Making a Witch: The Triumph of Demonology Over Popular Magic Beliefs in Early Modern Europe

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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Abstract

By the end of the fifteenth century, demonological beliefs were well established by demonologists, inquisitors, judges, and the educated upper class of early modern Europe. These teachings, coupled with the almost universally held belief in magic and witchcraft throughout Europe, gave rise to a period of intense witchcraft persecutions. The gradual introduction of the inquisitorial procedure in Europe allowed for a higher number of witchcraft accusations than was seen in previous centuries. Likewise, the employment of torture on suspected witches combined with the type of leading questions asked during the trial directly resulted in confessions of Devil-worship.

In the trials examined in this paper, witches who were first accused of practicing harmful magic against their neighbors were typically found guilty of worshiping the Devil throughout the course of the trial. This occurred because demonologists and judges strongly believed that witches gained their power by renouncing their faith and swearing allegiance to the Devil. They also believed that witches participated in several horrific rituals and crimes associated with the Devil, such as attending the Sabbath, sex with the Devil, and cannibalistic infanticide. These beliefs prompted judges to use whatever means necessary to get witches to confess to worshiping the Devil, so as to reaffirm what they already believed about witchcraft and the Devil and to gain more understanding.

This study analyzes several demonological and legal treatises, witchcraft trial documents, and confessions of witchcraft and Devil-worship. Witches themselves had little control during the trials. However, although they were forced to confess to crimes of Devil-worship, the details of their confessions were entirely their own. Therefore, the trials discussed in this paper were a dialogue between the judge and accused witch, and, more specifically, between established

demonology and popular magic. Ultimately, demonological beliefs triumphed over popular magical beliefs because of state-sponsored violence and the authority given to judges and inquisitors over suspected witches.

Introduction

In 1518 in Italy, Bartolomeo da Castel Martino accused Chiara Signorini of casting a spell on his sister. Signorini was arrested and brought before the Inquisition for interrogation. Depositions from the case demonstrated that people believed she was a witch. As Carlo Ginzburg describes the documents' contents, "Nina, a young girl . . . had spotted Chiara Signorini one day placing near the entrance of their house certain 'bewitched objects,' consisting of 'fragments of olive branches formed like a cross and wild vetch and pieces of human bones, and silk dyed white, presumed to be smeared with holy ointment.'"[1] Another witness claimed that she "was seized by violent pains that drove her to her bed" after refusing to allow Signorini or her husband to stay on her land.[2] Others noted that Signorini was well-known and was feared throughout the town.

Signorini began "her defense on the spot, not simply by refuting the facts, but by denying that she had received any sort of diabolical assistance in committing them."[3] During the trial Signorini confessed to having "special powers, such as being able to take away or put spells on specific people," but she maintained that her power had come from God.[4] Upon further questioning, she confessed that she was often visited by miraculous appearances of the Blessed Virgin Mary who comforted her with kind words. Ginzburg describes how, as the trial continued, "the churchman now blatantly attempts to influence Chiara's testimony, convinced that the so-called visions of the Madonna were really only diabolical hallucinations."[5] Signorini maintained that the Virgin was visiting her, confessing that "the Virgin did appear before her, promising

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[1] Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 4.
[2] Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, 5.
[3] Ibid., 3.
[4] Ibid., 3.
[5] Ibid., 7.

vengeance," that "[the Virgin] asked Chiara to offer her soul and body to her," and that "even her husband Bartolomeo saw Our Lady on various occasions and paid homage to her."[6] Dissatisfied with Signorini's answers to his questions, the inquisitor sent her to be tortured.

Under the stress of torture, Sigorini confessed to committing maleficent crimes against Margherita Pazzani (Bartolomeo da Castel Martino's sister). Her torture continued, now with a focus on the Marian apparitions. Eventually, and under the strain of torture, she confessed that "the Devil appeared before her in the form of a youth . . . and the Devil asked Chiara to tell him whatever she desired, since she had summoned him; and Chiara replied that she wanted him to cast a spell on Lady Margherita Panzana, because Lady Margherita had expelled Chiara from her possessions."[7] She also confessed to worshipping the Devil. She repeated these confessions outside of torture, a requirement for the confessions to support a conviction. She showed repentance and asked for forgiveness from the Holy Office. Sigorini was declared a heretic and was condemned to spend the rest of her days in prison. Unlike so many other confessed witches, however, she was not burned at the stake.

The case of Chiara Sigorini follows a pattern evident in many witchcraft trials during the early modern period. Sigorini was originally accused of performing maleficent magic, or *maleficia*, against her neighbor, but during the course of the trial she was coerced into confessing additional crimes of diabolism. Early modern judges and inquisitors involved in witchcraft trials believed from the beginning of the trial that witches had gained their power to perform harmful magic from the Devil. This pattern, in which trials transformed from accusations of *maleficia* to convictions of diabolism, is the focus of this study.

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[6] Ibid., 8.
[7] Ibid., 10.

The discussion that follows is an examination of a particular type of witchcraft trial, one that was common but, we should note at the outset, was not uniform across all such trials. For example, trials in urban settings followed different patterns based on different social forces and dynamics. Often they followed from suspicions that political sorcery or that magic had been used to spread the plague. In some areas, massive panics broke out when an accused witch named her alleged accomplices. Even in these cases, however, when judges and inquisitors brought in and questioned alleged accomplices, they almost always began their questioning with inquiries about the Devil and crimes of diabolism, not with *maleficia*. The Devil, it turns out, lived in cities too. And so, the cases discussed in this paper are one piece of a larger puzzle of European witch trials.

Changes in legal practices contributed to the high number of accusations of harmful magic and witchcraft. Before the thirteenth century, much of Europe employed an accusatorial system in which "a criminal action was both initiated and prosecuted by a private person," and a judge would decide the fate of the person if it was proved he or she was guilty.[8] But, if the accused was found not guilty, the accuser could face prosecution in retaliation. However, beginning in the thirteenth century, many European states and the Church switched to what historians call the "inquisitorial system," a system in which the accuser would no longer face prosecution if the accused was found not guilty. As a result, people could accuse others without fear of themselves being prosecuted later on.

The primary source material that I will be using consists of writings by learned men called demonologists. During the early modern period, demonologists published witchcraft treatises to share with one another what they had learned during trials and to instruct judges on

[8] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 75.

how to carry out future proceedings. These works served to affirm previously held beliefs about witchcraft and to introduce new ideas into the "official" discourse of demonology. Although most of these treatises were focused on proving the existence of diabolism and establishing procedures for a trial, many also included transcripts from witchcraft trials that contained both the questions asked by judges and the subsequent answers from accused witches. These transcripts offer us insight into the already established beliefs of demonologists and into the role of suggestive questioning in getting accused witches to confess to crimes of diabolism. Many treatises also touched on the maleficent characteristics of witchcraft as a means to explain how witches used the power they received from the Devil. Through these witchcraft treatises, these intellectuals involved themselves in an ongoing discourse about the maleficent and diabolic realities of witchcraft. They will be examined here with particular attention to popular and expert beliefs about witchcraft, the influence of demonology, and instructions given to judges about how to carry out trials. This paper will analyze popular and educated beliefs about witchcraft, the influence of demonology on these trials, and the question of how much agency an accused witch had during her trial.

The most important and influential demonological work of the early modern period was the *Malleus Maleficarum* (the Hammer of Witches), which was published in 1487 by the German churchman and inquisitor Hienrich Kramer and the Dominican friar Jacob Sprenger.[9] While the *Malleus* was not the only important demonological treatise, it had by far the most influence on early modern demonological thought. It was published with the papal bull *Summis desiderantes*, which gave the work and its authors credibility. It contained several chapters on proving the

[9] Historians have questioned how much of a role Sprenger played in the writing and publication of the *Malleus*, as his name was not added to the work until 1519. However, his name was included in the 1484 *Summis desiderantes.* Some have speculated that Sprenger was named as a collaborator to give the work higher authority, and many attest the majority of the *Malleus'* contents solely to Kramer.

existence of diabolism with examples from trials in which Kramer had participated. It also gave judges a detailed guide of how to initiate and carry out witchcraft trials. It was disseminated throughout Europe and used by judges and inquisitors as a manual for witch hunting, and the text has been lauded by its contemporaries and historians alike as the most important treatise of its kind. Because of its enormous influence on the legal realm of witchcraft persecutions, I will treat the legal procedures described in the *Malleus* as the standard for how witchcraft trials were carried out.

The following study both draws upon and hopes to contribute to a lively historical literature on early modern witchcraft. A few recent works warrant particular mention before we turn to popular beliefs about magic. Brian Levack's *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* is the most important recent comprehensive work on early modern witchcraft. Levack outlines the major social, intellectual, economic, and legal elements of witchcraft during the period and surveys the major historical interpretations of those topics. He also discusses the impact of the Reformation on witchcraft and demonology, the chronology and statistical data of the witch-hunt, and the decline of witchcraft prosecutions during the eighteenth century.

Carlo Ginzburg's *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* is a fascinating look into the evolution of popular beliefs about witchcraft into established educated beliefs at the hands of inquisitors. Ginzburg uses court records to tell the story of a peasant fertility cult in Italy that consisted of men and women called the *benandanti* who described ritual battles that they fought against witches in order to protect their harvests. The inquisitors who heard their testimonies, like the judges and inquisitors we will be discussing in this paper, were convinced that the *benandanti* were actually witches. Ginzburg finds that over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the inquisitors used

suggestive questioning and interrogation to get members of the cult to confess, and to believe, that they were indeed witches who had attended the Sabbath. He argues that a similar transformation of ideas and beliefs took place throughout all of Europe. Without addressing the plausibility or implausibility of this broader process of diffusion, the case of the *benandanti* is similar to the trials studied in this paper, making Ginzburg's analysis of the inquisition's engagement with the *benandanti* a valuable example of how suggestive questioning was used to shape ideas and attitudes during the course of witchcraft trials and over the course of time.

In *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany,* Lyndal Roper analyzes the confessions of accused witches that followed from German witch hunts. Roper discusses the details of witchcraft prosecution as well as the societal implications of the belief in witches. She explores demonological thought and the use of interrogation and torture to get an accused witch to confess. In her analysis of specific witchcraft confessions, Roper discusses how much agency witches had in their individual trials. She argues that, although they were forced to confess to crimes of diabolism, German witches had the power to make their confessions entirely their own. She discusses how many confessions contained details that were reflective of the society in which these women lived. Driven by the desire to learn more about the Devil, the judges and inquisitors who questioned these accused witches had no choice but to accept the details that the accused provided. Roper reminds us that the encounter between accused and interrogator was a dialogue, albeit a dialogue that occurred between unequal parties in which varying forces were at work.

Drawing upon this literature, this paper analyzes the difference between popular and educated witchcraft beliefs, and discusses the clash of these beliefs during witchcraft trials. It argues that in trials where women were initially accused of *maleficia* and then eventually

confessed to and were convicted of diabolism, judges and inquisitors used suggestive questioning and torture to get accused witches to confess to worshipping the Devil. Demonology triumphed over popular beliefs throughout the course of these trials for several reasons. Judges and inquisitors had the authority of state-sponsored violence on their side, and therefore could utilize suggestive questioning and torture to reaffirm their beliefs. The claims made by demonologists concerning diabolic witchcraft needed to be substantiated by real confessions. By forcing these confessions, judges were able to affirm established beliefs and learn new things about the Devil from the details provided by witches.

Although they had state authority on their side, demonologists needed witches to confirm their theories, both for their own satisfaction and to contribute to the legitimacy of their expertise. The confessions themselves give historians insight into early modern society. Forced to provide details, accused witches gave detailed confessions about their workings with the Devil, confessions that were influenced by their daily lives. As we will see, early modern demonology included both a relatively stable set of beliefs held by demonologists and an array of personalized but nonetheless precedent-setting confessions forced out of accused witches. What resulted from the trials, then, was fusion of ideas in which a set of beliefs originally established by theological and scholarly thought relied on pieces of evidence influenced by popular culture.

Chapter 1: Popular Magic and *Maleficia*

The belief that witches could perform harmful magic was founded on a widely-held belief in the existence and efficacy of magic. The early modern period had centralized ideas about witchcraft, the practice of magic, and the subsequent involvement of the devil. Michael D. Bailey traces the history of magic in Europe from late Antiquity through the Enlightenment and argues that ideas about magical practices have evolved throughout the centuries, eventually forming what we recognize as the beliefs central to early modern witchcraft.

Several distinctions must be made about popular magic, the first being the difference between high and low magic. Brian Levack defines high magic as "a sophisticated and speculative art that requires a certain amount of education," which included practices such as astrology, necromancy, divination, and alchemy.[10] Practitioners of high magic were almost exclusively elites who had the education necessary to learn the practice. Bailey argues that high magic was "grounded in Arab, Greek, and Jewish texts," and that it "became the focus of interest among the scholars and intellectuals of Europe."[11] Low magic, on the other hand, was practiced by the lower members of society, since it "requires little if no formal education and can be learned by oral transmission, apprenticeship or even individual experimentation," and "usually takes the form of simple charms and spells."[12] Low magic is the focus of this chapter.

Low magic included both black and white magic. Black magic, or maleficent magic, was "the performance of harmful deeds by means of some sort of extraordinary, mysterious, occult, preternatural or supernatural power."[13] For most contemporaries, black magic was the most

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[10] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006): 7.
[11] Michael D. Bailey, "From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages," *Speculum* 76, no.4 (2001): 965.
[12] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe,* 7.
[13] Ibid., 4.

dangerous type of magic. Contemporaries also believed in white magic, which was beneficial rather than harmful. White magic was practiced primarily by cunning men and, and examples of white magic included healing, protective, and love magic.[14]

In his work *Religion and the Decline of Magic,* Keith Thomas discusses the popular beliefs about magic in early modern England. Although his discussion deals specifically with magic in England, many of the magical beliefs he describes were of a kind with beliefs held throughout the rest of Europe. Magical beliefs gained traction and were popularized in Europe by the Middle Ages. The Christian Church often spoke out against the popular uses of magic and magicians. In England "the Anglo-Saxon clergy forbade soothsaying, charming and love philtres, along with such survivals of paganism as the worship of wells and trees, and the making of sacrifices to heathen divinities"; indeed, as Thomas notes, "by the thirteenth century it had become customary for the clergy to pronounce an annual excommunication of all sorcerers *in genre*, and parish priests were expected to use the confessional as a means of coercing their flock into abandoning their time-honored recourse to magic."[15] However, the fine line between popular magic and religious rituals was often blurred in the minds of the people. Bailey argues that "much of the early medieval history of magic involves Christian authorities laying down a veil of Christianization to rescue certain rites and practices from condemnation."[16] Keith Thomas makes the same argument. He notes how the medieval church argued that religious rituals worked because they came from God, not from the magic of the devil. The church used a number of "holy objects" and rites to engage the faithful, such as reverence for the saints, the efficacy of

[14] Ibid., 4-6.
[15] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 253-254.
[16] Michael D. Bailey, "The Age of Magicians: Periodization in the History of European Magic," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 3, no.1 (2008): 8.

