

“Ihr verfluchte Truden...” A Psychoanalytical Study of the Witch Mania in Râșnov, Transylvania, in 1732

GABRIEL BALACI
DORIN-IOAN RUS

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The designation of individuals as the source of evil, by projection, allows for a regulation of the functioning of society, modeled on the individual psyche.

Gabriel Balaci

Lecturer at the Vasile Goldiș Western University in Arad, editor-in-chief of the *Romanian Journal of Psychoanalysis*.

Dorin-Ioan Rus

Independent researcher, author, among others, of the vol. **Wald- und Ressourcenpolitik im Siebenbürgen des 18. Jahrhunderts** (Forest and resource policy in 18th-century Transylvania) (2017).

THE AIM of this study is the psychological analysis of some testimonies from a 1732 witchcraft trial in Râșnov (Rosenau, Barcarozsnyó), today a town in southeastern Transylvania, in the present-day county of Brașov. Charged with witchcraft were Downen Nith, the widow of Rith Mechels, their daughter Downen Catharina, and her daughters Catharina and Agatha (Downen Nith's granddaughters), Downen Rosin, wife of Krafft Hannes, Downen Threin, Rosina Hannes, wife of Krafft Hannes, and Downen Nith's granddaughter, all from Râșnov. The trial took place in Râșnov in 1732, ending with the acquittal of the “witch” (Saxon Trude/n) Downen Nith. The events, recounted by the witnesses, span a period of 20 years (circa 1712–1732), are based on

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their recollections and focus on elements which in the mentality of the time constituted acts of witchcraft.

Speranța Milancovici, in her article “About Sorcery as an Alternate Mean of Communication and Validation of Oneself,” points out that

*European or exotic, sorcery can be analyzed starting from typical situations, easy to inventory, in terms that allow its identification, at the level of social implications as well as mental manifestations, with a system where silence and word, strength and weakness, force and death are closely related. The numerous ethnological and historical works on the phenomenon of witchcraft have not, however, removed all the shadows and difficulties of interpretation which are attached to the definition and explanation of the phenomenon.*¹

From a psychological perspective, today these acts seem to be products of the imagination, difficult to accept as possible. However, in our study we must take into account the historical and social context in which witchcraft was considered possible and true. Even though psychology did not exist as a science in the period to which we are referring, psychic phenomena, psychic developmental processes and even mental disorders existed. People’s relationship to witchcraft is influenced by the cultural context in which they live and have constructed their personality; it is known to be influenced by three factors: heredity, environment, and education. We will therefore approach people’s testimonies according to the socio-cultural and historical context in which they took place. Man’s relationship to witchcraft is very close to man’s relationship to dreaming. Both the manifest dream—i.e., the images that our psyche forms during sleep—and the somatic manifestations considered as consequences of witchcraft, may be expressions of unconscious or repressed contents. Repression is a defense mechanisms that the ego uses to protect itself from unconscious contents (desires, fantasies) which, if they became conscious and manifest, would expose it to feelings of shame or guilt. Such contents are related to sexuality or aggressiveness (sexual drives, aggressive drives).

Status of historical research

THE FIRST Transylvanian historian who critically dealt with the history of this phenomenon was Friedrich Müller (1828–1915); he had a thorough theological education, serving as bishop of the Evangelical C.A. Church in Transylvania from 1893 to 1906. His work deals with witchcraft from a theological point of view, and it presents the history of witchcraft in an-

cient and medieval Europe, as well as the legislation in Hungary, of which Transylvania was a part. He points out that witchcraft trials in the intra-Carpathian territory only took place in the 17th century, later than in Western Europe. He also analyzes the way in which the trials were conducted and the motives for which the alleged witches were accused.²

In his book, Carl Göllner presents a history of witchcraft trials in medieval and pre-modern Transylvania, using legal acts and documents published up to 1970. The structure of the chapters is the same as in Friedrich Müller: witchcraft in the pre-Reformation period, the Reformation, then the great trials of the 17th century, ending with the period of the Extinction and the last trials of the 18th century.³

Hans Gerhard Pauer describes the trial in Mediaș of July 1663, in which Hannes Schebeschin, a peasant girl from Băgaciu (Bogeschdorf, Szászbogács) was accused of witchcraft, tortured and sentenced to death by burning. The charges were based on superstitions.⁴ Carmen Popa has translated and analyzed a judicial protocol of a witch trial from 1697; the text is discussed from the point of view of its translation.⁵ Ioana Constantin's article examines an interrogation protocol of a witness from a witch trial in 16th century Sibiu and analyzes the elements of magical belief that appear in it, which characterized the thinking of people in both Transylvania and pre-modern Western Europe.⁶

Hungarian historians of Hungary and Transylvania have also dealt with the subject. The volume edited by Gábor Klaniczay and Eva Pócs examines urban and rural conflicts related to witchcraft from the early modern era to the present, examines the role of healers, midwives and wily men in social, legal, medical and religious contexts, and traces the decriminalization of witchcraft and the decline of persecution in Hungary and Transylvania.⁷ The book edited by Péter Tóth is a collection of texts from the archives of the town of Sighișoara (Schäßburg, Segesvár) containing witch trials that were mostly recorded in the town of Sighișoara and the neighboring villages between 1666 and 1748. The publication contains both insult trials for witchcraft and other cases such as criminal trials. The more than 600 testimonies provide an insight into the conflict-filled daily life of the inhabitants of early modern Sighișoara.⁸

We might consider that people's inability to manage and resolve various conflicts leads to an increase in psychological tensions related to aggression, envy, or jealousy. In general, people are not willing to take on such feelings (jealousy, envy, hatred), even today, just as they were not able to in the 18th century. They were projected onto the persons towards whom these feelings arose. Witchcraft was seen as a way of settling these conflicts, but it was also a good reason for accusations that masked the real reasons that aroused feelings that were difficult to accept.

International State of the Art

IN RECENT decades, European research into witchcraft has modernized in many areas and moved away from the strongly Enlightenment-influenced approach of modern rationalists towards the primitive and superstitious practices of the pre-modern era. At the same time, interdisciplinary approaches, combining primarily history, legal history, linguistics and anthropology, have drawn an increasingly detailed and multifaceted picture of witchcraft in the European cultural space.

In the field of *low history*, we should mention the work of Gudrun Gersmann,⁹ Rainer Beck,¹⁰ Owen Davies,¹¹ Claudia Kauertz,¹² Erika Münster-Schröer,¹³ Katrin Moeller,¹⁴ Michael Ströhmer,¹⁵ Lyndal Roper,¹⁶ Jonathan Strom,¹⁷ Robert Zagolla,¹⁸ Jürgen Martschukat,¹⁹ and Valerie Kivelson.²⁰

In the field of the *history of mentalities*, the works of Katrin Fischer,²¹ Elisabeth Reis, Christian Rohr,²² Ulinka Rublack,²³ Ulinka Rublack,²⁴ Thomas Winkelbauer,²⁵ Wolfgang Behringer/Sönke Lorenz/Dieter R. Bauer,²⁶ Thomas Keith,²⁷ should be mentioned.

