mythology and the social context of the historical figure of the witch. From a joint use of such sources, one can provide an overall image of werewolves and witches in Portuguese tradition that might prove useful in a comparative perspective. He comes up with a number of suggestive answers to these questions.

As a researcher of contemporary Estonian folklore, *Ülo Valk* turned to the examination of an important aspect of early modern witchcraft prose-

cutions. He wants to understand the role popular beliefs and legends played in fueling Estonian witch hunts. His principal sources come from witch trials in the seventeenth century, when the Lutheran Church's fight against witchcraft, idolatry, superstition, and the remnants of folk Catholicism became fiercer. Analyzing the testimonies in the trials, he points to the impact of Lutheran demonology upon the judicial witchcraft narratives, and he cites some examples which show the willingness of the witnesses to meet the expectations of the interrogators and spice some demonological clichés into the local witchcraft beliefs presented in their accounts. Besides all that, however, it is possible to recognize some legend types and narrative motifs that derive from folklore. For example, the legends and narrative accounts about the parties of supernatural beings were adjusted to the concept of the witches' Sabbath. Legends about the intercommunication with representatives of the supernatural world were modeled into narratives about personal encounters with the Devil and transactions with him. Comparisons of the testimonies given at the witch trials with the later collections of the Estonian Folklore Archives show that some of these narratives and beliefs sustained their popularity until the beginning of the twentieth century.

As a continuation of the above described historical investigations by Adelina Angusheva, *Iveta Todorova-Pirgova* describes her fieldwork which showed that historical models of witchcraft beliefs are still to be perceived in present-day Bulgaria. She presents interesting examples on a special phenomenon which was broadly disseminated in Southeastern Europe: the strange cooperation of priests with "witches" and "sorcerers," considering the socio-cultural connections between witches and priests in the context of local village culture. In addition, some of these examples come from villages where Christians and Muslims live together. This factor introduces further complexities into the problem and makes them even more interesting for researchers in this field.

Finally, *Mirjam Mencej* provides a folklorist's fieldwork account on witch beliefs in Slovenia, a territory on the borderline of the Balkans and Central Europe, whose interesting beliefs, for this very reason, have been largely ignored by international research. Her analysis complements very well the information in the study by Monika Krojej on the beliefs of a Slovenian village in Styria, published in Volume Two of our collection. In the East Slovenian village Mencej examines witchcraft beliefs that are still

very much alive. Here the witchcraft accusations still function as a kind of communal institution managing (stirring up and resolving) internal tensions and conflicts. Underlining the variety of present-day witchcraft beliefs, she distinguishes four principal types coexisting in this sphere. The *neighborhood witch* beliefs respond to the envy and the tension emerging in this relationship; the *village witch* is a possible scapegoat figure whose witchcraft reputation and the subsequent stigmatization is related to her alleged violation of communal value systems; the *counterwitch* plays a crucial role in diagnosing and resolving witchcraft conflicts; finally, there is the *night witch*, appearing in dreams and nightmares, who resolves tensions with the supernatural world.

If this typology does not sound alien to a historian of late medieval or early modern witch trials, that might reinforce the common impression of the large conference, the materials of which have filled up these three volumes: historians and folklorists are frequently examining closely interrelated phenomena, and they can profit immensely from such interchanges of ideas and research results.

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PART I

# MYTHOLOGIES



# THE CONCEPT OF THE WITCHES' SABBATH IN THE ALPINE REGION (1430–1440): TEXT AND CONTEXT

MARTINE OSTORERO

The talk given in October 1999 in Budapest presented the conclusions—unpublished at that time—reached by a team of researchers, to which I belong, from the University of Lausanne. The work has now been published under the title *L'imaginaire du sabbat. Edition critique des textes les plus anciens (1430c.–1440c.)* edited by Martine Ostorero, Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, and Kathrin Utz Tremp, in collaboration with Catherine Chène, Lausanne 1999 (*Cahiers lausannois d'histoire médiévale*, 26).<sup>1</sup> Here, I shall first present some of the significant results obtained in this book. Secondly, I shall examine the various circumstances which influenced different authors when they constructed their concept of the witches' Sabbath.

*L'imaginaire du sabbat* aims at establishing the critical edition, with a French translation, of five texts written between 1430 and 1440. These present for the first time, and in the most complete version, the fantasy of the witches' Sabbath, which led to widespread persecutions from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries.

The following five texts were selected:

1. Hans Fründ, *Rapport sur la chasse aux sorciers et aux sorcières menée dès 1428 dans le diocèse de Sion*.
2. Johannes Nider, *Formicarius*, Book II, Chapter 4 and Book V, Chapters 3, 4 and 7.
3. Anonymous, *Errores gazariorum, seu illorum qui scopam vel baculum equitare probantur*.
4. Claude Tholosan, *Ut magorum et maleficiorum errores...*
5. Martin Le Franc, *Le champion des dames*, Book IV, verses 17377–18200.



These texts are well known by specialists; however, a thorough re-reading of them and a critical survey of the extant manuscripts were necessary. This volume attempts to determine the local context and the cultural and political *milieu* in which each of these texts were produced.

As far as the genesis of the witches' Sabbath is concerned, I would point to the following most significant results: on the basis of seventeen manuscripts of the *Formicarius* by Johannes Nider, Catherine Chène edited all the chapters dealing with evil spells and sects connected with the Sabbath, and tried to differentiate the various episodes distinctly. The 1901 publication of excerpts from the *Formicarius* by Joseph Hansen gave a somehow distorted account of witchcraft, as it combined dissimilar testimonies. In reality, Nider on the one hand wrote about evil spells and ritual magic perpetrated by witches in the Simmental region at the end of the fourteenth century. He also wrote on the other hand about a sect of cannibalistic, infanticidal, devil-worshipper witches, who "recently" (*noviter*)—namely around 1437–38, when he drafted the *Formicarius*—surfaced in the Lausanne diocese. As a matter of fact, it would be difficult to state now that the witches' Sabbath appeared in Simmental as far back as 1375. Catherine Chène has also tried to identify Nider's different informants.

Chantal Ammann-Doubliez investigated the archives of Valais and she discovered numerous trials and new information about witchcraft dating as far back as 1428 which amplify Hans Fründ's report on witch hunts in Valais. These early trials show that the Sabbath appears as early as 1429.<sup>2</sup>

A second manuscript of the *Errores gazariorum* (Rome, BAV, Vat. Lat. 456, f. 205v–206r), formerly discovered by Pierrette Paravy, has also been published in the volume. It shows numerous and important variants to the publication of Joseph Hansen (Basel, Universitätsbibliothek, A II 34, f. 319r /307r/–320v /308v). The study of these two versions allows the hypothesis that the treatise was written before 1437 in Val d'Aoste (Northern Italy, Duchy of Savoy).<sup>3</sup> It quickly spread in Vaud, which similarly depended on the House of Savoy, and after 1438 new elements coming from the Vevey deanery in Vaud enriched it.

As far as Martin Le Franc's *Le champion des dames* is concerned, the passage edited with Robert Deschaux's cooperation is far more substantial than the brief excerpt previously published by Joseph Hansen. This edition includes the debates on the reality of the witches' Sabbath, on the power of demons, and on magic. Each of these elements is essential for

understanding the idea of the witches' Sabbath which emerges at this moment in the fifteenth century.

Finally, Claude Tholosan's treatise, unknown to Hansen, was published in the version that had been presented and edited by Pierrette Paravy in 1979.

Despite their diversity, all these texts, which discuss for the first time the witches' Sabbath, refer to a very homogeneous geographic area. This region includes the Val d'Aoste, the territory of Bern, the diocese of Lausanne (particularly the deaconry of Vevey as far as the *Errores gazariorum* are concerned), the region of Valais and the Dauphiné valleys. It is a mainly alpine geography. What is all the more remarkable is that authors refer to this alpine area even though they are foreigners or write their work somewhere else. Nider writes his *Formicarius* in Vienna and Martin Le Franc is a native of Normandy. The importance of the alpine region—which recent historiography kept in the fore—could never again go unnoticed.<sup>4</sup>

We also tried to show how the authors, who lived in the same period, belonged to quite different worlds. Each gave a particular vision of the witches' Sabbath. Lay people (Fründ, Tholosan) and clerics (Nider, Martin Le Franc) wrote about the Sabbath for different reasons. Emphasizing the danger that the witches' sect represented to society, the chronicler was mostly preoccupied with political issues. The judge from Dauphiné, Claude Tholosan, who tries to exalt the primacy of princely justice, follows the same line of thought. For the Dominican Nider, eminent professor at the University of Vienna, evil spells and Sabbath are used as moral lessons, which aims to reform society. Martin Le Franc's *Le champion des dames*, one of the earliest texts of French humanism, is above all a work to amuse the reader. The author, provost of Lausanne and secretary to the Duke of Savoy Amadeus VIII (the Pope Felix V), would recommend a pastoral action to refute the beliefs of these women, rather than the intervention of the inquisition or of any other judicial authorities. His discourse against bad priests, who do not care for those who have strayed from the flock by way of vain superstitions and are exposed to the Devil's attacks, is typical of the reformers of the Council of Basel, which he attended. Finally, even if the *Errores gazariorum* are anonymous, the author seems to have a judicial experience comparable to that of an inquisitor active in Val d'Aoste. He might be identified, as Wolfgang Behringer (2005,

p. 167) suggests, with the Franciscan Ponce Feugeyron, appointed inquisitor in a large district extending from Southern France to the diocese of Aoste. Moreover, a court of inquisition appears in 1434 in Aoste. It was represented by a Franciscan called Ponce, who can be identified with Feugeyron.<sup>5</sup> From a thematic and stylistic point of view, his text could be ranged with polemical writings against heretics. Such a diversity of authors and accounts testifies to the fast diffusion of the myth of the witches' Sabbath and its assimilation in both clerical and lay circles.

Finally, the local context of each text might determine to what extent they are connected to the current judicial situation. They correspond to a phase when trials infused with the idea of the witches' Sabbath multiplied. According to the documents known to us, this concept appears only just prior to the writing of the first texts which describe it.

### *When Five Authors "Fabricate" their own Witches' Sabbath*

It has long been known that the concept of the witches' Sabbath was not born out of nothing. Various elements of the Sabbath have been present in local cultures, and their *mentalité* was receptive to this concept. The population easily adhered to the idea of cannibalistic and Devil worshippers' sects. Magical-religious rites, necromancy and belief in fortunetellers or conjurers are thus an integral part of the mental habits of everyday medieval society; they became even more preponderant at the end of the Middle Ages (Kieckhefer 1976, 1989, 1997; Bailey 1996, 2003, 2006; Schmitt 1998; Klaniczay 2003). Both Carlo Ginzburg and Wolfgang Behringer have shown to what extent the Sabbath originates from an ancient universe—possibly based on shamanic or Celtic culture—as far as nocturnal flights and animal metamorphoses are concerned (Ginzburg 1992; Behringer 1994, 2005; Klaniczay 2003). The Christian representation of the Devil and demons was widely disseminated among the masses; since the ninth century, the idea of the pact with the Devil gained ground. It began with the legend of Teophil's pact and gradually continued with the accusation of heretics as Devil's allies (Cohn 1982, pp. 81–100; Neumann 1997).

My purpose here is not to discuss the origins of the Sabbath nor to research its real or imaginary traces in popular mythology. I would rather

try to show how certain authors, around 1430, made a bricolage based on their own culture and “mental tool-kit” to form their own concept of the witches' Sabbath. My aim is to understand the way these authors tried to adapt the Sabbath to their own mental categories, be they juridical, theological, literary, or political. The appearance of the witches' Sabbath, trial after trial, confession after confession, set a problem and meant a great challenge; they consequently decided to put this new phenomenon in writing, which was then a problem of topical interest. Each author therefore absorbed considerable influence from the world he was living in. In this short contribution I shall deal with four examples: heresy, anti-Judaism, fear of conspiracy, and alpine folklore.

### *Heresy*

The relationship between heresy and witchcraft is quite close in our texts and this will not surprise us if we think of Wolfgang Behringer's contribution in the first volume of this series (Behringer 2005). He has proved to what extent Waldenses could be transformed into witches, due to possible contacts of Waldensian *barbes* with the other world. My purpose is the opposite (or complementary): witches themselves were deemed heretics. Each author of these early texts defines witches as *heretici*. The chronicler Hans Fründ relates that in 1428 in Valais, the heresy of witches had been spotted. The *Errores gazariorum* speaks about *novi heretici* introduced in their new sect through a cannibalistic feast. In the *Le champion des dames* the Adversary describes the Sabbath and the witches' misdeeds as perpetrated in reality and not in a dream. The title of the *Errores gazariorum*, although it was given subsequently, belongs to the tradition of the list of errors attributed to heretics (for example *Errores Valdensium* or *Errores Manicheorum*). Moreover, the term of *gazarii* refers to the Cathar heresy (*L'imaginaire du sabbat* 1999, pp. 301–304). The accusation of heresy, accompanied with apostasy and idolatry, refers to the competence of an ecclesiastical court as it had been a crime against faith. This was necessary to justify the legal actions which were taken. This is introduced by Claude Tholosan, the jurist, even though he deems it necessary to refer them to secular justice too, since witches, through their misdeeds are guilty of *lese-majesty*. In his opinion, witches' heresy is a threat not only to the Church,

but also to the whole Christian society, and all the other authors adopt this same position (*L'imaginaire du sabbat* 1999, pp. 30, 280, 378–415).

The term of sect (*secta*), keystone of heresy, is very present: Johannes Nider related that the new adept becomes a member of the sect by drinking a potion made of infant corpses, and afterwards he “acquires the main rites” (*L'imaginaire du sabbat* 1999, p. 156). The word sect is recurrent in Claude Tholosan’s work and in the *Errores gazariorum*. In the latter, the adherent has to swear not to divulge the secrets of the “sect” (*L'imaginaire du sabbat* 1999, pp. 154–56, 288, 363 and *passim*). This rhetoric should not surprise us: since Alexander V’s bull in 1409, inquisitors, like Ponce Feugeyron, were concerned with the *novas sectas* of Jews and Christians who propagated rites incompatible with Christian faith and who practiced witchcraft, divination, conjuration, and other magical activities. In 1418, Martin V and, in 1434, Eugene IV resume Alexander V’s order to confirm the mandate of Ponce Feugeyron (Hansen 1901, pp. 16–17; Simonsohn 1989, pp. 658–661; Behringer 2005, pp. 164, 167; Ostorero 2002).

The relationship with heresy does not stop at the level of vocabulary. Some of the accusations imputed to heretics reappear against witches. Apostasy, the pact with and idolatry of the Devil as well as sexual orgies and cannibalism—which have a prominent place in our texts—are the most common examples (Cohn 1982, pp. 35–82; Patschovsky 1991; Hergemoeller 1996; Blauert 1989, pp. 35–50). Wolfgang Behringer has shown that even the idea of ecstatic experiences and contacts with the other-world, as it appears in trials against heretics, like in the case of Arnaud Gélis, might have repercussions in the fantasy of the witches’ nocturnal flight (Behringer 1994 and 2005; Utz Tremp 1994, pp. 130 and 132; Ginzburg 1980; Lecouteux 1986; Schmitt 1994; Pócs 1989, 1993, 1998). The “witch” Jeannette Barattier seems to say just that during the trials against her in 1480 at Montreux, when she admits to having made a pact with the Devil in order to find out the destiny of her deceased children and to see them again.<sup>6</sup>

In the same context of heresy, the motif of caves, as it appears in Fründ’s report is quite significant. The chronicler relates how witches, sitting on chairs, flew at night to the caves of rich citizens. There they celebrated and drank wine from barrels (*L'imaginaire du sabbat* 1999, pp. 34–36). According to the anonymous author of the *Errores gazariorum*, the Devil unlocks the caves of wealthy people to the members of the sect, who

can meet together and steal their wine. These clandestine meetings in caves remind us of the accusations against Waldenses who were forced to live underground. This was attested to in the register of Jacques Fournier, bishop of Pamiers, in the trials against Waldenses from Lombardy in 1387–88, and above all in contemporary trials against Waldenses from Fribourg in 1430 (Utz Tremp 1994, pp. 130–132, 2000; Amati 1865, pp. 17–21).

Finally, chronicler Fründ relates that witches were meeting in “schools.” The place is kept secret, since they are taught by the evil spirit, who preaches against the Christian faith and forbids them confession. As Kathrin Utz Tremp noted, the term “school” refers to the assemblies of heretics, described in this way during the trials against Waldenses from Fribourg in 1430 (1999, pp. 36–37 and n. 9).

All these early texts were written in a context in which witches' trials were preceded by persecutions against heretics. That is the case of Waldenses in Dauphiné and in the Lausanne diocese, particularly in Fribourg (Paravy 1993, pp. 909–1183; Utz Tremp 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 1995a, 1999, 2000). In these regions, one can perceive a shift from heresy to witchcraft during the first half of the fifteenth century. When the struggle against Waldensian heresy began to flag, the inquisition turned towards other targets. Trials on heresy were influenced by the newly coined discourse on the witches' Sabbath and gradually underwent a change, while preserving their own characteristics. For example, in the trial against Waldenses in 1430 in Fribourg, an accusation of *maleficium* suddenly came to the fore (Utz Tremp 1991b; Andenmatten and Utz Tremp 1992, pp. 82–92). Conversely, the very first texts about Sabbath and witchcraft trials bear the characteristics of heresy. Thus, in 1448, in Vevey the term of modern Waldensian heretics (*heretici moderni Valdenses*) is being used to designate devil-worshipping witches.<sup>7</sup>

The relationship with heresy had a special consequence on the formation of the concept of the witches' Sabbath; since heretic sects gather together both men and women, initially the witches' Sabbath was not exclusively associated with women. In Nider, Fründ, Tholosan, or the anonymous author of the *Errores gazariorum*, the Devil's worshippers are both men and women, and there is no special insistence on women. This corresponds to contemporary trials—in the fifteenth century in French-speaking Switzerland it was principally men who were brought to trial. In

the alpine regions, the mythology of the witches' Sabbath was not constructed against women and that is undoubtedly due to the importance of antiheretic stereotypes. It is only gradually that the Sabbath focuses on women. (Chène and Ostorero 2000; Ostorero 1999; Burghartz 1986; Utz Tremp 1995a).

In these early texts, the imprint of heresy is strong, even though their authors are not necessarily clergymen or inquisitors—for example Hans Fründ is a lay chronicler. Their cultural frame of mind is determined by a common geographic area, where the struggle against heresies, particularly against Waldenses, remained vigorous until the end of the Middle Ages. In alpine areas, interactions and influences between cases of Waldensian heresy and other cases of heterodoxy, like witchcraft, Sabbath, magic, cases of “journeys to the other-world,” and other ecstatic experiences, as Wolfgang Behringer has shown (Behringer 2005), are numerous. Perhaps this should not be much of a surprise, since in many instances the very same persons who conducted the proceedings for heresy, witchcraft or other cases of heterodoxy are involved: inquisitors, such as Ponce Feugeyron, Ulric de Torrenté, Nicolas Jacquier, and probably the inquisitors and judges from the Dauphiné. All of them had to deal with heretics, witches, heterodox preachers, or with Jews.

### *Anti-Judaism*

The influence of anti-Judaism is particularly perceptible in the *Errores gazariorum*. The notion of synagogue (*synagoga*) is used to designate the place where witches meet the Devil. The same terminology is also used by Tholosan or Martin le Franc. This term appears in all the witches' trials, before the term Sabbath became established; the latter is even more explicitly related to the Jewish people.<sup>8</sup> Beyond this terminology, in the *Errores* adepts of the sect are compared to Judas, due to their hypocrisy towards the Catholic Church—which recalls the famous treason of Judas (*L'imaginaire du sabbat* 1999, pp. 286–87, § 18 and pp. 323–27). The figure of Judas became gradually demonized—and in the last centuries of the medieval period this had been extended over the entire Jewish community (Blumenkranz 1966, p. 91; Trachtenberg 1961; Macoby 1992). A brief remark in a witch trial in 1467 in the Valais area adds a revealing point to

this association: the Devil who seduced Pierrette Trotta was called Judas and had the appearance of a black man with a hooked nose, wearing a bearskin (Strobino 1996, pp. 74 and 130–35). We also find out from the *Errorres gazariorum* that witches were suspected of throwing poisonous powders in the air. Behind this accusation lay the fear of the plague or any other epidemic and the need to find someone responsible for them. Carlo Ginzburg brought attention to the fact that during the Great Plague of 1348, Jews had been accused of conspiring to spread the epidemic and became the victims of massacres (Ginzburg 1992, pp. 70–7). When the epidemic reached the shores of Lake Lemman, twelve Jews were incarcerated in the castle of Chillon (Vaud district) and were forced to confess that they poured “red and black” poison in fountains and springs in order to destroy Christian society (*Urkunden der Stadt Strassburg* 1896, pp. 167–74, n185). Clement VI did his utmost to defend Jews and to prevent charges being leveled against them. Rumors of Jews spreading poison nevertheless persisted, and Martin V had to intercede again on their behalf in a 1422 bull.<sup>9</sup> The phantasmagoria of a gigantic plot hatched by Jews against Christian society was clearly expressed in the above-mentioned bull of Alexander V, from 1409, addressed to Ponce Feugeyron. When dealing with these “new sects,” an assimilation seems to take form between Jews and witches who, as they are supposed to perform magical rites, are a common danger. Thus various motifs defaming of Jews, such as proselytism, perfidy, and black magic coalesce with notions of sect, clandestinity and demonology. All these could contribute to the birth of the concept of the witches’ Sabbath. If we admit that Ponce Feugeyron might be the author of the *Errorres gazariorum*, the traces of anti-Judaism which can be detected can easily be explained. In Southern France and Savoy, Feugeyron took steps against the Talmud and Jewish books. In the bull of Alexander V, he was also concerned by *conversos* suspected of a relapse into Judaism or acting against Jewish usurers (Loeb 1885, p. 31; Foa 1996, p. 370; Ostorero 2002).

Finally, we must not forget that the preacher Vincent Ferrier visited the western regions of Switzerland and the Alps in the first *part* of the fifteenth century. He made hefty attacks against Jewish usurers in his sermons in 1404: his preaching campaign might have resulted in the dislocation of the Jewish communities, who were, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, still favorably received by the Duke of Savoy



Amadeus VIII. Jews were expelled from Fribourg in 1428 and progressively vanished from Lausanne by 1437 (Morerod 1997, pp. 446–50; Hodel 1993; Utz Tremp 1995b and 2006; Bardelle 1993). In the context of a renewed outbreak of anti-Judaism, it is not surprising that the authors of these early texts drew inspiration from these contemporary ideas when describing the sect of the adepts of the Devil. It is a particularly efficacious means of denigrating a social group, labeling it devilish and a threat to the Christian society.

### *The Phantasmagoria of Conspiracy and the Fear of Rebels*

The phantasmagoria of conspiracy does not exclusively refer to Jews and it would be excessive to see here only a feature of anti-Judaism. Chronicler Fründ's report seems to say something different: witches became so very numerous that they were ready to elect their own "king," overthrow the ruling powers, establish their own tribunals and threaten Christianity. Political concerns appear in Fründ's argumentation. They are similar to the activity against witches of the Diet and the communes of Valais where, between 1428 and 1434, they conceived special ordinances to suppress them. Witch hunts in Valais started shortly after the war of Rarogne (1415–1420). In those years, different political clans confronted each other, which brought about lasting dissensions. The obsession of a vast conspiracy in Valais doomed some persons of a considerable political power and so-called witches to a common fate. Both were prosecuted by a lay jurisdiction that was obsessed by rebels and disturbers of the established order. This is how everything which threatens public authority gets lumped together (*L'imaginaire du sabbat* 1999, pp. 42–43 and Ammann-Doubliez 1999, pp. 78–86).

The same political background can be found in Simmental. It is likely that the witches described by Nider are in reality the opponents to the newly installed authorities from Bern in Simmental. One of Nider's informers, Judge Peter, was tossed down the stairs in his own castle of Blankenbourg. This aggression looks more like a political assault made upon him by rebels than a bewitchment (*L'imaginaire du sabbat* 1999, pp. 188–96; Chène 1999, pp. 260–64; Borst 1988, pp. 267–86).

The political aspect of witchcraft affairs has been emphasized by Jacques Chiffolleau, Arno Borst, and Robert Muchembled.<sup>10</sup> Chronicler Fründ and Judge Peter, who is one of the first judges in Simmental and whose account figures in Nider's report, are close to the events recounted and are both lay persons. Their environment is shaped by political conflicts and tensions resulting from the building of the modern state and the formation of new territorial entities. This struggle has a strong influence on their concepts about witchcraft.

### *Wolf, Kneading Trough or Cloud: How to Fly in the Sky?*

Research has shown how the formation of the concept of the witches' Sabbath was influenced by popular and folkloric representations (Ginzburg 1992; Pócs 1989, 1993, 1998; Klaniczay 2003; Behringer 1994 and 2005). Three examples will show how the first authors who describe the witches' Sabbath have also used elements originating from a local culture.

The first one is related to Valais: in his chronicle, Hans Fründ tells how the Devil taught several witches to turn into wolves and devour cattle. They are also taught how to become invisible using different plants. Lycanthropy was rather atypical within the concept of the witches' Sabbath at this early point in time. It is particularly well-attested in some regions such as the Alps (*Etres fantastiques* 1992, pp. 17–46; Behringer 1994, pp. 39–40; Harf-Lancner 1985; Lecouteux 1992, pp. 121–44; Kieckhefer 1976, pp. 71–72). The Devil's apparition in this scene of lycanthropy illustrates the relationship between Christian demonology and a background of beliefs and legends. These are being demonized and associated with a sect, performing the misdeeds of the Sabbath, and become part of the accusations which bring their proponents to the stake.

The trials attested to in the same years in Valais echo the very same beliefs. In 1428–1429, Agnès Lombarde is accused of being familiar with wolves, and Pierre Chedal of riding on their back. In other cases, women change into wolves by means of an ointment produced from bones ground into powder and spread over the entire body. This metamorphosis enables them to move faster (Ammann-Doubliez 1999, pp. 86–89). Could this be a “deformed echo of an ecstatic cult of Celtic origin” (Ginzburg 1992,

p. 124)? I would not be able to furnish any further proof at the present. The fact that, in some regions of Valais, witch trials had been conducted by secular authorities certainly has some consequences; the ensuing formulations of the witches' Sabbath may not be very rich from a demonological point of view, but folkloric elements are more prevalent here than elsewhere. Thus, elements such as the metamorphosis into wolves, the flight on chairs, or the processions of the dead contribute to the creation of an image of the Sabbath that is less uniform than what is found in subsequent texts.<sup>11</sup> At this moment, the demonological melting pot has not yet taken a final form, even though it has already acquired some of its principal characteristics.

The second example is related by Nider in his *Formicarius*: an old woman believes that she could fly by sitting in her kneading trough. The author draws inspiration from a background of ancient legends, particularly well-attested in the Germanic world, regarding nocturnal flights and the hill of Venus (Behringer 1994, pp. 62–63; Klaniczay 2003, pp. 16–17). This episode however is not integrated into the fifth part of his *Formicarius*, dealing with witches and their evil spells; it shows up instead in the second part, devoted mostly to dreams. For the Dominican, nocturnal flights are not yet part of the concept of the witches' Sabbath; they are considered a popular belief which he is openly mocking (*L'imaginaire du sabbat* 1999, pp. 134–36 and Chène 1999, pp. 215–20). Thus, Nider's text constitutes a turning point in the formation of the concept of the witches' Sabbath: while he is skeptical about nocturnal flights, he is persuaded that groups of infanticidal and cannibalistic witches, gathered around an "evil spirit" on the occasion of a Sabbath, are real. Impregnated with Germanic legends, he is not yet ready to accept the reality of nocturnal flights. About twenty years later, the French Dominican Jean Vineti will take this step, when demonstrating that the witches' flight is possible and consequently undeniably real.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, the last example, taken from the *Errores gazariorum*, refers to a side note which appears in the Basel manuscript. It narrates how witches extract ice from the mountains in order to precipitate it onto crops during hailstorms. This anecdote is in fact almost a verbatim reiteration of a motif present in a trial directed in 1438 by Ulric de Torrenté against Aymonet Maugetaz in Epesses (a vineyard situated between Lausanne and Vevey). The same motif can be found in the trial against Christin Bastardet in

1457 in Fribourg (a hailstorm caused by witches, descending from the Dent de Jaman) and in the one against Guillaume Girod, judged in 1461 in Lausanne.<sup>13</sup> The famous early medieval *tempestarii* of Lyon come to mind here. In the ninth century, they already intrigued Bishop Agobard. The accusations of causing tempests in order to destroy crops provide an explanation for natural catastrophes and express the everyday concerns of the population for its survival and its economy, particularly in a wine-region where hail is the worst calamity (Berlioz 1998). Elements such as icy mountains and vineyards make us think of an alpine environment and its wine-producing hills and testify to the adaptation of a well-known theme, such as the flight of “good ladies,” in a local context.

Although popular beliefs have certainly played a major part, they do not fully explain the reasons for the emergence of the concept of the witches' Sabbath in the alpine areas around 1430. Defamation and preaching against heretics and Jews also left their imprint, since it was a region where they had been particularly strong and active. The formation of the witches' Sabbath was made possible precisely by the convergence of different themes. The first authors who wrote about it came under these different influences and, by means of their own mental and cultural background, built up their own image of the Sabbath. Claude Tholosan or the anonymous author of the *Errores gazariorum* do not tell the same thing as Fründ or Nider. Yet, they already share the same concept of the witches' Sabbath—they all speak of a group of men and women, casting evil spells, rallying around the Devil or a demon and performing sacrilegious rituals and cannibalism. This is the mythological core concept which is adopted by authors originating from France or Bourgogne, such as Nicolas Jacquier, Jean Vineti, Pierre Mamoris, or Jean Tinctor. These writings differ from texts, which were written in a different cultural context, such as those emerging from the Italian Franciscan observants. In Bernardin of Siena and John of Capestran for example, the feminization of the witches' Sabbath is much more preminent and references to the antique *strigae* and *lamiae*, originating from a different cultural tradition, are more numerous (Montesano 1999, pp. 95–152). When dealing with the history of the witches' Sabbath, it is therefore essential to identify the cultural and geographical areas involved and to examine the authors' different approaches. With this method, we shall better understand how this phenomenon became “actual” in a given period and space.

## Notes

- 1 The Lausanne team greatly benefited from and appreciated the collaboration of Robert Deschaux for the *Le champion des dames* and of Pierrette Paravy for the edition and commentary of Claude Tholosan.
- 2 Georg Modestin has recently found a new manuscript of Fründ's report, see Modestin 2005b.
- 3 A third manuscript of the *Errores* (Rome, BAV, Pal. Lat 1381, f. 190r–192r) has been discovered. See *Inquisition et sorcellerie*, 2007, pp. 493–504. The hypothesis of the Val d'Aoste is now confirmed by the study of Silvia Bertolin and Ezio E. Gerbore 2003, pp. 18–21.
- 4 For explanatory factors of this geographical coherence see *L'imaginaire du sabbat* 1999, pp. 511–513.
- 5 This hypothesis is interesting for more than one reason: first, because it is Ponce Feugeyron whom Alexander V invests with the power to act against “new sects” of Jews and Christians who propagate rituals that are against religion and practise divination, devil-conjuring, and other forbidden arts; the same bull will be confirmed in 1418 by Martin V and in 1435 by Eugene IV; this leads to the conclusion that Ponce displayed a continuous activity for 30 years; secondly, if the author of the *Errores gazariorum* were Ponce Feugeyron, the anti-Judaic elements which may be felt from the text (see below) are all the more explicable. The Franciscan deployed an intense activity against Jews expelled from the French kingdom and began a campaign against the Talmud and Jewish books. See Ostorero 2002.
- 6 Maier 1996, p. 234: the demon told her: “Tu habes nescio quid et magnum melenconiam de tuis liberis qui deffuncti sunt. Si tu velis credere, ego tibi monstrabo liberos tuos.” Ibidem, p. 238: “Interrogata que fuit causa per quam fecit homagium demoni, dicit quod causa mortis liberorum suorum.”
- 7 Ostorero 1995, pp. 174–182 and 274. The same expression of *moderni heretici* can be found in the trial against Catherine de Chynal in Montjovet in 1449 in Val d'Aoste: Gamba, 1964; Bertolin – Gerbore 2003, pp. 52–53.
- 8 A first reference in French to the term of “Sabbath” can be found in a trial in the Parliament of Paris in 1446 against a woman from Saintes: Jehanne Guerne “confessed that, during one Sabbath, a big black man with big sparkling eyes took part.” See Gauvard 1999, 99 n. 50. The same character figures in Pierre Mamoris's *Flagellum maleficorum*, in the expression *ad demoniaca sabbata or in sabbato demonis*, around 1462 (Hansen 1901, p. 210).
- 9 Bull of Martin V, 26 February 1422: “Nonnunquam eciam plurimi Christiani, ut dictos Iudeos redimi facere, ac eos bonis et substanciis suis spoliare, et lapidibus cedere possint, fictis occasionibus et coloribus asserunt, mortalitatum et aliarum calamitatum temporibus, Iudeos ipsos venenum in fontibus iniecissee, et suis azimis humanum sanguinem miscuisse, ob que scelera, eis sic iniuste obiecta, talia astruunt ad perniciem hominum evenire; ex quibus occasionibus populi commoventur contra Iudeos ipsos, eosque cedunt, et variis persecutionibus et molestiis afficiunt et affligunt”; see Simonsohn 1989, pp. 711–712.

- 10 Chiffolleau 1986, 1990, 1992; Borst 1988, pp. 267–286; Muchembled 1993. The political dimension of the different waves of witchcraft trials in French-speaking Switzerland has been pointed out in each case, see Maier 1996, pp. 65–57 and pp. 192–193; Ostorero 1995 pp. 127–131 and pp. 185–187; Modestin 1999a, pp. 171–174; Modestin 1999b, 2000 and 2005a.
- 11 For the procession of the dead, see Guntern 1978, pp. 504–579.
- 12 Hansen 1991, pp. 133–145.
- 13 *L'imaginaire du sabbat* pp. 334–353. Modestin 1999a, pp. 214–251 and 1999b, p. 120. To avoid any possible misunderstanding: I am not saying that it is during this trial that the idea of the witches' flight in the sky was invented. I am just pointing out that the scribe of the manuscript B of the *Errores* incorporated an episode from a particular trial.

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ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSION  
WITH CARLO GINZBURG,  
GUSTAV HENNINGSEN, ÉVA PÓCS,  
GIOVANNI PIZZA AND GÁBOR KLANICZAY

*Gustav Henningsen*

Eleven years ago, on our previous meeting here in Budapest, I raised the question, whether the very concept of shamanism was appropriate for understanding the different variants of dream cults which had been brought to light in the wake of Carlo Ginzburg's pioneering study of the *benandanti*. I called attention to the fact that most of the so-called shamanistic beliefs which had been discovered, conformed to a European pattern which "differ from the classical definitions of shamanism." The differences can be summarized in five points.

1. While the shaman is a master of his trance, the European agents have no control whatsoever over how and when they are falling into catalepsy.
2. While the trance of the shaman tends to be a collective spectacle, his European counterparts are usually alone when their soul leaves the body or at most they are being watched by their spouse or by another member of the family.
3. While a shaman almost always travels alone, the European agents usually meet with many others of their kind when going on their soul journey.
4. While a shaman almost always has a public position in society as a kind of folk-healer, this is far from the rule for the European counterparts, many of whom keep their soul journeys as a strictly private and secret affair.
5. Finally, the very psychological basis for the soul journeys of the European agents does not seem to be a trance, but a deep lethargic sleep with a strong, visual dream experience.

In part II of *Ecstasies*, Ginzburg sets out to find a common basis for the different deities which night-goers claimed to have met on their nocturnal journeys. In the end, he ventures the hypothesis that they were all distorted echoes of an ecstatic cult from the Celtic period.

In a subsequent chapter Ginzburg admits that this hypothesis of the nightly goddesses being late derivations of Celtic deities cannot explain why the tradition endured for so many centuries, and what is worse, appears to be contradicted by evidence so far not discussed in his exposition. With these words he turns to an article of mine in which I analyze a series of trials held by the Holy Office in Sicily against women and even young girls who claimed to meet with mysterious female beings, the so-called *donne di fuori* or “women from outside.”

I am totally in agreement with Ginzburg when he concludes that the Sicilian fairy cult can in no way be considered as an offshoot of the Celtic tradition. “In the ‘women from outside,’” he says, “we are forced to recognize an anomalous phenomenon, definitely incompatible with the historical hypothesis advanced here.”

In order to save his theory, Ginzburg brings in some interesting evidence from Poseidonios of Apamea’s *Biography* of Marcellus. During the campaign of the Roman commander in Sicily, a certain Nikias and his wife succeeded in fleeing from the town of Engyon to the camp of Marcellus by using a trick. Engyon in eastern Sicily was famous for the apparitions of certain deities, the so-called “Mothers,” to whom the town had dedicated a temple. The following event may be dated to the year 212 B.C.: Nikias starts speaking out against the Mothers, saying that their apparitions are fraudulent. Soon after in a public gathering he suddenly lets himself fall lifeless to the ground. After a while he pretends to come back to normal and explains with a sorrowful voice that the Mothers had almost choked him, in continuation he tears his clothes to pieces and runs away. His wife escapes by pretending that she will go to the temple to ask the Mothers’ forgiveness for her husband.

I shall not go into the discussion of Ginzburg’s interesting comparison of the mother goddesses of Engyon with the Celtic *matronae*. I find it more problematic, when he continues by making the following statement: “At this point the hypothesis of a subterranean continuity, in the Sicilian sphere, between the Mothers of Engyon and the ‘women from outside’ seems irresistible.” Ginzburg admits that the two phenomena are

not identical: "Unlike the 'women from outside', the Mothers were at the centre of a public cult, not private ecstatic experience" (II, 2,4).

But the problem is that not a single one of the Sicilian night-goers experienced a kind of ecstasy. They simply fell asleep and dreamt. The dream was so strong that they were convinced that they were traveling in spirit, leaving their empty body behind. After having re-read Ginzburg's *I benandanti*, I find the same to be the case there. No one is reported to have fallen into trance or to have been able to provoke his or her nightly ecstasies in some other way.

That is the reason why I have chosen to distinguish the phenomenon of dream cult from shamanism on the one hand, and on the other hand from ecstatic cults. We may distinguish between the three categories in the following way:

	Location	Visionary experience
Shamanism	public	active, provoked
Ecstatic cult	public	passive, not provoked
Dream cult	private	passive

Most of the cases of night-goers will fall into the third category, that is, of dream cult. I propose that we study this as a genuine religious institution. In my opinion, we do not reach a proper understanding of these phenomena by projecting them back and taking them for relics of shamanism or echoes of ecstatic cults. Relics and echoes cannot keep a tradition alive. If we cannot find the slightest indication of trance techniques or spiritual possession in our material, we should accept this and start reconstructing a belief system with the elements we have at hand, and ask ourselves how such a system could function and keep itself up.

### *Éva Pócs*

Carlo Ginzburg's books are among the greatest professional reading experiences of my life. It was fascinating for me to make the "journey into the realms of the dead," into Europe's past, even if this journey had to make great spatial and temporal leaps without sufficient evidence. There was no other way to reach these dimensions; but through such an inspired reconstruction, Ginzburg did not wish to avoid asking the ques-

tions that he could not answer with proofs supporting his claims with a hundred percent certainty. The result of his comparative method, which reconstructs the whole from fragments is a system where basically everything falls into place, which works and does not become outdated. My own research gives ample proof of this: more and more new facts from Central and Eastern Europe, unknown to Ginzburg, turn out, for me, to have a previously appointed place in Ginzburg's system. Evidently, his method has received and will receive much methodological criticism, and its findings will always be debated but not defied—for his critics themselves do not possess more or better methodological devices. I do not wish here to dwell upon the methodological problems of the reconstruction. Instead, on the basis of the data available for me from Central and Eastern Europe, I would like to make some additional statements at certain points and propose some refinements.

I began to study so-called European shamanism, its supposed Hungarian representatives and, independently from these topics, witchcraft in general about the same time that I read Ginzburg's first relevant book, *I benandanti—The Night Battles*. This book already helped to make several things clear for me. But especially after reading *Ecstasies*, I felt that the system of Hungarian magicians and mediators not only fits into the dual typology described by him, but that I can even complement it with new types unknown to Ginzburg: first of all with the Serbian/Bulgarian/Macedonian *zmaj/zmej* sorcerer and its Hungarian relative, a relevant type of the *táltos*, and also with the magician's netherworldly female pair. These sorcerers were still practicing in the beginning of the twentieth century, and they were surrounded by a quite vivid folklore in Central and Eastern Europe. Their activities and their cultural context may support and justify Ginzburg's concept, while at the same time they may fulfill the function of a control group in some important questions. Such a question is the supposed link between sorcerer-mythologies and the witches' Sabbaths. For in the case of these magicians, who were active even in the recent past, we can probably identify a mythical context more authentic than in the case of the sorcerers appearing in the alien environment of historical sources, such as witchcraft trials.

As for the above mentioned *zmaj/zmej* sorcerers, their system can be connected to the so-called "basic myth" in the Slav mythology reconstructed by Jakobson, Ivanov, and Toporov from folklore traces and lin-

guistic data. This myth is about the fight of the storm god with the monster of the netherworld. Through this, the dual system may perhaps be connected with Slavic shamanism related to the god Perun and Veles, the god of the cattle and the god of the dead—if we recognize the male sorcerers with heavenly connotations and the female ones with netherworldly connotations as the male and female branches of the same mythic-ritual system. This duality seems to strengthen the typological duality drawn up by Ginzburg. At the same time, however, it raises important problems as to the categorization of these phenomena.

I believe that reconstructing these sorcerers and their typologies from the European past is important enough for its own sake, even if the qualification of the system may be problematic. (As it is well known, the categories “shamanistic” or “European shamanistic substratum” have been the focus of much criticism.) I would now like to circumvent the problems around the definition of shamanism, and I do not wish to comment on the question of whether these phenomena related to the abovementioned sorcerers can be qualified generally as shamanism or not. Instead, I would like to raise the following question: if we do qualify them as shamanism on the basis of, for example, the criteria of Eliade, Hultkrantz or de Heusch (whose statements are, I believe, accepted by Ginzburg), then how can I use this qualification—is not the applied model oversimplified? Besides ecstatic flying and turning into animals, sometimes other cultural distinguishing marks come forward as well; also the differences between the symbolism in different systems are sometimes indistinct. For instance, at some key areas from the point of view of origins, shamanism and possession cults are not distinguished from each other. I feel that in some places, the distinction of individual types needs further defining (e.g., the battle of spirits is not a determinant of either the fighting male sorcerer with a heavenly connotation-type nor shamanism in general, since the fight of guardian spirits is also an almost obligatory characteristic of systems of possession as well). These problems of definition and distinction affect the presumed connection between shamanism and witchcraft as well. Just as I sometimes feel the definition of shamanism is overgeneralized, I feel that something of an overgeneralization exists in the discourse about European shamanism as a popular predecessor of witches’ Sabbath images. This problem becomes manifest in the fact that what seems really to have become



closely interwoven with witchcraft from these mythical-ritual antecedents—or, as Ginzburg calls it, the shamanistic substratum—is not the whole reconstructed system of shamanistic sorcerers but certain types of the so-called female branch. Moreover, the activities and the magical and ritual context of these types have much more to do with possession than with shamanism. These types include the female branch of the above-mentioned dual system, the female sorceresses with a netherworldly connotation. Other members of this group are the seers, healers and witches with a snake, frog, chicken or lizard helping spirits, whose capability to fall into trance is due to their helping spirits, though they use this skill not to make shamanistic heavenly journeys but to turn into malign spirits; and whose helping spirits, on the other hand, often appear as their lovers or as demons possessing them. The group may also include the fairy beliefs and cults of Slavs, Albanians, and Romanians in Southeast Europe. These cults also have a place for netherworldly female magicians and their activities based on possession. On the other hand, in cases of collective ritual trance, the *călușarii*, the *rusalia*, or the *regös* mentioned frequently by Ginzburg have a clear-cut kinship with the possession cults of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. In the belief systems of these netherworldly (infernal) female sorceresses related to possession, a main character of *Ecstasies* also appears: the Celtic/Thracian/Illyrian/Iranian chthonic goddess with snake attributes. This goddess, reconstructed by Ginzburg as a character of the distant past, appears in different Central and Southeast European belief systems even as a part of living folk beliefs, e.g., as the initiating spirit of netherworldly female magicians or their possessing deity. This amply justifies Ginzburg's presumed reconstruction and his view on potential distant historical connections. At the same time, however, if we take the nature of the spirit-host relationship as a basis for defining the two systems, then everything related to these netherworldly (infernal) female magicians, their snake, frog and chicken helping spirits, fairies and this chthonic goddess in our region can be regarded much more as a phenomena of possession than as shamanism.

How does all this relate to the witches' Sabbath? There are many diverse "popular" witches' Sabbath images relatively free of the influence of demonology in our region. Their interpretation and the detection of their origins is the main topic of *Ecstasies*. The convincing verification of

the general relevance of the “journey into the realms of the dead” with an immense amount of comparative historical analysis was an indisputably great achievement of the book (and of Ginzburg’s previous book as well). We may claim that it had an even more productive effect on the research of the last decade than the discovery of the so-called shamanistic magicians and the elaboration of their typologies. And yet allow me to propose a certain definitional differentiation in this field as well, again in the context of shamanism and possession. The witches’ Sabbath is fundamentally a communication with the dead; but it is not necessarily and not merely a “journey into the realms of the dead,” if this refers to the shamanistic migration of the soul in a narrow interpretation of shamanism. The main evidence of the connection between the presumed shamanism and witchcraft are examples of the female type of sorceresses; consequently the “journey” of the witch to the Sabbath and her carrying the living there is more likely to be seen as an act of possession. Undoubtedly related to the field of possession is the most frequent “popular” form of witches’ Sabbath in Central Europe—the feast of witches, which often takes the form of a fairy feast, though both versions bear the characteristics of the most archaic type of possession, the possession by the dead.

And what about the male type, the par excellence shamanistic sorcerers? In this question, the comparison of popular narratives and court narratives is very telling. The witches’ Sabbath is primarily a narrative construction that comes into being at the court. If we examine the witches’ Sabbath narratives recorded in Hungarian court documents of witchcraft trials, we find no traces in the living folklore of witches’ Sabbath narratives about “shamanistic” otherworldly battles of fertility sorcerers, while there is an abundant narrative tradition about people carried away to witches’ Sabbaths. The battle narratives of the accused *táltos* in their pleas are not expressions of witches’ Sabbath images but reflections of their own belief system adapted to the given narrative situation. Therefore, my experience is that at least in Hungary, the system of European shamanistic fertility sorcerers is only related to the rich store of popular witches’ Sabbath images through this rather thin line: simply because our sources about the *táltos* are mainly witchcraft trial documents, and because there were *táltos* who were accused of witchcraft. In Southeast Europe, where such sorcerers were still practicing in the re-

cent past, I can see no such connection between witchcraft and shamanism. Let me stress once more that I do not intend to question Ginzburg's basic concept—my proposition aims only at some further differentiation. And perhaps my proposition is only relevant for a specific geographic area and historical situation.

### *Giovanni Pizza*

When I first read Carlo Ginzburg's book, ten years ago, I was in the first year of my Ph.D. studies. I was just beginning field work in the region of Campania of Southern Italy, on local knowledge of the body and the cultural experiences of illness. That is to say folk medicine and the local representation of health and disease. I read this book together with another book very important in my development—another classic of Italian anthropology: *La terra del rimorso*, written by Ernesto de Martino in 1961. I hope to explain in what sense I read these two books together, and in what sense these two books were and are related to my field work. But I want to add some considerations to the fact that all books written by Ginzburg have always been food for thought for an anthropologist. That is to say: *Storia notturna* and the entire work of Carlo Ginzburg is thought provoking for an anthropologist because of the precise reasons Ginzburg himself has explained very well. *Storia notturna* is, in my opinion, a sort of open work. Not only in the sense that it has provoked such a big debate, and not in the sense that there is such an attempt to imitate the work itself, but in the sense that it has opened up several fields for us which still need to be explored.

First of all, there is the question of shamanism; as Ginzburg has recalled, it was posited in an early book in 1966, not as a question of analogy but as that of a real connection. The connection between the *benandanti* and the shamans was not considered by him to be analogical, but rather real. Ginzburg never appeared to be interested in the deconstruction of the category of shamanism, even though, as Gustav Henningsen and Éva Pócs have told us, that working in Europe, that is to say working in an unsuitable setting for researching shamanism, would have helped to deconstruct these categories. Furthermore, if I am not wrong, it is not true that Carlo Ginzburg never wrote on these topics after 1989, because I have

read a very beautiful article entitled “*Europeans Discover (or Rediscover) Shamans*,” which was published in Italian in 1994. In this essay, he deals directly with the question by examining texts which document the historical, archaeological, and philosophical works and travel literature on shamans since the introduction of the Tungus term *shaman* in Europe. And this literature is not read by Ginzburg in an attempt to deconstruct the literary “myth,” as has been done, for example, by Gloria Flaherty in her work on the representations of shamanism in eighteenth-century Europe. This literature is rather a source testifying to the European rediscovery of shamans given that there is documentation of a real shamanic presence in ancient Europe. So even those who are critical of the use of the shamanic model in the study of symbolic practices in Europe have to admit that the use of this model by Ginzburg is really very different from the use of the shamanic model by those who have written after Ginzburg. That is to say that, for Ginzburg, the model of shamanism constitutes a continuous challenge in a work which includes metatheoretical narrative levels and also basic documentation. Even when Ginzburg’s category of shamanism seems to us to tend toward reification, nobody can deny the relevance of this choice, which in fact defines the unique position of Carlo Ginzburg within the “anthropology-and-history” community. This could be summarized as follows: the impatient quest for an explanation which goes beyond the conflict between rhetoric and proof, and an interpretation which problematizes analogies without giving up on the challenge of an explanation of real historical connections. For anthropologists and for ethnographers of shamanism in anthropology, this category is in effect fully deconstructed. Recent studies do not focus on shamanism as an autonomous phenomenon, but tend instead to explore the connection of shamanic practices to wider social processes. In such works, shamanism is used as a category for certain discourses and practices that operate in a local, regional, national, and transnational context. I refer, in particular, to the work of Jane Atkinson, “Shamanisms Today” (*Annual Review of Anthropology*, 1992). But this does not mean, of course, that we must renounce the study of shamanistic features in a comparative and trans-cultural view. On the contrary, comparative analysis can be renewed through a comparison with the contemporary ethnographies, which are most attentive to the local practices embedded in particular historical, cultural, and social contexts. At the same time, we must avoid the risk of reification of such cate-

gories, I agree with Éva Pócs when she says that it is difficult to consider shamanism and spirit possession as opposites. This strong opposition originally from Luc de Heusch, an anthropologist who has theorized the difference of shamanism and spirit possession, is accepted by Ginzburg. But I cannot accept this opposition, because of my observations in the field and due to my findings in the book by Ernesto de Martino, *La terra del rimorso*. While working on local images of the body and the local experience of illness, I found many narratives which were related to a particular illness affecting certain women. It is the same illness which is related to the *donne di fuori* in Sicily. In Sicily, *donne di fuori*, “women from the outside,” are spirits who are responsible for spirit possession and are called *matrazza*. They are at the same time identified with another symbolic animal which is very central in witchcraft mythology, the toad; *donne di fuori* are often toads. Researching some narratives in Campania I found a story about a woman who was suffering from *matrazza* (*mal di madre, a madre*), during her sleep a spider came out of her body and took a journey and then came back into the body of the woman. I recalled immediately the legend of King Gunthram, which is mentioned in the “Anomalies” chapter in Carlo Ginzburg’s book and also the spider possession accounts given by Ernesto de Martino in which the spider responsible for the possession, bites the woman right on her pubis. Furthermore, in Campania, in the places where I have done contemporary field work, the uterus is seen as a spider. As well as in other European regions, that is to say in Sicily or in the Alps, the uterus is seen as a toad. So, should these narratives be considered as narratives of the migration of the soul or should they be considered as narratives of spirit possession in the sense of the spider-bite of *tarantism*? Or should we go beyond, toward a more open interpretation of spirit possession and shamanism, as I do and consider animals as metaphors for the female body? In the same chapter “Anomalies” regarding *donne di fuori* Ginzburg suggests that we have to go back to the archaic religions based on feminine deities. I think that the question of female physiology is another perspective to read this prevalence of female symbols in the mythology of witchcraft.

Anyway, what I have tried to relate to you is how I came to take suggestions from these two books, and this means that for me they are two “classics.” And please, let me conclude with a statement which I borrow from Italo Calvino, a writer whose style has been compared by a reader to that

of Carlo Ginzburg's and who has told us why we have to read classics, and what a classic is. He has written: "A classic is a book, which has never ended (*saying*) to say what it has to say." In this sense I read *La terra del rimorso* by Ernesto de Martino and in this sense I have read and I will read again *Storia notturna* by Carlo Ginzburg.

### *Gábor Klaniczay*

I should like to bring three more points into this discussion which have partly been touched on but perhaps not fully considered. The first relates to the picture of the historical evolution Ginzburg describes in the first part of his book. While much of the subsequent historical discussion targeted this first part and has tried to bring up critical arguments, I was surprised that it was rarely pointed out that Carlo Ginzburg was the first historian to put his finger on the moment and the region where the Sabbath imagery emerged, and where it can be historically analyzed—when and how such imagery was put together. His analysis convinced me of the value of the new evolutionary sequence he suggests for the emergence of the witches' Sabbath: the "Conspiracy of the Lepers"; the persecution of the Jews after the Great Plague; combined with the traditional defamatory arguments against heretics, all this could indicate the slow maturation of complex notions of scapegoats which subsequently develop into a stable Sabbath imagery. But, having accepted all this, it seems incomprehensible to me, why he still considers the case of the Templars, that is the first explosion of this same type of judicially framed diabolical phantasmagoria as having no relevance to this historical process. The trial against the Templars, as researched by Malcolm Barber and others, coincided with a number of analogous cases, and these accusations were related to the rise of the modern state in the late Middle Ages and the formation of the judicial machinery of a "persecutive" society. All this could provide a wider framework to the scattered emergence of the new type of diabolic accusation he describes. Apart from this reservation, I think that the present-day historical research, especially the ones we have heard in our conference from Martine Ostorero and Wolfgang Behringer, could unearth more and more details in connection with the early fif-

teenth-century rise of the witches' Sabbath, confirming the suggestion which was first developed in Ginzburg's book.

The second point I wanted to make is related to the problem of the methodology, which he labeled morphology, and which I would actually regard as a specific way of making a comparative history of ideas and of folk beliefs. This has stimulated or provoked other enquiries like the recent research of Éva Pócs concerning the central, eastern, or southeastern European region, or by Giovanni Pizza, who just spoke of the Mediterranean. I have found an ingenuous combination of materials without any discussion (except for some very general, vague suggestions) of the historical procedures of the diffusion. How can one follow the precise order of the appearance and the regional impact of certain variants of these beliefs? On the one hand, this is an encouragement for others, on the other, however, this might be the point where critics are liable to discover serious inconsistencies in the scheme proposed by the book. Embracing Eurasian distances and by bringing together very remote, maybe incompatible motifs might be seen as a substitute for a real attentive analysis of what happened in Europe.

Regarding the third point, I was astonished by the fact that the most substantial book written so far on the witches' Sabbath stops its historical considerations at the very moment when the witches' Sabbath finally appears in the early fifteenth century. It can of course be considered a carefully chosen literary device. Besides, one book cannot be asked to elaborate all the immense and colorful material that witch trials produced on the witches' Sabbath. But there is more to this issue. Seen from a strictly theoretical and classificatory point of view, descriptions of the witches' Sabbath not only refer to a central, historically evolving mythology but each individual narrative of them is a local and judicial construction, a *bricolage* in the sense of Lévi-Strauss. The individual construction of complex religious constructs has been analyzed so well by Carlo Ginzburg in his *The Cheese and the Worms*, in connection with the cosmological ideas of Menocchio, the sixteenth-century Friulian miller. He managed to show how a single man, a village authority, could be the meeting point of innumerable tendencies within high and low culture, combining regional influences and universal human values. Where is this sensitivity for the *microstoria* in *Storia notturna*? It seems to be replaced by the eternal (and maybe unanswerable) question of finding the

“origin” of this mythology and the speculations concerning its relationship to various “archaic substrata” of European, indeed Eurasian civilizations. I do not deny the fascinating effect when one discovers coincidences on such a universal scale. But once we have agreed upon these wide categories, we have to come back to the variety of the sources, the many descriptions of the Sabbath produced locally, in a specific context. Besides the persistence of the archaic pattern I would stress here the crucial role of invention and of fantasy in it (let me refer here to the studies by Lyndal Roper). The large variety produced by this ungrateful and frequently dangerous, painful and mortal encounter of different individuals in specific historical and judicial contexts is another dimension to be added to the archaic mythological substrata—a dimension that also belongs to “ecstasies,” which rely only partly on “archaic techniques,” so nicely reconstructed by Carlo Ginzburg.

### *Carlo Ginzburg*

Thank you very much for your praise and criticism. Both of them are welcome. Gustav Henningsen, I cannot agree more with your emphasis on the private feature of those experiences as opposed to shamanism. Actually, on page 171 of my book *Ecstasies* I wrote: “but in one crucial respect these analogies prove to be imperfect, the catalepsy of the Eurasian shaman is public, that of the *benandanti*, the *kresnik*, and so and so forth... the *táltos* is always private and so and so forth...” Your suggestion to use a label like “dream cult” seems more problematic, insofar as we are trying to make sense of something which is really far from our culture—something really difficult to imagine. We are confronted with dreams based on a repeatable cultural pattern—something we are unable to make sense of. Notwithstanding the differences we mentioned before, we could speak of shamanism as a sort of *analogon*, something which, albeit related to a different phenomenon, can help us make sense of dreams based on a regional pattern, which implies the possibility of individual variations as well. I would like to emphasize that analogies are a necessary tool for historians. As any tool, sometimes they can be used in either a debatable way or for a debatable purpose, or both. But a tool which is one hundred percent error-proof is uninteresting.



Éva Pócs. You are right: the relationship between possession and ecstasy is much more complicated than I put in my book. I am more perplexed by your emphasis on a female kind of shamanism since, as we heard also in this conference, the predominant stress on women in the witches' Sabbath is a later historical development. On a more general level I completely agree with your stress on distinctions. The landscape I sketched in my book needs to be tested (and perhaps qualified or refuted) on a smaller scale, as well as on its own terms.

Giovanni Pizza. *Touché!* I did indeed write an essay on the (re)discovery of shamanism, in which I tried (among other things) to make sense of Karl Meuli's great essay "Scythica" (1935). Meuli read a famous passage from Herodotus as a description of a shamanistic ritual. Today I would put more emphasis on the distinction between the observers' and the actors' categories, between the *emic* and the *etic* level, as Kenneth Pike put it. I am convinced (against both deconstructionists and positivists) that historical analysis necessarily implies a dialogue between these two levels. *Shaman* is an *emic* word; we may turn it into an *etic* category, talking of European shamans, and even of European shamanism—which is definitely a construction related to an outside perception. But to reject the legitimacy of *etic* categories would mean to reject the possibility of a comparative approach.

Gábor Klaniczay. Concerning the first part of my book: you may be right about the Templars. They may be, or may not be, part of the historical series leading to the construction of the witches' Sabbath stereotype, according to the boundaries of the series itself, which is of course our construction. The Templars can be regarded as a fuzzy, borderline case. Concerning the second and third part of my book: I am well aware that my piece of conjectural history (if I may refer to this eighteenth-century genre) concerning the migration of motives and experiences from East to West, is highly debatable. A specific chronology would have been impossible. But I would like to stress that my conjecture was not based on a diffusionist hypothesis. In my book, I stressed the distinction between diffusion, which is a fact, and diffusionism, which is a highly debatable theory. I suggested that the diffusion of themes focusing on the power ascribed to certain individuals to go temporarily into the world of the dead, might have been reinforced by formal elements. This tentative argument could be tested on the basis of more circumscribed

evidence. On a general level, your criticism concerning the absence of a microhistorical analysis and Éva Pócs's criticism converge. To a certain extent, I agree with both. But a microhistorical test of my hypothesis concerning the origins of the witches' Sabbath stereotype was made *before*, with the book on the Friulian *benandanti*. *Ecstasies* was a different kind of experiment.

# LEARNED SYSTEMS AND POPULAR NARRATIVES OF VISION AND BEWITCHMENT

GÁBOR KLANICZAY

The two phenomena contained in the title, vision and bewitchment, are different by nature. Visionary experience represents a specific type of contact with the supernatural, when heavenly or diabolic forces make an intrusion into the everyday life of humans, and convey their messages to them in a form visible and audible by their perceptive organs, or ravish them with their own supernatural world for a while, providing them with amazing experiences (Benz 1969; Dinzelbacher 1981; Christian 1998). Bewitchment is, according to the explanatory system of witchcraft beliefs, the misfortune caused by the malevolent activity of witches, a kind of negative miracle brought about by their evil supernatural power (Evans-Pritchard 1980; Klaniczay 1997). The link between the two is provided by the fact that while visions and apparitions are generally understood as a sensory experience of the presence of some divine or holy beings (in Christianity God, the Virgin Mary, Jesus, angels, or the saints), which frequently have miraculous effects, bewitchments are also often attributed to the consequence of the nightly apparition of witches. Sometimes this is just a spooky nightly aggression, the witch “pressing,” physically injuring the victim, coming to see him in a metamorphosed animal shape. There are, however, also other occasions when witches or demons take the victim to the enchanted world of the witches’ Sabbath. In such cases, the bewitchment is the aftermath of a real diabolic vision. This second type could be, justifiably, put in relation with the mainstream of visionary experience in Latin Christianity, especially with the cases in which mystics are tempted and tortured by devils, or with the mass of less elaborate visions: the apparitions of saints in dreams or visions included into medieval miracle accounts (Goodich 2007).