Plate 1 Painting on the wall of Rila Monastery church, Bulgaria, condemning popular magic.
CC Image courtesy of Martha Forsyth on imagesofbulgaria.com.

holy water, charms or the repetition of prayers for healing, the sacraments, and the ultimate power of the Mass. Through this "Christianization" of previously magical rites, religion became closely intertwined with magic, and it was often difficult to distinguish between the two.[17]

Those who practiced low magic were usually called magicians, or cunning or wise men and women, and they provided their customers with charms, healing services, love magic, fortune telling, theft detection, and other services. Thomas notes that in England, "most of the magical techniques of the village wizard had been inherited from the Middle Ages, and had direct links with the Anglo-Saxon and classical practice."[18] The popular magic practiced by these men and women differed from the learned magic of the time. The learned magic of this time was

[17] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 25-50.
[18] Ibid., 228.

based on theories published in books and pamphlets, and it included typically high magic practices such as alchemy, necromancy, and astrology. Popular magic was not based on any form of established theory. In fact, it was rare for magicians to use books for their practices. While a village wizard may have owned guide books on certain types of magic, such as fortune telling, "usually his technique was learned verbally from some relative or neighbor."[19] Here we see an early separation of popular and learned magic.

One of the most common types of popular magic was healing magic. Healing magic was especially popular because of "the inadequacies of orthodox medical services."[20] Healing magic consisted of "a mixture of commonsensical remedies . . . combined with inherited lore about the healing properties of plants and minerals." [21] Common remedies included "burning or burying an animal alive to help the sick party recover, dipping him in south-flowing water, dragging him through trees or bushes, and touching him with a special staff."[22] Religious components were often included in these remedies. Indeed, "the pronouncement of Catholic prayers in Latin long remained a common ingredient in the magical treatment of illness" and some remedies or charms used by magicians involved "debased versions of Christian prayers or barely intelligible bits of semi-religious verse, describing supposed episodes of the life of Christ or the saints."[23] Magical healing also consisted of folk diagnostic techniques. One common technique was "to examine some item of the patient's clothing, preferably his belt or girdle, on the assumption that it would sympathetically reflect the wearer's state of health by fluctuating in size."[24]

[19] Ibid., 228.
[20] Ibid., 178.
[21] Ibid., 178.
[22] Ibid., 185.
[23] Ibid., 178.
[24] Ibid., 184.

Another aspect of magical healing was discovering whether a person's ailment was caused by some sort of supernatural occurrence. Thomas notes that "if the witch had already struck, there were plenty of counter-charms designed to force her to reveal herself and call off the spell."[25] Contemporaries offered "magical preservatives" to guard against possible *maleficia* and a multitude of remedies for bewitchment.[26] Magical preservatives included herbs to be hung above the threshold or other amulets. Other techniques included "boiling the victim's urine, or burning a piece of thatch from the suspected witch's house to see whether this brought her running to the scene," or "he [the magician] might alternatively have recourse to a mirror, a crystal ball, a sieve and shears, a familiar spirit, or some other method of divination."[27] If it was discovered that the person had indeed been the victim of a maleficent crime, the magician would provide remedies to reverse the bewitchment, or the afflicted would take these suspicions to court to prosecute the suspected witch. The employment of cunning men and women for healing magic was extremely popular throughout Europe during the early modern period.

Cunning men and women also offered theft detection and recovery of stolen items to their customers. They had several ways of doing this. One common technique involved shears and a sieve:

> Stick a pair of shears in the rind of a sieve and let two persons set the top of each of their forefingers upon the upper part of the shears holding it with the sieve up from the ground steadily; and ask Peter and Paul whether A, B, or C hath stolen the thing lost; and at the nomination of the guilty person the sieve will turn round.[28]

Another technique used a key and a book. In this method, "a key was placed at a chosen point in the book. The names of possible suspects were then written on separate pieces of paper and inserted one after another in the hollow end of the key. When the paper bearing the name of the

[25] Ibid., 543.
[26] Ibid., 543.
[27] Ibid., 186.
[28] Ibid., 213.

thief was put in, the book would 'wag' and fall out of the fingers of those who held it."[29] Another form of theft detection was to "wrap up the pieces of paper bearing their names inside little clay balls, and put them into a bucket of water to see which would unroll first."[30] While these simple forms of theft detection were extremely common, magicians also used more complex techniques. Thomas notes that

> Some purported to operate by astrology and would produce a description of the thief after setting a figure. Others engaged in geomancy – interpreting the meaning of the pattern of dots produced by the random doodlings of the wizard in a state of semi-trance. Yet others used mirrors or crystal balls in which the client would be asked if he could perceive the features of the guilty party.[31]

In most cases the person seeking information about the thief came to the magician with a list of possible suspects. The role of the magician was then to reveal the guilty party from this list. Thomas asserts that "it is more than likely that he saw his main task as that of discovering the identity of the party whom the client himself most strongly suspected."[32] He argues that this is the practice of the modern African counterpart to European cunning men. Whether or not this was the case, early modern magicians were trusted by their clients to produce accurate results. Indeed, Thomas notes that "officers of the law are known to have apprehended the supposed culprit on the basis of such identification."[33]

People also turned to magic to secure the recovery stolen goods. Intimidation played an important role in getting thieves to return what they stole. One form of intimidation was to perform the divination technique with all suspected parties present. In addition to the techniques already discussed, magicians used several other methods to intimidate suspects into confessing to theft. One way was "to prescribe dry powder, which would be likely to stick in the dry throat of

[29] Ibid., 214.
[30] Ibid., 215.
[31] Ibid., 215.
[32] Ibid., 216.
[33] Ibid., 216.

the guilty party. Or one could draw a large eye upon the wall and invite the suspects to look at it; the guilty man's eyes would water when he did so."[34] Also, "cunning men were known to have magical recipes which could inflict physical injury upon the culprit, or paralyse him so that he would be unable to make off with the goods."[35] Thomas asserts that all of these techniques of intimidation were remnants of the trial by ordeal, and that they served as additional proofs of guilt. Early modern society believed in and relied upon the efficacy of magic to both detect and prevent theft, as well as to intimidate thieves into confessing to their crimes and return stolen goods.

Early modern belief in beneficial magic allows us to understand how the belief in harmful magic was a feature of early modern life. In the witchcraft trials we are discussing, the witches were accused of practicing harmful magic, or *maleficia*, against someone or against their property. Like the "white magic" noted above, maleficent crimes touched on every aspect of early modern life. Some examples include killing livestock, destroying crops, inflicting sickness upon a person, poison, arson, infanticide, theft, injury, assault, and causing impotence. Most accusations came from friends, family, or neighbors who were more concerned about crimes of *maleficia* than they were of diabolism, since *maleficia* affected their daily lives.

There were several types of maleficent magic practiced in early modern England. The first is curses. Thomas mentions that "in the Middle Ages the power to bestow God's curse had been claimed by the Church and used as a sanction against many kinds of undesirable behavior."[36] He argues that, over time "the real source of the continuing belief in the efficacy of cursing lay, not in theology but in popular sentiment."[37] Curses were a popular option for those

[34] Ibid., 221.
[35] Ibid., 221-222.
[36] Ibid., 502.
[37] Ibid., 505.

who felt they had been wronged by their neighbor. Early modern villagers "believed that curses worked only if the party who uttered them had been unjustly treated" and that "it was above all the poor and the injured whose curses were believed likely to take effect."[38] Cursing took many forms. In some cases, it was a matter of praying to God that some evil or harm would befall the receiver. Often curses were "delivered in ritual form, the woman on her knees in the middle of the street, and a small crowd gathering to watch the event."[39] Other times curses "could be written on a stone and buried in the ground."[40] Or, "there were stones and wells at which imprecations might be uttered with a greater prospect of success."[41] In cases where the cursed person died, the curser could be charged with witchcraft. Thomas notes that one contemporary argued that "'curses are murderers . . . for if it please God to suffer their curse to take effect, the party cursed is murdered by the Devil."[42] Whatever the form of delivery or the outcome, contemporaries believed in the power of curses and of witches to do real harm through them.

Thomas argues that "the most common maleficent technique was the use of image-magic, by making a model in wax or clay of the proposed victim and then sticking pins or bristles in the part which was to be afflicted."[43] Image magic had been used by ancient civilizations and was well known throughout the Middle Ages. The power of image-magic was believed and feared by contemporaries: "Tudor governments were periodically provoked into carrying out a search for sorcerers, after discovering some wax doll with pins stuck in it, feared to be a model of the reigning monarch or one of his family," and "in the reign of Elizabeth I the lives of both the

[38] Ibid., 506-507.
[39] Ibid., 507.
[40] Ibid., 508.
[41] Ibid., 509.
[42] Ibid., 511.
[43] Ibid., 513.

Queen and her leading counsellors were thought to have been threatened in this way."[44] Thomas gives other examples of the practice of image-magic:

> In 1580 some witches at Windsor were said to have made extensive use of pictures in red wax which they pierced in the head with a 'hawthorn prick'. The eldest son of the Earl of Rutland was thought in 1619 to have died because his glove had been malevolently buried and allowed to rot in the earth. Anne Bodenham in 1653 was also alleged to have needed some of her victim's clothes before her spells could take effect. Sometimes necromancy was practiced, with a skull, or a supposedly deadly poison made out of a rotting corpse.[45]

Physical evidence of image-magic has survived as proof that contemporaries did indeed attempt to harm their enemies through them. That physical proof of this kind of magic survives suggests just how popular it was at the time. Also, image magic did not require the skill or training that other popular magical practices required. Virtually any person could sculpt the image of a person out of clay and prick it with pins. It seems plausible, then, to suppose that image magic was more widely available to all people of society than other magic.

Another type of maleficent magic was the practice of ritual fasting, which was "designed to secure the death of some specified victim."[46] Thomas recalls how "in 1519 Elizabeth Robinson of Bowland appeared before the ecclesiastical court of Whalley after publicly declaring her intention of carrying out a 'black fast' against Edmund Parker; and in 1538 Mabel Brigge was executed for practicing the same ritual against Henry VII and the Duke of Norfolk."[47] Although there is little archival evidence of ritual fasting as *maleficia* in England, Thomas notes that "the Bishop of Durham found it necessary to forbid black-fasting in 1577."[48] Fasting, which was an important component of Catholic piety, thus became another Christianized form of popular magic.

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[44] Ibid., 513.
[45] Ibid., 514.
[46] Ibid., 512.
[47] Ibid., 512.
[48] Ibid., 513.

Maleficia served as a point of contact between popular and learned beliefs about witchcraft, between "low magic" and the magical works studied by experts. Demonologists wrote about the existence and dangers of *maleficia* in their treatises. Martín Del Rio's work *Disquisitones Magicae* (1608) rivaled the *Malleus Maleficarum* as the Catholic encyclopedia for witchcraft beliefs. In it, Del Rio offered detailed descriptions of how witches committed *maleficia*. He described powders used by witches, "which they mix in food or drink, or rub on a naked body, or scatter over clothes. The powders which kill are black; those which simply cause illness are ash-coloured (or sometimes reddish-brown) whereas the powder which removes a spell and acts as a medicine is exceptionally white."[49] Another way "they work malefice [is] with herbs, pieces of straw, and other rubbish such as that. This they do by throwing them on the ground, and when the person against whom they wish to work malefice walks over them, he will most certainly fall sick or die."[50] He claimed that witches had the power to "poison people merely by breathing or blowing on them. This is how they are accustomed to cause miscarriages, as well as very great danger to life."[51] Witches could also cause harm through reciting enchantments, Del Rio claimed.

Lambert Daneau, a French Calvinist, wrote a treatise called *A Dialogue of Witches* (1564) which outlined many of the Protestant beliefs about witchcraft during the early modern period. Daneau warned that

> They have power over men, for that we daily behold, whilst some they kill with their poisons, and some they make sick and past recovery. I have seen them who, with only laying their hands upon a nurse's breasts, have drawn forth all the milk and dried them up. I have seen [them] that have caused unto some most grievous pain of the colic, wringings in the belly, gout, the palsy, the apoplexy, that they have also made men lame

[49] Martín Del Rio, *Investigations Into Magic*, 2000, in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* by Brian Levack (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004): 91.
[50] Ibid., 91.
[51] Ibid., 91.

> and feeble, and cast them into other diseases, which neither themselves afterward neither yet most excellent learned physicians could know or cure.[52]

Maleficent magic such as this terrified contemporaries because of the severity of these crimes. In rural communities where livestock was a precious commodity, the death of livestock could financially ruin a person or a family. And, as we have already noted, early modern medicinal practices did not always guarantee a cure or an improved condition. Therefore, the belief that witches could cause illness was especially worrisome for contemporaries.

The trials discussed below occurred almost exclusively in rural towns and villages, and so they reflected the characteristics and problems of rural life and society. Because crimes of *maleficia* touched on every aspect of early modern life, social relationships strongly impacted witchcraft accusations. Levack argues that "witchcraft accusations allowed members of early modern European communities to resolve conflicts between themselves and their neighbours and to explain misfortunes that had occurred in their daily lives."[53] The lack of privacy in early modern villages contributed to this. Thomas notes that "eavesdropping may have been technically an offence, but this did not inhibit the witness from testifying in adultery cases to what they had seen through a window or hole in the wall."[54] The same occurred in witchcraft cases. Contemporaries believed that "everyone had a right to know what everyone else was doing," and public opinion about a person or a family was extremely important.[55]

The importance of public opinion carried over into civil and ecclesiastic trials, as we shall see in witchcraft trials discussed in the final section of this work. Thomas notes that in "ecclesiastical law a bad reputation ('ill fame') was sufficient to justify a prosecution . . . [and] in

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[52] Lambert Daneau, *A Dialogue of Witches, in Foretime Named Lot-tellers and Now Commonly Called Sorcerers,* 1575, in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* by Brian Levack (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004): 74.
[53] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe,* 134.
[54] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic,* 527.
[55] Ibid., 527.

common law courts it was still acceptable that the jury in a criminal trial were not impartial assessors, but members of the community from which the offender had sprung, and well-informed about his general standing in the community."[56] Contemporaries were concerned with maintaining social harmony, and people with bad reputations were seen as a threat to that harmony. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that people with poor reputations were accused of disrupting the moral order by practicing witchcraft.

Another aspect of witchcraft as it related to the problems of society is that of the relationship between witchcraft and gender. Witchcraft was understood as a predominantly female activity in early modern society. Levack finds that "the percentage of female witches exceeded 75 per cent in most regions of Europe, and in a few localities, such as the county of Essex, England, the bishopric of Basel and the county of Namur (in present-day Belgium), it was more than 90 per cent."[57] Edward Bever notes that "while in some regions and certain trials men predominated, overall women constituted 80% of the people tried [as witches]."[58] Historians have wrestled with why women played such a prominent role in early modern witchcraft. Demonologists and judges believed that women were more likely to be tempted into witchcraft by the Devil than men. This is one of the major arguments of the *Malleus.* However, Bever argues that "the most fundamental question is not why early modern male elites thought women were particularly susceptible to the Devil's blandishments, but why early modern common people – female as well as male – thought women were particularly likely to use magical powers

[56] Ibid., 528.
[57] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe,* 141.
[58] Edward Bever, "Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power in the Early Modern Community," *Journal of Social History* 35, no.4 (2002): 956.

against them."[59] This is an important distinction, since the trials we are discussing began as a result of neighbors accusing each other of practicing *maleficia* against them.

Levack suggests that the personalities of accused witches may have made them more susceptible to persecution. He notes that "the witch was viewed by authorities as a rebel – an apostate rebel against God and a conspirator against the political, social, and moral order of humankind," and that in many cases witches were often the "scolds" of the community, described as "sharped-tongued, bad-tempered, and quarrelsome."[60] Such behavior would have frightened the upper classes, but would it have driven commoners to accuse their neighbors of *maleficia*? In another explanation, Bever argues that the persecution of women for witchcraft was ultimately a power struggle in which "the trials served to diminish women's power and strengthen men's."[61] While the idea that witchcraft trials were a manifestation of a power struggle between men and women is a good explanation, it does not offer a complete answer as to why women were primarily persecuted as witches.