Approaches to *theological and religious history*—here we have the works of Franz Gunther/Franz Irsigler,²⁸ Ulrich Pfister,²⁹ Miriam Rieger.³⁰ Socio-anthropological approaches were pursued by Alan Macfarlane,³¹ Manfred Wilde,³² Herbert Pohl,³³ and Barbara Groß.³⁴ The history of witchcraft was also approached from the point of view of gender history. Of the rich literature on the subject, selective mention should be made of: Ingrid Ahrendt-Schulte,³⁵ Lara Apps/Andrew Gow,³⁶ Willem de Blécourt,³⁷ Monat Chollet,³⁸ Peter Arnold Heuser,³⁹ Claudia Opitz,⁴⁰ and Helga Schnabel-Schüle.⁴¹

Among other things, during National Socialism, a scientific analysis of the persecution of witches was also attempted. Between 1935 and 1944, on the instructions of Heinrich Himmler, an index of victims of witch persecution was compiled as part of a “special order for witches,” which has now become a subject of historical interest under the name “Himmler’s Witch Index.”⁴²

In her socio-psychological work, Evelyn Heinemann set out to investigate the unconscious motives behind the European witch-hunts of the 15th–18th centuries. The fear of witches and a certain form of misogyny manifested in it are understood as epoch-specific phenomena in the sense of a basic disposition of the masses. The author works with the concept of projection or projective identification. As a result of the changes occurred in the early modern period, a high potential for aggression and fear developed within society, which gave rise to a desire for control, punishment and, in certain circumstances, the pre-emptive annihilation of social losers. In addition, a worldview based on a sharp division between the forces of good and the forces of evil is seen as typical of the

early modern period. “God and the devil, Mary and the witch” were the defining poles of popular imagination.⁴³

Freud addressed occult phenomena also through the prism of unconscious desires and in association with dreaming in the article “Dreaming and Occultism” from his *New Lectures on Introduction to Psychoanalysis*.⁴⁴ He identifies three categories of factors that influence our attitude and implicitly the way we interpret the phenomenon of witchcraft:

1. the intellect, by which we try to explain the phenomenon logically. This factor serves to deny the occult dimension of witchcraft;
2. the psychic factor, by which he understands man’s predisposition towards credulity in regard to these phenomena or to phenomena called miracles;
3. the historical factor, as Freud emphasizes that occult phenomena remain the same throughout the ages.

Even if in certain periods the purely imaginary nature of occult phenomena was considered to have been demonstrated, they reappear after certain periods of time and are regarded with the same fear and credulity by people. Taking into account the three factors identified by Freud, but also the three factors that contribute to the formation of personality—heredity, environment, education—we can deduce that the optimal analysis of this phenomenon must be made from a psycho-cultural perspective. Witchcraft has been, and still is, accepted in different cultures as a real phenomenon, as a manifestation of evil forces. The conception of witchcraft was culturally integrated, thus influencing the formation of the personality of individuals raised in that cultural environment. Mention should also be made of comparative regional studies, which interdisciplinarily analyzed witchcraft and witchcraft processes in different regions: the Duchy of Bavaria, neighboring eastern Swabia and the southern parts of Middle Franconia and today’s Upper Palatinate,⁴⁵ the county of Lippe,⁴⁶ Thuringia,⁴⁷ and Southwest Germany.⁴⁸

The documentary sources on the trial of Râșnov are archival, kept at the National Archives of Romania, County Department of Brașov, Town Hall Collection of the city of Brașov for 1732, and consist of: Document 141: Indictment against the woman Downen Nith of Râșnov, accused of witchcraft, German language; Document 142: Questions for indictment against the woman Downen Nith of Râșnov, accused of witchcraft, German language; Document 143: Supplementary inquiry with depositions of witnesses 18–25 in the witchcraft trial against Downen Catharina and her daughters Catharina and Agatha, accused of witchcraft, German language; Document 144: Interrogation of Downen Rosin, married to Krafft Hannes, Downen Nith, widow of Rith Mechels, Hannes and Downen Threin, accused of witchcraft, German language; Document 145: Inquest before the Council of Râșnov in the presence of two senators from Brașov

against Rosina, wife of Krafft Hannes, and her grandmother, Downen Nith, accused of witchcraft by Römers Jacob, with 25 witnesses; Document 146: Hearing of witnesses before the Council of Râșnov at the request of Jung Römers Jacob against Jung Krafft Hannesin Rosina, with 11 depositions of witnesses. The entire trial consists of a single file of 22 pages, written on both sides. The trial closes with the acquittal of the “witch” Downen Nith. We have no information about the fate of the other defendants.

Historical and Legal Background

THE NAME Rosenau (Râșnov, Barcarozsnyó) comes from the Slavic *ruzzi* = rye (German *Roggen*) *Ruz* + *en* + *ovo* = a place where rye grows. Râșnov was an ecclesiastical possession of the Kronstadt chapter, first attested as such in 1394. From the administrative point of view, the parish is a place of the free district of Kronstadt, documented as such since 1377. Râșnov becomes a borough = oppidum by receiving the weekly market license in 1427.⁴⁹

The inhabitants of Râșnov were engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry. In 1500, flax weavers are attested, with the permission of the guild of Brașov, and in 1522 wainwrights, who in 1620 are organized in a guild. In 1588 we have blacksmiths and between 1718 and 1729 wood turners.⁵⁰ Râșnov has an imposing peasant defensive fortress, which was probably built before 1231. It was occupied and sacked by the Kuruc in 1705; on 29 August 1718 it was burned together with all the provisions and valuables deposited for safekeeping by the wealthy people from the neighboring towns.⁵¹

In the run-up to the trial of 1732, the borough of Râșnov burned on several occasions; devastating fires, caused by lightning and/or incursions of the Kuruc, are mentioned on 17 March 1698,⁵² 26 and 27 June 1715, 26–27 June 1715,⁵³ 30 August 1718, including the fortified fortress, 1724,⁵⁴ the best houses in Râșnov burned⁵⁵ in 1726 and on 28 April 1727,⁵⁶ and the plague epidemic of 1719 ravages Râșnov, killing 1,166 people (521 Saxons and 711 Vlachs), leaving 57 households uninhabited.⁵⁷ In the following year, 1720, the community hit by the fire of 1718 and the plague of 1719 received small donations from other Transylvanian towns, and the Gubernium relieved it of some of its debts.⁵⁸ On 24 July 1731, during the night, a storm with walnut-sized hail destroyed the orchards on the border between Râșnov and Cristian (Neustadt, Keresztényfalva). In December 1704, between 12 July and 19 November 1705, the Kuruc plundered the fair and the fortress, which was then taken over by the Austrian imperial troops, on 29 July 1706, Râșnov and Cristian⁵⁹ were plundered by the

Kuruc, and then again on 9 January and 4 April 1707, with the loss of sheep, goats, oxen, and the killing of 3 people.⁶⁰

We can imagine the fear that such phenomena produced. It was not only due to the encounter with “witchcraft,” but also to man’s inability to explain the nature of this phenomenon, its cause. Fear decreased once a credible explanation was found, but one that was in line with the cultural context of the time. The man in the street had no access to science, at least in today’s sense. Fear, in general, activates unconscious feelings of guilt in the psyche. The danger or phenomenon that is perceived as a punishment makes the person’s ego incapable of activating adequate defense mechanisms. In the absence of an adequate internal defense, the ego resorts to archaic defense mechanisms, such as projection. The source of the “evil” is projected onto something concrete, either a person, as in the case of witches, or various objects. In this way, by annihilating the source of evil, i.e., the person designated by the community as the “scapegoat,” man had the illusion of protection and diminished his feelings of guilt. Danger was no longer seen as the consequence of personal sins, but as the manifestation of evil, of the aggressiveness of the person considered to be the cause of it.