In my present study, I propose to examine the relationship of these two categories in three documentary clusters, taken from three different chronological segments of medieval and early modern Christianity: one from thirteenth-century Germany and Italy; one from fifteenth-century Switzerland and France; and the third from seventeenth and eighteenth-century Hungary. The first one relates to the thirteenth-century transformations of the cult of the saints, the rise of the ideal of the “living saint.” The second one would take us into the context of late medieval doubts, to the moment when the high profile of visionary sainthood was challenged, and the critically dissected visions were increasingly assimilated to diabolic delusions, and to the world of witchcraft. The third one, finally, is confronting more or less visionary type descriptions on the witches’ Sabbath. Besides highlighting three stages of a plurisecular transformation process of medieval and early modern Christianity, what these cases have in common is that they all represent a combination of “popular” beliefs documented by narratives recorded in judicial context and learned systems framing this “raw material” into new explanatory systems.<sup>1</sup>

### *From Experience to Fable, from Simple to Complex Form*

My first group of examples is taken from the canonization process of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, the pious Hungarian princess, who died in Marburg as the widow of the Thuringian landgrave, on 19 November 1231 (*Sankt Elisabeth* 1981; Klaniczay 2002, pp. 195–251). What is interesting about her hagiographic documentation is that it had been collected in the framework of a new type of procedure, a canonization process, introduced and developed by Popes Innocent III and Honorius III a few decades earlier, but reaching its full-fledged canonical form precisely with the investigation around the sanctity of Elizabeth (1232–1235), and her subsequent canonization.<sup>2</sup> In opposition to the majority of previous legends and miracle accounts, frequently adorned with hagiographic stereotypes and colorful stories, the new type of documentation intends to present a truthful image of the saint-candidate and it authenticates every single assertion with the testimonies

of eyewitnesses. The description of Elizabeth's saintly life is provided by the *Libellus de dictis quatuor ancillarum*, which compiles into a single narrative the testimonies of her handmaids (Huyskens 1911; Würth 2005–2006). The accounts of her 129 miracles (*Miracula felicitatis Elizabeth*), instead of offering the usual elaborate fantastic fables of divine justice mediated by saintly relics, provide a series of brief and dry accounts carrying the imprint of a judicial procedure.<sup>3</sup>

One cannot fail to recognize the large number of agents in generating and recording these seemingly very authentic popular narratives: Elizabeth's confessor Conrad of Marburg, principal promoter of her canonization and one of the papal legates in the first investigating group; the friars and priests who advised the people to make a pilgrimage to the grave of St. Elizabeth for healing; and the scribes putting the vernacular accounts into written Latin. Yet, in a comparative perspective, one still has to admit: these legends and miracle accounts have the "smell of life," where the social identities and the psychological inclinations seem to transpire with a fairly reliable exactitude. This is what I would call "popular narrative" here, for the sake of convenience.

This could provide useful starting points for a new kind of historical analysis of visions and apparitions: the massive occurrence of accounts of such supernatural events in canonization processes has hitherto been largely unexplored. Let me select three examples of visions related to Elizabeth. The first is from the *Libellus*, a story told by Isentrudis, one of her noble handmaids, a most fascinating image of the communication of Elizabeth with her "heavenly bridegroom," striking with its unadorned, Franciscan style simplicity:

... she fixed her eyes on the open windows and finally started to laugh with a great joy. After a long hour, her eyes closed, she cried infinite tears and soon after she opened her eyes again laughing joyously as before, staying in these contemplations until the compline, sometimes crying with her eyes closed and soon after sometimes laughing with her eyes opened, but with more joy. Finally when she was silent for a time, she suddenly broke out with these words: "My Lord, you want to be with me and I want to be with you and I never want to be separated from you." Having said this, Isentrudis, noblewoman, and her other handmaids and *familiares* immediately asked her to reveal whom she

spoke to. The blessed Elizabeth was difficult to persuade, finally won by their prayers she responded: "I saw the open sky and my lord sweet Jesus bending towards me and consoling me in various difficulties and tribulations which surround me, and when I saw him, I was happy and I laughed, but when he turned his face away I cried. Then pitying me, he again turned his serene face towards me, saying: 'If you want to be with me, I want to be with you.' To which I responded as it was said above." ... She had frequent revelations, visions and divine consolations during her daily and nocturnal prayers. But in all ways suppressing and dissimulating as much as she could she concealed it ... as the Apostle says: keep me from being unduly elated by the magnificence of such revelations (2 Cor. 12.7).<sup>4</sup>

This is the only vision, the only description of an immediate communication with the supernatural in the *Libellus*, and this fact adds a strong emphasis to the exceptional importance of this event, embedded in an overall realistic image of Elizabeth's sainthood acquired by the fervently realized religious ideals of charity, humility, and piety. The strength of the text resides in its accurate description of the physiology of rapture and the fluctuating emotional states of mind characteristic for ecstasies and mystics (Elliott 1997). The desire for mystical union with Christ, appearing in the "open sky" is expressed with the powerful and simple words of mutual marital consent: "If you want to be with me, I want to be with you, and I never want to be separated from you." There could have hardly been a clearer statement of the central longing of late medieval female saints aspiring to live like brides of Christ.

The "bridal" motif of late medieval and early modern feminine spirituality had been expressed in a number of devotional writings, legends, *Schwesterbücher*, and canonization process testimonies from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries, and it was accompanied by an impressive series of similar visions, from Mary of Oignies, Hadewijch of Brabant, Hedwig of Silesia, Margaret of Cortona, Angela of Foligno, Gertude of Helfta, to Bridget of Sweden, Catherine of Siena and the great early modern mystics such as Theresa of Avila. There has been much historical analysis of this kind of spirituality recently (Bynum 1984, 1987; Kleinberg 1994; Lewis 1996; Klaniczay 2003; Caciola 2003; Elliott 2004). A systematic study of the visions themselves, the "encounters" with Christ

and the Virgin Mary, narrated in these writings, is still to be done (cf. Dinzelbacher 1981; Petroff 1986; Leonardi and Pozzi 1988; Hamburger 1998; Newman 2005).

There is another kind of vision, which is more frequently present in the lists of healing miracles produced during the canonization investigations—the healing occurring in dreams. Let me quote, still from the canonization process of St. Elizabeth, the healing story of Beatrix, a nine-year-old girl, who had a hump and goiter (*gibbosa et strumosa*) and was carried by the stepfather on his back to the sepulcher. They stayed there, together with the mother, for ten days praying for the healing.

Their request had not been heard, and the upset mother started to grumble against Elizabeth, saying: “I will warn everyone not to visit your tomb since you did not listen to me!” And thus she departed in anger. After they traveled a mile and a half, they stopped at a spring near a place called Rosseberch, the daughter crying from the pain in her body. And there, while she was sobbing, she started to sweat and then fell asleep. When she woke up she said she saw in her dream a lady approaching; her face was splendid, her hands graceful and candid and with her hands she touched her body in the back and in the chest and said: “Stand up and walk!” The girl rose up, sweating all over, and shaking in her body she hit her chest with her hand and said to her mother: “O, mother, here I am free in all my body.” And standing upright, she started to walk freed from her hump and goiter and became healthy.<sup>5</sup>

This vision is actually a medieval representative of a very archaic type of healing miracle, the incubatory dream, first appearing in the cult of Asclepius, the “divine doctor” (Hamilton 1906; Edelstein and Edelstein 1945) and, subsequently, in Christian form, in the cults of a number of Byzantine saints, such as Sts. Cosmas and Damian, Sts. John and Cyrus, and St. Artemios (Deubner 1900; Delehaye 1925; Crisafulli and Nesbitt 1997; Csepregi 2007). With some variations, the formula of dream-healing also made its way to Latin hagiography and showed up in the early medieval miracle accounts of Gregory of Tours (Bozóky 2003). Pierre-André Sigal analyzed a total of 2050 posthumous healing miracles, collected from 76 saints’ lives and 166 miracle lists, before the end of the twelfth century.

Within this material he found 259 miracles obtained by dream-healing, which, though a rather small fraction within the entire pool of the recorded miracle accounts, is still a considerable number (Sigal 1985, pp. 139–140).

In the miracle lists of Saint Elizabeth, from the altogether 129 miracles there are six cases where dream-healing plays some kind of a role. Four of these are rather similar to the already presented one: a charmingly simple story of the appearance of a “most beautiful lady” (*pulcherrima domina*) in the dream of the afflicted person, touching the ill person or giving advice on how to obtain healing.<sup>6</sup> There is, however, one considerably longer miracle story, which provides an illustration of how such rudimentary judicial accounts can develop into a complex fable.

The story is about an “epileptic” Cistercian monk, Henricus, from the monastery Amelungesburnen in Saxony (1/II).

He suffered so gravely and miserably that each night and every other day he lay on the floor or on his bed; his head, back and legs were shaking, he was uttering cries demonstrating a great pain in the body, always keeping four monks at his side to help... one night, as he claims, there appeared to him a woman in white robes who asked whether he would like to be cured, to which he responded: “This is my greatest longing.” She said: “If you want to be cured, make an oath to lady Elizabeth of Marburg and hence you will be cured.”

At first Henricus was reticent or rather afraid to take this oath, but after two renewed apparitions he did, and indeed got better. However,

because the rule of St. Benedict prohibits the monks to take oaths or do other special things without the permission of their spiritual father... the prior said it was possible that the monk was seduced to do this prohibited thing by the apparition and persuasion of a malignant spirit.

But the following night, the same person he saw earlier appeared again and this finally convinced the abbot to allow him to go on pilgrimage and get healed.<sup>7</sup>

This very long and convoluted miracle account is interesting from several points of view. The dream-healing is developed here to a complex set



of serial apparitions, when there is an uncertainty whether the “woman in white robes” was St. Elizabeth herself or just a divine envoy (it frequently happened in early medieval incubation miracles that the saint came in a kind of *incognito* to the patient). The uncertainty goes even further; the superiors in the monastery put the question: wasn't this apparition rather one by a malignant spirit? With this question we join here the large medieval tradition of the discernment of the spirits (*discretio spirituum*). “Satan himself goes disguised as an angel of light,” as Saint Paul already warned (2 Cor, 11,14). This type of questioning of the origin of the miraculous dreams and apparitions and trying to decide whether the miracles were really obtained by the mediation of the saint or by some kind of magic became one of the key issues to be settled by the new style canonization processes (Switek 1972).

At the same time, the acts of the canonization process of St. Elizabeth also testify of another process: that of narrative and mythological construction. The originally simple patterns of visions and dreams included in the healing miracle narratives get elaborated, restructured, enriched, critically examined, and discerned by the clerics involved in the authentication and the transmission of these stories.

Similar things happened to the vision accounts included in the saints' legends. One can observe it within the hagiographic tradition of St. Elizabeth itself. Her powerful and simple bridal vision of Christ made its way into her subsequent legends, it was at a central place in the most popular legend collection of the thirteenth century, the *Legenda Aurea* compiled by James of Voragine, who dedicated a special chapter to Elizabeth (Vauchez 1986; Varazze 1998, vol. 2, p. 1168). Still, around the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, this apparently did not satisfy all those who venerated Elizabeth as the most popular “modern saint” among women. Since visionary sainthood became the dominating model in late thirteenth-century Europe and, especially in Italy, the original, charity-centered “Franciscan simplicity” of Elizabeth had to be refashioned, adorned by a number of more spectacular vision descriptions as well. In the ample set of re-elaborations of Saint Elizabeth's hagiography, a number of other hitherto unedited stories appear, describing alleged visionary type events.

A late thirteenth-century “Tuscan vita,” probably originating from Franciscan surroundings, narrates the “miracle of the mantle” and the

“miracle of the rose,” which became two very popular elements of Elizabeth’s late medieval image. The former story describes the embarrassment of Elizabeth when called by her husband to receive a noble guest, but being dressed according to her usual humble ways in very poor and ragged apparel, she could only be rescued by supernatural help: an angel brought her from the heavens “a shining crown and mantle,” saying “adorn yourself with these, that your celestial spouse has sent you from heaven.” Though the latter story, the famous rose miracle—the food taken to the poor by Elizabeth wondrously transformed into roses in wintertime (Lemmens 1902, pp. 15–16; Gecser 2005)—is not a vision account, these two stories illustrate very well how brief reports of a Christo-centric visionary experience get transformed into fascinating hagiographic fables. Another creative literary-hagiographic invention appearing in fourteenth-century Elizabeth hagiography, notably in the amplified versions of the most popular Elizabeth legend written by the Thuringian Dominican friar, Theoderic of Apolda around 1292, is the so-called “*leprosus* legend,” where Elizabeth is described to have given medical care to a suffering leper subsequently put to rest in the bed of her husband, whom the alerted (and probably raging) Count Ludwig sees, with his “inward eyes,” transformed into the “Crucified One,” understanding thus the deeper meaning of charity (Renner 1998, pp. 40–41; Klaniczay 2002, pp. 371–72).<sup>8</sup> To complete the visionary transformation of Elizabeth’s hagiographic portrait, in early fourteenth-century Tuscany even a separate visionary opusculum got (falsely) attributed to her: the *Revelationes beate Marie virginis facte beate Elisabet filie regis Ungarie* (Oliger 1926–27; Falvay 2005).

It is these truly elaborate literary accounts that I would include in the group of “learned” vision descriptions, building upon a preexistent (or sometimes maybe not even preexistent) immediate, “popular narrative” of visionary experience, turning it into theologically meaningful discourse, and, frequently, also transforming experiences stemming from a specific feminine spirituality into the male narrative of the confessors and the spiritual directors. This is what Friar Arnaldo was probably doing with the visions of Angela da Foligno or Raymond of Capua with those of St. Catherine of Siena (Bynum 1987; Mooney 1999; Coakley 2006).

*From Fable to Experience,  
from Imagination to Reality*

Late medieval religious visions, especially towards the end of the Avignon Papacy and even more during the Great Schism (1379–1414), became thus inextricably entangled in learned theological systems and the debates of the highest ecclesiastical sphere. The most spectacular prophetic-visionary oeuvre of John Rupescissa, Saint Bridget of Sweden, Saint Catherine of Siena, and a number of female prophets in the Schism period (Vauchez 1990; Rusconi 1999; Blumenfeld-Kosinski 2006) provoked an increasing irritation among broad circles of the ecclesiastical elite—the influence of this new source of revelation had to be curtailed.

This led to a new vogue of the genre of the “discernment of spirits” in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with important treatises by leading theological authorities such as Heinrich von Friemar, Heinrich von Langenstein, Pierre d’Ailly, and several ones by Jean Gerson, trying to distinguish between “true and false apparitions” (cf. Switek 1972; Hohmann 1977; Voaden 1999; Elliott 2002; Klaniczay 2003, pp. 40–62; Caciola 2003, pp. 284–314). The most influential work in this tradition was the book entitled *Formicarius* (Anthill) written around 1436 by Johannes Nider (1380–1438), a leading figure of the Dominican observance and a spokesman of the Council of Basel (Nider 2005; Tschacher 2000; Bailey 2002; Klaniczay 2003).<sup>9</sup> His book not only resumed the entire critical repertoire elaborated in the previous debates in connection with late medieval visions and apparitions, but related these doubts to the emerging new collective anxiety of the age, the menace of diabolic witchcraft.

This association was certainly influenced by the fact that Nider’s work was written in the precise historical moment when the amazing success and then the scandalous trial of Joan of Arc brought about a decisive turn in the appreciation of visions and apparitions (Christian 1981, pp. 188–94; Fraioli 1999; Sullivan 1999; Elliott 2004, pp. 315–68). The *Pucelle’s* extraordinary deeds gave new actuality to the question that had been lingering in the mind of those who wanted to “discern the spirits” in the amazing visions of late medieval ecstasies: were those voices or apparitions coming from God and its angels or were they rather from the Devil and its

allies? Nider personally witnessed the echoes of the case of Joan of Arc at the Council of Basel. On the basis of this, he gave a detailed account on Joan “deifying herself and appearing in male attire.” Joan

would have stated of herself that she has God’s angel as her familiar, but according to a large number of interpretations and examinations of most learned men, this was judged to have been rather a malevolent spirit, and consequently secular justice had been instructed that the spirit and the witch (maga) under its influence should be burned.<sup>10</sup>

Joan’s condemnation and the ensuing debates testify to the fact that the borderlines between heavenly and diabolic apparitions, in this period of generalized doubt and skepticism, were becoming more and more uncertain, to the point of vanishing almost completely.

This constellation makes Nider’s *Formicarius* a fitting example for illustrating another, related change in the history of heavenly and/or diabolic visions and apparitions: the advent of a new age of credulity, the conversion of fable and fantasy to reality. In current anthropological debates, Michael Taussig (1998) has usefully underlined that faith and skepticism, unconditional acceptance of “other types” of realities and rational doubts, while opposed to each other, are also presupposing each other and usually coexist in pairs, not only in the same ages or the same milieus, but also in the worldview of individual thinkers. The fluctuating evaluation of late medieval visions and Nider’s work in particular is a good illustration for this.

Nider is truly skeptical of “false, simulated visions.” Though he seldom mentions the ultimate argument, their allegedly “satanic” origin, and still turns with veneration to “truthful” visions of real, living saints, he dedicates the entire Book III of his treatise to an enumeration of a number of cases where the claim of the contact with the supernatural is nothing but fraud, deception, and humbuggery. He describes, for instance, a certain “*fraticellus*” or “*semi-beghardus*” living in the town of Bern who acquired a considerable notoriety by throwing about stones and pieces of wood in his house at night, making the kind of racket that haunting ghosts would make. He shut himself up in his room,

changed his voice and started moaning and groaning, pretending that he was the spirit of a deceased local notable. Then he started answering the questions of the curious, as if the spirits themselves were answering.<sup>11</sup>

He even collected money to be able to undertake pilgrimages to earn indulgences for the deceased. After a while, however, his activities grew suspicious; his clients started suspecting him, exposed the hoax, and he got what he deserved (Caciola 2000, pp. 69–73; Klaniczay 2003, pp. 8–9).

From among such fraudulent apparitions, the most disturbing ones were related to holy women of “high repute.” These women, according to Nider, would

lose all sense of the external world, and, by force of their interior devotion, fall into a profound ecstasy. I myself have witnessed an occasion when a woman, listening to a sermon on the love of Christ, let out loud shrieks and moans before the eyes of all the congregation, as if unable to control her overwhelming love for Christ. Most educated people consider demonstrations of this sort to be mere simulation.<sup>12</sup>

Nider gives a number of examples to validate his skeptical view of female visionaries. He knew a Dominican nun who lived a life beyond reproach before she entered the order, and immediately thereafter. When, however, she heard in this reformed convent of the extraordinary lives lived by the saints of old, she was overcome with the desire to be considered one of them.

She feigned ecstasy and pretended to have received revelations, though she had had neither experience, as she admitted later in the presence of her superior ... In acts of pure simulation, she began to cry out joyfully for all to hear, and then fell to the floor, pretending to be beside herself in ecstasy.<sup>13</sup>

A similar story had been narrated to Nider by a fellow Dominican preaching in the Rhineland, about a woman renowned for her holiness. During the sermon, “she uttered cries of rejoicing before all the multitude;

but she did this, as she later confessed, not from a surfeit of love, but from a vain desire for attention.”<sup>14</sup>

To convince their rather skeptical clerical and lay “public,” these visionaries had to resort to visible bodily proofs of their contact with the supernatural going far beyond the outward signs of ecstasy which, as we have seen, could be put down as simulation. The most prestigious of these signs was the reception of the holy wounds of Christ, the *stigmata*. After the “founding miracle” of Saint Francis of Assisi (Vauchez 1968; Schmucki 1991; Frugoni 1993; Davidson 1998), this claim has been voiced by or attributed to several female visionaries throughout the Middle Ages. In the thirteenth century it was claimed by beguines such as Elizabeth of Spalbeek (Simons and Ziegler 1990; Simons 1994; Caciola 2002, pp. 113–25) or Christina of Stommeln (Kleinberg 1992, pp. 40–98), Cistercian nuns such as Lukardis of Oberweimar (Kleinberg 1992, pp. 101–11) or the heterodox, but also Cistercian-supported cult of Guglielma of Milan (Benedetti 1998, p. 86; Newman 2005). In the fourteenth century it was attributed to Dominican nuns such as Saint Margaret of Hungary, the Blessed Helen of Hungary (Klaniczay 2002), then, most prominently, to Catherine of Siena (Giunta 1999), a series to be continued subsequently in the late fifteenth century by Lucia Broccadelli (da Narni), Caterina Racconigi, Stefana Quinzani di Soncino, and Osanna Andreasi (cf. Zarri 1990, pp. 87–164; Herzig 2006).

Nider also provides a report of a claim of stigmatization just before the Council of Constance, in the small nearby town of Radolfzell. A saintly recluse living in the town “often lay prostrate in a state of ecstasy, and when she came to, described the secret revelations that she had received. . . . One day the news started to be spread that the five wounds of Christ would appear on her hands, feet and side on a particular day.”<sup>15</sup> A great throng of the curious gathered for the occasion; they found the recluse lying on the floor of her cell, “motionless in her rapture, and quite beside herself” (*velut in raptu, immobilis, fatua*), but the *stigmata* failed to appear, to the great consternation of all those who had believed in the woman’s enigmatic teachings and revelations (*deliramentis et ejus revelationibus*). Among those present was Heinrich von Rheinfeld (d. 1433), a Dominican friar and “professor of theology,” who took advantage of the occasion to preach a fire and brimstone sermon about the dangers of believing in “foolishness” of this sort. Not much later, the

fraudulent woman (*ipsa fictrix*) and an associate of hers were obliged to appear before an ecclesiastical court; here she retracted her claims, and repented of her sins.

A comparable desperate attempt to challenge the doubts concerning the truthfulness of visionary experience, a similar claim to perform the miraculous bodily transformation in public was repeated, in another form, by a Clariss nun, Magdalena Beutlerin, who was renown for her spectacular raptures and revelations in Fribourg, in the 1430s (Petroff 1986, pp. 350–55; Dinzelbacher 1995, pp. 91–93; Klaniczay 2003, pp. 12–14). She declared before Christmas 1430 that she would die during the following Epiphany. She said that her devoted followers could assist at this spectacle and thereby escape the tortures of hell. The news attracted a great deal of attention, and various secular and ecclesiastic notables, urban authorities, and also a certain Magister Paulus, a professional doctor and a large crowd appeared in her convent for the announced date to witness the event. The detailed description, acquired by Nider from a Dominican friar who was present, narrates that Magdalena fell into ecstasy in the convent church and lay motionless for a while. As the bystanders were curious whether she was dead or alive, the doctor publicly touched her pulse and confirmed that she was still alive. Then, in a strange coarse voice, she asked to be put into the sarcophagus prepared there for her. This was carried out, but she still remained alive. The impatient crowd was quickly losing faith. Finally she arose from the sarcophagus in front of the crowd and asked for food. She hoped to save face by referring to a new revelation communicating her that divine intentions had changed and she would be left alive.

This series of stories in the *Formicarius*, reporting of quasi-experimental testing of the truthfulness of supernatural claims, also included an anecdote related to the archetypal myth concerning the ecstatic capacity of the witches: their ability to fly. The belief concerning women who go out for a nightly ride in the air with goddess Diana is continuously attested from the early Middle Ages on. Penitential handbooks of the medieval church have been condemning this belief as vain superstition since the instructions of Regino of Prüm dating from 906. The condemnation has been taken up in the *Decretum* of Burchard of Worms as stemming from the Synod of Ancyra of 314, and was incorporated in the twelfth century into the *Decretum* of Gratian with the

name *Canon episcopi* (Ginzburg 1991, pp. 89–91; Tschacher 1999). According to the text

some wicked women, perverted by the Devil, seduced by illusions and phantasms of demons, believe and profess themselves, in the hours of the night, to ride upon certain beasts with Diana, the goddess of pagans, and an innumerable multitude of women, and in the silence of the dead of night to traverse great spaces of earth, and to obey her commands as of their mistress, and to be summoned to her service on certain nights... Wherefore the priests throughout their churches should preach with all insistence to the people that they may know this to be in every way false and that such phantasms are imposed on the minds of the faithful not by the divine but by the malignant spirit. (Kors and Peters 2001, p. 62)

Despite the (rather “enlightened”) medieval interdictions, these mythological constructs survived in various forms in legends, literary creations, and in folklore (*Herodiada*, *Dame Habonde*, *Satia*), and as Carlo Ginzburg has shown (1991, pp. 89–108), they contributed to the emerging mythology of the witches’ Sabbath. The early fifteenth century, when the *Formicarius* was conceived, is precisely the moment of this gradual reversal of the condemning ecclesiastical attitude to an unconditional acceptance of the possibility of such nightly flights, which was the consequence of, and a further stimulus to, the emerging witch persecutions.

Nider is in this matter still on the critical and skeptical side: his anecdote presents the well-known story as something that happened to his own preceptor, and only fleetingly refers to his related readings in the field of canon law. He describes how a “*vetula dementata*” claimed to be carried through the air on a night ride with Diana. Like the contested stigmatic just mentioned, she seemed to be willing to perform her ecstatic journey while being observed, and accepted the request of the Dominican friar to be present at this occasion. She sat in a large bowl used for kneading dough, positioned on a bench. She rubbed herself with her ointment, uttered magic incantations; whereupon her head leaned back, and she fell asleep almost immediately. She apparently had some “demonic dreams” in the company of “*Domina Venere*.” She exploded into joyful jubilation, fluttered her hands and her whole body shook with violent gestures. Then



she fell off the bench together with her bowl, badly hitting her head, and then lay in deep sleep for some hours. When she awoke, she was told that she had not been on a ride with Diana. She became very confused when all the witnesses confirmed that her body was seen to remain motionless in the room the entire time.<sup>16</sup>

Nider uses this example in the row of the previously mentioned ones, supporting his skeptical view on the veracity of visions and other supernatural manifestations of the late medieval charismatic female visionaries, and paves the way by this anecdote to bring them into the dangerous neighborhood of a new type of diabolic apparition: the horrendous “novelty” of the witches’ Sabbath. This emerging demonological narrative has been described for the first time in a set of documents emerging from the witchcraft persecutions in early fifteenth-century Switzerland and Savoy, the treatises by the secular judge Claude Tholosan (*Ut magorum et maleficiorum errores manifesti ignorantibus fiant* – 1436), the anonymous *Errores gazariorum* (around 1437), the Lucerne chronicle by Johann Fründ on the witch hunts in the Wallis between 1428 and 1430, the *Le champion des dames* written by the papal secretary, Martin le Franc (1440–42), and, not the least, some of the most eloquent testimonies preserved in Book V of *Formicarius (L’imaginaire du sabbat)*; Nider 2005). The general discussion on the emerging concept of the diabolic witches’ Sabbath has been reformulated on the basis of these newly edited or reedited documents, and a series of studies carried out by the research group around Agostino Paravicini Bagliani in Lausanne—the study of Martine Ostorero gives a good account of all this (cf. also Bailey 2002; Klaniczay 2003). In my present study, I should like to make two observations within this context.

The first is the curious fact that Nider’s generally skeptical approach to visions was surprisingly reversed when talking about diabolic apparitions allegedly experienced by witches. He reports without his habitual critical alertness the accounts he heard from a witch-persecuting judge from Bern, called Peter, on the secret gatherings of the witches. In a church on Sunday morning, before the blessing with the holy water, they denied Christ, their Christian faith, and the Catholic Church, and swore to follow the Devil, whom they called *magisterulus*.<sup>17</sup> Nider gives the appearance that he considers these accounts rather a reality than an illusion or an apparition. Furthermore, he explicitly discusses the issue whether nightly

demons can physically injure humans. Judge Peter told him the story of his own personal encounter with witchcraft. After he had already given up his office as judge, the witches avenged themselves on him by pushing him off a flight of steps in the dead of night. He was found the next morning, bruised and bloody. Nider adds an explanation:

We needn't believe that Peter was physically pushed off the steps by some witches who were not there; it was very much the present demons conjured up by the witches' rites and sacrifices that led to Peter's fall... It is by the impact of the witches on the imagination that the demons can evoke the sensation of being absent or present.<sup>18</sup>

There is no sense of the same critical alertness here with which Nider put rational questions to the experiential performance and the veracity of late medieval female charismatics. At the same time, we can see that the fable of the witches' Sabbath is gaining an increasing credibility among the ecclesiastical elite of the age, who receive with eager attention the confirmation of this myth from the confessions of the accused witches. My second observation relates to Claude Tholosan, a contemporary of Nider, a secular judge who conducted more than a hundred witch trials in the region of Briançon, in Dauphiné (Hansen 1901, pp. 539–44; Marx 1914, pp. 32–43; Paravy 1993, pp. 783 ff.), and also wrote the abovementioned treatise on the “errors of the magicians and the witches,” partly describing the beliefs and practices of the new sect of the witches and partly advising judges how to proceed against this crime.

In his description of the witches' Sabbath, included in the treatise, Tholosan, like Nider, performs a balancing act between the skepticism of the *Canon episcopi* and the folkloristic wealth of confessions that he himself had had a hand in extracting under torture. On the one hand, he emphasizes that the witches' self-perception that they have physically (*corporaliter*) gone off to an assembly (*synagoga*) is an “illusion” suggested by the Devil in their sleep; on the other hand, he assembles the information available to him on the matter in a systematic description of what could be considered to be a real ritual for venerating the Devil. He describes how on Thursdays and Saturdays the witches fly to their conclave on magic wands greased with the magic ointment; at times they ride on a broom or on the backs of wild animals. Once at the witches'

Sabbath, they kneel to the Devil, kiss him on the lips, and have intercourse with him. His body is as cold as ice (*frigidum sicut glacies*). They have intercourse with demons and with one another, sometimes in an “unnatural way” (*contra naturam*). Then they kill children—at times their own—who have been brought there to be cooked and eaten, or make maleficent powders and ointments out of them. The devils then open all kinds of dwellings to them, where they can eat and drink, make music, and dance in a circle (Paravy 1979, pp. 356–57; *L’imaginaire du sabbat*, pp. 364–66; Kors and Peters 2001, pp. 333–39). The court records of confessions made in Tholosan’s presence enrich this description with colorful folkloric detail. Witches, we learn, use black or chestnut horses and rabbits to get around. When they dance in circles, the head devil keeps time on a drum; their merrymaking comes to an end when the cock crows (Marx 1914, pp. 36–39).

Claude Tholosan also extracted confessions from the accused on how they made their alliance with the Devil on the Sabbath:

“They stand in a circle and put a pot in the middle. The Devil urinates in it; they drink it, and then bend backwards for the purpose of totally abjuring their faith in Christ.” The novice then “draws a cross on the ground for the purpose of dishonoring Jesus Christ ... he stomps on it three times with his left foot, spits on it thrice, urinates on it, and then defecates on it; he then turns his bared bottom toward the east, thumbs his nose, and spitting once more, says: ‘I deny you, prophet!’”<sup>19</sup>

The Devil—Tholosan tells us in his treatise—appears at these rituals “in the form of a man and/or a number of animals.” From the more verbose documents of the witch trials that Tholosan held in Briançon after 1436, we learn that the Devil is a man dressed in black, whose “eyes burn like coal and are as big as a calf’s; his tongue hangs to the ground, his legs are bowed, his toes are black.” He is a Saracen with red hair, a young white man, a white child, a black cat, a black dog, a black pig or a black cock.<sup>20</sup>

In the same collection of documents, we find one instance when the various demons were arranged into a sophisticated symbolic system. Jubertus de Bavaria, who was sentenced in 1437, had three devils appear to him regularly: *Luxoriosus*, who appeared in the form of a lovely twelve-year-old virgin, and “slept with him and had her pleasure of him at night”;

*Superbus*, a middle-aged man dressed in black; and *Avarus*, an old man dressed in tattered clothes but whose purse was full of gold.<sup>21</sup> (One may well wonder whether we find here a “popular” echo of late medieval moral preaching or a “learned” invention of the cultured judge.)

On the whole, if one compares the demonological treatises with the multiplying documents of witchcraft persecution, the following tendency becomes apparent. Unlike what we have observed at the medieval canonization processes, legends, and miracles, where a simple and experience-based form gets elaborated into a complex visionary narrative, my impression is that in late medieval witch trials rather the opposite procedure occurs. A learned mythological construct of the secret, nightly cult of the Devil is forced upon the reality of witchcraft accusations.

This suggestion is certainly not a new one in witchcraft research. The mainstream of nineteenth and twentieth-century historiography, from Wilhelm Gottlieb Soldan (1843), Joseph Hansen (1900), and Henry Charles Lea (1939) to Norman Cohn (1975) and Richard Kieckhefer (1976) departed from the assumption that the vision of the diabolic witches’ Sabbath was a learned construct injected into the popular *imaginaire* by ecclesiastical and judicial propaganda and constraining mechanisms, and subsequently confirmed by confessions obtained from the accused witches using suggestive questions and torture. The question to be examined more closely, along this line of arguments, would consist above all in the specific nature of the psychological and physical/bodily constraints, the procedure of interrogation and torture which achieve this specific blending of diabolical concepts coming from the “elite” and the desperate fantasies and improvisations of the accused who are trying to ease their pains by complying with the demands of the interrogators (Rowland 1990; Roper 1992 and 2004, pp. 44–65).

This approach, however, had been challenged by other researchers, who were convinced that the nocturnal visions of the witches’ Sabbath took their core elements instead from “popular” mythologies and religious practices. After a romantic vision of “pagan,” and “feminine” anti-Christian resistance by Jules Michelet (1862) or the erroneous anthropological concept of a secret diabolic cult by Margaret Murray (1921), archaic, “shamanistic” practices and concepts were detected by Carlo Ginzburg (1966 and 1991), and I contributed to this as well (Klaniczay 1984 and 2003), whereas Éva Pócs (1989 and 1998) pointed to

the possible impact of fairy and *mora* beliefs, and that of other popular mythological constructs. There were also interpretations which saw in the nightmarish vision of the Sabbath a “world turned upside down,” a simple symbolic inversion of the rituals that could be observed in ecclesiastical or popular festivities (Clark 1980; Muchembled 1988).

In my present study, in guise of a conclusion, I should like to direct the attention of witchcraft research to yet another possibility of interpretation: namely to the consideration of a considerable group of accounts on the witches’ Sabbath as a specific type of popular vision narratives.

### *The Sabbath Narratives of the Accusers*

My examples come from the documents of 2275 Hungarian witch trials against 4212 accused witches (3673 women and 590 men) between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries.<sup>22</sup> In this documentation, there are more than a hundred Sabbath descriptions stemming from witchcraft confessions, mainly extorted under torture—the most noteworthy ones come from the biggest “witch panic”<sup>23</sup> in Hungary, the Szeged persecutions of 1728 (cf. Reizner 1900). But there is also another significant group, whose number almost equals the witches’ delirious confessions: the Sabbath descriptions given by the accusers who complained of having been attacked by the witches during the night and carried away to the witches’ Sabbath.

As to the cultural or judicial context defining these descriptions, they differ fundamentally from the Sabbath accounts of the accused and tortured witches. Though undeniably influenced by the circulation of nightmarish Sabbath stories generated by the witch panic and supported by the sensational confessions extorted from the accused by torture, the accusers come forward with autonomous narrative constructs, and claim to have really experienced these diabolic visions. In these Sabbath accounts, there are no traces of any constraint or forceful suggestion coming from “learned” interrogators. I have already tried to make a plea for a special consideration of this extraordinary type of source material (Klaniczay 1993), and I will draw on that corpus of sources here again.

The first such nightmarish vision accounts come from the witch trials of Kolozsvár (Cluj, Romania) from the second half of the sixteenth

century, where some of the witches are said to have aggressed the victim in the shape of a dog subsequently changing into a wild boar, from the mouth of which flames came forth (Komáromy 1910, p. 5). Other testimonies describe archetypal stories on “the terror coming in the night” (cf. Hufford 1982). The witches enter the witnesses’ room through the window, in groups of three, four, or seven, menace the paralyzed victims, maltreat them, harm and bewitch the children sleeping in the room near the mother and “extract” their bones (Komáromy 1910, pp. 64, 78–79). Similar nightly aggression accounts are narrated by the witch-accusers in the region of Pozsony (Bratislava, Slovakia), where the diabolic Sabbath concepts have frequently appeared in the witchcraft confessions of the beginning of the seventeenth century (Horna 1933). In 1618 and 1627, witnesses in the trials in Sempte, describe the witches coming into their sleeping rooms through the window, dancing and feasting there, pulling them out of their beds, dragging them naked thrice around their house, menacing and maltreating them (Schram 1982, vol. 3, pp. 233–39; Klaniczay, Kristóf, and Pócs 1989, pp. 390–91, 405–6).

The accounts on the nightly appearance of the witches is the kernel from which the more colorful Sabbath descriptions develop, where the witches have a feast in the house or the courtyard of the victims, feast and dance there, consume their food and drink, or carry them away to some other places, to the wine cellars, to the main square or the border of the village or to some near or remote mountain.<sup>24</sup> At times, witches are said to transform the victim into a horse—as we hear, for instance, in 1739 in the borough Hódmezővásárhely, from the account of a servant accusing the wife of his master,

the witch came to him in green female dress during the night, she pulled him up from his lying position by his hair, pushed a bridle into his mouth and changed him instantly to a yellow-haired horse with a saddle on the back, and so she rode on the back of the witness to Mount Saint Gellért where an innumerable army was gathered also from other places, and they diverted themselves with many kinds of music and exquisite food... (Schram 1970, vol. 1, p. 253).

The nightly appearance of the witches frequently takes the form of sexual aggression: witches sometimes take up the shape of the wife or the

husband of the victim and thus rape and maltreat them (1612 – Komáromy 1910, p. 77), other victims complain of having been raped by the witch coming upon them in the form of a horse or a bull (Schram 1982, vol. 3, p. 204). In some cases, these descriptions are colored by weird sexual phantasies—witches bite and damage the genital organs of the victims (Schram 1970, vol. 1, p. 155; vol. 2, p. 335).

Ultimately, we find a similar folkloric variety of realistic details, stereotypical stories and improvised inventions as in the Sabbath accounts in the torture confessions of the accused witches. With one very noteworthy difference though: while in the torture confessions the Devil is at a central place both in the witches' gathering and he is also the protagonist in the depraved orgies of the witches, he is almost altogether absent from the Sabbath accounts of the accusers, where the figures performing all the evil deeds are just the witches themselves. In the few cases where devil-like characters also appear, they remain in the background as distant, secondary actors.

Let me conclude with one of the most detailed Sabbath accounts from a witch-accuser in Hungarian documentation which provides an example of this. It comes from a witch trial against a certain “black skirted woman” living as a poor beggar in Western Hungary, at the borough Csorna, who was tried for charges of witchcraft together with her daughters, Eörse (Elizabeth) and Kata (Catherine) Szekér, in 1733, in the years which witnessed the (rather belated) peak of Hungarian witch hunts.

The Sabbath description is provided by the alleged victim of the witches' aggression, a maidservant in the household of Matthias Bognár, a farmer living on the estate of Prince Eszterházy, the “honest girl” (*honesta puella*) Éva Katona, 16 years of age, who confessed the following:

During Lent, she asked her patroness for permission to leave to take part at a mourning festivity after a funeral... She stayed there and entertained herself with some other young lads and maidens. She spent enough time there and the hour came when she was supposed to go home. She first felt some kind of a great fear coming upon her. She started praying; but even her prayer-book fell out of her hands. Then suddenly the abovementioned Eörse Szekér entered the room and turned to her. She reprehended her why she had not gone home yet to her patron who was going to leave the morrow and who was upset at

her for not having fed the cows. But the witness remained in the room. She reproved her for the second time, and the witness still did not go home. Only when Eörse Szekér scorned the witness for the third time, making reference to her mistress, did she leave the mourning house, but when she reached the courtyard she suddenly lost her sight. Soon there appeared Kata Szekér, she took her by the hand and led her to a plantation garden, where [a company of witches] came forth by the sound of drums and trumpets and they tried to force the witness to join their company. Since she refused this, they started beating and torturing her. After many painful torments they carried her to the stream called Keszegér where they took a bath. And while these fair women were bathing in the stream, they made the witness hold their clothes, she remarked in the interrogation that she would have rather carried any other heavy burden than those women's clothes. Among the bathing women she did not recognize anyone except the two daughters Eörse and Kata of the abovementioned black skirted woman. After the bathing there came huge whirlwind and it took them to the top of a high mountain and there again they tried to force the witness to join them, or else, they said, they would throw her down from the ridge to the precipice [which they indeed did]. After all these tribulations, the witness could not stand up, and they did not come down to her for a while. Then, like a hen to be roasted, she was tied by the hands and carried down to the village of Csorna to the small street, with a flag and the sound of a drum and a trumpet. They stopped in front of the house of Joseph Mattyus, the tax official. They tied the witness to the door near the wine-barrels and started to feast. During those amusements in the street, the evil ones dragged a cow and a black dog with themselves. Meanwhile, they tried to force the witness again to join their company. After the feast when they came down with their flag from the hill where they had danced, they freed her from beside the barrels and took her to the house of her master and pushed her through the porch door and even there they continued to frighten her in various ways. But before they pushed her through the porch door, they tied her to a tree in the courtyard and there came to her a tall man with a book in his hand asking her to write her name into it and tried to trick the witness saying: Do not believe in the black scripture [i.e. the Bible], for hell is also totally black but do believe in the red and yel-



low scripture [i.e. the inscriptions made with blood] because Paradise is also red and yellow; and those who do not believe in the book he has in his hands, shall never see Paradise—this is how he tried to deceive her. After all this, about two weeks later, one afternoon they ravished her again and took her to the brick oven of the provost and threw her twice into the oven, trying to constrain her to join their company and sign the book with her blood. When she got out of the oven, there came from the barn of the provost a huge tall man, wearing a coat (since it was raining), and he approached her, called her by her name holding a big book in his hands. He attempted to force her to cut her finger and sign the book but she did not do it. After this her master and mistress, not knowing where she was, asked their lodger to find her. He then took her home. In the end, she says that she would never be well again and she believes she could not blame anybody else but the black skirted woman and her two daughters Eörse and Kata, who destroyed her and made her miserable (Schram 1970, vol. 2, pp. 92–93).

This exceptionally detailed story provides a good example of the complexity of these narratives. We know from the trial documentation that the interrogation was led by one of the judges of the County of Sopron, Ferenc Hannibál, who was indeed obsessed with diabolic witchcraft and who participated in several similar cases which lead to the condemnation and burning of witches.<sup>25</sup> The story narrated by the maid is also told, with some variations, by her mistress, who adds the detail that the witches threatened to impale her with a glowing spit to force her to enter their company (Schram 1970, vol. 2, pp. 96–97), also summarized in the text of the judicial accusation of the trial (Schram 1970, vol. 2, p. 83)—so it is difficult to find the “authentic” variant of the diabolic vision of the maidservant which has probably been shaped and augmented by the various informal and formal occasions when it was told. The story is remarkable for its epic length and repetitive structure: the stereotypical Sabbath motifs (feasting, drinking, dancing, processions, flags, drums, trumpets, and flying on the top of the mountain) recur three times, and make a good narrative exploitation of contrasts: high and low, mountain and valley, bathing in the stream or being thrown into the fiery oven, feasting on the borderline of the village civilization or in the very center, in the cellar of the tax officer or the yard of the provost.

We also encounter a few valuable archaic motifs: we hear of the “beautiful women,” which has been a recurrent denomination of witches since the sixteenth century (*pulchrae mulieres*) and whom Éva Pócs (1989) has identified as belonging to the local “fairy”—antecedents of Sabbath beliefs. The cows or oxen carried in the witches’ procession might also betray some archaic beliefs (Ginzburg 1991, pp. 92–93).

The presence of a “diabolic book,” the requirement from the victim to sign her name in it with her own blood, a well-known stereotype from demonological treatises, and the appearance of a devil-like male figure administering this ceremony is quite exceptional in Sabbath descriptions stemming from “popular” witch-accusers.<sup>26</sup> This may provide an indication of the success of the demonological constructs in haunting the accusers’ mind in times of a true witch-panic. On the other hand, it is worthwhile noting the realistic or comic details that our witness feels somehow necessary to add to these demonological elements. The diabolic witch-master was wearing a cloak “since it was raining.” The argument concerning the inverted significance of the black and the red colored letters, wickedly meant to be persuasive, reminds us of the ruses young village lads could have employed in the tavern to confuse and cheat the handmaids considered too silly to see through their plot.

All taken together, such “popular” accounts on the Sabbath by witchcraft accusers have much to reveal. The confrontation with “popular” dream-vision narratives related to saints, the comparison with other types of vision or Sabbath accounts, either coming from or influenced by learned treatises, or being produced in a constraining judicial, interrogatory, or confession situation, or coming from a “professional” popular healer or soothsayer—all these different types should now be distinguished and characterized on different geographic and chronological samples. This would take us closer to understanding the ambivalence and the historical metamorphoses of saintly and diabolic visions.

## Notes

- 1 The distinction between “popular” beliefs and learned explanatory systems is a contested one. I use it in the sense given to it by Peter Burke (1978). According to this, “popular culture” is the culture generally shared by various (potentially all) social strata and cultural milieus, and transmitted both in oral, ritual, and in writ-

- ten forms; “learned” or “elite” culture is a second system of reference for some strata and milieus within the larger societies, based on more elaborate, principally written, cultural transmission mechanisms, and special institutions.
- 2 For the evolution of the canonization procedures, see Vauchez 1981 and Goodich 1982; for Saint Elizabeth’s canonization process, see Klaniczay 2004.
  - 3 Huyskens 1908; Wendel-Widmer 1987; I have discussed the testimonies in this trial recently in Klaniczay 2004.
  - 4 “*oculos defixos habebat versus fenestram apertos et tandem cepit dulciter ridere in magna vultus hilaritate. Post magnam autem horam clausis oculis emisit lacrimas infinitas et breviter post aperuit oculos, iterum ridens iocundissime ut prius in ea iacens contemplatione usque ad completorium, quandoque flens causis oculis et breviter quandoque ridens apertis oculis, sed multo plus immorans iocunditati. Tandem cum diu tacuisset, subito prorupit in hec verba: ‘Ita Domine Tu vis esse mecum et ego volo esse Tecum et nunquam volo a Te separari.’ Dicta ergo Ysentrudis nobilis femina plus reliquis pedissequis ei familiaris instanter rogabat eam revelar sibi, cum quo esset locuta. Beata vero Elizabeth difficilem se reddens, tandem precibus eius victa respondit: Vidi celum apertum et illum dulcem Jesum dominum meum inclinantem se ad me et consolantem me de variis angustiis et tribulationibus, que circumdederunt me et cum vidi eum, iocunda fui risi, cum vero vultum avertit, tamquam recessurus, flevi. Qui misertus mei iterum vultum suum serenissimum ad me convertit dicens: ‘Si tu vis esse mecum, ego ero Tecum’. Cui ego respondi sicut supradictum est. Revelationes autem, visiones et consolations divinas frequenter habuit multas in diurnis et nocturnis orationibus constituta. Quod tamen ipsa modis omnibus supprimans et dissimulans, quantum poterat, occultabat asserens in huiusmodi summopere cavendum, ne spiritus superbie subrepat, ut ait apostolus: ‘Ne magnitudine revelationum extollat me.’” Huyskens 1911, pp. 122–123. (Unless otherwise stated, the translations are my own.)*
  - 5 “*Tandem mater eius, voto facto pro filia, sepulchrum domine Elyzabet cum ipsa filia et oblationibus visitavit; vitrico puella ipsam in dorso suo portante per decem dies apud sepulchrum cottidie orantes permanebant. Postea consummatis diebus hiis, cum non exaudirentur, mater irata murmuravit contra dominam Elyzabet, dicens, ‘omnes avertam homines a visitatione sepulchri tui, quia non exaudisti me’.* Et sic irata recedens, cum peregrisset miliare et dimidium, resedit iuxta fontem apud villam, que dicitur Rosseberch, filia eius ex dolore corporis multum plorante. Et dum ploraret, cepit sudare et obdormiens parum, cum evigilasset, dixit se in sompno quandam dominam ad se venientem vidisse, cuius facies splendida erat, manus graciles et candide, que manibus suis linivit corpus eius in dorso et in pectore et dixit: ‘O mater, ecce iam resolvor in toto corpore meo’. Et sursum erecta, libere cepit ire et liberata a gibbo et struma, totius corporis sanitatem recepit. Unde mater et vitricus et filia, ad sepulchrum redeuntes, Deo et sancte Elyzabet gratias referebant; sportam, in qua quella puella portata fuerat, apud sepulchrum relinquentes.” Miracle 3/I, Huyskens 1908, pp. 159–160.
  - 6 Miracles 40/1, 76/1, 105/1, 23/II, cf. Huyskens 1908.
  - 7 “... *Ita graviter ac miserabiliter vexabatur, ut singulis noctibus et insuper alternis diebus pateretur, terram vel lectum capite, dorso ac pedibus pulsans, gemitus dans*

*magni doloris testes et sepe quatuor fratrum ad se tenendum adiutorio opus habens... nocte quadam, sicut ipse asseruit, apparuit ei quedam domina in vestibus albis, a qua interrogatus, si curari vellet, respondit: 'Libentissimus'. Et illa: 'Si vis,' inquit, 'curari, vove te domine Elyzabet de Marpurc et sic curaberis.'” “ob institutione regule, scilicet Benedicti, qui vetat fratres sine permissione spiritalis patris speciale aliquid facere vel vovere, inordinatum esse dicebant et illicitum votum a monacho sic emissum. Adiecit et prior dicens possibile fore monachos ad huiusmodi prohibita malignorum spirituum apparitione et persuasione seduci.” Miracle 1/II, Huyskens 1908, pp. 243–244.*

- 8 For the most up-to-date overview of Elizabeth’s hagiography, see Chapter I of Ottó Gecser’s related Ph.D. dissertation (2007).
- 9 In the following citations from the *Formicarius*, I have used the Helmstedt edition of 1692, which appeared under the changed title *De visionibus ac revelationibus*; the cited page numbers of the Latin quotes refer to this volume.
- 10 *Formicarius* 5, 8, pp. 600–2, “*fassa est, se habere familiarem Dei angelum, qui iudicio literatissimorum virorum iudicatus est esse malignus spiritus ex multis conjecturis & probationibus, per quem spiritum velut magam effectam ignibus per publicam iustitiam consumi permiserunt.*” Quoted in Klaniczay 2003, p. 61.
- 11 *Formicarius* 3.1, p. 288: “*mutata voce verbis gemebundis, ac si anima esset alicujus defuncti, in civitate bene noti, responsa sciscitantibus dedit, asserendo se animam esse cujusdam nuper defuncte persone.*”
- 12 *Formicarius* 3.1, pp. 292–93: “*Vidi aliquando & audivi saepius feminas, ut videbantur satis bonae famae, rapi, quantum visu perpendi potuit, ad interiora ab externis sensibus, quasi ecstasin quandam ex devotione paterentur. Vidi insuper aliam, quae in publica praedicatione alicujus de Christi “charitate auditâ sententiâ, coram omnibus clamorem quendam elatum extulit, quasi non valeret amorem sui pectoris ad Christum, clausum, ut antea retinere. Et tamen à multis literatis tales pro fictis habebantur.*”
- 13 *Formicarius* 3.1, pp. 293–94: “*revelationem finxit & ecstasin, quam nunquam habuit, ut mihi coram suo Superiore propria fassa est ... publice mere ficta clamare coepit voce alta & in jubilo; vel, cadendo in solum, effingere raptum vel mentis excessum.*”
- 14 *Formicarius* 3.1, pp. 294: “*coram cunctis clamare quasi in jubilo coepit. Quae fassa est ... quod illud non ex charitatis fervore, sed tantum fecisset ex inani gloria.*”
- 15 *Formicarius* 3, 11, pp. 391–93: “*Ostenderat autem se predicta femina saepe numero jacere, velut in ecstasi & in raptu ecstático: Ex quo reversa & expergiscens, suis postmodum secreta, quae non noverat, dicere solebat ... certa die, quae nominabatur, quinque Christi stigmatum insignia, in manibus, pedibus, & in corde feminae certitudinaliter apparerent.*”
- 16 *Formicarius* 2.4, p. 200; see the detailed analysis of this story by Catherine Chène in *L’imaginaire du sabbat*, pp. 204–20.
- 17 *Formicarius* 5.3, p. 547; *L’imaginaire du sabbat*, pp. 156–57; English translation in Kors and Peters 2001, p. 158.
- 18 *Formicarius* 5.7, pp. 590–95; *L’imaginaire du sabbat*, pp. 196–99, “*Nec tamen credere debes, Petrum ... manibus maleficarum, quae in castro non erant, corporaliter*

*per gradus projectum, sed maleficarum sacrificiis vel cerimoniais allecti Daemones praesentes illud praecipitium fecerunt Petri .... Daemonis impressione in imaginatione malificorum factum est, ut absentia velut praesentia cernerentur.*"

- 19 "... *et subvertendo aliquod vas quod ponunt in circulo facto per eos in terra, ubi etiam mingit dyabolus, de quo bibunt, et demum suppinant, intencione quod sic totaliter recedunt a fide Christi ...; faciat crucem in terra in dispectu Jesu Christi ... et super crucem ter ponat pedem sinistrum et ter expuat de super et mingat et extercoret et culum nudum ostendat versus solis ortum et faciat figam cum digitis et expuendo dicat ego te renego propheta ...*" The first half of the quotation comes from the treatise *Ut magorum*, the second part from a trial staged by Tholosan in 1438; but the treatise itself also contains a very similar description. Cf. Paravy 1979, p. 355; as well as *L'imaginaire du sabbat*, pp. 365–67, 400–1. Almost the same description can be read in the sentence of a trial presided over by Tholosan in 1436 (see Marx 1914, p. 36) and a third trial in 1437 (see Hansen 1901, p. 541).
- 20 Marx 1914, p. 34: "*habebat oculos grossos, admodum oculi bovis, scintillas igneas emittentes, et habebat linguam extra hoc longam versus terram ... et habebat tibias curvas et articulos pedum nigros.*" The other references are from *ibid.*, pp. 33–36.
- 21 Hansen 1901, pp. 540–41: "*cum illo de nocte dormiebat et delectabatur et habebat rem delectabilem.*"
- 22 I have dealt in detail with the history of Hungarian witch hunts in several studies (Klaniczay 1990a and 1990b), the statistics have been further developed and completed by new published and unpublished materials in Tóth 2000.
- 23 This useful category has been elaborated by Gustav Henningsen in his analysis of Basque witchcraft persecutions (1980).
- 24 Dozens of such stories are described and analyzed in Klaniczay 1993.
- 25 For a more detailed documentation of his activities, see Klaniczay 1993, p. 243.
- 26 For a more detailed analysis of the act of "signing in" to the diabolical book, see Klaniczay and Kristóf 2001.

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# LATE MEDIEVAL WITCH MYTHOLOGIES IN THE BALKANS

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At the time when Europe was in the grip of witch hunting, in the south-eastern part of the Balkans, then part of the Ottoman Empire, there were almost no trials on witchcraft or other harmful magic activities. Neither in the sixteenth century when the main persecution of magic practitioners took place in Western Europe nor later in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when many trials against witches were attested in Central Europe (Ginzburg 1985; Ankarloo and Henningsen 1989; Klaniczay 1990; Bošković-Stulli 1991) were any palpable measures against popular forms of magic and divination taken in the Balkan Orthodox communities.<sup>1</sup> But did all these territories remain totally unaffected by the process? And did all these trials fail to leave a trace in the culture of Southeastern Europe? In this paper, I shall try to examine evidence of witch condemnations by analyzing extant literary sources of the late medieval Orthodox Christian tradition in the Balkans.

The literary production in the territories populated with Greeks and Bulgarians between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries was mainly repetitive; the authors followed the examples of much earlier Christian writers with little innovation in topics and style. Especially popular were the collections of didactic sermons and simple hagiographic narratives such as the *Thesaurus* by Damascene Studite (d. 1577) edited in Venice in 1558. Soon after it had been published, the *Thesaurus* was translated twice in the South Slavic milieu (Miletich 1908; Petkanova-Toteva 1965; Ivanova 1967; Demina 1971; Ilievski 1972). The *Thesaurus* repeated in a simple and traditional way the lives of the most popular saints of the Orthodox Christianity such as St. George and St. Demetrius, but in contrast to the previous hagiographical collections, the texts were in spoken Greek. The

translations preserved the simplicity of the language and gave preference to forms closer to the spoken language rather than to more archaic standards (Vasilev 1980, pp. 118–22). Between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, the regular contents of the *Thesaurus* were revised and appended with new materials. Thus a new conclusion was added to Damascene Studite's *Sermon on the Publican and the Pharisee*, which stigmatizes various superstitions, popular magic, as well as the beliefs in divinatory powers of the birds. In at least six Slavic manuscripts of that type, a group of several short didactic sermons against witches, sorceresses, and enchantresses appears. The group is known as the “women's sections” in late medieval collections (Petkanova-Toteva 1990). The texts do not belong to the original part of the *Thesaurus* and are typical only of Bulgarian literary production. I shall mention here only four of the late medieval Bulgarian miscellanies containing the texts against witches: *Sam. Mus. Hist. Slavo* 13 (dated 1791–92, from the Historical Museum of the town of Samokov),<sup>2</sup> N324 (from the end of the eighteenth century), N325 (from the second half of the eighteenth century), and N761 (from the very end of the eighteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century). All three are kept in the National Library in Sofia, Bulgaria. The sermons against witches are not entirely original texts—they relate well-known stories about Simon Magus, Cyprian, and Cynops the Magician translated centuries ago in the medieval Bulgarian literature. These stories, however, were provided with rhetoric openings condemning the witches, sorceresses, and all possible magic activities practiced by women. The narratives did little more than exemplify the didactic pathos of the beginnings. Bonyo Angelov correctly associated these compilations with the name of the late medieval Bulgarian writer Josiph Bradati (Joseph the Bearded, born ca.1714), who died some time after 1758 (Angelov 1969; Petkanova-Toteva 1965, pp. 134–69).<sup>3</sup> Most of the facts of his biography are uncertain, although he left numerous colophons in the manuscripts that he compiled between 1740 and 1758, when, as a monk of the Rila monastery, he visited various Balkan Christian villages to collect alms for the monastery by distributing and copying books for priests and laymen. *Codex Sam. Mus. Hist. Slavo* 13 was copied by two laymen from Samokov, Petre Yovanchovich, and Stoyan Vakarelec. In the colophon, the latter is said to be Petre's charcoal worker (Dzurova and Velinova 2002, pp. 41–43). Josiph Bradati had been to Samokov, and the town enjoyed close connections with the Rila monas-

tery. Manuscript N325 was probably copied by one of Josiph's disciples, Nikiphor Rilski (Khristova, Karadzhova, and Ikonomova 1982, p. 269; on Nikiphor Rilski: Angelov 1969, pp. 86–109; Petkanova 1992, pp. 293–94); N324 was reproduced by Teophan Rilski (Khristova 1992, pp. 465–66), who mainly edited volumes containing the writings of Josiph Bradati; and the latest one, N761, was prepared by Todor Pirdopski, who was a teacher (Stoianov 1984). The second and the third miscellanies were copied most probably in the Rila monastery.

Of these four codices, N761 contains only texts devoted to women. The thematic scope and the tone of the texts are clear: they anathematize female vices and glorify holy women. The content of the manuscript almost entirely repeats the “women's section” of the other three codices. I shall quote this section according to the content N325 in order to give a more precise picture of the character of the texts. In N325 there is a large number of didactic ascetic sermons and instructions at the beginning of the manuscript, e.g., *Sermon about Christian Life*, *Sermon about the Fear of God*, excerpts from the works of St. John Chrysostom, St. Antony, and Pope Gregory. These texts are absent from N761, while N324 contains various prayers and didactic texts. Manuscript *Sam. Mus. Hist. Slavo* 13 starts with the *Thesaurus* version of St. George's vita and contains the life of St. Nicolas and an apocryphal text. In N325 the group of sermons stigmatizing witches and sorceresses begins after the *Sermon about the Virgin who Escaped to the Desert* (f.41r–48r). The first of the texts against enchantresses, *Sermon on Fairies, Sorceresses and Witches* (48r–62r), retells a story from the *Kings* 1.28, 2:11. In it Josiph Bradati anathematizes various magic practices (e.g., binding wild bears and wolves and the bewitchment of newly married couples). He reports not only magic activities, such as astrology and hydromancy, consistently forbidden in many Christian canons, but also popular types of wizardry, widely practiced in the rural communities such as healing with coal, blue and black cloth, broken crockery, knife, herbs, and willow. The next text, *Sermon on Magicians Compiled from Different Books* (62r–73v), contains even more common narratives excerpted from earlier South Slavic translations: the story of the rivalry between St. Peter and Simon Magus, and the story of Cyprian who was converted to Christianity. Although in these examples men are acting as magicians, the introduction clearly reveals that the sermon concerns primarily women. The third text, *Sermon about Witches, Fairies and Sor-*

*ceresses and on Spell and Sorcery* (73v–78r) is a compilation of ascetic monastic readings. Josiph Bradati remarks in it: “I haven’t seen as many sorceresses, fairies and witches as in the Bulgarian lands.” After a late medieval redaction of St. John Chrysostom’s *Sermon on Evil Women* (78r–81r) translated in Bulgaria in the tenth century, and *Sermon on Good Women* (81r–85v), a text devoted to the pious women among whom Virgin Mary, Melania from Rome, Helene, and Thecla are mentioned, the manuscript ends with *Didactic Sermon for Adornment of Virgins and Women* (86r–91r).