Stuart Clark attempts an explanation by pointing out that "trends in population and in marriage patterns led to an increase in the number of women living alone as spinsters or widows," women whom men then perceived as threatening in a male-dominated society.[62] Levack also notes that the number of unmarried women exceeded married women in witchcraft cases. He contends that "there is reason to believe . . . that the single status of many witches contributed at least indirectly to their plight," because "in a patriarchal society, the existence of women who were subject neither to father nor husband was a source of concern, if not fear."[63]

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[59] Bever, "Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power in the Early Modern Community," 957
[60] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe,* 161, 162.
[61] Bever, "Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power in the Early Modern Community," 975.
[62] Stuart Clark, *Thinking With Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 107.
[63] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe,* 155-156.

However, Bever argues that recent evidence suggests that "the women most likely to be accused of witchcraft tended not to be poor, marginal outsiders, but integral members of their communities."[64] Such contention is common among historians discussing witchcraft, though it does not satisfy the question at hand. Rather, it shows us that every woman in society could possibly be accused of witchcraft, regardless of rank or position in society. That historians have been unable to reach a consensus as to why the vast majority of accused witches were female suggests that the explanation is not a simple one. As we have seen, there are several possible explanations, and, taken together, these explanations shed light on the views about gender as it related to witchcraft in early modern society.

There are several explanations as to why accusations of *maleficia* occurred so often in early modern Europe. One reason was that belief in witchcraft provided explanations for everyday misfortunes that may have otherwise been unknown. Thomas argues that "there was virtually no type of private misfortune which could not thus be ascribed to witchcraft."[65] He describes how "in Maidstone in 1652 . . . a group of witches was accused of being responsible for the deaths of nine children and two adults, the loss of five hundred pounds' worth of cattle, and the shipwreck of a large quantity of corn."[66] Accusations of using harmful magic for the purpose of killing livestock, theft, injury, and death were common in the early modern period.

As mentioned above, contemporaries turned to magicians for healing magic because medical treatments at the time were unreliable. *Maleficia* was often used to explain poor health, death, and disease. Thomas describes how

> Today's doctors . . . might have no difficulty in diagnosing the case of Roger Boyden, who, when threshing corn, was 'suddenly stricken down to the ground and taken lame, both in his right arm and left leg, and so continued till his death'; or of his daughter, Lucy

[64] Bever, "Witchcraft, Female Aggression, and Power in the Early Modern Community," 957-958.
[65] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 535.
[66] Ibid., 536.

> Boyden, who 'after a ravenous manner did devour an extraordinary proportion of sustenance, yet she pined away to skin and bones and so died'. The one clearly had a stroke; the other perhaps cancer, or galloping consumption. Yet in 1605 Margaret Cotton was charged with having brought about both deaths by witchcraft.[67]

Demonologists and judges were convinced that witches caused impotence or made a man's genitals disappear. This topic is discussed at length in the *Malleus.* Kramer first addressed the issue of impotence and failure to copulate. He argued that the Devil "can prevent bodies from approaching each other, either directly or indirectly, by interposing himself in some bodily shape."[68] Further, the Devil "can excite a man to the act, or freeze his desire for it, by the virtue of secret things of which he best knows the power," and that "he can so disturb a man's perception and imagination as to make the woman appear loathsome to him."[69] Women, too, could be influenced by the Devil, who "can so darken her understanding that she considers her husband so loathsome that not for all the world would she allow him to lie with her."[70] Finally, Kramer maintained that the Devil "can directly prevent the erection of that member which is adapted to fructification," and "can prevent the flow of the vital essence to the members . . . by closing as it were the seminary ducts so that it does not descend to the generative channels, or falls back from them, or does not project from them, or in any of many ways fails in its function."[71] Kramer also argued that "there is no doubt that certain witches can do marvelous things with regard to the male organ," such as making it disappear.[72] He maintained that this was physically done by the power of the Devil or "through some prestige or glamour."[73] He asserted that when done through a glamour, "it is no illusion of the opinion of the sufferer. For his

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[67] Ibid., 536.
[68] Heinrich Kramer and Jakob Sprenger, trans. Montague Summers, *The Malleus Maleficarum* (New York: Dover Publications, 1979), 55.
[69]Kramer, "*The Malleus Maleficarum*," 55.
[70] Ibid., 55.
[71] Ibid., 55.
[72] Ibid., 58.
[73] Ibid., 58.

imagination can really and actually believe that something is not present, since by none of his exterior senses . . . he can perceive that it is present."[74] Such explanations that *maleficia* and diabolism were responsible for health problems were used by both members of lower society and demonologists.

A theological explanation for misfortune had been used for centuries in Europe. According to Thomas, religious doctrine had taught contemporaries that God would bring suffering upon a person "either to punish sin, or to try the believer, or for some other unknown but indisputably just purpose."[75] Thomas argues that this "had never been a comfortable doctrine to swallow."[76] Uncomfortable with the idea that God was punishing them for their sins, contemporaries turned to *maleficia* to explain their misfortunes.

Not only was *maleficia* useful as explanation, but it also allowed for some form of justice. Thomas asserts that "the greatest difficulty about the theological explanation of misfortune was . . . that the diagnosis offered no very promising means of redress."[77] Witchcraft accusations and trials, however, brought some semblance of recourse to the afflicted party. The best remedy for bewitchment, however, was the trial and execution of the witch. According to Thomas, "all of Robert Throckmorton's children recovered after the execution of the witches of Warboys."[78] Therefore, the use of *maleficia* to explain misfortunes was not only a way to work around uncomfortable theological beliefs. Contemporaries also believed it to be the best preventative means and remedy for bewitchment.

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[74] Ibid., 58.
[75] Ibid., 543.
[76] Ibid., 543.
[77] Ibid., 543.
[78] Ibid., 545.

The trials we are discussing began as accusations of *maleficia* and were transformed during the trials into confessions and convictions of Devil worship. From what we have seen, popular beliefs about harmful magic were one aspect of a larger popular belief in magic. Fear of the dangers of harmful magic coupled with social tensions and fears were what drove so many contemporaries to accuse their neighbors of practicing *maleficia*. It was demonological expertise, however, that turned *maleficia* into Devil worship.

Chapter 2: Demonology

Beliefs about the diabolic nature of witchcraft were circulated among the educated elite, and judges and inquisitors were more concerned about diabolic crimes that with *maleficia*. The idea of diabolism originated in the time of the early Christians. Early Christians within Roman society pushed back against Roman religion by claiming that "all pagan deities were in fact Christian demons, and so church authorities held that the rights of pagan cults were superstitious and all effects supposedly derived from them were magical."[79] This was the beginning of European Christians correlating magic with demons or the devil. They also believed that "magicians, by the very performance of their arts, entered into pacts with demons and so became agents of the devil."[80] Romans inscribed curses on tablets in order to bring harm upon people or things. One tablet says,

> I adjure you, demon, whoever you are, and I demand of you from this hour, from this day, from this moment that you torture and kill the horses of the Greens and Whites, and that you smash their drivers Clarus, Felix, Primulus and Romanus, and leave not a breath in their bodies. I adjure you, demon, by him who has turned you loose in these times, to god of the sea and the air.[81]

At this time, magicians were not subservient to demons, but commanded their power for personal use. This belief that magicians commanded demons would continue into the Middle Ages. This emphasis on the demonic nature of magic gained more traction in the Roman Empire as Christianity flourished, and it was carried over into the medieval period.

In the Middle Ages, theologians and church authorities were concerned with magicians practicing high magic. As we know, high magic was a learned affair and included practices such as necromancy, astrology, divination, and alchemy. It was believed that magicians summoned

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[79] Michael D. Bailey, "The Age of Magicians: Periodization in the History of European Magic," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 3, no. 1 (2008): 3.
[80] Bailey, "The Age of Magicians," 5.
[81] *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae,* 1906, in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* by Brian Levack (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004): 14.

demons to do their bidding, much like in Roman times. Levack asserts that this belief "did not become widespread in western Europe until the ninth century, when various legends regarding such pacts were translated into Latin."[82] As in popular magic, magicians made a pact with the Devil or demons in exchange for something. However, the difference between the pact between maleficent witches and scholarly magicians was the issue of power. In pacts, where high magic was to be performed, the magician summoned the demon to do his bidding, not the other way around. Levack notes that "they often offered demons either reverence or some sort of physical object, such as a chicken or their own blood, in order to lure them into service."[83] By the time early modern demonological beliefs were established, control had transferred from the magician to the Devil, and the witch became indebted to him once she formed the pact.

Legal and theological arguments responded to beliefs about high magic, and their arguments shaped medieval thought concerning magic and witchcraft. The inquisitor Nicholas Eymeric wrote *Directorium Inquisitorium* (1376), a late-Medieval manual for inquisitors that outlined how to determine if a person practicing magic was guilty of heresy. He distinguished between magicians who simply practiced the art of magic and those who used magic to conjure and worship demons. He found that

> If the invokers of demons show to the demons they invoke the honor of *latria* [honor due to God] by whatever means, and if they are clearly and judicially convicted of this, or if they confess, then they are to be held by the judgement of the Church not as magicians, but as heretics, and if they reject and abjure heresy they are to be permanently immured as penitent heretics.[84]

In the *Summa Theologica* (1265-1274) and *Summa Contra Gentiles* (1264), Thomas Aquinas countered this statement by arguing that all magic had demonic origins, therefore the practice of

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[82] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 37.
[83] Ibid., 39.
[84] *Directorium Inquisitorium,* 1978, in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* by Brian Levack (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004): 45.

any kind of magic was a sin against God and heresy. This claim would influence demonologists for several centuries thereafter.[85] In 1398 the University of Paris released a document condemning ritual magic. Their concern was with elite and literate magicians practicing elaborate ritual magic, not with the men and women who would later be accused of practicing harmful magic and worship of the devil.[86] Levack argues that these discussions about ritual magic were important to the development of ideas about witchcraft because "many ideas regarding the crime of witchcraft, especially the equation of magic with heresy, originated in the discourse regarding ritual magic in the Middle Ages."[87] The high magic of the Middle Ages evolved into the popular magic of the early modern period, and the magician transformed into the witch. The belief that magic was inherently diabolic remained throughout this process, and a more stable demonological theory emerged and solidified in the early modern period, coming to focus increasingly on the role of the devil in cases of magic and witchcraft.

The witch's pact with the Devil was central to early modern demonological beliefs. This belief evolved from the medieval idea that elite sorcerers and magicians obtained their magic by summoning demons during rituals. In the minds of many early modern demonologists and judges, the pact with the Devil is what defined a witch. They believed that a witch obtained her power to perform *maleficia* by renouncing her faith in God and pay homage to the Devil. Other times she was promised some sort of monetary reward in exchange for her oath to the Devil.

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[85] *Summa Theologica* and *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1928, in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* by Brian Levack (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004): 37-38.
[86] *Démonomanie des sorciers,* 1580, in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* by Brian Levack (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004): 48-49.
[87] Johannes Nider, *Formicarius,* 1901, in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* by Brian Levack (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004): 51.

Plate 2 Witches trampling on the cross as part of their pact with the Devil.
From Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum* (1610 edition).

Plate 3 The Devil rebaptizing a witch during the pact with the Devil.
From Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum* (1610 edition).

Plate 4 Witches kissing the Devil's buttocks as part of their pact with the Devil.
From Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum* (1610 edition).

Plate 5 A witch receiving the Devil's mark during the pact with the Devil.
From Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum* (1610 edition).

Plate 6 Witches trampling on the Bible as part of their pact with the Devil.
From Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum* (1610 edition).

Demonologists and trial records offer several descriptions of the pact with the Devil. In his work *Formicarius* (1475), Johannes Nider provided one man's experience with the pact with the Devil. The young man described the ceremony:

> First, on the Lord's day, before the *holy* water is consecrated, the future disciple must go with his masters into the church, and there in their presence must renounce Christ and his faith, baptism, and the Church universal. Then he must do homage to the *magisterulus,* that is, to the little master (for so, and not otherwise, they call the Devil). Afterward he drinks from the aforesaid flask, and this done, he forthwith feels himself to conceive and hold within himself an image of our art and the chief rites of this sect.[88]

In the *Malleus,* Kramer maintained that

> The method of procession is twofold. One is a solemn ceremony, like a solemn vow. The other is private and can be made to the devil at any hour alone. The first method is when 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, promising them worldly prosperity and length of life; and they recommend a novice to his acceptance. And the devil asks whether she will abjure the Faith, and forsake the holy Christian religion . . . and never venerate the sacraments; and if he finds the novice or disciple willing, then the devil stretches out his hand, and so does the novice, and swears with upraised hand to

[88] Nider, *Formicarius,* 54.

> keep that covenant. And when this is done, the devil at once adds that this is not enough and when the disciple asks what more must be done, the devil demands the following oath of homage to himself: that she give herself to him, body and soul, forever, and do her utmost to bring others of both sexes into his power. He adds finally that she is to make certain unguents from the bones and limbs of children, especially those who have been unbaptized; by all which means she will be able to fulfill all her wishes with his help.[89]

In the treatise *Compendium Maleficarum* (1608), Francesco Maria Guazzo outlined eleven steps that were taken to form the pact. Like many others, this work described that the witch must first renounce her faith in God to begin the pact. Then, "the Devil then places his claw on their brow, as a sign that he rubs off the holy chrism and destroys the mark of their baptism."[90] Next, Satan "bathes them in a new mock baptism" and the witch is given a new name.[91] Guazzo described what the Devil "takes" from the witch during the pact: "of their spiritual goods he takes their faith and baptism; of their bodily goods, he claims their blood, as in the sacrifices of Baal; of their natural goods he claims their children . . . and of their acquired goods he claims a piece of their clothing."[92] The next step in the pact was to "swear allegiance to the Devil within a circle, traced upon the ground. Perhaps this is because a circle is the symbol of divinity, and the earth is God's footstool; and so he wishes to persuade him that he is the God of Heaven and Earth."[93] Then, "they pray the devil to strike them out of the book of life, and inscribe them into the book of death," and "promise to sacrifice to him . . . [and] to strangle or suffocate for him one child every month or two weeks."[94] Finally, the Devil "places his mark upon some part or other of their bodies, as fugitive slaves are branded," and "when they have been so marked they make

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[89] Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 99-100
[90] Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum: the Montague Summers edition*, trans. E. A. Ashwin (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1988): 100.
[91] Ibid., 100.
[92] Ibid., 100.
[93] Ibid., 100.
[94] Ibid., 100.

many vows" including that were designed to renounce and ridicule the Catholic faith.[95] The pact with the Devil could be formed at any time and place, but it was believed that it was primarily formed during the witches' Sabbath.