The Juridical Context

RÂȘNOV HAD a borough judge who initially acted only as a subordinate attaché of the Kronstadt judge and only had a share of the court fees. The borough judge had a share of the court fees only from the second half of the 16th century. The local court judge was a special court of the Kronstadt district. The district court of Râșnov was responsible for the town of Râșnov and the neighboring free rural communities of Cristian and Vulcan (Wolken-dorf, Szászvolkány).⁶¹ Among the Lutheran priests active in Râșnov in the period we are analyzing, we should mention: Martin Albrich (priest between 1660 and 1694); in 1691 he helped the community with 8000 Gulden;⁶² Markus Fronius, active between 1701 and 1703, writer and scholar, who later became a priest in Brașov; in 1702 he introduced the “Katechismus Examina publice” in the Evangelical Church and “privatim” in the private houses of pastors and deacons.⁶³

The witch trials were conducted by “political domini,” Saxons, Szeklers, and nobles, with an arbitrary interpretation of the “statutory law” in the royal land and the “tripartitum” in the counties.⁶⁴ Until 1753, witchcraft trials were held and tried in Saxon courts.⁶⁵ The relationship that Transylvania entered with Austria at the beginning of the 18th century did not have a direct influence on witch trials, since the state treaty on which this was based did not grant the ruler the right to legislate.⁶⁶ In principle, the religious offenses of witches were to be pun-

ished by spiritual judges, and misdemeanors by secular judges.⁶⁷ We note that the role of judge was given only to men, and the accused were often women. This makes us approach this legal context also from the perspective of the male-female relationship. The woman was often associated with “temptation, sin,” considering that she could seduce the man unable to defend himself against the sexual urges triggered by the image of the woman. We can imagine that this perspective played an important part in the decisions made by the judges. People were taught by the papal authority that witches harmed children and adults, made animals sick, and destroyed crops.⁶⁸ This can also be understood from the perspective of male involvement in family life. In other words, when a man is in love with a woman other than his own wife, he becomes less involved in family life, which will have an impact on his role as a father, but also on his economic function within the family. The intensification of witch-hunts in the late Middle Ages was certainly favored by threatening epidemics and natural disasters.⁶⁹ In fact, “witches” never made any profit from their supposed magical powers. Many of them were old and poor, and their senseless destructive instincts were devoid of self-interest.⁷⁰ There were witches who could heal without causing harm, and witches who could cause harm/damage but did not heal.⁷¹ The people of the pre-modern period, let alone those of earlier periods, had no medical knowledge of how to cure illness or injury; to them, illness was something that came from the outside, like a foreign body.⁷² As such, in the absence of medical personnel, it was natural to turn to people with healing “powers,” “witches,” barbers and grocers.

Who Were Those Accused of Witchcraft and How Was the Trial Initiated?

Witchcraft trials in Europe, including Transylvania, were conducted according to the “Malleus Maleficarum” (Hexenhammer), published in 1487; this was a code of witch trials designed to help judges;⁷³ after the Reformation, it served as a guide even for Protestant witch-hunts and also enjoyed an authoritative reputation in Transylvania.⁷⁴

The judge had to recommend denunciation to anyone who wished to bring a “witch” to court. The denouncer did not undertake to provide evidence, but only swore to the truth of his allegations, which could also refer only to individual circumstantial evidence, bad reputation, and other uncontrollable assumptions; the denouncer also did not have to offer bail (*poena talionis*), as in a normal criminal trial, and his accusations remained secret. The person making

the denunciation is therefore presumed to be acting out of credulity and thus not guilty of any offense if the accused is acquitted. The judges may also initiate proceedings against a woman on their own initiative, solely on the basis of a bad reputation (infamy).⁷⁵ The most common accusations were of evil actions against animals, people and or households.

Suspensions were heightened if a close relative of the accused had been convicted as a “witch” for the same “crime.”⁷⁶ In the Rosenau trial of 1732, it is mentioned that the aunt of the accused Downen Nith, named Durmes Rosa, was burned as a “witch” after a trial by ordeal: “My mother’s sister, named Rosa, was accused of witchcraft, put in the water and died in prison.”⁷⁷

Another suspicion of witchcraft involved keeping toads in the stable⁷⁸ and not attending Sunday vespers; Downen Rosin, the 28-year-old accused, is asked if in her youth she had been in the stable during Sunday vespers. And what did she do there with her mother and grandmother?⁷⁹ Likewise, the elder Downen Nith, “If she admits, when her daughter Rosin was yet a child, that she went with her and her daughter Threin to the barn during vespers one Sunday, and sat in the pew...”⁸⁰ What appeared to be a cleaning activity is interpreted by the witness Andres Bergeln (36 years old) as an act of witchcraft by the three Doven.⁸¹ The interpretations of the accusers are influenced by superstitions, but also by the context in which these accusations were presented. This context is legal, the accusations being accepted without a request for concrete proof, and the accusers gave free rein to their imagination. The court represents the supreme authority, which could stimulate in the witnesses and accusers an identification with the father as an authoritarian figure with a determining role in the construction of the Super-ego (the critical instance at the level of the personality). At the same time, the positioning of the accusers on the side of authority and their identification with it leads to an implication of sadism at the level of the Ego.

In the 14th testimony, Anna, Eiven Stiffen’s wife, recounts such an encounter⁸² in the middle of the night with Downen Nith, after having had dreams in the previous nights about a leg disease that was growing worse. We will later return to the dream.⁸³ Fire has always fascinated mankind and stimulated the imagination. It is associated with purification, rebirth and divinity, but also with destruction, aggression and hell. In general, any symbol can represent either one thing or phenomenon or the opposite. Both fire and dreams have always challenged the human mind, and psychoanalysis has paid particular attention to them. Gaston Bachelard, a French philosopher, pointed to the importance of studying fire, and more specifically its meaning, from a psychological perspective:

Contemporary science has almost completely turned its back on this truly primordial problem posed to the naive soul by the phenomenon of fire. In the course of time,

the chapters on fire in chemistry books have become shorter and shorter. And there are many modern chemistry books in which one would search in vain for a study of fire and flame. Fire is no longer a scientific object. Fire, as an immediate and prominent object, an object that imposes itself on a primitive choice by supplanting many other phenomena, no longer opens up any prospect for scientific study. It seems instructive, from a psychological point of view, to trace the inflation of this phenomenological value and to study how a problem, which had oppressed scientific research for centuries, suddenly found itself divided or removed without ever having been solved.⁸⁴

The dream has always been considered a gateway to other worlds, a gateway through which the divine or the devil communicates with man. Until the advent of psychoanalysis, dreaming was a mystery and its secrets were never unraveled. In fact, it is also a myth that the psychoanalyst interprets the patient's dreams. What the psychoanalyst interprets is the secondary elaboration of the dream, i.e., the story the patient tells about the dream, as well as the associations the patient makes about the dream. Freud even recommends the cautious use of interpretation according to a "dream decryption key," i.e., translating the symbols that appear in the dream according to a predetermined meaning. If we try to approach the dream using knowledge of psychoanalysis that did not exist at the time, we should keep in mind the distance between the dream's narration and the moment it happened. As Freud points out in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, both the repressed contents in the unconscious and the diurnal remnants, i.e., emotional experiences lived by the person in question on the day before the dream or in a period close to the dream, contribute to the formation of the dream. We do not have accounts of the accused's daily life and it is impossible to interpret such a dream. However, the story Anna tells about the dream and how she interprets her dream shows the impact on the discourse of the cultural context and belief system in which she lives. The pain reported by Anna may be the result of a neurological disorder that may be activated during sleep due to reduced control of body posture. Although "fire-taking" from neighbor to neighbor was a common practice, in the context to which we refer, this practice is considered evidence of materializing evil intentions in the performance of spells. This highlights the dimension of ambivalence with which certain social practices were viewed—in this case, helping the neighbors—but also in relation to their symbols and their meaning, as they were circulated at the time. We find the same ambivalence towards witchcraft itself.