In contrast to *Sam. Mus. Hist. Slavo* 13, N325 and N761, before the first *Sermon on Fairies, Sorceresses and Witches* there is in N324 a short text titled *Sermon on Grandmothers’ Feasts*. Bonyo Angelov arrived at the conclusion that this text was an original work by Josiph Bradati (Angelov 1969, pp. 23–85). The protagonists in this simple and naive story<sup>4</sup> are two old women (grandmothers), Drusa, who cast molten lead and charmed water (*liiashe olovo i baeshe voda*), and “uplooking” (*gorogleda*) Petka, who divined by wax. Grandmother Drusa persuaded one of the local priests, Torno, who was a literate man (*beshe knizhovan*), to include the Twelve Fridays among the other Christian feasts in the church calendar. “And—Josiph Bradati says—the priest Torno wrote down what grandmother Drusa dictated him.” The ominous Twelve Fridays are quoted in the text. When priest Torno added these feasts to the calendar, grandmother Petka divined that it would be good if the other priest, Mitno, put in the calendar *March Saturdays and Thursdays, Wolves’ feasts*,<sup>5</sup> *Rusalii*,<sup>6</sup> and *Goreshtnitsti* (Marinov 1984) as well as a prohibition on women spinning on Fridays and Tuesdays. This done, the two priests were urged by the witches to summon a great many people on a hill, where Josiph concludes, “the lawless people fixed a law.”

The story does not reflect an historical fact,<sup>7</sup> and contains some of the classical characteristics of the narratives about the creation of heretic sects: priests seduced by “temptresses,” who entrapped gullible people in vice. It is, however, difficult to relate the story directly to any Greek or Slavic source. It presents the transfer of power from the (educated) male Christian authority to the illiterate superstitious female one. The “reforms” that the witches introduced concerned mainly the festal calendar and the incorporation of evidently pagan celebrations and taboos. The names of the witches are quite significant with respect to popular beliefs: the first of



them is called Friday (Petka),<sup>8</sup> the name of the second, Drusa, designates a fever (Gerov 1975). Despite the demonic undertones of their names, they are said to practice popular forms of divination and healing by water, wax, and lead—types of magic similar to hydromancy and lekanomancy—widely popular among the wise women in the Balkans and attested in later folklore collections. More elaborate Greek versions of these magical practices appeared in a number of late medieval manuscripts,<sup>9</sup> but in the South Slavic literatures only geomancy was translated. Possibly to underline the ironic implication of the narrative, Josiph Bradati represents the witches skilled in the most common (and harmless) exertion of magic powers.

Neither in this text nor in the rest of his compilations on the same topic has Josiph Bradati ever given a description of the feasts or the magical practices, which he mentioned in passing. Only the Twelve Fridays are represented in more detail in *Sermon on Grandmothers' Feasts*. Thus the story constructs a situation and creates a myth on the ground of an already existing myth (Twelve unlucky Fridays). However, in contrast to other feasts and magical practices mentioned by Josiph, the Twelve Fridays were by no means part of the folk culture in the Balkans.<sup>10</sup> The source from which Josiph took them was a literary one.

The apocryphal *The Story about the Twelve Fridays* gives a list of the twelve most unlucky events described in the Holy Scripture and the Christian history, which according to the text happened on twelve different Fridays. The Christians were expected to fast on these Fridays and not to work on them. *The Story about the Twelve Fridays* is constructed on association: a Friday before a great Church feast was said to be the very day on which an ominous event from the sacred Christian history took place (e.g., the Friday before the feast of the Holy Cross has to be commemorated as the day on which Moses crossed the Red Sea; the Friday before the Annunciation is the day on which “Cain killed Abel,” cf. Veselovskii 1876, p. 329). *The Story* was grounded on popular beliefs about Friday, both pagan and Christian. A short Greek text from the Byzantine period gives clear evidence for the replacement of the ancient notion about Friday with a Christian one—in the past, Friday was believed to be under the spell of Aphrodite, but according to the Christians it is now dedicated to Virgin Mary mourning her son.<sup>11</sup> In his *De correctione rusticorum* Martin of Braga (in the sixth century) anathematized women who observed Friday rituals at weddings, and considered this to be worship to the Devil:



“*Mulieres in tela sua Minervam nominare et Veneris diem in nuptias observare et quo in via exatur adtendere quid est aliud nisi cultura diaboli*” (Naldini 1986, p. 66). In the Balkan popular culture, Friday is marked with a number of taboos, and those who neglected them lived under the threat of loosing their sight (Megas 1975). Yet the emergence of *The Story about Twelve Fridays* depends more on the genuine Christian image of the Crucifixion day (Friday) in the New Testament. *The Story the about the Twelve Fridays* appeared in the Christian milieu to express the fatalistic view of Friday as the day of Christ’s Crucifixion, expanding it by analogy to the tragic events of Christian history. *The Story about the Twelve Fridays* was popular, not only in Byzantine and Latin literatures, but was also widespread in Western vernacular languages (Veselovskii 1876, pp. 326–27). The text was translated from Greek in the South Slavic milieu around the eleventh–twelfth centuries. Different versions are attested in more than forty copies from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries in all South Slavic literatures, and also in the Russian and Carpatho-Russian tradition (Porfiriev 1859, pp. 181–98; Tikhonravov 1863, pp. 335–36; Jagić 1868, pp. 119–21; Novakovich 1872, pp. 24–28; Tolstaia 1985, pp. 237–47; Angusheva 1997, pp. 513–19; Ryan 1999, pp. 301–302). The Twelve Fridays listed in the text of Josiph Bradati came from a Serbian version.<sup>12</sup>

Josiph Bradati was aware of the wide dispersion of this text in Slavic apocryphal manuscripts, used by priests who were literate but gullible and poorly versed in Christian norms (as the two mentioned in his fable). Josiph did know the *Indices of the Forbidden Books* in which *The Story about the Twelve Fridays* was anathematized, and he deliberately endorsed the stigma by an ironically retold narrative about the influence of witches and sorceresses. His story, a unique late medieval Bulgarian example of a text playing on another text, was designed to protect the Christians from dogmatic deviations. By listing the *Twelve Fridays* and the pagan magic (practiced by the two grandmothers) Josiph equated the two forms of digression, but made the witches responsible for both.

Why did Josiph transform the illiterate witches, who practiced primitive forms of magic, into founders of a heretic sect? The sway of the witches over the two priests reflected in a naive form the reality of eighteenth-century Bulgarian society. At the time of the Ottoman rule, the lack of powerful Christian institutions made the struggle against the pagan and apocryphal Christian beliefs extremely difficult, since these be-

liefs were supported by locally respected people who exercised supernatural powers (mainly female magicians). Thus, Josiph Bradati stigmatized the activities which remained—to use the words of H. Maguire—“outside of the regular channels of the Church” (Maguire 1995, p. 51). These two witches acted as diabolic instruments that corrupted the Church. The sermons against witches in Sam. Mns. Hist. Slavo 13, N324, N325, and N761, as well as this original story, restore the ancient image of the woman as a bearer of a low type of religiosity and superstitions in contrast to the pure and higher religious devotion of men (cf. Cicero, *On Divination*). The Christian Church introduced severe punishments for magical activities and superstitions,<sup>13</sup> but magic was treated with a certain suspicion even in late Antiquity (Benko 1985).

In the eighteenth-century Orthodox Balkan milieu, Josiph Bradati was not alone in anathematizing women who practiced magic. One of the most respected and productive continuers of the Christian patristic and ascetic tradition, St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain, composed a long treatise on the different types of magic, performed by women, in *On the types of Magic* (Nikodimos 1993). St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain (1749–1809) a highly educated man who, after studying in Smyrna, had been on the staff of the Metropolitan in his native town Naxos since 1770, and became a monk in the monastery of St. Dionysios at Mount Athos in 1775. Inspired by St. Makarios (1731–1805), a former Metropolitan of Corinth, and in close collaboration with him, St. Nikodimos compiled in 1777 at the Holy Mountain one of his major works, *Philokalia* (The Christian Love of Goodness). The work originally contained 1207 pages and was printed in Venice in 1792 (Kadloubovsky and Palmer 1951, 1954; Nikodimos and Makarios 1979). The treatise *On the Types of Magic* appeared at about the same time. *Philokalia* represented a broad collection of the works of early Christian ascetic fathers (such as Abba Dorotheos, Isaac of Syria, Abba Philemon, Philotheos of Sinai, et al.) and was translated three times into Russian. The first translation, in 1793, was completed by Paissij Velichkovsky. He was highly esteemed by St. Nikodimos, who wanted to meet him personally, but a severe sea storm thwarted the intended journey (Nikolov 1995, p. 7). The third translation was made by Theophan the Recluse in the nineteenth century and was considerably longer than the original (Kadloubovsky and Palmer 1954, p. 11). In contrast to the three Russian renditions of *Philokalia*, there is no trace of a

translation of Nikodimos' treatise on the magic in the Slavic milieu before the end of the nineteenth century.

At first glance, the sermons against the witches in the Slavic collections and *On the Types of Magic* by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain are textologically related. If one accepts the assumption of Bonyo Angelov that these sermons were compiled by Josiph Bradati, they could not be dated later than the end of 1750s, i.e., some decades before *On the Types of Magic* was composed. Although Slavic and Greek speaking monks worked together on Mount Athos, a direct influence of the sermons against witches on the St. Nikodimos' treatise should also be excluded, because none of the original passages of Josiph's texts appeared in Nikodimos' work. A thorough examination shows that the similarities that could be noted do not appear as a result of borrowing. The similar places in them originated from the common texts used in the compilation of the Greek and the Bulgarian work, i.e., Biblical texts (especially 1. *Kings*), the writings of John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, and other Church fathers on witchcraft, divination and the use of demonic powers.

The treatise of St. Nikodimos is a broad survey of the whole range of Orthodox Christian views of magic activities. It starts by describing thirteen types of magic, such as different kinds of divination, enchantment, spells (performed according to the author by wicked old women, Gypsies, and female drunkards), incantations of demons, cloud divination, amulets, dances with icons, astrology, and numerology.<sup>14</sup> The classification derives from medieval sources and Christian canons anathematizing magic. In a didactic mode, Nikodimos discusses why magic is prohibited for Christians, why those who practice wizardry denied Christ in their hearts, why magicians are not Christians, and why sometimes demons could heal or predict. All these problems were addressed many times by the Christian authorities in the medieval period, and especially by John Chrysostom. The last part of the treatise consists of a survey of the punishments envisaged by the Church and the imperial canons against the magicians.

Much more learned than Josiph Bradati's writings, Nikodimos' work contains fewer allusions to the contemporary magical practice. He mentions only the priests in Cyprus and Crete who wore their consecrated robes the wrong side out, lit tar candles and read from *Solomon magic* in order to provoke the death of the flocks of their enemies. He also listed some divinatory practices and pagan rituals which accompanied St. John

the Baptist's feast. Nikodimos condemned the practice of burning the bodies of the deceased, said to be *boukolakoi* (the souls of those who perished in violent death and could harm people). Different stories about *boukolakos vukolak*, or *vrkolak*, were still popular in the Balkans long after the period in question. Although St. Nikodimos stated that even pagans did not believe in this any more, the mentioning of *boukolakoi* possibly reflects a discussion taking place in the monastic communities at Mount Athos. There is, for instance, a service for expelling the *boukolakos* in a late Medieval Greek manuscript from the Great Lavra.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly to Joseph's sermons, the treatise of St. Nikodimos displays a wide picture of magic practices, but focuses mainly on stigmatizing witches who pretend to heal or divine, but who in fact evoke the demons and hand Christian souls to the Devil. Nikodimos was much in debt to early Christian tradition and John Chrysostom in particular, for the idea that divination was an act performed with the help of demons. In his *Sermon 29 on I Corinthians*, Chrysostom represented Pythia as sexually possessed by the demons that penetrated her organs and made her insane. John Chrysostom not only used Plato's concept of the diviner as "a mask" through which the god speaks, but also transformed Plutarch's account of a Pythia who did not keep her body pure of sexual activities and as a consequence became insane (Plutarch 1973, pp. 59–122 and 1993, pp. 13–56). In his treatise St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain restored this old myth already reshaped by early Christian Fathers in order to create a picture of the witch who exposed the parts of her body to the influence of the evil spirit when performing magic. Nikodimos quoted Chrysostom's depiction of Pythia (twice) and went on in presenting the act of magical healing as a similar form of contact with the demons. He regarded the whispers of the witch in the moment of curing as praying to the demons. According to him, she yawned during the enchantment to allow the evil spirit to reach her heart, and she breathed in order to pass the demonic energy from her body onto the patient. The disclosure of the mechanisms of magical healing makes the witch appear not just as a passive recipient, but also a transmitter of the evil powers.

St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain used spoken Greek and even translated the passages of the Church Fathers quoted in the text in attempt to make his work more acceptable and understandable to the larger lay public. In this, as well as in the common negativism towards witches and

magic activities, the sermons of Josiph Bradati and the treatise of Nikodimos are very much akin. Josiph and Nikodimos targeted their contemporaries, but articulated the questions through the patterns and images of the medieval tradition. Nikodimos used effective classical images of healers and diviners who obtain supernatural power through a body contact with demonic creatures. Even the new narrative about the two witches, Petka and Drusa, was based on old representations of witches, who defraud clerics. Furthermore, in contrast to many of the Western and Central European accounts, the witches represented by Josiph Bradati and St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain did not fly and never attended Sabbath.

The texts were traditional and repetitive as far as the content was concerned, but at the same time, they addressed problems of the eighteenth-century town and village Christian communities in the late Ottoman Empire. To a great extent, the terror-inspiring representation in these texts resembled the "terror of magic" in the early Christian epoch (Brown 1970, p. 19). There are many reasons for the flourishing of magic in the eighteenth-century Balkans. The situation then was reminiscent of the Late Antiquity with its political and social insecurity. Both Josiph and Nikodimos belonged to the monastic circles (Mount Athos and the Rila monastery) which experienced the changes in the Orthodox Christian society at the early stages of the national revivals in the Balkans. The clearly manifested attempts to use a language more understandable by the majority and to anthologize and summarize the Christian Patristic tradition showed the efforts of these monastic communities to exercise once again more powerful control over religious practices.

There were no traces of real persecution of magicians at that time in the Bulgarian or the Greek territories, partly because the legal institutions were in fact Turkish Ottoman and, partly because the pathos and experience of the Orthodox monastic communities, to which both writers belonged, were more those of nonviolent instructions and spiritual leadership. The two monks tried to cure through condemnation, not through real physical torture. Although the similarities between the writings of Nikodimos and of Josiph did not represent a direct influence of one of the text on the other, they revealed a common, deliberately cultivated tendency within the two monastic centers aimed at publicly stigmatizing the witches and the popular magic practices. Probably each of these two monasteries was aware of the efforts of the other: the Rila monastery kept very

close contacts with the Holy Mountains; monks from Mount Athos traveled to Rila, and *vice versa*. There was a constant exchange of books; in 1466 an agreement was reached to this effect between Rila monastery and St. Panteleimon (a Russian monastery at Mount Athos).

The fact that the stigmatizing of witches was a matter of organized propaganda coming from the monastic centers, rather than an effort of individual clerics, could be proven on the grounds of sources originating mainly in Southwestern Bulgaria (i.e., places closer to the Rila monastery, to Greek territories and Athos, respectively). There is a group of frescoes from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries known as “The visit to the witch” depicted usually on the southern exterior walls of the churches, the northern side being traditionally reserved for “Last Judgment.” On these frescoes, a woman (witch) surrounded by devils is depicted offering a bowl (supposedly with a curing potion) to a sick person. In some of the versions, a devil is depicted urinating into the bowl.<sup>16</sup> The earliest example dates from 1799. It is from the St. Luke’s church, one of the houses of worship belonging to the Rila monastery and situated within a walking distance of it. Other examples come from the main church of the Rila monastery (1844); from the monastic church “St. George” near the village of Gera, Blagoevgrad; and from the church dedicated to Virgin Mary in the town of Petrich (1871). The image of the witch and her visitors painted in contemporary costumes, alongside the traditional Biblical frescoes of the Orthodox Churches conveyed a powerful warning to all the believers. Another aspect of this organized propaganda was the dissemination of prints depicting the same deplorable scenes bound to arouse indignation and condemnation of witchcraft. The first Bulgarian print workshop that was established in the Rila monastery produced, in the nineteenth century, prints with the same iconography.

To conclude: these texts and images undoubtedly mirrored an outlook, connected mainly with the monastic centers but targeting the contemporary religious practices in the Orthodox lay communities. In comparison to the Central European cases, and especially Hungarian seventeenth and eighteenth century *táltos* trials (Klaniczay 1990, p. 141), the appearance of the treatises against witches in the eighteenth century Orthodox South European milieu should not be regarded as anachronistic. They reflected the formation of a new and more rigorous type of Christianity among Greeks and Bulgarians. Although the propaganda against witches did not

lead to any trials, the sermons and the treatises against them created a new mythology of the dangers that the witches and sorceresses could bring to Christian society.

### Notes

- 1 According to a story published in *Sbornik za Narodni Umotvoreniia Nauka i Knizhnina*, vol. 1 in 1828, Turkish *zaptiehs* caught and arrested a witch, naked in a field, when she was practicing magic, stealing the crop. It is not clear whether they tried to punish her because she was practicing magic, or because she was undressed.
- 2 I am grateful to the staff of the Slavo-Byzantine Studies Center "Acad.Iv. Dujchev," Sofia, for the opportunity to work *de visu* with the manuscript.
- 3 The presumption that Josiph was an abbot of the Rila monastery at about 1784 is unsubstantiated (Grasheva 1982, p. 369).
- 4 Hereafter all quotations are from N324, National Library Sofia, ff123v–126r.
- 5 Days in the winter rural calendar of the southern Slavs connected with taboos aimed at keeping wolves away from the cattle (Marinov 1984).
- 6 *Rusalii* is a feast of the popular calendar associated with healing rituals that take place on Pentecost. It was first attested in the early medieval Slavic sources composed, according to Ch. E. Gribble, in tenth-century Bulgaria: Gribble 1989, pp. 41–46.
- 7 There was a sixteenth-century Russian heretical sect that worshiped St. Paraskeve (Friday) and St. Anastasia and forbade manual work on Wednesdays and Fridays. It is mentioned in the legal code *Stoglav* (Nicol'skij 1988, 45). Josiph might have known about it through some of the Russian books from the Rila Monastery library. However, the "heroes" of his story and the feasts mentioned in it point undoubtedly to the Balkan Slavic popular culture.
- 8 Here Josiph Bradati probably associated the name of the witch with St. Paraskeve (Petka/Piatnica in the Slavic version), who replaced the pagan female deity believed to "govern" Friday and was widely celebrated in the Orthodox Christian world as a saint protector of women and of the eyes. In one of his sermons, Josiph severely criticized women who believed they could be struck with blindness were they to spin on Fridays. On the substitution of the pagan deity with Paraskeve: Ivanov and Toporov, 1982, 1983.
- 9 Edition of similar Greek medieval texts in A. Delatte 1927 and 1932.
- 10 Only in Russia the story was spread in the oral tradition as well. The texts were used as amulets in the Russian and in South Slavic milieu. Cf. Ryan 1999, pp. 301–302.
- 11 The text is edited in *Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum*, vol. 4, p. 98.
- 12 The closest version is from manuscript IIIa.10, Tumanski Zbornik, the sixteenth century, f.35r–35v, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (HAZU), Zagreb.

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- 13 *Collectio canonum*, p. 488, especially can.329.
- 14 All these magic practices are widely attested in the medieval sources. Cf. Thorndike 1923; Storms 1948; King 1975; Flint 1991; Kieckhefer 1992.
- 15 The text is edited and commented on by L. Delatte 1957.
- 16 On a more 'realistic' note, the compiler of the new conclusion to Damascene the Studite's *Sermon on the Publican and the Pharisee* asserts that those who use the potion provided by the witch, in fact give to their ill relatives "human urine to drink" (cf. the text in Petkanova 1990, p. 329).



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# CHILD WITCHES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WITCHES' SABBATH: THE SWEDISH BLÅKULLA STORY<sup>1</sup>

PER SÖRLIN

The great Swedish witch trials took place in the years 1668–1676. They began in the province of Dalarna and subsequently spread over large areas of northern Sweden. During these years, some 250 people were executed on charges of witchcraft, making pacts with Satan, and the supernatural abduction of children.<sup>2</sup> This last element—the witches' alleged habit of taking innocent children with them to the witches' Sabbath—gave the trials their special character.<sup>3</sup> An important part of the judicial examination centered on the children's role as informers and witnesses—they were, after all, the main source of information. However, the effect the children went beyond the courts' handling of the cases. Bengt Ankarloo has appositely characterized *Blåkulla*—the mythical site of the witches' Sabbath in Sweden—and the activities which took place there as bizarre and contradictory (Ankarloo 1971, p. 223). Good and evil, light and darkness, pleasant and unpleasant elements jostle for space in a world full of irrational and absurd activities. My ambition in what follows will be to discuss these characteristics in the *Blåkulla* story. As will be evident, the children's testimonies reinforced these elements and brought them into focus.

After the first outbreak of witchcraft in the province of Dalarna in 1668, field marshal Carl Gustav Wrangel commented during a sitting of the council of the realm that “the more one looks into this matter, the worse it will probably get, as has been my experience in Pomerania” (*Blåkullefärderna*, III, p. 44). It is tempting also to apply this comment to attempts to understand beliefs of the type represented by the *Blåkulla* story. The story's complexity offers many angles of approach: historical, structural, symbolical, comparative, etc., and it is difficult to construct an overall picture. In my view, complex phenomena, such as the *Blåkulla*

story resist simple explanatory models and a research design ought to be broad enough to accommodate complementary analyses. In this particular context, however, I shall restrict myself to work within a situation and event-orientated perspective. The trials themselves will be regarded as a structuring process and the beliefs as a kind of implement arranged to fit the situation. As will be evident, the local clergy, officialdom, and peasantry (not least the latter) dealt with the children's reports of the Blåkulla journeys in a very concrete fashion. Claude Lévi-Strauss has made some pertinent observations based on a contemporary witchcraft case from Brazil, which I believe, say a lot about the Blåkulla trials as well. A boy stands accused of maleficent witchcraft and is interrogated by the tribe; a curious process ensues with the boy giving new versions of his magical abilities each time he is caught lying. He augments his story by carrying out magical rituals in public and even produces material "evidence" of his magical skill. The incredulous spectators are increasingly fascinated and absorbed by the story but also the boy becomes completely engrossed in his new role. Finally, when it is established beyond doubt that the magical system really exists, the final reaction is not one of triumph over the truth being revealed but rather a kind of consternation that such a thing could be possible: "The judges do not expect the accused to challenge their theory [...] Rather, they require him to validate a system of which they possess only a fragment; he must reconstruct it as a whole in an appropriate way." (Lévi-Strauss 1979, p. 29f).

The concept of rationality is important for parts of the analysis. Yet it is not my intention to "save" the thinking that enabled the Blåkulla story to be accepted in an intellectually defensible way, but rather to problematize this and other approaches by illustrating the difficulties which after all arose when these beliefs were to be realized and show what consequences this in turn had for the shaping of the Blåkulla story. A further important concept, which is also crucial to our interpretation of the mechanisms shaping the story, is the expression "introverted witchcraft." I shall end by contrasting Blåkulla with its Basque counterpart, the *Aquelarre*, where children also played a prominent role.<sup>4</sup> As will be made evident, the Basque Sabbath exhibits some distinct differences with respect to the Swedish one, in spite of all the children. With respect to the construction of the witches' Sabbath, the phenomenon of child witches prompts both a discussion of belief and of the ability of the popular mind to combine and create cultural images.

### *The Coherence and Correspondence of the Blåkulla Story*

Stuart Clark has analyzed the demonological literature of the early modern period, an appropriate starting-point for our analysis (Clark 1997, pp. 3–147, see also 1980, pp. 98–127). Even though we nowadays brand this literature as incomprehensible and irrational, a body of literature, which successfully propounded its arguments for a couple of hundred years, cannot be regarded as an intellectual mistake. Clark's theoretical point of departure is that all discourse presupposes a set of common understandings whereby various concepts and their rules of use in argument are part of convention. By establishing the forms in which such a discourse might be conducted in order to be meaningful, one eliminates anachronistic approaches. Moreover, the criteria we use today for the concept of rationality would be suspended, or would at any rate be of no interest. Rationality is instead judged according to whether the phenomenon under study, e.g., the witches' Sabbath, followed the linguistic conventions which applied and were consistent with the prevailing "worldview."

What forms of expression, then, did the demonologists have to work with? The witches' Sabbath shared its inverted manner with the forms taken by, for example, charivaris, carnivals, and certain types of drama. For all these events to have any validity, an act of understanding and recognition was required. Most fundamental to the validity of inversion was the prevailing conception of the world's essential nature. Existence was constructed according to a principle of contraries, in pairs of opposites, each a prerequisite for the other. This thinking was part of an inherited cosmology with its roots in Greek philosophy, which was later cemented by the tendency to dualism furnished by Christianity. In the final analysis then, the constitution of reality was decided by God. This way of regarding the world was reinforced during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by a predilection for fixed, antithetical forms of argument and expression. Thus the science of the period not only had as its object a contrarily constructed world to be described, but it also based its illustrations and arguments on the same principle. Moreover, early modern Europe was obsessed with the continuing and constantly escalating struggle between good and evil. Millenarian and apocalyptic ideas flourished in the same environment that fueled the notion of the witches' Sabbath.

All this together made it completely logical to presuppose an antithesis to ordered society in the form of a sect led by Satan. It is possible to say that such a sect was necessary so that ordered society could take up its rightful place in the universe. The inverted forms in which the Sabbath motifs were articulated followed in turn a common linguistic convention, which itself, like an antithesis, reflected the contrary structure of existence. Seen in this way the witches' Sabbath does not appear as irrational but as the logical product of a way of conceptualizing reality. To have any meaning and to be understood it could not have any other form than what in our sense is an absurd one. The success of demonological literature as a whole was dependent on each individual element in the Sabbath being inverted in comparison with normal, accepted behavior. "Establishing in exact detail what occurred at a witches' Sabbath looks initially like arid pedantry, intellectual voyeurism, or, when linked with torture, a kind of sadism. But it can also be construed as a logically necessary way of validating each corresponding contrary aspect of the orthodox world" (Clark 1997, p. 141). In this context, it was less important that inversion led to a suspension of the laws of nature when the demonologists described the back-to-front manner of the Sabbath. This in itself was an inversion and it was entirely fitting that the witches should be able to do impossible things. With this approach, the absurd form of the witches' Sabbath is immediately demystified. If we are, in addition to this content, to regard internal coherence as a criterion of rationality, all the unnatural features of the stereotype can easily be disregarded. Since this was no problem for the learned writers, it would be the mark of an anachronistic outlook to go deeper into this matter.

Nonetheless, with regard to the question of rationality, I believe that the Blåkulla story cannot be completely understood with coherence alone as a criterion. During the Blåkulla trials there arose doubts and problems concerning the accounts of the witches' Sabbath, which suggest that an analysis of the structure of demonological literature cannot simply be carried over to a concrete set of events and particular trials. We will return to the seventeenth century and examine the way in which people dealt with the Blåkulla story.

In response to the hair-raising testimonies, which emerged during interrogation of the children, countermeasures were of course taken. The authorities fought with such weapons as were available to them. Chancel-

lor Magnus Gabriel de la Gardie saw two solutions: "1st to pray to God, 2nd to let the Magistracy do its office" (*Blåkullefärderna*, III, p. 39). Out in the country, parents in their turn tried to prevent their children from being taken to Blåkulla. They visited those rumored to be witches to persuade them to stop abducting children. Angry scenes with threats and violence took place (Ankarloo 1971, p. 312f). The clergy were also made to say protective blessings on the children so that the witches would not gain power over them. Bedtime prayers were repeated as never before. The protective name of Jesus was written on slips of paper or directly on to the children's bodies.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes measures like these seemed to help, but only for a night or so. Besides the more spiritual protective measures, physical methods were also used. The children were put to bed with their parents, who sometimes had them tied to themselves. A chaplain put a seal on the rope in order to be sure it was not undone by the tricks of Satan's followers.<sup>6</sup> Parents often sat and watched over their children while they slept.

In the so-called waking-sessions, children were kept awake with constant prayer and hymn singing. Reputed practitioners of witchcraft were sometimes forced to participate in these sessions.<sup>7</sup> On one occasion, a horse which the children claimed that they were in the habit of riding to Blåkulla was also present.<sup>8</sup> The supervision of children was not always successful. In the morning when parents asked their children about the events of the night, they often turned out to have been abducted in spite of the safety precautions. Beliefs about the witches' ability to replace children with animals and objects, as well as the capacity of metamorphosis and invisibility, become comprehensible in this context.

In terms of their function, these beliefs did not differ from the improvised lies and tricks the children made use of to preserve the credibility of their accounts. Under questioning the children endeavored to satisfy the court and they also exerted powerful group pressure on each other. If anyone showed signs of hesitating and wanting to back out, he or she was immediately branded as suspect by the others.<sup>9</sup> In that case, the child in question was an adept and had begun to abduct others. In order to circumvent detailed questions about the order in which they sat on the animals, how many there were of them and how many times they had ridden during the previous night, the children resorted to a series of evasions. The children had been blindfolded, had been abducted while sleeping, had had their memories taken from them or had ridden so often that it was



impossible to remember (Ankarloo 1971, pp. 250ff). "Otherwise all the children testified that when they are being abducted and are on the way they cannot always see each other, or recognize each other, until they have arrived at Blåkulla."<sup>10</sup> If they were found to be contradicting themselves they could always as a last resort say that Satan had persuaded them to lie.

On the occasions when the children were unwilling to point out someone directly, the same kind of prevarications were used. In such cases the witch was in disguise, had turned her back to the witness or had been sitting behind the children on the journey.<sup>11</sup> Sometimes certain clues were given as a partial concession to the pressing questions. For instance some children knew the name of the person who abducted them, but they were not quite sure of her identity.<sup>12</sup> The children of the town of Gävle were at first reluctant to denounce minister's wife Katarina Bure, who was rather hesitantly described by means of details of her clothing.<sup>13</sup> If the children had been abducted for quite a long time before they confessed, there also arose a problem to which a solution must be found, namely why they did not immediately tell of their journeys to Blåkulla. In such cases they have been threatened so that they did not dare tell, or been deceived, or else the witch has stopped them every time they wanted to reveal everything.<sup>14</sup>

Everything that could possibly be verified from outside became an object of interest. The children had to produce the gifts and horns for carrying ointment that they had been given at Blåkulla—everything had, however, been turned into rubbish. This appeared to many to be a sign, that the children had been blinded by Satan.<sup>15</sup> Sometimes it was also claimed by the children, that the objects had been reclaimed by the witches, or else that they had quite simply been lost. The animals that served during journeys to Blåkulla were examined with the same keen interest. Sometimes they turned out to have been damaged after these rides. Human beings too complained about their condition. Mayor Falck of Gävle—the minister's wife Bure, mentioned above, was the reputed rider—claimed that he was "all sore in his body and much more tired when he is about to rise than when he goes to bed."<sup>16</sup> Children often made use of genuine illnesses and deaths among animals and people, which gave their statements greater weight. So it was, too, with injuries from maltreatment at Blåkulla, which occasionally left visible traces. If they had been maltreated without any visible marks being left it was because Satan healed them.<sup>17</sup>

In his study of the witch trials in New England, John P. Demos has pointed out that out-and-out disorders in perception were among the reaction patterns of people in the environment of witchcraft (Demos 1982). But in the Blåkulla cases it was unusual for anyone outside the circle of abducted and accused to claim to have witnessed obviously preposterous things. In Ångermanland, however, an invisible witch had intruded on a wedding feast “and taken away the food from the table, *herr* Erich, the chaplain, testified that the food quite vanished before their very eyes and became thin air.”<sup>18</sup> It is possible that the chaplain was among the guests, but the wording does not exclude the possibility that he was only reporting a rumor.

On the other hand, strange occurrences and signs were common. A girl who slept with her parents had mysteriously changed places and lay in another bed in the morning, in the company of a soldier and a farmhand. According to the girl, the witch had put her in the wrong bed on their return from Blåkulla. Another girl suffered from a severe fit—“as if she had had epilepsy”—and when she recovered consciousness was “in a wretched condition, grey and wet in the eyes.” A four-year-old at play spoke the following ominous words to her doll: “Confess, confess.” When her parents wondered why she said this, the daughter replied: “The white birds say so away yonder where we often go.”<sup>19</sup> Persons in authority too had strange experiences. The minister of Älvdalen, where the first witchcraft cases were heard in 1668, was the victim of attempted assaults on the part of the witches. One night he had been sorely tormented and heard scratching sounds on the window shutters: “yet had not been able to discover anyone there, but those who were there confessed that they had been sent there by Satan” (*Blåkullefärderna*, III, p. 61f).

Various experiments to investigate the state of affairs took place. The results of these were often ambiguous. The provincial governor Duwall in Dalarna became more and more skeptical towards the witchcraft issue and tried to find objective methods of dealing with it: “So I came upon this method, that I had the woman weighed, saying that if they could fly in the air so easily, they could not possibly have the same weight as other people.” The woman weighed only a quarter of her expected weight, and she also confessed to her visits to Blåkulla (*Blåkullefärderna*, I, p. 68). Since witches were believed to steal milk by magic from their neighbors’ cows, “milk tests” were set up in which children and adults were to show their

skills. Failures were explained away by saying that they had lost their ability since confessing.<sup>20</sup> Other experiments took place in which the hair of children or the accused was set alight to establish whether it was they themselves or something else that had taken their place in bed.<sup>21</sup> On one occasion, a lock of a girl's hair was cut off. Comparison the following day revealed that the lock had a different shade from the girl's real hair (Bidner 1981, p. 16).

The ambition that existed to verify and find methods of achieving more definite knowledge also finds expression in the use of so-called "wise boys" (Sw *visgossar*) or "clairvoyant children" (Sw *synebarn*). In retrospect this group, who identified witches in return for pay, strikes us as a particularly cynical feature of the witchcraft investigations. It was not, however, a shortage of children endowed with second sight (such were to be found in every parish) that caused the clergy and parish administration to send for these in order to discover witches. If anything, in fact, it was logical to have that detail dealt with by strangers, who could, unaffected by local opinion, separate the chaff from the wheat. In practice, it did not work that way. Bribes and blackmail flourished in these circumstances. The use of *visgossar* was condemned by the authorities and the local clergy was subjected to criticism (Ankarloo 1971, pp. 307ff). It seems, however, that confidence in them was strong. In the province of Medelpad, one of these was caught contradicting himself, but instead of losing faith in the method, a new boy was brought in.<sup>22</sup> A man in the same province who had been rumored to belong to the witches even produced a written certificate stating that this was not true—the evidence was written out by the clairvoyant children of Ljusdal in the adjoining province of Hälsingland.<sup>23</sup>

What has been described in the previous pages may be considered a kind of rationality as expressed in action. It is clear that practical and intellectual problems arose in the attempts to tie together the Blåkulla story with human beings of flesh and blood. Beliefs relating to the witches' various activities—since they were considered factual—were in principle verifiable. And that in fact is the way the Blåkulla story has been treated. Nobody however laid very much stress on activities at Blåkulla, which after all was out of reach. On the other hand, everything that came into contact with worldly life was subject to verification, experiment, and supervision. Thus what we can observe in the trial records is a collision between genuinely held beliefs and different methods of acquiring explicit information.

As it turned out, however, the stereotype was equipped to deal with this confrontation. The children clearly did not want to be exposed as liars, and they therefore protected the Blåkulla story as well as they could from being proved false. They excelled in improvised lies to evade awkward questions. By referring to genuine facts, for example illnesses and deaths among animals and people, they gave a more trustworthy impression. Moreover, certain things could be explained on the basis of the beliefs themselves. Children who lied were excluded from the investigation on the grounds that Satan was trying to thwart the work. Those who were reluctant to continue their confessions were fully trained witches and were therefore regarded as unreliable. The way in which gifts and ointment-horns turned into rubbish confirmed Satan's deceitful nature and ability to distort people's perceptions. Inability to steal milk on demand was logical, since the pact had been broken by confession. Nevertheless, the most important thing the Blåkulla story had to offer in the way of defense against close examination concerned beliefs on how children were fetched. The exchange of children for animals or objects, the ability to change shape, invisibility and shrinking of their natural bodily size explained how children could disappear, or the witch make her way in unnoticed, and finally how there could be room for so many of them on the riding-animals. The power of flight also belongs in principle to this category of beliefs. All these things, which brought the Blåkulla story into contact with earthly and thus verifiable reality, were of course not new inventions created during the great witchcraft trials. They were things long associated with witches, or if not, they made up part of the general arsenal of ideas in popular mythology.

If, however, the witch trials are seen from the perspective of those actively involved, these beliefs appear not to have been brought to the fore, simply because this had to happen according to an already existing stereotyped story. They rather appear as intellectual implements with the function of binding together the Sabbath motifs—the central element of the stereotype—with “reality.” After all the courts were not investigating something that already belonged to the past, the abduction of children went on uninterrupted throughout the hearings, causing those around to try in all possible ways to examine and check the children's statements. It would, in other words, be possible in this respect to maintain that the Blåkulla story contains primary and secondary beliefs. The latter are in

their function reminiscent of the phenomenon observed by the anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard, namely that the people had methods which enabled them to disregard anomalies and contradictions which might threaten their fundamental beliefs about witchcraft (Evans-Pritchard 1980, pp. 201ff. et passim).

To the extent that demonological literature was based on material from actual trials, it is necessary to modify Clark's coherence criterion for rationality. Considering the beliefs simply as a collection of ideas it is perhaps enough to establish that they were coherent with the dualistic conception of the world. But as far as the witches' Sabbath is concerned, it is not just a question of ideas but also of a model touching on real situations. Parts of the beliefs about the visits to Blåkulla were also intended to overcome problems that arose when the story as a whole was to be realized. The story had to correspond to reality and it therefore contains features that were intended to keep its validity intact in the face of objective situations and checks. In a concrete situation, then, the criterion of coherence has to go hand in hand with the criterion of correspondence in order for the stereotype to be capable of rational comprehension.

The fact that the stereotype in its applied form in witch trials had to be rationally defensible both in relation to the prevailing conception of the world and in relation to "reality" means that the absurdity of the Blåkulla story has two sources. We have seen with Clark that its back-to-front manner and its unnatural features followed a convention in which inversion was a valid means of expression. To this we may now also add that the elements which were accessible to direct verification necessarily—paradoxical though it may seem—had to be absurd for the stereotype as a whole to retain its validity in confrontation with reality. Both the criteria for rationality relate to the mindset of the period, but the latter was determined by the situation and took a roundabout route via an effort to attain empirical confirmation.

### *Contrasts in the Blåkulla Story*

We have illustrated the question of the Blåkulla story's absurdity and established that this was related to the requirements dictated by rationality, those of coherence and correspondence. We will now go on to discuss the

contrasts in the Blåkulla story. What is meant here is not the contrasts between inverted elements and those which have been projected directly on to Blåkulla. For instance, everyday activities, chiefly household work, were usually carried out in a normal way. It is possible that these were not as symbolically charged as religious ritual or sexual activities. Instead, our interest will focus on the contrasts between the positive and negative features of Blåkulla. In discussing the story's rationality, it was stressed that consideration must be given to the requirements of correspondence. The same applies here too: we will continue to treat the beliefs as "necessities."

Witchcraft hearings were usually a matter between the court and the accused when it came to securing a confession. Accounts of contact with Satan were not easy to extract. As a rule, they demanded physical or psychological force. In the Swedish Blåkulla cases, on the other hand, there was an army of child witnesses, who could give well-informed descriptions of everything that happened at the witches' Sabbath. It is consequently from these underage participants, who as victims had the least to lose by their own confessions, that the greater part of the information about Blåkulla emanates. The children too were subjected to pressure. Torture was known to occur in court, but above all the confessions seem to have been secured by means of persuasion, bribes, and beatings from anxious relatives (on the subject of torture, see Ankarloo 1971, pp. 256 ff).

The children did not simply make up stories in court. The gruelingly tedious records of interrogation bear witness to standardized, often ready-formulated questions. What seem to be spontaneous and consistent accounts are in fact the result of highly detailed questioning (Ankarloo 1971, pp. 249 ff). The courts set the rules of the game. The children were in a dilemma. As we have seen, they sought to make their evidence credible. For the most part this was not difficult, since there were as a rule few questions, formulated in a standardized way. On the other hand, the children's willingness to cooperate meant that they could not avoid arriving at Blåkulla and participating in sin. This fact has contributed to certain of the curious contrasts in the stereotype, the children of course wanted to minimize their own responsibility. Malcolm Ruel, in a perceptive paper addressing self-confessed witchcraft and making use of the concept "introverted witch," has expressed what no doubt characterized the situation: "If the witch is the 'other' person, one can be content with a simple representation of his moral character; but such a simple stereotype is no longer

appropriate to any self-conscious inquiry about one's own implication in potentially evil actions" (Ruel 1970, p. 335). Through the court's questions, the children could not help getting involved, and some, perhaps in their imaginations, abandoned themselves to all sorts of forbidden fruit—in the state of relative nonresponsibility they found themselves in—but in the end, they all wanted to show that they had returned to God.

In the summary interrogations, this aspiration on the children's part can only be glimpsed. Fortunately, however, we have available the highly detailed interrogation of Gertrud Svendsdotter—the girl who first raised the issue of witchcraft in Dalarna. The girl did not go with her tutor in witchcraft, Marit Joensdotter, to conjure up Satan but to see a handsome man, whom she thought she would meet in church. Mised and deceived, the girl is then fetched by Marit, who dresses her, carries her, and places her on the heifer for the very first trip to Blåkulla. This immobility is repeated on other occasions. She does not herself take the sandwich that Satan gives her, but it is handed over via Marit, who also holds out Gertrud's arm when she is to shake hands with Satan. At Blåkulla the girl is led by the hand through the doorway. Marit also stands in front of Gertrud and holds the girl's arm, so that she is marked on the finger without knowing what is happening. Gertrud lets Marit answer when Satan on two occasions asks if Gertrud wishes to be his servant. This passivity is of course not a matter of chance. The pact with Satan was an act of free will and Gertrud has been given the opportunity to circumvent this. Gertrud nevertheless finally became a fully-fledged witch as a result of the court's persistent questioning. This leads to a paradoxical situation. It might be thought that the girl would resist Satan with all her might and that the court would do all it could to force him on the girl. But this is not the case when the girl, as a fully-fledged witch, has begun to ride herself. The court then wants to achieve independent visits to Blåkulla and wishes to play down Satan's role, whereas Gertrud needs him with her in order to minimize her own responsibility, thus illustrating a mechanism through which demonizing processes did not need to be initiated or at least completed by the elite.<sup>24</sup>

If we then leave Gertrud and turn to the more fragmentary interrogations, which became more and more common in the face of the enormous accumulation of child witnesses, this tendency to minimize responsibility nevertheless remains. The children always state that they have been pas-

sive when fetched. If the witch on occasion speaks to them, they are always deceived. They are never asked, "Do you want to go to Blåkulla?" but rather, "Do you want to go to a wedding?" or "Do you want to go to a feast?" (*Blåkullefärderna*, III, p. 55). The familiars the children have had allocated to them sometimes turn out to be a liability to their owners. Instead of bringing back food and milk as intended, these beings help themselves out of the children's own dishes.<sup>25</sup> Blåkulla is represented as seductively beautiful by some children in order to show that they have been tricked: "All confess the same, that Blåkulla is situated in a lovely meadow, and is beautiful and finely decorated," states the Reverend Skragge in Mora (*Blåkullefärderna*, III, p. 57). While conjuring up this picture, however, they are interrogated on the activities of the fully-fledged witches. Thus Blåkulla can be a beautiful place at the same time as the witches gorge themselves, fight, dance backwards, and fornicate under the table in the banqueting hall. This contrasting effect is reinforced when Blåkulla definitively takes on its character of darkness, after the children have confessed. The children were then punished for their talkativeness with violent blows. They were made to run the gauntlet and executions were arranged, after which Satan brought them back to life and restored their health again. Satan and the demon-consorts showed their true, terrible nature. The fine presents were transformed into worthless rubbish. Blåkulla becomes a veritable hell. The children are shown the agonies of the damned in hell, whose strangled voices are heard from the boiling cauldrons.

Fortunately the angels stood at the ready when the horror was at its worst. The children were rescued and brought to the Angels' Room where they escaped their torments, and sometimes they were taken back home again by these beings. In this environment the children sang divine hymns and said their prayers in a correct, god-fearing way. Nevertheless, the representatives of the forces of goodness were not an unambiguous group. Instead of angels, mention was sometimes made of "the white man." On a couple of occasions black angels also occur. The parish minister of Rättvik, Gustav Elvius, reported that the children there were protected by white birds, lambs, and children. It also happened that children were allowed to meet God, Jesus—who looked like a lad of fifteen—and deceased relatives.<sup>26</sup>

Lawyers often suspected the reports about the angels. It seemed strange that they kept the children from eating, but not from having sex-



ual intercourse with the demons (Ankarloo 1971, p. 223). Certain aspects of the angels' appearance were also suspect. They were dressed in "linen clothes, short jackets and tight short trousers, others have long white mass-gowns, white bonnets trimmed with black," but they also had "claws on their feet, hairy knees, on their hands too there are claws."<sup>27</sup> According to the lawyer Håkan Häggbom, who participated in the witchcraft commission in Hälsingland 1673, such attributes as these last indicated that this phenomenon was a parallel to the shape-changing tricks, which Satan practiced in order to seduce the ignorant, disguised as a good angel.<sup>28</sup>

A painful Blåkulla is the condition, which must be established both by the children and the court. It is a logical terminus. The children must be seen as victims in the end, at the same time as they receive their well-deserved punishment. In this way the court could be sure that the children had seen through Satan's deceptions and that the necessary preconditions existed for saving the children's souls. Under the terms of a doctrine of individual salvation, it was important for the children to show clearly that they had understood their sinfulness, and a dark Blåkulla guaranteed this insight. Thus the victory of official Christianity was always finally confirmed, as is made clear in a case like the following, in which a girl

burst out into bitter tears both over her own madness and for joy that she had come back to a knowledge of the true God, begging the minister to give her yet more instruction. The minister stated that he could in no way doubt the genuineness of her conversion, since she is said to have given full proof of it by frequent weeping and other such signs.<sup>29</sup>

A moment of triumph.

On one important point, however, the children's desire to arrange ideas about witchcraft for their own ends collided with the court's. The children persisted in giving "incorrect" accounts of the angels. Although the angels were out of place at the Sabbath, the children needed them for protection and needed the Angels' Room as a sanctuary. But in addition to this, the angels were used in a way that was unacceptable to the authorities. The official explanation of the outbreak of witchcraft was that Satan with God's permission "for the sins of the country and in these the last times of this world has been let loose more than ever before."<sup>30</sup> It was the duty of the

Christian authorities to do all in their power to avert God's anger in order to avoid further visitations. Satan was to suffer a setback, the witches to suffer their well-deserved punishment and the children to be saved—through the efforts of the authorities.

The children's version was different. They were not taken to Blåkulla to be saved but to save. They stated that they had been told by the angels to unmask the witches. The children were abducted in large numbers

so that they might be the stronger to testify against the old ones who go to Blåkulla. And God had therefore permitted small infants to be brought there, so that the god-fearing might inquire into such things with so much greater zeal and faithfully commend their children to God. And inasmuch as the authorities failed to investigate these things and to ensure subsequent punishment for them, a great hunger and starvation would arise in the country. And that there still remained a little time for repentance, after which Satan would be defeated and never rise again.<sup>31</sup>

In a manner typical of the period, events are set in an eschatological perspective.<sup>32</sup> But what interests us here is the fact that the angels were necessary to justify to the children themselves, their abduction to Blåkulla. Such a thought was suspect from the authorities' point of view not only because angels were not expected to figure at a witches' Sabbath. To accept the children's accounts on this point would also have meant that the court should carry out its investigation on the children's terms, which was quite unthinkable. It would have meant a further inversion, this time that of the ordered society, in a situation where the court's purpose was precisely to oppose the threat from a chaotic anti-world.

The introduction of the angels was nevertheless not a drastic step. We must ask ourselves what kind of place Blåkulla actually was. Bishop Jesper Svedberg (1653–1735), Emanuel Swedenborg's father, mentions in his memoirs a dream vision he had at the age of thirteen—that is, in 1666. It seemed to him that he was in “a certain high place, which was wide and splendid.” There were “two large houses or dwellings” and between them something like a little corridor or porch. On the inside of the porch were two doors, one to each dwelling. A large number of people were there and all of them walked into the porch, where the son of God stood and sepa-

rated them. The blessed, to whom Svedberg belonged, were allowed in the right-hand door and into “the splendid room or dwelling [...] which was high and very long, likewise light and brightly shining.” The others, however, Christ sent through the left-hand door to the west. After He had separated the souls and each had been given its allotted place, He took Svedberg by the hand to show him the scene in the left-hand room. There was a “foul darkness and quite a hideous tumult. The ugly devils and the damned danced there in a ring [...] kicking their feet up to their backs.” There was also a horrendous round pit in which a fire burned, and the damned tried in vain to get up out of the hole, but were pushed back “down into the abyss with pitiful shrieks and terrible whining.” In the left-hand room there was a pulpit, in which a black man wearing a slouch hat stood and held a blasphemous sermon. Having seen this wretched place, Svedberg was led back into the right-hand room where “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Sebaoth” was sung.<sup>33</sup>

The environment in Svedberg’s dream vision seems familiar. The left-hand room is Blåkulla as it is when the children have confessed and its proper nature emerges. The right-hand room, like the Angels’ Room, is bright and shining white and filled with harmonious people, who spend their time praising the Lord. It is in this milieu that we have seen how the children met not only the angels but also God, Jesus, and their own deceased relatives. In actual fact Blåkulla seems, together with the Angels’ Room, to be the place to which the souls of the dead migrate. An account from this period mentions, not without irony, that people who have been dead for several years are to be seen both in the white chamber and in the cauldron in the banqueting hall of Blåkulla; “so that it is now definitely considered that both *locus purgatorii* and *infernii* have been found, which all *curiosi* might wish to see.”<sup>34</sup> It is thus possible that the abduction of children to Blåkulla is an equivalent to the guiding of the souls of the dead. At the executions in Gävle, the children claimed that white birds came and fetched the witches who had confessed, whereas those who had gone to their deaths staunchly denying their guilt were fetched by black birds. They also later reported that the headless bodies of the unrepentant were in the usual manner set up as candlesticks at Blåkulla.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the children knew what they were doing when they introduced the angels into the story. It was simply a matter of bringing out the right-hand side of Blåkulla.

We do not know if this was a permanent feature of the popular image of Blåkulla, if the witches' Sabbath took place so to speak next door to God's angels. Nor do we know whether the Sabbath was always localized in purgatory or in hell. But the witches often said when commanding their riding-animals, "To hell!" On the other hand, it was logical for the angels to be incorporated in the story when the dark and hellish Blåkulla emerged; the state of darkness we have found that it was necessary to establish, partly so that the children should finally be regarded as maltreated and tormented victims, and partly so that it should be clear to those around that the children had seen through Satan's deceitful trick of making Blåkulla a beautiful place.

The authorities, on the other hand, found it hard to accept the angels. Nor did they accept that the children—as spokesmen for the angels—should by unmasking witches and then appear as the ones who saved everybody else in the world. Carlo Ginzburg has shown how an old fertility cult in the Italian province of Friuli, practiced exclusively while dreaming or possibly in a state of trance, disintegrated step by step when the Inquisition began to take an interest in this phenomenon (Ginzburg 1983). There is a similarity in principle between the situation the *benandanti* were in and that of the Swedish children. Both groups wished to be regarded as antagonists of the witches. The *benandanti* strove to retain their older status as such. In contrast to them the Swedish children hardly express any similar intact and living dream cult. They became involved in a full-fledged diabolical stereotype to which they did not belong. In this situation they strove to achieve the position which the *benandanti* defended. The *benandanti* considered that they fought on God's side against the witches. The Swedish children were drawn into a situation in which they too were to unmask witches and they wanted to do it by the command of God—as far as Sweden is concerned it is therefore perhaps possible to talk both of a diabolization of the initially deceptive Blåkulla environment and at the same time of a Christianization of it. What is clear is that the children's involvement in the Sabbath story gave it unexpected aspects which were not so appealing to the authorities. For just as it was unthinkable for the Inquisition to accept a dream cult whose practitioners fought for God, it was equally unthinkable for the authorities in Sweden to allow the children to develop into *benandanti*.

### *Blåkulla in Comparison*

With the Italian example we have introduced a comparative perspective to the analysis. Let us proceed in that direction, but this time by allowing the comparison to encompass witch trials involving children. There are great similarities between the witch hunts in the Spanish Basque country (1609–14) and northern Sweden (1668–76). In both places, something like a “dream epidemic” took place, with thousands of children claiming that they had been abducted to the witches’ Sabbath, often as a result of “waking sessions” where adults, priests, and parents kept an eye on the children. The Basque and Swedish descriptions of the Sabbath also show a great deal of similarities, sometimes in an astonishing detail.

The similarities between the two areas naturally offer a number of interesting questions; not the least of which, a fascinating idea, that some kind of a link may emerge between them. With respect to the Sabbath, however, there were also differences, which we shall consider in what follows.<sup>36</sup> Up until now, the line of argument has suggested that the child witnesses, who were the main sources of information, have brought into focus and reinforced two mechanisms which were at work at the trials, namely the requirement of correspondence and the effort to minimize the witnesses’ own responsibility. Taking as a point of departure the Basque situation—which involved children to a very large degree—the differences in the table accordingly require discussion.

Internally, the Sabbath stories contain elements which support each other in a cognitive sense—albeit in a bizarre way—so that for example the copulating in Blåkulla could explain where the ingredients for the witches’ ointment came from, namely from the resulting monstrosities. However, whereas such elements could be identical in the respective Sabbath stories, they might possibly be linked internally in different ways. Conversely, the stories contain divergent elements, which might perform the same function, so that the differences may only be apparent. This line of thinking, which prompts us to think of the formalistic analysis of Vladimir Propp, may be extended in principle to include elements which are not elaborated at all (Propp 1968, *passim*). For example, one of the differences between the Sabbath accounts is the relative lack of details concerning the abduction and journey stages in the Basque version. The

witches' *maleficium*, on the other hand, is exhaustively described (at least in the initial, pacesetting trials; the subsequent Sabbath descriptions are less specific on that point). In Sweden, by contrast, these elements coincide: the witches' "riding" on animals and humans is the *maleficium*, and other types of maleficent witchcraft are quite incidental to the story.

Table 1

Sabbath accounts in Northern Sweden (1668–76)  
and the Spanish Basque country (1609–14).

Aspect/Element	Sweden	Spain
Points of time	Holidays and Thursdays	Yearly general assembly, holidays and Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays
Substitute at home and at Sabbath	Objects, animals, and "little people"	Mention of "demons" in report
Flight, flying on	Objects, animals, people	Fly without assistance
Witches' ointment, made by	Monstrosities begot in Blåkulla	Excrement from familiars
Journey	Pass by forests and lakes, sometimes the Trondheim cathedral, traveling towards the northwest	<i>Not much elaborated</i>
Sabbath location	Blåkulla, painted building with several stories, mythical geography	Aquelarre, outdoors, nearby
Food	Ample and often good	Cannibalism
Dance	Yes	Yes
Sex	Yes, including bestiality	Yes, including homosexuality
Housework	Yes	<i>Not elaborated</i>
Pact	Yes, stigma, egalitarian	Yes, stigma, devout homage
Christian practices desecrated	Yes	Yes
Organization	Yes, hierarchical, geographic	Yes, hierarchical, geographic
Internal fighting	Yes	<i>Not elaborated</i>
Familiars	<i>Bårer</i> , "little people"	Dressed toads
Gifts	Clothing etc., wield magic powers (familiars)	No, wield magic powers (familiars)
Maleficium	<i>Not much elaborated</i> (stealing food from the storage houses)	Yes, including the killing of infants
Sabbath is transformed	Hell, Angel's Room	<i>Not elaborated</i>
Good helpers	Angels, man in white, a white ram, etc.	Virgin Mary

The relative lack of details concerning the abduction and journey stages in the Basque Sabbath story is crucial. The method of abduction, it was claimed, involved witches casting a deep sleep over the entire household, including the intended victims. Indeed this seems to have been the usual mode of operation.<sup>37</sup> This “sleeping-syndrome” with its slumbering Sabbath travelers would seem to have left the reports short on specificities; this would also seem to be the case throughout the entire chain of events. While it is clear that witches generally flew to the Sabbath, the witnesses in Sweden described in detail what they flew on whereas the Basque sources are usually silent on this point—unless of course such silence is to be assumed as confirming that witches traveled through the air under their own steam, so to speak. Witches could fly thanks to a special salve or ointment. According to the Swedish stories, the people, animals, or objects that served for the rides were rubbed with this salve. Significantly perhaps, the Basque witches were said to rub it on themselves instead. When the witches finally took off, the children in Sweden gave fairly detailed descriptions of the journey. Blåkulla lay to the northwest, and the witches called out something like, “Now head north and down to hell” when they set off. The counterpart expressions of the Basque witches did not contain this spatial element: “I am a devil, from now on I shall be one with the Devil.” Moreover, except for a yearly “general assembly,” the Basque Sabbath took place in the immediate neighborhood. For this reason alone, the scarcity of information about the journey would seem logical, although we should not forget the effect of the “sleeping-syndrome:” the abducted first awoke upon arrival at the site of the festivities, from which point on their accounts began.

Gustav Henningsen suggested that a real dream epidemic among the afflicted children eventually became the principal mover in the Basque trials—we are, in other words, faced with a fascinating psychological phenomenon connected to these trials (Henningsen 1980, p. 390). Those abducted by the Basque witches claimed they were in a state of sleep. The children’s stereotypical dreams about the Sabbath were in turn the result of an intensive religious propaganda in combination with waking-sessions, where every effort was made to keep the children awake so that the witches could not take them to the Sabbath. Perhaps the Sabbath dreams centered around the Sabbath itself, leaving the other details sketchy. It is probable that the preaching and church propaganda dwelt on the more spectacular features of the witch stereotype. Interestingly enough, the

Swedish accounts of the Blåkulla journeys also became less detailed as the trials spread. Unless this development is to be ascribed to the courts that, faced with crowds of child witnesses, increasingly standardized their inquiries, the idea of a dream epidemic also springs easily to mind. Certain objections do however present themselves before the thesis of stereotypical dreams. In both the Basque region and Sweden, the reports eventually lost all sense of proportion: there were journeys to the Sabbath all hours of the day and night, and children and sometimes adults claimed that they left from the church or even from the ongoing hearings. Some testimonies—I am speaking now of Sweden—differed from the majority of very lucid reports by being vague and dim, just as if a minority were expressing real dream experiences. On the other hand, according to Henningsen, stereotypical dreams of this kind are characterized precisely by their lucidity and richness of detail.<sup>38</sup>

We have so far not paid any attention to the underlying beliefs in each area of persecution. The Swedish witches would seem to have at least some in common with fairies. It is also a known fact that shamanistic elements infused traditional religion in the north countries. The prominent role played by the journey in Sweden is thus not surprising, one could argue; indeed I could dwell on this and other correlations for some time, noting for example that internecine fighting occurred between the witches at Blåkulla—described by a boy as “tournaments with shooting”<sup>39</sup>—which could be compared to the battles of shamans. On one occasion, a full-scale battle erupted, with witches equipped with baking paddles fighting each other.<sup>40</sup> I have, however, argued that the Swedish children were hardly dreaming or acting from a state of trance but rather constructed, so to speak, the Sabbath story as a result of a demand for rationality or correspondence, which means that they “made use of” various elements of belief, some of which might be interpreted as “shamanistic,” in their interaction with the adult world and the courts. I am, however, uncertain as to the exact relation between these conceptions and the Sabbath. There is always the possibility that beliefs could be assembled which otherwise lacked connections of a more sustainable kind. Thus systems appeared which could be *ad hoc* constructed on the spot (cf. our previous discussion on primary and secondary beliefs).

The divergences between the Sabbath accounts tentatively discussed so far, may, to some extent, derive from the source material, which is avail-



able. In Sweden, there are thousands of pages of records from both the lower courts and the witchcraft commissions active during the years of the witchcraft trials. The description of the Basque Sabbath stems primarily from an account written during the initial phase of the witch hunt by the three inquisitors involved in the proceedings, namely Salazar, Valle, and Becerra.<sup>41</sup> The inquisition's report from the initial hearings provides a hair-raising description of the witches' activities. It is however just that—a report—representing, to use the inquisitors' own words, a summary of “the most important details to have emerged from the confessions” (Henningson 1997, p. 7; 2004, p. 112). It moreover rests on the confessions of adults, *not children*.<sup>42</sup> For unlike the Swedish trials, where the children were involved from the very beginning, the Spanish Basque ones started as “adult trials.” The concept of child witches does however apply here, since in the confessions, the adults place their apostasy from God in their childhood. This prime example of the effort to minimize personal responsibility has its equivalent in the confessions, which have the pact occurring later in life in a state of despondency and hardship. The former implies how the phenomenon of child witches became more common—namely through “ordinary” witch trials, although popular beliefs may of course have helped by providing the idea that witchcraft was present in certain families, with the older members initiating the younger ones. As regards the Basque country, witch trials involving children had taken place earlier and there were probably certain expectations regarding such occurrences in both the local and the central spheres (Idoate 1978).