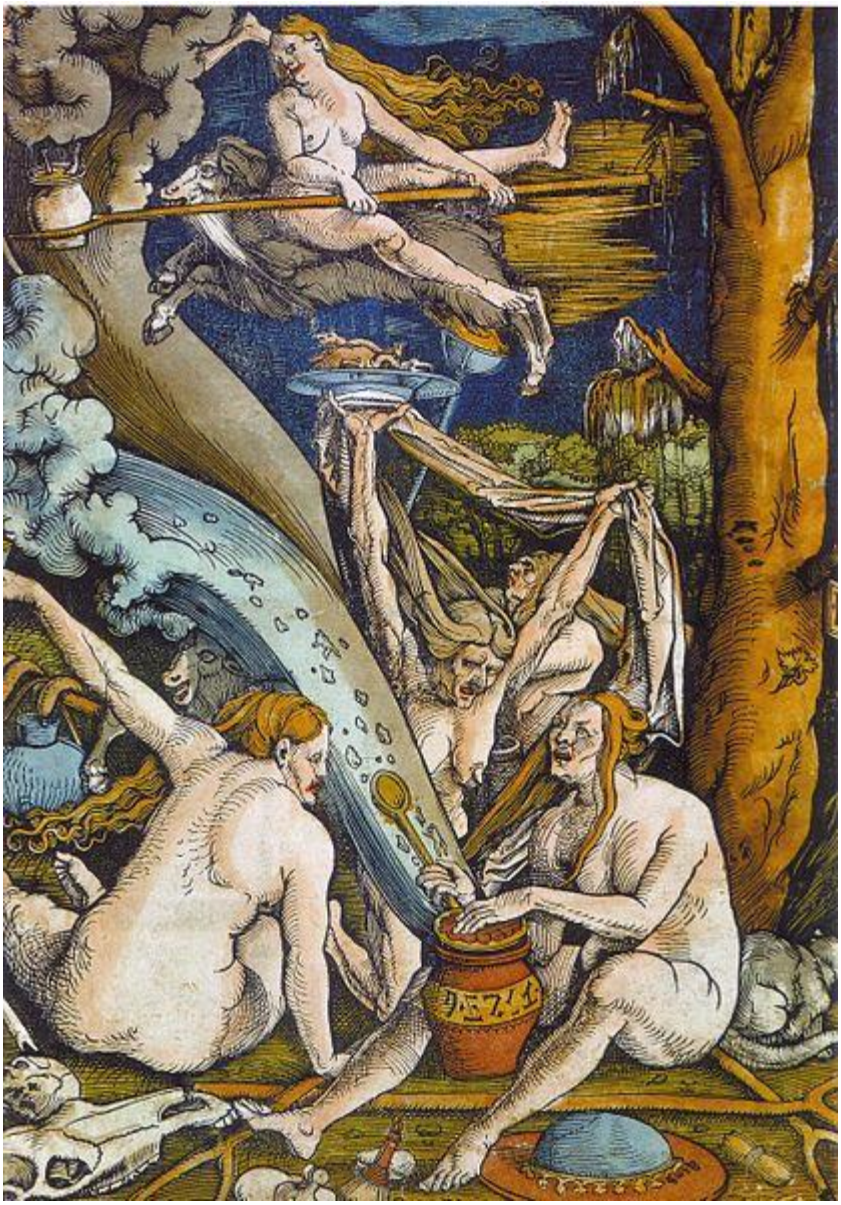

Plate 7 *Witches.*
By Hans Baldung (1508)

[95] Ibid., 100-101.

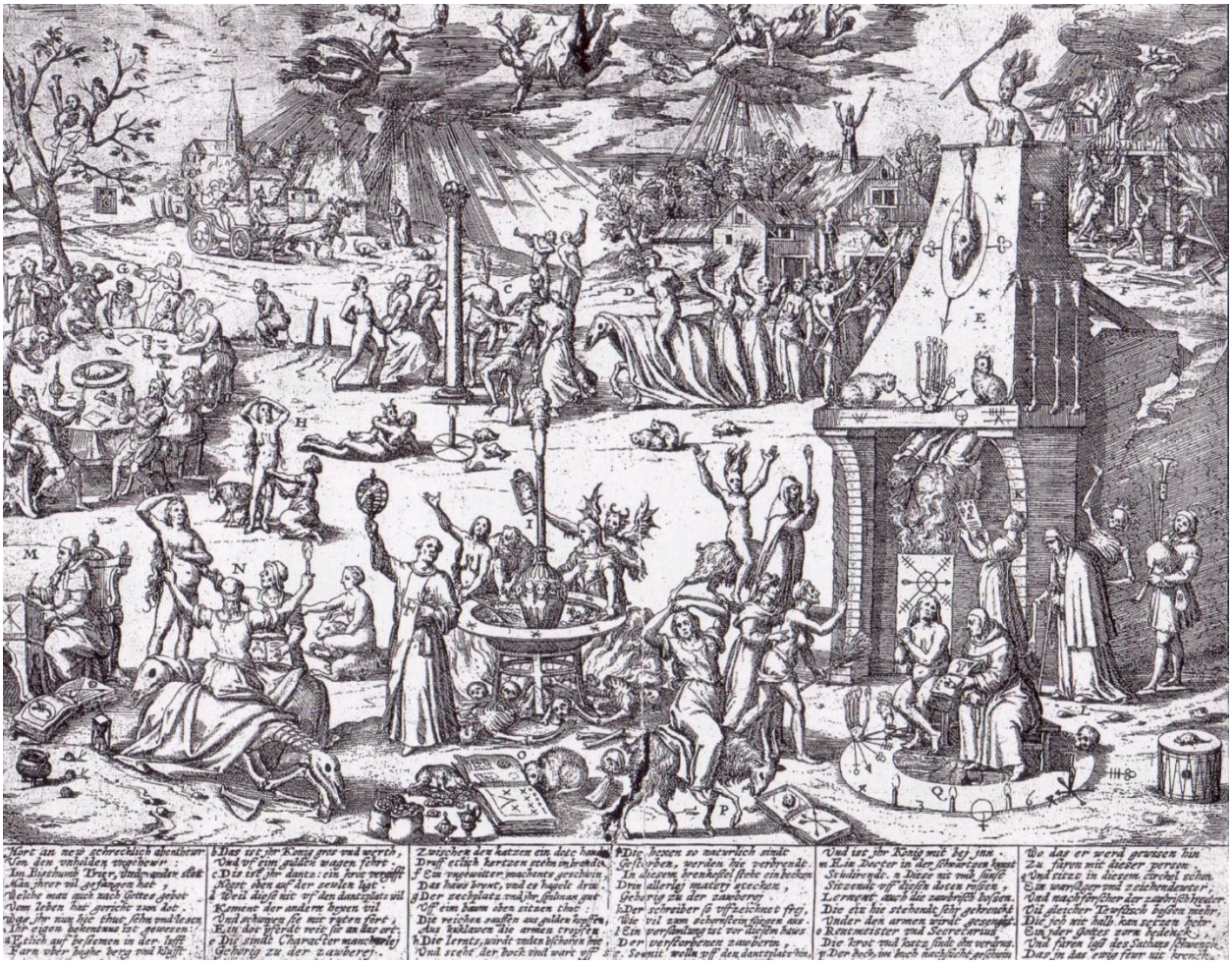

Plate 8 A depiction of the Sabbath.
From R. Decker, *Trier Hexentanzplatz* (1594).

Levack argues that the educated population of early modern Europe believed that the witches' Sabbath was "of equal and in some respects greater importance" than the pact with the Devil.[96] The Sabbath was a nocturnal gathering of witches and demons in which witches made pacts with the Devil, partook in sex with the Devil, played obscene games, performed lewd dances, gathered for feasts, and performed cannibalistic infanticide. Nicolas Rémy, an official who prosecuted many witches in Lorraine and who wrote the witchcraft treatise *Demonolatry* (1595), discussed the number of witches who attended the Sabbath:

[96] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 41.

> All those taken up for witchcraft are unanimous in their assertion that the Sabbats [sic] are attended by great numbers. Leanne le Ban (Masmunster, June 1585) and Nicole Ganète (July 1685) said that the numbers were so great whenever they were present that they felt little pity for the human race than when they saw how many enemies and traitors were opposed to it, and that it was most surprising that mortals did not suffer greater damage from them. Catharina Ruffa (Ville-dur-Moselle, June 1587) stated that she saw no less than five hundred on the night when she was first enticed into their company. Barbeline Rayel (Blainville, Jan. 1587) said that the women far exceeded the men in number, since it was much easier for the Demon to impose his deceits upon that sex. ... Certainly I remember to have heard of far more cases of women than men; and it is not unreasonable that this scum of humanity should be drawn chiefly from the feminine sex, and that we should hear mostly of women simplists, wise women, sorceresses, enchantresses, and masked Lombard women. For in estimating numbers and frequency it is enough to reckon those who form the majority.[97]

The belief that witches participated in the Sabbath in droves led judges and inquisitors to pursue not just witches, but their accomplices as well. Demonologists and judges were extremely

Plate 9 Witches and the Devil at the Sabbath.
By Johann Jakob Wick (1522-1588)

[97] Nicolas Remy, *Demonolatry*, trans. E. Ashwin (London, 1930), in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* by Brian Levack (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004): 86.

concerned about witches' participation in the Sabbath and with the specific details of what occurred during these nocturnal gatherings. Questions about the Sabbath appeared in virtually all witchcraft trials, and curiosity and fear of the Sabbath prompted judges and inquisitors to question accused witches about it in order to both confirm established demonology and to gain more knowledge about these demonic gatherings.

The belief that witches could fly was key to understanding the Sabbath, as it explained how witches went to and from the remote locations of the Sabbath without being noticed. Witches' flight was highly debated by contemporaries, and views differed in Catholic and Protestant demonology. The belief in a witch's ability to fly had its roots in popular medieval beliefs. Levack argues that "the first of these was the belief . . . that women could transform themselves at night into flying screech owls or *strigae* who would devour infants."[98] The second belief referred to the cult of Diana, in which "women went out at night on a ride, sometimes referred to as a 'wild hunt', with Diana, the Roman goddess . . . who was often identified with Hecate, the goddess of the underworld and magic."[99] These beliefs were well known in Medieval and early modern Europe, and were heavily condemned by the Church, who claimed that Diana, like the other pagan gods, was actually a demon.

Levack argues that in the later centuries of the Middle Ages, these beliefs evolved, and "the ladies of the night became perpetrators of cannibalistic infanticide while their procession or ride on beasts became an airborne flight," and that the educated upper class "began to argue that they had a physical reality."[100] Here we see the stereotypical image of the witches' flight to the Sabbath begin to emerge. These beliefs eventually formed the established belief in the witches'

[98] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe,* 46.
[99] Ibid., 46.
[100] Ibid., 47.

flight, which argued that the Devil had the power to physically transport a person from one place to another using a number of methods.

Demonologists maintained there were several ways in which a witch could be transported to the Sabbath. Kramer noted that one way was by taking an unguent which "they make at the devil's instruction from the limbs of children, particularly of those whom they have killed before baptism, and anoint with it a chair or a broomstick; whereupon they are immediately carried up into the air, either by day or by night, and either visibly or, if they wish, invisibly."[101] In another method, the Devil "transports the witches on animals, which are not true animals but devils in that form" or "sometimes even without any exterior help they are visibly carried solely by the

Plate 10 A witch flying to the Sabbath on the back of an animal.
From Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum* (1610 edition).

[101] Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 107.

operation of the devil's power."[102] Rémy described the confessions of several convicted witches regarding their flight to the Sabbath:

> Nicole Ganette (Mazières, Dec. 1583) added that it was her custom, when she was preparing to start on that journey, to put one foot up into a basket after she had smeared it with the same ointment which she had used upon herself. François Fellet (at Vergaville, December, 1585) said that he used to place his left foot, not in a basket but on the ends of the backward bent twigs of a besom which he first anointed. Others, again, use other methods to fly to their assemblies. Margareta Doliar said that she had often been carried there riding upon a wicker net or a reed, after having pronounced certain requisite words. Alexia Bernard (in Guermingen, Jan. 1590) said that she rode upon a pig; and Hennezel Erik (at Vergaville, July 1586) that his father went upon a huge mighty bull, and his mother on a forked stick such as is used in stables ... Jeanne Gransaint (at Conde-sur-l'Escaut, July 1582) of Montigny said that whenever she wished to make this journey there immediately appeared before her door a terrible black dog, upon which she boldly mounted as upon a well-tamed horse; and in payment for her passage, when she dismounted she was in her turn mounted and defiled by the dog; but first (as it seemed to her) it changed itself into a not uncomely young man.[103]

Information about a witch's flight to the Sabbath didn't just come from confessed witches. One witness claimed that

> She saw in a field nearby a band of men and women dancing round in a ring. But because they were doing so in a manner contrary to the usual practice, with their backs turned towards each other, she looked more closely and saw also dancing around with the others some whose feet were deformed and like those of goats or oxen. Nearly dead with fright, she began (as we do when some sinister disaster threatens us) to call upon the saving Name of Jesus, and to beseech Him that she might at least return safe and unhurt to her house. Thereupon all the dancers seemed to vanish at once, except one named Petter Gross-Petter, who rose quickly into the air, and was seen to let fall a mop such as bakers use to clean out their ovens before putting in their dough.[104]

Inquiry into how witches flew to the Sabbath was extremely important to demonologists because it seemed to confirm the existence of the Sabbath. It also provided an explanation for how thousands of women could attend the Sabbath in the middle of the night without their absence being noticed.

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[102] Ibid., 107.
[103] Rémy, *Demonolatry*, 85-86.
[104] Ibid., 84-85.

Demonological views about the flight to the Sabbath also focused on whether witches could be transported while they were asleep. Kramer argued that "such things can happen not only to those who are asleep; namely, they can be bodily transported through the air while they are fast asleep."[105] Rémy noted that

> Credible authors, such as Fr. à Turella and Jean Bodin in his *Daemonomania*, have vouched for cases where women have manifestly spent the whole night at home, and even in bed with their husbands, and yet on the next morning they have confidently recounted many details of the Sabbat at which they have affirmed they were present on the previous night. Other women, again, have been kept under express observation throughout the night by their friends and relations, as well as their neighbors, who had become suspicious of them because of certain rumours; and they have been seen to move spasmodically in their sleep as if they were smitten with some acute pain; or even to mount upon a chair or some other object and act as if they were spurring a horse to great speed; yet they did not go out of the house, but on awaking appeared as weary as if they had returned from a long journey, and told wonderful stories of what they imagined they had done, and were much offended and angry with those who would not believe them.[106]

The accounts above, as well as the writings of other demonologists, show that it was widely held that a witch could be transported to the Sabbath "in spirit" while she was asleep. This was important in cases where an accused confessed to attending the Sabbath, but one or more witness claimed that the accused was never absent from her bed.

The belief that witches could fly was not uncontested. Lyndal Roper argues that some "demonologists responded by claiming that the witches' flight was not real, that it was illusory, or that it was merely a dream."[107] She argues that this belief did not change their belief that witchcraft was real, and she notes that many believed that "the Devil, as master of illusion, could easily hoodwink his victims into believing that they had flown, yet their allegiance to the Devil and the malevolence did in his name was certainly no dream."[108] Despite this line of thinking, the

[105] Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 105.
[106] Rémy, *Demonolatry,* 84.
[107] Roper, *Witch Craze*, 104.
[108] Ibid., 104.

general consensus remained that witches were able to fly with the help of the Devil using the methods described.