The dream, in Freudian perspective, is the "guardian of sleep," providing the partial satisfaction of repressed desires. Deciphering the dream solely through a symbolic interpretation of its manifest content, i.e., of the images appearing

in the dream, is subject to error, and the conclusions can only be erroneous. In the historical context of the legal case to which we are referring, the dream was ascribed a different meaning, and the way in which it was used should not be condemned, but understood as a support for people's superstitions.⁸⁵

A myth quite widespread in Europe at that time was that witches could turn into flies or bees.⁸⁶ The witch entered the mouth like a fly and tied the tongue:

*sometimes it is not the body that flies out, but only the soul; the body remains motionless...; more often the soul flees through the mouth like a mosquito, and the body, while it is outside, is as good as dead.*⁸⁷

We have a similar account in the chapter "Special Aspects, after the 17th Testimony" in the indictment of Dowen Nith.

*1. If ever, during your husband's lifetime, you sat at night behind the stove. And why not next to your husband? 2. If you know that your husband searched for you in vain, and when he found you at last behind the stove, that he dragged you out by your legs.*⁸⁸

During questioning, Barben Pitter's 70-year-old wife Catharina Pitter confesses,

*as I arrived, the woman was lying on the ground in the room, as soon as I saw her, I said to the man "bring only water, the woman is dead, you have surely struck her dead." In the meantime, as we were sitting with the candle beside her, a bee came and flew into her mouth, then she woke up, and said, "how well I slept."*⁸⁹

The witches appeared at night, between 11 and 12 o'clock, in various forms;⁹⁰ during the trial, a witness is asked if "about 11 years ago, at 11 o'clock at night, 4 female persons kept him in front of the house" of Dowen Nith.⁹¹ The four women gathered together could also be a reference to a witches' sabbath. In the 5th testimony, the witness Elsen Andres relates a conversation with the same Dowen Nith: "what were you looking for in my house last night, that you were sticking nails in my room, and if you don't help my wife, know that I will give you a hard time."⁹² We observe here the influence of superstitions on the discourse that reflects people's attitude towards witchcraft as a real and concrete phenomenon. The inability to explain certain somatic symptoms due to a lack of medical knowledge makes people resort to magical explanations.⁹³ The inability to explain or treat certain symptoms makes people regress to an infantile way of dealing with reality, namely, a regression to magical thinking. The appearance and disappearance of symptoms are explained by the action of

evil forces on the body. The ambivalence towards witchcraft also emerges from this testimony. The witness considers that the “witch” is also capable of doing good, i.e., providing a remedy for certain medical problems. The psychic capacity to tolerate ambivalence presupposes a certain degree of psychic maturity and involves the child’s ability to attribute positive and negative sides to the same person. The witness report on the accused person shows that this capacity is not completely acquired or, we could say that the fear of the witch has caused a regression to the pre-ambivalence period, when the mental representation of a person is split in two, a completely good part and a completely bad part, as if they were two persons. The hallucinatory construct, which the witness creates, and which cannot be considered as psychotic delirium, may result from an imaginary universe strongly influenced by the social environment of the time, which seems to be impregnated with magical elements.

Also, it was enough to report that a victim felt pain when passing by a certain person for the latter to be arrested. In deposition no. 18, Thrin, Krafft Jacobs’s wife of about 15 years, relates how she was overcome with dizziness in the church following her encounter with defendants Catharina and Agnetha Downen, to the point that she had to be led outside to a well.⁹⁴ Dizziness is not uncommon in church. It can be caused by tiredness and the difference in the warm temperature outside compared to the cool temperature in church. Also, the excitement of the time of the examination in the church could have caused this malaise that the accuser describes. The association of these states with the devil’s influence on a person’s soul was common and accepted in the 18th century. The representation of the devil that a person may form is caused by repressing and projecting socially unacceptable aggressive or sexual tendencies, and projecting them onto the persons towards whom the author of the representation develops these tendencies. More often than not, aggressive tendencies follow on from sexual tendencies forbidden either by the Overself or by the social moral authority. The aggressiveness of the witness can be seen in the language used towards the two accused.

In defense of her honor, Downen Nith is invited to summon Andres Marcellen, with two witnesses: “Did you summon Andres Marcellen afterwards? A: I sent two men, Barisch Gergen and Barisch Jacob, but I don’t know if they summoned Mr. Borbopschen Hannchen to court.”⁹⁵

OFFENSES: THE devil commands all witches to harm people by means of animals or secret concoctions.⁹⁶ From the cross-examination of the witnesses in the present trial, it appears that the singular witnesses are those who disagree in detail, but agree on the gist of the matter.

1. Evil Actions on People

L 1. “SHE bewitched my child...” Women who had recently given birth were especially afraid of witches. They would take their newborn child to them, so that it would not be stolen by the witches, and in some villages the light was left on at night in the woman’s room.⁹⁷ A witness is asked if Borbotschken Georg’s wife had come to the accused Dowen Nith “and told her that after a quarrel arose from the plowing payment, her child got sick, she cannot suckle, and if she cannot help, it will not be well”;⁹⁸ and in the 11th testimony, Krafft Gerg’s wife says to the same Dowen Nith: “sister Nith, look, since then, when you quarreled with my husband about the payment, my child has made me sick, and so it will not be well.”⁹⁹ Then, in 1716, her child, Johannes, was taken ill in the leg, then cured by Doven Nith, as a result of the pressure put on her; the child is said to have had terrible pain in his leg as a result of her husband’s refusal to help her plow, due to the lack of draft animals; little Johannes is found by the family with a knife handle near his diseased leg. Interestingly, the woman first appeals to a competent/rational person, who relates her diseased leg to erysipelas, then appeals to a Wallachian seer, who sees the cause in the evil intervention of Dowena Nith.¹⁰⁰

1.2. *The evil-eye.* The mania of “evil spells” inflicted on humans and animals by poison, or also in the form of magic effects at a distance, materialized in the invocation of the evil eye, was widespread throughout Europe.¹⁰¹ Thrin, the wife of Krafft Jacob (15 years old), testifies that she went to Codlea (Zeiden, Feketalom) to cut flax, where after three days she met Dowen Threin’s daughters Catharina and Agnetha, with whom they had an exchange of words; one day later, during the examination in the church of Codlea, she is seized with dizziness, then fainting, and is helped by others to get out. During the rest following her fainting spell, she has another encounter with the “witches,” who send her home to Râșnov. In her parents’ home, she is cared for, but experiences hallucinations, probably caused by her illness.¹⁰²

Even fever-induced hallucinations were considered valid testimonies. Their cause is also to be found in the “evil-eye.” Anna, the wife of Eiven Stiffen (50 years old), relates the hallucination she experienced while sick, refusing the food.

*The following day, as I lay sick in bed, I vomited, and there came out of me a thick matter, in which was a green silk-like being, which I threw up. After this I remained three days more very ill, during which days the woman appeared to me again, each time in some form, and brought me food, but I ate nothing, and then she threatened me, “I want to take you away altogether, the more you consume yourself with fear of me.”*¹⁰³

1.3. The *Loan*. The witch often took revenge because someone would not lend her something.¹⁰⁴ Römert Merten relates that in 1724 the accused Dowen Nith had asked her for a cotton comb, and that her refusal to lend it resulted in the child falling ill while the family was in the fields.¹⁰⁵ From this we infer that the refusal to lend had evil consequences for the child of the family, according to popular belief.