In addition, the reports of *maleficium* came at the early stage of the outbreak, when it was still a local—and adult—matter. It would seem that this element of traditional witchcraft played a less important role when the abduction of the children began. However, this is not the only point in which a convergence between the Basque and the Swedish accounts may be discerned. There was probably also a growing interest in the details surrounding the abductions and the journeys connected with the children's participation in the Sabbath, which is why information of this kind became increasingly common; the story became more “shamanistic,” if you will.<sup>43</sup> A rapprochement between the Sabbath accounts is also noticeable with respect to their internal contrasts. In Sweden, one can discern a transition between a first, relatively bright stage in the Sabbath stories to a far more dismal one. This is true partly in a chronological sense; as the

years passed, the testimony at the trials became increasingly stereotyped and dark. But it is also true with respect to the individual stories, which comprise both these features. It is my impression that the witches' Sabbath was depicted in somewhat darker terms in the Basque country, and in a chronological sense, the occasionally more benign features that do appear would seem to do so at a later stage in the course of events—that is, when children became involved. The very distinctive part of the Blåkulla story regarding the angels, for instance, is not without a Basque equivalent, in which the children were claiming that the Virgin Mary herself was attending the Sabbath in order to protect the children (Henningsen 1997, p. 86; 2004, p. 288).

I have tried to demonstrate how the child witnesses in Sweden, who were the main sources of information, have brought into focus and reinforced two mechanisms which were at work at the trials, namely the requirement of correspondence and the effort to minimize the witnesses' own responsibility. The differences appearing with respect to the Basque accounts of the Sabbath—which at first sight seem to challenge this line of reasoning—are fairly logical once it is shown that (somewhat paradoxically) the voices of few if any children were actually heard.<sup>44</sup> Generally speaking, the children played an increasingly important role during the final stages of the trials for witchcraft in Europe (see for example Behringer 1989, p. 32). In Sweden this also meant that the Sabbath was free to combine with a broader set of popular beliefs. In other respects, the Swedish Blåkulla trials comprised just the beginning of a period stretching far into the 1700s, where popular culture showed up in the trial records in a wholly new way and with greater prominence.

### Notes

- 1 Preliminary versions of some of the studies presented here have been published elsewhere: Per Sörlin, "The Blåkulla Story" (1997, pp. 131–152), idem, "Djävulens barn" (2000, pp. 43–65). This paper is based on church historian Emanuel Linderholm's collection of transcriptions, which is deposited in the university library of Uppsala. The collection of transcriptions originated at the beginning of the 1900s and includes a very large body of unprinted material covering Sweden during the years of the great witchcraft trials. With respect to the Spanish Basque country, my comparative study is based partly on Gustav Henningsen's meticulous description of the witches' Sabbath in *The Witches' Advocate* (1980, pp. 69–94), and partly on

idem, *The Salazar Documents* (Ms 1997, published in 2004). I would like to thank Gustav Henningsen, who has kindly let me look at the manuscript before it was published.

- 2 The great witch trials are exhaustively described in Ankarloo 1971.
- 3 In the Appeal Court of Götaland—and there is no reason to believe that matters were substantially different in the Svealand Appeal Court's jurisdiction on this point—trials on issues of maleficent witchcraft and above all superstition were much more common. Parallel with the Blåkulla cases in northern Sweden, extensive witchcraft trials also took place in the province of Bohuslän in the southwest, but these did not include child abduction. Towards the end of the seventeenth century and during the eighteenth century, Sabbath cases including abduction of children began to occur. With rare exceptions the courts handled these with great caution: Sörlin 1999, pp. 27–41.
- 4 According to Robin Briggs, there is a lack of comparative studies regarding the witches' Sabbath in 1996, p. 38.
- 5 Bidner 1981, p. 12; Linderholm's collection 85, C 84: Torsåker, October–November 1674, p. 16. In circumstances other than the inflamed atmosphere that prevailed in connection with the Blåkulla trials, some of these measures might very well have been regarded and even punished as a kind of magic or superstition: Sörlin 1999, *passim*.
- 6 Linderholm's collection 86, C 85: Lövånger, September 1676.
- 7 Linderholm's collection 86, C 85: The so-called excess of tobacco-inspector Rokman, Umeå, September–October 1676.
- 8 Linderholm's collection 82, C 76: The papers of Rev Gustav Elvius of Rättvik, p. 36.
- 9 See for example Linderholm's collection 83, C 78: Järvsö, July 1673, p. 13.
- 10 Linderholm's collection 84, C 80: The witchcraft commission in Gävle, 1675, p. 472.
- 11 For different views on the phenomenon of masked witches: Pócs 1999, pp. 39 ff.; Clark 1997, pp. 19 ff.
- 12 Linderholm's collection 82, C 76: The papers of Rev Gustav Elvius of Rättvik, p. 76.
- 13 Linderholm's collection 84, C 80: The witchcraft commission in Gävle, 1675, *passim*.
- 14 Such statements occurred in almost every hearing, for instance Linderholm's collection 84, C 80: The witchcraft commission in Gävle, 1675, pp. 409, 430, 531.
- 15 Linderholm's collection 82, C 75: Statement of the consistory of Stockholm, thirteenth March 1676, p. 53.
- 16 Linderholm's collection 84, C 80: The witchcraft commission in Gävle, 1675, p. 403.
- 17 For example Linderholm's collection 86, C 86: District court of Oland in Österlövsta, seventh August 1675, pp. 370 ff.
- 18 Linderholm's collection 85, C 84: Boteå, January 1675, p. 100.
- 19 Linderholm's collection 82, C 76: The papers of Rev Gustav Elvius of Rättvik, pp. 25, 148, 234.

- 20 Linderholm's collection 84, C 80: Gävle, thirtieth March 1675.
- 21 Linderholm's collection 83, C 78: Tuna-Idenor, January 1674, p. 229.
- 22 Linderholm's collection 85, C 83: Stöde, May 1674, p. 578.
- 23 Linderholm's collection 85, C 83: Borgsjö, November 1673, pp. 492 r f.
- 24 Linderholm's collection 82, C 76: Älvdalen, September 1668, pp. 7 r, 11 v ff. Cf also the discussion on "popular demonization" in Liliequist 1992, pp. 131 ff.
- 25 Linderholm's collection 85, C 83: Stöde, May 1674, pp. 578 ff.
- 26 Linderholm's collection 84, C 80: The witchcraft commission in Gävle, 1675, p. 515; Linderholm's collection 82, C 76: The papers of Rev Gustav Elvius of Rättvik, pp. 71 ff.
- 27 Linderholm's collection 83, C 79: On the white angels at Blåkulla.
- 28 Linderholm's collection 83, C 78: The witchcraft commission in Hälsingland, 1673, written report by Håkan Haggbom.
- 29 Linderholm's collection 82, C 76: Älvdalen, September 1668, p. 23 r.
- 30 Linderholm's collection 82, C 75: Cathedral chapter of Uppsala's statement on the question of witchcraft, November 1675, p. 32.
- 31 Linderholm's collection 82, C 76: Älvdalen, September 1668, p. 30 r.
- 32 A closely related phenomenon in Sweden would be the ecstatic religious movements of the 1700s, which were common, precisely in the northern parts of the country; Bondesson 1997, pp. 75–108. Jan-Inge Wall has pointed out that as late as the middle-1800s, in connection with a religious revival in the province of Dalarna, children once again began testifying that they had been abducted to Blåkulla, only now referred to as *Josefsdal*. Wall has also pointed to the similarity between a presumed exogenous conception of the Sabbath and older, endogenous, Christian visionary narratives from the Middle Ages, in which people found themselves suddenly carried off to a faraway world; Wall 1987, pp. 99–120; 1989, pp. 11–43.
- 33 Linderholm's collection 82, C 76: Appendix 1 a: The memoirs of Jesper Svedberg.
- 34 Linderholm's collection 83, C 79: On the white angels at Blåkulla.
- 35 Linderholm's collection 84, C 80: The witchcraft commission in Gävle, 1675, p. 550.
- 36 Ideally, examples from Germany would have been included in our discussion where—unlike in the Basque country and Sweden—children were executed for witchcraft; see for example Behringer 1989, pp. 31–47.
- 37 Henningsen 1980, p. 164. In Sweden this was a very uncommon method, even if it did occur on occasion.
- 38 Henningsen 1980, p. 390. Rickard L. Sjöberg's study of testimonies given by hundreds of children in Rättvik 1670–71, of whom only a small percentage stated that their experiences took place in dreams, should not invalidate it, since the stereotyped dreams were, as we have seen, characterized by a large measure of realism: Sjöberg 1995, pp. 1039–1051.
- 39 Linderholm's collection 84, C 80: The witchcraft commission in Gävle, 1675, p. 462.
- 40 Linderholm's collection 82, C 76: Älvdalen, September 1668, p. 7 v. See also Lagerlöf-Génétay 1990; Tegler 1997, pp. 47–72.

- 41 It is this account which underlies Gustav Henningsen's comprehensive exposition of the defendants' confessions in *The Witches' Advocate* (1980).
- 42 It is thus highly unlikely that we are gaining any insight into the Basque "children's" conceptions of the Sabbath; rather it is a matter of grotesque adult fantasies. Cf. Monter 1993, p. 388.
- 43 As evidently occurred during Salazar's stay in the afflicted areas; Henningsen 1980, p. 315. It should however be noted that even during the latter stage of the witch hunt very few children crop up in the sources.
- 44 Monter views the lack of source material in Spain as a consequence of a skeptical attitude (1993, p. 386).

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PART II

**LEGAL MECHANISMS  
AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS**





# RIVER ORDEAL—TRIAL BY WATER— SWIMMING OF WITCHES: PROCEDURES OF ORDEAL IN WITCH TRIALS

PÉTER TÓTH G.

Around the year 1710, “the time of revolutions past,” in village of Tiszakeszi (Borsod County, Hungary)

the nobleman András Molnár, together with some companions, had taken goodwife Dorkó Boda with force out of the house of the late Péter Kovács. They tied her and took her to the Tisza River, where they dipped and swam her as they pleased. The aforementioned woman was then taken out of the Tisza and, with her hands tied behind her back, she was dragged to the yard of András Molnár’s house in Keszi, where a pole had been driven into the ground beforehand. She was tied to the pole and scourged and beaten severely. Subsequently, András Molnár had straw and chaff piled up under her feet and she was burnt alive at the stake.

The witness accounts also reveal that the local magistrate András Molnár had Dorkó, the woman charged with witchcraft, seized from a funeral ceremony, where she was mourning near the corpse (Bessenyei 1997, p. 171).

The trial of András Molnár, who was eventually found guilty of arbitrary measures, provides an exemplary case for the study of early modern Hungarian legal customs and, more specifically, of punishment rites related to witchcraft persecution. The description of the case includes elements that can be shown to bear on the general practice of trial by water in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Hungary: 1) arbitrary measures that trigger such procedures; 2) the period, i.e., the times of Prince Ferenc Rákóczi’s insurrection against the Habsburgs during which administrative

and legal institutions ceased to function and thus provided ground for spontaneous action; 3) the place, i.e., the southeastern regions of Upper Hungary, where the swimming of witches took place most frequently; 4) the course of the procedure as official witch-identification and punishment; and 5) the “circumstances” which caused an increase in the number of trials by water, official or spontaneous, individual or public. The case I cited above was by no means unique: the first two decades of the eighteenth century were one of those periods in European history when the urge for witchcraft persecution emerged with renewed strength, mostly in the rural and market-town communities of Eastern and Central Europe, and all this in spite of the fact that in Western Europe this urge for the persecution of witches had, for the most part, subsided. Yet, even contemporary Western sources contain dozens of witch-swimming cases.<sup>1</sup> In my study I will explore how this archaic procedure relates to contemporary legal practice and what its meaning could have been for the participants.

In order to have a better understanding of the phenomenon, it is advisable to briefly reconsider classic studies on the history of religion that explicitly deal with this kind of legal ritual (Franz 1909; Leitmaier 1953; Müller-Bergström 1930–31; Nottarp 1956; Sabbatucci 1986). These texts often mention Mesopotamian river ordeals and the liturgical trial by water in medieval ordeals as antecedents of, or phenomena akin to, the swimming of witches. I will start with a survey of these procedures. Scholarly literature places these three phenomena in the category of ordeals. This categorization is, however, somewhat problematic since in this way other kinds of ordeals (duels, trials by fire, trials by repast, etc.) would have to be described in similar terms and the emphasis on similarities might conceal obvious differences. Thus, my aim will be to reflect on possible differences as well as on glaring similarities.

### *The River Ordeal*

Trial by water as an ordeal procedure was first recorded in Mesopotamian societies. The best-known textual source from this period is the Code of Hammurabi, now kept in the Louvre in Paris.<sup>2</sup> The procedure called *river ordeal* (*Flussordal*, *l'ordalie par le fleuve*) differed from trial by water as practiced in early modern witchcraft persecution in that the

persons going through the ordeal were considered innocent if they were not swept away, while they were held to be guilty if they drowned. This type of ordeal was probably widely-known in the ancient world and was by no means unique in the Old-Babylonian Empire. The legal customs of Hammurabi's era can be traced back to Sumerian traditions: river ordeals are mentioned in legal texts as early as the period of King Sharukkin I (c. 2371–c. 2316 BC)<sup>3</sup> or the third dynasty of Ur (c. 2100–c. 2000 BC).<sup>4</sup> From our sources it seems that river ordeals occurred most frequently in the Acadian period, but the practice probably remained widespread in later times as well. River ordeals are mentioned in the sources of Indo-European peoples as well as Semites. They appear in the legal texts of the Hittites in Asia Minor from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries BC,<sup>5</sup> and in the legal texts found in the archives of the Elamite Empire in Susa from the thirteenth century.<sup>6</sup> In addition, river ordeals are also mentioned in old and new Assyrian documents (eighth and seventh centuries BC)<sup>7</sup> and literary texts from the time of the New-Babylonian king, Nabú-kudurri-usur (605–562 BC).<sup>8</sup>

In a word, the legal procedure of river ordeals had been present in Mesopotamian societies for two thousand years, even though centuries, during which no mention of the practice is made, separate the documents. The ordeal was used mostly in those cases where the charges were quite serious (adultery, murder), or for charges that could not have been proved otherwise (lechery, malign spells).<sup>9</sup> Albeit less frequently, river ordeals were also resorted to in civil conflicts and property debates. This was especially characteristic of the Acadian period in the second millennium BC (Liebermann 1969–70). It is certain, however, that they were applied only in cases involving “common people,” but were never used against members of the literate elite. The relative scarcity and the centennial gaps of written sources may also be attributed to the unwillingness of the literate elite to record a custom practiced by the common people.<sup>10</sup>

According to Dario Sabbatucci, there are two types of judicial ordeals. In the first, the ordeal is a legal proceeding conducted by the investigating judge or the judicial personnel, while in the second it is in itself a punishment, a sentence imposed on the accused. The first type includes the procedures by which the guilty are singled out from a group of persons suspected of some crime. Here the function of the ordeal is to separate the guilty from the innocent. In the second type the suspect is judged as an

individual, i.e., the function of the ordeal is to find out whether the defendant is guilty or innocent. In his classification, Sabbatucci puts river ordeal into the second category, arguing that this procedure was applied as punishment and only against individuals. An important difference is that in the first type the lives of the suspects were not in danger, while in the second one they were seriously endangered. The most common procedure of the latter type was the poison ordeal: if the suspects were guilty, they died after taking the poison, while they were deemed to be innocent if they vomited. The case of river ordeals was similar: if the victims sank, it was probably related to their crimes, while their survival of the procedures ensured their acquittal. Thus, this procedure was the "trial of life and death." Statistics show that river ordeals (and ordeals in general) were used as a means of proving the accused guilty, or simply as punishment (Sabbatucci 1986, pp. 92–97).

It still remains a question precisely why river ordeals were used as punishment: for malign spells and lechery, or as evidence that the suspects were guilty. In Mesopotamian societies the scene of the ordeals could be a church, a sacred mountain near the town, or the bank of one of the several canals and rivers in the Middle East. Géza Komoróczy discussed the question why the river played such a significant role in the vocation of Biblical prophets. He was primarily interested in the Babylonian Canal, its religious status, and its being the scene of "theophany." Komoróczy eventually comes to the conclusion that the river (canal) as the scene of cleansing ceremonies, ritual baths, or ritual cleansing, had been a significant place for both exiled Hebrews and autochthonous peoples (Komoróczy 1993). But what does a procedure from the second millennium BC have to do with the practice of the swimming of witches, characteristic of early modern witchcraft persecution? Russel Zguta claims that, in spite of the lack of direct evidence, certain relations may be posited between the Mesopotamian Semitic river ordeals and the swimming of witches practiced much later by the Eastern Slavs. Zguta proposes the nomadic Scythians of the steppes and the Caucasian peoples as possible transmitters of the practice. Though this remains a hypothesis, it could be argued that the swimming of witches and magicians could be considered a Indo-European legal custom (Zguta 1977, pp. 221, 225). However, it is even more important to recognize the similarities between the Biblical and the Eastern European examples.

Let me therefore return to the Biblical tradition. There are only a few *loci* in the Bible, which mention ordeal-like procedures.<sup>11</sup> The ordeal performed by Prophet Elijah on Mount Carmel, described in the First Book of Kings seems to be of utmost importance.<sup>12</sup> According to Nicholas Tromp, this narrative may have two readings: the procedure can be either interpreted as a “decision ceremony” or as an “ancient rainmaking rite.” Comparing the story with other texts, Tromp concludes that the process is essentially related to legal practices for preventing drought. Owing to the climatic and economic characteristics of the region, these practices were very important and widespread in the Middle East.<sup>13</sup> The interpretation suggesting that behind the procedure there may be a rainmaking ritual, can bring us closer to the understanding of the Mesopotamian river ordeal and the European swimming of witches. Although in the Biblical text, the victims, from the point of view of Judaism, are not magicians but pagan priests and references to river ordeal-like procedures do not play a central role in the story, the text still calls our attention to the parallels hidden in the procedure, i.e., the ordeal on the mountain considered to be a sacred place, the killing of the prophets of Baal (which also signifies their being guilty), and the role of the river in the ordeal.

Summarizing the data concerning the Mesopotamian river ordeals, we may conclude the following points: 1) the procedure had been present in the legal customs of the Mesopotamian people for almost two thousand years, i.e., it was a living custom that could be related to all ancient civilizations of the Middle East; 2) starting from the cultures of the Semite peoples in the Middle East, the procedure later became a generally practiced legal custom among the Indo-Europeans; 3) the water trial was used mostly in cases in which it was difficult to prove the charges (magic spells, adultery); 4) the water trial was in most cases intended as punishment, i.e., there was no possibility of the suspect’s exonerating him or herself; 5) the defendant was not chosen from among members of a group but was judged as an individual; 6) the trial was a trial of life and death, since the victim’s death proved his guilt; 7) the trial is akin to certain rainmaking procedures that were of great significance in the cultures of the Mesopotamian peoples; 8) from the evidence we may conjecture that the procedure was applied in cases that involved the common people.

### *Liturgical Trial by Water*

In contrast to Greek and Roman times, medieval sources provide an ample store of evidence on ordeals. According to Dario Sabbatucci, these procedures differed from their ancient parallels in that they were regarded as God's judgment, i.e., these procedures went beyond legal/judicial concerns. It is from this point that we may call these procedures—with Sabbatucci—ordeals. Sabbatucci points out that it was the first time in history that ordeals and techniques of divination were used together. Medieval European ordeals had several elements which reinforced the religious aspect of the procedure: the prayer to God which helped the identification of criminals, the participation of priests in the official rite, and the fact that rites were performed in a church or near a saint's shrine.

The articles from Hammurabi's Code reflect the legal practice of Mesopotamian cultures conforming to the general legal customs of ancient oriental societies. Medieval sources, on the other hand, are permeated by Roman law. As regards ordeals, however, several historians of religion and law have come to the conclusion that it was not Roman law and Christian liturgy that adopted German customs, but it happened the other way round. The *Lex Visigothorum*, the *Lex Burgundiorum*, and the *Lex Salica* are mentioned as sources in which ordeals are remnants of pagan German laws in a Christian liturgical guise (Müller-Bergström 1930–31; Leitmaier 1953 pp. 115–23; Nottarp 1956, p. 103; McNamara 1986, pp. 293–326).

The validity of this hypothesis (accepted by scholars like Müller-Bergström, Leitmaier, Nottarp, etc.) has nevertheless been challenged by Robert Bartlett from various perspectives. The majority of German researchers (and, under their influence, scholars of several other nations) talk about the Germanization of Christian liturgy. But, according to Bartlett, ordeals were equally organic parts of the liturgical activity of the medieval church as a whole, and they were also practiced by non-Germanic peoples. Consequently, the claim that ordeals are the remnants of pagan German religion, or of any other pagan religion, is an exaggeration. On the basis of Bartlett's investigations the history of medieval ordeals may be divided into three major phases (Bartlett 1986, pp. 153–66). The first phase is the prehistory of ordeals, to the sixth and the eighth centuries.

From between 500 and 800 AD, mostly Irish, Salian and Ripuarian Frank, Visigothic and Lombard legal sources mention ordeals, i.e., trials by hot iron or hot water, and cauldron-trials (Bartlett 1986, pp. 4–12). Subsequently, ordeals became extremely widespread in the period between the ninth and the twelfth centuries. This era started with the reign of Charlemagne, and came to an end due to the influence of the religious and ecclesiastical reform movements of the twelfth century. The ordeals from this period differ from their earlier parallels in three respects: several types of ordeals came into existence; ordeals appeared in regions where they had not been recorded before; and they were positioned within a new judicial environment in the nascent Christian kingdoms. In the twelfth century, however, one may observe a rising stream of criticism: clerics urging ecclesiastical reforms and intellectuals promoting the refinement of secular legal practice began to attack the institution of ordeals. With the rationalist influence of the nascent scholastic philosophy, theologians started to differentiate between the natural and the supernatural world more strictly than ever before, and, within the supernatural world, they distinguished the spheres of the miraculous and the sacramental. If the contact with the supernatural was of a spontaneous character, the phenomenon was regarded as miraculous, while contacts mediated by church liturgy were considered rather sacramental (Bartlett 1986, p. 87). Precisely because of this, ordeals and trials by water had been ranked among sacramental liturgical activities up to the twelfth century, when criticism first emerged. Many religious authors for example, considered trial by water to have been virtually of the same value as Christian sacraments. In their interpretation, the ritual is the parallel of baptism. After the ban on ordeals by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, and their subsequent disappearance in the thirteenth century, the tradition of the liturgical trial by water survived in two forms. On the one hand, it was preserved to a certain degree in the baptismal customs of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a kind of life and death test of the newborn, when the body was submersed into the baptismal water, which could also reveal whether the child was fit for life or not. On the other hand, the ordeal survived in the swimming of witches. Like other medieval church practices, rituals and hagiographic beliefs, theories and ideas that became “demonical” from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the liturgical trial by water was transformed into the swimming of witches and the procedure for the persecution of heretics



became an effective method of identifying witches. In the swimming of witches, the proof of the suspect's guilt was the weightlessness of her body, since weightlessness was seen as a sign that her body was possessed by some demonic force or the devil itself. The belief in the weightlessness of witches is undoubtedly related to the beliefs connected to the *mara/mahr/mora* beings, the presumable predecessors of witches (Pócs 1999). However, theories related to the swimming of witches and to trials by water are probably not connected with the beliefs in spirits. Instead, it is the body here that becomes weightless due to its being possessed by demons or the Devil.<sup>14</sup> Instead of spirit beliefs, here the possession of the body serves as a primary explanation for the presumed effectiveness of trials by water, and this notion in turn can probably be traced back to the traditions of baptism and liturgical trial by water.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, however, the efficacy of ordeals was often disputed and the various ordeal procedures were criticized by clerics as "tempting Providence." Expanding urban culture, the reform of judicial procedures, and the fact that Roman law procedures were gaining ground eventually made the institution unnecessary. The desacralization and the gradual loss of importance of the ordeals were, therefore, the result of a bi-directional process. The growing importance of secular courts made the church's mediation in the judicial matters unnecessary, while the church's withdrawal from the judicial matters made the execution of ordeals impossible (Bartlett 1986, pp. 13–34). In the third phase of the history of ordeals, from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, this practice was repressed and eventually disappeared, to be rediscovered by the intellectuals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in a completely new judicial, cultural, and social environment. It was the period in which, owing to the witchcraft persecutions, descriptions of ordeals, torture, and trial by water reappeared in the early modern legal documents (Bartlett 1986, pp. 34–102, 127–52).

The number of sources about trial by water increases from the ninth century on (Müller-Bergström 1930–31, p. 1028; Franz 1909, p. 378). The laws promulgated in 829, the year of the second division of the Carolingian Empire, already mention trial by water. Besides the practice of trial by water, the imperial decrees based upon the tenets of the Council of Paris mention the necessity of punishing those guilty of witchcraft and magic, but no causal relation between the two incidents should be assumed

(Franz 1909, p. 355). It is a fact, however, that Hincmar, Bishop of Rheims, writes about the liturgy of trial by water, as an organic part of religious rites.<sup>15</sup> Hincmar (c. 806–882) was educated in the monastery of St. Denis and his master was Abbot Hilduin whom Hincmar followed even to his exile to Corvey in 830. He returned home only when Charles the Bald ascended the throne and Hincmar became Bishop of Rheims in 845. He took part in the debate about predestination and the Holy Communion, and persuaded Lothar II to reunite with his wife, Theutberga. In relation to this, he discussed divorce, adultery, and malign spells but did not relate these matters to trial by water (Müller-Bergström 1930–31, p. 1028). A ninth-century fragment of the regulation (*ordo*) of Montpellier also mentions trial by water. This text makes clear that the procedure has some sort of relation to baptism. The text of the benediction read at the execution of the trial shows that the defendant's floating on the surface of the baptismal water was taken as a sign of guilt, while sinking down, i.e., that the baptismal water accepted him/her, indicated innocence.<sup>16</sup>

These ceremonies could have been performed on two scenes. One of them was the church, and within the church, the baptismal font.<sup>17</sup> Another scene could be the bank of a nearby river.<sup>18</sup> The river, as contemporary sources attest, symbolized the Jordan, since before liturgical trials by water, the river had been consecrated. The procedure of medieval ordeals was generally the same everywhere, unlike the concrete act of the trial.<sup>19</sup> After the preparation of the trial (fasting, confession, and time spent within the church), the priest accosted the suspect during the mass. After the dramatized conversation, the priest consecrated the place and the water used for the trial. Following this there came the litany and the preparation of the objects necessary for the trial (victuals and sacred bread). In certain cases, the ceremony was accompanied by the ritual of the driving out of demons and the sprinkling of baptismal water. The procedure, the execution of the ordeal, and the declaration of its results started after the defendant took Communion (Leitmaier 1953, p. 38).

Thus, liturgical trial by water had a significant role in church practices as well. This is also proven by the fact that the trial was often used in the case of suspected heresy. It was, however, in most cases the general public and not the various institutions that demanded resorting to this practice. A Soissons case of 1114 is a fine example of how the attitudes towards ordeals were divided. An enraged mob of true believers tried several per-

sons, suspected of heresy, by water, while the council of the bishops was still discussing the judgment (Bartlett 1986, p. 23). When one compares trial by water to other types of ordeals, it becomes clear that in the former case, the reaction of the mob was violent, whereas in the case of trials by hot iron, for example, the people present remained calm until the judgment was passed. Considering this, one may reach a better understanding of the cruelty and abuse of power in the sixteenth to eighteenth-century practice of the swimming of witches. Liturgical trial by water functioned in these cases as a collective punishment. During the execution of the trial, the participants could free themselves from the judicial institutions and the judgment was passed by a spontaneous reaction of the public.

Trial by water could also support the settlement of everyday conflicts. According to a charter, a debate between a local nobleman and the abbot of Siegburg about the ownership of a nearby forest was settled—with the approval of the abbot—by trial by water (Lacomblet 1966, p. 257) in Siegburg by the Rhine in 1151. Trial by water was also used to punish ordinary crime. The laws of the Czech prince Břetislav (1034–1055) provide an excellent example of this.<sup>20</sup> Liturgical trial by water was also used in the case of robbery, murder, and theft. The Assizes of Clarendon of 1179, which considerably restricted the power of English feudal lords' jurisdiction, mention several such cases (Douglas 1953, pp. 407–10).

As a summary, the following five points may be made in relation to the liturgical trial by water: 1) from the ninth to the twelfth century, the procedure was an organic part of ecclesiastical legal practice and conformed to the official tenets of the Christian church; 2) its purpose was to prove the guilt of a person accused of ordinary crime (robbery, theft, adultery or witchcraft), the settlement of debates over property rights or even of political conflicts; 3) the trial was used to prove the defendant guilty, or upon request, it could also prove his or her innocence, i.e., it functioned both as a punishment and as a rite of cleansing—the procedure was essentially the repetition of the Christian rite of baptism; 4) the trial was organically related to other types of ordeals: the official rite was administered in the presence of a priest, the rite was performed in the church, on consecrated ground, or near the shrine of a saint; 5) according to the social hierarchy, it satisfied the needs of common people—its purpose was finding and the punishment of criminals, the possibility of collective punishment included.

### *The Swimming of Witches in Early Modern Hungary*

Bartlett points out that the ordeals in use during the witchcraft persecution, i.e., the trial by water, could not be regarded as a remnant of the procedures supported by the medieval church. According to him, these ordeals were a form of popular verdict, always present throughout the period, which the authors of demonological treatises rediscovered, and used as an efficient means of identifying witches during the great witch hunt. His observation is supported by the fact that in the Middle Ages it was predominantly the sacral trial by fire and not the liturgical trial by water that was used against witches (Bartlett 1988; Gersmann 1998).

One may also argue for the validity of Bartlett's claim by pointing out that ordeals were diversified according to the hierarchical structure of contemporary society and in charges of witchcraft the chosen type of ordeal depended not so much upon the charge as on the accuser. Decisive duels, single combats, and jousts were used by the elite, while trial by hot iron and the like satisfied the needs of the common people. Trial by water was used exclusively with ordinary persons, and it occurred less frequently than trial by fire.

In addition to the examples from Western Europe,<sup>21</sup> several Eastern European sources<sup>22</sup> mention the relation between witchcraft and trial by water. After the medieval documents, it is only from the fifteenth century on that we find sources mentioning trial by water as a means of proving suspected witchcraft.<sup>23</sup> This intermediary period ended with the fifteenth century, when ordeals gradually disappeared from Eastern European legal customs as well. Actual cases of the swimming of witches reappear only in the sixteenth century at the beginning of the great witch hunt. The first cases from Germany (1584), the Spanish Netherlands and Hungary (1588), and England (1613) date from this period.<sup>24</sup> The chief European exponent of the swimming of witches was Wilhelm Adolf Scribonius, against whose views the pamphlet *De examine et purgatione sagarum per aquam frigidam epistola* (1589) was written. The idea was based on the following reasoning: since witches rejected the water of baptism, so the element of water would reject them in turn, and they would float in an unnatural manner. This method of trial had been used for many years,

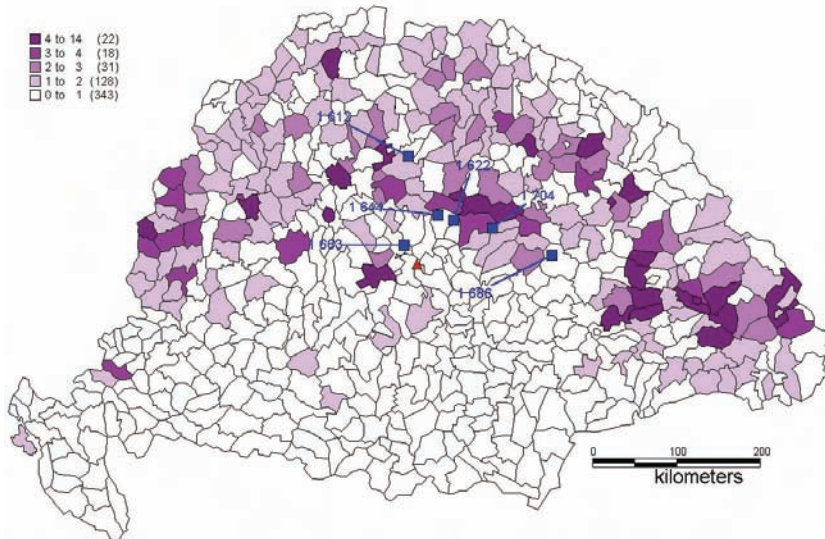


Fig. I. Witch hunt in Hungary (1601–1700) / by Péter Tóth G.

and was given more prominence when advocated as the test of the guilt of witchcraft by King James I in his book “*Daemonologie*.” The first preserved record of its use in England was in 1612 when the Northampton witches were tested in this manner. It was the time when the legally educated elite rediscovered trial by water as a possible means of identifying witches. Dozens of treatises were published on the subject between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries.<sup>25</sup>

As far as the cases of the swimming of witches mentioned in Hungarian witch trials are concerned, the first source directly reporting on the swimming procedure is a Kolozsvár (Cluj, Transylvania) trial of 1588, mentioned in the record of the city’s treasurer: “17. Martii. Gave the gypsies 25 denars to cast into water the woman from Monostor street who was suspected of putting a spell on a little girl” (Komáromy 1910, p. 71). The other swimming case dates from 1597, and it took place in Téhány (Ľahanovce, Slovakia), a village on the Hernád River: “Janos Teriek went to Tehhan a year ago, and said before the magistrates and jury of Tehhan: it is a shame, Magistrates, that you cannot punish or duck [butot] Margit Gögine, the shepherd, and Anna, the wife of Péter Hegedös from Tehhan”

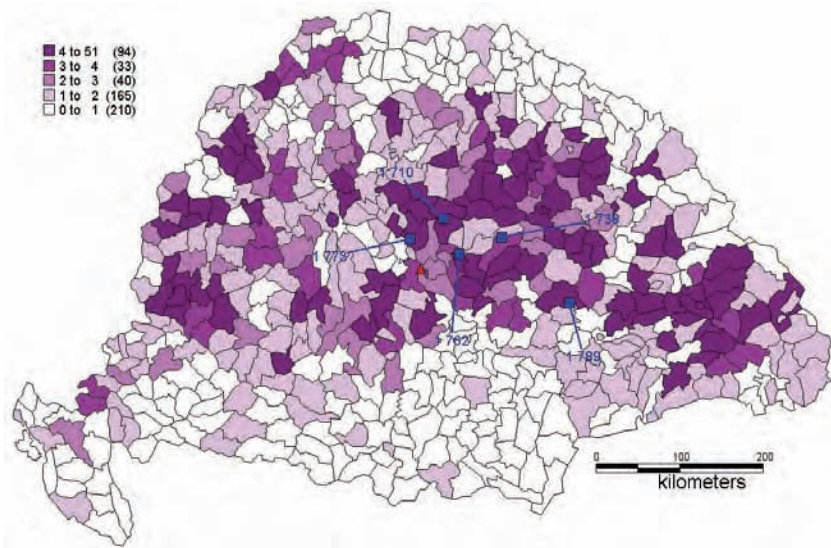


Fig II. Witch hunt in Hungary (1701–1800) / by Péter Tóth G.

(Döbrentey 1840; Klaniczay, Kristóf, and Pócs 1989, p. 1). The phrase “punish” could refer to the swimming procedure, but another interpretation (that of punishment) is also possible. Unfortunately, we have no sufficient evidence in relation to the terminology of the swimming of witches. The only document that uses the same expression (*bútat*) is from a 1629 Kolozsvár trial: “so that the suspicion be ascertained, she should be ducked [*bútat*] into water first, then their excellencies pronounce the law upon her, and decide on the form of torture to be used. Assuming responsibility, Kerekes proceeded” (Komáromy 1910, p. 99).

The number of swimming procedures reached a peak between 1690 and 1730. Most of the data comes from Transylvania, the eastern part of Upper Hungary, the Partium, and the regions east of the Tisza River. We have data from the following regions: Kolozs, Torda-Aranyos, Maros-Torda, Szolnok-Doboka, Szeben, and Brassó Counties in Transylvania; Pozsony, Nyitra, Abaúj-Torna, and Gömör Counties in Upper Hungary (now Slovakia); Szatmár, Szilágy, Ugocsa, Bihar, Bereg Counties in the Partium (now Slovakia, Ukraine, and Romania); and Csongrád, Szabolcs, Hajdú, and Békés Counties in the regions east of the Tisza. Some scattered



reports come from the Transdanubian Region, from the counties of Sopron, Komárom, Esztergom, Győr, and Tolna, but most of these date from the end of the seventeenth century. The data directly mentioning trial by water comes by and large from Eastern Hungary and Transylvania, from sources dating from between 1710 and 1730.<sup>26</sup>

Data from Upper Hungary (9), the Transdanubian Region (5), Transylvania (3), the region east of the Tisza (2), the Partium (2), and the region between the Danube and the Tisza (2) reports on the swimming of witches *in groups* (Belius 1735; Müller 1854; Herbert 1896; Reizner 1900; Komáromy 1910; Eckhart 1954; Varga 1958; Schram 1970). One example is the trial in Hermannstadt (Nagyszeben~Sibiu, Transylvania) in which, on November 11, 1678, six witches, two from Hermannstadt and the rest from Burgsprig (Vurpód~Burgsberg~Vurpär, Transylvania), were subjected to trial by water. As a countercheck, the officials also cast into the water a Vlach lad sentenced to death for bigamy. All six witches remained floating on the surface of the water, but the Vlach, albeit a young man, could not swim and sank, and he would surely have died, had the executioners not pulled him out in due time. On the next day, the six witches were burnt alive but the life of the Vlach was spared (Komáromy 1910, p. 129).

The practice of *individual* swimming occurs predominantly in Transylvania, although the Partium and the region east of the River Tisza also witnessed cases. The swimming of witches in groups was characteristic of the counties of Upper Hungary, while individual swimming procedures took place in the regions of Eastern Hungary and Transylvania. Anna Lázár was officially charged with witchcraft in Mikeháza of Inner Szolnok County on May 12, 1712. The verdict was the following:

Considering this, I had to summon her before the court: because she was changing her shape and taking up the likeness of a hound, she entered a house, which the owner rented to her, and then the hound changed again into a woman. It is because of the deed here recounted that this unclean person, an offender in the eye of our Sovereign God and our law, should be tortured first so that she discloses her accomplices. After that, being the criminal she is, she should be burnt alive. Verdict on March 31: the defendant should be submitted to a water trial; if she goes down, let her be acquitted, but if she does not, let her be burnt alive (Komáromy 1910, pp. 256–57).

From among the “spontaneous” and the “official” trials by water, the number of official cases is far greater. It must be added, however, that no record was preserved of most of the spontaneous popular verdicts, i.e., lynching. Most remaining records of “spontaneous” action come from the eastern counties of Upper Hungary. The majority of the trials took place within the confines of manorial courts. A large number of the swimming of witches in groups is related to the legal procedures of feudal lords. Cases of individual swimming that occurred in Transylvania took place within the institutional confines of civil courts, and most of the cases were recorded in the seventeenth century.

The cases in which the authorities intervened in spontaneously performed swimming procedures may be called the “intermediate type.” The suspects’ escape, their being taken from the mob, or the rescue of the suspects from lynching may be mentioned here as actions belonging to this category. Around the year 1696, Ferenc Dezső, a witness, testified in Hódmezővásárhely that

he knows that in Vásárhely ... (where he was a *decurio* at that time) the aforementioned woman was cast into water after the inquisition process in the presence of the witness who cast her into the water with his own hands, and she did not sink, but floated as a pumpkin and therefore they took her with due preparations to be burned, but the Officers from Szeged protected her, and thus she was saved from the fire ... [he said] That he knows furthermore that in Vásárhely many people confessed to the crime of witchcraft (Iványosi-Szabó 1996, p. 166).

In many cases, the swimming of witches served different kinds of social interests than those generally behind the witch identification and punishment procedures.<sup>27</sup> Works analyzing the climate of the first two decades of the eighteenth century mention the extreme weather conditions characteristic of the period. Damaged crops, famine, and the insufficient distribution of food all contributed to the decrease of the population (Lamb 1982; Réthly 1962 and 1970; Rácz 1988, 1989 and 1990). It is, therefore, no coincidence that the number of testimonies and narratives about rain-making rituals, and rumors about witches having prevented rain, increase at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In this context, the function of



the swimming of witches may well have been the intention of rainmaking. This is supported by the following case: [1708, Búd, Abaúj County]

*Testis Sophia Tót consors Joannis Vasas annorum circiter 26 jurata et examinata fide mediante fassa est. [...] When the seeds to be sown were taken to the field, she cried: "What use to sow if you will reap nothing, even in this year I shall see you starve to death." Then somebody said to János Kis's wife in good humor that some women would be swum, since there had been no rain. To this János Kis's wife answered: "There is no need of swimming, if they steal the rod of the Búd shepherd, there will be rain on the third day" (Bessenyei 1997, p. 1).*

The tradition of the swimming of witches did not vanish with the end of the great witch hunt. Examining the sources from the nineteenth century, one may find several examples of the tradition's survival in Western, Central, and Eastern Europe (Nottarp 1956, p. 207; Zguta 1977, p. 228; Bartlett 1986, p. 151; Davies 1999, pp. 86–100). The rumor of Eastern European swimming procedures aroused the interest of the Central European reading public as well. Zoltán Kovács reports on nineteenth-century Russian "witch killing" from Hungarian periodicals of 1878–1879: "these magazines often mention among the daily news, trials by water, torture, or burning" (Kovács 1972, pp. 212–13; Okenfuss 1986). These newsreports, however, are by no means unique, since in the very same period many examples show that lynching had not yet disappeared from the public scene.

## *Conclusion*

This paper gives an overview of eighth to twelfth-century sources on liturgical trial by water and then compares them with early references to the swimming of witches. As for the characteristics of the swimming of witches, the paper concludes that although this procedure was in many aspects similar to trial by water, in many ways it also differed from it. Considering these similarities and differences, the paper makes two substantial statements on the connections between river ordeals, trial by water, and the swimming of witches. One is that the primary meaning of

the swimming of witches can be traced back to Christian liturgical traditions, i.e., the procedure was essentially the repetition of the Christian rite of baptism. The other is that in Central and Eastern Europe, the swimming of witches seems to be related to rainmaking rites and weather magic in many cases.

The first statement, i.e., that a parallel can be drawn between the swimming of witches and the rite of baptism, is supported by several arguments. Since the procedure was organically integrated into Christian liturgy and the eighth to twelfth century tenets of the Church, many contemporaries held liturgical trial by water to be of the same rank as the Christian sacraments, and may have seen the institution of trial by water as a kind of test of the efficacy of baptism. The ninth to twelfth-century liturgical texts and Biblical quotations related to water ordeals unequivocally refer to the rite of baptism. The essence of the liturgy could be summed up in the following way: during the trial by water, the water of baptism does not accept the guilty body or, to put it another way, the weightless body is the indicator of guilt and of being possessed by demons. This is further prompted by the fact that the ritual was often preceded by exorcism.

The paper's second substantial conclusion was that in Central and Eastern Europe, the swimming of witches often functioned as a type of rain and weather magic. The belief figures of witches in Central and Eastern as well as Western Europe were thought to be able to control the weather. Witches appear as belief figures causing storms and bringing hail in several Western European depictions. In the texts of Hungarian witch trials several passages imply that the swimming of witches was interpreted as weather magic practiced during droughts. In addition, statistical data also show that accusations charging witches with causing droughts and taking away the rain multiplied in periods when contemporaries recorded heavy droughts. This is also borne out by research into climatological history. Therefore the increasing number of trials by water can be connected with unfavorable changes in the climate. The two types of swimming of witches, individual and mass swimming, also show sharply distinctive features. While mass swimming of witches typically occurred in places where charges of stealing rain and accounts of droughts often came up in witchcraft trial documents (Northern Hungary, Partium), individual swimming more frequently took place in areas where witch persecution reflected

Western European patterns more closely (Transylvanian towns, Western Hungary).

Polarizing these two statements, we may conclude that the swimming of witches during the witch persecution in Western Europe shows connections with the liturgical trial by water and, beyond this, with the ceremony of baptism. In contrast, the mass swimming of witches practiced in Eastern Europe seems to be related to the customs of rain and weather magic, themselves belonging to the collective rites employed during great crises.<sup>28</sup>

### Notes

- 1 Sticking to the subject, let me mention only cases in which witches were swum, and disregard other cases of witchcraft persecution. *Burgundy, 1700*. Müller-Bergström 1930–31, p. 1033; *Virginia, 1706*. Burr 1914, pp. 441–2. cit. Bartlett 1986, p. 147; *Kamenec-Podolski, Ukraine, 1709; Dubno, Volhynia, 1711*. Zguta 1977, pp. 227–8; *Hessen-Kassel, 1711*. Wolf 1995; *Horninghold, 1709; Leicestershire, 1717; Naseby, 1735* etc. Davies 1999, pp. 86–100. “Suspected witches had their right thumbs tied to their left toes, and their left thumbs to their rights toes. A rope was then tied around their waists, and they were thrown into a pond or river while two men held either end of the rope. If suspected witches floated, then this was interpreted as a sign that the ‘sacred water of baptism’ had rejected them because of their crimes. If, however, they sank, then God’s water had obviously embraced them, thus signifying their innocence” (Zguta 1977, p. 221).
- 2 The cuneiform script on the stele (date cca. 1792–1750 B.C.) disposes of the sentencing of sorcerers and the trial by water in the following way: 2.§ (Stele 5. v.33) “If any one bring an accusation [of sorcery] against a man [awélum], and the accused goes to the river and leaps into the river, if he sinks in the river, his accuser shall take possession of his house. But if the river proves that the accused is not guilty, and he escapes unhurt, then he who had brought the accusation shall be put to death, while he who leaped into the river shall take possession of the house that had belonged to his accuser.” Translated by Leonard William King. King 1976; King 1975.
- 3 Akkadian Empire, Sharukkin I. who defeated the Sumerian emperor of Uruk. Foster 1989, p. 56; Old Akkadian nukkusu(m) “balance an account”: *ibid.* pp. 90–91, no. 115; Owen 1988, pp. 305–311; Weiher 1981, pp. 95–102.
- 4 Postgate 1992; Cardascia 1993, pp. 169–84. The work of Jean Bottéro, whose study on Mesopotamian ordeals is probably the most comprehensive account of the ordeals of this specific age and region, should also be mentioned here: Bottéro 1981–82, pp. 1005–1067; Lafont 1989, p. 28. In relation to the so-called “Marduk-ordeal” see furthermore: Livingstone 1987, pp. 36–37, no. 68. Frymer-Kensky 1983, pp.

- 131–41. In relation to the legal customs and the ordeals of the third Dynasty of Ur, see where text No. 99 is an ordeal: Edzard 1968.
- 5 I.e., during the period when the Hittite Empire was the largest; Korosec 1970, pp. 413–18, [hapa-, hapati-].
  - 6 Elamite Empire, with the capital Susa. Klíma 1971, pp. 39–59, 401–424; Hirsch 1973, pp. 75–77.
  - 7 Old Assyrian sources from the 8th century mention river ordeal. Koschaker, *Mitteilungen aus der vorderasiatischen Abteilung der staatlichen Museen zu Berlin*, § 17., 22., 24. Sources from the New Assyrian Empire. Kataja 1987–88, pp. 65–68; Postgate 1976.
  - 8 The period of the New-Babylonian Kingdom. Beaulieu 1992, pp. 58–60.
  - 9 Hammurabi's following articles concern the sentencing of lecherous women and men: 143.§ (Stele 8. v.6) "If she [the woman] is not innocent, but leaves her husband, and ruins her house, neglecting her husband, this woman shall be cast into the water." / 155.§ (Stele 11. v.72) "If a man [awélum] betroths a girl to his son, and his son has intercourse with her, but he (the father) afterward defiles her, and is surprised, then he shall be bound and cast into the water (drowned)." Translated by Leonard William King. King 1976.
  - 10 The latest and most comprehensive study on this period deals with how little we know about ancient ordeals. Postgate 1992.
  - 11 In the Book of Numbers, we may find allusions to the so-called "bitter water" or "poison" trial used in the case of women accused of adultery. These concrete descriptions of the custom, just like the casting of lots in the Book of Joshua, do not concern our subject. *Deut* 5:11–31; *Psalms* 5, 17, 26, 27, 31, 35; *Jer* 8:14–17; *Ezekiel* 23:31–34; *Micah* 6:1–16; *Num* 5:11–31; *Jos* 7:1.
  - 12 1 *Kings* 18:2 And there was a sore famine in Samaria / 1 *Kings* 18:22–24 Then said Elijah unto the people [...] And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. / 1. *Kings* 18:38–41 Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God. And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there. And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain.
  - 13 "Water thus is integrated into the drought cycle and finds its logical conclusions." Tromp 1975, pp. 480–502; Saint-Laurent 1980, pp. 123–39; McCarter 1973–75, pp. 403–412.
  - 14 Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger: *Malleus maleficarum*, 1486, Part II., Question I. Chapter VII, "And, finally, the reason is self-evident. For since the devil has power over inferior things, except only the soul, therefore he is able to effect certain changes in those things, when God allows, so that things appear to be otherwise than they are. And this he does, as I have said, either by confusing and deluding the organ of sight so that a clear thing appears cloudy; just as after weeping,

- owing to the collected humors, the light appears to be different from what it was before. Or by operating on the imaginative faculty by a transmutation of mental images, as has been said. Or by some agitation of various humors, so that matters which are earthy and dry seem to be fire or water: as some people make everyone in the house strip themselves naked under the impression that they are swimming in water." Summers 1928.
- 15 Hincmar of Rheims: *De divortio Lotharii*, interrog. VI, M. CXXV 667–671. "*Colligatur autem fune, qui examinandus in aquam dimittitur, quia, ut scriptum est, funibus peccatorum suorum unusquisque constringitur*" [...] "*Qui ob duas causas colligari videtur, scilicet ne aut aliquam possit fraudem in iudicio facere, aut si aqua illum velut innoxium receperit, ne in aqua periclitetur, ad tempus valeat retrahi.*" Leitmaier 1953, pp. 50–52.
  - 16 "*Benedictio aquae ad iudicium faciendum.*" [...] "*si culpabilis sis de hac re, aqua, que in baptismo te suscepit, nunc non te recipiat; si autem innocens sis, aqua, que in baptismo te recepit, nunc recipiat.*" Franz 1909, vol. 2, p. 377; cf. Morris 1975, pp. 95–111.
  - 17 Illustration of the liturgical trial by water: *Sachsenspiegel*, Heidelberg, 13th century. Cf. Eckhardt 1965; Alver 1971; Müller-Bergström 1930/1931; Bartlett 1986, p. 26, 110, 112. The baptismal font had to be 12 feet deep and 20 feet wide. Franz 1909, vol. 2, p. 356.
  - 18 Illustration of the liturgical trial by water: *Rituale Lambacense*, 12th century, MS Lambach CmL LXXXIII. fol. 64v. Cf. Bartlett 1986, jacket illustration, reproduced by kind permission of Benedictines of Lambach; Leitmaier 1952, p. 17.
  - 19 Ordo von Uzés (*Uticensis*, eleventh-twelfth centuries) disposed of the three-day fast before trial by water. Franz 1909, vol. 2, pp. 355–56.
  - 20 The prince published his laws during a campaign against Poland in 1053, in Gniezno, by the grave of Saint Adalbert: "Fourth, if a woman complains that her husband does not love her, but treats him maliciously, let there pass an ordeal between them in the presence of the Church, and the one that is found guilty should pay the penalty to the prince. Likewise in the case of those who are said to have killed somebody, let the archdeacon send their names to the comes of the local castle, and let the comes send them in front of a court. If they refuse, let them be put in prison until they repent. If they refuse to repent, let their guilt or innocence be proved by trial by hot iron or water." Vaneček 1951–52, pp. 132–34.
  - 21 In his 1975 book, Norman Cohn enumerated the legal cases relating to witchcraft from the period before the great witch hunt. Some of these mention trial by water, but in most of the cases different procedures and modes of punishment are used. Cohn 1975; Pijper 1907; Radding 1979, pp. 945–69.
  - 22 The Arabian traveller-merchant Abu Hámid al-Gharnáti (1080–1170) recounts a swimming-case which took place near Kiev around 1153. Copies of the report of Abu Hámid may be found in several European archives. According to the Saint Petersburg variant, witches are swum every tenth year by the forest dwellers living near the Kiev Slavs. In the Western European textual variants, however, it is the Slavs themselves who perform the swimming every twentieth year. The corruption

- of the text notwithstanding, the variants agree in the description of the swimming. Charmoy 1834, pp. 342–43; Hnatiuk 1912, p. 189; Bolsakov–Mongait 1971; Dubler 1953, p. 129; Zguta 1977, p. 222.
- 23 One of the examples is a resolution from a fifteenth-century national council in Riga (1428), a second one is a Swiss manuscript dating from the end of the fifteenth or the beginning of the sixteenth century. They exemplify an intermediary stage: in these times ordeals were still in use, but their original role seems to fade away. In the Swiss document, the chronicle of Diepold Schilling (*Luzerner Chronik*, 1513, Zentralbibliothek Luzern, Hs.S.23.), several miniatures illustrate the procedure of ordeals (duel, trial by water or fire). Hilbert 1928; Balys 1936; Leitmaier 1953, p. 43; Erler 1941/43; Schilling 1977; Duerr 1988, p. 257.
- 24 Weyer 1563, pp. 449–50; Godelmann 1591, pp. 98–100; Perkins 1610, pp. 206–7; Hopkins 1647, pp. 5–7. Cf. Thomas 1971, p. 551; Zguta 1977, p. 221; Bartlett 1986, p. 147; Soman 1992; Gersmann 1998; Davies 1999, pp. 86–87.
- 25 Cf. Appendix I.
- 26 Cf. Appendix II.
- 27 Some of the sources, on the other hand, can only report on the memories of the witnesses. The memory of the procedure takes the form of an oath or a threat in the eighteenth-century testimonies. An example for the *threat formula*: around 1710 [(1722), Gyula, Békés County] “*Quarta testis Anna Kis conthoralis Michaelis Fekete annor. cir. 30 ad primum heard it from others Ad. 2dum the witness himself heard it from the [mouth] of the wife of István Kis that she said she deserves only the reed and the fire, since her mother was also burnt and she herself was swum. ad 3.4. nihil.*” Schram 1982, 3. p. 470. An example for the *oath formula* [1702, Debrecen, Hajdú County, “Égető hely,” the trial of a witch-finder]: “*Causa Fisci contra the wife of György Kis, Kata Szabó I. reassumpta post attestiones. Deliberatum. Her own testimony has been confirmed from the testimonies of the witnesses about deeds and schemes of a person diabolical, witching, and enchanting. If she examines a sick person, she knows whoever ate him/her, when she swims them, she knows who ate them; some of those she has had beaten or burnt. Those whom she pronounces witches should be taken to water, and if the person sinks, she herself should be burnt. It is not permitted to collect herbs without her permission, for anyone who does so will be tempted, and the herbs will fly here and there ... and she can charm the pot so that—be it of the knees’ height—not a bit of porridge will remain in it, and persons dealing with such like things of purchase (!), swimming, seducing, make-believe, and vicious and forbidden handling of money should be burnt, and unless they confess in due order their accomplices, they should be tortured. Interim ad instantiam I. post ultro citroque factos discursus sententia mitigatur taken to the Égető hely should be decapitated beside the Rogus piled up.*” Schram 1982, 3. p. 497.
- 28 Lynching, mob rule, and “legal lynching”: Wright 1990; Jackson 1996; Gatrell–Arthur 1994; Evans 1996; Davies 1999.

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HOW TO MAKE A (LEGAL) PACT  
WITH THE DEVIL?  
LEGAL CUSTOMS AND LITERACY IN WITCH  
CONFESSIONS IN EARLY MODERN HUNGARY\*

ILDIKÓ KRISTÓF

It is well known that the historiography of early modern European witchcraft has been enriched by adopting a social/sociological approach during the last three decades.<sup>1</sup>

I myself have made use of a similar perspective in my book analyzing the social and cultural background of witch hunting in forty-five Hungarian Calvinist communities from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. While having studied the witnesses' testimonies from a sociological point of view, I have almost entirely neglected this aspect in my examination of the confessions of the accused witches themselves. I drew only data of the yes-or-no-type from the latter: whether the accused witches accepted the charges, or rejected them, whether Calvinist demonology influenced popular imagination, or not (Kristóf 1998).

This approach—not so much a social, but rather a somewhat religious focus—is perhaps most commonly used by the students of witchcraft confessions. It aims at demonstrating whether or not official church demonology penetrated into popular witchcraft beliefs; and *vice versa*, whether or not particular popular concepts of witchcraft affected learned demonology.<sup>2</sup>

There is, however, a possibility to deepen the analysis of witch confessions by adopting a somewhat similar “social” approach (in the broadest sense of the term) as has been used in the case of the witness testimonies. This approach would involve the following working hypothesis. Analyzing witch confessions, the researcher always has to take into account the possibility that the accused witches, having been interrogated and even forced by the magistrates to speak about their alliance with the Devil, might have confessed to their diabolical activities based on many different aspects of their stock of everyday knowledge.

The Hungarian confessions do seem to indicate that the above-mentioned religious aspect might have been only one among many others. I suggest that a broader social interpretation is also inscribed in the stories, to be seen in the frequent occurrence of two closely related groups of notions. These are certain characteristics of the contemporary urban/rural practice of “literacy” on the one hand, and that of criminal and civil “law,” on the other. At least four dozen early modern Hungarian witch confessions seem to represent one or another element of both practices, as will be shown below.

All of these confessions originate in official interrogations conducted by Hungarian town and county magistrates during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In almost all of these cases, the questions put to the accused witches rely on the 60th chapter of Benedict Carpzov’s famous jurisdictional treatise, *Praxis criminalis*, written in 1635 and adopted into Hungarian criminal law from the end of the seventeenth century on.<sup>3</sup>

In his own model of interrogation, Carpzov seemingly attempted to describe the witches’ pact as something “real.” It was a very concrete, quasi-tangible “thing” for him, almost like a physical object. According to *Praxis criminalis*, the pact had two particular forms. It could be made orally as a sort of ritual/ceremony, and could also be put into writing as a kind of document.<sup>4</sup> It is easy to recognize, however, that there are plenty of “holes” in Carpzov’s representation. Practically nothing is said about the very circumstances under which the diabolic alliance could be carried out. The most important “rubrics” like place, date, instruments, and moreover, the particular procedures itself are expected to be “filled in” by the interrogated people. And it is exactly here, in the functioning of this forced imagination that the researcher can grasp something about the ways the “witches” interpretation worked.

Let us turn to the confessions themselves. I find it significant that a great many elements (ideas and practices), connected with the particular procedure of concluding a pact with the Devil, seem to have had their counterparts in the contemporary social world. Imaginary, diabolic acts and gestures seem to reflect particular legal customs; rites common in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Hungarian cities and villages, and descriptions of the pact as a physical object seem to rely upon particular written documents used in contemporary bureaucracy, jurisdiction, or even economic life. It is these very features that encourage me to pro-

pose a *social (legal/communicational) reading* of the image of the witches' pact.

Let me point to some of the specific characteristics of the Hungarian witch confessions that support this interpretation.

A significant general feature of the stories is their reference to a remarkable communicational duality to be seen in the ways of representing the satanic contract. A couple of "witches" described written documents, while others mentioned only certain words and/or symbolic gestures.<sup>5</sup> This dual representation might have been based upon a particular characteristic of early modern Hungarian legal practice.

I would argue first that the image of the witches' pact could itself imply the idea of a "business transaction"—a rather bizarre version of a sale and purchase procedure in which it is nothing other than the soul of a human being that is put up for sale. Secondly, I propose that it is not by chance that *both the oral and the written means* of communication are used by the defendants in order to authenticate, in imagination, that semidemonological/semilegal business.

It is not a very much known—actually, barely studied—fact that a similar double possibility of authenticating and proving a legal transaction was also permitted by early modern Hungarian civil law. This possibility was usually expressed by a specific formula, one of the most completely elaborated versions is *litterali documento vel humano testimonio*.<sup>6</sup> It meant that a legal transaction could be either written down or—and it is important to emphasize this "or"—could have been testified by a group of witnesses present at the occasion, that is, by oral means. I cannot yet provide an exhaustive list of all those early modern law books and local decrees in which this principle occurred, it seems to me, however, that it referred primarily to the middle and lower status groups of the contemporary society. As for its chronology, one can find it at least from the sixteenth century onwards right into the eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

It is significant that early modern Hungarian civil law made this legal/communicational choice possible primarily for those particular social groups—town dwellers and peasants—who actually played the roles of accusers and accused in the drama of witchcraft. Having been themselves involved probably in various legal transactions—like selling or pawning a piece of land or a vineyard, lending or borrowing money, or making one's last will—the defendants must have been quite familiar with the possibility

of selecting the oral or the written mode of authentication. And, when they were interrogated during a witch trial and forced to imagine how to sell one's soul to the Devil, they supposedly made the same communicational/legal choice.