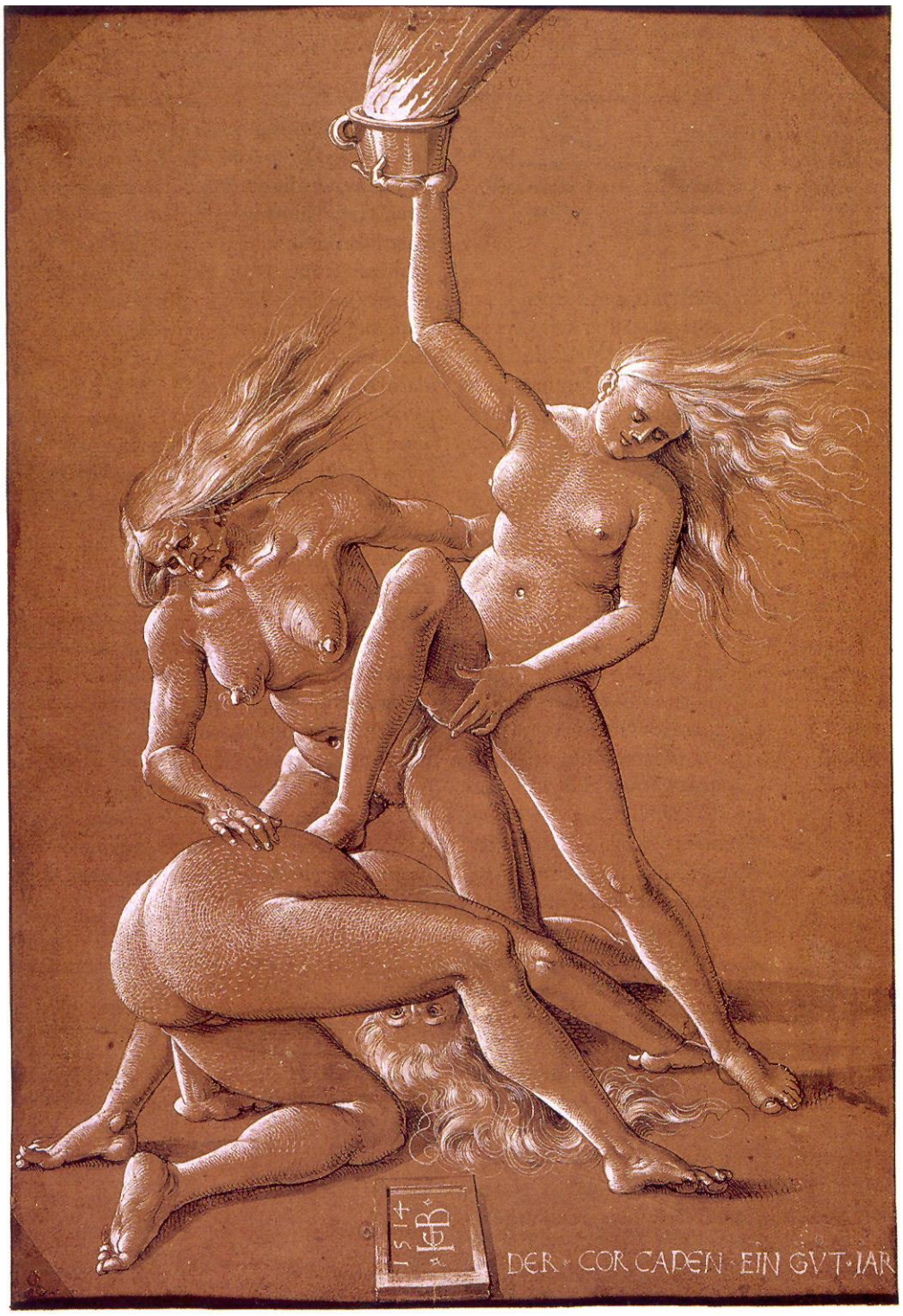

Plate 11 An engraving of three witches playing leapfrog.
By Hans Baldung Grien (c. 1514)

Once a witch arrived at the Sabbath, it was said that she participated in several horrific activities. In many confessions, the accused described that they made their pacts with the Devil at the Sabbath. The *Compendium Maleficarum* contains images of witches affirming their allegiance to the Devil at the Sabbath by kissing his buttocks, allowing themselves to be repabtized by him, and by trampling on a cross (See Plate 2).[109] As mentioned earlier, witches were often branded with the Devil's mark during the ceremony (See Plate 5). In addition to making a pact with the Devil, witches confessed to playing games and performing lewd dances with each other during the Sabbath, usually naked (See Plates 11 and 12).

Plate 12 Witches dancing during the Sabbath.
From Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum* (1610 edition).

[109] Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum*, 14-17.

In his work *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et demons* (1612), French magistrate and demonologist Pierre de Lancre described how one witch confessed that during the Sabbath witches "would dance without their cloaks, back to back, each with a large cat attached to the tail of their shirt, then they would dance completely naked."[110] Disgusted by their dances, de Lancre argued that "the dances of the witches almost make the men furious and force abortions on the women most often."[111] In most descriptions of the Sabbath, sex with the Devil and other demons immediately followed these dances.

Roper argues that "intercourse with the Devil was the physical counterpart of the pact with him."[112] Indeed, it was one of the aspects of the Sabbath that judges and inquisitors were most curious about, "and it was sex with the Devil which many accused witches talked about at length, rather than the pact which, according to demonological theory, actually made them Satan's own."[113] De Lancre recalled confessions of copulation with the Devil:

> Johannes d'Aguerre, says that the Devil, in the form of a billy goat, had his limb in the back and had sexual relations with the women by agitating and pushing with this against their fronts. Marie de Marigrane aged fifteen years and resident of Biarritz said that she often saw the Devil coupling with an infinity of women that she names by name and surname: and that his custom is to have sexual relations with the beautiful women from the front, and the ugly ones from behind.[114]

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[110] Pierre de Lancre, *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et démons, ou il est amplement traité des sorcierrs et de la sorcellerie* (1612), ed. Nicole Jacques-Chaquin (Paris, 1982) in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* by Brian Levack (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004): 105-106.

[111] De Lancre, *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et demons,* 107.

Roper argues that many confessions about dances at the Sabbath were actually a reflection of early modern popular culture. She notes that, while demonologists were focused on the diabolic aspects of the witches' Sabbath and the heinous nature of the dances performed, the witches themselves were confessing to dances that were very similar to those that they attended in their towns and villages. This revelation once again brings up the question of how much or how little agency a witch possessed while she was on trial, and just how much of her daily life influenced her confession.

Roper, *Witch Craze*, 109-113

[112] Roper, *Witch Craze*, 84.

[113] Ibid., 84.

[114] De Lancre, *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et demons,* 107-108.

Confessions also revealed that "the Devil has never become accustomed to having contact with virgins, because he cannot commit adultery with them, so he waits until they are married," and that he usually favored one witch during the Sabbath who was given the title "Queen of the Sabbath."[115] The Devil's alleged insistence on only sleeping with married women reaffirmed the socially-disruptive nature of the (already disturbing) notion of sex with the Devil. As Roper suggests above, demonologists believed that sex with the Devil completed the pact made by the witch. By engaging in intimacy with him, the witch gave herself completely to the Devil. By confessing to sex with the Devil, witches solidified the demonological belief that they were heretics and enemies of God.

Witches also described having sex with the Devil on occasions outside of the Sabbath. Roper gives examples of contemporaries in Germany who confessed to having sex with the Devil while not attending the Sabbath. Many of these confessions involve the sensory aspects associated with sex with the Devil. She relates the testimony of one witch who confessed that

> The first time, he, the Evil One, came to her about eight years ago; before her bed, dressed in black, with smooth trousers. She was a widow at that time, and he knocked on the shutter (since she intended to take a second husband at that time, she thought that it was the man whom she desired to marry, a thresher called Michael). He said to her that she should take him, he had 25 gulden, he was Michael Thresher, didn't she know him? So he slipped under the bedclothes to her and he had to do with her bodily. Everything about him was cold. She was badly shocked by this, and sensed that it was not right. [He came again two days later but didn't sleep with her.] She lay with him in bed, but he only took off his coat. He had hard feet.
> [He came a third time, and she opened the door for him again.] He said that she was his now, because she had laid with him. [She slept with him again]. He said he was called Little Feather (*Fäderle*). . . . [He said she was his.] He said he would not leave her whole life long, she would have good things, but she didn't have many good days. . . . The third time, as he left her, he let out such a stink (begging your pardon), that she thought that she would die of this terrible stench in her chamber. It looked like a blue mist.[116]

[115] Ibid., 108.
[116] Roper, *Witch Craze*, 82.

This testimony is similar to many of those given by accused witches in Germany. Roper notes that in most German witchcraft confessions, "usually the Devil is a young man, virile and sexually knowing," and that "the Devil's colour is black, and many of these demons did appear as 'black men', a designation which might refer to skin colour or to clothes."[117] One description of the Devil's clothing described that "often he wears trousers of satin or velvet. He sports a hat with a crest of feathers (*Federbusch*), a stylish adornment which hints at his potency as it sets off his attire."[118] The Devil is almost always described as cold and hard with hard feet, which Roper says "hints that these are cloven animal hooves."[119]

Along with details about the physical and sensory characteristics of the Devil, confessions revealed that "the Devil promised love and marriage" to those he enticed, and that there were elements of courtship involved in confessions of sex with the Devil. [120] The woman was told that she belongs to the Devil, he promised her a good life and good things, and "often the demon gives the woman a token, frequently some money, symbolizing the stream of money he will supply as a husband."[121] One witch confessed that

> He came to her . . . in her chamber, like a servant man, red face and red beret, smooth trousers and stockings, a hat with black and white feathers, and he spoke to her: Where are you going Miss? And asked, Whether she had no husband?, and she answered, No. Upon which he said, she should take him. If she would follow him, he would help her, so that she should have sufficient all her life long. She said to him that he was good looking for her, and asked him where he came from. He said that he would tell her later, and that he wanted to come to her that very day. She said to him: Bring me something good, and he said: Yes. That night he came to her in her chamber and said: Come here. I love you. Wanted to give her enough, she should be his, and do what he told her. He had sex with her. He had a cold member, and called himself *Spitz Hutlein* (pointy little hat).[122]

[117] Ibid., 87.
[118] Ibid., 87.
[119] Ibid., 84.
[120] Ibid., 87.
[121] Ibid., 88.
[122] Ibid., 88-89.

In early modern Europe, if a man promised marriage to a woman and then had sex with her, their marriage was considered valid so long as there had been two witnesses of the promise. However, such promises were often made immediately before sex when there were no witnesses present. In such cases, a man could deny the validity of the marriage if the woman could not produce witnesses of the promise. This was a common problem in early modern Europe prior to the Counter-Reformation. By early modern standards, the Devil's promise of marriage prior to sex was not far off from typical practices in society. Married women also confessed to sexual relationships with the Devil. Roper notes that "if the woman was already married, the Devil sometimes promised a trade-in for a better husband," such as "good times" or money.[123]

Confessions of sex with the Devil outside of the Sabbath provide historians with a number of insights into popular culture in early modern Europe. First, these confessions show a sense of sexual and marital longing than many early modern women, whether married or widowed, seem to have experienced. These longings reveal a desire to be provided for on a material, emotional, and sexual level. Second, they show that there existed in popular culture some shared ideas about sex with the Devil including what he said, how he acted, how he dressed, and what he felt like. While it is true that many beliefs concerning diabolism reached the general public through confessions and trials, that so many confessions were similar around the same time suggests a diffusion of ideas in popular culture over which demonologists had no control. In her analysis of German witchcraft confessions of sex with the Devil, Roper notes the divergence of witchcraft confessions from demonological beliefs. Once again, she discusses the role of the accused witches' agency while undergoing trial. She says that

> It is striking how often the confessions of the accused witches did not quite accord with demonological theory. Because confessing to witchcraft nearly always meant supplying stories about copulation with the Devil, it forced women to tell convincing tales about

[123] Ibid., 89.

> sex, stories which would draw on individual detail in order to persuade the interrogators that the stories were true; and the more individual detail was supplied, the more the tales departed from the demonological conventional.[124]

It is also possible that the details about sex with the Devil that witches had confessed to found their way into the public and were intertwined with popular beliefs over time. Due to the lack of written evidence about popular beliefs concerning demonology and because of the ultimate dominance of demonology over popular beliefs, historians may never fully understand why these accused witches confessed the particular details that they did.

Although uncommon, male witches also confessed to having sex with the Devil. Roper argues that "things became more difficult when men were accused of witchcraft and began admitting to diabolic intercourse" because, although the Devil appeared to them in the form of a woman, "men's descriptions of sex with the Devil were frequently unorthodox and convoluted."[125] Roper notes one man's confession:

> Hanz Holz described how he had been seduced into witchcraft by his sister in autumn in the cow stall. He had been drunk, and had not understood what he was doing when he promised to obey her and learn the trade. Shortly after, a pretty young girl appeared in the cow stall, dressed in white with a white apron and a hairband on her head . . . he had sex with the white-clad girl on his sister's instruction. Sex with her was like that with any other woman, but cold. The girl's hand, however, was rough, hairy and chill, characteristics which suggested the true masculine nature of his paramour. Moreover, the Evil Spirit usually showed up when Holz was drunk.[126]

Another man confessed to sex with "a female devil dressed in black with a hat . . . [who] promised herself completely to him."[127] This deviated from typical demonological beliefs about sex with the Devil in which the witch promised him or herself to the Devil. Roper notes that another man confessed "that he had committed bestiality on the urging of the Devil." [128] Women

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[124] Ibid., 85.
[125] Ibid., 90.
[126] Ibid., 90.
[127] Ibid., 91.
[128] Ibid., 90.

confessed to having sex with the Devil while he was in the form of a billy-goat or in human form with animal-like characteristics (such as hooves), which may have been implicitly or indirectly alluding to bestiality. These differences support Roper's claim that witches brought into witchcraft confessions aspects of early modern peasant culture that were not present in established demonology.

Plate 13 Marginal decorations of witches flying on broomsticks.
In *Le champion des dames*, by Martin Le France (1451)

Ideas about witches' flight to the Sabbath also had several sexual connotations. This is seen in the overwhelmingly popular belief that witches flew to the Sabbath on broomsticks. Levack argues that "the broom is primarily a symbol of the female sex," was "often used in fertility rites, thus suggesting associations with ancient pagan goddesses," and "served as a phallic symbol and therefore was appropriate in a scene that was stuffed with sexuality."[129] Roper remarks how "often, the sensation of flying is described in terms of riding," and that "riding naturally had a sexual dimension."[130] She also notes that

> Most witches described how their diabolic lover accompanied them on the flight. Some gripped the mane of the goat to keep from falling off, or they held fast to their diabolic lover, sometimes riding in front of him, sometimes behind. Riding bareback with a lover on the most sexual of animals, the goat, or on a phallic rod, stick or fork, was a fantasy of sexual abandon. In images of the witches' flight, women are shown with their hair streaming out behind them, a sexual symbol which underlines the orgasmic nature of the ride.[131]

The implied sexual nature of the witches' flight was part of a larger sexual dynamic at work in diabolism. Descriptions of the flight often said that witches flew to the Sabbath with their lovers, who were the Devil or some other demons. Demonologists noted how, in many confessions about the Sabbath and diabolism in general, the sexual relationship the witch had with the Devil played an important role. Therefore, the sexual undertones of descriptions of the flight are not surprising and are, in fact, a characteristic of the perceived sexual nature of witchcraft.