Dowen Rosin's borrowing of a bushel of wheat from the wife of Elsen Andres ("Do you know that your Rosin, about six years ago, before Easter, went to Elsen Andres to borrow a bushel of wheat?"¹⁰⁶) is again a charge against Rosin Dowen, because borrowing was considered an action that could cause evil deeds. Dowen Nith's refusal to lend a box of millet to Dowen Nith would have spared Andres Elsen the loss of a cow, which died as soon as it returned from the herd after an illness blamed on a "witch": "if I had given him another box full of millet, my cow would still be alive."¹⁰⁷

1.4. *Night visits to the victim*. The "witch" leaves a mark on the victim's hand or somewhere on her body.¹⁰⁸ Theodora (36), Stoica Borhand's wife, says:

*she came to me in a dream, Doven Nith, and bit me on the arm, I fell on my back in horror, in the morning I went to her house, I found her near the oven where she was baking bread, I talked to her and said: "look, we had another fight and you bit me on the arm, here is the sign," to which she replied "I did it to you, I'll come to you tonight, look, people suspect me of being bad, they say about you that you are bad, but if I hurt someone, then I have no health."*¹⁰⁹

Anna, wife of Eiven Stiffen (50), confesses:

about 12 years ago a person appeared to me in my sleep, gave me a creepy pitcher to drink, the [following] night the person appeared to me again, grabbed my left toes and pulled my leg as if he had shaken a plum tree, after which I felt a pain in my leg, and with such a pain, as if eight bones had grown, and they grew in such a way that they were hanging from the chimney, so it was strictly forbidden, no one was allowed to take anything out of the house that day, they took me to bed with my pains, where I fell asleep immediately. In the meantime Rosina came to me after the fire, as I was awake, I heard a conversation on the porch, I ask the janitor who it is, the man says that "Rosina came after the fire," then I go in and say why did she give it to her, the man gives the answer that "she took it herself," and then Rosina was still a girl. After this, when the pains left me for some years, it happened, about two years ago, that I was passing every day by Roth Hannes's lane, I felt a bump from head to foot in my left leg, after which the old pains began again, as if eight bones were growing out of my leg, which I wrapped in a towel and nursed, as I tried to see what was the

*matter with it, as I did then the first time. So I found nothing, and the leg is still not completely healed.*¹¹⁰

From Anna Stiffen's deposition at T 14, a combination of maleficence emerges: appearing in a dream, causing physical pain to the body, taking fire in the middle of the night.

1.5. *Quarrels*. Another reason for being accused was the illnesses that followed quarrels and threats with neighbors.¹¹¹ On 18 August 1732, the young Jacob Römers files a lawsuit against the young Rosina Krafft of Hannes, residing in Roth Hannes alley, and accuses her of his illness, stating that she is responsible for it, therefore he accuses her of witchcraft; the quarrel arises due to a dispute between the two neighbors, due to the dumping of household waste by Rosina Krafft near the fence of Jacob Römers. The quarrel degenerates into swearing, which is also an occasion for evil manifestations.¹¹²

2. Evil Actions on Cattle

2. 1. "SHE bewitched a cow..." Bewitching cows was another major charge in witchcraft trials in Europe.¹¹³ Downen Nith is accused by several people of suddenly sickening, killing or curing animals in the herd: "Do you know that you are accused of many evils and mischiefs against men and cattle?"¹¹⁴ For example, Krafft Marten blames her that the following day, after a bull fell sick, his calf died with its neck twisted.¹¹⁵ The same old Downen Nith is asked whether she remembers, when her husband wanted to take wood to town, "a wheel broke, fell off and hurt his best horse"?¹¹⁶ And the town watchman, Gerg Marcellen, accused her, with witnesses, of harming her own calf¹¹⁷ as well as Andres Sattler's calf.¹¹⁸ We observe in these accusations how the men did not take responsibility for the losses or accidents in which they were involved, projecting their own incapacity onto an evil force directed at them by a woman. In other words, the woman was to blame for any inability or incapacity of the man. Likewise, the sickness of animals or their death is also felt as a loss or inability to cope. The confrontation with helplessness produces narcissistic frustration, a narcissistic injury that triggers aggressive reactions. The condemnation of the "witch" provides a satisfaction of aggressive impulses, but also a narcissistic reparation by transforming the powerless into the victim of occult forces. To emerge from the position of victim was to defeat the witch. All the accusations made against a "scapegoat" were nothing more than the purge of some inferiority complexes and a discharge of hatred produced by the realization of certain inferiorities.

In his sixth testimony against the “witch Downen Threin,” Merten Sadlers confesses:

*some years since Doven Train’s husband deserted here, . . . then Trein and her mother came often to me, one and other, . . . but I happened to have a young calf in my room, which, after their departure, grew sadder and sadder, and became ill.*¹¹⁹

Elisabetha, 60 years old, the wife of Bergeln Georg, whose husband had prepared Downen Nith’s land for plowing, says that 4 years ago (1728) she had lost her cow 8 days after she had asked for payment for the work she had done.¹²⁰ In the account in T 15 we can identify the associations Elisabetha makes. Evil is projected onto the accused. Her inability to understand why the cow got sick makes her find a magical explanation. The magical thinking to which Anna reverts is a stage of infancy, entailing the development of thinking as a higher cognitive process.

2.2. *Horse diseases.* Bartsch Hannes’s horse becomes sick and goes mad after he allegedly wakes up Downen Nith violently, and an insect is also observed around the “witch” woman, according to Anna, Steffen Merten’s wife (30 years old).¹²¹ Anna’s account (T16), as she herself states, is not based on a personal experience, but on an account of an experience of her father. Both the lived experience and her account are marked by the subjectivity of the person involved. When the statement is based on another person’s account, the subjectivity is even greater, which can lead to a significant distortion of reality.

Downen Nith is also blamed for the wounds on the neck of Bergeln Andres, who had held her to account for the death of the mare.¹²² Here we see a malevolent action on the man as a result of Bergeln Andres’ accusations against Dowena Nith for the death of the mare. According to the witch-judges, all this wickedness and sorcery was performed with the help of roots, herbs, ointments and spells, which the witches knew from the devil. However, they usually needed an object from their victim’s property to cast the spells, so they would bring fire from the neighbor’s house, a splinter from the yard, etc., at very unusual hours.

The evil acts mentioned here are mostly in the field of domestic economy—animals get sick and die as a result of magical practices, witches cause damage in the fields, cause diseases and various ailments, natural disasters occur. It is striking that, in this process, harmful spells are directed against people and not against animals or crops. The abovementioned forms of maleficence were considered a reality by Transylvanian ecclesiastical and secular authorities until the 18th century and were a recurring theme throughout the history of witch trials.¹²³

As to preventive measures, the simplest was for people to keep away and beware of them. Gabor Gergens’ daughter Catharina (17) confesses: “Once, as we were going from one hill to another where we had to cut, we met these Dovine,

as soon as I saw them I went into a courtyard so they wouldn't see me, because I was terrified of them."¹²⁴

Public Accusations

IT WAS very dangerous to be publicly scolded in front of a witch. If the "witch" remained in the village, the injured party would send two neighbors to her with the demand to pay for the damage or face a trial.¹²⁵ Sattler Andres accuses Downen Nith of sickening the cow, shouting in the alley and thus publicly accusing her: "Downen, may you be struck in the back of the head! If you don't heal my cow, I'll call you to the probationary."¹²⁶

On 18 August 1732, young Jacob Römers has a trial with the young Rosina Krafft.