The general communicational/legal practice adopted in early modern towns and villages might have thus patterned the representation of the witches' pact to a considerable extent. Some witch confessions permit the researcher to go even beyond the general features and to point to particular elements of the imaginary pact that also seem to have had their equivalents in contemporary social/legal practice.

Let me consider first the "oral/gesture" version of the pact. It is remarkable how deeply these stories are penetrated by a certain "symbolism of the body," and especially, that of the "hand."

According to official learned demonologies, a peculiar form of concluding a pact with the Devil could consist only of a rather simple gesture, a kind of ceremonial use of the hands. Stretching out one of them during the act of oath-taking was represented already in *Malleus maleficarum*,<sup>8</sup> while shaking them in conclusion of the agreement was described, among others, by Johann Weyer, the famous sixteenth-century physician of the Prince of Clèves. (It is important to note that Weyer referred to this particular gesture as a powerful example in his counterargument put forward against the possibility of any contract between demons and human beings. He argued that the Devil, being of a spiritual nature, does not even possess a hand that could be extended toward the human party.<sup>9</sup> Peter Melius, the first bishop of the Hungarian Calvinist Church in the sixteenth century also emphasized the disparity of nature of humans vs. demons as he, too, argued for the impossibility of the witches' pact.<sup>10</sup>)

Describing the "gesture version" of it, the Hungarian witch confessions refer, however, quite frequently to the act of a handshake.<sup>11</sup> This gesture, being an ancient symbol of agreement in European Christian culture, constitutes one of the most constant elements in Hungarian customary law, as well. It has been fairly often mentioned in various civil law trials held in early modern Hungarian cities and villages; it was a quasi-compulsory gesture involved in almost any legal transaction.<sup>12</sup> I would argue then that the recurrent representation of shaking hands with the Devil finds its explanation in the hypothesis suggested here. If the practice of early modern



civil law served indeed as a model for the image of the witches' pact, the use of this gesture was almost inevitable.

Another gesture described quite frequently in the confessions is a peculiar act of stabbing or cutting one's finger in order to use one's blood to conclude the pact. A witch could write the entire text of the contract with blood, could sign it with blood or could only pour some drops of blood onto a paper or into a book as a sign of the agreement.<sup>13</sup> Beyond its evident allusion to the Faustian story, which in itself demonstrates another cultural influence on the construction of this image, there might be at least two possible levels of legal meaning implied in this representation, both of them depending on small, seemingly insignificant, details: who actually cuts the finger and which finger is cut.

As for the first detail, in most of the stories it is not the would-be witch herself who voluntarily injures her own body. In one type of the confessions she is forced by the Devil or by another witch to do so, and in other types it is the Devil himself or another witch who carries out the act. This representation might refer to one of the contemporary legal customs of self-defense and the underlying ideas: to the custom of the so-called "blood-showing."

Originating in ancient medieval feudal law and developed with the intention of reducing the number of violent fights and bloodshed, the custom of blood-showing was used to protect the injured party in a quarrel or a fight, provided that he or she showed his or her bleeding wounds immediately to the magistrates (or other witnesses available). No matter who actually began the quarrel, the law made it easier for the "showing" party to prove his or her case. Consequently, it was more probable for the injurer to be found guilty and be obliged to pay a penalty.<sup>14</sup>

I would propose that the central idea of this custom—to defend the injured victim, the blood-showing party—is very close to the idea suggested by the witch confessions (see note 13). The would-be witches are presented as victims of a violent—diabolical—injury, rather than willing participants. Wounded on the hand, the would-be witches, however, had had no possibility to "show their blood" to the magistrates because at the moment that the wound was done to them, they were usually far from home. As if the occasion of the witch trial was the first opportunity for the witches to prove their case, by narrating in detail, from whom and under what circumstances they got those bleeding wounds.

Behind the widespread demonological motif of writing with blood, these stories might have also conveyed a message of innocence, perhaps inspired by, consciously or not, a plea for innocence. A plea, perhaps from a would-be witch and inscribed within the convention of the popular knowledge, might appeal to the magistrates as an explanation for diabolical activities.

The strategy of relying upon the imagery and practice of the contemporary legal means of self-defense did not seem to have been limited to the custom of blood showing. Let me only hint at the fact that a parallel custom seems to have been incorporated in the early modern Hungarian discourse on witchcraft as well. This is the so-called “blue-showing” which was based upon the same ideas as its “bloody” version but it concerned those cases of fights which resulted only in bruises (“blue” spots) on the body, and not in open wounds (see note 14). This gesture seems to have been attributed quite frequently to the healer-type of witches. Witnesses to the Debrecen witch trials for example described it as a particular strategy of “good” witches showing to their patients how many bruises they had had to suffer from supernatural enemies in defense of the same patients.<sup>15</sup> The legal custom of blue showing, reformulated in terms of witchcraft beliefs seems to reveal a similar, more or less conscious strategy of defending oneself against the charges of voluntary ill-willed magic, as that of blood showing.

The other aspect of the stories about blood—the significance of which fingers the would-be witch has had cut—is also closely connected to the contemporary means and ritual of oath taking.

When they spoke of the act of concluding the nonwritten version of the pact, the accused witches most frequently used the Hungarian verb *beesküdni*. Its meaning is quite close to the English expression: “to take an oath of office.” In ancient Hungarian, *beesküdni* had a double reference. On the one hand, it was used in the context of a certain function or office that could be taken after the act of taking an oath. On the other, it was an oath required of new candidates to a body of people—a corporation or a society—united by certain common activities or privileges.

It is quite common that the accused witches present the particular setting of this oath taking in their confessions. In many of these cases, the imaginary solemnity of the ceremony seems to have been modeled on its everyday, official equivalent. A significant example comes from a witch

confession made in 1757 in the city of Szeged (Southern Hungary). The accused Catholic woman described a room in an ordinary house and a table in front of which she was standing during the ceremony. Beside the Devil himself, there was “a man” in the room “who recited the text of the oath and she repeated it ... she took her oath on a book of big size,” which was lying on the table (Reizner 1900, p. 527). This description would probably correspond to the ordinary circumstances under which almost any kind of official oath was taken in early modern Hungarian cities or villages—excepting, of course, the presence of the Devil. The house of a magistrate, the Bible lying on the table, the written text of the oath read aloud to the candidate were all common elements in the procedure of the ceremonial initiation into a kind of community office (that of the judge, the sworn members of the council, the many types of lower functionaries) on the one hand, and, into the body of the urban or village community or a guild, on the other.

Some of the Hungarian early modern law books and local decrees concerning customary law describe the particular procedure of oath-taking in a detailed manner. One of these texts commenting upon habitual gestures made during the ceremony leads us back to hand symbolism and to the issue of the significance of fingers. This text is to be found in a handwritten law book which dates from the end of the sixteenth or the beginning of the seventeenth century and was used in the city of Kassa (Kosice, Slovakia). The text is all the more important, because the population of Kassa was religiously mixed in early modern times. Here Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists lived together, therefore the formulas and the meanings of the oath might have been put forward in such a way that all the three churches could accept them. (The issue of the Calvinists is, however, a more complicated one—I am not so sure that they would agree on the use and the symbolism of the gesture described.)

The remarkable passage of this *Instructio pro juraturis* reads as follows:

All of those who want to take an oath should hold out their right hand with their first three fingers stretched out. The first finger, the thumb is understood as God, the Father. The second, or index finger signifies the Son, while the middle finger the Holy Ghost. The last two fingers have to be bent, of which the ring finger stands for the soul—hidden in the human body—and the little finger means the body, which is con-

sidered smaller than the soul. The whole hand represents the One God, the Creator who had created Man and all the creatures of Heaven and Earth (Petkó 1883, p. 797).

Unfortunately, it is not very common for the defendants in Hungarian witch trials to specify the particular hand and the particular finger that was used for the bloodletting in the pact. If it is mentioned, it is either the little finger or the ring finger which are named; the hand being less certain (there are, however, confessions, specifying the right one).<sup>16</sup>

At this stage, at the beginning of the study of this particular gesture symbolism, I can but propose a preliminary interpretation which needs, of course, thorough further research. Let me first point to the fact that a very similar finger symbolism was already put forward in *Malleus Maleficarum*, in passages in which the two fifteenth-century inquisitors described the “usual manner” of making the deponents swear. Krämer and Sprenger themselves identified the first three fingers to be raised as symbol of the Holy Trinity elaborating a different but nevertheless remarkable interpretation for the last two fingers. According to them, the deponents should bend or “depress” the latter in testimony of the damnation of their soul and body if they will not “speak the truth in their depositions” (*Malleus Maleficarum*, 207, emphasis is my own: *I. K.*). Provided that this legal and religious interpretation of the hand and its fingers was known enough in early modern times to affect popular imagination, the following hypothesis could be proposed. The imaginary use of one or the other of the last two fingers for concluding a pact with the Devil could be explained according to this legal and religious gesture symbolism, which vested the fingers with a binary significance: divine vs. human / salvation vs. damnation / sacred vs. diabolic. Preferring the human/diabolic fingers to let blood from might thus suggest that some demonological concepts were incorporated indeed into the stock of knowledge of town and village people. The act of cutting the ring finger, which signified the human soul, would symbolize the perfect or “official” version of an alliance between a human being and the Devil. It is tempting to associate it with the Faustian story of offering one’s soul to Satan. However, in the act of cutting the little finger (symbolizing the human body), it is not so easy to find a parallel. Could it represent a kind of “popular” demonology in which the physical/material/bodily features of the alliance are much more stressed than the spiritual ones?

Even if it were so, one should be very careful in attributing constant, rigid, and fixed meanings to the hand and its fingers. The use of the first three divine/sacred fingers for example is to be found in other contexts. In early modern culture, the meaning of the particular fingers of the hand could also vary. Let me only hint at two contexts. The first three fingers raised and symbolizing the Holy Trinity is a very ancient gesture known from Christian iconography and liturgy. In its pictorial representations, it is attributed mostly to Jesus Christ and Catholic—later also Lutheran—priests and stands for the act of blessing.<sup>17</sup> It appears, however, in another set of liturgical gestures, as well: in that of making the sign of the Holy Cross in which the meaning of the particular fingers depends on the specific way of holding them. One of the official, Post-Tridentine prayer books written by the Catholic Archbishop Péter Pázmány and published in Hungarian in 1651, distinguishes three different ways of holding the fingers while making that sign. The one with three outstretched and two closed fingers symbolizes for him the Holy Trinity. Making the sign with the thumb and the index finger put together would stand, however, for the double substance of Jesus Christ (divine and human), while making it with all the five straightened fingers would refer to the five stigmata of the Savior (Pázmány 1606, pp. 12–14).

The religious as well as legal hand/finger symbolism certainly deserves further investigation. We have to acquire a better understanding of its possible connections to early modern witchcraft discourse. The Hungarian witch confessions seem to indicate, as I argued above, that there existed a certain connection.

Turning finally to the written form of the pact, it seems that its representation in Hungarian witch confessions permits a similar legal, communicational (sometimes even economical) interpretation, just as the “oral/gesture version” treated above. All three forms according to which the accused Hungarian witches have imagined the written contract—a piece of paper (called sometimes *levél* i.e., a letter, sometimes *cédula* i.e., a slip), a book (either small or big) or a (not much specified) list (*lajstrom* i.e., a register of names)<sup>18</sup>—seem to have had, again, their social counterparts in the everyday life of town or village people. They belonged to the sphere of practical literacy used in every day life by early modern bureaucracy. Supposedly nobody could escape this sphere involving various public as well as private transactions and administrative acts. Public acts were recording

taxes in diverse books; registering members of the community—those moving in and out, those marrying or dying or those becoming orphans or members of a guild—into other kinds of books; and private acts: proving the sale of goods by written contracts (*contractus*), making written vows (*reversalis*, *alba*), signing pledges, testifying to having paid taxes by written receipts (*cédula*, *scheda*, or *quietantia*), or testifying, for that matter, to one's identity by means of the so-called *passus* (a letter of pass).<sup>19</sup> It is thus significant—but not at all surprising—that many of the defendants imagined the diabolic pact as one of these latter types of documents.<sup>20</sup> It was called, for example, a written *contractus*,<sup>21</sup> an *alba*,<sup>22</sup> others imagined it as a list of names written into a book,<sup>23</sup> or even as a *cédula*, a slip received from the Devil himself.<sup>24</sup>

I would suggest in conclusion that, in order to elaborate appropriate answers to official interrogation, the Hungarian “witches” made considerable use of their knowledge of the surrounding social world. They drew from contemporary legal practice (customary as well as written law) in general, as well as of their everyday use of the means of communication in particular to construct the image of the witches' pact. Far from denying the impact of religious ideas and official demonology on witchcraft beliefs, I find it important to emphasize that certain phenomena of contemporary social life could also be hidden beside or behind those beliefs.

Paraphrasing Marcel Mauss, one of the French pioneers of social and legal anthropology, I would say that the witches' pact appears in the confessions as a *fait social total* (a total social phenomenon). It is an imaginary transfiguration of ideas and institutions that are, in the same way as their image is, “at once legal, economic, religious, aesthetic, morphological, and so on.”<sup>25</sup> It is exactly this multiple reference of the image and the possibility of its multiple reading that I attempted to highlight in the present study.

## Notes

\* For a further elaborated version of this paper analyzing early modern Hungarian discourses on witchcraft and civil law from the point of view of communication and functional literacy, see Kristóf, “Towards a Historical Anthropology”; see also Klaniczay and Kristóf 2001.

- 1 Here I can but refer to some of those studies: Ankarloo and Henningsen 1990; Behringer 1987; Boyer and Nissenbaum 1974; Clark 1980, 1990, 1997; Demos 1982; Henningsen 1980; Klaniczay 1990a, 1990b; Larner 1984; Levack 1987; Macfarlane 1970; Midelfort 1972; Monter 1976; Thomas 1978.
- 2 The most prominent scholars arguing for this particular approach are, among others, Éva Pócs and Carlo Ginzburg: Pócs 1992, 1999; Ginzburg 1983, 1990.
- 3 The index called *Régi Magyar Könyvtár* (A Short Title Catalogue of Ancient Books Printed in Hungary, hereafter referred to as RMK) lists three editions of *Praxis Criminalis*, all of them in Latin and published in the—mostly Catholic—city of Nagyszombat (Trnava, now in Slovakia): 1687 (RMK II/1621), 1697 (RMK II/1897), 1700 (RMK II/2013). As for its eighteenth-century editions, the bibliographical index made by Géza Petrik mentions three of them, all in Latin: Tyrnavia, 1717 and 1732, Claudiopoli, 1748; Petrik 1888, p. 811; I used its first edition, see *Praxis Criminalis*. Its introduction and use in seventeenth and eighteenth-century jurisdiction in Hungary is treated by Iklódi 1982 and Klaniczay 1990b.
- 4 Chapter 60 (*De Magia*) provides important indications concerning the particular forms that could have been attributed by some German magistrates to the witches' pact. Two questions of its *Interrogatorium* are especially relevant in this respect: “*An scripto vel ore tenus sit factum?*” (Question 5) and “*Ubi sit pactum, aut quale signum inde habeat?*” (Question 9). *Praxis criminalis*, p. 31.
- 5 This statement is based upon an earlier study of mine in which I set up an inventory of the references made by the accused witches as well as their accusers to written and printed means in their confessions and testimonies. See Kristóf 1995.
- 6 The formula is used in this particular form—though in a negative sense—by the lawyer of two ecclesiastical landlords (the Provostship of Csorna and the Abbey of Pannonhalma, Western Hungary). For example, as he was raising objections against the evidences produced by the other party—a peasant family—in a trial of succession held before the court of the Abbey in 1655: “*Procurator dominorum terrestrium solenniter protestatur super replica et assertione procuratoris I, quam exquo nullo literali documento vel humano testimonio etiam coram tribunali doceret, neque praetensi I consanguineitas eiusdem constaret, cui assertioni tamquam nuda, in foro contradictorio locus dari non debet.*” Varga 1958, p. 382 (emphasis is mine: I. K.).
- 7 For the inhabitants of the so-called free royal cities, one of the most important historical sources in this respect is a general law book existing in manuscripts as well as print. One of its manuscript versions coming from the sixteenth century, written in Latin and enumerating eight free royal cities (Bártfa, Buda, Eperjes, Kassa, Nagyszombat, Pest, Pozsony, and Sopron) is published in Harsányi in 1909. From among its later printed versions I used the bilingual (Latin and Hungarian) one printed for the inhabitants of the city of Kassa (Kosice, now in Slovakia) in 1701, to be cited further on as *Jus civile*. The formula in question appears, among others, in the following particular contexts in this law book. Proving one's proprietary rights to a house, a piece of land or vineyard: “*Si quis super alienatione domus, vel vinea aliquid jus habere praetendit, id literis Civitatis Sigillo autentico roboratis,*

*vel testimonio juratorum civium probare tenetur.*” *Jus civile*, pp. 14–15; concluding a sale and purchase contract of a house or land property: “*Si quis domum, vineam, jugera, foeneta, sive quacunq̄ue alia immobilia emerit*” [...], he is obliged to act “*bizonyos emberek előtt, vagy kötés levélben*” that is, in the presence of certain people or by putting the business into writing. *Ibidem*, pp. 21, 22; pawning (a house): “*Si quis hominum domum suam invadiaverit, vigore Literarum Civitatis aut testimonio sufficienti juratorum Civium* [this is how he should proceed].” *Ibidem*, p. 114; Transactions of credit and debt: “*Si attractus fatebitur, vel si Literis efficacibus, aut testimonio sufficienti A. contra I. approbare voluerit* [this is how they should proceed].” *Ibidem*, p. 106; Testifying one’s identity, origin, or reputation: “*Quod nemo acceptetur in Civile consortium eorum, nisi sit Pater familias & bonae famae*” which is to be testified “*levélel avagy élő jámbor személyekkel*” that is, either by means of a document or by honest persons. *Ibidem*, p. 3; For peasants, versions of the same formula are to be found for example in the early modern archives of the landlord’s courts of which hundreds of documents are published by Varga 1958. For the presence of the formula in cases of testifying identity, see note 6, in that of making and testifying last wills, see my article: Kristóf 1999 dealing with the double— oral and written—form of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Hungarian testaments. One could also prove “*quietantiakkal avagy emberi bizonyossággal*” that is, by means of written receipts or human testimony to have performed some feudal services, like having payed the tithe. Two cases, among the many, come from the Estate of Szalónak, Western Hungary from 1651: *Ibidem*, pp. 201, 203; as for the nobility, the use of written documents seems to have been much more preferred in legal contexts than that of oral evidence. Much further research is needed, however, to understand the differences (and the similarities) between early modern law books like that of Werbőczy or Kithonich written for the (middle/lesser) nobility and law books like *Jus civile* and others written for burghers. See Werbőczy 1989 and Kithonich 1650. I could, however, cite examples to demonstrate that the formula in question was applied, in some cases, also to the legal/communicational practice of the nobility itself. According to the judges of the landlord’s court held in the Estate of Németújvár (Western Hungary) in 1613, for example, one could prove his noble (here actually *agilis*) status and also that of his land by “*humano testimonio ac si voluerit, literis etiam et literalibus instrumentis.*” Varga 1958, p. 269; question XXX in the law book of Kithonich treats the way one should defend himself or herself against accusations of infamy. It says precisely that “*literali fulcimento, aut alio probabili documento, sufficienti scilicet humano testimonio comprobare, ipsum verum Nobilem & honestae conditionis hominem esse.*” Kithonich 1650, p. 211 (emphasis is mine: I. K.); for more references and a broader discussion of the formula, see Kristóf, “Towards a Historical Anthropology.”

- 8 The so-called “solemn ceremony” is described like this: “[...] witches meet together in conclave on a set day, and the Devil appears to them in the assumed body of a man, and urges them to keep faith with him [...] and they recommend a novice to his acceptance [...] if he finds the novice or disciple willing, then *the Devil stretches out his hand, and so does the novice, and she swears with upraised*



*hand to keep that covenant.” Malleus Maleficarum*, pp. 99–100 (italics are mine: I. K.).

- 9 On Weyer, see Baxter 1977, especially p. 61.
- 10 On Melius, see Kristóf 1997, p. 10 and 1998, p. 56.
- 11 The stories to be cited here relate the gesture not only to the Devil himself, but also to witches. One of the tortured witches coming from the village of Ebergöc (Sopron County, Northwestern Hungary) confessed in 1745 that one night she happened to meet two women in her courtyard who “invited her in their company [...] telling her *to give them her hand; so she did, stretched her hand towards them* and they told her: very well, from this time on you belonged to us.” Schram 1983, II, p. 228; one of the most detailed confessions representing the circumstances of the ritual/diabolical handshake comes from the village of Kamocsa (Komárom County, Northwestern Hungary), from 1728. The tortured woman admitted that she had walked once through the fields belonging to her village with Mrs. Hegedűs, a suspected witch and just as “they stopped at the crossroad at noon [...] there appeared the Devil before them, in human form, wearing German clothes, and Mrs. Hegedűs forced her *to give her hand to him* and deny God the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary, and the Holy Sacrament of Baptism before him,” which she did. Klaniczay, Kristóf and Pócs 1989, I, p. 499; the act of shaking hands with the Devil appears even in 1781. A woman from the village of Mezőtárkány (Heves-Külső Szolnok County, Northeastern Hungary) told her judges that “there came a Black Man to me one night, twenty years ago [...] He promised me lots of money *provided I give him my hand, so finally I shook hands with him.*” Sugár 1987, p. 214 (italics are mine: I. K.).
- 12 For aspects of the legal symbolism of the hand in ancient Roman culture, see Maine 1931; for its religious symbolism in medieval Western Europe, see Schmitt 1990, especially pp. 93–134 (Chapter III, *La main de Dieu*); for the specific use of the hand in medieval rites of vassalage, see Le Goff 1982.
- 13 Let me give only two examples. A peasant woman, living in the village of Rőjtök (Sopron County, Western Hungary), confessed under torture in 1746 that “she was registered [into the witches’ company] by her own blood having been obtained from her finger.” Schram 1983, II, p. 256. According to the testimony of the landlord of a 16 year-old servant, made in the city of Csorna (Northwestern Hungary) in 1734, “while crossing one of the courtyards, she met a tall man wearing a cloak [...] who addressed her by name and showed her a book, then wanted her to drop her blood into that book, but she did not do that.” *Ibidem*, p. 97.
- 14 For the free royal cities of the Hungarian Kingdom, Tractatus II, Titulus III (*De verberationibus cum livoribus & plagis ac sanguinis effusionibus*) of *Jus civile* describes that practice in details. It states that one has immediately to show his or her wounds or bruises either to the magistrates or—if they are not available—to his or her neighbors: “*Si quis hominum quempiam virorum verberaverit, & verberando eidem livores & plagas intulerit, aut inferri fecerit, palam vel occulte, & ipsa testimonio sufficienti probari poterit, aut citatus trinies, vel ad tres terminos juridicos venire per se vel per legitimum Procuratorem suum parere noluerit, aut non curaverit, extunc*

*parti laesae pro quolibet livore & plaga vel sanguinis effusione singulas tres Marcas & Judici pro tempore constituto totidem solvere tenebitur. Si autem testimonio sufficienti probare non poterit, & ipsi livores & sanguinis effusiones post perpetrationem juratis Civibus ostensae fuerint, juxta fassionem ipsius, jurati Cives, quot & quantae ipsae plagae livores & sanguinum effusiones fuerint, pro quolibet illarum in terminis post se se sequentibus, semet tertius purgabit suis juramentis. Si autem ipsos livores, plagas & sanguinum effusiones jurato Civi vel juratis Civibus non ostenderit, & loca seu cicatrices plagarum, livorum vel sanguinis effusio non apparuerint, penitus & omnino; tunc Attractus se solum in proximo termino juridico purgabit suo Juramento, juxta quantitatem & divisionem causarum.” Jus civile, pp. 31–32. Its sixteenth-century manuscript version repeats this passage almost word for word: Harsányi 1909, pp. 60–61. The same gesture of blood showing and blue showing referring to women is described and treated the same way, although separately in Titulus LXII (*De poena inferenda vituperantis aut verberantis Mulierem, aut livorem vel sanguinis effusionem patientis: ac de mulieribus se mutuo verberantibus*). *Jus civile*, pp. 81–82. To be found with almost the same words in the sixteenth-century manuscript version: Harsányi 1909, p. 84.*

- 15 One example, among the many, is that of Mrs. András Bartha, a healer or wise woman, accused of witchcraft in Debrecen in 1725. According to the testimony of one of her patients, the notary of the town of Kaba, she showed bruises and wounds on her body to him in order to give evidence of her nightly fights against witches as sign of her good will and said to him: “I have been suffering a lot for your health, just like the other night; she kept exhibiting him her body, which looked blue. She even asked him to tell the witches of Kaba not to torment her any more.” Kristóf 1998, p. 98.
- 16 Let me cite only three of the most revealing examples. A teenage Catholic gypsy girl confessed in the town of Bátaszék (Tolna County, Southwestern Hungary) in 1782 that a certain woman “had cut her ring finger of the right hand and she had to register herself with that blood [into the witches’ company].” BA-Szkd782.doc: unpublished document to be found in the *Archives of Witchcraft*, Institute of Ethnography, Budapest; an accused peasant woman told in her confession made under torture in the village of Röjtök (Sopron County, Northwestern Hungary) in 1746 that “she had been carried to the bushes of Lövő [a nearby village] and there György Tóth and his wife registered her name among those of the witches with the blood of her little finger.” Schram 1983, II, p. 257. According to the notary, a woman from the village of Barbac (Sopron County, Western Hungary) confessed under torture in 1742 that “*Diabolus nomen ipsius ipsa consentiente annuente, et volante sanguine e digito minori emisso inscripserit.*” *Ibidem*, p. 171 (italics are mine: I. K.).
- 17 Analyzing medieval religious gesture symbolism, Jean-Claude Schmitt provides plenty of illustrations of the liturgical acts of *benedictio* and *consecratio* in which the priests’ first three fingers of the right hand are raised while the two last ones are bent. The hand of God, that of Christ and saints are also often represented as making the same gesture. See Table V, VI, XX, XXIV, XXXII and Figure 3, 7, 14, 16/3, 16/7, 17/1, 17/4–6, 17/8, 19/1, 37 and pp. 208 and 329 in his book: Schmitt 1990.

The very meaning of it—the Holy Trinity—is mentioned, however, only in connection with that of making the sign of the Cross with the first three fingers joined. It is Cardinal Lothaire, the later Pope Innocent III, who wrote on this finger symbolism in his *Ordo missae* and *De sacro altaris mysterio* in the end of the twelfth century: *Ibidem*, pp. 333–34; the gesture of blessing can also be seen on numerous woodcuts spread by Hungarian Catholics as well as Lutherans as a means of religious teaching and propaganda. For pictures, more references, and a further discussion of finger symbolism, see Kristóf “Towards a Historical Anthropology.”

- 18 For the inventory of these forms, see Kristóf 1995.
- 19 The particular types of written documents, their terminology, and the legal gestures (for example a handshake) cited here refer to those used in general in early modern Hungarian jurisdiction—in the practice of civil as well as criminal law. Supported by the National Scientific Research Fund (OTKA, No. F023078), I am currently pursuing research into the historical anthropology of legal and religious communication in Hungary between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries. Working primarily on two groups of sources—early modern printed books on civil/criminal law and the archives of certain communities—my investigations concern both the norms and the practices of legal communication. I am obliged to express my gratitude here to the Committee of that Fund, without whose help I would not have been able to prepare this study.
- 20 For a further elaboration on this argument, see Kristóf, “Towards a Historical Anthropology.”
- 21 A man confessed his diabolic crime in the city of Eger (situated in Northern Hungary) in 1773 with the following words: “In accordance with his *contractus*, he has signed [the pact] with his own blood.” Sugár 1987, p. 213 (italics are mine: *I. K.*).
- 22 A 60-year-old man accused of witchcraft in the city of Szeged (situated in Southern Hungary) told his judges in 1728 that “he has given his handwriting and his *alba* to the Devil.” Reizner 1900, p. 396 (italics are mine: *I. K.*).
- 23 One of the best examples comes from the chief judge of the city of Szeged who was accused of witchcraft in 1728. In his confession, he gave a description of the meeting of the witches that seems to mirror a quite ordinary meeting of the town council. The Devil’s pact seems to be imagined here as a register of the council members themselves, by means of which the leader of the meeting checks the participants: “The *list* was kept by Pluto [the Devil] and when they came together, he enumerated all the witches one by one and asked why this or that witch was not present and where he or she was to be found. And he [the judge] was in charge of giving him an account of each and everyone.” Reizner 1900, p. 407 (italics are mine: *I. K.*).
- 24 This belief seems to be most characteristic of those Szeged witchcraft trials which were conducted in 1728. Many of the accused men and women confessed to having obtained a small piece of paper (a “*cédula*” that is, a written slip) from the Devil during the ceremony of their oath taking. However, the confessions diverge on the issue of what happened later to the slip. According to the testimony of a 56 year-old-man, he concluded his contract “by means of both letters and words and

the *slip he was given is now to be found with the captain* [of the witches].” Reizner 1900, p. 417. In contrast, a 65-year-old woman told in the same trial in 1728 that “she took her oath in writing, obtained a receipt, too, *which receipt is to be found in the cupboard*.” *Ibidem*, pp. 389–90. And, a third accused, a 60-year-old man thought that “that *writing*, if it has not been already taken away by those wicked, *must be at home, in the pot*.” *Ibidem*, pp. 413–14 (italics are mine: I. K.).

- 25 For Mauss’s brilliant analysis of the worldwide practice of gift-giving in which he interprets the custom as a multifunctional, multireferential social institution that is, a *total social phenomenon*, see Mauss 1967. Citation is from *Ibidem*, p. 76.

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Abbreviations:

RMK: *Régi Magyar Könyvtár* [A short title catalogue of ancient books printed in Hungary]



# HEALING AT THE JAGIELLONIAN COURT

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It is fair to say that medicine became increasingly professionalized at the dawn of early modern times. Yet, patients did not hesitate to resort to traditional remedies and the difference between medicine and healing remained at times problematic. The criteria of rationality or efficacy cannot resolve the matter since from our point of view some of the medical procedures in the medieval and early modern times were highly irrational and ineffective. The suggestion of Richard Kieckhefer seems more promising. He defines healers as persons who lacked formal, licensed education in medicine and stresses that their prosperity and even personal safety depended to a great degree on their clients' estimation (Kieckhefer 1992, p. 59). A set of the sixteenth-century chronicles, diaries, and courtly correspondence lets us trace a number of such healers at the Jagiellonian court. The descriptions of the practices of unlicensed medicine are fragmentary and often biased, yet I propose in this paper to reconstruct the portrayal of a healer and analyze the procedures and objects they made use of. The studies that have been written on the Polish Renaissance court so far commonly stress the dichotomy of popular and learned culture. I prefer rather to demonstrate how they intertwined and influenced each other, how popular remedies penetrated into the court, how illiterate healers found their way to royal chambers and, finally, how far the notion of the healing power of certain objects and procedures was shared by the courtly milieu and the common folk.

One of the most interesting characteristics of unlicensed medicine at the Jagiellonian court is the fact that we cannot correlate healers to a particular gender, social rank, or occupation. There is not much information concerning two male healers who appeared at the Jagiellonian court. The

first known individuals committed to healing, certain Bernardine monks, tried in vain to heal the diarrhea of King Casimir Jagiellon, who had refused to trust his doctors.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, we know much more about a certain Baliński, a quack whose therapy resulted in the untimely death of King Alexander I, the son of the aforementioned King Casimir Jagiellon. Baliński very successfully set up his practice as a doctor in the neighborhood of Cracow. His fame was so widely spread that Cracovian townsmen would pay one hundred *złoty* for a diagnosis; this uncommon wage earned him the nickname *Centurio vel Centanarius*.<sup>2</sup>

As we lack any additional information concerning the Bernardine monks, it would be too hazardous to draw any conclusions on the basis of one person, the healer of King Alexander, Baliński. The only common feature of these two cases is the fact that the healing performed virtually denied magic. Even Baliński, who subsequently devoted himself to *Alchimia et Philosophia* and was versed in incantations, is presented as a charlatan (*deceptor*) rather than a magician. He did not practice folk medicine; instead, he pretended to have been educated abroad, played the role of a professional doctor, and openly performed medical care. In the chronicle of Matthew of Miechów, he is given the name *propheta* but his remedial procedure proposed to the king apparently did not rely upon magic. His behavior was perceived by the chronicler as purely rational even though harmful and contrary to the doctors' counsel. The following historiographical tradition made additional effort to rationalize his healing technique. Thus, Matthew Strykowski claimed that Baliński was a quack (*matacz*), false doctor (*falszywy lekarz*), and traitor hired by the powerful Muscovite family of Gliński's, whose aim was King Alexander's death (Strykowski 1980, pp 330–31).

The cases of magical healing are exclusively associated with women. Their practices show how far the line between magic and medicine is blurred. They also demonstrate how easily the healers were intertwined with witchcraft accusations. The first known healer, Catherine Telniczanka, daughter of a Silesian merchant, entered the courtly milieu as the lover of King Sigismund I and the mother of his children. Jilted by the king and subsequently widow of Andrew Kościelecki, Catherine allegedly strove to establish herself as the lover of the royal chancellor, Christopher Szydłowiecki. Christopher Szydłowiecki suffered from *humor melancholicus*, which Catherine Telniczanka intended to heal by some magical pro-

cedure including incantations. However, the sources clearly emphasize that Catherine Telniczanka resorted to healing in order to lure Christopher Szydłowiecki, who, by the way, hardly sought her service.<sup>3</sup> Biased as it is, the picture emerging of her from both the courtiers' letters and the poem of Andrew Krzycki bears features typically attributed to the Renaissance literature of old, repugnant and lecherous women (Krzycki 1888, p. 218).

A number of female healers appeared again at the royal court during the lethal sickness of Queen Barbara Radziwiłł who, for all we know, suffered from womb cancer (Kuchowicz 1978, pp. 242–57). King Sigismund Augustus inquired of the Queen's brother, Nicholas Radziwiłł the Red, about the healing women in Lithuania. The king demanded that these women [*baby*] be learned and experienced in magical arts, and precisely, in healing venereal diseases [*około macice*] (Jasnowski 1939, p. 67). The reason the king looked for healers in distant Lithuania remains uncertain. It is possible that Sigismund Augustus made an effort to conceal his interest in unlicensed magic. I also tend to believe that he selected Nicholas Radziwiłł the Red to intercede on his behalf, not only because Nicholas was the Queen's brother, but also because he was a person the king trusted entirely.

It is also possible that, as recently suggested by Zbigniew Kuchowicz, the females from the Great Duchy of Lithuania were believed to be particularly able in magical arts (Kuchowicz 1978, p. 66). That would explain why in 1571, when King Sigismund Augustus discontinued his policy of concealing the healers, it was again the *castellanus* of Wilno (Vilnius) Jan Chodkiewicz who provided the king with unlicensed magicians.<sup>4</sup> The sources fall short of furnishing any decisive evidence to prove this hypothesis, albeit we positively know that in both groups of healers some Ruthenian women appeared.<sup>5</sup> We also find a Jewish woman among the females trying to heal Queen Barbara Radziwiłł, which might be related to the presumed Jewish mastery in magic (see for instance Gratiani 1838, p. 64; also Tyszkiewicz 1983, pp. 197–98). Finally, the king might have deemed local healers dangerous since they could have been suborned by his enemies. Sigismund Augustus was completely aware of the common hatred toward Queen Barbara and he seriously considered the danger of assassination, poisoning, and witchcraft. Therefore, he possibly preferred healers to be selected by the Queen's brother and far from the hostile Polish court.

Some of these healers are referred to as “women” [*baby*], without their names mentioned, and we cannot identify any of the healers who were called on to cure Queen Barbara. However, we can recognize three persons, Korycka, Susanna Orłowska, and Budzikowa, who took care of Sigismund Augustus in the late sixties and seventies. Two of them, Korycka and Susanna Orłowska were kinswomen.<sup>6</sup> Contemporaries held that magical power was inherited, however, the sources do not suggest whether Susanna, as the niece of Korycka, was somehow predisposed to healing. As presented by royal courtiers, it was rather Korycka who controlled the therapy, while Susanna Orłowska emerges from the sources essentially as a royal lover. Despised by Sigismund Augustus, Susanna refused to participate further in healing and used harmful magic in order to punish her unfaithful lover. Finally her rage was tempered by Korycka who seems to have been the dominant personality.<sup>7</sup> Korycka was also believed to enjoy unusual authority at the royal court, which was partly attributed to her magical power and partly to quite practical means. For example, it was rumored that Korycka had a copy of the keys to the royal castle in Lublin and of having led there anybody she wanted.<sup>8</sup> We cannot definitely know Korycka’s influence on Sigismund Augustus. Both she and Susanna Orłowska were women of common origin, presumably illiterate and their intimacy with the king did not help them in becoming part of the ruling elite. Their influence faded as the king died, albeit they were said to have collected some personal wealth. The last thing we hear about Susanna Orłowska is that she married a certain Mazurian peasant, Bogatka, which is not an outstanding career move for a royal mistress.<sup>9</sup>

Sigismund Augustus appears to be the only king who availed himself of the service of female healers. But even this interest in magic granted, Sigismund Augustus still seems as attentive to the ambiguous nature of healing as his contemporaries who believed his death to be the result of healers’ wickedness. The interrogation pursued by the nobility after the death of Sigismund Augustus proved that the king was killed by love potions (*amatorium poculum*) and other practices of his healers.<sup>10</sup> Certainly, this conclusion should be understood in the context of the political fight for power that started after the Jagiellonian dynasty became extinct. Healers served as convenient scapegoats, while in fact the accusation created a powerful opportunity to end the power of the Mnischs family, who were accused of supporting “the murderous witches.” Yet,

the context of demoniac theory does not prevail in these accusations. Furthermore, Stanislas Czarnotulski mentions that one of the healers, Korycka, entered the church and prayed for the king's recovery before she decided to start healing.<sup>11</sup> Certainly, her devotion would not contradict the accusation of witchcraft since we otherwise know that some of the supposed witches were deeply religious (Baranowski 1952, p. 125). Still, the testimonies of the courtiers and the final sentence of the interrogation mention magic (*czary*) but do not attribute it precisely to any of the healers and they escaped punishment for the presumed murder (Kozmian 1845, pp. 66–67).

It should be stressed though that healers were really feared for their ambiguous power. Stanislas Wilkocki, the courtier of late King Sigismund Augustus, professed that the king acknowledged the danger and warned him not to drink or eat anything in the presence of Susanna Orłowska.<sup>12</sup> Even though his testimony could have been partial or forced during the investigation, the letters of King Sigismund Augustus demonstrate that he did not have absolute confidence in his healers. Significantly, on sight of his wife getting better, the king commanded an anonymous healer to leave the court, even though she had not undertaken any diagnosis and in fact had not even seen the queen (Sigismund Augustus 1999, p. 199). His reluctance might have been associated with the well-established conviction that the person having the power to heal has also the power to harm.

We see here clearly that magic was believed to be twofold in character. Once benevolent, the wielder of magic might turn malevolent. The courtiers stressed that the remedies taken by Sigismund Augustus were particularly harmful and at last caused his death. However, they also believed that the proximity to the king offered the healers a good chance to influence his will by means of magic. Stanislas Czarnotulski claimed that the healers, specifically Korycka and her niece Susanna Orłowska, stole some threads from royal underwear and some pieces of an amber chalice belonging to the king, which gave them the power to subdue the king.<sup>13</sup> The courtier obviously believed that different objects, such as clothes or belongings, might have been utilized in magic in order to influence their owner. We know for sure that this type of magic was popular in sixteenth-century Poland and the testimony of Stanislas Czarnotulski did not differ on this point with the popular notion of his contemporaries (Kuchowicz 1982, p. 370; Sochaniewicz 1922, pp. 125–35).

To sum up, women seem prominent in the sphere of magical healing. All of them were commoners and, with the exception of Catherine Telniczanka, who presumably embarked on healing in an attempt to ravish the chancellor, they belonged to what Keith Thomas calls “cunning folk.” In the case of Barbara Radziwiłł, the female dominance should be perceived as a consequence of the venereal nature of the illness. In the case of Sigismund Augustus, we may assume that the king resorted to the persons who had been previously put into service during his wife’s malady. The interrogation carried out after the royal death proved that the healers attended the court of Sigismund Augustus for many years. Moreover, one of them, Korycka, counseled in 1568 that the king should comply with the suggestion of a woman who had tried to heal his wife (Orzelski 1917, p. 65). Taking into consideration that Barbara Radziwiłł died in 1551, the demand of Korycka may suggest that the king sustained some contacts with the same healer for almost two decades.

Korycka, Budzikowa, Susanna Orłowska, and unnamed females that were called on to heal Queen Barbara Radziwiłł seemed more or less notorious, and experienced in the healing arts. They lacked formal education, which is not surprising in times when female opportunities for professional participation in medical care were suppressed and limited to midwifery. However, each of them was, as requested in one of the letters of King Sigismund Augustus, *in arte incantamentorum bene versata et perita*.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps they performed medical care for their families and neighbors, who were not able or could not afford to call upon professional doctors. Their occurrence at the royal court shows not only the persistence of folk medicine but also the diffusion of what we used to distinguish as popular and learned.

The case of Catherine Telniczanka for several reasons does not support this scheme. Even if we consider the courtiers reliable, apparently neither Catherine’s patient nor his friends entertained and welcomed her intervention. Besides, Catherine seemed to be involved in healing only incidentally and she in fact worked toward seducing Christopher Szydłowiecki. Her case demonstrates interestingly how recipes or remedies could have been spread at the courtly milieu by persons who were neither doctors, nor notorious healers. Sometimes we don’t even have the names of these persons. The remedy for the illness of Queen Elisabeth of Austria, the first wife of Sigismund Augustus, was suggested by a certain *vir bonus*, which

might imply that he was not a professional doctor.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, a Lithuanian magnate and a very close friend of King Sigismund Augustus, Nicholas the Black Radziwiłł, decided to follow the therapy counseled by an anonymous member of his own household. Against the advice of all his doctors, Nicholas Radziwiłł tried to heal his gout with a mixture of “active silver,” which eventually killed him (Jasnowski 1939, pp. 391–92).

Thus, we find three types of people involved in healing. The first group constituted charlatans who pretended to have the knowledge and education necessary for medical practice: in my sources it is represented by Baliński. The healing women comprised the second group. In these cases, the traditional dichotomy between learned and traditional culture proves irrelevant. Despite the increasing tendency to separate themselves from commoners, the members of the court occasionally disregarded doctors’ suggestions and resorted to unlicensed female healers. Their control of medical practice at the Jagiellonian court demonstrates how deeply the courtly milieu, including the royal family, was rooted in ritual and oral culture. The third group is made up of people, such as Catherine Telniczanka, Bernardine monks or *vir bonus*, who happened to be familiar with some traditional remedies, and only occasionally stepped into the sphere of unlicensed medicine. We cannot trace the sources of their healing practices; the knowledge could have been passed on orally or emerged from written handbooks.

The description of healing practices is almost absent from my sources. The Bernardine monk was said to have tried to heal King Casimir Jagiellon with dark Lithuanian bread (*pane grossissimo ac nigerrimo Lithuanico*), the diet ultimately responsible for the king’s death (Maciej of Miechów 1986, p. CCCXVI). Baliński’s therapy was not much more complicated since he advised King Alexander to drink fortified wine and then led him to a hot bath, and the effect was additionally strengthened by unspecified vapors and herbs.<sup>16</sup> This combination struck royal doctors as particularly dangerous since the king suffered from paralysis. Nonetheless, his treatment bore significant similarities to the magical baths arranged for King Sigismund Augustus by his healing women.

Due to the interrogation carried on by the Diet, we have relatively detailed accounts of two baths meant to heal—or at least partly ease the symptoms of—royal gout. According to the royal courtier, Stanislas Czarnotulski, King Sigismund Augustus visited Korycka, the healer, at night in

the bedchamber of his servant Jacob, the keeper of royal cellars. Korycka was alone. She prepared a bath. Initially, she filled a bowl with the fluid in the tub and let it be tasted by the aforementioned Stanislas Czarnotulski who accompanied the king. Sigismund Augustus drank what was left in the bowl. Next, the courtiers were asked to retire from the room and the king remained with Korycka by himself. She allegedly prompted him to take a bath in the tub.<sup>17</sup> Later on, Stanislas Czarnotulski saw Korycka pulling the tub with the fluid to the Vistula River and washing the royal underwear (*femuralia*) (Orzelski 1917, p. 65). The second bath was carried out in the presence of the royal doctor Fogelfeder and royal surgeon Luke. Another healer also gave a bath initially to the king, then she asked Sigismund Augustus to turn around three times.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, Stanislas Czarnotulski failed to note the specific meaning of that practice. And all this was not the only magical practice the healers suggested. Stanislas Czarnotulski admitted that the king had formerly sought their advice and consulted Budzikowa upon herbs (*de herbis, quas vino mixtas Vilnae sibi bibendas quondam dedisset*) and rites (*ritus*) (Orzelski 1917, p. 66).

Healing baths worked through a kind of analogy. Healers tried to “wash away” the illnesses from the body of the sick person as if illnesses were material substances. Together with incantations based on the belief in the magical power of words and herbal remedies, the baths constituted the third type of popular healing practices in sixteenth-century Poland (Baranowski 1952, pp. 130–32; Kuchowicz 1982, p. 372). The sources do not mention the rites that accompanied the baths, neither do they specify the types of herbs or note the words of incantations. In fact, we cannot even decide how far the relations of Stanislas Czarnotulski and Stanislas Zieliński provide a faithful documentation of the actual healing care the king received. Yet, true or not, their stories describe the typical healing procedures of the “cunning folk.”

The sources do not dwell much on the objects utilized in healing procedures. The diary of Świętosław Orzelski passes a vague comment on the ring (*plumbeum*) given to Sigismund Augustus by a certain healer who tried to save his wife (Orzelski 1917, p. 65). We can only speculate whether this ring was meant to heal some kind of an illness of the king or just to protect him; certainly, it could possibly serve both purposes. Another healing object, “the ring of the English kings,” was looked for by the Polish court during the illness of Queen Elisabeth of Austria, who



suffered from epilepsy (Zakrzewski 1909, p. 26). It is clear that the Polish court believed in the thaumaturgical power of the king and sought one of the cramp-rings, which were rubbed by the English monarch and given to epileptics and sufferers of some other diseases (King 1989, p. 185). We do not have any traces of the thaumaturgical power of Polish sovereigns. However, the notion lingered at the court and in 1517 Nicholas Radziwiłł, the bishop-elect of Samogitia, pleaded with the Polish king, Sigismund I, to give him a recommendation to Francis I. Nicholas Radziwiłł persisted in the belief that the French king could heal his scrofula even though the previous (1515) intervention of Francis proved ineffective (Pociecha 1958, p. 86).

His determination suggests the final problem: what made the healers popular? Some patients, such as King Casimir Jagiellon or Nicholas Radziwiłł the Black, refused to rely upon licensed doctors. Some others, such as King Sigismund Augustus and Queen Barbara, did not decline the therapy of professional doctors, however, they supplemented it with various forms of healing. The common feature of the patients was the conviction that their illness was grave. Doctors proved ineffective in curing Queen Elisabeth of Austria, they had no hope of curing Queen Barbara before healing women were called into service, and the death of King Sigismund Augustus was anticipated by both doctors and healers. And, finally, I would like to emphasize again that, even though medical care was increasingly professionalized, in some cases the distinction between licensed and unlicensed medicine in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was still uncertain and even doctors occasionally profited from the knowledge of healers and, as noted in *Acta capitulorum: ... consuluerunt medici, ut mulieres antiquas super tali dolore consuluerit* (Koranyi 1927, p. 4).

## Notes

- 1 “*Monachorum minorum de observantia, quos vulgariter Bernardinos nuncupant, accepto consilio. (...) Et exhilaratus in suos medicos invexit, quod relligiosorum medicina pluris valeret, quod in arte medica doctorum*” (Maciej of Miechów 1986, p. CCCXXVI).
- 2 Maciej of Miechów 1874, pp. 279–80. Similar subsequently in: Bielski 1976, p. 403; Kromer 1982, p. 95.

- 3 “*Catharina de Telnicz, mater episc. Vilnensis, incantatrix, quae incantationibus aegritudines inferebat Tomicio et Szydlovicio, volens ab iis amari*” (Górski 1857, pp. 105, 118–19).
- 4 “*Misisse post haec Regem eundem ad Vilniensem Castellatum per litteras oratum, ut mulierem quandam curando corpori sibi mitteret*” (Orzelski 1917, p. 66).
- 5 Jasnowski mentions two Ruthenian women and one Jewish woman who tried to heal Queen Barbara (Jasnowski 1939, p. 67). We also know that a female healer sent to the king in 1571 spoke Ruthenian (*Russico idiomate dixisse*) (Orzelski 1917, p. 66).
- 6 “*...feminam Zusannam Orloviam, Coryciae ex sorore filiam ...*” (Orzelski 1917, p. 64).
- 7 “*Sed istis venire recusantibus, Susannam quidem, se praesente, Regem desolatae sui et Gizancae adamatae incusasse haecque verba adiecisse: Regem, perfido et Italo Lithuanoque invicem mixto sanguine ortum, unquam sincere cum quoquam egisse ac ut contumeliam, qua se affecisset, sarciat, malum malo se reddituram. Denuo igitur Regem se misisse et mille florenorum summam, dotis nomine, Susannae promississe, et, si advenire nollet, valetudinis dumtaxat Regiae curandae admonuisse. Susanna per iocos se absolvente, Koryciam vero seniore iocos illos miratam, fanum primo ingressam, sanitatem Regis (...) pollicitam esse*” (Orzelski 1917, pp. 64–65).
- 8 “*Koryciam posthaec cerea clave fabricata arcis Lublinensis portam aperire et, quem vellet, immittere consuevisse*” (Orzelski 1917, p. 64).
- 9 “*Cum Susanna Bogatka quispiam Masovius connubium contraxit*” (Orzelski 1917, p. 66).
- 10 Orzelski 1917, p. 3. See also *ibid*, p. 76: “*Primum quidem incantationum signa satis superque in corpore Regio conspecta atque doctorum chyrurgorum Regis ipsius, Czarnotulii, Vilcocii, Cracoviensis Episcopi et ab aliis mulieribus magis litterarum scriptarum testimoniis confirmata fuisse, praeposteram Regis Venerem luce meridiana notioem esse.*”
- 11 “*... fanum primo ingressam ...*” (Orzelski 1917, p. 65).
- 12 “*Vilkocius retulit se ab Rege tertia ante morte die Susannae advehendae sermonisque eius perscrutandi et Regi referendi causa missum et cavendi apud eam victus admonitum perquirereque de ferrea arca gradum sursum deorsumque percurrente iussum ...*” (Orzelski 1917, p. 66).
- 13 “*Susannam aevectam narraisse sibi amitam suam Koryciam fraude cum Rege egisse illumque, quem memoravimus, funiculum Regis in arbitrio suo et potestate sua habendi gratia rupisse. Cuncta haec Regi se retulisse et ut ae, quae per magiam abrepta essent, liberandi sua sui gratia remitti mandaret, sedulo orasse. Regem ad ea praeter haec, quod plures suas res feminas illas detinuisse diceret, nihil respondisse. (...) Denique in agone mortis Regiae, se eadem, quae paulo ante, Regem rogasse, quare hunc ad mulieres missum funiculum dudum memoratum et scyphum viridem, ex succino confectum pedeque comminutum, tantumdem reportasse*” (Orzelski 1917, pp. 65–66; Similar in Koźmian 1845, pp. 66–67).
- 14 From a letter to Nicholas Radziwiłł the Red, March 5, 1551; Sigismund Augustus 1999, pp. 95–196.

- 15 A letter of Stanisław Górski to Jan Dantyszek from June 13, 1545; Zakrzewski 1909, p. 26: "*Dixit mihi quidam vir bonus, quod Sermus Rex Angliae habeat hoc donum Dei, quod a tali passione liberantur hii, quibus ille annulum suum consecratum donaverit. Si id R. D. Vestra unquam audivit et verum esse scit, oro et atque obsecro, ut id vel michi, vel ipsi regi quam primum significet, vel anulum hunc quam primum impetret huic nobilissimae reginae mitti; scio enim, quod ex Gdano frequentissimi in Angliam navigant.*"
- 16 "...in castro Vilmensi (cedentibus medicia regiis) ex stuba grandi facto balneo, vapores ex coctione herbarum producents, regem ad sudandum desuper locabat. Ad bibendumque vinum et malmaticum porrigebat, quae in paralisis apud omnes medicos suspectissima erat" (Maciej of Miechów 1874, p. 280).
- 17 "Korycia adveniente absolutaque coena regem ad eam noctu in cubiculum pincernae, Nicolao Mniszko candelam praeferente seque adesse iusso, ivisse; praeter solam Koryciam litremque aqua repletum neminem offendesse. Koryciam deinde accepto potum cochleari de eo assumptum sibi praegustandum, reliquum vero Regi bibendum dedisse. Discedere omnibus iussis Regem solum cum Korycia sola remansisse, aegrotum admodum et macilentum corpus in lintre illo lavandum dedisse, aliquantum temporis colloquio insumpsisse" (Orzelski 1917, p. 65).
- 18 "Veniente eadem ad Regem et Fogelfedrio doctore Lucasque chyrurgo praesentibus atque Regis pedes manusque ligatas silventibus corpus Regium lavasse et, ter in gyrum Regem obambulantem, Russico idiomante dixisse, Serenissimum Regem, si eam, quam habuisset mulierem, sperneret, istam autem, quae tunc venisset, adama-ret, sanum tandem futurum" (Orzelski 1917, p. 66).

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# FOLLOWING THE TRACES OF XENOPHOBIA IN MUSCOVITE WITCHCRAFT INVESTIGATION RECORDS

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## *Introduction*

Witch hunts in the seventeenth-century Muscovy did not possess most of their European counterparts' characteristic features: they never raised a similar scale of panic, did not claim even a slightly comparable number of victims, at all times remained individual investigations of detached crimes, and therefore cannot even be called hunts in the strict sense of the word.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding these differences, as well as the variance in the nature of the concept of witchcraft both as an activity and as a crime in Russia and continental Western Europe,<sup>2</sup> there is one distinct similarity between the two: to a larger or smaller degree, the concentration and intensity of witch trials was greater in the zones where several religions, cultures, or ethnic groups mingled and coexisted. Examining the impact of the Reformation on the dynamics of witchcraft trials in Western Europe, Brian Levack concluded that "witch hunting was most severe in countries or regions where either large minorities lived within the boundaries of a state or where the people of one state or territory adhered to one religion and the residents of a neighboring state adhered to another" (Levack 1987, p. 105). In the Western European case, it was not the adherents of other religions but members of one's own flock who became the targets of accusation; however, these "insiders" were frequently marginal figures, isolated from their communities by various, most commonly, economic factors.<sup>3</sup> Preserved records of witch trials in the seventeenth-century Muscovy testify that the issue of marginality was at the core of witchcraft accusations in Russia as well as in the West, however in Russia they surfaced in other shapes, and one major group of marginals were the outsiders. Witches and sorcerers were not invariably detected in the victims' and accusers' localities—on the contrary, one prominent group was that of wanderers and migrants.

And even among the accusations leveled against inhabitants of one's neighborhood, a fair proportion was directed at people of a different religious and/or ethnic background.<sup>4</sup> In this paper I will examine these "strangers within the community," the type of accusations which were brought against them and look into the motives, which made them more predisposed to be accused of witchcraft.

### *Historical Background*

The sharp distinction between the familiar *here* and the fearful and unknown *there* and springing thereupon, the notion of "evil from beyond" must have been very pertinent for medieval Russia, which faced continuous invasions from the vast and unknown steppes which circumscribed its territories. It is not surprising therefore that fear of the evil which could penetrate the lands' borders was reflected in the Russians' anticipation of malefic witchcraft from outside and the association of it with the foreign. There is ample evidence for the long roots of this witchcraft-related xenophobia with their ends deep down in the early times of Russian history. Thus, the Pskov Chronicle tells of a fourteenth-century priest who came with "wicked and malicious" potions from the Golden Horde (Afanasiev 1869, vol. 3, p. 625). A very graphic testimony of fear of a foreign sorcerer and the harm he could do to the Russian nation appears in the Pskov Chronicle for the year 1570, which tells us that Ivan the Terrible brought from abroad a wicked German sorcerer who made the tsar atrocious to his own people and lenient towards foreigners.<sup>5</sup> Another chronicle tells of a case in 1591 about a great number of Crimean sorcerers who were sent by "*basurmane*" (Muslim Turks) (*Letopis o mnogikh miatezhakh*, pp. 15–16).

The chain of examples of the fear of foreign sorcery continues into the early modern period, often directly linked with matters of national security. For instance, the Patriarch of Constantinople warned Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich (1613–1645) against presents and letters from the Turkish Sultan, cautioning him that such messages could contain some malicious spells (Afanasiev 1869, vol. 3, p. 624, cf. 4). And during the reign of the same tsar, in 1632, a decree was sent to the city of Pskov interdicting buying hops from Lithuanians, since Russian spies had found out that some Lithuanian sorceress had cast spells on this hops in order to bring plague

upon Russian cities (*Akty, sobrannye v bibliotekakh* vol. 3, p. 283). In criminal investigation records, we find evidence that distrust of foreigners and suspicions of their aptness to meddle in sorcery for political reasons were a continuous matter of concern to Muscovy's authorities. Thus, in the 1642 case of sorcery in the tsarina's palace, one of the sorceresses involved turned out to be married to a Lithuanian. Her situation immediately became more perilous and she was subjected to more thorough interrogation, as her husband was suspected of having received orders from his native land to bewitch the tsar's family (Novombergskii 1906, case #33).

Another testimony to the phobia of foreign magic is Tsar Alexis Mikhailovich's 1653 decree concerning the spread of witchcraft and sorcery in Ukraine and Poland, which was sent to a number of Russian cities to be read there on fair and trading days (Novombergskii 1906, case #16). It declares that in Ukraine and Poland people meddle in fortunetelling, keep forbidden books, consult sorcerers and witches, and kill people with their spells and potions. It warns Russians not to follow in their footsteps, on pain of being burnt. This decree is another reflection of the association of witchcraft practices coming from abroad, in this case, from the West.

### *Sorcery and Medicine*

At least among the nobility, the association of magicians with foreigners might have been strengthened by the combination of two factors: the traditional association of magic and medicine, and the prevalence of foreigners both at court and in the contemporary Russian medical infrastructure.<sup>6</sup> Foreign physicians were often experts in natural magic,<sup>7</sup> and a very blurred distinction Muscovites made between demonic magic and the natural magic exercised by foreign physicians, made the position of these "scientists" at the Russian court quite precarious. Although arriving in Muscovy on an official invitation, foreign doctors met with mistrust and suspicion and often found themselves in danger of being accused of practicing sorcery (Galkovskii 1916, pp. 220–21).

The border between science, medicine, and magic remained diaphanous even among the highest aristocratic layers to have foreign educated physicians at their disposal. Naturally, this was even more the case with the lower classes, for whom empirical traditional knowledge or popular



medicine transmitted through local healers remained the mainstay against disease. A vague distinction between a healer and a magician, as well as the relatively large number of foreign "healers" at large in the country, strengthened in the popular mind the unity of foreignness and sorcery.

Another example of association of these two concepts is the connection of epidemics with malefic magic and the perception of epidemics as evil penetrating the country from abroad. In early Russian history, there are a number of examples of witches and sorcerers being burnt because of a spread of an epidemic or drought. The abovementioned example of the Lithuanian sorceress casting a plague spell on the hops illustrates that the connection of the source of the epidemic with malignant foreign magic was there, even if not in an explicit form. If one looks at seventeenth-century medical documents, one may find plenty of warnings and edicts on measures against the "penetration and spread of plague" from Lithuania, Poland, and Astrakhan, in short from all around the Muscovite border. In this light, with the understanding of both the disease and the doctors coming from abroad, and with the traditional view that those who could heal could also hurt, the aura of sorcery around foreigners became even thicker.

### *The Image of a Wandering Sorcerer*

In Muscovy, practitioners of witchcraft were often associated with mobility: sorcerers traveled from village to village and town to town offering their services to local residents.<sup>8</sup> The common perception of their migratory mode of life is reflected in the 1649 decree of Alexis Mikhailovich which forbade dealings with sorcerers who "came" to villages and cities (Novombergskii 1906, case #14, p. 76). Wandering sorcerers are also visible in the investigation records, in which they sometimes appear as professionals wandering from one locality to another.<sup>9</sup> Incidentally, they are often not Russians. One such example is Nester, the Pole, who was accused of sorcery, apparently after some unsuccessful attempts to find treasure (Novombergskii 1906, case #25 /year of 1673/). He was accused of killing a person by means of a hexed potion, which he denied under torture, although confessing to practicing love magic and treasure finding. Another example is that of an old Tartar woman who wandered around villages,

performing fortunetelling and curative magic (Novombergskii 1906, case #5 /year of 1630/). In a different case, we come across another wandering female fortuneteller who was also a Tartar. There are also cases where there are some implicit associations, such as for instance the accused peasant Tereshka Ivlev, claiming to have studied magic when he was a sailor on the Volga.<sup>10</sup>

### *Scapegoat Mechanisms*

Admonitions and warnings against foreigners issued by the highest authorities necessarily left some trace on the collective mind of Muscovy's population; and this influence must have added to the already existing mistrust of foreigners, and strengthened popular expectation of the foreign nature of malefic witchcraft. In the sample of fifty cases examined for this paper,<sup>11</sup> in almost 20 percent of the cases, either accusations or denunciations were leveled against a person of a religious or ethnic background other than Russian. Several nationalities regularly reappear in the sources in the capacity of the accused, such as Mordvins, Tartars, Poles, Lithuanians, and Cherkes. Sometimes no particular nationality was specified in the source, and the alleged sorcerer was alluded to simply as an *inozemets*—a person from another land. In most cases dealing with sorcerers of different ethnicity, it is a Russian who was initially accused, and an alien whom the accused Russian denounced as an associate, teacher or the actual performer of a magical act. It was invariably a one-way connection: the foreigner was the sorcerer, the Russian—a student or a client.