Another activity that witches confessed to was cannibalistic infanticide. Both upper and lower class contemporaries were extremely concerned with the idea that witches were involved in cannibalistic infanticide both during the Sabbath and outside of it. In the *Malleus,* Kramer warned against "certain witches, [who] against the instinct of human nature, and indeed against

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[129] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 49.
[130] Roper, *Witch Craze*, 108.
[131] Ibid., 108.

the nature of all beasts . . . are in the habit of devouring and eating infant children."[132]

Demonologists believed that witches offered sacrificed children to the Devil and consumed them during the feast at the Sabbath. Belief that witches consumed murdered infants was strengthened by confessions of cannibalism during witchcraft trials. Nider relates the confession of one witch who provided details of the act:

> With unbaptized babies, even baptized ones if they are not protected by the sign of the cross and prayers, we kill them in our ceremonies, either in their cradles or by the sides of their parents, who afterwards are thought to have suffocated or to have died in some other way. We then quietly steal them from their graves and cook them in a cauldron until their bones can be separated from the boiled meat and the broth. From the more solid material we make an unguent suitable for our purposes and rites and transmutations. From the more liquid fluid, we fill up a flask or a bottle made out of skins, and he who drinks from this, with the addition of a few ceremonies, immediately becomes an accomplice and master of our sect.[133]

Cannibalism outside of the Sabbath was also a feature of witchcraft. One witch

> Confessed that in his practice of over a period of time he had killed seven babies in the womb of the woman in house where the woman and man lived, such that he aborted foetuses [sic] in the woman for many years. In the same house, he did the same to all the pregnant cows, none of which gave birth to any living thing for the same number of years, as the conclusion to this series of events proved. . . he revealed his crime by saying that he had placed a lizard under the front entrance to the house, which, if removed, would restore fertility to every animal living there.[134]

Witches who confessed to cannibalistic infanticide further affirmed demonological theory that it was a characteristic of witchcraft and a component of the witches' Sabbath.

Some demonologists argued that midwives who were witches provided the infants during the Sabbath. Despite their extremely important role in early modern society, midwives were feared and suspected to be witches by the educated and non-educated people of early modern Europe. The *Malleus* ferociously attacked midwives as witches who killed infants or offered

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[132] Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 66.
[133] Nider, *Formicarius,* 54.
[134] Ibid., 53.

them to the Devil before they had a chance to be baptized. Kramer repeated the testimony of a woman who had faced the diabolic wrath of a midwife:

> I was, she says, pregnant by my lawful husband, now dead, and as my time approached, a certain midwife importuned me to engage her to assist at the birth of my child. But I knew her bad reputation, and although I had decided to engage another woman, pretended with conciliatory words to agree to her request. But when the pains came upon me, and I had brought in another midwife, the first one was very angry, and hardly a week later came into my room one night with two other women, and approached the bed where I was lying. And when I tried to call my husband, who was sleeping in another room, all the use was taken away from my limbs and tongue, so that except for seeing and hearing I could not move a muscle. And the witch, standing between the other two, said: "See! this vile woman, who would not take me for her midwife, shall not win through unpunished." The other two standing be her pleaded for me, saying: "She has never harmed any of us." But the witch added: "Because she has offended me I am going to put something into her entrails; but, to please you, she shall not feel any pain for half a year, but after that time she shall be tortured enough." So she came up and touched my belly with her hands; and it seemed to me that she took out my entrails, and put in something which, however, I could not see. And when they had gone away, and I had recovered my power of speech, I called my husband as soon as possible, and told him what had happened.[135]

Her husband did not believe her. The woman fasted and prayed, and one day "when she wanted to perform an action of nature . . . all those unclean things fell from her body" such as "thorns, bones . . . bits of wood . . . brambles as long as a palm, as well as a quantity of other things."[136] The presence of these objects in her body proved to her husband that she had been the victim of witchcraft. Midwife witches often confessed to killing the children that were in their care. One witch "confessed that she had killed more than forty children, by sticking a needle through the crowns of their heads into their brains, as they came out from the womb."[137] Another said "that she had killed more children than she could count."[138]

It was feared that children who were not killed by witches during childbirth were offered to the Devil before they could be baptized. This is why Kramer claimed that "no one does more

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[135] Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 140.
[136] Ibid., 140.
[137] Ibid., 140.
[138] Ibid., 140.

harm to the Catholic Faith than midwives."[139] He argued that "witches are compelled to do such things at the command of evil spirits, and sometimes against their own wills. For the devil knows that, because of the pain of loss, or original sin, such children are debarred from entering the Kingdom of Heaven."[140] Kramer described how this act was carried out:

> When they do not kill the child, they blasphemously offer it to the devil in this manner. As soon as the child is born, the midwife, if the mother herself is not a witch, carries it out of the room on the pretext of warming it, raises it up, and offers it to the Prince of Devils, that is Lucifer, and to all the devils. And this is done by the kitchen fire.[141]

Testimonies of witnesses and confessions from witches affirmed this belief. One witness recounted how "he hid himself in the house and saw the whole order of the sacrilege and dedication to the devil . . . he saw also, as it seemed to him, that without any human support, but by the power of the devil, the child was climbing up the chain by which the cooking-pots were suspended."[142] The concern with the diabolic actions of midwives reveals something about the society and its concern with positions of power. A midwife's participation in a woman's pregnancy and during childbirth was seen as a threat to men who were accustomed to having the power in society. Excluded from being present during childbirth, men worried about what a witch would do during or after childbirth. By accusing and prosecuting midwives for witchcraft, men exerted dominance over women in what was one of her only forms of power.

One of the most striking elements of the Sabbath that appeared in demonological beliefs and witchcraft confessions was the work of cultural and theological inversion. The Sabbath can be viewed as an inversion of acceptable behavior. Contemporaries and historians alike noticed this relationship and discussed its significance. Stuart Clark notes that every aspect of a witch's behavior was inverted. He mentions Rémy's description of the inverted behavior of witches:

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[139] Ibid., 66.
[140] Ibid., 141.
[141] Ibid., 141.
[142] Ibid., 141.

> They love to do everything in a ridiculous and unseemly manner. For they turn their backs towards the Demons when they go to worship them, and approach them sideways like a crab; when they hold out their hands in supplication they turn them downwards; when they converse they bend their eyes toward the ground; and in other such ways behave in a manner opposite to that of other men.[143]

It can also be argued that the Sabbath shared many characteristics of the early modern Carnival. Peter Burke and other historians describe the notion of Carnival as "the world turned upside down."[144] Just as Carnival represented a disordered and inverted society, so also did witchcraft and the Sabbath represent an inversion of a moral society.

In the *Compendium Maleficarum,* Guazzo discussed many details of the Sabbath that can be seen as an inversion of the Catholic Mass. He noted that "when these members of the devil have met together, they generally light a foul and horrid fire . . . and they approach him . . . [and] they offer him pitch black candles, or infants' navel cords."[145] These offerings can be likened to the people's offerings to God during the Mass. He also described a feast which included "food which the demon has provided," wine that is "black like stale blood," and "human flesh was also set out," presenting the witches with a diabolical and Eucharistic meal.[146] Witches said "grace" before this meal that was "composed of blasphemous words in which Beelzebub himself is acclaimed the Creator and giver and Preserver of all."[147] Confessed witches admitted that this feast "satisfy neither their hunger nor their thirst, but they are just as hungry and thirsty afterwards as they were before."[148] The feast during the Mass was supposed to have the opposite effect on its participants; it was intended to "fill," at least symbolically, those who partook in it. Likewise, the belief in cannibalistic infanticide during the Sabbath is another inversion of the

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[143] Stuart Clark, *Thinking With Demons,* 14.
[144] Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009): 264.
[145] Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum,* 35.
[146] Ibid., 37.
[147] Ibid., 38.
[148] Ibid., 37.

Eucharist. Roper discusses this connection: she says that "many witches describe the standard fare at diabolic feasts as infants and wine; the meat was always consumed by groups of witches, whose bonds with one another were strengthened thereby, just as the Christian congregation becomes one body."[149] These similarities further exemplify the perceived idea that the Sabbath was an inversion of moral society.

Adoration of the Devil was another example of inversion during the Sabbath. Guazzo described how "when they approach the demons to venerate them, they turn their backs . . . when they speak they turn their faces to the ground."[150] And just as the faithful sang hymns of praise at Mass, so also did witches "sing in honor of the devil the most obscene songs to the sound of a bawdy pipe and tabor."[151] Also, as noted above, the Devil rebaptized witches during the pact they made with him. These elements of the witches' Sabbath that appear to be an inversion of the Mass shed light on the religious nature of early modern demonology. Demonologists, inquisitors, and judges used this explanation of inversion to support their belief that accused witches were guilty of heresy and Devil worship.

Popular beliefs about magic and demonological beliefs about witches and the Devil converged during trials. In the trials we are discussing, contemporaries accused their neighbors of practicing *maleficia* against them. The judges, however, were convinced that these accused women were actually worshipping the Devil in addition to performing harmful magic. What resulted was the triumph of demonology over popular beliefs that manifested in forced confessions of diabolism.

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[149] Roper, *Witch Craze*, 74.
[150] Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum*, 38.
[151] Ibid., 38.

Chapter 3: Witchcraft Trials

Early modern witchcraft trials were handled primarily by secular courts. The exceptions to this were in Spain and Italy, where the Inquisition and ecclesiastical courts retained judicial prominence. As a result, "the number of witchcraft prosecutions and executions [in Spain and Italy] during this period remained relatively low by European standards."[152] Levack notes that in the rest of Europe, both the Inquisition and Catholic and Protestant church courts declined in power during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and that their decline gave rise to secular courts. He argues that secular courts assumed control over witchcraft cases because they were "concerned for the maintenance of public order that was being seriously challenged" by the crimes of witches.[153] By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, ecclesiastical courts had become reluctant to use torture, as they had seen that it "had resulted in numerous miscarriages of justice," and recommended more moderate sentences for convicted witches.[154] Secular courts had no such reservations.

In the *Malleus*, Heinrich Kramer discussed why it was appropriate for civil courts to try accused witches, given the ecclesiastic nature of their crimes. He pointed out that "if witches are to be tried by the Inquisitors, it must be for the crime of heresy; but it is clear that the deeds of witches can be committed without any heresy."[155] He argued that, in most cases, witches were guilty of apostasy, not heresy. Kramer distinguished between heresy and apostasy:

> For a person rightly to be adjudged a heretic he must fulfill five conditions. First, there must be an error in his reasoning. Secondly, that error must be in matters concerning the faith, either being contrary to the teaching of the Church as to the true faith, or against sound morality and therefore not leading to the attainment of eternal life. Thirdly, the error must lie in one who has professed the Catholic faith, for otherwise he would be Jew

[152] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe,* 92.
[153] Ibid., 91.
[154] Ibid., 91.
[155] Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum* ,194.

> or a Pagan, not a heretic. Fourthly, the error must be of such a nature that he who holds it must still confess some of the truth of Christ as touching either his Godhead or His Manhood; for if a man wholly denies the faith, he is an apostate. Fifthly, he must pertinaciously and obstinately hold and follow that error.[156]

He stated that witches may be tried by civil courts as apostates, not heretics, because "even a witch, who has wholly or in part denied the faith . . . may have done this merely to propitiate the devil; and even if she has totally denied the faith in her heart, she is to be judged as an apostate, for the fourth condition . . . will be wanting."[157] This distinction allowed inquisitors to pass witchcraft cases along to judges and magistrates. He also pointed out that because witchcraft crimes were both civil and ecclesiastical in nature, it was okay for civil courts to try, judge, and sentence accused witches.

The *Malleus* gave inquisitors and judges a comprehensive template of how witchcraft trials should be carried out. Kramer discussed the three ways a case could begin: "the first is when someone accuses a person before a judge of the crime of heresy, or of protecting heretics, offering to prove it, and to submit himself to the penalty of talion if he fails to prove it."[158] It was this sort of accusation that brought Chiara Signori before the inquisitorial court. Kramer warned judges to be wary of such cases, since "it is not actuated by motives of faith, nor is it very applicable to the case of witches, since they commit their deeds in secret."[159] The second method involved the denunciation of a specific person, but the accuser "does not offer to prove it and is not willing to embroil himself in the matter; but says that he lays information out of zeal for the faith," or because he feared he would be excommunicated or punished for not sharing what he knew.[160] Like the first method, Kramer cautions judges about this method since the informer did

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[156] Ibid., 198.
[157] Ibid., 201.
158 Ibid., 205.
[159] Ibid., 205.
[160] Ibid., 205.

MALLEVS
MALEFICARVM,
MALEFICAS ET EARVM
hæresim frameâ conterens,
EX VARIIS AVCTORIBVS COMPILATVS,
& in quatuor Tomos iustè distributus,
QVORVM DVO PRIORES VANAS DÆMONVM
subversiones, prastigiosas eorum delusiones, superstitiosas Strigimagarum
cæremonias, horrendos etiam cum illis congressus; exactam denique
tam pestiferæ sectæ disquisitionem, & punitionem complectuntur.
Tertius praxim Exorcistarum ad Dæmonum, & Strigimagarum male-
ficia de Christi fidelibus pellenda; Quartus verò Artem Doctrinalem,
Benedictionalem, & Exorcismalem continent.
TOMVS PRIMVS.
Iudices Auctorum, capitum, versiculque non desunt.
Editio nouissima, infinitis penè mendis expurgata; cuique accessit Fuga
Dæmonum & Complementum artis exorcisticæ.
Vir sine mulier, in quibus Pythonicus, vel diuinationis fuerit spiritus, morte moriatur;
Leuitici cap. 20.
LVGDVNI,
Sumptibus CLAVDII BOVRGEAT, sub signo Mercurij Galli,
M. DC. LXIX.
CVM PRIVILEGIO REGIS.

Plate 14 The cover of the *Malleus Maleficarum.*
From Kramer, *Malleus Maleficarum* (1669 edition).

not present specific information about the crime and was unwilling to formally accuse the person in question. The third was Kramer's preferred method, and was the one that he used often when traveling throughout Germany to hunt down and prosecute witches. This method "involves an inquisition, that is, when there is no accuser or informer, but a general report that there are witches in some town or place; and then the Judge must proceed, not at the instance of any party, but simply by virtue of his office."[161] This method made it possible for witch hunters to enter towns and take control of witchcraft trials, and it gave way to the intense witch-hunts that occurred in many places in Europe. The cases we are discussing were brought about by the first method.

[161] Ibid., 205.

In most cases, accusations of maleficent magic came from members of the middle and lower classes and were then carried out by judges and inquisitors. Influenced by demonological treatises, these judges and inquisitors had no doubt that witches committed these crimes with the help of the devil. Therefore, in the majority of witchcraft trials, a judge's focus shifted away from *maleficia* and towards diabolism. Educated contemporaries were convinced (and terrified) that there were thousands or hundreds of thousands of witches in early modern Europe. Levack notes that "for people living in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the main statistical question as far as witchcraft was concerned was not how many witches had been executed but how many were still loose."[162] Judges believed that the only way to eliminate witchcraft was to get suspected witches to confess to crimes of diabolism and to carry out the harshest sentence possible against them.

Obtaining a confession and identifying accomplices were particularly important to witch hunters and judges. As Michel Foucault notes, in early modern Europe, "the confession was . . . highly valued; every possible coercion would be used to obtain it."[163] This was especially true in witchcraft cases, where public safety and morality were at stake. Torture was employed on reluctant witches in order to extract confessions. Kramer pointed out that a confession was necessary because "common justice demands that a witch should not be condemned to death unless she is convicted by her own confessions."[164] Confessions of diabolism, followed by a list of others who had participated in these "heinous acts," allowed judges to find other witches that may not have yet been accused of *maleficia*. When accused witches provided names of their

[162] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 24.
[163] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), 39.
[164] Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum,* 223.

accomplices, judges and inquisitors would then prosecute them for diabolism. They, in turn, often named additional accomplices, resulting in the large witch hunts that occurred in many parts of Europe.