*On Monday evening I received a shot in my right leg, and for this I hobbled around for 28 days with a crutch, I sought to cure myself by all means, but all in vain, as I suffered long enough, I myself went to the accused in the house and they talked, both the old woman and the young lady, I fell upon them, that they are guilty of my plight, to help me, if not, I will open trial, after this I was somewhat better.*¹²⁷

It follows that the young Jacob Römers also exercised a form of blackmail on the "witches," and that they healed gunshot wounds, thus possessing healing powers¹²⁸ in the eyes of the common people and, in the absence of medical professionals, they were involved in pharmaceutical activities.

In 18th-century judgements, witnesses were not asked whether they had any statement to make about the case in question, but whether they knew, "had seen or heard anything about the suspect having been involved in witchcraft";¹²⁹ the fact that Krafft Georg's wife is called to give her opinion shows that by 1732 we are dealing with a 'sweetening' of this type of trial:

*Krafft Georg's wife, as the mother-in-law of the accuser, will not be so much in favor of a confession, but will only bring more light into the trial, will listen and harmonize the testimony with what has happened before.*¹³⁰

In general, the judicial forms seem very loose: witnesses are rarely asked whether they have a statement to make about the case, but rather whether they have seen or heard anything. The witnesses now heap all the amalgam of personal injury, superstition and general gossip on the unfortunate plaintiff, and he becomes the defendant.¹³¹ This is also the "reason" of the judges in acquitting Dowena

Nith: "The defendant named herein is herself the accuser, so the matter was first brought before the court to initiate her rescue."¹³²

While in Western Europe a witch had to confess under torture in order to be convicted, in the Saxon witch trials the testimony of witnesses under oath after the ordeal was sufficient. If seven witnesses "swore on the head" of the accused person, this was considered evidence.¹³³

If the accused did not confess, he would be sent back to prison.¹³⁴ Unfavorable conditions, however, caused Dowena Nith to be sent home, but with the guarantee of the male witnesses: Kiren Hannes, Truetschen Chrestel, Sadlers Hannes, Krafft Taise Merten and Durmes Hannes, "who themselves would have to put themselves at the disposal of the court at any time."¹³⁵ Rosina's husband, J. Krafft Hannes, also vouches for her release, "and he will be good to pay for all wrongs if his wife should do any harm to anyone. Finally, the plaintiffs also agree to be Christian and peaceful and not to take serious revenge on anyone."¹³⁶

In the inquiry, dead frogs, grass clippings and wax were considered *corpora delicti*.¹³⁷ These were found at Dowen Nith's house as she was questioned as to their provenance: "where are the turtle shells from?"¹³⁸ Items which proved suspicious during a house search were handed over to the council and usually gave rise to the strictest questioning.¹³⁹

After the alleged witch was arrested, she was left without any means of defense.¹⁴⁰ All incriminating evidence was underlined and exculpatory statements trivialized.¹⁴¹ Those persecuted/burned were mostly lower-class people, poor, crippled, beggars; not a clergyman, not a teacher, hardly even a merchant, and this is one of the characteristics of the Transylvanian witch trials.¹⁴²

The 18th century restored the long-lost peace in Transylvania. The people gained respite to think of more than their physical existence; the education of the clergy increased; the opinions of enlightened foreign countries prevailed; the secular power finally ceased to punish the superstitions of the masses as a crime when they conflicted with the opinions of all educated people. But this development, like all progress, was gradual, and the trials of witches took place in greater numbers at the beginning of the war-torn century than before.¹⁴³ In the trials of the 18th century we find references to executions, about which nothing more can be established.¹⁴⁴ The common people accepted official accusations only when they were backed up by witch-hunts or the compliance of the courts. However, in Saxon trials, the accused is rarely the accuser, but the suspect is morally obliged to present the case himself.¹⁴⁵

Typically, the plaintiff asks the defendant to prove what he has said, asks for restitution of honor and the reimbursement of costs. Dowen Nith is asked why she did not try to save her honor after being accused of witchcraft.¹⁴⁶ Unlike the trials in Europe, in Transylvania no ordeal other than by water was ever used.¹⁴⁷

From the trial under analysis, it does not appear that water or torture was used in the investigation against the women accused of witchcraft.

Conclusion

THE SOCIO-economic roots of this process are evident. There is a “tradition” of blaming Downen women that spans many years. The document, which also features aspects of medical history and ethnography, reveals a closed, theatrical world dominated by fear. Interestingly, the women are not blamed for climate events (rain, hail) which caused material damage, nor for the plague of 1719. The latter only appears in the context of describing a contextual event. The document makes no mention of the torture of the alleged witches; rather, it hints that they were acquitted as a result of a gentle, superstition-free and more free-thinking process. Nith Downen also seems to be a connoisseur of traditional medicine, to whom the people in need of herbs and help turn to.

The image of the mental functioning of the people of the 18th century in this community that we can get from the trial and the accusations against the alleged witches is one of a society with an infantile mental functioning. By this we mean the frequent use of magical thinking to explain various phenomena and events, but also the use of projection as a mechanism to regulate social functioning. Projection is a mechanism, initially a mechanism of psychic functioning, which then becomes a defense mechanism, involving the attribution of negative psychic contents to other people or objects. Often, the feelings of aggression or forbidden sexual desires are externalized through projection. This can be demonstrated by the fact that the accused are women, and the witnesses formulate their testimonies in an aggressive and hateful way.

The designation of individuals as the source of evil, by projection, allows for a regulation of the functioning of society, modeled on the individual psyche. Just as the single individual tries to keep any negative feelings or tendencies out of the self-image, the community, in order to maintain moral behavior, needed a support, a “scapegoat,” to encompass all that was considered negative in each individual. However, we cannot consider this community as being dominated by an archaic, totally magical thinking. The argument for this is offered by the judge’s decision, which shows that there were people in that community who put reason before imagination and who managed to overcome the superstitions that dominated the mental functioning of a significant part of the community.