A lot of sorcery investigations adhering to this pattern were conducted in the Nizhegorod and Shatsk regions and involved Mordvins, people belonging to a Finno-Ugric tribe, whose lands had already been claimed by Riazan and Nizhegorod principalities in the thirteenth century, but were firmly incorporated into the Muscovite state shortly after Ivan IV's capture of Kazan in 1552. In the seventeenth century, the distribution of different ethnic groups in these regions was not even: while in some territories Mordvins and Russians lived side by side, there also existed strictly Mordvin villages.

In all the cases involving Mordvins, it is indeed a Russian man or a woman who under torture blames one or several Mordvins of being the

main culprits in his or her crime, namely, the teacher of sorcery, supplier of magic herbs, or caster of spells. Moreover, in all cases the Russians try to divert blame from themselves by accusing Mordvins of general sorcery practice, their particular case being just one of many. Thus, when a certain peasant Maksimka Ivanov was accused of having given his wife an herb from which she died, he denounced a peasant of the same village, Fedyka, and his *master*, the Mordvin Vetiasko as his teachers and people generally infamous for their knowledge of magic (Novombergskii 1906, case #4 /year of 1629/). Maksimka later named other accomplices; however the investigating authorities did not raise the charge of “practicing” sorcery against anybody but the Mordvin. All the other accused were asked the same question, namely, what magic they had “hired” the Mordvin to perform. The end of the case is unknown; the Mordvin died under torture.

In another case, a Russian woman, Aniotka, was accused of killing her husband by giving him a maleficent root (Novombergskii 1907b, case #5 /year of 1650/). The woman claimed that she had given the root in good faith as a medicine and had received it from a Mordvin, Sobaiko Beliaev. She also claimed that Sobaiko had previously been known as a sorcerer and an expert in roots. The Mordvin was tortured (from records it seems that he was tortured far more severely than Aniotka) and although he did not confess to being guilty, was kept in prison for four years without any further investigation to confirm Aniotka’s allegations. Only following his eventual petition for release did the investigation recommence. A large number of people from nearby villages, of both Russian and Mordvin ethnic background, were interrogated and out of over 200 witnesses, only about a dozen, all of them of Mordvin origin, explicitly said that they knew that the Mordvin was no sorcerer. All others simply claimed not knowing anything about his activities. In the end, both the Mordvin and the initially accused woman were released on surety.

In the third case, a Russian woman named Marfitsa was accused of bewitching her husband and parents-in-law (Novombergskii 1907a, case #35 /year of 1658/). Under torture, Marfitsa admitted to having attempted love magic (putting magical herbs and objects into her relatives’ beds) to make her husband and in-laws kind to her. She claimed that she was taught this magic by two “recently baptized”<sup>12</sup> Mordvin women, Narovka and Ulevka, and that another spell was cast for her by a Mord-

vin man named Kichatko. She also named her sister as a provider of another magical item (garlic over which a spell had been cast by another Mordvin). All the Mordvins accused were interrogated. After several torture sessions, the Mordvins admitted nothing, and later under torture Marfitsa acknowledged that she had slandered them. This case ended well for all of the accused, including Marfitsa—they were all freed due to the stamina on the part of the Mordvins who unanimously maintained their innocence.

As in Western Europe, so in Russia there were frequent occurrences of the accused retracting denunciations, which they had made under torture. Of course, if made solely with the purpose of deflecting the attention of the authorities from one's own person, these denunciations had to target suitable individuals, whom the authority would be ready to prosecute—in other words, marginal figures whose involvement in a witchcraft case would be believable. As the last case suggests, other nationals, namely Mordvins belonged to a group in whose potential culpability the authorities were ready to believe.

The suitability of the “others,” and in particular, the Mordvins, to appear in accusations and denunciations becomes conspicuous when examined from the perspective of gender.<sup>13</sup> In general, women are rarely visible in the investigations in the capacity of the accuser—out of fifty cases, there are only three which commenced upon a woman's accusation. In all of these, women leveled charges against other women, never against men.<sup>14</sup> A similar pattern with slight modifications is visible in denunciations. The only men denounced by a woman were either her own or another denounced female's relatives or else other nationals, in this case Mordvins. Of course it might be just a coincidence—there are not enough cases to draw a statistical conclusion; nevertheless, I would propose the concept of power relationships as a possible explanation for this pattern. The course of all the accusations and denunciations is either vertical from up to down or horizontal: there are masters accusing serfs and servants, but never the opposite; there are men accusing women (although rarely), but never women accusing men. When women denounce men, these men are either relatives, or men of potentially lower status and credibility than their own, such as a brother of a wise woman or people of a different nationality and religion.

### *The Role of Non-Orthodoxy in Witchcraft Accusations*

Although in Muscovy there was no elaborate demonic setting to witchcraft trials, and sorcery-related crimes were investigated by secular authorities in the same manner as the nonspiritual ones, the importance of faith is perceivable in many cases. First of all, both witnesses and the accused stress that the latter have a “spiritual father” and go to confessions. They often supply exact references as to who this spiritual father is. For instance, when questioned about one accused, witnesses testify that they do not know whether he had engaged in any magical activity, but they do know that he had been seeing his spiritual father for at least the past 10 years.<sup>15</sup> Thus, it looks like for the common people, the following of the Orthodox religious practice was the proof of the person not meddling in sorcery-related things.

In most of the sorcery cases discussed above, the accused non-Russians were also not Christians, or at least not Orthodox. Thus, Tartars were Muslims, Poles were Catholic, and Mordvins were pagans (a lot of them having resisted Christianization well into the eighteenth century).<sup>16</sup> However, even the baptized ones could have been baptized in name only and preserved their pagan customs. The term “recently baptized” would stick to them for generations, which reflected the persistence of their cultural and religious identities. A different religious affiliation made a person more suspicious in any circumstance in the eyes of authorities.<sup>17</sup> This must have been especially true in a crime that involved the issue of religious loyalty.

For a better illustration of the role of religious affiliation in witchcraft cases, it is useful to compare the accusations leveled against adherents of other religions with those that were brought against aliens of the same faith. The most obvious example of the latter are the Cherkes or Ukrainian Cossacks and peasants who started settling along the Russian southern frontier zone in the sixteenth century; their heavy migration continuing well into the seventeenth century (Liubavskii 1996, p. 306; Shaw 1983, p. 129). The Cherkes were of the Orthodox faith, religious persecution in their native lands under Polish rule being one of the major factors in their eastward movement.

There is no doubt that there existed anti-Cherkes feelings among the Russian population. An illustration of this is a nonsorcery case from the city of Kozlov, situated on the fortified frontier line, quite far to the north of the principal Cherkes settlements. In a quarrel between a Russian and a Cherkes, the latter called the Russian a pig. The Russian twisted the Cherkes' words and claimed that he had called the tsar a pig. The animosity towards the Cherkes as an outsider and intruder is evident from the cause of the quarrel: the slanderer affronted the Cherkes for "invading" his town of Kozlov instead of staying in Chuguiev (one of the original Cherkes settlement sites).<sup>18</sup>

However, when we look at the preserved records of the Cherkesy accused of sorcery, we find that the type of accusations do not fit the same pattern as that of the Mordvins. First of all, it is neither a denunciation under torture nor an accusation of general sorcery practice, but an individual complaint very much in line with the ones conducted between Russians. In one case, a Russian widow from Belgorod (a southern city, most likely abundantly populated by the Cherkes) accused a Cherkes woman of having given her maleficent herbs from which she suffered pain in her stomach and the whole body (Novombergskii 1906, case #32 /year of 1688/). She was initially not allowed to take the case to court by her father. Later she took the veil and sent her petition when already in her new station as a nun. This case has no outcome, but in the initial accusations there are no allusions to the general fame of the woman as a sorceress—it is a personal and singular accusation. A more ambiguous case is the one involving two Cherkes men, which takes place in a town with Cherkes self-rule, with mostly a Cherkes population, as it seems from the Cherkes witnesses' depositions (Novombergskii 1906, cases #21, #23 /year of 1666/). The case was initiated by a petition of a certain Cherkes who accused another man of bribery and illegal taxation. However, when Russian authorities started questioning witnesses, they met with the unanimous support for the accused and, on the contrary, an attack on the accuser who was charged by all those interrogated with raising a rebellion, entertaining a sorcerer in his household, and indulging in sorcery himself. However, although here we find an accusation of general sorcery, it is addressed to defend one Cherkes from the other, and is made by Cherkes people themselves. Moreover, it seems to be used only as an addition (no concrete sorcery is specified) to the main political accusation, that of raising a rebellion.

To summarize it all, notwithstanding the evident perception of the Cherkes as “others” both by Russian population and the authorities, the Cherkes position does not seem to have been as frail as that of the Mordvins and Tartars. At least, in witchcraft cases they never play the role of scapegoats, as Mordvins do. Moreover, there is at least one case of a Cherkes starting a case against a Russian—an inversion of the accusation stereotype which is never found with adherents of other religions, such as Mordvins, Tartars, or Poles.

### *Colonization Politics and Interethnic Conflicts*

There is another explanation for the dichotomy of patterns of accusations between the Cherkes and the Mordvins—which is based upon the historical process of the building of Russia. The Mordvins’ position in relation to the Russian state was not clearly defined until the middle of the sixteenth century. The vast majority of them lived under the aegis of the Tartar Kazan Khanate, and while some part of the population would at times affiliate themselves with the Russians, others served the Tartars, while yet other groups existed independently of the two major powers, frequently fighting both. As late as the second part of the sixteenth century, Mordvins were reluctant to submit to Muscovite authority, and after the capture of Kazan by Ivan IV and his *voievodes*, the Muscovites spent several years subjugating the former subjects of the Kazan Khanate, the Mordvin population among others (Liubavskii 1996, p. 265). For decades afterwards, popular insurrections were still common and there is a reflection of the Mordvins’ unyielding nature even in one of the seventeenth-century witchcraft investigations. In the case of Aniutka who claimed to have received a poisonous root from the Mordvin, Sobaiko Belyaev, the Mordvin was not immediately apprehended and his wife and children were ordered to be detained to ensure his appearance at court. However, Russian officials met with the open resistance of other Mordvins who did not let them arrest their neighbor’s family. The Mordvin was later captured in Moscow and there was no further development to the Mordvins’ insurrection incident. Nevertheless, it remains a vivid example of this people’s solidarity towards each other and their joint resistance to Russian authorities.

By contrast, the Cherkes relationship with Russian authorities was rather peaceful. Since the arrival of new settlers strengthened the defense of Muscovite territories against Tartar raids, the Russian government encouraged immigration and in particular the colonization of the southern frontier zones by Cherkes. The newcomers were even provided with special rights, such as trade advantages, unlimited land distribution, and permission for a semi-independent government in some of their settlement locales. These privileges actually might have had a negative impact on the relationship between Russian and Cherkes populations, since many of the former Russians were often resettled into the frontier zones contrary to their wishes and did not enjoy the Cherkes rights to unlimited land ownership or free liquor trade (Shaw 1983, pp. 130–31). This imbalance in privileges might have caused some tensions between Russians and Cherkes on an individual level, which was reflected in cases such as the one from the city of Kozlov, discussed above. Nevertheless, a relatively peaceful existence within the framework set up by the Russian government combined with the religious affinity with the majority of the Muscovite population could have made them less “foreign” for practical purposes in the eyes of Russians, which led to the formation of a different pattern of expression of animosity between the two peoples—based on a much more equal standing.

### *Conclusion*

All the above cases illustrate that in early modern Russia there existed a general view of foreigners as possessors of magical knowledge. This prejudice permeated all levels of the Muscovite society and was expressed both in tsars’ decrees and testimonies of commoners. Among the sources for this prejudice were, first of all, centuries of warfare, which incited mistrust of neighboring nations. This apprehension led to an expectation of a secret evil even in the absence of visible danger; and sorcery was the logical path such evil could take. The second factor was the mental connection of medicine and magic, the spread of epidemics from western and southern borders, as well as the predominance of foreigners in the medical sphere. Thirdly, the incorporation of non-Christian peoples into the Muscovite State brought the Orthodox popu-



lation into everyday contact with them and made the Russians acutely aware of the “others” in their midst. This juxtaposition in the light of the correlation of witchcraft and Paganism, and their traditional ostracism in the Christian tradition strengthened the common association of foreigners with malefic sorcery.

Thus, the most significant features, which made one a “foreigner” and segregated him from the rest of the population, were his religious affiliation and, perhaps, the history of his nation’s relationship with Russia and its people. Orthodox aliens enjoyed relative equality of treatment with the Russian population. On the contrary, Muslims, Pagans, and Catholics due to their doubly insecure position as infidels and subjects of potential enemies were viewed with extra suspicion and could be subjected to harsher treatment by the authorities and selected as the scapegoats by the population. Although in Muscovy just as in Western Europe many witchcraft accusations were initiated over household and neighborhood problems, “others” were more feared, more resented, and more frequently selected as culprits. And if witch hunts can be seen as a projection of the phobias of their participants, Muscovite witch trials, however small in number and scale, serve as a telling reflection of the xenophobic spirit of the early-modern Russian society.

### *Notes*

- 1 Presently there is only one known exceptional case when individual investigations in Muscovy came close to a small-scale Western European type witch hunt which was described by Kivelson 1991, pp. 74–94.
- 2 In fact, the crimes in question should be more suitably termed “sorcery,” since they most often involved magical techniques and only very rarely mentioned the pact with the Devil, the principal characteristic feature of West-European witchcraft. However, since no visible distinction between crimes with references to the Devil and those with an absence thereof was made by the investigating authorities, and neither is there a specific term for each of the notions in Russian, I would use the two terms interchangeably. For an extensive discussion of the distinction between the concepts of sorcery and witchcraft and the demonological background of the concept in the Russian context, see Ryan 1998, pp. 49–85.
- 3 Keith Thomas and Alan Macfarlane, for instance, observed that older women, often widows, who were in some way burdensome to their communities, were likely targets of accusation. See Macfarlane 1971; Thomas 1971.

- 4 This tendency to accuse outsiders had been noted in passim by the English-speaking scholars of Russian witchcraft trials. For instance, see Zguta 1977, p. 1197 and Kivelson 1991, p. 86, cf. 33.
- 5 This “sorcerer” was in fact a Dutch physician, Bomeliy. See Afanasiev 1869, p. 620; Galkovskii 1916, vol. 1, p. 219.
- 6 From the sixteenth century on there was an influx of foreign, predominantly western physicians, into Muscovy. They were also widely employed in the *Aptekarski Prikaz*, a special chancellery in charge of all medicine related issues. See Novombergskii 1907b, pp. 1–2.
- 7 Sometimes their knowledge went beyond that. Dmitri Silin, brought to the Russian court from Poland by Princess Sophia, besides his medical learning was also presumably apt at fortunetelling, working love magic and casting spells against different diseases. See Afanasiev 1869, p. 649.
- 8 For an overview of traveling professionals, including sorcerers, see Zguta 1972, pp. 297–313.
- 9 All the cases examined in this and other chapters below are the seventeenth-century investigation records which were extracted by N. Ya. Novombergskii from the Archives of the Ministry of Justice and published in the beginning of the twentieth century. Currently these materials are to be found in the Russian Archive of Ancient Documents (RGDA), fond 210; in this paper all the citations refer to Novombergskii’s publications.
- 10 Novombergskii 1906, case #11 (year of 1647). This of course could have been a smart way to escape further tortures and implications of innocent people. Nevertheless, such testimonies must have surely added weight to the existing association of magic practices from distant lands.
- 11 On the description of sources, see note 8.
- 12 The term does not necessarily imply that these women were not born Christians; often the label “recently baptized” would be attached to converts for generations. See Khodarkovski 1997, pp. 20–21.
- 13 Hereafter I distinguish between accusations—reporting of the alleged criminals to the authority, and denunciations—and naming of accomplices done during interrogation or under torture.
- 14 The only exception to this rule is a case in which possessed women, or “klikushi,” accused men as well as women of witchcraft during their fits. However, very often they were not explicit in their accusations, and the interpretation of their unintelligible speeches was rendered by men. See Kivelson 1991, pp. 76–77, cf. 9.
- 15 Novombergskii, 1907a, case #37. For other cases with references to a spiritual father see *idem.*, 1906, cases # 7, #19, and #32.
- 16 In sorcery trials, Mordvins are required to swear “by their own custom” as opposed to Christian Russians who had to kiss the cross in confirmation of the oath. On the non-Christian subjects of Muscovy religions see also Galkovskiy 1916, p. 251; *Slovo o pogibeli Russkoi zemli*, cf. Paszkiewicz 1954, p. 351; Khodarkovski 1997, p. 19.
- 17 As late as 1776, Prince Mikhail Shcherbatov proposed a six-fold political division of all the peoples of the Russian Empire, in which religious affiliation played not

- the least important role: non-Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and pagans were placed in distinct groups. See Khodarkovski 1997, pp. 21–22, cf. 48.
- 18 Novombergskii 1911, case #77 (year of 1645). The conversation was overheard by several people (of both Cherkes and Russian ethnicity) who supported the Cherkes version of the story, as a result of which the Russian was sentenced to be beaten for slander.

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THE TRIAL OF AN HONEST CITIZEN  
IN NAGYBÁNYA, 1704–1705;  
A TENTATIVE MICROANALYSIS  
OF WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATIONS

JUDIT KIS-HALAS

This study tries to find a set of the alternative explanations for the witchcraft indictments of Márton Szappanos, a burgher of the town of Nagybánya (Baia Mare, Romania), by examining the historical, social, and cultural background of the charges.

In the following chapters, I intend to create neither a general scheme of witchcraft accusations nor even a witch stereotype in an early modern Hungarian town, because I have not yet had a chance to study the source material with the intensity required of such a voluminous task.

Rather, I shall try to trace the mechanism and assist the construction of witchcraft accusations in an even smaller unit than a single trial—in the group of accusations centered around one individual, Márton Szappanos, an “honest citizen.” He is not poor at all, married, elderly, but still full of vitality and ambition. In addition, he counts as an unusual case within the more than 130-year-long history of witch trials in Nagybánya. Three of the male Nagybánya witches presumably had a lower social status: László, a seer, was a wandering gypsy (1664), Márton Milkó, an apprentice-boy, was a potter (1697), and “Istók” Balázs, another seer, was a beggar (1753). Two others, Mihály Erszénygyártó Portörő and Sámuel Vásárhelyi Portörő, were owners of two gunpowder mills. They accused each other of bewitching each other’s products (1718). Mihály Kolozsvári, an inhabitant of Nagybánya without citizen rights (*plebeus*), was indicted together with his wife for forbidden brandy-distillation and using magical practices in the distillery (1760).

## *The Trial of 1704–1705*

Márton Szappanos was accused of witchcraft and “devilish arts,” and was brought to the court of Nagybánya, a royal free mining town in Szatmár County. The enormous trial against him and other witches started on 9 September 1704, and lasted until 15 July 1705.<sup>1</sup> There were nineteen persons charged with witchcraft, seventeen women and two men. Seven of them were burnt alive at the stake and two were banished. The records are silent about what happened to the rest of the accused. Further files may still be hidden on the shelves of the archives. It is also possible that there were no consequences of the indictments because the charges raised by their neighbors or acquaintances were not definite enough to lead to an official process. Nine of the accused witches lived in the town of Nagybánya, eight of them came from the village of Felsőtótfalu [Giródtótfalu, Tăuții de Sus, Romania] and one woman, called Kata, was of Dobrovica [Szakállasdombó, Dumbrăvița, Romania] origin. (See the map in Appendix 1.)

## *Historical Background*

### *The town and its inhabitants*

Nagybánya, a royal free town, was founded by King Louis I of Hungary in 1342 and was thereon controlled directly by the king’s jurisdiction, the Royal Chamber, instead of being subordinated to the county (Szatmár) in which it was situated.<sup>2</sup>

The first inhabitants of Nagybánya were Saxons, who settled here in the twelfth century, but by the fourteenth century the majority of the population consisted of Hungarians. Certain names of Saxon origin, but written in the Hungarian way, can even be seen in eighteenth-century documents (Rácz 1893). The inhabitants of the town were mostly miners and artisans (goldsmiths, tailors, furriers, bootmakers, harness-makers, locksmiths, butchers) and merchants (Szádeczky 1889; Balogh and Oszóczki 1979). Some noble families of the neighboring estates, the Drágffys, the Telekis, etc., also had houses, even smaller palaces in the town (Schönherr 1902; Palmer 1894). There were also non-burgher in-

habitants who lived in modest circumstances either in their own houses or as lodgers in the burghers' stone-houses. The suburbs around downtown and outside the city-wall were inhabited by non-burghers, "plebei." By the middle of the seventeenth century, the population reached its maximum at more than 3,300 inhabitants. (The map of the town is in Appendix 2.)

After that, the rapid and often unexpected changes of the political and economic situation in Hungary had a negative effect on the demography of the town and its surroundings, causing a strong decline in the population. At the beginning of the 1660s the Turks led quite a few military expeditions to the neighboring Kővár [Kőváralja, Vărai, Romania] region and reached the boundary of Nagybánya in 1661. After getting rid of the Ottomans, the German troops had arrived in order to ensure the loyalty of Nagybánya to the Habsburg Empire, because the town had become subordinated again to the Crown of the Hungarian Kings by the treaty of Vasvár in 1664. Nagybánya resisted the centralizing policy of Emperor Leopold I (also King of Hungary) by fortifying the town center, and refusing to admit General Strassoldo, the appointed military commander and his company in 1670. But in 1672, General Cobb captured the town and forced its inhabitants to destroy the walls of the fortification that they had built with their own hands (Szirmay 1809–10, p. 230; Schönherr 1902).<sup>3</sup> As a final blow to the independence of the town, between 1672 and 1685 Nagybánya was obliged to send two honest citizens as hostages to Szatmárnémeti (Satu Mare, Romania) in order to tender their loyalty to Emperor Leopold I.

### *Religion and Education*

The Catholics in Nagybánya and the related parishes converted to Protestantism in 1547, and even after the division between the Calvinist and the Lutheran confession in 1567, both churches existed peacefully side by side. The ministers of Nagybánya often gained higher ecclesiastical positions such as deans or even bishops.

The *Schola Rivulina* founded by the Calvinist preacher János Kopácsi in 1547 provided the talented young men with both the lower and the medium level of grammatical and even theological education. During the



sixteenth century it had become a smaller center of Calvinist education in Northeast Hungary and its *rectors* often fulfilled the position of the first minister of the town.

The counterreformation movement had started a drive for regaining the lost positions of the Catholic Church in Nagybánya, when General Spankau captured the town in April 1673 and forced the Calvinists to give their church, formerly the church of Saint Stephen, back to the Catholics. In the last two decades of the century, the Protestant homogeneity of the population of Nagybánya was still a fact. The institutions of congregational life, however, were utterly demolished by the anti-Protestant laws and acts of the Habsburg Empire, and the continual vexation by the Jesuits and the representatives of the *Cameralis administratio Scepusiensis seu Cassoviensis* (the Royal Chamber of Szepes or Kassa) accompanied by German troops. The *Schola Rivulina* was banned in 1688 and thrived in a small neighboring village (Magyarkékes, Kikes, Chechiş, Romania) until 1705. Both the Lutherans' and the Calvinists' former churches were handed over to the Jesuits. The Calvinist and Lutheran ministers were expelled and put under pressure to spend the following years in constant fear while trying to get back (Soltész 1902, pp. 189–90; Palmer 1894, pp. 137–38).

In January 1704, Count Mihály Teleki II, the captain of the castle, capitulated at the fortress of Kővár and the whole Kővár region was attached to the territories conquered by Prince Ferenc Rákóczi II, the leader of the insurrection. Soon after the capitulation, on 17 August 1704, the army of the insurgents captured Nagybánya and the prince promised to restore its religious and political independence. In 1705, the Parliament at Szécsény (Hungary) delivered the churches back to the Protestants. In the same year, the Jesuits were expelled from the town, and only Saint Nicolas remained in Catholic hands.<sup>4</sup>

### *Jurisdiction*

According to the available historical sources from the seventeenth century, the court of Nagybánya was equal to the senate of the town that consisted of twelve senators, two consuls, and the magistrate.<sup>5</sup> During the seventeenth century the growing population of the nonburghers (*plebei*) required its own representation in the urban administration. Therefore in

1658 a greater council called *Electa Communitas* consisting of sixty members was formed, with a broad popular basis, including the “plebei.” Each subdistrict had a *decurio* who was in charge of public order in his area. The *Electa Communitas* sent one, and later, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, two representatives called *szószóló* (mediator) into the presumptuously named Senate (Mitrofan 1972, pp. 206–10). In consequence, the aforementioned democratization of the electoral system of these two offices was slowly turned into a political power play among some burgher families of the town, and among the masters of certain guilds.<sup>6</sup>

### *Witchcraft Prosecutions at Nagybánya*<sup>7</sup>

The temporal distribution of witchcraft indictments at Nagybánya shows three periods of culmination between 1636 and 1761, the dates of the first and last records. The trial between 1704 and 1705 marks the beginning of the second wave of witch hunting at Nagybánya, but at the same time marks the highest peak in the number of accused witches. The importance of this particular trial is also indicated by the large number of citizens involved in the trial proceedings. To facilitate understanding, I have provided a brief chart of the most important *dramatis personae* on the following page.

### *The Biography of Márton Szappanos*

Márton Szappanos belonged to one of the old burgher families in the town of Felsőbánya (Baia Sprie, Romania).<sup>8</sup> He was married, but his wife’s name is unknown. They must have had at least three children, two boys, one of them called János and a girl, Borbála (often referred to as “Borka” by the witnesses). In 1704, only his daughter Borbála was alive, both his sons died young. János must have lived in Nagybánya with his father because the 22-year-old János Dobi Szabó remembers him as one of his mates whom he used to spend his spare time with at the local inn kept by Mrs. György Csizmadia Nagy.

Márton Szappanos played a leading role in the struggle to secure the existence and relative independence of Felsőbánya, both from the centralizing tendencies of the Habsburg Empire’s administration and from

its neighbor and “brother-town”, Nagybánya. The contract between the Royal Chamber and Felsőbánya which aimed to restore the town’s autonomy and privileges given by King Louis I of Hungary in 1342, was prepared by the magistrate (judge), Mihály Fónyi and some of the senators, among them Márton Szappanos. The contract was signed at Misz-tótfalu (Tăuții de Jos, Romania) in 1689, and had come into force on the

Table 1

List of personalities of Nagybánya, mentioned in this article in connection with Márton Szappanos

Name (age)	Status (profession)
Cseteri Fazakas, Mrs.	(potter’s wife)
Csizmadia Nagy, György, Mrs.	(bootmaker’s wife)
Dési Futak, János	citizen, deputy magistrate
Dobi Szabó, János (22)	(taylor)
Erdélyi Szócs, Mihály	(furrier)
Gálfi, János	juror and mediator ( <i>szószóló</i> )
Modra, János	
Monay Fazakas, Mihály	(potter)
Noé Asztalos, János, Senior (56)	former juror and market supervisor ( <i>iudex fori</i> ), Master of the Joiners’ Guild
Suho, Mrs.	close relative of the Senator György Suho
Szabó, Gáspár (32)	(taylor)
Szalárdi Szócs, Ferenc (48)	juror, (furrier)
Szebeni Takáts, Mihály	(weaver)
Székely Szabó, Sámuel (40)	juror and mediator ( <i>szószóló</i> ) (taylor)
Szekeressi Nagy, Katalin [Halábori, Mihály, Mrs.] (48)	
Szekeressi Nagy, Mihály (42)	
Tölcséres, István (60)	(tinker)
Vásárhelyi Szócs, István (35)	juror (furrier)

first of January in 1690. Unfortunately some members of the Felsőbánya senate were not in the least satisfied with this turn in the fortunes of the town and decided to overthrow the existing regime and take over the magistrate’s position. It is a matter of fact that Mihály Fónyi was a Catholic, and his enemies belonged to the Protestant Church. It was

rather easy, therefore, to reformulate the conflict in terms of religious animosities. A defamation campaign was started with strongly anti-Protestant motifs, and the name of Márton Szappanos emerged again and again in connection with Mihály Fónyi as having been his accomplice in a suspicious conspiracy, holding secret nightly gatherings in the Protestant church where a Catholic priest celebrated mass. Eventually Márton Szappanos found himself in the middle of a hefty confrontation between the Calvinist majority and the Catholic minority. (In fact, Márton Szappanos was a Calvinist, as we learn from the evidences that one of his sons was a pupil at the local Calvinist grammar school.) The Protestants, led by three senators, looked for the opportunity to take over the magistrate's place, and seize municipal power. Several more or less severe assaults were carried out against the magistrate, Mihály Fónyi and the members of his party. In one of these skirmishes, Márton Szappanos's little son was so badly injured by one of his schoolmates, son of a Protestant burgher, that he died on the spot. On All Saints' Day in 1694, Mihály Fónyi, the magistrate of Felsőbánya resigned and a representative of the Calvinists was elected, together with a brand new Senate.<sup>9</sup>

Márton Szappanos was a man deeply involved in urban politics. He took part in the preparation of a vitally important political decision by the Felsőbánya leadership that aimed to consolidate the postwar situation by joining the Habsburg Empire, and at the same time to ensure the relative independence from it. He had a taste for being an appreciated and important personality in his hometown, but then also had to gain disappointing experiences of the limits to loyalty and friendship when confronting his townsmen. We may not be far from wrong in supposing that the latter especially provided a strong motivation for him to change his place of residence. Yet he was not totally forgotten by his former friends, kinsmen and servants, as we shall see later.

In the following chapter, I will trace back the origins of the accusations against Márton Szappanos by establishing three layers in the evidence, each of them supporting the construction of the image of the witch: his disgraceful deeds, his suspicious knowledge, and the sphere of local beliefs. Within the latter, I made a distinction between the beliefs emerging from the witnesses' deposition and those recorded during his torture, because evidence under torture may often reflect the interrogators' knowledge of elite demonology rather than that of the

witches' themselves. Furthermore, the situation itself leads to the distortion of the personality of the victim of torture, and as a result, the evidence gained from them.

### *Rumors about a Venerable Burgher*

Márton Szappanos moved with his family to the neighboring Nagybánya around the 1700s, shortly before the accusation of witchcraft against him emerged. He might have made some efforts towards gaining a position in the administrative bodies of the town similar to those he possessed in Felsőbánya, but we know for sure that he did not become a senator; he was only juror (*juratus plebeus*) as we can read in the final sentence brought in his case. He seemed to have lost the status of a venerable burgher (*civis*) that he used to have in his former hometown as reflected in the evidence given by the witnesses. What were the requirements a venerable burgher was supposed to satisfy? The testimonies given by the witnesses, Márton Szappanos's friends, neighbors, servants, colleagues, and acquaintances provide us with only those aspects of this image that fit in the context of witchcraft: the characteristic features of a nonvenerable burgher.

Most of the witnesses tell us about certain deeds of Márton Szappanos that they judged outstandingly disgraceful, or at least strange. We can distinguish four activities that the witnesses tell stories about: 1) juggling; 2) dancing; 3) visiting witches; 4) swearing. Obviously these were, at least theoretically, the deeds a venerable burgher should never commit.

1) A man of this quality should not boast of his abilities by arranging a juggler-show as Márton Szappanos occasionally did. János Noé Asztalos, Senior (a master in the joiners' guild) tells us a detailed story of his fellowman's suspicious businesses:

he heard Márton Szappanos saying "Come and see what an ability my son has: he can almost swallow a knife." And his late son was holding the knife between his palms and wanted to swallow it but I, the witness, and other venerable persons who were there, did not let him do so. I have also seen that he (Márton Szappanos) pulled a new bridle through the split of his late son's shirt and tied a knot on the bridle and sent his son outdoors and told us "Look what I am doing!" He locked

the door and kept the end of the bridle inside the house while his son was standing outside and he (Márton Szappanos) was pulling and shaking the bridle in his hand until his son was knocking at the door and Márton Szappanos opened it and his son was there with the end of the bridle in his hands but it was not tied on his shirt any more and his shirt was not torn.”

Another witness, the 35-year-old István Vásárhelyi Szőcs, a juror, remembers Master Mihály Erdélyi Szőcs (probably a leading member of the guild of the furriers) saying that Márton Szappanos had put a grain of corn into his ear and he had taken it out of his mouth. János Remethei, a 40-year old burgher of Felsőbánya reports of the same fact saying that he “has seen him playing with the grain of corn”, we may suppose, that Márton Szappanos had practiced such tricks before moving to Nagybánya.

2) A venerable burgher should not find satisfaction in delighting his fellowman by his excellent abilities in dancing.<sup>10</sup> Márton Szappanos’s virtuous dancing skills must have been widely known. Mihály Szebeni Takács says that he “saw Márton Szappanos while he was practising ... he played and danced in a jerking manner in János Varga’s house and he did not fall down.” The aforementioned János Noé Asztalos had “heard him saying that he could dance on a plate, on the top of a table. I saw him dancing on the top of an armchair.” Master Noé Asztalos did not hesitate to inform János Gálfi, the “similarly respected” juror and also a *szószóló* (mediator) about the strange case:

some years ago I heard János Noé Senior saying that Márton Szappanos had told him that he and her his daughter Borka had danced together, and he (János Noé Senior) had reported it to Master János Dési, the deputy magistrate. János Dési mentioned that he had known about it already.

And in addition to all this, János Gálfi heard István Vásárhelyi Szőcs saying that Mrs. Suhó (the wife of a respected burgher and senator) had seen Márton Szappanos “dancing on a couch while balancing a cup of wine on the top of his head...”

3) A venerable citizen should not be interested in witchcraft so intensely that he tries to visit one of the arrested witches in jail, and, what is

more, initiates a conversation with her as we are informed by Sámuel Székely Szabó, juror and mediator:

When I was up in the guildhall acting as mediator I saw Márton Szappanos bowing his head towards the hole on the door of the jail and talking to Mrs. Szűcs this way: “Now look woman, you lose yourself and others as well by saying these useless things all over here and there!” And then I called Márton Szappanos saying: “Master Szappanos, what are you looking for here? You gain a bad reputation again!” He was turning to me and patted me on my shoulder saying: “God bless your Honor for admonishing me to do so!”

As we shall see later, Márton Szappanos had already succeeded in gaining a bad reputation by having a rather definite opinion about the water-ordeal of the witches, and strange news having been spread about his knowledge on the practices and abilities of witches.

4) A venerable *civis* and a zealous Calvinist strives for an exemplary family life and cannot stand his own son swearing like blazes, saying “God damn it” or what is even worse “Devil take it” as we hear from János Széki.

Based on the opinion of his fellow townsmen about his behavior, the picture of a bright-minded, skilful, and a little bit cantankerous person can be drawn of Márton Szappanos. Were all these actions done by him to draw his fellowmen’s attention to himself as someone well qualified and suitable for acquiring a more responsible role in local politics? Or, taking a more daring step, can we suppose, that Márton Szappanos’s fellowmen’s awareness of his practices to obtain more power led them to the final solution of accusing him of witchcraft and defeating him by ruining his reputation? The relatively high proportion of a certain type of officials—particularly jurors—among the witnesses testifying against Márton Szappanos may support such a conspiracy theory, but without having more evidence from other sources the idea seems to be slightly infirm.

Concluding this chapter, it can be clearly seen that Márton Szappanos’s arrival and settlement in the town and even his ambitions had become the source of tensions between him and a lower-leveled power group, the official representatives of the “plebeus” inhabitants of Nagybánya, the so called “juratus plebeus.”

In the following chapter, a different aspect of the documents is examined: how the generally held view of Márton Szappanos as a non-venerable burgher turned into the more dangerous image of witches' companion.

### *Suspicious Knowledge*

In order to gain better insight into the case of Márton Szappanos and his knowledge of witchcraft we should take a step back in space and time. In 1696, three women were found guilty of witchcraft at Felsőbánya (Baia Sprie, Romania): Kata Fazakas, her daughter Erzsébet Matzi, and a midwife, Mrs. Márton Stenczel. The first and the last woman were executed, while the young Erzsébet Matzi was banned from the town. During the inquisition in Márton Szappanos's case, the Nagybánya Senate asked the magistrate of Felsőbánya to interrogate some witnesses, who still remembered Márton Szappanos's way of life when he used to live there. Curiously enough, the senators' committee found six former acquaintances—among them Márton Stenczel and Judit Stenczel, the husband and the daughter of the late Mrs. Stenczel—who stated under oath that Mrs. Stenczel blamed Márton Szappanos himself for her unfortunate fate. However in the 1696 trial to which they refer, Márton Szappanos's name is never mentioned in connection with that of Mrs. Stenczel. What we find instead, is that a woman named Judit Makovi tells a story about her bewitchment by Kata Fazakas—Judit refused Kata's request for some grapes, and she found her legs swollen by the next day. Then Judit Makovi turned to Márton Szappanos for help, who threatened Kata Fazakas for her maleficious deed and suggested that Judit Makovi smear the swollen leg with ashes (Abafi 1888, p. 369). Let us now quote the 40-year-old Márton Stenczel's testimony taken eight years later at the trial of Márton Szappanos: "I heard my wife saying when the time of her execution was coming that she was accused of witchcraft by Márton Szappanos, and that he should have been punished the same way as her. May God summon his soul for this deed!"<sup>11</sup>

We may suppose at least two things: 1) there was a real misunderstanding or a still unknown conflict between the head of the Szappanos family and the midwife, Mrs. Stenczel, the memory of which Márton Stenczel kept in mind; 2) Márton Szappanos interfered in a conflict between a



witch and a bewitched woman and this is the kernel of the memories connecting him with witchcraft. Both ideas are, of course, purely hypothetical—our data is insufficient to draw further-reaching conclusions. The fact remains that witchcraft played a certain, though still partly indeterminate, role in Márton Szappanos's past and people did not forget about it. Were these memories responsible for the rising suspicion against him? I would not say so, but they seem to have been used rather effectively in creating his image as a witch.

There is one testimony proving that Márton Szappanos was a member of a committee in a trial against a certain Mrs. Jeremiás Nagy's son, and made a rather unusual statement about witches. István Tölcséres quotes Mrs. Márton Szappanos on her husband's opinion on the witches' flight at night: "He said to the accused man 'Your soul is going away! They [e.g., the witches] had enough at night and when people looked for them in the morning their beds were empty!'" We may draw two conclusions from this testimony. First, this is the first information of his official participation in a legal procedure, which might have had something in common with sorcery. (By the way, no traces of this trial could be found in the archives of Nagybánya.)

Secondly, Márton Szappanos is described as a person who possesses an extraordinary knowledge about witches. It is closer to the rather folkloric ideas about the witches' nightly feasts than to the elite Sabbath-mythology, and therefore the tinker István Tölcséres could also understand them clearly.<sup>12</sup>

Márton Szappanos claimed to have some knowledge not only about the way the witches leave for their gatherings by night, but he also had a definite opinion on the ordeal by water, or the swimming of witches, which was still widely practiced as an ordeal at Nagybánya and the neighboring settlements. The Senate, in agreement with the uncodified law, applied the water-ordeal and thus the witches accused in the same trial were dipped into the River Fernezely by the Bridge Street Gate (*Híd utcai kapu*) of Nagybánya. Márton Szappanos witnessed the swimming, probably out of curiosity, and gave comments on it to his fellowman, Mihály Monay Fazakas. Let us recall János Gálfi's testimony: "He heard Mihály Monay Fazakas saying that he had heard Márton Szappanos saying when he had stayed at the gate while the witches had been bathed, that the dipping of witches had not been a reliable test, for had he been thrown

into the water, he would not have sunk.” Sámuel Székely Szabó, juror and mediator also remembers another similar case: “As we were coming into the jail, he was telling me about the dipping of the witches into water as a test. He said ‘If I were plunged, I would not sink!’”

Márton Szappanos’s contemporaries may have interpreted these stories in the following way: Márton Szappanos knows things about the witches’ nightly flights and feasts, he keeps on saying that he would not pass the witches’ water-ordeal because he would swim and not sink, furthermore he pays a forbidden visit to a witch in the town jail and talks to her, therefore he must be a witch himself, a potential accomplice. The expressions used in formulating the charges listed in his sentence reinforce this hypothesis: “Márton Szappanos was a seriously suspicious personality even before moving to our town ... he was going out together with impure and sentenced witches.”<sup>13</sup>

### *The Sphere of Beliefs*

Apart from suspicious memories and deeds, certain elements of contemporary local beliefs also played an important role in the accusations, as we have already seen in a fragment of the testimony.

We have already seen how eager the witnesses were to give a detailed description of his and even his daughter’s virtuosity in dancing: he can dance on the top of tables, on the arms of armchairs, on carriages; he is able to carry out the most difficult figures. Taking a further—probably not on the whole unintentional—step towards the construction of the image of a witch, a story appears in the depositions, in which we find interwoven the belief motif of the man forced to dance by the witches’ magical power. The story originates from the potter’s wife, Mrs. Cseteri: Mihály Szekeressi Nagy “heard Mrs. Cseteri saying that some Wallachians of Máramaros were stopped against their wills [...], and had been made to dance and Márton Szappanos was the whistle-player.” His wife also presents the same story in her testimony naming her husband and the same Mrs. Cseteri as sources, but with a minor difference: she remembers that only one man suffered injuries from the witches’ troop when saying “a Wallachian man came and they did not let him go until they had made him dance and Márton Szappanos was their whistle-player.” We can also hear another,

more modest interpretation of the “dancing Wallachian,” which I would place between the almost legend-like story told by the Szekeressi Nagy couple and the other evidence recalling Márton Szappanos as the virtuous dancer. Ferenc Szalárdi, the 48-year-old juror and mediator “heard Mihály Terebesi Czermerny saying that “a Wallachian man of Lacfalu heard the loud sound of violins when he was walking home from Felsőbánya by night. He looked into the foundry and saw Márton Szappanos dancing.” The three stories have a strong reminiscence of two motifs of folkloric narratives: the musician dragged by the fairies to their feast and the man made to dance by fairies or witches. Both of them occur in legends and belief stories of Eastern Hungary and Transylvania in the nineteenth and twentieth century, and were presumably known at the time of the trial (Pócs 1989, pp. 42–44).

One of the witnesses, Gáspár Szabó, tells a story about Márton Szappanos’s magic-book that reflects some motifs known from medieval exempla about the stolen book of the magician, but may also have certain relations to the local variants of the Faust legends (Tubach 1981, p. 60; Erdész 1993, pp. 79–100).

I heard János Modra saying that when he stayed at the foundry by Felsőbánya, Márton Szappanos saw a huge cloud emerging so he went into his house and saw his son reading a book. As he [Márton Szappanos] saw him [his son], he made him put the book away and scolded him. Then he went into the chamber and spread half of a quarter of cornmeal saying: “If I had not given them something to work on, there would have come a great danger and loss!”

The last sentence may refer to a belief-motif well known even in the twentieth century: the one who happens to see the witches while standing on Saint Lucy’s stool or staying in the middle of a magic circle becomes visible to the witches themselves and they start chasing him immediately. To get rid of them he spreads seeds of corn, poppy etc. onto the ground. While the witches are gathering the seeds, he slips away.<sup>14</sup>

There is another testimony telling a story which contains a folkloric element. The often cited János Noé Asztalos, Senior “heard him saying ‘I would produce such a flood that you could not stay in your house!’” One of the Eastern Hungarian variants of the Faust legend tells a very similar

story: the wise man conjures a huge flood unexpectedly and in the next moment he removes the deluge (Erdész 1993, pp. 89, 95).

Assessing the belief motifs found in the testimonies, we can discover a somewhat faded image of the magician, which differs from that of the “wise man,” the practitioner of white magic: Márton Szappanos is not a seer or a healer, not even a *táltos*, who also appears in the Nagybánya trials. I would call him rather a learned magician.<sup>15</sup> He fits this image because of his real qualities as a local politician, and his slightly mistrusting attitude towards the witches’ swimming that he has never concealed before his fellowmen.

The torture evidence gained from his miserable quasi-accomplices picture him also as a kind of summoner, or even the leader of the witches’ horde. Though the questions raised by the interrogators are unknown, the answers given may be interpreted such that the interrogators may have had a certain knowledge of the questionnaire of the sixtieth paragraph of the *Praxis Criminalis*<sup>16</sup> (Kristóf 1998, pp. 40–42). The interrogators intended to explore a conspiracy of the witches, marked by the existence of an organized troop or even army with surgeons, captains, and soldiers. The witches’ army was a widespread concept in both the elite and popular views of witchcraft (Körner 1969; Pócs 1999, pp. 85–88). Its reflection can clearly be seen in the replies of the witnesses: Márton Szappanos was either the musician (whistle player, drummer), or the summoner of the witches’ troop accompanied by his daughter Borka. The interrogators tried to squeeze out some more evident information on Márton Szappanos’s relation to witchcraft, but the poor women questioned could only repeat the rumors and gossips heard throughout Nagybánya.

### *Conflicts*

Bearing in mind that the scarce information gained from the witness testimonies is far from being sufficient to throw light on the net of kinsmen, friends, neighbors, and other members of the community centered around Márton Szappanos. Yet, I would draw attention to some peculiar nodes.

I have already pointed at the group of nonburgher jurors, the members of the *Electa Communitas*, who played a key-role in supporting testimonies against Márton Szappanos. The idea of a potentially existing tension

between them and Szappanos, who acquired a status even higher than theirs, was suggested. It is best seen by the example of István Monay Fazakas, who appears as the source of rumors about Szappanos, and his opinion on the witches' swimming is cited in the testimonies. He was only a *juratus plebeus*, a simple juror representing one of the suburbs in 1704, but by 1705 he had been elected for a *juratus civis*, which means that he succeeded in gaining the rights of citizenship. Although he still remained a simple juror, he won the battle for a higher status and Márton Szappanos was a loser from this point of view.

Unfortunately, the list of the dwellers of the particular streets and districts is not at my disposal, therefore I can only guess that some of the witnesses were Szappanos's neighbors. György Széki, who informs us of the swearing János Szappanos, and Mrs. Cseteri Fazakas, who tells about the Wallachian, made to dance. Neither of them talks about the real conflicts between them and Szappanos. We should take into consideration that the stories told by the witnesses are not always the precise facts of the events that happened with them and the one accused of witchcraft, but rather the symbolic manifestation of real feelings, such as hatred, sympathy, or fear felt concerning the person in question (Kristóf 1998, pp. 178–79). Therefore, at the present stage it is impossible to tell what was hiding behind Mrs. Szekeressi Nagy's *maleficium*-narrative about her late aunt, allegedly bewitched by Márton Szappanos. In any case, the existence of tensions and hostility between the Szekeressi Nagy household and Márton Szappanos is evident.

We have followed the unfolding series of accusations against one individual witch, Márton Szappanos. Concluding the investigation, the results and the missing links can clearly be seen. 1) Without a thorough examination of all of the accusations of this particular trial, Márton Szappanos's witch-character cannot be precisely drawn. 2) The lack of further source material is also an obstacle if we want to see the deeper layers of personal interactions and conflicts between Márton Szappanos and his closest community. We have not found an all-explanatory model of witchcraft accusations in Nagybánya, but we could see various stages of the shaping of an image of a potential witch and have also identified some potential sources of social tensions. The ambitious local politician, after settling down in Nagybánya, meets hostile attitudes in the new community. Unlike his former hometown, Felsőbánya, Nagybánya had not succeeded in its

battle to secure greater independence from the centralizing intentions of the Habsburg Empire. The imperial troops were still garrisoned at the town until 17 August 1704. The town was constrained to transfer its rights over the silver and gold mines to the Royal Chamber. The economic decline reached its nadir at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The authorities of Nagybánya could hardly manage to impede the general deterioration of the town, and they tried to secure their legitimacy by demonstrating their power, by way of a monstrous, large-scale trial against the witches of Nagybánya.

The political elite did not need Szappanos—the once experienced local diplomat but now fallen senator from the neighboring town—because there was a whole group of local volunteers of the status he had formerly been recruited for. We may suppose that the conflicting interests led to an open confrontation, and accusing Márton Szappanos of witchcraft seemed to be the proper solution to the situation. Of course, this hypothesis would be insufficient proof for a possible conspiracy directed against him. If their purpose was to get rid of a potential contestant by demolishing his reputation, they certainly succeeded in it. Márton Szappanos's personal qualities, the rumors about his knowledge, and his former deeds gave a firm basis on which to build an image of the learned witch, adding further elements of the local learned and also the popular knowledge of witchcraft.

Márton Szappanos was not sentenced to death, but he was forced to leave Nagybánya in a rather disgraceful way: the hangman would see him off. Several pleas for mercy were referred to in the sentence, and I had the chance to read one written by Márton Szappanos himself and another sent by the Felsőbánya Senate. After all, moved by the petitions, the Nagybánya Senate modified Márton Szappanos's sentence and he was to be seen off by the official town servant and not by the hangman.

## Notes

- 1 The trial records are found in the Archives of Nagybánya in the Division of Máramaros County of the National Archives of Romania (*Arhivele Statului Judetul Maramures, Baia Mare*) in the Records of Public Administration No. 17, 1704, pp. 1–4, 6, 12–22, 26–31, 33–40, 42–65; Records of Council-meetings, Book 7, pp. 200–201, 212–3. The trial records had been discovered and placed kindly at my

- disposal by Mr Béla Balogh before his publication. See Balogh 2003, No. 25/I–XXV.
- 2 The monographic history of Nagybánya is written by Mitrofan 1972. Gyula Schönherr had also planned a monograph of the town, however only the first two chapters and some smaller historical studies had been prepared. Morvay 1906.
  - 3 The Castle Street is the only remnant of the fortress.
  - 4 For the history of Nagybánya at the time of the Rákóczi insurrection in contemporary sources, see: Esze 1955, pp. 130–32; Köpeczi and Várkonyi 1973, pp. 145, 151–52; Thaly 1870, pp. 337–48. A thorough and minute description of the social history of the Kővár Region is found in Szentgyörgyi 1972. The history of Calvinist diocese of Nagybánya before and at the time of the Counter Reformation and especially between 1704–11 is summarized in: Soltész 1902, pp. 181–90; Palmer 1894, pp. 137–41.
  - 5 For further details of the administrative system of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Hungary, see Bónis, Degré, and Varga 1996, pp. 22–25, 107–108; Kállay 1996, pp. 20–24, 67–79. The changes in the administrative bodies of Nagybánya are described in Mitrofan 1972, pp. 206–10.
  - 6 During the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century, the guild of the goldsmiths' played a leading role in the administrative bodies of the town, but the center of political power slowly shifted over other guilds. Balogh and Oszóczki 1979.
  - 7 The complete documentation of the trials is published by Béla Balogh, therefore I think it unnecessary to get into more details at this point (Balogh 2003).
  - 8 Unfortunately I did not have the opportunity to study the archival sources of Felsőbánya (Baia Sprie, Romania), and my suppositions are based on mostly secondary material, except for the publications of the source material of witch trials. See Szmik 1906 and Abafi 1888.
  - 9 A more detailed description of the events is seen in Szmik 1906, pp. 86–90.
  - 10 I have not found the trace of contemporary treatises against dancing that were known in Nagybánya at that time. It cannot be excluded that similar ideas were not absolutely foreign in the strictly Calvinist and Lutheran community of the town. All the treatises that I know were printed at Debrecen. Gyulai 1681; Pathai 1683; Szentpéteri 1697. Cf. Trócsányi 1958, pp. 104–106.
  - 11 Records of Public Administration No. 17, 1704, pp. 47–48. See Balogh 2003, No. 25/XVIII.
  - 12 On the popular and elite concept of the witches' Sabbath in terms of the Hungarian witch trials, see Pócs 1991–92, pp. 327–37 and Pócs 1999, pp. 73–105. The belief of the feasts of the fairies, or using the local and contemporary term “fair woman” (*szépasszony*) must have been known also in Nagybánya. The term “fair woman” was used exclusively as a synonym for “witch” by the accused witches and the witnesses in the Nagybánya trials, and also in the trial in question. The Hungarian “fair woman” (*szépasszony*) beliefs are thoroughly analyzed by Zentai and Pócs. Both authors agree in that “fair woman” is a collective term for both fairy

and witch, and it refers to a dominantly malevolent supernatural being. See Zentai 1976; Pócs 1989, pp. 12–38.

- 13 Records of Council meetings No 7, pp. 212–13. See Balogh 2003, No. 25/XXI.
- 14 According to Éva Pócs, a certain type of the seers (who can see the dead visiting the world of the living around the winter solstice) in Middle and Western Europe is also initiated sitting or standing on Saint Lucy's stool. See Pócs 1999, pp. 122–26.
- 15 The representatives of positive or white magic and the other types and functions of magical specialists are described in details by Pócs 1999, pp. 121–164, a vivid picture of the witches' magical counterparts in early modern Debrecen is given by Kristóf 1998, pp. 89–113.
- 16 The *Praxis Criminalis* was originally a collection of criminal law compiled by the Lutheran lawyer Benedict Carpzov of Leipzig. It was translated into Hungarian by Cardinal Leopold Kollonich, and had been used under the name of *Praxis Criminalis* as an appendix of *Corpus Juris* since 1696. The 60th Paragraph contains a questionnaire referring to the witches' Sabbath and the Devil's pact. Cf. Carpzov 1652.



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Figure I.

Alsófernezely, Ferneziu  
 Alsóújfalú, Satu Nou de Jos  
 Berend, Berindan  
 Berkeszpataka, Berchezoaia  
 Erdőd, Arduđ  
 Erdőszada, Arduđat  
 Felsőbánya, Baia Sprie  
 Felsőfernezely, Firiza  
 Felsőújfalú, Satu Nou de Sus  
 Giródtótfalu, Tăuții de Sus  
 Hagymáslápos, Lăpușel  
 Kapnikbánya, Căvnic  
 Koltó, Cătălina  
 Kőváralja, Vărai  
 Kováskápolnok, Făurești  
 Lacfalú, Șișești  
 Lăposbánya, Băița

Lăposhidegkút, Mocira  
 Lénárdfalú, Recea  
 Magosfalú, Mogoșești  
 Magyarberkesz, Berchez  
 Misztótfalu, Tăuții de Jos  
 Nagybánya, Baia Mare  
 Nagysikárló, Cicărlău  
 Oláhkékes, Chechiș  
 Rákosterebes, Racova  
 Sárközújlak, Livada Mică  
 Szakállasdombó, Dumbrăvița  
 Szamosveresmart, Roșioi  
 Szatmárnémeti, Satu Mare  
 Szinerváralja, Seini  
 Tomány, Tămaia  
 Vámfalú, Vama  
 Zázár, Săsar

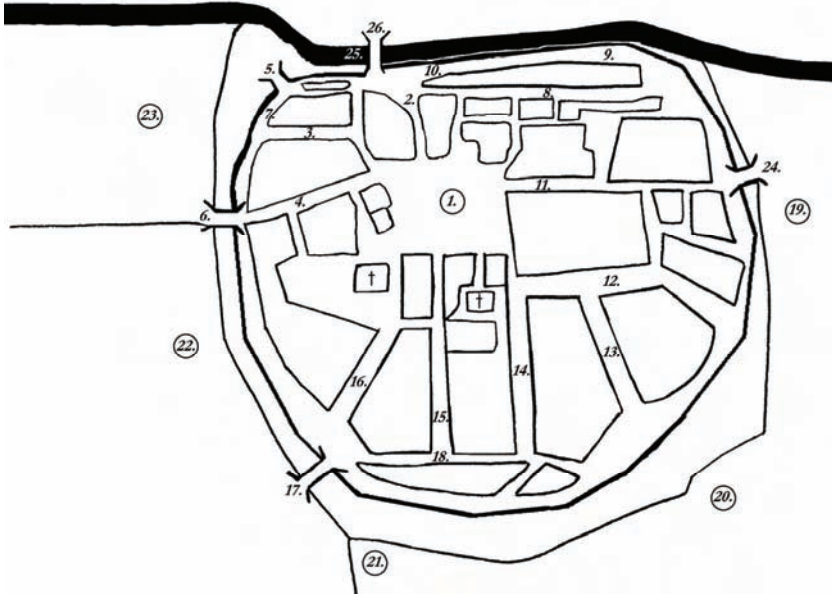


Figure II.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Marketplace, Piac tér                   | 17. Hungarian Street Gate, Magyar utcai kapu               |
| 2. Bridge Street, Híd utca                 | 18. New Street, Új utca                                    |
| 3. Kőrös Street, Kőrös utca                | 19. Felsőbánya Street Suburb, Felsőbánya utcai külváros    |
| 4. Szatmár Street, Szatmár utca            | 20. Saturday Street Suburb, Szombat utcai külváros         |
| 5. Bridge Street Gate, Híd utcai kapu      | 21. Hungarian Street Suburb, Magyar utcai külváros         |
| 6. Szatmár Street Gate, Szatmár utcai kapu | 22. Szatmár Street Suburb, Szatmár utcai külváros          |
| 7. Locksmith Street, Lakatos utca          | 23. Bridge Street Suburb, Híd utcai külváros               |
| 8. Cotter Street, Zsellér utca             | 24. Felsőbánya Street Small Gate, Felsőbánya utcai kiskapu |
| 9. Great Mint Street, Nagy Pénzverő utca   | 25. River Szaszar, Szaszar folyó                           |
| 10. Small Mint Street, Kis Pénzverő utca   | 26. Bridge, Híd  |
| 11. Felsőbánya Street, Felsőbányai utca    |  |
| 12. Crayfish Street, Rák utca              |  |
| 13. Saturday Street, Szombat utca          |  |
| 14. Castle Street, Vár utca                |  |
| 15. Hungarian Street, Magyar utca          |  |
| 16. St. Nicolas Street, Szent Miklós utca  |  |

**BOUNDARIES AND TRANSGRESSIONS:  
WITCHCRAFT AND COMMUNITY CONFLICT  
IN ESTONIA  
DURING THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY<sup>1</sup>**

DANIEL RYAN

In October 1880, an Estonian peasant, Hans Tamberg complained before the Kehtna *Vald* court that Jüri Tunberg came to his yard and affronted him, “you thief, you witch, you pig, you have let my crop get eaten up” (*sinna waras, sina nõid, sina siga, sa olled mino wilja lasnud ära süia*), struck him once with his fist, and threatened to strike him with a rock because Tamberg’s livestock had wandered onto his field. Called before the court, Tunberg explained that Tamberg’s pigs had eaten his potatoes for the third time, and that his cow was gored by his neighbor’s oxen, and died two weeks afterwards.<sup>2</sup> From the data in this court document, there is no reason, however, to believe that Tunberg really viewed Tamberg as a witch, since he made no attempt to justify this insult to the court. It is possible that he was reticent to reveal such “superstitious” beliefs to the court, since it was not likely they would take such a complaint seriously.<sup>3</sup> Belief in witchcraft was not held universally by Estonians during the late nineteenth century, and in fact this outlook was often derided in contemporary newspapers as stupid and backwards.<sup>4</sup> However, it is nonetheless interesting that the correlation between trespass—in this case that livestock wandering onto a neighbor’s land—was connected with the pejorative terms “thief” and “witch.”

One commonality between these forms of transgression is that they were all potentially harmful to the household’s economy. Moreover, witchcraft and theft typically required the criminal to enter the household domain, whether the house, the farmstead’s outlying buildings, or fields. Peasants protected and defended their households from all forms of intrusions: magical and natural. Natural forms of trespass, such as animals wandering over fields and theft did damage to a household’s economy, as

did witchcraft by endangering valuable livestock, harming crops, and disrupting other economic activities such as butter-making.

This essay will explore the household in order to examine particular situations in which peasants believed witchcraft might arise. According to folk beliefs, numerous means of committing witchcraft required that the malevolent individual violate the household territory. These beliefs also provided the means to cope with such occurrences, including a repertoire of countermagic and magic that could be employed to seek revenge, occasionally against persons who had committed thefts or caused harm in some other fashion. By emphasizing the household as an economic, territorial, and social unit, it is possible to highlight certain aspects of witchcraft suspicions. Not only did peasants believe that witchcraft was likely to occur when people violated the physical boundaries of the household, but, correspondingly, they believed that to overstep these boundaries could lead another to retaliate through magic, which could be construed as witchcraft. These beliefs and accompanying conflicts are documented in the minutes of township courts (*valla* and *kogukonnakohu protokolliraamatud*), newspaper accounts and folklore—particularly accounts of beliefs, memorates, and belief legends.

### *Household, Membership, and Boundaries*

The idea of the household encompassed psychological and real boundaries that defined and shaped the individual's interaction within the community. In her discussion of magic in Finland, Stark-Arola points out that the symbolic boundary between households was "partly the expression of economic competition and envy" (Stark-Arola 1998, p. 169). Therefore, Finnish peasants utilized a variety of magical practices in their everyday lives to protect the household from neighbors' magic and to protect livestock and children who ventured outside of the household area (Stark-Arola 1998, pp. 169–78). Rural Estonians also feared magical attacks on their household economy and members. It is possible that these anxieties increased during the latter half of the nineteenth century when the countryside and household boundaries underwent a great deal of change.