Those who claimed to have witnessed or to have suffered from acts of witchcraft were asked to give a deposition under oath. They were questioned about whether they knew the accused, how long they had known the accused, what they knew of the accused's reputation, and whether or not the accused was known for being a witch. After witnesses were questioned, the inquisitor or judge decided if there was enough evidence to proceed with a trial. Kramer noted that judges "do not speak of a light suspicion, arising from slight conjectures, but of a persistent report that the accused has worked witchcraft upon children or animals."[165] If the testimonies provided enough evidence to begin a formal trial, then the accused was summoned for questioning. However, in some cases "if the Judge fears the escape of the accused, he shall cause him or her to be placed in custody."[166] Attempts to run away from a witchcraft trial were common enough in early modern Europe that suspected witches were often jailed before and during their trials. In many cases, the homes of suspected witches were searched prior to the trial or at the time of the arrest

The trial of Françatte Camont in Lorraine in 1598 began in this way. Several depositions were taken from witnesses who suspected her of committing *maleficia* and of being a witch:

> Jean Claude Maimbourg, 50, testified that during the 20 years she had been in the village, he had various quarrels with her, and she usually threatened him, saying he would repent. These threats were normally followed by the death of animals, and in one period of two years he lost eight horses and during a winter four oxen, so that since she and her husband were his neighbors he had lost animals to the value of over 1000 francs. In view of her reputations and the threats she made, he was sure she had caused most of these deaths. Seven or eight years earlier his wife had died after an illness lasting a fortnight,

[165] Ibid., 212.
[166] Ibid., 212.

> during which she often asked her daughters and others to persuade Françatte to visit her, since she suspected her of being the cause, but she only came to the funeral procession.[167]

From another deposition:

> Demenge Colas Jacquemin, of Raves, 40, had served seven years in the house of the widow of Jacquat Rolbel, hostess at Layegoutte. During this time his mistress was ill and sent him to consult a woman at Fertrupt on her behalf. He left early one morning, and as he left the village he fell, dislocating his shoulder, which he had to have set by a doctor at St Marie. On his return he told his mistress about this, and she said Françatte had joined another woman by spring after he left, saying "that the hostess had sent her valet to the Devil, and that she wished to make him sick as well as her." Nevertheless he did not think she had caused his fall, and if she had he forgave her.[168]

Several other depositions similar to these were given against Camont. The suspicion of her neighbors and the evidence they provided was enough to provoke a formal inquiry, and Camont was prosecuted by Rémy.

After enough suspicion was brought about a person, she was brought in for questioning. The *Malleus* outlined that once the accused was summoned or jailed, she was to be questioned first about her birth, her family, where she was raised, and whether she had heard of there being witches in her birthplace. She was also asked whether she believed that witches were real. Kramer noted that many of the accused denied believing in the existence of witches, and that those who denied this were seen as very suspicious by judges. The questioning continued, and the accused would be asked about her reputation, especially regarding "why the common people fear her, and whether she knows that she is defamed and hated"; she was also asked for details about the specific crimes she had allegedly committed.[169] If the accused denied the charges against her, Kramer instructed the judge to consider "her bad reputation, the evidence of the fact,

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[167] The Trial of Françatte Camont in Lorraine, 1598, The Archives of the Meurthe-et-Moselle Department at Nancy, B 8682, no. 8, transcript provided by Robin Briggs, in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* by Brian Levack (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004): 180.
[168] Briggs, the trial of Françatte Camont, 181.
[169] Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 212.

and the words of the witnesses; and he must see whether these agree together."[170] If the judge concluded that those three qualifications did not agree, the accused was released. If the opposite was true, the accused was held in prison for further questioning.

After the depositions against her were taken, Françatte Camont was brought in for questioning. Her interrogation began according to the model just described.

> She said that she was a native of a village named Baignon, near Verzou in Burgundy. Her father's name was Jean, and she had never known her mother. Her father was a "cousturier," who also begged his living, and he had one other child. She had been to see a relative at Kayserberg when they all caught the plague. The others died, while she was ill and taken to hospital, which she left three weeks later. She went around begging until she was employed by a lieutenant at Bruyeres to keep animals, which she did for five years. She had another seven years and a half in service with five masters, starting in Ban de Corcieux and ending up in Wisembach. When she was about 20 she married her husband, who was a blacksmith from France, and had been married some thirty years; she thought she was about 54.[171]

When questioned about the charges against her, Camont "denied most suggestions of quarrels and said 'that the false witnesses could not make her bad; that the more there were, the worse; and that it would be much better if they were all burned.'"[172] This response did not satisfy Rémy, as we will see below.

Transcripts from the trial of an unnamed woman at Eichstätt in 1637 show similar patterns of introductory questioning. The transcripts described how "after serious consideration by the civil councillors of the court, the prisoner, N.N. commonly known as N.N., having been taken into custody on suspicion of witchcraft, and on fifteen sworn depositions, meriting death, is thoroughly examined."[173] She was first asked her name and about her parents and family. She answered:

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[170] Ibid., 213.
[171] Briggs, the trial of Françatte Camont, 182.
[172] Ibid., 183.
[173] Hugo J.J Zwetsloot, *Friedrich Spee und die Hexenprozesse* (Trier, 1954), in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* by Brian Levack (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004): 203.

> N.N., aged forty years, does not know the names of either her father or mother, or when they were born, or where they were brought up, or when they died. She has lived with her husband twenty-three years, and during that time has borne eight children, five of whom are still living. Of the three deceased, one died of smallpox twenty-one years ago; another died eight or nine years ago at the age of six, on account of which she was told to appear at the town hall because of these suspicious circumstances of death; and the third had died six years ago, also of smallpox.[174]

She was then asked if she knew why she was brought in for questioning, to which she answered that "she knows of no reason other than the accusation of being a witch."[175] When she was told the accusations against her, she denied all of the accusations and maintained that she was not a witch.

Judges and inquisitors also looked for evidence on the accused's body to determine whether she was a witch. Often the first thing that was checked was whether the accused had the so-called "Devil's mark" somewhere on her body. Levack notes that demonologists believed that "as a sign of their allegiance the Devil imprinted a distinctive mark on the witch's body, usually in a concealed spot."[176] The transcripts of the case of the unnamed woman tried at Eichstätt relay that she was "examined for the Devil's mark, which is found on the right side of her back, near her shoulder blade, about the size of a half-kreutzer. Then, the mark is pricked and found to be insensitive; however, when she is pricked in other places, she immediately behaves as if she is mad. Many more suspicious marks are observed."[177] The transcripts of the case of Johannes Junius, mayor of Bamberg, described how he was "stripped and examined; on his right side is found a bluish mark, like a clover leaf, is thrice pricked therein, but feels no pain and no blood flows out."[178] In the minds of judges and inquisitors, the presence of the Devil's mark was often

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[174] Zwetsloot, *Friedrich Spee und die Hexenprozesse*, 204.
[175] Ibid., 204.
[176] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 30.
[177] Zwetsloot, *Friedrich Spee und die Hexenprozesse*, 204.
[178] *The Witch Persecutions*, ed. George L. Burr, 198.

a clear indication that the accused was indeed a witch. The *Malleus* also instructed judges to identify whether the accused cried during interrogation or torture, since "it is found by experience that the more they are conjured the less are they able to weep," and that "if she be a witch she will not be able to weep."[179] Kramer also cautioned readers to carefully watch the accused, since many attempted to produce fake tears that made it look like they were crying.

When an accused witch did not readily confess to crimes of *maleficia* or diabolism or, as in Sigorini's case, did not provide answers that the judge was looking for, she was usually sent to be tortured. The *Malleus* instructed judges to first strip search the accused, then "the Judge shall use his own persuasions and those of other honest men zealous for the faith to induce her to confess the truth voluntarily; and if she will not, let him order the officers to bind her with cords, and apply to her some engine of torture."[180] It also instructed judges to "let her be often and frequently exposed to torture" during her questioning, and to begin with the "more gentle" tortures.[181] After undergoing torture, the accused was to be questioned outside of the torture chamber and persuaded to confess. If she did not confess, she was notified that she would continue to undergo torture until she revealed the truth. Kramer did note that the torture should not last forever. He said that "if then she is not induced by terror to confess, the torture must be continued on the second or third day, but not repeated at that present time unless there should be some fresh indication of its probable cause."[182] If an accused did confess under torture, she was required to repeat her confession outside of the torture chamber. However, if she denied the confession outside of the torture chamber, she was once again tortured to (re-)induce a confession.

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[179] Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 227.
[180] Ibid., 225.
[181] Ibid., 226.
[182] Ibid., 226.

Plate 15 The torture of witches, possibly by James VI and I.
From *Daemonologie* (1597)

Fearful of the diabolic power that witches wielded, the *Malleus* instructed judges to take certain precautions when torturing and examining an accused witch. Kramer cautioned that judges "must not allow themselves to be touched physically by the witch, especially in any contact of their bare arms or hands; but they must always carry about them some salt consecrated on Palm Sunday and some Blessed Herbs."[183] He also suggested that "the witch should be led backward into the presence of the Judge and his assessors . . . [and] let him cross himself and approach her manfully."[184] Finally, Kramer implored judges to shave every part of an accused's

[183] Ibid., 228.
[184] Ibid., 228.

body, “for in order to preserve their power of silence they are in the habit of hiding some superstitious object in their clothes or in their hair, or even in the most secret parts of their bodies which must not be named.”[185] Demonologists feared that witches would use diabolism to physically interfere with interrogation and the outcome of the trial. They believed that witches were able to withstand the pain of torture with the help of the Devil. Therefore, before employing torture, judges often ordered that the accused be strip searched to make sure that she was not hiding any diabolical objects that could aid her during torture. Guards were also placed outside of a witch’s cell at all times to watch for indication that the Devil had visited the accused in her cell to give her strength during the trial.

Plate 16 Witches being tortured and burned at the stake.
Unknown author. 14th century C.E.

[185] Ibid., 228.

Several methods of torture were used on suspected witches. Levack claims that "the most common instrument of torture . . . was the strappado, a pulley that raised the person off the floor by his arms, which were tied behind his back."[186] Other instruments included thumb screws, leg screws, the rack, the ladder, tourniquets, and head clamps. Levack relates testimony of Dr. Fian in Scotland who "'was put to the most severe and cruel pain in the world, called the boots,' with the result that 'his legs were crushed and beaten together as small as might be, and the bones and flesh so bruised, that the blood and marrow spouted forth in great abundance.'"[187] There were also reports in Scotland "of a witch's fingernails being pulled out by pinchers."[188] In Germany, the witches' chair was commonly used. In this method, the accused witch was seated on a chair "which was heated by fire from below."[189] Other brutal tortures included

> Force-feed[ing] their prisoners with large amounts of water . . . filling the nostrils with lime and water, tying the victim to a table covered with hawthorn twigs, rolling a pin with dagger-like points up and down the spine, gouging out the eyes, chopping off the ears, squeezing the male's genital organs, and burning brandy or Sulphur over the victim's body.[190]

Although many of these methods were technically illegal, there was little regulation of torture methods used during witchcraft trials. It was commonly believed by demonologists and judges that the Devil helped witches withstand the pain of torture so that they would not confess. They hoped that brutal methods would be more successful in producing a confession from a reluctant witch.

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[186] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 83-84.
[187] Ibid., 85.
[188] Ibid., 85.
[189] Ibid., 85.
[190] Ibid., 85-86.

Torture was used to force confessions from both Françatte Camont and the unnamed woman noted above. When Camont denied the allegations against her, Rémy ordered that she be tortured. The transcript described that she was

> [r]acked severely, but would confess nothing, insisting she was a good Christian. Either later the same day or subsequently she was tortured again, being racked "very severely," and finally asked to be released, saying she had been seduced by Persin the previous year. When sat down by the fire she said the seduction had been ten years earlier. She had been very angry with her son Jacquot, who had returned from Allemaigne. He had refused to guard the animals, so she beat him. Persin gave her a purse, offering her a bigger one which he showed her. She went to the sabbat once, but only identified one of those who were dancing, Dedielle, the wife of Michiel Claudel of Ginfosse.[191]

Following the usual pattern of witchcraft trials, she also confessed that

> [s]he had paid the rent of a chicken to be let off regular attendance at the sabbat, but then said she had been more times than she could remember. She confessed to the usual activities of damaging crops. She added to the names of those she had seen there Gregoire Matthis and his daughter, of Bertrimoutier, both executed, the late Dion Bouray of Raves, Dedielle (already named), Jennon, la mother superior of Wisembach, and Laurence, wife of Colas Mandray of Wisembach.[192]

Camont repeated her confession outside of torture and was "asked if she had taken any of her children to the sabbat [sic]," to which "she insisted she had not."[193] The court ordered that she be subject to another interrogation without torture, to which "she now said she was not a witch and had only confessed this because of torture."[194] However, the court concluded that the evidence against her and her previous confessions had been enough to provide a conviction. She was sentenced to death and was executed on July 7, 1598.

The trial of the unnamed woman followed a similar pattern. When the devil's mark was found on her body, she was asked where it came from. When she responded that she did not know, she was sent to be tortured. The transcripts from her case revealed that

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[191] Briggs, the trial of Françatte Camont, 183.
[192] Ibid., 184.
[193] Ibid., 184.
[194] Ibid., 184.

> [a]fter being tied to the pulley [the strappado], and hoisted up a little, she says, that, yes, she could be a witch, yet when released, she announces she is not a witch. Therefore she is pulled up somewhat higher, and then a second and third time, and then released on the admission that she is a witch. But immediately she becomes stubborn and denies she is a witch. Then again she is pulled even more tightly on the ropes. She confesses that fourteen years ago, when she was unmarried, she had become a witch.[195]

She then asked to be released from torture, promising that she would tell the judge the truth. However, she was told "no, she must first begin confessing; she deserves to remain as she is."[196] Resigned to the fact that her torture would continue, the woman gave a full confession of her dealings with the Devil, including her sexual affair with him and how he demanded that she renounce God and instead pay homage to him. After her torture ended, the unnamed woman affirmed that her confession under torture was true: that she had indeed been seduced by the Devil. However, a few days later she recanted her previous confession, saying that "all her life she never saw the Devil nor had intercourse with him. All her previous testimony was false."[197] The judges, however, were not happy with this, and "the hangman was ordered to stretch her on the ladder."[198] She quickly agreed to confess to other dealings with the Devil if the torture ceased. She gave further testimony and the names of two other witches with whom she had dealings, "whereupon she is led back to the torture chamber and the list of accomplices is read to her, and she confirms it."[199] The transcript ends with an entry from December 17, 1637, stating that "she die[d] penitent."[200]

The 1628 trial of Johannes Junius exemplified the effect torture had on confessions. The trial records noted that he was first questioned without torture. Despite being presented with alleged witnesses to his crimes, Junius maintained his innocence. He was then tortured with

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[195] Zwetsloot, *Friedrich Spee und die Hexenprozesse*, 205.
[196] Ibid., 205.
[197] Ibid., 207.
[198] Ibid., 207.
[199] Ibid., 209.
[200] Ibid., 209.

thumb screws, but he refused to confess to witchcraft. When leg screws were applied he still would not confess, and he maintained his faith and allegiance to God. His response was the same when we underwent the strappado. However, "on July 5, the above named Junius is without torture, but with urgent persuasions, exhorted to confess, and at last begins and confesses" to witchcraft and various dealings with the Devil.[201] Junius' case is made more interesting still by a letter that he wrote to his daughter from his cell after confessing to witchcraft. In it, he offered a rather different sense of his torture and subsequent confession:

> Many hundred thousand good-nights, dearly beloved daughter Veronica. Innocent have I come into prison, innocent have I been tortured, innocent must I die. For whosever comes into the witch prison must become a witch or be tortured until he invents something out of his head and – God pity me – bethinks him of something.[202]

He then gave a detailed narrative of his experience in the torture chamber, and reminded her that "I confessed in order to escape the great anguish and bitter torture, which it was impossible for me longer to bear."[203] He was burned at the stake for his alleged crimes.