Notes

1. Speranța Milancovici, "About Sorcery as an Alternate Mean of Communication and Validation of Oneself," in *2012 International Conference on Economics Marketing and Management IPEDR* 34 (Singapore, 2012), 107–111.
2. Friedrich Müller, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Hexenglaubens und des Hexenprocesses in Siebenbürgen* (Braunschweig, 1854).
3. Carl Göllner, *Hexenprozesse in Siebenbürgen* (Cluj, 1971).
4. Hans Gerhard Pauer, "Hexenprozess in Mediasch anno 1693: Opfer des Aberglaubens," *Siebenbürgische Zeitung*, 10 February 2009.
5. Carmen Popa, "Ein Hermannstädter Hexenprozess aus dem Jahr 1697: Kulturhistorische und translatologische Betrachtungen," *Germanistische Beiträge* 37 (2015): 196–213.
6. Ioana Constantin, "Hexenwahn und Aberglauben im Spiegel der Hermannstädter Gerichtsprakotolle des 17. Jahrhunderts," *Transilvania* 10 (2018): 30–35.
7. Klaniczay Gábor and Pócs Eva, eds., *Witchcraft and Demonology in Hungary and Transylvania* (Hardfordshire, 2017).
8. Tóth G. Péter, *Segesvári Boszorkányperek Schäßburger Hexenprozesse* (Budapest, 2010).
9. Gudrun Gersmann addresses the discussion of the significance of honor in witch trials and deals with defense strategies against witchcraft accusations, touching on aspects of jurisprudence; see Gudrun Gersmann, "'Gehe hin und vertheidige dich!': Injurienklagen als Mittel der Abwehr von Hexereiverdächtigungen ein Fallbeispiel aus dem Fürstbistum Münster," in Sibylle Backmann, Hans-Jörg Künast, Sabine Ullmann, and B. Ann Tlusty, eds., *Ehrkonzepte in der Frühen Neuzeit: Identitäten und Abgrenzungen* (Berlin, 1998), 239–269.
10. Rainer Beck's monograph deals with two phases of the persecutions in Freising, analyzing the trials in which the victims were children: Rainer Beck, *Mäuseilmacher oder die Imagination des Bösen: Ein Hexenprozess 1715–1723* (Munich, 2011).
11. Owen Davies used an unfamiliar type of source, the "reverse witch trials:" alleged witches appeared as plaintiffs before secular courts. Davies offers a fascinating insight into the processes of cultic communication and emphasizes that witch accusations are a "feminine type of conflict" due to culturally and socially determined gender characteristics: see Owen Davies, "Hexereivorwürfe in England des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts," in Nils Freytag and Diethard Sawicki, eds., *Wunderwelten: Religiöse Exstase und Magie in der Moderne* (Munich, 2006), 143–162.
12. Claudia Kauertz reports on the witch trials around 1600, 1630 and 1650 in the electorate of Schönstein an der Sieg in the context of the economic depression after the end of the Thirty Years' War: see Claudia Kauertz, "Hexenverfolgung als Herrschaftsinstrument? Adlige Gerichtsherrschaft und Hexenprozesse am Beispiel der Reichsherrschaft Wildenburg und der kurkölnischen Unterherrschaft Schönstein an der Sieg (1565–1681)," in Monika Gussone, Hans-Werner Langbrandtner, and Peter K. Weber, eds., *Zwischen Macht und Ohnmacht: Spielräume adliger Herrschaft im frühneuzeitlichen Rheinland* (Bielefeld, 2020), 119–194.

13. In her essay, Erika Münster-Schröer presents the case of a witch trial before the Düsseldorf court in 1738, which led to the swift execution of a 48-year-old woman and a 16-year-old girl. The regional limits of the openness to enlightenment in the 18th century become particularly clear in this article, as the burning of the two women could hardly have been avoided in the first place in the context of the tension between recatholicization, popular superstition, and the lack of a critical bourgeois public: see Erika Münster-Schröer, "Ein vorgetäushtes Wunder, ein Hexenprozess und eine Wallfahrt Gerresheim-Düsseldorf, Kavales und Naviges," in Ute Küppers-Braun, Jutta Nowosadtko, and Rainer Walz, eds., *Anfechtungen der Vernunft: Wunder und Wunderglaube in der Neuzeit* (Essen, 2006), 97–114.
14. Katrin Moeller consistently places the persecution of witches in the specific political and socio-economic environment of the region. The study is mainly based on criminal court files, correspondence with the authorities and court records of the law faculties in Greifswald and Rostock. Moeller believes that the starting point of the persecutions was the categorically Protestant interest of the ruling class in moral discipline and in combating everyday magic in the processes of state-building: see Katrin Moeller, *Dass Willkür über Recht ginge: Hexenverfolgung in Mecklenburg im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert* (Bielefeld, 2007).
15. Michael Ströhmer, in his work on the history of law, resorts to a "microanalysis" of the reception and implementation of the Caroline in the witch trials in the town of Lemgo between 1583 and 1621: see Michael Ströhmer, *Von Hexen, Ratsherren und Juristen: Die Rezeption der Peinlichen Halsgerichtsordnung Kaiser Karls V. in den frühen Hexenprozessen der Hansestadt Lemgo 1583–1621* (Paderborn, 2003).
16. Lyndal Roper's book focuses on the witch-hunts in the region of Upper and Eastern Swabia (Nördlingen, Augsburg, Marchtal) from the 16th to the 18th century and includes trials in villages and towns. Roper asks the central question as to why women in particular were persecuted, and provides the answer: the destruction of fertility by witches explains the prevalence of women. She discusses the connection between witch-hunts and the persecution of Jews and the different meanings of magic for different confessions. She deals with interrogation and torture, attempting to show the development of a relationship between the interrogator and the accused. The book discussed cannibalism, devilry and the witches' sabbath as important elements of the witches' imagination: see Lyndal Roper, *Hexenwahn: Geschichte einer Verfolgung* (Munich, 2007).
17. In his book, Jonathan Strom examines the Lutheran Reformation movement in 17th-century Rostock and, in particular, the associated ideas about the exercise of church discipline. He shows how conflict between the clergy and the city council escalated during the witch trials of the 1660s: see Jonathan Strom, *Orthodoxy and Reform: The Clergy in Seventeenth Century Rostock* (Tübingen, 1999).
18. Robert Zagolla's study, which is based on a systematic and thorough evaluation of the Rostock Law Faculty's legal memoirs of criminal proceedings from 1595–1610, 1645–1660, 1685–1700, aims to make a contribution to the judicial practice of this era. Zagolla's observations focus on the use of torture in the context of witch

trials and the circumstances surrounding them. The witch trials reveal some serious shortcomings of early modern criminal procedure. Until the 18th century, there was an unbroken belief in the efficacy of torture as a method of obtaining evidence. As a result, people accused of witchcraft were often tortured several times until they confessed. For most judges, only the confession of the accused counted. The thorough investigation of the circumstances of the crime was not one of the tasks that the court tried to clarify. Rostock jurists were often aware in their legal briefs, based on the documents submitted by the consultees, that they were overstepping the bounds set by legal theory when applying torture. As is well known, the courts managed to break out of this vicious circle only gradually, when more and more doubts about the reality of witchcraft began to be made public. Seen in this light, Zagolla's work is an important contribution to demystifying the witch trials: see Robert Zagolla, *Folter und Hexenprozess: Die strafrechtliche Spruchpraxis der Juristenfakultät Rostock im 17. Jahrhundert* (Bielefeld, 2007).

19. Jürgen Martschukat analyzes the death sentences in North American witch trials, such as the Salem hysteria around 1692, and sees them as an early form of capital punishment: see Jürgen Martschukat, *Die Geschichte der Todesstrafe in Nordamerika: Von der Kolonialzeit bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 2002).
20. Valerie Kivelson analyzes the witchcraft trials in 17th-century Russia. She shows that the fundamental difference between the Moscow trials and those in the West was that the satanic aspect was completely absent: see Valerie Kivelson, *Desperate Magic: The Moral Economy of Witchcraft in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (Ithaca, 2013).
21. Katrin Fischer understands the image of the witch as a deeply ambivalent stereotype that contributed to heterogeneous processes of identity formation in different social and historical contexts. One of Fischer's findings is that, although the magical belief in witches has no social relevance today, an image of witches with primarily negative connotations has been transmitted into the modern era as a legacy of the modern "witch craze:" see Kathrin Fischer, *Das Wiccatum: Volkskundliche Nachforschungen zu heidnischen Hexen im deutschsprachigen Raum* (Würzburg, 2007).
22. The twelve articles in the volume that Elizabeth Reis has edited are intended to present the history of the witch imagination and the persecution of witches in North America from the colonial period to the present day. The common threads that hold the individual essays together are necessarily loose: the genre category, a broad concept of magic that encompasses demonology, possession, unorthodox folk piety, and neo-paganism, and the geographic framework, the contemporary United States. The idea of tracing ideas about witches and witchcraft over three centuries within a national history is innovative. "Spellbound" offers a new perspective on the development of witchcraft in North America. The diversity of US cultures is rediscovered in the discourse on witchcraft: see Elizabeth Reis, ed., *Spellbound: Women and Witchcraft in America* (Wilmington, 1998).
23. In his work, Christian Rohr shows that extreme weather conditions, especially hail and storms, were increasingly interpreted by people in the late Middle Ages as so-called "weather magic," which they countered with criminalization and witch trials. Heat and drought, cold and frost, and strong winds, on the other hand, were not

interpreted in religious terms: see Christian Rohr, *Extreme Naturereignisse im Ostalpenraum: Naturerfahrung im Spätmittelalter und am Beginn der Neuzeit* (Cologne, 2007).