One of the most significant factors affecting the Estonian countryside was the promulgation of land-reform legislation in 1846 (for Livland,

which included present-day southern Estonia) and in 1856 (for Estland, or present-day northern Estonia), which helped to alter economic relationships and changed the very landscape in rural Estonia. These laws allowed peasants to own land and to make arrangements with German estate-owners concerning the rent and price of land. Later laws, promulgated in the 1860s, ended the practice of labor rents altogether (Kõll 1994, p. 25). The process of buying land was especially slow in Estland, where only eleven per cent of farms had been purchased by 1881. In Livland, half of the land had been purchased by 1882. At the turn of the century, this figure reached ninety per cent in Livland, but only fifty per cent in Estland (Raun 1991, p. 69). While purchasing land in perpetuity was a gradual process, the dimensions of landholdings changed more rapidly during the 1860s when farmsteads were reapportioned into consolidated lots whenever it was possible to do so.

While these developments marked a trend towards consolidated territory, it was not always possible to create coterminous lots. The majority of the households tended to have parcels, such as hay fields and pasture land, located a distance from other farmland and the farmstead (Troska 1998, p. 261). New household borders gave rise to novel concerns about trespass and conflicts over land use.

There are a variety of complaints in lower-level courts pertaining to quarrels involving the new boundaries of farmsteads and farmlands. One issue concerned the difficulties in getting animals to pastures when a neighbor's land lay between a household's farmstead and its grazing land. These problems typically gave rise to litigation. For example, in one such instance, an obdurate farmer swore at a woman and threatened to strike her when she tried to herd her livestock across his pasture after repeatedly refusing to give her permission to do so.<sup>5</sup> Another case highlights the conflicts that arose when village boundaries were redrawn. In this instance, Kaarel Tirell complained to the court that a neighbor, Mart Treumann, had forbidden him passage through his pastureland while herding livestock. Tirell protested that villagers had been using a path, now located within Treumann's territory, for well over one hundred years. Treumann, however, countered that he had recently purchased the land, and could not allow his property to be used as a village pathway.<sup>6</sup> Using a neighbor's field as passage could cause damage to crops and frequently led to interpersonal conflicts and legal action. Other cases typically involved accusa-



tions that neighbors intentionally let animals onto fields or that animals went astray into these areas.<sup>7</sup> In addition to concerns about witchcraft committed through trespass, peasants worried about these terrestrial forms of encroachment. These tensions nonetheless help to clarify the roots of neighbors' hostility towards one another, and occasionally seem to have influenced witchcraft suspicions as well. One commonality between these forms of transgression is that both were potentially harmful to the household's economy.

### *Magical Attacks on the Household through Trespass*

Estonian beliefs about witchcraft manifest a certain anxiety concerning the possibility that neighbors might trespass onto their land in order to perpetrate acts of witchcraft. The conception of a jealous neighbor secretly intruding into a household's economic realm was widespread and quite varied.

Fears of jealous neighbor's secret visits are frequently articulated in folklore. One common belief was that malicious individuals tied the stalks of a neighbor's crops together in order to damage the entire crop (Jung 1879, p. 13). According to one legend:

The growth of the crop will be stunted if three stalks are taken and tied together. Witches and jealous persons often do this to villagers. Once a farmer found three stalks of grain tied together in [his] field. He quickly understood what such twists mean. He immediately tore that grain out of the ground, all the stalks and roots, took them home, and threw them into a burning stove. Nothing happened to the man's crop. In another farmer's field, only a few individual stalks grew out to size. During the harvest, the man found grains tied together. Then he immediately understood why the crop failed.

*(Viljakasv jääb kängu, kui kolm viljapead võetakse ja kokku sõlmitakse. Kadedad ja nõiad teevad tihti nii külameestele. Korra leidnud peremees põllult kolm kokkuseotud viljapead; Märganud varsti, mida niisugune sidumine tähendab. Kisunud kohe need viljapead kõige kõrtega ja juurtega maast üles, viinud koju, visanud küdevasse ahju. Mehe viljale ei sündinud midagi viga. Teise peremehe rukkipollu lipendanud ainult*

*mõni üksik kõrs. Lõikuse ajal leidnud mees kokkuseotud viljapäid põlult. Nüüd mõistnud kohe, miks vili ikaldanud.)*<sup>8</sup>

Such accounts highlight the potential for harm, and the need to guard against such surreptitious visits upon the household's croplands. While I have found no concrete instances of denunciations in connection with this belief, a farm mistress suspected of bewitching an infant was rumored to have committed a number of other magical crimes, including tying neighbors' grain stalks together.<sup>9</sup>

A particularly common means of bewitching seems to have involved contaminating or polluting the household sphere with foreign matter, such as rotten meat, chicken eggs, and old rags (Jung 1879, p. 12. Such beliefs also existed during the early modern era, see, Madar 1993, I). It was believed that such matter, when carefully hidden in animal sheds or the field (often believed to have been buried), would cause misfortune to visit crops or livestock. For example, one belief account suggests:

They often used to put eggs and pieces of meat in front of the cow shed, so that an animal would perish. I saw these pieces of meat myself, several times. It was necessary to pick them up with a glove and to burn them so that no misfortune would occur.

*(Ennem, pandi tihti mune ja lihatükke karjalauda ukse ette, et mõni loom otsa saaks. Ma nägin neid mune ja lihatükke ise mitu korda. Neid pidi kindaga võtma ja ära põletama, et midagi õnnetust ei juhtuks.)*<sup>10</sup>

Another account describes the potential for harm, in slightly more detail:

If some evil person wants to harm his neighbor's animals, then he takes meat pieces, or chicken eggs, performs an incantation on them, and then takes them to some place over which the neighbor's animals walk. But if the neighbor discovers such pieces of meat or chicken eggs, takes them from the ground with something (not bare hands) and throws them into a fire, where he must burn them up, then all the harm will go to the evil person's own animals.

*(Kui keegi kuri inimene tahab oma naabri loomadele midagi viga teha, siis võtab ta tükki liha ehk kana mune, lausab nende peale ja viib nad*

*siis niisugusesse kohta kus naabri loomad üle käivad. Aga kui naaber sarnase liha tükki ehk kana muna üles leiab, mõne asjaga (mitte palja käega) ta maast võtab ja tulde viskab, kus ta ära peab põlema, siis tuleb kõik viga kurjategija enese loomade peale.)<sup>11</sup>*

The examples of contaminating a household with meat or eggs, and tying grain together suggest peasants' fear that jealous neighbors sought to ruin their economic livelihood through secret visits to the household. Such instances were known to happen, but have only occasionally been documented outside of folklore.

There are a handful of cases, revealed in contemporary newspapers, which suggest that such incidents did occur during the late nineteenth century. For example, an account from the newspaper *Olewik* (1895) notes that a farmer from Tartumaa experienced a bad turn of luck when his horse fell ill, dying soon afterwards and an ox became afflicted as well. He claimed to have found rotten eggs and pieces of meat hidden in a pile of manure, as well as animal bones in the yard. Reports of similar findings around this time come from Pärnumaa and Viljandimaa.<sup>12</sup> Leaving such matter, or tying grain stalks required the witch to secretly visit the household's realm of productivity—its various animal sheds and fields.

Anxieties about trespass, however, were not only expressed in regards to witchcraft, but theft as well—which also took away from the household economy. Interestingly, the latter crimes also seem to have had some link with witchcraft suspicions, perhaps because of the connection between trespassing and the potential to harm another person magically. Likewise, both theft and witchcraft typically took place secretly. A form of theft, which was explicitly linked to witchcraft, was the theft of hay. Peasants believed that an individual could make a cow yield more milk, and correspondingly, make a neighbor's cow stop giving milk, by stealing hay or straw from the barn, and performing a certain magical procedure.<sup>13</sup> Folklore records, such as this memorate, similarly indicate such beliefs concerning straw:

Taking straw from another brings misfortune to the person whose straw has been taken. This person's animals fall ill, or will not eat. I have myself seen a neighbor-woman take straw from us. After this, our pigs didn't want to eat. Help came from the fact that I secretly took the

straw which she had taken from us, and threw it back into the pigshed. Then the pigs' appetite returned.

*(Põhu teiselt võtmine toob sellele õnnetuse kelle käest on võetud põhk. Sellel jäävad loomad haigeks ega ei söö. Olen ise näinud, kuidas naabrinaine võtis meie käest põhku. Pärast seda ei tahtnud meie sead sööma hakata. Abi sai sellest et ma tõin salaja sellelt naiselt võetud põhu tagasi, mis ta meilt viis ja viskasin selle sealauta. Siis tuli sigadel söögiisu tagasi.)<sup>14</sup>*

Thus, stealing straw, while not always leading to such suspicions, was connected with witchcraft in folk beliefs.

It is useful to keep in mind that both theft and witchcraft typically required the malefactor to overstep a household's boundaries secretly in order to commit these crimes (or perceived crimes). However, theft could also be conducted through the use of magic, and, even worse, the witch could transform himself or herself into various shapes, which made detection and defense much more difficult. For example, Ivar Paulson notes that a witch or sorcerer was believed to be capable of dispatching his or her spirit in the form of a whirlwind or gust of wind that scattered grain and hay, and stole as well. A related figure was the *kratt* or *puuk*, a procuring agent that could be used to steal or acquire wealth through using a doll or figurine (Paulson 1971, pp. 155, 176). These spirits purportedly served their masters in the form of a cat or rooster.<sup>15</sup> In these ways, theft was undoubtedly connected with occult manipulations.

Persons denounced or slandered as witches also seem to have been called various names connected with thievery. This occurred in an 1882 case from the Mahtra *Vald* Court, in which Hans Einmann was called not only a witch (*nõid*), but also a hay-thief (*heinavaras*). Before delving into this, it is useful to examine the animosities between these two families that preceded the witchcraft denunciation. According to court records, expressions of malice first shot back and forth between the two wives, which is what brought the families to court in the first place. Anu Einmann complained to the court that Ann Noort had slandered her in saying she had buried infants in a hillock (*tema olla lapsed künkasse pannud*)—an apparent reference to infanticide.<sup>16</sup> Noort, on the other hand, complained that Einmann had affronted her and her child (of an undetermined age) in a horrible manner. What ultimately arose during these proceedings was an

additional complaint, made in a second court appearance, that one of the Noorts had slandered Hans Einmann as a thief and a witch. For the purposes of this study, it is most important that one of the Noorts (the records do not specify which of the two) actually justified calling Hans a *nõid* (literally, a “cow-witch”—*lehmanõid*). They claimed not only that he had crooked (*pusereti*) teeth (one of numerous stereotypes about the physical attributes of witches),<sup>17</sup> but also that they had seen him poking their cow through the fence.<sup>18</sup> The Noorts called Hans Einmann a ‘hay-thief,’ noting that they always seemed to be running out of hay, while their neighbors seemingly had plenty. This particular form of trespass—molesting a neighbor’s cow—and the slanderous accusation of ‘hay-thief’ accompanying the witchcraft denunciation, suggest the connection between witchcraft and violating a household’s boundaries.

Peasants reacted angrily in the face of such occurrences, confronting and sometimes assaulting perpetrators.<sup>19</sup> There is evidence to suggest that they used magic to defend the household—to send back the witchcraft or to avenge transgressions against the household. Moreover, it seems that those who brought harm to a household, magically or naturally, also may have had reason to fear magical retaliation.

### *Transgressions and Magical Revenge*

In defending against encroachments on the household or attacks on its members, peasants retaliated, sometimes by using magic—either counter-witchcraft or harm simply sent as revenge—hoping to punish the wrongdoer for his or her transgression. It should be noted that counter-witchcraft often entailed sending magical misfortune back to its source, paying back the malfeasance in kind. Estonians were aware of this, and in conflicts and situations where they felt wronged, may have attributed their misfortunes to their neighbors.

There is evidence from folklore to suggest that conflicts with neighbors could provoke witchcraft as a retaliatory measure. It was believed, for example, that bewitched eggs could be returned to their source:

In the old days, the farm master or mistress walked once around the house each morning to make sure that some *nõid* hadn’t come during

the night, and brought something into the yard. Once a chicken egg was brought into our yard. On my parents' command, I threw the egg into the cabbage garden of the neighboring farm. Sure enough, the neighbor's ox distended his hind leg the same day.

*(Vanasti käinud igal hommikul peremees või perenaine kord ümber oma maja, et järele vaadata, kas mõni nõid pole öösi mõnda asja nende õuele toonud. Kord oli meie õuele toodud kanamuna. Vanemated käsu peale viskasin selle muna naabritalu kapsaaeda. Eks samal päeval naabri küünihärg venitanud oma puusa liikmest välja.)<sup>20</sup>*

This account demonstrates not only the anxieties about the potential for witchcraft, but also a potential solution—returning the bewitched item back to its presumed source.

Apparently, such beliefs were still held during the late nineteenth century; an individual suspected of witchcraft had reasons to expect that the "victim" might try to seek revenge. For example, in 1895, a man in Viljandimaa believed that his neighbor had hidden eggs in his field, namely because she suspected him of bewitching two milk cows, which had ultimately perished earlier in the year. In this case the farmer, while harvesting his crop, found chicken eggs and pieces of meat wrapped in flax in his field.<sup>21</sup> Thus, to be suspected of witchcraft, one could expect retaliation in kind whether or not witchcraft had been committed in the first place.

One report of sending magical revenge appeared in an 1885 newspaper, describing a perceived instance of witchcraft in Viljandimaa. When a farmer's cow died, he reportedly attributed this to a young man at a neighboring farm household. He went to a cunning person (*tark*) to seek revenge on the young man. To do so, the animals' heart and lungs were removed, placed into the stove, amidst the embers, while a glass of the animal's blood was hung over the smoke hole. Later it was reported that the young man fell ill.<sup>22</sup> Contrary to the opinion of the writer, it is likely that he became suspect after the procedure, when he fell ill, as a case below, involving the theft of rye, demonstrates.

A peasant suspected of theft might attribute a misfortune to magical retaliation; it was possible that the victim of theft might seek to punish the perpetrator with magical harm. For example, in 1894 the newspaper *Olewik* reported one instance in which a farmer in Tõstamaa lost several bushels of rye to theft, and went to a *tark* for information about the cul-

prit. The *tark* was unable to provide any concrete information about the thief, except that the individual was known to the farmer, and instead agreed to set misfortune upon the thief. The newspaper reported that soon after, a fellow villager's horse fell ill.<sup>23</sup> Of course this could also be regarded as a means of detection, since the wronged peasant had only to wait until someone experienced misfortune. Peasants committing theft, then, had reason to fear magical retaliation.

Such fears gave rise to a witchcraft denunciation in an 1882 case from Harjumaa, which came before the Mahtra *Vald* Court. This incident suggests that those who had stolen may have attributed their misfortunes to a member of the household from whom they had stolen. A peasant woman suspected that a neighbor who had caught her son stealing had bewitched him. First, Juhan Reinberg brought a complaint to the court that hay had been stolen from his barn, and that upon following a trail from the hay, he discovered that Mihkel Adra, the son of a neighboring woman, Ann Adra, was responsible.<sup>24</sup> This issue came to court, but the accused did not appear, Ann Adra testified on his behalf and explained her son's absence—he was home with an illness. She confirmed that he had in fact stolen the hay, but not with her permission or knowledge. The court decided to let the matter rest until Mihkel Adra was able to appear in court. Apparently though, Ann Adra believed that Juhan Reinberg had somehow caused her son to fall ill, but did not reveal her suspicions before the court.

Both parties returned to court the same day, this time because Reinberg claimed that upon leaving the court, Adra had called him a witch [*sõimanud teda nõiaaks*], saying that either he had bewitched her son, or that he had someone else do so (perhaps a *tark*), causing him to fall ill because he had stolen the hay [*“et olla poja ära rabanud, seepärast ollagi poeg Mihkel haige, kas olla ise rabanud, ehk olla ühte tõist lasknud rabada. (Heina warguse pärast)”*]. She tried to deny it, but a court official, Hinrik Taavelson, testified that he had heard her say this to Juhan Reinberg. For this, Adra paid two rubles to the court as a fine, which both parties found satisfactory.<sup>25</sup> In this instance, Adra suspected witchcraft specifically because her son had stolen hay from Reinberg.

Denunciations of suspected thieves were commonplace in nineteenth-century Estonian village life. Peasants likely returned such insults, insinuations, and slander in kind, occasionally resorting to imprecations directed at the offending party. In one such case involving theft,

Jüri Maurea came before the Haggad *Vald* Court to complain that Leenu Krieg had “sworn at him in a shameful fashion, uttered a curse at him,” and struck him with a farm implement. Apparently, this was due to the fact that Maurea had brought her brother, Hans Siiman, before the court on charges of theft. Krieg refuted her brother’s guilt during the confrontation, proclaiming that he had neither entered nor stolen grain from Maurea’s shed. The curse—though redacted in the minutes of the court proceedings—was something to the effect that, “his eyes should drip blood where Hans’ eyes dripped tears.” The court chose to punish her for striking Jüri, but not for insulting or cursing him. Perhaps Krieg’s verbal insults were overlooked because Maurea had insinuated that she was the thief, since she was so certain that her brother was not the perpetrator. Krieg justified the curse not as an attack on Maurea, but on “he who has made tears flow from my brother’s eyes, and locked him up without guilt” (*kes Hansu silmad pannud wett tilkuma ja ilma süüta kinni pannud.*)<sup>26</sup> Clearly, animosities expressed through such accusations and slander ran deeply. Such verbal formulae, as well as threats would later figure in witchcraft suspicions.

Animal trespass, like theft, could also lead the offending party (the owner) to suspect that a neighbor might attempt to harm his livestock with witchcraft. This could be for the purpose of revenge, and demonstrates peasants’ fears about animals’ safety outside the household realm. One example, a belief legend, seems to manifest both of these anxieties:

A farm mistress captured a neighbor’s animals from her hay field and herded it (to her own) home. At home, she locked the neighbor’s cows in the shed, and began to smoke them with rags that had been tied to the end of a long stick. This was supposed to take away the milk yield of the neighbor’s cow.

(*Taluperenaine võtnud naabri loomad oma heinamaalt kinni ja ajanud koju. Kodus pannud naabri lehmad lauta kinni. Sääl hakanud neid suitsetama närudega mis pika kepi otsa olnud seotud. See pidanud nabilahmadelt piimaanni ära võtma.*)<sup>27</sup>

According to this account, peasants had reason to fear what might happen when livestock strayed onto a neighbor’s territory. More terrestrial concerns included the possibility that livestock might incur some injury in



being herded away or secured on a neighbor's land. For example, in one such case, a neighbor complained that his cow's hind leg was injured while being held by a neighbor after wandering onto his field. The complainant suggested that it had been gored by another animal, or perhaps even struck with a rock, presumably by the angry neighbor.<sup>28</sup> Of course, many such instances were resolved amicably, but those that reached courts often demonstrated the hostilities that could arise from such intrusions, as well as hostilities when animals were herded away, and indeed held captive in a neighbor's shed as in the legend above, until adequate financial compensation was determined.<sup>29</sup>

Peasants frequently became angry over the issues of animal trespass. The landowner or renter had good reason to lash out at a neighbor when a cow or pig trampled plow-land and hay fields, or ate food out of feed bins—these were indeed tangible losses, for which adequate compensation was sought. On the other hand, peasants, in fits of rage, often went too far (at least in their neighbor's eyes). Injuries to livestock, often struck when attempting to herd them away, were not uncommon complaints in local courts.<sup>30</sup> Sometimes peasants attributed the death of their livestock to neighbors in this context.<sup>31</sup>

## *Conclusion*

While witchcraft denunciations do not seem to have been especially common in late nineteenth-century Estonia, the belief in magic and witchcraft clearly persisted, apparently remaining an important facet of everyday life. Peasants typically saw witchcraft as something directed at a household, its economy and members, or as emanating from a household as a result of some perceived transgression. Belief legends and accounts emphasize the importance of guarding against witchcraft—by searching fields and sheds for signs of intrusion, pollution (such as rotten eggs and meat) and manipulation (such as tying grain stalks together). However, it is evident from extant records that witches could also be persons who sought magical revenge against those who had encroached upon their households. The case of theft demonstrates the complexity of witchcraft suspicions. Victims of theft as well as purported thieves had reason to attribute their misfortunes to witchcraft. Folkloric evidence demonstrates

such beliefs, while newspapers and court records show that peasants did apply this oral knowledge when ascribing their recent misfortunes to a fellow villager's witchcraft.

### Notes

- 1 Research for this paper was made possible by a J. William Fulbright fellowship. A partial grant from the University of California, Los Angeles helped to defray travel expenses for participation in the conference. I thank Ülo Valk and Stephen Frank for offering useful comments on earlier versions of this paper.
- 2 Eesti Ajalooarhiiv (Estonian History Archive: abbr. EA), f. 2744, nim. 1, s. 7, p. 64.
- 3 Peasants typically refrained from making witchcraft denunciations in formal legal settings during this time period. For example, in a case cited below, a peasant woman waited to denounce her neighbor until after they had left the courthouse in a case regarding theft. When they returned to court the same day, she denied having slandered him as a witch. By contrast, in another case, a man accused of assault justified his behavior claiming that his neighbor had hexed his horse. EA f. 3082, nim. 1, s. 2, pp. 10–11.
- 4 Virtually any mention of witchcraft ends and begins by lamenting the low level of education or the harmful effects of “stupidity” (superstition). See, for one example, “Eestimaalt. Jürjewi kreisist”, *Sakala*, 49 (1879), p. 3.
- 5 EA, f. 2742, nim. 1, s. 4, p. 49.
- 6 EA, f. 1090, nim. 1, s. 4, p. 95.
- 7 Such instances are ubiquitous in the cases I have examined; see EA, f. 2744, nim. 1, s. 1, pp. 78–91, 91, 92–93, 119, 133–137, 151, 153, 162–163, 166.
- 8 Eesti Rahvaluule Arhiiv (Estonian Folklore Archive, abbr.: ER), folklore collection of M. J. Eisen: E 8 I, 19 (58).
- 9 “Omalt Maalt. Harjumaalt” (1874). *Eesti Postimees* 29, p. 167.
- 10 ER, folklore collection of M. J. Eisen stipend-holders: E,StK 27, 10 (24) Koeru, Liigvalla, Nõmmküla.
- 11 ER, folklore collection of Jakob Hurt: H II 37, 535/6 (30). Järva Jaani, Võhmuta v.
- 12 “Kirjandus. Seltsielu. Segasõnumed. Äksist.” 25 *Olewik* (1895), pp. 584–85; another report of such an occurrence can be found in: “Omalt maalt. Pärnumaalt”, *Sakala* 25 (1885), p. 3; a third case, from Viljandimaa, will be discussed below in the context of magical revenge.
- 13 Wiedemann (1876), p. 390. For comparison, in various parts of Russia, peasants believed certain stolen items, such as seeds from a well-off neighbor, could yield economic fortune for a household. See Frank 1999, pp. 197–98.
- 14 ER, folk medicine collection of the academic society of veterinarians: ALS 2, 754, Valga, Karula.
- 15 Le Roy Ladurie notes various procuring agents which also took the form of various animals in French popular beliefs of the nineteenth century. See 1987, pp. 31–37.

- 16 Such euphemisms derive from the very language of folk narratives of this time period. In legends about dead-child beings or infants killed shortly after their birth, there is typically some mention as to where the mother secretly buried the child. Aivar Jürgenson lists other common locations which occur in Estonian folklore: in the earth in the corner of the grain shed, beneath an apple tree, beneath a stone garden, beneath a home floor, beneath the stove, etc; 1988, pp. 28–57. While I don't wish to overemphasize the frequency of euphemism *pannud künkasse*, I have also found mention of it in EA, f. 2744, n. 1, s. 1, pp. 93 and 120. In the case mentioned above, and in other cases, women slandered in this fashion did take the insult quite seriously, and attempted to prove that they had not committed this crime, even though they were not being charged with this crime. For example, one woman was particularly upset because her baby had recently died. See EA, f. 1090, nim. 1, s. 2, p. 37.
- 17 Folklore accounts occasionally give special mention to the physical attributes of witches, such as having unusual teeth, for example, an infant born with teeth or persons having double rows of teeth, particularly long teeth, or especially crossed (*pusereti*) teeth. Such beliefs gave rise to the appellation *hambamees* (literally tooth-man) in some regions of Estonia, including Harjumaa, where this incident took place. See Laugaste 1937, pp. 5–6.
- 18 EA, f. 2626, nim. 1, s. 7, pp. 152–155, 158–163.
- 19 In contrast to other assaults, it should be noted that attacking a witch was more than a manifestation of anger—in fact this was also a means of possible recovery against witchcraft. Belief accounts mention the efficacy of bloodying a witch in order to undo harmful magic. Concrete instances of this practice can be found in “Kodumaalt” *Perno Postimees*, 9 (1881), p. 2; EA, f. 3082, nim. 1, s. 2, pp. 10–11. This practice was widespread in Europe, including Denmark, England, and Russia. Thomas 1971, p. 634; Henningsen 1988, pp. 119, 124; Popov 1903, pp. 35–36. Judith Devlin mentions such instances of violence directed at witches, but does not mention this practical reason which may have motivated peasants to assault suspected witches. See Devlin 1987, pp. 120–39.
- 20 ER, folklore collection of the Estonian Folklore Archive, ERA II 132, 463 (9) Hageri khk. ja vald v; Hans Mesikäpp 1937.
- 21 “Kodumaalt. Kolga-Jaanist,” *Eesti Postimees* 247 (1895) p. 3.
- 22 “Eestimaalt. Wiljandimaalt,” *Wirulane* 8 (1885) p. 2.
- 23 “Kirjandus. Seltsielu. Segasõnumed. Tõstamaalt.” 48 *Olewik* p. 1028.
- 24 EA, f. 2626, nim. 1, s. 7, pp. 149–150.
- 25 EA, f. 2626, nim. 1, s. 7; pp. 150–152. For the theft of hay, Mihkel Adra later agreed to pay Reinberg three rubles: EA, f. 2626, nim. 1, s. 7, p. 152.
- 26 EA, f. 2742, nim. 1, s. 4, pp. 50–51. Folklorists have recorded variants of this type during the 1940s and 1950s: ER, folklore collection of the Estonian Literary Museum, RKM II 23, 52 (30) Häädemeeste—M. Mäesalu (1949); RKM II 58, 350 (15) K-Wõm., Häädemeeste k.—M. Mäesalu (1956). Another instance of an imprecation uttered amidst an accusation of theft can be found in EA f. 3082, nim. 1; s. 4, p. 100.

- 27 ERA II 3, 341/2 (6) Saarde.  
28 EA, f. 1090, nim. 1, s. 1, p. 31.  
29 EA, f. 2744, nim. 1, s. 1, p. 91; EA, f. 1090, nim. 1, s. 4, p. 97; EA f. 1090, nim. 1, s. 5, p. 34.  
30 EA, f. 2744, nim. 1, s. 1, p. 92–93; EA f. 3082, nim. 1, s. 2, pp. 76–77; EA, f. 3082, nim. 1, s. 4, pp. 14–15.  
31 EA, f. 2744, nim. 1, s. 2, p. 38.

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PART III

**WITCHCRAFT AND FOLKLORE**



# EXTRAORDINARY CHILDREN, WEREWOLVES, AND WITCHES IN PORTUGUESE FOLK TRADITION

FRANCISCO VAZ DA SILVA

In Western Europe, there used to be definite rules for the choice of godparents—though the same rules would not apply to all siblings. One classic model for the choice of godparents, used in the French village of Minot until the First World War, specifies, “one took for the first child the paternal grandfather and the maternal grandmother, for the second one the father’s elder brother and the mother’s elder sister, then for the others one would pick at a greater distance (*on s’écartait*)” (Zonabend 1990b, p. 229). Another report, concerning the Pyrenean region, states that after choosing among grandparents and parents’ siblings (like in Minot), people would rather make their own elder children act as godparents for the younger siblings (Fine 1984, p. 111). Actually in Minot, this “ingoing” option would be in use as well, along with the “outgoing” choice of distant godparents, for the lastborn children. Interestingly, the seventh child appears to be concerned in both cases (Zonabend 1990b, pp. 217, 238–39). In Portugal, this is most explicit, since grandparents, uncles, and aunts would be regular picks for godparents but elder siblings would baptize the seventh child. Thus, the usual rules for the choice of godparents among kin and social peers would not apply for to the seventh child, who would be given unusual godparents: strangers or siblings.

Marc Bloch called attention to the “supernatural power ... attributed to the seventh son ... sometimes also ... to the seventh daughter, appearing ... after an uninterrupted series of the same sex.” This is on the whole, according to Bloch, a healing and divinatory power, but can entail—like in Portugal—animal metamorphosis (1983, pp. 293–94). Indeed, in Portuguese folk beliefs, the lastborn of a series of seven or nine siblings would risk becoming a werewolf, a wolf-keeper, or a witch. A wish to avert this



danger was the main reason given here for making eldest children act as godparents to lastborn siblings. Another method in use would be to give such children special names, one of which is Bento—a *bento* being, significantly, both a healer and a soothsayer (Pedroso 1988, pp. 187, 193; Vasconcelos 1980, pp. 102–103).

The special baptism given to the seventh child relates therefore to their alleged healing and prophesising powers and the danger of metamorphosis. Although reasons for this are rather obscure and of a metaphysical sort, I suggest they can be partly grasped from a joint analysis of social practices, so-called superstitions, and fairy tales. In what follows, I shall first inquire into why there should be anything at all so special about being a seventh child. Then I will consider some traits of Portuguese witches and werewolves and see how these correlate to the properties of the seventh child. Finally, I will briefly place results obtained in a pan-European perspective in order to propose a synthetic view.

### *The Special Baptism of Extraordinary Children*

Whatsoever is so special about number seven must be understood within a wider numerical series. Consider this statement: “As soon as three male sons are born one after the other, the third should be named Adam; if nevertheless this was skipped, then, when the series of seven is completed, the first-born should act as godparent to the lastborn” (Coelho 1993, p. 355). So then, the third son prefigures the seventh. Furthermore, I was told during fieldwork in Northern Portugal, in the early 1980s, that the ninth is the virtual werewolf.

This equivalence between numbers three, seven, and nine I propose to look at in light of the triune, or “three-in-one,” concept (see Dundes 1980, p. 137; Zimmer 1993, p. 284). Such adages as *três é o número que Deus fez* (three is the number God made) and *não há duas sem três* (there are no two without [an upcoming] three) indicate that “three” is a number of perfection which—being odd—nevertheless allows for renewal. Hence, in fairy tales the third sibling tends to be opposed to the other two, he or she alone being able to tap into the hidden forces used to activate renovation:  $3 = ([1 + 1] + 1)$ . Furthermore, if the first two units were conceived in terms of the “three-in-one” notion, the series would add up to *seven*:

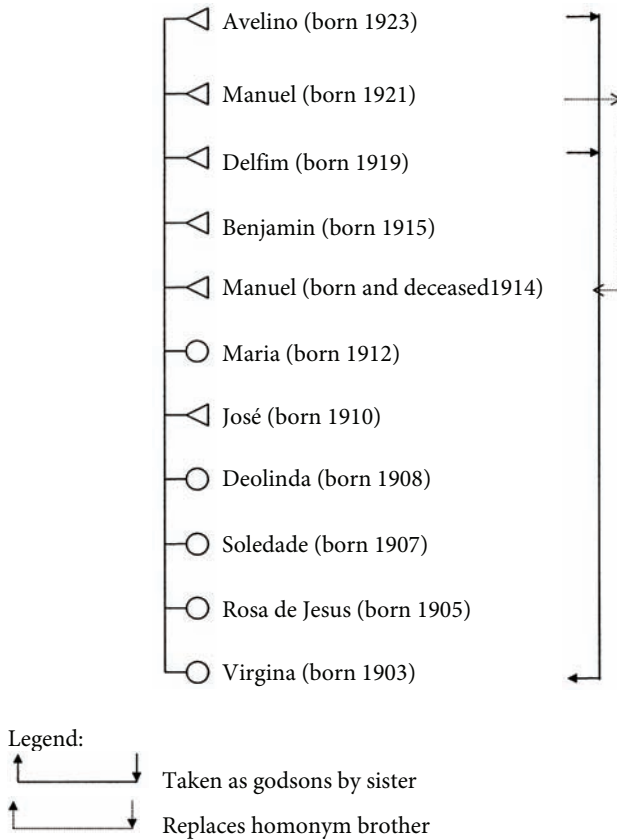
$7 = ([3 + 3] + 1)$ . Finally, if the surplus unit itself were thought of in the same terms, the child in excess would be the *ninth* sibling:  $9 = ([3] + [3] + [2 + 1])$ . The structural principle underlying such empirical variations then is that of *three* as a number of dynamic unity, with the consequence that the last element both completes and transcends the series.

This connects directly to the necessity of making the first child act as godfather or godmother to the lastborn sibling. During my fieldwork in Northern Portugal, I heard three reasons for this custom: 1) the wish to avoid an unpleasant fate, for the lastborn, of becoming a werewolf or a witch; 2) uneasiness at the idea of continuing to burden neighbors by asking them to perform as godparents; 3) the wish to cease having children. Given three different explanations for one act, a single principle should underlie them all. The notion that one would bother virtual godparents by asking them to perform as such, beyond a certain point supposes that a regular series of children closes at that point. It is as though the eldest child would take all extra siblings in charge in order to integrate them in the regular series, and hence, prevent them from becoming werewolves or witches. Such an interaction is supported by the conviction that a witch is able to release her soul (which can appear in the form of light) from her body, an ability which has traditionally been regarded as a shamanistic trait. In this way, the first and lastborn siblings tend to merge and the series of siblings is seemingly drawn to a close—which explains the birth-control connotation of this practice.

The resulting inference is that children born in excess of a conceptual limit are to be drawn back, as it were, into the series in connection with an elder sibling. This is supported by empirical data. Consider, for example, the following family constellation as reconstituted by myself from both parish registers and oral inquiry in Rio-Frio, Northern Portugal, in the early 1980s.

When I met Virginia, the eldest sister, as an elderly woman, she told me that the ninth is the problematic position in a series of siblings. This fits with the fact that her eighth sibling was named Benjamin (with a connotation of “youngest”; note also that the unusual delay before the next birth suggests a deliberate attempt at birth control at this point). Moreover, Virginia acted as godmother to her ninth and eleventh siblings—but not to the tenth (Manuel), who had been named after a previously dead infant. Such facts demand a unitary interpretation. Manuel did not

need to be integrated into the series by his elder sister because he had already taken up, as it were, his homonymous dead brother's seventh position. In other words, the three sons born after the theoretical "youngest" (Benjamin) were all integrated into the regular series, either in their godmother's position or in that of a previously dead brother. This suggests that a series of siblings comprises, to use Claude Lévi-Strauss's happy expression, a limited number of "classes of position ... successively occupied by living occupants" (1962, pp. 261–62). Similarly, Françoise Zonabend notes that in Minot the names of prematurely dead children are passed on to their succeeding siblings, "as if, within the group, positions ought to be always occupied" (1990a, p. 254).



Of course, in social practice, people cannot simply leave surplus children out of ordinary family positions and of the corresponding normal rules for picking godparents. Such children, allegedly at risk of becoming werewolves or witches, must gain social integration by means of extraordinary godparents—mostly very close kin. Fairy tales, on the other hand, can boldly let surplus children go and confront werewolves and witches in the theatre of imagination. Consequently, a model of supernatural godparents—the paradigm really of all flesh-and-blood distant godparents—is visible in this genre dealing so extensively with surplus children.

Note that Perrault's well-known *Le Petit Poucet* (ATU 327B) illustrates much of my argument concerning seventh children. It presents a series of *seven* boys, all born in only *three* years, the youngest of whom is *seven* years old. As these children were produced in couples, the series comprises one main group of *three* twin births, plus a *seventh* child. Finally, the lastborn of this excessively large series is someone special—no bigger than a thumb and yet endowed with more subtlety and a greater share of wisdom than all his brothers put together (Perrault 1977, p. 101).

Not surprisingly, the supernatural godparent figure hovers behind this theme. In several French oral versions of ATU 327B, the children advised by a godmother go to the forest (Delarue 1985, pp. 310–24). Furthermore, a Portuguese tale translates the dilemma of a couple unable to feed an excessive number of children into the story of the plight of a man unable to find godparents for the lastborn children. The tale explicitly has Saint Anthony volunteer for the task *on condition* that the surplus brother and sister be sent away to a given mountain. There the children meet an ogress who attempts to kill and cook them, but they throw her into the heated oven where the ogress's eyes turn into two dogs that will help the boy slay a seven-headed serpent and then to get married to his love (Vasconcelos 1986, pp. 301–304). Other Portuguese oral versions have the lastborn—a third son, or a seventh child named *Finger*—defeat a werewolf, from whom he obtains riches (Vasconcelos 1986, pp. 294–96). While in Grimms' *Hänsel and Gretel* the abandoned children of course defeat a witch by throwing her into the heated oven, thus obtaining riches, another German variant presents a wolf in the same "involuntary donor" role, and French versions feature a wolf or a werewolf (Delarue 1985, pp. 310, 321). As well the Grimms connect Hänsel to a seventh child (Hunt 1968/1, pp.

355–56), and their version implies that the whole adventure happens in the world of the dead whence the children return, as also happens in French tradition, by crossing the classic stretch of water (Delarue 1985, pp. 306–309, 311; Grimm and Grimm 1980, p. 93).

Picking up a distant godfather has supernatural implications even in social practice. In Northern Portugal, it was usual for women wishing to become pregnant, or fearing for the life of their embryo, to have the first person appearing after midnight on a certain bridge—allegedly built by the devil—perform an ad hoc baptism on their belly (Fontes 1979, pp. 82–83; cf. Castro n.d., pp. 115–18). Just as the saintly godfather in fairy tales provides for the social insertion of problematic children, so the unknown godfather issues from the darkness on the bridge built by the Devil to propitiate a problematic embryo. The connection of the unknown godfather to the Devil repeats that of the saintly godfather and the ogress—and a French version of ATU 327 depicts the godmother as a witch (Delarue 1985, p. 321).

To sum up, in fairy tales, a distant godparent serves the social insertion of problematic children through the defeat of werewolves or witches, while in social practice a close godparent, providing a solution for the social insertion of surplus children, keeps them from becoming werewolves or witches. One inevitable inference is that this social practice implies the intention of overcoming a werewolf/witch nature in flesh-and-blood seventh children. Indeed, often the eldest sibling must bleed the seventh child's little finger (Pedroso 1988, p. 187; Vasconcelos 1980, p. 393). By this practice one is able to “break the fate” (*quebrar o fado*) of a werewolf (Coelho 1993, p. 357; Pedroso 1988, p. 191; Vasconcelos 1980, pp. 213–14). Furthermore, when a werewolf resumes human shape, his little finger is supposedly either wounded or missing (Pedroso 1988, p. 191; Vasconcelos 1980, p. 211; 1986, p. 290). This correlates of course to the fact that the very small slayer of a werewolf in fairy tales is called *Finger*. Indeed, if bleeding or cutting the little finger is a way of excising the werewolf nature of a person, then a small hero called *Finger* who, on his way to social integration, slays a werewolf presumably presents a nature similar to his victim's essence.

In short, just as in fairy tales, surplus children are often given supernatural godparents and are made to defeat werewolves and witches, so in real life, surplus children are excised of at least a part of their

werewolf/witch nature as their elder siblings bleed them and take them as godsons. In other words, one finds, both in tales and in “real life,” the notion that series of siblings are constituted of a limited number of positions, with the corollary that children born beyond this limit must fight their werewolf/witch nature in order to achieve social integration. But what exactly might this werewolf/witch nature be?

### *The Supernatural Dimension of Extraordinary Children*

Before attempting to answer this question, let me relate the position of fairy-tale heroes as last-born or, in any case, “the offspring of a union that is ... mysterious or problematic” (Tatar 1987, p. 75) to the fact that—as Marie-Louise Tenèze profoundly noted—they are inherently endowed with foresight (1970, pp. 20-24). Now small fingers too can supposedly disclose the occult (Oliveira 1955, 13 n. 8; Vasconcelos 1938, pp. 480-84; 1985, p. 66), and of course seventh sons may likewise perform as soothsayers (Vasconcelos 1980, pp. 102-103; cf. Pedroso 1988, pp. 187, 193). Thus, a fundamental connection of problematic children with the Other World emerges.

We already know that werewolves are surplus children and persons afflicted by a “faulty” baptism. Moreover, they stem from improper sexual relations mainly involving the sacred ties of baptism (Pedroso 1988, p. 186; Vasconcelos 1986, p. 292). Overall, werewolves are creatures that should not have been born, are, in any case, unable to occupy an available social position, and thus remain in touch with the other world as they alternate between two opposed realms, as days alternate with nights, for seven years. Now one corresponding fate for seventh daughters is that of becoming *peiras de lobos* (“wolf-keepers”) (Pedroso 1988, pp. 197-98; Vasconcelos 1980, p. 386; 1986, p. 300). Such fate I heard described as a *degreto* (“exile”)—a notion that also refers to the last seven years of a person’s life, in which one’s double takes to wandering by itself and appears in the procession of the dead. People whose baptism was incomplete also participate in this procession of the dead (Pedroso 1988, p. 283), are thus able to see what goes on in “the other world” (cf. Coelho 1993, p. 459), and of course risk becoming werewolves (Vasconcelos 1980, p. 214; 1986, p. 291).

However, the most frequently mentioned danger threatening seventh daughters is that of becoming witches. This is understandable if one takes into account that witches, too, are supposed to endure a seven-year fate in the course of which they turn into animals at night (such as cats and geese—Vasconcelos 1980, pp. 129–30; 1986, 332 n. 62). The fact that the same term *degredo* denotes both the seven-years fate of wolf-keepers and the terminal seven-years period of life (during which the detached double participates in the procession of the dead) implies that the wolf-keeper's fate is a form of “death in life” in which a double endowed with materiality joins the dead—here represented as wolves. It is then comprehensible that there is a connection between wolf-keepers and witches.

This implies, of course, that children born to no definite social position must remain between the living and the dead, between the Christian and the pagan worlds, in the guise of creatures pertaining to two realms which baptism—which serves to insert people into social positions marked by Christian names—should have radically set apart. However, to remain between two worlds, having been born in untenable positions, is not all there is to the matter at hand. An underlying notion of ontological complexity, clearly visible on a pan-European scale, must now be taken into account.

### *The Complex Ontology of Werewolves and Witches*

In Central and Eastern Europe, werewolves often are, as Éva Pócs sums up, “individuals born in a caul or, in other cases, with a ‘surplus of body parts’ ... a double set of teeth or ... two hearts” (1999, p. 34). According to Pócs, being born in a caul is also characteristic of mostly female *mora* creatures, able to send out their souls at night while in a trance, and on which the figure of the supernatural witch was likely based (pp. 32–34).

Being born in a caul therefore reveals an essential duality in connection with a “second skin” (see Belmont 1971, pp. 52–60). Likewise, the old Scandinavian notion *hamr*, which Claude Lecouteux describes as “an internal shape determining external appearance and character,” denotes a skin or envelope (1985, p. 22; cf. Dumézil 1985, p. 209). Metamorphosis, whereby an internal form is sent out in animal shape, is therefore the conversion of “internal form” into “external appearance”

(Boyer 1981, pp. 150–51)—which fits of course with the widespread notion of werewolves as “skin shifters.”

Now this supposes a basic equivalence between metamorphosis taken as a flight of the animal double from the body (as Lecouteux insists, it is in all cases) and conceived as a change of skin (as patently it is in many instances). Indeed, Lecouteux proposes that in cases where metamorphosis takes place by discarding human clothes that these are substitutes for the lethargic body (1992, p. 134). To be more precise, I suggest, both stripped clothes and the dormant body represent the discarded human form that the notion of *hamr* equates to a skin. In other words, as ecstasies take on animal forms, they discard their human shape as an empty envelope, later to be re-entered in order to resume human shape. This seemingly corresponds to the periodic inversions, characteristic of werewolves as *versipellis* (skin-shifters), whereby the internal skin becomes external (and vice versa). In both cases then, double-skinned beings periodically alternate between opposite aspects of themselves.

As Claude Gaignebet perceptively synthesizes this notion by saying that at the core of each such being lies “a double, his other aspect, ready to replace the aging envelope” (1985, p. 104 n. 48), the link between the notion of changing or discarding skins and the sloughing snake becomes noticeable. Indeed Roman Jakobson and Marc Szeftel perceptively pointed out, apropos the epic image of a Russian werewolf prince, that “a serpent paternity entirely fits with the caul and werewolf motifs: the serpent able to shed its skin brings into the world a son provided at his birth with a second skin, and afterwards enriched with a werewolf power to change his skin. It is worthy of note that in Serbian *košulja* ‘shirt’ means both ‘caul’ and ‘serpent skin’” (Jakobson 1949, p. 64; cf. Belmont 1971, p. 23, 205 n. 104).

In other words, the “second skin” characteristic of both werewolves and supernatural witches is like a serpent skin. It is therefore significant that, returning to Western Europe, a variant of the Portuguese seventh daughter’s fate as a witch is her becoming a sea-serpent (*hirã*) (Pedroso 1988, p. 187; Vasconcelos 1986, p. 312). Lecouteux notes that fairies come from the water and return to their origins (1982, pp. 29, 158) and, in the same vein, Laurence Harf-Lancner comments that fairies’ love for water betrays their serpent nature (1984, p. 150). This is made clear by such well-known cases as Mélusine, who endlessly haunts wells as a serpent even after disappearing as a winged dragon (Sébillot 1983b, p. 133), and



Arie, the goose-footed fairy who often turns into a “fairy-serpent”—as Raymond Christinger put it (1965, p. 120)—that is, a dragon (Sébillot 1983a, pp. 280–81; 1983b, pp. 43–44, 135–36).

In Portugal, whenever fairies are mentioned in fairy tales, they are figured as either “witches” or “enchanted maidens” (cf. Coelho 1993, p. 342). Such blond enchanted maidens, dwelling in wells and caves, often appear as serpents (Coelho 1993, pp. 347, 449, 454; Vasconcelos 1986, pp. 110–12, 306–309). Witches likewise haunt places with water, either dressed in white or in the shape of ducks (Vasconcelos 1986, pp. 115, 118; cf. Coelho 1993, p. 364), and fairies in tales assume the shape of birds in watery places (Pedroso 1984, no. 18, 37). Werewolves can also transform into ducks in watery places (Coelho 1993, p. 357). Furthermore, they are supposed to be generated by witches (pp. 355, 357) who, in turn, require (as wolves do) the guidance of shepherds who are, supposedly, sorcerers and werewolves (Vasconcelos 1980, pp. 111, 393, 596–97; 1986, pp. 336–37).

Hence, werewolves and witches appear as complementary aspects of double-skinned beings (therefore prone to metamorphosis) related, as such, to serpent or bird entities. This concurs, of course, with the close relationship between werewolves, the “death aspect” of fairies and dragons as shown by Pócs concerning Eastern Europe (1989, pp. 16, 18, 24), or yet with the fact that werewolf seers would be characterized by “underworldly ‘snake initiation’” (1999, p. 143).

This leads back to the connection between the “second skin” and a pervading theme of divination. Indeed, James Frazer’s incidental observation that “a Russian epic hero, whose father was a serpent, understands the language of birds, beasts and fishes” (1888, p. 163), leads us to the fact that Portuguese last-born children that are wont to turn into werewolves and witches also display a gift for divination. This is, indeed, what the understanding of the language of birds—granted by serpents—stands for.

### *Double Skins and Regeneration*

The renowned oracular wisdom of serpents—in other words, their command of the language of prophetic birds—Indian scholar Kalipada Mitra sought to explain by the idea that snakes are the natural prey of

birds, and “in nature the victims well understand the habits of their enemies that enable them to guard themselves against an attack” (1925–1926, p. 86). Frazer, for his part, chose to put forward the view that birds are the natural prey of serpents, who therefore learn the bird language as they eat birds and birds’ eggs (1888, p. 181). Each author is of course partly right since the two enemies, continuously ingesting each other in an endless circle, are ultimately identical. Thus Frazer, commenting on Democritus’ statement that snakes are generated from the mixed blood of diverse birds, acknowledges that serpents have “the blood of birds in their veins” (pp. 180–81).

Gaignebet shows that the alternation between predator and prey constitutes an image of endless death and regeneration involving the unity of fighting halves (Gaignebet and Lajoux 1985, p. 104), which indeed fairy tales present indifferently as bird and serpent, two serpents, or two dragons (Róheim 1992, p. 173). In other words, the identity of fiery and watery enemies (to take Pócs’s terms; 1999, pp. 130–31) amounts to the casting snake, alias the dragon figure encompassing the sky, the underground, and the sea.

Now the language of birds is typically granted to someone who—in the most explicit instances—saves young serpents even while being involved in the killing of an old one (Frazer 1888, pp. 166–67), or yet kills an unfaithful she-snake that neglects to wait on her casting husband (p. 171). Either as the hero thus propitiates the serpent’s regeneration or as (like in Grimm and Grimm 1980, no. 16) the serpent grants means of resurrection to him, there is a constant involvement of the hero with the perennial snake. It is then most interesting that Mitra should note that such means of life-restoration “could be inherited by the serpent slayer” (1925–1926, p. 87), for—as we saw—the hero who propitiates the young serpent is also the slayer of the old snake. In other words, he who gains supernatural knowledge and/or means of resurrection from serpents is inherently a dragon slayer. This goes to explain that in Eastern Europe, as Pócs puts it, “snakes and other watery animals from the underworld ... are used before Saint George’s day for knowledge ... within the context of the dragon ... that was conquered by Saint George” (Pócs 1999, p. 132). It is also, of course, reminiscent of Sigurd learning the language of birds as he licks blood from the slain dragon’s heart (Byock 1990, pp. 65–66; Sturluson 1995, pp. 101–102).

One implication is that the slaying of the old dragon is homologous to the snake's casting of the old skin. But then, the dragon slayer is himself like the young snake—which Vladimir Propp rightly sensed as he stated, “he who was born from the dragon will kill the dragon” (1983, p. 363, cf. 290–91). Now this relates to the fact that the fairy-tale hero called “Finger,” who slays a werewolf, presents a nature similar to his victim; thus, it is not surprising that in another version already quoted, the surplus child should prove to be a dragon slayer. Likewise, Jakobson and Ružičić showed that the Slavic werewolf begotten by a serpent is more precisely a “Dragon and Fiery Wolf” who sets out, as a proper dragon slayer, to kill his father (1950, pp. 344, 347–50). The equivalence of werewolves and dragons as double-skinned beings thus correlates to the fact that surplus children, assimilated to witches and werewolves whom in fairy tales they must kill, are inherently dragon killers (thus, much to Delarue's amazement, a seven-headed serpent may replace the usual ogre, devil, or wolf of ATU 327; Delarue 1985, p. 308).

Overall, the foregoing discussion reveals a cyclical conception of time and being that relates double-skinned entities with endless death and regeneration, on the model of the sloughing serpent. It is in light of this widespread symbolic connection that the persistent association of regenerative powers to people born in a caul (see Ginzburg 1984, 1991; cf. Jakobson and Szeftel 1949, p. 60) is best understood. Moreover, the cosmic import of cyclic renewal linked to alternating skins is manifest in such convergent insights as those of Jakobson and Szeftel stating that “the existence of a wolf cult in the pre-Christian Slavic past is very probable” (1949, p. 68), Marija Gimbutas speaking of an “Old European snake worship” (1989, pp. 134–37), and Arnold van Gennep defining yet another double-skinned animal (cf. Gaignebet and Lajoux 1985, pp. 79–83) as a “Bear-God” (Gennep 1979, pp. 908–909).

To conclude, a joint study of fairy tales, folk-beliefs and social practices discloses crucial properties of a complex worldview. One aspect of this, examined here, is the symbolic equivalence of the flesh-and-blood seventh child—credited with the nature of werewolves and witches, yet presenting oracular and healing powers—to the “Dragon Slayer” theme lying at the core of all fairy tales, as profoundly intuited by Propp (1996, pp. 89–90, 114).

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# REFLECTIONS OF FOLK BELIEF AND LEGENDS AT THE WITCH TRIALS OF ESTONIA<sup>1</sup>

ÜLO VALK

Historians have discovered data about 145 witch trials in Estonia from the period of 1520–1819. Most of them took place in the seventeenth century when the country became a part of the Swedish Kingdom and the Lutheran Church started its fight against witchcraft, idolatry, superstition, and survivals of folk Catholicism. The testimonies that were given at the witch trials of Estonia shed light both on the influential concepts of Lutheran demonology and on the ideas of popular religion. As in other countries of Europe, the relationship between church doctrines and folk belief is complex: it involves mutual dialogue and intertwining, conflict and collision. The confessions of the defendants at witch trials testify to their readiness to meet the expectations of the judges, to interpret folk belief and personal experience with the emphasis on diabolic and evil. It is possible to recognize some legend types and narrative motifs that derive from folklore.

Carlo Ginzburg, Gustav Henningsen, Gábor Klaniczay, Éva Pócs, and several other researchers have proven the historical continuation of religious concepts and practices from (Indo-) European shamanism to medieval and early modern witchcraft. They have shown not only the continuation of traditions but also the coexistence, merging, and conflicts of different belief systems. The same processes can be traced in Estonia where the witchcraft beliefs emerge from Balto-Finnic shamanism, which derives from the Finno-Ugric and North-European heritage. There is little historical data about pre-Christian religion in Estonia but the possibilities to study the folk beliefs of the seventeenth and centuries are somewhat better. The most important sources that have been preserved from this period are the documents of witch trials and the records that were made

by Lutheran clergymen, Baltic German scholars, and some travelers. Most of the witchcraft beliefs and legends were recorded and the relevant practices were described by the folklorists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Estonian Folklore Archives in Tartu contain about 1,300,000 pages of manuscripts. In this article, the beliefs that were reflected at the Estonian witch trials are compared and contrasted with the data of the later folklore collections. I give a few examples of the three basic cases that illustrate the varieties of relations between the belief systems of the learned clergymen and that of the Estonian peasants.

First, folk belief can be strongly influenced by clerical doctrines and we can speak about the folklorization of theological concepts. The idea about the pact with the Devil was most probably introduced into Estonian folklore from church demonology. Secondly, it is possible to find folk belief, not influenced by the learned traditions—the voice of the peasants has been recorded by the scribes of witch trials without considerable alteration. Sometimes we can even trace reflections of social protest which is manifest, e.g., in the demonization of the landlords. Thirdly, learned and popular beliefs can meet, merge into one another, and form a new system of beliefs and corpus of narrative motifs which is shared by different layers of society, although the interpretations may vary. For example, the legends and narrative accounts about the feasts of supernatural beings were adjusted to the concept of the witches' Sabbath. In the religious thinking of tradition bearers, all the three cases were combined, and it would be difficult to draw sharp lines between them. (In Estonian folk legends of the seventeenth century, the blood contract could be made with the Devil in the guise of a gentleman who later appeared at the demonic feasts of the witches.) Such a tripartite typology is atomistic but it provides an elementary tool for analyzing the dialogic relationship between the two basic discourses of witchcraft and demonology—in popular and in learned traditions.

The idea of the *pact with the Devil* was the cornerstone of the demonological doctrine of the church and provides evidence of the impact of the learned and clerical doctrines on the popular beliefs of the Estonians. Several theologians asserted that human beings do not have any supernatural powers, everything that surpasses natural human abilities is either of divine or demonic origin. The first part of the notorious *Malleus maleficarum* by Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger is dedicated to “the

three necessary concomitants of witchcraft which are the Devil, a witch, and the permission of Almighty God.” The Livonian demonologist Hermann Samson (1579–1643) defined witchcraft as follows: “It is to do with witchcraft when a creature and God’s creation is used and influenced differently from the rules prescribed by God through the help of Satan and alliance with him” (1626, the first sermon).

The Estonian witch-trial records of the seventeenth century reveal that the local concept of witchcraft was similar to the theological ideas of late medieval and early modern times. Close relations between witches and wizards and the Devil are evident. The Evil One often manifests himself to his servants; he is the teacher of magic; witches are said to have sexual relations with their demonic master; they have feasts and parties together; entering into the blood contract has been described several times. It seems to be self-evident that witches and wizards can do harm only if the Devil assists them in their evil intentions (Uuspuu 1938a, p. 87). Sometimes the Devil actively incites magicians to evil practices.

In 1723 there was a witch trial in Tartu (Dorpat). The peasant Wielo Ado from Valguta confessed that the Evil Fiend had taught him secrets of witchcraft. He also told the court about the charms and spells of black magic that he had used. In order to do harm to somebody, one had to put a piece of cloth into water and place a stone on it. The following words were said: “*Kurrat litzj sinnu kiwi pähee ninck teh temmal kurrj.*” (Let the Devil bruise his head with the stone and do him evil.) Wielo Ado knew other evil spells as well, also recorded by the scribe of the court in the Estonian language:

*Tulle nüüd kurrat, minnul sinnu abbj tarwis, Murra Jalg, wähna kael, ehck wähna kässj, ehck panna essi hende kiddoma, ehck wotta warsti, sis saab Häng sinnulle, olgo minnu Hänge pähle.* (Come now, ye Devil, I need your help, break the leg, wrench the neck or wrench the hand or make him sickly or take him soon, then the soul will be yours, instead of my soul[?] [Uuspuu 1938b, p. 19]).

Such explicit applications to the powers of evil are extremely rare in the Estonian spells that were recorded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

According to learned demonologists, the pact formed between the Devil and a witch entails sacrifices to him. Newborn, unbaptized babies



were supposed to be appropriate for this purpose; the Devil also claimed the children of witches (Guazzo 1608, p. 14). On August 28, 1640 the peasant Pavel Willapulck was charged with witchcraft and later sentenced to be burned in Karksi, South Estonia. It seems that he confessed his cooperation with the Devil on his own accord, without any pressure from the court. He had met the Evil One ten times, talked with him, and even sold his two sons, who were three weeks old, to him. He received 20 thalers for this bargain, which changed into coal when he took the money. The name of his demonic master was *Holy Father (Heiliger Pater)*. Pavel Willapulck also proclaimed that there was another wizard, Kiewase Hen, who had committed much evil. He had bewitched the child of Tyro Janus and offered it to the Devil. On the following day, August 29, 1640 Kiewase Hen and Pavel Willapulck were confronted in the court and the latter repeated his charges. Finally Kiewase Hen pleaded guilty to killing several children and offering his own unbaptized daughter, who was two years old, to the Devil. Kiewase Hen mentioned another sorcerer Nossy Hen who had taken his unbaptized daughter to the witches' party at the *blue hill (blauen Berge)* on St. John's Eve and given her to the Devil (Uuspuu 1937, pp. 117–19; 1938a, p. 118). The accusation of offering children to the Devil, associated with the terrifying belief that sorcerers may steal them, was repeated at Estonian witch trials time and again. The belief that the Evil One himself steals and exchanges unbaptized children was still popular at the end of nineteenth century. However, the idea that the witches and wizards steal babies and offer them to the Devil was forgotten by the time extensive folklore collecting started in Estonia.

The judges of Estonian witch trials always tried to find out whether the accused person had made a pact with the Devil or not. This was their particular interest, because everybody who had concluded the contract was to be sentenced to death according to the ruling Lutheran doctrine (Uuspuu 1938a, pp. 80–82). Witches and wizards (*maleficae*) who had formed a pact with the Evil One, served him deliberately and caused harm to their fellow men, cattle and crops were ordained to be burned alive (Samson 1626, ninth sermon). Emphasizing the witches' relations with the Devil, the courts undeniably had a considerable influence on folk religion. Similar ideas were supported by Lutheran sermons as well. Many passages of the sermons of that period justify the witch trials and explain the idea of the Devil's pact as the cornerstone of the Christian doctrine of witchcraft.

Heinrich Stahl (c. 1600–1657) wrote in his influential sermons published in 1641 in the Estonian language:

Ye poor people, who are deluded by the Devil into blundering and serve him through witchcraft, spells and charms or who look for help from sorcerers, warlocks, wizards and witches, ye must learn to recognize the fraud of the Devil and make sure that ye become free and get rid of him (Stahl 1641, p. 40).

The spiritual atmosphere created by such sermons and witch trials strengthened the belief in a close relationship between witches, wizards, and the Devil. It was a dominating belief in seventeenth-century Estonia that the specialists of malefice are in close co-operation with the Evil One. The idea of the diabolical contract most probably belonged to the basic corpus of beliefs.

The images of demonic evil acquired a concrete embodiment in the figure of the German landlord. It is possible to speak of both the demonization of the German landlords as well as the Germanization of the Devil in Estonian folklore. In Estonia, the landlord was demonized as early as the late Middle Ages and early modern times, the evidence of which can be found in *runo* songs about serfdom (Valk 1995). These songs spread and became extremely popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but they rely upon medieval folklore. The demonization of landlords is also confirmed by some of the recordings of witch trials dating back to the Swedish rule. There was a trial in Tallinn in 1615 in which the defendants were two women. It was established that Kai and Mall were werewolves and had participated in the witches' gatherings on the hill three times a year, and that Kai had been the Devil's cook. Every year they had to pay tribute in grain to a gentleman called Peters (i.e., the Devil) (Arbusow 1911, p. 108). In 1623, a trial was held in Merimõisa where a woman called Ann, the wife of Tammeaugu Indrek, confessed after being tortured that she was a werewolf. A charge was also made against her husband who was said to have given somebody the following advice: "Why do you go to communion so often? When you go there next time and get the Host, take it out of your mouth and put it on an old aspen stump on three Thursdays in a row. Then on the last Thursday the wafer will begin to foam and soon there will come

a gentleman who will make you rich" (Eisen 1923, p. 1590). There is no doubt that the gentleman was supposed to be the Devil.