One contemporary, Friedrich Spee, was outspoken about his disdain for the way in which witchcraft trials were carried out. Spee was a Jesuit priest who served as a confessor in many German witchcraft cases. While Spee did not deny the reality of witchcraft, he argued for fair trials based on sound evidence. He denounced the proceedings of the trials, first arguing that there often was not enough evidence to prosecute the accused. He asserted that

> If he does not yet have much evidence against her, then the inquisitor has his men, often immoral and disreputable ones, inquire into everything in her past, and of course it cannot happen otherwise than something which she has either said or done presents itself which those men with their mean-spirited interpretation can easily twist and turn into proof of magic.[204]

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[201] *The Witch Persecutions*, ed. George L. Burr, 199.
[202] Ibid., 201.
[203] Ibid., 202.
[204] Friedrich Spee von Langenfeld, *Cautio Criminalis, or a Book on Witch Trials*, ed. Marcus Hellyer (Charlottesville, Va., 2003), in *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* by Brian Levack (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004): 147.

He criticized the proliferation of accusations against the accused witches, saying "if there are any people who ever wanted to do her harm, they now have a wonderful opportunity to hurt her. They can allege whatever they want, they will easily find things. So they shout from all sides that she is incriminated by strong evidence."[205] He also argued that once the judge had made up his mind that the accused is guilty, there is nothing she can say or do to change his mind:

> So either she confesses or she does not. Whatever happens, she is done for in either case. If she confesses, the matter is clear, as I said, and she is executed. Any retraction is made completely in vain, as we showed above. If she does not confess, then the torture is repeated two, three or four times. Whatever the judges want is permitted. For there is no rule governing the duration, severity, or repetition of torture in excepted crimes. The judges do not think that they have committed any sin here which they will have to confront in the court of their own conscience.[206]

Spee ends his admonishment of witchcraft trials with a plea that "our rulers take care of themselves and their whole flock, for one day GOD will require as accurate an accounting as possible for it from their hands."[207]

The cases of Camont, the unnamed woman, Julius, and the testimony of Spee show the amount of influence that torture had on confessions. Foucault argues that torture had two roles: "the regulated pain involved in judicial torture was a means of both punishment and investigation."[208] In these cases, investigation played the larger role. Torture was utilized in the majority of witchcraft trials to extract information, and, in the eyes of interrogators, it served its purpose. As we have seen, the torture of an accused witch did not end when she confessed to crimes of diabolism. Rather, she would continue to be tortured until she provided enough details concerning her diabolism to satisfy the interrogator. Levack also argues that confessions of diabolism obtained from torture or the threat of torture were "contaminated . . . since it was more

[205] Spee, *Cautio Criminalis*, 147.
[206] Ibid., 149.
[207] Ibid., 152.
[208] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 42.

likely that the confession would indicate what the torturer wished to hear rather than what the accused had actually done."[209] We have seen this to be true in the cases mentioned.

The efficacy of bodily examinations and torture served to transform the alleged practices of witchcraft into the evidence of diabolism. The accused witch was most likely unfamiliar with demonological theory and the connection of witchcraft and the Devil. For her, witchcraft was the practice of harmful magic, not Devil-worship. Judges and inquisitors relied on their knowledge and expertise in these matters to guide the accused witch into confessing to diabolism.

Judges did not just rely on torture to extract confessions. Additionally, interrogators used suggestive questions both inside and out of the torture chamber. Often their questions were aimed more at reaffirming what they already believed to be true than revealing the accused's side of the story. As we saw with the case of Chiara Signorini, the Inquisitor was convinced that Signorini's visions of the Virgin Mary were actually the result of diabolical hallucinations. Although Signorini maintained that Mary was visiting her, Ginzburg argues that what followed was "a classic example of suggestive interrogation intended to lead the defendant's responses along a premeditated course."[210] Further questions about her visions revealed that "the Virgin did appear before her, promising vengeance, and, in fact, [Mary] did avenge her against the many who were injuring her," and that she had she had "offered her soul and body to her" and had "on various occasions paid homage to her."[211] Ginzburg notes that the judge's suggestive questions eventually produced the desired effect: that "Chiara adapted herself to the questioning of the vicar and submissively followed his lead, even in her efforts to save herself."[212] If we look at her responses from the perspective of the Inquisitor, we see that his questions allowed the

[209] Ibid., 15.
[210] Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical*, 7.
[211] Ibid., 8.
[212] Ibid., 9.

stereotypical beliefs of diabolism to emerge, and it is easy to see how he believed she had actually given herself over to the devil, not the Virgin Mary.

Levack contends that "suggestive questioning became routine in witchcraft cases" and encouraged "the publication of sets of questions to be asked of witches."[213] The *Malleus,* too, attested to this practice. Kramer instructed that "a prudent and zealous Judge should seize his opportunity and choose his method of conducting his examination according to the answers or depositions of the witnesses, or as his own previous experience or native wit indicates to him."[214] Demonological works such as the *Malleus* provided interrogators with a sort of road map for witchcraft trials in which the route was well-established for those in power, but not for those under investigation. Given this interplay of expectation and improvisation, it is unsurprising that many of the learned demonological beliefs found their way into what were originally *maleficia* trials.

[213] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 86.
[214] Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum,* 227.

Conclusion

While it is true that demonologists influenced confessions through their questions and the use of torture, the witches themselves played a part in the evolution of demonological beliefs. Roper argues that many of the confessions about witchcraft not only came from learned witchcraft beliefs, but also from popular beliefs about witchcraft. She writes that

> [f]or a learned judge like Rémy, at home in classical culture and skilled in Latin, encounters with witches summoned up half-remembered tales about creatures who did not fit into the neat categories of Christian demonology . . . [but] when those accused of being witches confessed to what they broadly knew about witchcraft they used their own idiom, talking not about complex Satanic rituals in which every detail of the Mass was inverted but about local village festivities they knew. Under interrogation, every witch had to develop an account of her life with the Devil and her fellow witches. The outlines of her confession were predictable . . . Yet nearly every witch made the story her own, conveying complex emotions or providing idiosyncratic detail.[215]

In instances where witches confessed to details that were not part of or consistent with learned demonology, the judge was faced with the challenge of understanding the new aspect of witchcraft that had been brought to light. Roper argues that, ultimately, witchcraft trials were a dialogue between witches and judges; more specifically, they were a dialogue between demonology and popular culture. Although it is impossible to define how much agency witches had at any given point during their individual trials, the idea that they provided the details that demonologists lacked is an important contribution to the study of early modern witchcraft trials that few historians have acknowledged.

It may be tempting to attempt an explanation for the specific details provided in confessions. My initial reaction is to trace the details of their confessions back to popular culture and the societies in which these witches lived. While this analysis is outside the scope of this project, it does offer some insight into historiographical issues and the problems of evidence in

[215] Roper, *Witch Craze*, 107.

witchcraft cases. In these trials, the accused found themselves at an obvious disadvantage. Not only did their interrogators and judges already believe them to be guilty from the outset, but these men in power utilized state-sponsored violence and could invoke publicly-legitimized forms of authority that they obtained from and reinforced through access to demonological theory and writings. Popular beliefs about magic and details of witchcraft were likely widely held due to sets of unwritten and local beliefs. Demonologists, however, had access to learned beliefs in written works that contained supporting and new evidence about the diabolic nature of witchcraft from areas all over Europe.

Here, then, we see that these trials were not only an encounter between popular and learned witchcraft beliefs. They also show a triumph of written knowledge over oral culture and uncodified beliefs. This triumph of the written over the spoken word is discussed in Elizabeth Einstein's *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*. She argues that the invention of the printing press had a revolutionary effect on myriad areas of early modern society. The triumph of written knowledge would help to solidify the related victory of institutionalized expertise over local customs. This is clearly illustrated in Ginzburg's analysis of the *benandanti* of northern Italy.

The *benandanti* believed and testified that they went out to fight witches. Ginzburg relates how Battista Moduco was interrogated in 1580 and confessed that

> I am a benandante because I go with the others to fight four times a year, that is during the Ember Days, at night; I go invisibly in spirit and the body remains behind; we go forth in the service of Christ, and the witches of the devil; we fight each other, we with bundles of fennel and they with sorghum stalks."[216]

[216] Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,* trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press: 2013): 6.

Moduco told the inquisitor that "one enters [the company of the *benandanti*] at the age of twenty, and is freed at the age of forty, if he so wishes," and that "members of this 'company' are all those who 'are born with the caul.'"[217] Other testimonies tell similar, if not the exact same story. However, the inquisitors who heard their case "rejected, with mingled shock and indignation, the paradoxical boasts of the benandanti to be the champions of Christ's faith,'" and "the judges tried to identify the benandanti . . . with the witches who were followers and worshippers of the devil."[218]

The struggle between the beliefs of the *benandanti* and the inquisitors lasted several decades. Ginzburg argues that "what was lacking . . . between benandanti and inquisitors was some mutual meeting ground, even if based on hostility and repression. The benandanti were ignored as long as possible. Their 'fantasies' remained enclosed within a world of material and emotional needs which inquisitors neither understood, nor even tried to understand."[219] The case of the *benandanti* is very similar to the accused witches we have been discussing. The *benandanti*, like the accused witches, held a series of popular beliefs unknown to and not believed by the authorities of their time. Ginzburg argues that the widespread local beliefs in the *benandanti* were indeed a remnant of an ancient pagan fertility cult that had survived into the early modern period. He also notes that "the thing that stands out is the vitality of these beliefs that were impressed upon the minds of the Friulian peasants of this period as an imperishable heritage."[220] These beliefs had been part of the oral culture of the Friuli for centuries, and were well-known throughout that society.

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[217] Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, 6.
[218] Ibid., 28.
[219] Ibid., 68.
[220] Ibid., 91.

Despite the strength in Friulian society, customary beliefs about the *benandanti* were slowly transformed by the Inquisition over time because of the inquisitors' insistence that the *benandanti* were actually witches. Ginzburg notes that "this tightly wound fabric of beliefs became unraveled for the first time" at the end of 1618 with the arrest and trial of Maria Panzona.[221] At the beginning of her trial Panzona testified that she was a *benandanti* and had seen witches during the customary battle between the two forces. When she reported that she "had been present at the battle 'in the form of a black cat,'" the inquisitor dutifully replied that she, too, must be a witch. However, Panzona responded that "I have never performed spells or charms, because I am a *biandante,* and benandanti are all opposed to witches and warlocks."[222] Later in her trial Panzona testified that "witches . . . consigned their menses to the devil-abbess, who then restored them so that they could be used 'to injure people, make them fall sick, become stunted and even die.' She herself had received 'a certain red substance' from the devil which she had hidden in the wall of her house."[223] When the substance was located and brought before her, Panzona said that "this is a present from the devil, which I use to free bewitched people, especially children whose blood has been sucked from them. The devil told me it was good for this."[224] She eventually confessed to forming a pact with the Devil and attending the Sabbath. Panzona's testimony was the first that strayed outside the typical *benandanti* claims.

After Panzona's trial, several *benandanti* trials followed, resulting in the same abjuration of traditional beliefs and confessions of diabolic witchcraft. This transformation of beliefs over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries exemplifies the victory of textual "facts" over oral traditions. Although the traditions of the *benandanti* were locally preserved and communicated

[221] Ibid., 93.
[222] Ibid., 93.
[223] Ibid., 94.
[224] Ibid., 94.

throughout society, professed *benandanti* eventually submitted to the authority of inquisitors and demonological witchcraft beliefs.

The situation of the *benandanti* was an exceptional instance of a paradigmatic development. The witches discussed in this paper were, however, not members of socially-coherent and cohesive groups like the *benandanti* were. Therefore, they were at an even greater disadvantage than the *benandanti*. While popular beliefs about magic were widespread throughout Europe, the triumph of the written over the spoken word in witchcraft trials was more complete because of the lack of such socially cohesive groups that promoted specific beliefs. During the trials, the beliefs that were shared among peasant contemporaries were increasingly put at the mercy of learned expertise, until the point where demonology completely dominated the discourse on witchcraft beliefs.

What we have traced through this analysis of a specific subset of witchcraft trials is the obvious triumph of demonology over popular magic beliefs. The state-sponsored authority and violence afforded to judges and inquisitors allowed them to impress their beliefs onto accused witches, who in turn quickly conformed their confessions to demonological beliefs out of fear and under the pain of torture. Digging deeper, we find that this dominance of demonological thought in witchcraft trials was part of a larger victory of the written word over oral culture. The judge's initial belief that the accused was guilty of diabolism couple with the use of suggestive questioning and torture slowly transformed popular beliefs into demonological ones. And, while it is true that the peasants involved in witchcraft denunciations were far more concerned with *maleficia* than they were with diabolism, the insistence that all witchcraft was in fact diabolical affected popular beliefs. We saw this specifically in the case of the *benandanti*.

A more obvious transformation occurred in demonology. Initially inquisitors and judges utilized demonological theory as a guidebook to understand and prosecute witches. As the trial unfolded, the use of torture and suggestive questioning was key to learning new information about the Devil. Roper says that "there was always more to find out about the Devil: aspects of his appearance or details of his habits . . . the interrogators did not terminate the interrogation when they had enough of a confession to justify an execution but continued until the witch had confessed all she knew."[225] What emerged from the insistence to affirm established beliefs and the desire to learn more about diabolism was a fusion of ideas that both parties contributed to. Levack also finds this to be true, noting that "although the various ideas regarding witchcraft were synthesized and spread mainly by the authors of learned treatises, their fusion first occurred in the courtroom, where inquisitors used torture to confirm their suspicions and to realize their fantasies. In most cases the treatises drew upon and developed ideas that had first emerged in the torture chamber."[226]

Viewed collectively, then, the work of the demonologists might be likened to the work of "the bricoleur," as put forth by Claude Lévi Strauss. He remarks that the bricoleur "builds up structured sets, not directly with other structured sets, but by using the remains and debris of events."[227] Demonology was likewise shaped by the "debris" of the trials. The interrogators who did not have access to the details of the Devil turned to those who did in order to discover the missing pieces of their already-established theory. The instruments available to learned beliefs, such as torture, literacy, and textuality, established the dominance of demonological beliefs over popular ones. However, the survival and promotion of demonological expertise depended on its

[225] Roper, *Witch Craze*, 51.
[226] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 87.
[227] Claude Lévi Strauss, *The Savage Mind*. Trans. by George Weidenfield and Nicholson Ltd., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966): 14.

contact with, rather than its separation from, the popular beliefs of magic and witchcraft. The discussion of this transformation is important because it highlights the deep divide concerning magical beliefs of demonologists and judges versus villagers and townspeople while also acknowledging the dependence of demonology on the cooperation and confessions of accused witches.

This analysis provides deeper insight into the relationship and exchanges between the interrogator and the witch, the authority of the state and the customs of peasants, and popular beliefs and demonology, insights which have yet to be fully developed by historians. By tracing the transformation of witch trials from accusations of *maleficia* to convictions of diabolism, I have found that the stereotypical early modern witch looked very different to peasants then she did to the theologians and scholars of witchcraft. The image of the witch also underwent a transformation during the trial from a maleficent member of society bent on doing harm to her neighbors, to a Devil-worshipper who participated in the Sabbath and diabolic activities.

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