24. Ulinka Rublack analyzes the charge of witchcraft against Katharina Keppler. She describes the political and social situation in Württemberg at the time of the witch-hunts and what fear of witchcraft and superstition could do to a family. When the accusations reached Johann Kepler's son Johann Kepler, who was already famous at the time, in faraway Prague, he interrupted his scientific work and returned home to defend his mother. He familiarized himself with the most important writings and arguments in the contemporary discourse on witchcraft and sought contact with influential figures. Kepler demonstrated once again that, even in the case of his mother's trial, it was not the unconditional will of sovereigns to persecute, but often the dubious or clumsy manipulation of local judges that was responsible for the fatal dynamics of witchcraft trials. The peculiarity of Rublack's study is that it builds bridges between the different (life) worlds of family members and their personal relationships, which sometimes divided more than united. The son saw the reasons for the accusations in the social position of his mother, a single, elderly woman who knew a lot about herbal medicine and helped her fellow human beings: see Ulinka Rublack, *Der Astronom und die Hexe: Johannes Kepler und seine Zeit* (Stuttgart, 2018).
25. Thomas Winkelbauer analyzes the phenomenon of witchcraft and witch trials in the Habsburg Empire from the point of view of the history of mentalities: see Thomas Winkelbauer, *Österreichische Geschichte 1522–1699: Ständefreiheit und Fürstenmacht*, vol. II (Vienna, 2003), 296–310.
26. This volume, edited by Wolfgang Behringer, Sönke Lorenz and Dieter R. Bauer, focuses on late European witch trials and is the result of a conference organized by the Interdisciplinary Working Group for Witch Research in 2005. The contributions show that witch trials were still common in the 18th century. They analyze these late trials using the methods of the history of mentalities: see Wolfgang Behringer, Sönke Lorenz, and Dieter R. Bauer, eds., *Späte Hexenprozesse: Der Umgang der Aufklärung mit dem Irrationalen* (Bielefeld, 2016).
27. In his fascinating and detailed book, Thomas Keith shows how magic, like the medieval Church, offered an explanation for misfortune and a means of redress in times of adversity. The supernatural thus had its own practical utility in daily life. Some forms of magic were challenged by the Protestant Reformation, but only with the increased search for scientific explanation of the universe did the English people begin to abandon their recourse to the supernatural: see Thomas Keith, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, 1971; Harmondsworth, 1991).
28. The anthology edited by Franz Gunther and Franz Irsigler presents the results of the working group's research, *Hexenprozesse im Trierer Land*. For the most part, contributions on the history of witch-hunting in the Archdiocese of Trier and the surrounding smaller territories are presented here. The volume is interesting in terms of the approached methods: see Gunther Franz and Irsigler Franz, eds., *Methoden und Konzepte der historischen Hexenforschung* (Trier, 1998).

29. Ulrich Pfister places his work, which is based on extensive archival research, in the context of the paradigm of confessionalization in Graubünden. Witchcraft trials and associated conflicts are considered, some of which were still violently manifest in the 18th century: see Ulrich Pfister, *Konfessionskirchen, Glaubenspraxis und Konflikt in Graubünden, 16.–18. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg, 2012).
30. The subject of Miriam Rieger's book is the Lutherans' relationship with ghosts, spirits and the possessed in the early modern period, between 1520 and 1760. The cases of the possessed that she investigates show that they not only made a pact with the devil, but in certain circumstances also had to fear persecution comparable to that of those accused of witchcraft. Similar to the exorcism of the possessed, priests could also play an important role in the pastoral care of witches, their task being to convert the accused back to God before death: see Miriam Rieger, *Der Teufel im Pfarrhaus: Gespenster, Geisterglaube und Besessenheit im Luthertum der Frühen Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 2011).
31. The book of Alan Macfarlane is a classic regional and comparative study of early modern witchcraft. The history of witchcraft continues to attract attention with its emotive and contentious debates. The methodology and conclusions of this book have impacted not only on witchcraft studies but the entire approach to social and cultural history, with its quantitative and anthropological approach. The book provides an important case study on Essex, as well as drawing comparisons with other regions of early modern England: see Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1970).
32. Manfred Wilde made the first comprehensive regional study of witchcraft and witchcraft trials in Saxony. He concluded that the manifestations of witchcraft and also the causes of persecution were extremely diverse, despite the relatively low rate of persecution: see Manfred Wilde, *Die Zauberei- und Hexenprozesse in Kursachsen* (Cologne, 2003).
33. For Herbert Pohl, the question of the function of witch trials in early modern society is particularly important. In line with socio-historical research, he interprets witch trials as a symptom of economic and social crises and considers the social environment as a conditioning factor in witch-hunts. At the same time, however, he warns against excessively one-sided explanations and emphasizes that the witch trials cannot be reduced to social problems, but that other factors (weather catastrophes, epidemics and diseases) were often responsible for the fear of witches and the population's desire to persecute them: see Herbert Pohl, *Zauberglaube und Hexenangst im Kurfürstentum Mainz: Ein Beitrag zur Hexenfrage im 16. und beginnenden 17. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1998).
34. Barbara Groß' work aims to describe persecutions as "significant patterns of social practices." To this end, she first traces the "internal communicative logic" of suspicions: their triggering in daily contexts, their diffusion and effect, and possible defense strategies, and then analyzes their "social logic" in the social context: see Barbara Groß, *Hexerei in Minden: Zur sozialen Logik von Hexereiverdächtigungen und Hexenprozessen 1584–1684* (Münster, 2009).

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Abstract

“Ihr verfluchte Truden...”:

A Psychoanalytical Study of the Witch Mania in Râșnov, Transylvania, in 1732

This study offers a psychoanalytical interpretation of testimonies from a witchcraft trial held in 1732 in Râșnov (Rosenau), a Saxon town in southeastern Transylvania. The analysis is based on archival judicial documents preserved in the National Archives of Romania in Brașov, including indictments, interrogations, and witness depositions concerning several women accused of witchcraft, most prominently the widow Dowen Nith and members of her family. The testimonies refer to events spanning approximately two decades (c. 1712–1732) and describe acts interpreted by contemporaries as manifestations of witchcraft affecting people, livestock, and domestic life. The article situates these accusations within their historical and socio-cultural context while applying psychoanalytic concepts, particularly those associated with Sigmund Freud. Mechanisms such as projection, repression, and regression to magical thinking are used to explain how fears, social tensions, and personal conflicts were externalized through accusations of witchcraft. The testimonies reveal how illness, dreams, quarrels, and economic losses were interpreted within a framework of supernatural causation. At the same time, the acquittal of Dowen Nith suggests the gradual emergence of more rational judicial practices in 18th-century Transylvania.

Keywords

Transylvania, Râșnov (Rosenau), witchcraft trials, psychoanalysis, early modern society