In the Karksi witchcraft trial of 1640, the accused Pavel Willapulck confessed that he had seen the Devil sitting on a tree top with a child in his lap. The Devil was dressed in blue clothes "like a German gentleman" (Uuspuu 1937, p. 117). In 1641, a witchcraft trial was held in Pärnu. The accused, Layske Mart, admitted after being tortured that he had "a master" of his own (the Devil) with whom he and many others had gathered in the marsh of Röhma. The Devil had come to meet him in bright blue clothes like a German gentleman. At the same trial, another accused, Nemmiste Tennies, confessed after being tortured that Layske Mart had taken him to a gentleman who had rebaptized him. In 1642, Willakasz Jürgen was charged with witchcraft at the Pärnu provincial court. The prolonged interrogation gave no results, but after some torturing the man confessed that he, too, had met the Devil in the marsh of Röhma. There he had eaten and drunken wine and beer from silver vessels together with the others and danced for a while. His "master" Rostip had laid his hands upon his head and baptized him in the name of the Devil. He also had had three godfathers, devils who looked like German gentlemen, and there were many of them (Uuspuu 1938, pp. 119–21, Madar 1987, p. 139). At the witch trial in 1651, one of the accused confessed that when he had whistled, the Devil had appeared by the brook coming out of a mouse hole. He was dressed in black German-type clothes and spoke a good "non-German" language (Arbusow 1911, pp. 115–16). It is not always clear in the above accounts whether the word *master* (*isand*) means the Devil in the shape of a gentleman. Sometimes it may refer to the witch's subordinate position in relation to the Devil, who according to the medieval tradition was her lord and master. Nevertheless, in several cases it is quite obvious that the Devil is described as a German nobleman. This belief, which reflects social tensions, continued and was well known until the nineteenth century as the Estonians still remained subordinate to the German landlords. Iuri Lotman has pointed out that associating the concepts of "alien," "supernatural," and "demonic" is a characteristic feature of many archaic societies (1998, p. 67).

Sometimes learned and popular ideas merge into one another and form new systems of beliefs which are manifest in a certain corpus of narratives. Church demonology and Estonian folklore meet and combine in

the legends about demonic feasts. The testimonies of the accused persons of Estonian witch trials are laconic, as a rule. However, it is possible to recognize some motifs that derive from folk legends. Stories about supernatural feasts were still popular in the nineteenth century and were usually told about musicians who had played at a party of the Devil. The heroes of these legends could also be drunkards who were on their way home from a pub. An example recorded in North Estonia follows:

#### The Man on a Stone in the Middle of Lake Ülemiste

Once a man who sometimes liked to drink more than his head and feet could take, had again drunk in a pub in Tallinn. He was a bit tipsy when he started to stump towards Lake Ülemiste where his home was. A little way off the lake he saw two other men who were apparently going in the same direction. In no time the men were chatting away. They spoke at length of this and that. Finally the strangers said to the merry man, “You have still a long way home and it is dark already, you may get lost. Why don’t you come to our place? Our home is quite close and we are having a small party tonight, a few guests are coming and there will be no shortage of vodka. Let’s drop by for a while!” They walked about half a verst and reached a house all in lights. As they entered the house, the strangers warned the man, “Beware of mentioning the name of God! This party is different.” And the men went in. There were quite a few people in the house, who were all sitting around the table and sipping hard at their glasses. There was all kind of fine food, too, on the table. Soon the man made himself at home and was in such a merry mood that his only pre-occupation was to pour one glass after another down his throat and eat some snacks on top of those. Finally the man had stuffed himself silly and he went to thank the men who had invited him there; he thanked them with the warmest words but in the end said in passing, “Jesus Christ! I have never seen a party like this before.” As soon as he had said that, everything—the house, glass with vodka, snacks—disappeared and the man felt that he was sitting on something hard and cold in complete darkness. The man had to wait several hours before it grew light. Then he saw that he was sitting on a stone in the middle of Lake Ülemiste. He called for help and fishermen came and rescued him in their boat. From that day the man has never touched the bottle again.  
(E 43029/32 < Kuusalu - Joosep Prümmel [1902].)<sup>2</sup>

According to medieval and early modern beliefs, witches could not utter the name of God in situations where the Devil was involved. The leading demonologist of Livonia, Hermann Samson wrote in his sermons on witchcraft: "Witches and the Devil hate the holiest name of God so much that when they gather at their dancing parties and feasts, it is forbidden to mention the name of God or Christ and even think about them. Otherwise everything will fail, their good mood is over and everything disappears" (1626, ninth sermon).

Legends about demonic parties include paradoxes and are open to various interpretations. It seems that such stories offered a possibility to discuss and question the borders between dreams and reality. The first option to interpret the legends would be to confirm that everything truly happened as a bodily experience. According to this view, witches really fly, the coal presented by a fairy transforms into gold coins, and metamorphoses from human being into wolf physically takes place. Translocation in space (e.g., finding oneself on a stone in the middle of a lake) is to confirm the bodily experience. The food taken from the party which is transformed into dung can be interpreted as material evidence which proves that the feast was more than a mere dream. The second possible interpretation would be to say that although the experience was real, it happened in spirit as a shamanistic journey. While the body laid unconscious or in a state of sleep, the spirit left to go through supernatural adventures in another world. Thirdly, the whole experience can be understood as a delusion created by supernatural beings: by fairies or by the Devil who has taken over many roles from the spirits of nature in Estonian and European folklore. The power of witchcraft can also cause illusions when things appear differently than they really are. At several trials that took place in European countries witches confessed that after the rich meal that had been offered at the Sabbath they left the table as hungry as before. This means that the experience was a mere illusion induced by demonic powers. The fourth, psychological or rationalizing view completely rejects the supernatural interpretation. Everything that happened was the projection of the inner world outside of oneself: a hallucination, a fantasy of wish-fulfillment. The thrilling plot and the varieties of interpretation inherent in texts can explain the popularity of these legends throughout centuries. These narratives enable discussions about the reality of supernatural experiences, about the vague borders between delusions and the physical

world. The four interpretative models probably also reflect different historical layers of folk belief from archaic to the modern outlooks, but it is more important to note that these interpretations intertwine in folklore as different perspectives of the tradition bearers. Éva Pócs has noted parallels between the two interpretations, that is, soul travel and supposed actual physical experiences. A rationalizing and demonologizing view of the court is a third aspect (Pócs 1999, p. 73).

There are hundreds of legends about demonic feasts in the collections of the Estonian Folklore Archives but I have not found any stories that were told in first person. However, at the Estonian witch trials, these legends were sometimes told as experience-based accounts. One of the most detailed descriptions of a witches' Sabbath was given at a trial in Tartu in 1619. Elsa, the wife of Piper (Elsa Pipersche) confessed, after being tortured, that the witches had gathered on a hill near Tartu. About fifty people came together to consult how to take good luck from somebody and distribute it. Elsa did not know the names of the others because these people were dead already. Her spirit, the flying dragon (*ihr Geist, der fliegende Trach*), did not communicate with them. They drank beer and mead from silver vessels. They could go to their meeting any time they wanted. When the meeting came to the end, there was nothing there (*so wäre es nichts*) (Salupere 1998, p. 20). The last sentence probably means that the whole experience was a dream-like delusion and that Elsa was aware of this. She was burned as a witch on January 18, 1619.

Elsa mentioned the names of several other witches and wizards. On February 23, a peasant called Rein was taken to court. After being tortured, Rein gave a fantastic description of the witches' Sabbath on a hill near Tartu and once on the blue hill near Uniküla (*zu Dörben auf dem Blauen Berg bei Unnikülla*). Uniküla can be a real place name denoting several villages in Estonia but the explicit translation would be "a dream village." About a thousand witches gathered there to eat, and drink mead and beer from silver vessels. Some women served as cooks (the wife of *Saxa Jacken* and widows from *Löwikülla*). After the meal, the wife of Saksa Jaak gathered up all the knives and put them in a box. The witches were convened by Saksa Jaak who blew on a copper horn. He was the head of three hundred witches and had started teaching witchcraft to Rein four or five years earlier and taught him to run around as a werewolf. He had seen the wolf-skin at the place of Saksa Jaak—however, Rein had never used his

knowledge of how to become a werewolf. Rein also confessed that he was the head of the group of five witches and wizards and mentioned their names to the court (Salupere 1998, pp. 20–21). Rein was sentenced to death and was burned on February 23, 1619. Folk legends about werewolves were often reflected in the testimonies given at the witch trials in Estonia. At eighteen trials, eighteen women and thirteen men were accused of causing damage as werewolves (Madar 1993, p. 270). Legends about werewolves were probably transmitted by different layers of society, both by the intellectual elite and the peasants, but the models of interpretations could vary. While the populace believed in the bodily transformations of witches and wizards, and their journeys in spirit, the demonologists explained such cases as delusions induced by the Devil.

There were several other witnesses who confirmed that they had taken part in the demonic feasts and thus visited the supernatural world of legends. At the witch trial in Tallinn in 1615, Anders confessed that he had taken part in the parties of the witches. A party that he described was arranged near the stone at Laksberg (an adaptation of the German Blocksberg). He went there together with Lückede Kurt and they met the head of the witches called “Humphey,” who was sitting beside his wife. He was in a beautiful blue robe, which had a big collar. A large company gathered there drank from gold and silver cups and danced to the accompaniment of a bagpipe (Arbusow 1911, pp. 109–110).

Dishes made of precious metals used by witches at their feasts are often mentioned in the documents of witchcraft trials. It is a stereotypical image in the seventeenth-century Estonian folk religion, which has parallels in the golden and decorative accessories of fairylike witch feasts of Southeast European and Celtic fairy heavens (Pócs 1999, p. 89). In later Estonian folklore, this motif has been preserved in the legends about the Devils’ parties. In one legend recorded in Viljandi, somebody takes a golden plate and spoon with him from the Devil’s christening feast; later he finds them to be an old peasant’s shoe and a dungy animal bone (E 53207). In another story from Jõhvi it is a silver plate and spoon that are taken home from the party, and later these things turn out to be a darned and muddy birch-bark shoe and a dried goat’s leg with hoofs and hair on it (H II 7, 699/701 [1]). The nice parties thus turn out to be infernal feasts. In the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Estonian folklore the diabolization of legends continued and witches were eventually substituted by the Devils who were hold-

ing these parties. It is a typical feature of Lutheran folk religion that the Evil One becomes the dominant supernatural character in legends. In the folklore of several other North European peoples, the legends about illusory feasts are connected with fairies, especially with forest spirits whose dream-like parties can occasionally be attended by human beings (Löfstedt 1993, p. 156). It is probable that before the demonologizing tendency started to prevail, due to the influence of Christian doctrines, these legends were connected with the spirits of nature in Estonian folklore as well. Éva Pócs has shown that narratives about fairy merriments, which depict the alternative world of desire, have gone through the process of polarization in the folklore of several countries of Europe. The motif of illusory plenty deprived them of their reality and identified them as satanic deceit (1999, pp. 88–91).

It is obvious that the testimonies about the infernal parties that were given at the Estonian witch trials derive from the local legends that were popular in the seventeenth century. We can see that the concept of the witches' Sabbath was not forced into folk belief by the learned clergymen. It was not introduced from foreign belief systems but was recreated on the basis of local folklore, it emerged almost as a *generate spontanea*. The local foundation of the witches' Sabbath can be seen in the legends about supernatural feasts that are connected with delusions and dream-like experience. These legends refer to alcohol, music, and dance, which were all used in trance techniques known in Europe. In the testimonies given at witch trials, the perspective of belief legends was changed and stories were told as real experiences. The supernatural world was transformed into "historical" facts—powerful imaginations and beliefs merged with social reality.

Such confessions of the defendants could result in the accusation of diabolism and the subsequent death penalty. How to explain why the legends about the intercommunication with the supernatural world were transformed into memories about personal encounters with the Devil and transactions with him? One of the answers might lie in the distinctive features of the genre of legend which purports to be historical and factual and thus tends to be associated with real places and persons (Dorson 1968, p. 176). Just like memories can develop into legends, the latter may transform into memories if such changes of perspective are supported by the prevailing belief system. Somebody's personal participation in the de-



monic feasts probably created doubts among the Estonian peasants in the nineteenth century, but it was regarded possible, even firmly so at the period of witch trials.

Witch trials are among the most artificial story-telling events that one can imagine but such situations seem to reinforce some generic traits of legends. The witnesses merge facts with imagination; they confirm beliefs by referring to *realia* from everyday life and by filling the narrative roles with real human beings. Even the defendants are ready to confirm the reality of the world of legends and their intercommunication with supernatural powers. These are all rhetorical devices, used by legend-tellers who believe in their stories themselves and try to convince their audience. As Linda Dégh has pointed out, the performance of a legend usually involves discussion, even dispute about belief and nonbelief, truth and untruth (e.g., 1995a & b). Although the scribes of witch trials were not aware that they were recording folklore, they have captured the magic of the genre of legend and transmitted it to us. Modern historians and folklorists still ask the old questions whether and to what extent the records of witch trials are true and how to explain them, and we still discuss the vague borderline between the imagined and the real world, folklore and history.

### *Notes*

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- 2 A reference to the collections of the Estonian Folklore Archives in Tartu.

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# WITCHES AND PRIESTS IN THE BULGARIAN VILLAGE: PAST AND PRESENT

IVETA TODOROVA-PIRGOVA

## *Introduction*

This paper discusses some specific social and cultural relationships between sorceresses (witches) and priests in the context of the local rural cultures. When I refer to witches and priests, I mean not only their actual individual contacts but also the establishment of these contacts in the context of certain conceptual relations such as mythology and religion, witchcraft and religion, community of the living and community of the dead (divinities, demons), etc.

Quite frequently, research sources treat sorceresses (witches) and priests as antipodes, insofar as the former are associated with the concept of paganism and the latter with the concept of religion. This conceptual opposition is embedded in the very dogmas of Christianity in which witches are considered heretics or servants of the Devil. Such an interpretation kindles the fires for burning the diabolical, the evil that ruins the souls and blocks the road to Salvation. These fires, however, do not flare up in the context of Orthodox Christianity and this creates a possibility for the emergence of specific cultural forms, for which researchers seek an acceptable term: customary or primitive Christianity, folk Christianity,<sup>1</sup> popular Christianity, popular Orthodoxy, etc.<sup>2</sup> And naming those forms is not the only issue. We also need to focus on the way in which these specific phenomena exist and dominate the local rural culture.

The cultural space of the Bulgarian village is saturated with syncretic phenomena of various types, whose long coexistence has not only entailed a relative balancing of their meaning and functions, but has also eliminated the idea of opposing them on the conceptual level. This opposition seems to persist more in the abstract ideas of religious

philosophers and the historians of religion than in the vivid practice of social interaction. From this perspective, definitions of the type of “high” and “low Christianity” seem to be quite irrelevant, besides for the local rural community, there is but one type of Christianity and it is the sole one for the people that profess it.

### *Religion and Folklore*

Folklore was the dominant type of culture in the Bulgarian village until the beginning of the 20th century. The inherited and the acquired system of concepts, notions, beliefs, etc. have merged into a specific syncretic whole. This is also valid for the elements of the mythology of previous inhabitants and for the adopted monotheistic religion. The process of adjusting Christian ideas to the forerunners’ ideas about the world is definitely a long and complicated process. In order to get a better idea of the progress in that process, we need to visualize the way in which Christianity reaches the members of the rural community. This can be achieved by observing liturgy rites and listening to sermons, and by means of personal contacts established by the priest with certain individuals (these do not include the school education in Religion). To put it differently, the holy books of the Christian doctrine (and more specifically, the Bible) are perceived mostly *through talking and doing rather than through reading and pondering*. It also becomes clear that the *what* (i.e., the content aspect of the doctrine) depends mostly on the *how* (the way in which the doctrine is presented and perceived). In other words, *to a large extent this process is handled by the actors in this specific communication: priests and laymen*. This social interaction presupposes a series of interpretations of characters and plots from the Holy books, i.e., the creation of various folklore versions of their texts. Yet, this situation also implies the establishment of a specific cultural space, where old and new are bound up in an inseparable whole, perceived as a consistent and coherent explanation of the visible and invisible in the world around us. Consequently we can observe regulations of a new type of relations between the community members, formations of new conceptual models, and a stipulation of relevant behavioral norms.

Currently, folklore is not the dominant culture in the village, but it has retained sufficient “territory,” where all these processes take place in a very

interesting way. Even nowadays, as these processes unfold, we can trace some of the routes of molding the new syncretic forms and get an explanation of their positioning in the cultural space of the village. It is particularly interesting to observe their development in a more complex situation, i.e., in a settlement inhabited by various confessional and ethnic groups: Bulgarians, Turks, and Gypsies; or Wallachians, Bulgarians, and Tatars; Christians and Muslims belonging to diverse arms of Christianity and Islam, etc. By and large, the villages with Muslim population imams, who are unfamiliar with the Arabic language of the Holy Koran convert the word of God into enigma and give vent to secondary interpretations of the Koranic text.<sup>3</sup>

What happens to the sorceresses (witches) and priests in the context of these complex cultural interactions?

### *View from “Within”*

At this point, I would like to “turn over” the narrative to the very actors in this social interaction, so I shall quote some specific examples.

Example 1: An excerpt from the interview with a local priest from Northeastern Bulgaria taken during the 1991 field studies in the area:

In response to my question if he believed some of the ritual practices in the village were wrong from the perspective of faith and religious canon, he said: “Well, as for wrongdoing, is there anybody, who doesn’t do it?! Even Saint Apostle Paul said, ‘What is wrong—not to do what I should do and to do what I shouldn’t do.’ That is, the human mind, the human body is, how shall I put it ... we are mortal and we succumb. And this is wrong. This is the supremacy of evil in us. For example, to visit fortunetellers, sorceresses, imams who ‘cast lead,’ and other such stuff, for sure this is wrong, as the church has it.” (“Why is it wrong?”—I. T.) “Because sorceresses differ. There are some of them that say their words through God, through prayer, while others do their job through evil. For the Devil is also endowed with power by God to work his miracles.” (“How can I tell the kind of each sorceress?”—I. T.) “Well, almost everybody knows what kind they belong to. The imams, for example, they mostly deal with magic ... they practice witchcraft: they

make amulets, go to people's houses, and leave things there. And as people pass in the morning, they get sick, people suffer. You may not believe it, but it is so indeed ..." (A man went to see a fortuneteller and she told him that he had been bewitched, so he went to see the imam and brought him to his house, so that the imam could tell him where the witchery was and then undo it. And the imam told him it was in a gate pipe: "And indeed the amulet came out of it!" the reverend father added. The man had had amulets made for him earlier for virtue, for family reunion, but the enchanter was different, and the man knew that the amulet was hidden in his pillow—I. T.) "And the imam went straight to his pillow and took out the amulet. Well, I could've thought that he had lied to me for the other one, that he might have dropped it in the pipe, but he went and took straight out of the pillow that other thing, the amulet that was made for virtue. So, he says, there is something there, that he understands that thing. And as he entered, maybe he felt it, as those ... psychics. He somehow felt it."

("Can a spell be cast on behalf of God?"—I. T.) "If it is on behalf of God, yes. For health, for virtue, for bringing people closer. Everything should be consistent only with God. Those who have faith are strong. As, for instance, old Vanga (famous Bulgarian fortuneteller—I. T.), she was speaking for God. I had a neighbor over there. She also healed people like that—by mumbling incantations, by casting wax to chase away fear. She used to tell me, 'Reverend Father, I am doing this merely by praying to God. There is nothing else that I do. That's what I've been taught to do,' she says, 'and that's what I do. So it is!'" ("Would you bless her doing?"—I. T.) "Yes, I would! Even I went to see her. When I had a car accident, I was so scared, and she saw me. 'You are sick,' she said. 'Come!' 'I am not,' I said. I did not believe her. Then I went to see her, and it all came out on the wax—battered in sheet iron. I had a frontal car crash and the other car was badly battered in. She smelted the wax, put it in the water, and it all came out. It is simple, there is a result—a positive one. When it is cast three times, one is healed." ("Does it come out only the third time?"—I. T.) "The very first time it does. The second time it is less visible in the water that she later gives to you to drink. For, you know, wax is cast in water. And the third time it already disappears, that thing. But it is not within one day—over a period, like a few days apart. And it disappears only at the third casting. And I felt

in good health.” (“And what does she say meanwhile?”—I. T.) “She only says it to herself. It can’t be heard” (Todorova 1991a).

The priest does not renounce magic rituals as a whole, he rejects only those of them that are not exercised on behalf of God and seek to harm people. He accepts incantations which are of the healing type and considers them a virtuous and useful human activity, for they seek to improve people’s health and to help them. His judgment is made from a human point of view rather than from a religious and dogmatic perspective; it is consistent with his inherent need to match universal virtue with virtue substantiated by religion, so that he can perform his social functions in that community more adequately.

The description of the case, where he himself went to see a sorceress and the way in which he perceives her actions are not at variance with his religious ethics, insofar as actions in the name of God and for the well-being of humans are ranked higher than the dogmatic *pagan-Christian* opposition during his involvement in a rather archaic magic ritual. Thus the facet relevant for that ranking is the opposition *virtuous=in the name of God-evil=in the name of the devil*, rather than the *paganism – Christianity* opposition. The interpretation provided by the priest places him in an integrated rather than isolated position with respect to the community members, whose spiritual leader he is. In addition, I should mention that this particular priest is extremely popular not only among the Christian Orthodox population in the village but among the Muslims as well, which is due to the people’s firm belief that he performs his obligations as a priest perfectly and can act as anybody’s advisor during the difficult times of their lives.

Example 2: An excerpt from the interview with another local priest in Northeastern Bulgaria taken during 1990 field studies in the area:

The priest went to see a fortuneteller because he lost a rooster. “Well,” she said, “the rooster headed to the east and got lost. If you go to the east, you will find it within three days.” (“How did she tell fortunes—did she use beans?”—I. T.) “Well, no, she used cards. She takes the cards, she puts them this way, arranges them (he uses his hands to show me what she does—I. T.). The rooster,” she said, “headed to the east but in three day’s time it will be back. Thank God, so many years



have gone by but no rooster has shown up. (And he laughed—I. T.) ... It is about the fortuneteller described by Apostle ... what was his name, what apostle was he ... His Holy book is read after Easter, during the Easter week. I can't remember exactly, but I know that it is from the Apostle's activities. Saint Apostle Peter was walking down the street, when he saw a woman that was kind of telling fortune—like a sorceress and like those that prophesy and she said, 'These people are God's messengers'—meaning the Apostles Peter and Paul. Apostle Peter saw that she had such a spirit—to tell fortunes and to articulate the truth, for they were really God's messengers, so he went up to her and said, 'In the name of Jesus Christ I order that the spirit within you should come out!' So she had such a spirit to foresee things. And then they caught him, for the rich man had no source of wealth any more (he had hired her, paid her and took the respective amount from her). Well, it was like old Vanga (a famous Bulgarian fortuneteller—I. T.)—it was the same. And then they captured Apostle Paul and locked him away in prison. As they were rich and the power was on their side, they took him to court and then they hanged Apostle Peter—they crucified him like Jesus Christ. But he said, "I am not worthy to be crucified like my teacher. Indeed, I should be crucified, yet not with my head upward but with my head downward" And they crucified him with his head downward, as he wished. That was because he chased the spirit away from that sorceress." ("It turns out that he made a mistake in chasing that spirit away?"—I. T.) "On the contrary, for it is said ... Jesus Christ said that different ones would come about—just like now, and it would not be clear who is real and who is lying. All of them that tell fortune have a spirit, but some are real ones, and others ... just like now, are of different sorts."

(Then he told me in detail about his visit to a psychic in the city, who cured him of his back pain by using only his hands—I. T.) (Todorova 1990a).

The priest found Biblical parallels of clairvoyance in order to substantiate the truthfulness of this type of human activity and to explain the fact that he himself went to see a sorceress in search of the rooster he had lost. It was quite natural for him to reconcile her actions with his ideas of good and evil, and as he accepted them to a certain extent, he established a

natural link with the other community members, for whom the wise-woman was a ritual person with certain mandatory functions in the social milieu, a part of its role structure and “a guarantor” of the balance of social positions in it. The association of old Vanga with the image of a Biblical prophet makes the interpretation of the depicted Biblical event extremely interesting and worthy of separate analysis. In this case, however, I cite the example only to illustrate how Christian and folklore characters become part of the overall rationalization of a phenomenon with its respective social, ethical, aesthetical, and other dimensions in the context of the local culture.

Example3: An excerpt from the interview with a sorceress, who is well-known in the same region:

(“And do you put something on, do you change some piece of clothing, when you tell fortune?”—I. T.) “Oh, no, not at all! I do nothing. I stay just as I am. I take off my head kerchief and go ahead. And it is God that protects me! He protects me against everything. This thing that I am doing here (fortunetelling—I. T.), as the priest learns about it—I go to church, you know ... he calls me and asks me what I have said. And I tell him. *And he said, ‘Fine! Go help cattle, he said, and help people! And may you be lucky,’ he said. He was an old priest* (Italics by I. T.). He died. And now we have a new one, from town.” (“And you do not say anything bad, do you?”—I. T.) “I say nothing bad but, you see, he, the priest, did not know it. And he comes and he wants to know what I say—to make sure I do not say anything bad or wrong. You heard the story here (the enchanting words —I. T.), he said, ‘You are free,’ he said, ‘from me already ... there is nothing to fear.” (“Does God help you tell fortune, or is it some other saint?”—I. T.) “God does, only God. I pray, I always pray to Him to protect me, to make me lucky. That’s what matters. And still God brings the greatest luck!” (“And haven’t you got your luck from your Granny?”—I. T.) “My Granny taught me, yet the power is with God. Nay! Were it only for my Granny’s (power and teaching—I. T.) it wouldn’t be so. It wouldn’t be enough.” (“And where did your Granny get that power from?”—I. T.) “Well, she got it from her Granny. And she passed it on to me. And I shall pass it on, and that is how it goes down from generation to generation” (Todorova 1991b).

The stand of the sorceress is identical with that of the priests in the examples quoted above. She judges her practices as something good and beneficial for people and naturally associates the healing effect of the witch ritual with God's help. There is no confrontation between her religious feelings and her human ideas about good and evil and she in no way qualifies for oppositions of the *paganism—Christianity* type. "The blessing" of the priest, when he hears the specific wording of the incantation, is another natural element of the recounted social interaction, since it is compatible with the cultural environment that has generated that interaction and with the communicative needs of significance to it.

These examples should not be viewed as instances of shaken faith, as deviation from the church canon or as belittlement of the Christian doctrine. Instead they should be perceived as a natural part of the overall operation of the local culture and its integration into Christianity by subjecting its significant norms and rules to the doctrine. The priest judges the actions of the sorceress against the common human notions of good and evil, while sorceresses are usually very religious-minded and need his moral support in order to implement their social assignment and the ritualistic role they have assumed. The same holds true for the fortune-teller. She is associated with Biblical characters, so that she can be allotted her own position and her activity can acquire significance in the context of the Christian norm already interpreted by him.

### *View from "Without"*

How do the other community members comment on the relations between the sorceress (witch) and the priest? Here are two more examples:

Example 4: An excerpt from the interview with a representative of the Christian community:

("Is it right for a priest to go and see a sorceress or to look for a woman for witchcraft undoing?"—I. T.) "Well, why should a priest be different and not go to see her? What's wrong with that? He is also a man like us, and it may happen to him to either get sick or to fall into another kind of misfortune. Moreover, he has a wife and children. Why shouldn't he go and see her? Those women, they do it to help, not to hurt. They

help one out. Not all of them are equally powerful, but there are some—you go to see them once and you are okay. They know it from their grandmothers and great grandmothers, I mean the fortune-telling, from the past, from olden times. It was not invented just now, it has power, so to say. And ... it helps all people” (Todorova 1990b).

Example 5: An excerpt from the interview with a representative of the Muslim community:

(“Can the imam go and see old Anife, the sorceress?”—I. T.) “Of course he can, why not? The imam, he knows best how to heal people and how to make amulets for anything, but what she does is different. She also does it with prayer, but it is different” (Todorova 1993).

Most of the people living in villages with mixed population share with me that when they have a health problem or suspect that they have been bewitched, they go to see sorceresses from different ethnic communities, as well as Christian priests and imams one after the other, just to be on the safe side. “There is no harm, even if it is more than necessary.” And one never knows which of them will help (Todorova 1991c).

And as far as the conceptual opposition is concerned, it seems to me that we have to find better ways to interpret phenomena of this type without being trapped in preconceived theories.

### *Instead of a Conclusion*

This paper focuses mostly on the issue of the syncretic forms of culture. Both in the past and the present such forms have been created within the cultural processes occurring in living communities, and within active human communication. The *religious witch*, who heals and makes amulets “in the name of God” and the *pagan priest*, who perceives her centuries-old inherited skill as “a gift of God,” are most naturally positioned within the framework of the small and relatively closed rural community.

Today these relations are further complicated by the appearance of the village psychics: a hybrid phenomenon combining the modern urban

concept of a person of extraordinary abilities and traditional rural witch rituals. Will this once again change people's ideas of religious and witchy, of old and new, of valid and invalid in the cultural space of the village? Perhaps it will. And how exactly? Well, this is once again a matter to be examined by theologians, anthropologists, ethnologists, and folklorists. It will be interesting for us to participate, to observe, and ... we shall see.

### *Notes*

- 1 In Bulgarian folklore studies, several basic terms are used to designate the folklore versions of Christian ideas, notions, images, or story: "customary" or "primitive Christianity" (Gandev 1976; Zhivkov 1981; Mihailova 1988), "folk Christianity" (Ivanov 1992; Badalanova 1994; Badalanova-Pokrovska 1992; Todorova-Pirgova 1999, 2002).
- 2 The term "popular Christianity" and "popular Orthodoxy" is hardly ever used by Bulgarian academics and mostly influenced by Russian scholars such as Gurevich 1981, 1987; Tolstaia 1995, and others. A general review on different terms designating these phenomena is offered by Mihailova 1996.
- 3 The academic interest regarding "folk or popular Islam" has increased recently and various researches connected with the topic in question have been published in the past few years (Zheliaskova 1995; Todorova-Pirgova 1996, 2000; Gradeva and Ivanova 1998; Lozanova 1999, etc.).

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# WITCHCRAFT IN EASTERN SLOVENIA

MIRJAM MENCEJ

Countless books and papers have been written on witches, witchcraft, and/or magic, which have approached their subjects from a variety of perspectives and have dealt with them in different cultural and historical contexts. All of this research has shown that there are many similarities among the phenomena of witchcraft in different parts of Europe. At the same time, there are also many differences which are not just regionally conditioned. The appearance of these differences was influenced to a great extent by the period of the witch hunts, which began in Western Europe around the year 1450. It was during this period that the Church elites added some new elements to the folk beliefs about witchcraft which were (for the most part) previously unknown (e.g., the conspiratorial character of witchcraft, witches' pact with the Devil, meetings of witches by night),<sup>1</sup> or reinterpreted folk beliefs about witchcraft in a new context (Larner 1984, p. 32). These ideas played an important role especially in Western and Central Europe, while they had a lesser influence at its periphery (e.g., in England, Iceland, etc.). On the other hand, in Southeastern Europe, or more precisely in the area influenced by the Orthodox Church, the witch hunts never occurred. The effects of the witch hunts only partially reached that area and the institution of village witchcraft (internal tensions in self-sufficient peasant communities) barely existed there (Pócs 1999, p. 11).

In the search for the more archaic layers of witchcraft (Ginzburg 1984; Klaniczay 1990; Pócs 1989, 1991–92, 1999; Henningsen 1991–92 and others), the countries in which the influence of the Church on folk belief was not as strong as it was in Western Europe seem to be ideal places for discovering these earlier layers. The Balkans, an area where the Orthodox



religion predominated and where the witch hunts and the system of village witchcraft were, so to speak, unknown, would thus seem an ideal region for such research, and this opportunity has above all been exploited by Éva Pócs (1989, 1991–92) and partially by Gábor Klaniczay (1990). Pócs discusses on the one hand demonic witch-ancestors, whose negative aspects were later supposed (at least in Slovenia, Croatia, and Hungary) to have been integrated into the paradigm of witchcraft: “wherever ‘village witchcraft’ struck root, these demons—losing their original function—merged into beliefs surrounding the ‘human’ witch” (Pócs 1991–92, p. 308); and on the other hand, various types of “magicians” whom she sees as the other important witch-ancestors and who were “in all probability, repositories (...) of a proto-Indo-European shamanistic practice” (Pócs 1991–92, p. 313) (in the context of shamanic roots of witchcraft, this was also discussed in Klaniczay 1990).

Research on witchcraft in Slovenia, which together with Croatia abuts the Balkans on the one side and Western Europe on the other, should therefore be interesting in terms of unveiling different layers of witchcraft beliefs, especially those elements and beliefs which could be understood as being integrated into the paradigm of witchcraft when this became a predominant paradigm.

My paper is based on fieldwork done in 2000 and 2001 in a rural, undeveloped region of Eastern Slovenia of 550 square kilometers,<sup>2</sup> on the border with Croatia. The belief in witches is (still) very much alive in the region. Although people talk about them in the past tense,<sup>3</sup> they talk about their own experiences. However, it became pretty clear that witchcraft here is anything but a unified system and that the word “witch” has many different meanings. On the basis of the materials collected, it is possible to distinguish between several levels and elements of witchcraft, which partially overlap, but otherwise can be more or less clearly differentiated.<sup>4</sup>

### *Neighborhood witches*

The first level involves social tensions within the community, especially among neighbors. Here I am referring to those accusations motivated directly by relations between people, and how people consider the envy, jeal-

ousy or the wickedness of their neighbors to be the main driving force behind the harm which is done. The person who is typically accused in such a case is an envious neighbor to whom people attribute the presumed practice of witchcraft or magic. In a desire to damage someone's crops or livestock, the person places or buries in a neighbor's or villager's field, under a threshold, in a barn, etc., various objects—most often eggs and bones. Other methods of causing harm by these "neighborhood witches"<sup>5</sup> also originate from various degrees of intent, control, or lack of control over the destructive power of envy. The general consensus among the inhabitants is that it is possible to cause harm just by giving intentional praise—especially of small children or animals—since all praise which occurs in a milieu where it is generally known to be forbidden, is naturally received with suspicion. It is very rare to find harm done following direct threats, which in the majority of cases are supposed to go into effect soon after they are expressed. Both of these methods of doing harm could be included in the category of "evil speech." Envy can also work through an "evil look," which is also referred to here as "hurtful eyes" or "damaging eyes" (i.e., the "evil eye").<sup>6</sup> This method of doing harm seems to be limited only to a certain number of individuals who have such powers, and does harm mainly to small children and animals. Rarely did we encounter evil-doing through an "evil gift," i.e., a gift which is supposed to have harmful effects on an individual, or through an "evil touch," the consequence of which is the illness or death of animals.

Some of the most common stories one hears in this area confirms the classical belief in a witches' ability to change into animals. A typical example is the story of a witch who turns herself into a toad, or alternatively, sends a toad<sup>7</sup> into someone's barn or house, most often with the intent to steal milk, and more infrequently, to cause an argument between married couples, etc. Narratives about toad-witches are otherwise more abstract, vague, and less developed than those about the placing of eggs. More frequently than in other methods of evil-doing, toads are spoken of in the plural, abstractly, as if toads were witches, or they had witches in them, that they were sent by witches, etc.—thus the discourse used is one more characteristic of supernatural tensions. However, in most cases it turns out that the background to such stories are disputes among neighbors (mention is made of wickedness, envy, etc.) and that people accuse their envious neighbors of being able to transform themselves into toads.

Sometimes neighborhood witches are said to be able to steal milk in other, rather original ways: most often with something like a rope or an axe, through which they are supposed to be able to milk other people's cows from their own barns or to draw the milk of other people's cows into their barns, however, this sort of accusation is more usually applied to a village witch.

All of these methods of evildoing or aspects of witchcraft are known from ethnological studies of witchcraft in many places in Europe, although not all of our interlocutors always connected them with witchcraft. In particular, the placing or burying of objects and the evil eye were explicitly differentiated from this context by many people, although they always started to talk about them in response to our questions about witchcraft beliefs. They were ascribed solely to the envy and jealousy of neighbors, whose alleged intent was to cause harm to others (and in doing so benefit them, which is in accordance with the concept of "limited good").<sup>8</sup> For the most part, all of these accusations refer to economic damage and/or personal misfortune (illness and death of animals, poor harvests, cows not giving milk, sick children, and more rarely poor relations between married couples or in the village, etc.).<sup>9</sup> Such an object can be destroyed or left where it was found. Sometimes people wouldn't touch it at all or they would throw it to the place where the suspected witch lives. Sometimes they can identify the witch and at the same time destroy her power through the procedure of burning the egg (c.f. Mencej 2003a). When a toad-witch is found, it is burnt or stabbed. When the effect of envy is the result of an evil speech (praise, threat) or the evil eye (children get ill, young livestock get sickly, etc.), the classic procedure to counteract the harmful effects of a witch is the method of "drowning the spells": four pieces of heated charcoal are put into water; afterwards each of them is thrown over the shoulders; then water is given to the victim (if this is a child) to be drunk. Evil gifts, another means of bewitching people, will be rejected or thrown away or—when it is food—people would simply not eat it. In such cases, they would never visit a fortuneteller (who functions as a counterwitch), who they would only visit in the case of lasting harm, when neither any tangible object with harmful effect was found, or harm could not be interpreted as a result of the visit of an envious neighbor, who would act through the evil eye, speech, touch, or gift.

### *Village Witches*

The second subcategory of witches, still “social” beings, but with somewhat different characteristics, are the so-called “village witches,” i.e., women who have the reputation of being a witch throughout the entire community. De Blécourt writes that in a small community, there is probably only one well-known witch, apart from others who are only labeled as such within a small circle (De Blécourt 1999, p. 204), but in our region there were sometimes even two or three. When people ascribe evildoing to a village witch, they usually talk about magical stealing of milk, for instance by milking a rope, a beam, or an axe. The accusation of the magical paralyzing of livestock is connected only with this type of witch. She is accused of making livestock stand still just by her presence and she is supposed to be the only one who is able to make them continue on their way. Accusations of causing bad weather (storm, hail) also refer only to this type. Sometimes the toad (which steals milk, causes married couples to quarrel, etc.) is also recognized as a village witch, although neighbors are more likely to be victims of accusations in such cases. When night appearances and lights are recognized as a human witch (see further on), she is, as a rule, a woman who has a reputation as a village witch.

The line separating an envious neighbor and a village witch is not always easy to determine. At any rate, it seems that the same evildoing which is ascribed to envious and jealous neighbors is sometimes also ascribed to the women who have the reputation of being village witches in this area: the placing of objects, praising with evil intent, sending toads, turning themselves into toads... It could be that such accusations are made subsequently of women who already had such reputations. On the other hand, the opposite also seems likely, i.e., that one of the possible explanations for the fact that some women gradually acquire the reputation of being “village witches” is a gradually increasing general consensus about their harmful activities which they do to others because of envy. Thus the two categories—neighborhood and village witches—cannot always be precisely differentiated. At least in some cases, it is better to speak of different levels of reputation, which can gradually increase from conflicts between two families or individuals into a wider leveling of accusations among the community. This gradually increasing consensus has not just a quantitative but also a qualitative aspect. Such

women are gradually attributed nearly demonic, supernatural qualities and abilities.

However, there are also other, more common reasons for acquiring the reputation of being a village witch which are not directly connected with the evildoing of women who are envious of their neighbors. One of the categories of village witch are women who are said to possess unusually large amounts of wealth (more precisely, unusually large amounts of milk or butter) in relation to their circumstances, i.e., the number of cows they own. Here their harmful actions are not directed against one or more individual families, and people do not say that such women act out of envy. People don't usually claim somebody's cow stopped giving milk due to bewitchment. Instead they use vague accusations, like "she drags milk from other people's stables." In trying to understand these charges we may again use the concept of limited good, only in this case it is not about "stealing" from a particular person, but about stealing or taking from the common good. The witch takes from everybody and so everybody has got a bit less—while she's got too much of everything, all the other have got too little (cf. Alver-Selberg 1987, p. 31). As Alver and Selberg observed, one can also find the idea that those who were best off were those who were suspected of witchcraft—the concept of witchcraft becomes relevant where the distribution of limited goods is most out of balance (De Blécourt 1999, p. 152; Alver-Selberg 1987, p. 28).

Another reason why women acquire such reputations is the reputation of their family. If one of their ancestors had a book of black magic or if one of their parents was known as a witch, it was very likely that that label would be transferred to the daughter, since popular belief holds that such knowledge is most commonly passed on within the family.

Another reason for women acquiring a reputation is their involvement with healing, herbalism, etc. This corresponds with the reinterpretation of white magic from the beginning of the witch hunts, but it also discloses ambivalent feelings toward persons with knowledge. Due to their marginal status and low standard, this group of specialists is most often treated as village witches. Their "knowledge" doesn't make it possible for them to declare themselves as counterwitches, although the borderline between a medicine women and counterwitches is to some extent fluid; however they never identify witches as fortunetellers (counterwitches) do, but only heal. Also in these cases, their reputation is never connected with envy

and tensions in neighborly relations, and evildoing is not necessarily ascribed to such women.

On the other hand, such labels are often applied to women who simply conform to the image of a stereotypical witch. A woman's appearance or behavior corresponding to people's beliefs about what witches are supposed to be like, can contribute to her acquiring such a reputation. Her external appearance is stereotypical: she is ugly, filthy, unkempt, with a large, hooked nose, warts, dresses in a long black dress with a shawl which covers her face, etc. In terms of behavior, she is a quarrelsome woman, inquisitive, one who does not conform to feminine standards, is asocial, etc. Her social status is low, she is poor, solitary, has no social contacts and usually lives alone at the edge of the village (cf. also Macfarlane 1970, pp. 158–59, 161–64; Larner 1984, p. 50; Hall 1989, p. 191; Schöck 1978, p. 117; Petzoldt 1989, pp. 97–98). This abstract stereotype of the physical appearance of a witch corresponds (at least to a substantial degree) only with this type. In no way can it be connected with the “neighborhood witch,” much less with the abstract supernatural, demonic witch who is usually said to be guilty of unpleasant nighttime occurrences.

Women who had the reputation of being witches in the village were often connected with stories of long and painful deaths—women who died painful deaths could gain such reputation even subsequently.

Usually the deeds which are ascribed to women who have the reputation of being “village witches” are characterized by a higher degree of belief in their supernatural qualities than the actions of envious neighbors. In contrast to the envious neighbor, they are considered to have an aura of the supernatural. In terms of their characteristics and actions, village witches therefore operated on a level somewhere between the two fields, i.e., on the border between the envy found within neighborhood relations and the demonic quality of supernatural nighttime occurrences.

### *Counterwitches*

Especially in the case of friction between neighbors, people turned for help to a counterwitch (unwitcher, witchbuster), sometimes also just called “a witch.” This would be a fortuneteller, whose role was not restricted to telling fortunes, as the name implies, but was also—or was

mainly—able to identify witches, protect against their actions and eliminate harmful effects, and if necessary, redirect their evildoing back towards the witch. It seems that people believed that going to such a specialist was necessary, above all, at times when the source of the evil was unknown or unidentified. If a buried object or a toad was found in a field or some other place, they could destroy it, burn it, return it to the suspected perpetrator, etc., by themselves (the exact procedure on how to do this is more or less common knowledge in this region)—the evil thus had a “form” with which it was possible to do something. However, when the form and the name of the evil remained unknown, and all of the evidence pointed to the fact that a witch was at work, perhaps because pigs were dying, cows were not producing milk, and the harvest was declining, etc.,—especially when such occurrences lasted for a longer period of time—people would decide to see a specialist for help. When the “evil” was intangible, ineffable, and unidentified, when the source of the evil was impossible to destroy, and the perpetrator could not be named, then in the eyes of the people it was without a doubt much more dangerous. The reason why people probably went to see a fortuneteller was the belief, mentioned by various researchers, that this was moreover the only way to deal with the moral cause of the disease, to “root out,” so to speak, the causes of diseases and other misfortunes (e.g. Pina-Cabral 1986, p. 187; cf. also Favret-Saada 1980, pp. 6–8). Also, a *séance* with a fortuneteller probably had a certain therapeutic value, and most likely a visit to a specialist sometimes evoked simple curiosity which was generated by the reputation of the individual fortuneteller, or rumors which circulated about them.

By far the most commonly stated reasons for visiting a counterwitch was the death, illness, or the loss of appetite of livestock or cows not giving milk. Frequently the duration of such difficulties is emphasized. The pigs keep dying, their livestock never succeeds, and everything has been going wrong in the house for a long time, etc.<sup>10</sup> Of course the “duration” is relative: if the cow on whom everybody relied for subsistence was not giving milk, people might go to see a fortuneteller after just a few days.

Except for one or two specialists who had great reputations and lived far away, people usually decided to see specialists nearby. This seems reasonable since most of the villagers went on foot. On the other hand, they never went to see a specialist from their own town.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to these stationary specialists, there was also a special sub-type of specialists who went from house to house and offered their services: mainly fortunetelling, identifying witches and the destruction of harmful objects. These people came mainly from Croatia (perhaps because the standard in Slovenia was higher or they were searching for additional customers here) and some of them were Roma. Sometimes fortunetelling was a source of additional income for them, but for the majority it was their main occupation.

The most frequently mentioned technique of fortunetellers is using cards, which in two cases was connected with fortunetelling from “books.” With at least two fortunetellers we also find a technique used explicitly to identify witches or jealous neighbors. This was a technique whereby the client (or the fortuneteller) sees the face of the person who wishes to do him or her harm in a mirror or in water (in a pail).<sup>12</sup> When a fortuneteller identified a witch—this would almost for sure be a neighbor—the exact identification was, however, left to a customer.

### *Night Witches*

Beside this “social” level of witchcraft in the area under study, there was another one which should be differentiated from the first, since it concerns tensions with the supernatural world. Here I am referring to all allegedly supernatural occurrences, usually at night, or at dawn or dusk, and most often at spatial boundaries (at the edge of or outside the village, in the forest, near water).<sup>13</sup> These are apparitions, phenomena, or occurrences which people in this region interpret as encounters with witches.

Often people tell stories about getting lost, being led astray, or being unable to continue on their path or some sort of blockade. They frequently describe such occurrences as temporary loss of reason, disturbances, and shifts of the psyche or consciousness. Typical variants of such stories tell of people who, on their way home, find themselves trapped among thickets and unable to continue—and when the day comes or passersby rescue them, it usually turns out that they have been standing in the middle of the path the whole time. Sometimes they involve total disorientation. The victim walks in circles or crashes about the forest for the entire night, through thickets, brambles, and streams in the completely



wrong direction, and “comes to” in the morning when they usually find themselves in utterly different places, far from the path they intended to take. Frequently, nighttime encounters are described with witches in the form of multicolored lights—this type of encounter can also lead to losing one’s way, but not necessarily.

In addition to such nighttime phenomena, people in the Slovene region also describe nighttime female apparitions who wash clothes at the village well, at the spring, in the river or even in places where there is no water. They usually describe them as witches although most often they do not even attempt to identify them with particular women in the village.

In all of these cases it is not necessary that harm be done; these encounters can be completely harmless (the appearance of witches in the form of lights e.g., does not necessarily cause one to lose one’s way. Sometimes such lights are merely observed and identified as witches, without any kind of consequences for the observer). There is also no economic damage, and most often such events have no special influence on the social relations within the village.

The discourse which refers to these phenomena and occurrences, whenever they are interpreted as witches, is quite abstract. People speak of them in the plural, as “witches,” and only in exceptional cases connect them with particular women from the village. Such witches display many of the typical characteristics of demonic beings. They are encountered at times which are typical for the appearance of demonic beings, i.e., from eleven o’clock on, or around midnight until the first cock crows—during the part of the night which is, according to folk belief, the most dangerous, the time when there is a threat of supernatural beings and other dangers. The descriptions of these appearances precisely correspond to light phenomena or beings (*Ignis Fatuus*) found in Europe under various names like pixies, pispies, spunkies, pinkets, wandering fire, walking fire, Will o’ the Wisps, Jack-a-lantern, or Irrlichter (Wells Newell 1904, pp. 44–45; Briggs 1967, p. 54; 1978, p. 198; Röhrich 1971, p. 34; Hand 1977, p. 230; Uther 2003, no. 178, 264, 409, 440, etc.). The images vary greatly, from simple lights that move around to personified or even theriomorphic beings, carrying a torch or a lantern. Light can also somehow arise from the being itself (Wells Newell 1904, pp. 45–46; *Folklore in the News* 1958, p. 128; Hand 1977, pp. 226–28), but at any rate, the observance of lights is one of the universals of the whole tradition, as Hand stresses (1977, p. 228). Acts that are most often mentioned in other

Slavic and West European parallels are likewise a constant element in descriptions of such encounters in the researched area. These acts include instances in which a person is led astray (loss of the path, disorientation), in which an observer walks in circles, has to follow the lights or inexplicably ends up in shrubbery full of thorns (blockade of path) (cf. Briggs 1978, pp. 279–83, 299–301, 341–43; 1967, pp. 60–61; Dégh 2001, p. 104; Fortier 1888, p. 139; Wells Newell 1904, p. 41; *Folklore in the News* 1958, p. 17; Hand 1977, pp. 228–29, for Slovenian and Slavic data see Mencej 2007). What differs, however, is the interpretation of these phenomena within different belief paradigms. In eastern Slovenia, the appearance of lights and/or (simultaneously) the loss of the original course, subsequent roaming in the forest or blockades were almost always attributed to witches. The same explanation can be found in some other parts of Slovenia. In most Slovene areas, however, as well as in other Slavic and West European traditions, these two motifs are more usually connected with the belief in the dead—restless souls who after their death remain trapped between this world and the one beyond.

The occurrence of lights and the idea of losing one's way, etc., can, on the basis of comparisons with other similar phenomena (in the Balkans, among Slavs, and throughout Europe, including Western Europe), be understood as beliefs in witches behind which lie beliefs about the souls of the deceased, which after death (for one or another reason, e.g., premature death, sins committed during life etc.) remain in a liminal reality between this and the other world. The phenomena of identical motifs connected with this or that mythical, or demonic, being is not unusual in lower mythology. It is not surprising that identical acts or forms may be attributed either to restless souls or the fairies that probably evolved from them, or to witches—but only if witches roaming around at nighttime are perceived as mythical, demonic creatures rather than human witches. Reports about nighttime occurrences differ from those of the so-called “social witch” also in the manner of defense against the witches' powers, which reveals their demonic character. Waving a scythe is supposed to help as is wearing one's clothes inside out or urinating in your hand and throwing the urine over your shoulder—folk beliefs in metal and urine are known to be protective against demonic beings.

These night witches obviously have a completely different function from that of “social” witches. Whereas the basis of witchcraft accusations

is envy between neighbors in the village, behind which we can presuppose the concept of limited good (Foster 1965)—the village witch has the role as some sort of scapegoat in the village—night witches (like lights or vague presences) mainly resolve tensions with the supernatural world (cf. Pócs 1999, p. 11), although they can also be mobilized for other purposes. As is well known, memorates and legends tend to enforce behaviors which are in compliance with social norms, and this also holds true for the situation in this area of research, as in when the night comes one should stop working—rest was an important part of the working rhythm (cf. Grambo 1970, p. 261). However, it is indicative that the prevalent percentage of subjects in these memorates are men<sup>14</sup>—one reason for that is probably that men left home more often than women did and in this way more often entered the liminal space which stimulated such experiences. They could use these kinds of stories in case they needed an excuse for coming home late due to immoderate drinking,<sup>15</sup> revelry, or being unfaithful; these accounts could be used as a means in marital conflicts; sometimes they seem to be induced by sexual fantasies or used for hiding premarital sexual experiences. The prevailing role of men who first transmit their experience to their wives, daughters, etc. could also be understood as a way to keep women under control.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, they could be used as a basis for gossip when a night witch was recognized as a woman from the same village (cf. Mencej 2007–2008).

Yet, the most important function of these memorates was connected with the conceptualizing of space and time. As is well known, the time and space where and when fairies, demons, etc., appear is not random. Supernatural beings don't appear just anywhere, mystical experiences don't happen just anywhere—appropriate places are needed, usually remote places, isolated from everyday life (Devlin 1987, p. 72). Space is not something homogenous, it would not have the same characteristics in all of its manifestations. Men always conceptualized space by dividing it between settled, safe space and on the other hand unsettled, chaotic space, full of dangers, restless souls and witches. Such a division gave them a feeling of safety, it granted coordinates to men's life. In traditional folk beliefs the "sanctity" of space gradually diminished in contour lines, from the most sacred place (hearth, etc.) in the house through the threshold (as the first borderline) toward the fence and the village border and then onward to forests, uninhabited places such as swamps. A

typical place for such night encounters with witches is the forest, which represents an entrance to a dangerous, unsafe, unpredictable world which allows for unwanted and unwished for contacts with the other world, the irruption of the world beyond this world. The other world in traditional conception is not pushed away to the edge of the world, but breaks into man's reality in man's immediate surroundings. Besides the forest, water (a spring or brook), which again is to be found in the forest, is a prevalent location for such night experiences.

All these places only became dangerous at certain times of the day. Just as space is not homogenous, time also is not homogenous, in spite of its conception as cyclical time. Just as in space, also in time there are liminal points, ruptures, which allows for the breakthrough of the other world. In principle, the entire night is such a period, and within it the most dangerous period of time is the period which lasts from about eleven PM until one or two in the morning—this is a time when most of the encounters with night witches occurred according to the memorates we recorded.

A great many memorates show that night witches in our region (fairies or souls of the dead in other regions) functioned through their deeds as markers of liminal space and time, or as Narváez demonstrated for Newfoundland memorates, as folkloric mechanisms for the erection and maintenance of spatial and temporal boundaries, which established proxemic boundaries on the cognitive maps of community residents, boundaries which demarcated geographical areas of purity, liminality, and danger (cf. Narváez 1991, pp. 336–38, 354). Finally in such a conception of space and time, one can also see a psychological function. Narrating night experiences (time, place, form) helps a man to orient himself safely in space, it gives him a knowledge of permitted and forbidden movement in space and time and—in case he would trespass these rules—also acquaints him with the consequences of such behavior.

### *Legends About Witches*

In addition to these two levels of witchcraft, we should also mention various migratory legends about witches (e.g., the legend of the Witch Riding—cf. Hand 1977, the legend Following the Witch—Christiansen 1958, ML 3045 etc.), which are known and told in this area, but they are not

really a part of the complex of beliefs about witches—they are not supported by accounts or personal experiences (and are not told as *memorates*); people consider them to be more or less some sort of amusing anecdotes.

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In sum, witchcraft in the eastern region of Slovenia which we researched at the beginning of the 21st century displays a very heterogeneous, manifold image—from the analysis of the data it became clear that there are two layers of witchcraft (social and supernatural) and three or even four types of witchcraft: the neighborhood witch, village witch, night witch, and counterwitch, although there is a dynamic overlapping among them. Different layers of witchcraft and different types of witches dictate different ways of handling and different protective methods. They are ascribed different grounds for their evil acts and finally people also have different relations to them.

When an object (egg, bone, etc.) is found in the field, the suspect is as a rule a neighbor and the grounds for her actions is envy. People mostly maintain good relations with her and don't let her know that she is suspected, although sometimes she must have realized what they think of her from their behavior (they wouldn't talk to her, wouldn't lend her what she asked for, etc.). In the case of a toad or an object which was dug up they could throw it away, burn it or stab it. And in other cases (like evil speech and the evil eye) they could perform a procedure known as "drowning the spells." In case of necessity (when no object is found and when the misfortune lasts for a longer period) they would visit a fortuneteller.

On the contrary, village witches (if we don't take into consideration those women who acquired such a reputation as an increasing general consensus of the community about their envy and were suspected of the same deeds as neighborhood witches were) are not supposed to act out of envy, but had the function of the village scapegoat. The conviction that she could do harm if someone held a grudge against her led to good relations with her on the part of people from the village. However, everybody preferred to avoid such women if possible, which often led to their isolation. Only rarely did the relations between people and her become strained—

Svetieva recorded a threat with a stone to a woman who was supposed to have caused hail (Svetieva 2001, p. 154) and threats were also uttered in a situation when livestock was paralyzed. Often people emphasized her supernatural abilities in fear of her harming other people. Injuries are seldom mentioned and stories about village witches mostly depict events which are supposed to secure their reputation and stress their exceptional behavior or other reasons which led to their acquiring such a reputation. In cases of suspicion of someone being a village witch, people also never asked fortunetellers for help.

Night experiences with witches lights, night appearances, etc., on the other hand are mostly connected with geography of space, and their function is very different from stories which display social tensions. Their main function is a delineation of space, the demarcation of safe and dangerous spaces. No economic harm is mentioned. Protective techniques are utterly different from those which refer to “social” witches—they are similar to those used in traditional culture against demons, fairies, and the dead (cf. Mencej 2003a, pp. 174–75).

Earlier beliefs about souls of the dead in the shape of lights who lead people astray and make them lose their way, etc., have in this region at a certain point obviously been integrated into the prevailing paradigm of witchcraft. Such an interaction is supported by the conviction that a witch is able to release her soul (which can appear in the shape of light) from her body, an ability traditionally regarded as a shamanistic trait. The integration of folk beliefs about fairies, the dead and demons into the witchcraft paradigm or their overlapping is not unusual in Europe (cf. Mathisen 1993, p. 23; Jenkins 1991; Alver–Selberg 1987; Wilby 2000; etc.). The parallels between the notions of ghosts and witches on English data from the sixteenth until the early eighteenth century were shown by Bennett (1986, pp. 3–6). In addition to the motifs associated with ambivalent fairies that were later on integrated into the witchcraft paradigm, Éva Pócs also mentioned a motif of being led astray by fairies—a motif that forms a typical core of narratives about encounters with night witches in narratives recorded in the region under research (Pócs 1989, pp. 27–29, 39–40). The integration of beliefs about the restless souls into the witchcraft paradigm or the overlapping between them is clear from the data. However, night encounters are only occasionally ascribed to witches as humans with supernatural powers—night witches as a rule keep their autonomy, i.e., their demonic, supernatural im-

age and function. In spite of their integration into the paradigm of witchcraft, they represent a relatively stable, distinct layer, which differs substantially from neighborhood witchcraft as it does from village witchcraft, not only as regards place, time, acts, function, and the manner of protection, but also in the typical diction with which narrators talk about their experiences (the use of a plural, abstract style).

### *Notes*

- 1 Research later showed that all of these elements can be found in folk belief layers in this or in other parts of Europe.
- 2 The fieldwork was done together with students from the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Ljubljana. More than 150 interviews were conducted.
- 3 On the use of the past tense in witchcraft beliefs see Favret-Saada 1980, pp. 64–65.
- 4 On differences and points of convergence among these three levels see Mencej 2003a.
- 5 The expressions used here for the categories of witches partially correspond to those used by Éva Pócs in her classification (1999, pp. 10–11), however the classification which I devised on the basis of the material on witchcraft in the area in question differs from her classification of witches.
- 6 Some authors excluded the research of the evil eye from witchcraft, however, as De Blécourt points out, “within the context of European witchcraft (...) the isolation and reification of the evil eye is untenable, a result of an outsider’s approach” (De Blécourt 1999, p. 193).
- 7 The difference between sending out a toad or transforming into toad was not always clear to people. Alver explains the difference this way: “The difference between a person who has sent out the ‘hug’ (a soul) and one who has changed shape, or been changed (metamorphosis), is that the former can be observed in two places: in his or her own shape and in the ‘hugham.” (Alver 1989, p. 112).
- 8 Cf. Foster 1965.
- 9 For more detail about these categories of witches see Mencej 2003b.
- 10 Similar traditions have been established in France, see Favret-Saada (1980, p. 6).
- 11 This has also been pointed out by many researchers elsewhere in Europe: De Blécourt mentions that people often preferred to see a therapist across a certain border, outside the network of acquaintances and their territory (De Blécourt 1999, pp. 184, 204; cf. Schöck 1978, pp. 133–35; Favret-Saada 1980, p. 20); Favret-Saada also says e.g., that villagers found out that they had a very well-known unwitcher in their village only at his funeral, which was attended by a huge crowd of his former clients (Favret-Saada 1980, p. 57).

- 12 There are also stories in which someone sees the perpetrator and shoots him in a pail of water, and at the same moment the person actually dies from a gunshot wound (cf. *The Witch that was Hurt* ML 3055).
- 13 See Mencej 2007.
- 14 Although men are more often subjects of such memorates, it is mostly women who spread these stories around. They talk about their husbands', their fathers', their neighbors' experiences, etc.
- 15 The narrators of these stories often stressed or discussed the possibility that a man who encountered a night witch was in fact drunk. However, it is not my intention to discuss different hypotheses about possible grounds for such experiences, be it a true experience which was induced by sensory deprivation (darkness, silence, drunkenness, or hunger—which can all stimulate an altered state of consciousness), a state of disease like epilepsy, hallucination or mental disturbance or a combination of outer occasion and inner disposition, like fear, stress, etc. (Ranke 1971, pp. 245–54; Hartmann 1936, p. 100; Kvideland 1988, p. 10; Röhrich 1971, pp. 4–5) or simply an invented story.
- 16 Why these stories are transmitted by women with such enthusiasm is another question, however most women conform to men's and the community's expectations of them and they are ready to defend them as passionately as men—for reeducation of other women, who don't. On the other hand, another explanation for the prevalent number of women who transmit these memorates is that women enjoyed the weakness of men who were intimidated by women (interpreted as witches).



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