THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

WITCHCRAFT IN
EARLY MODERN EUROPE AND
COLONIAL AMERICA

Edited by
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KLEIO, a computer programme developed originally for the quantitative analysis of inventories in the Max Planck Institut für Geschichte in Göttingen, Germany. Almost two thousand witchcraft trials and approximately twenty thousand so-called maleficium or bewitchment narratives, which were found mostly in the testimony of witnesses in witch trials, were encoded at that time, according to a set of questions that the members of the research group developed. In this way the group gathered basic information about the individual trials: the accused witch’s name, sex, age, family and social status, and religion. The same data was acquired for all the accusers, together with their relation to the accused. Another questionnaire was designed to codify information in the narratives of bewitchment. Inspired by historical anthropology and social studies of witch-hunting in Western Europe, these questions were intended to emphasize the social and narrative features as well as the constructed nature of witchcraft accusations. The testimonies of the individual witnesses were to be coded according to the morphological sequence of a model or ‘ideal’ bewitchment narrative. They were intended to reveal how the act of maleficium was imagined in the minds of the witnesses, and how the accused person became a ‘witch’ in the eyes of others.¹

The discovery of new archival material since the formation of the research group has led to a steady expansion of the database. By the year 2000 the number of known witchcraft accusations had almost doubled, and archival research on the subject, still as well as outside modern-day Hungary, is still ongoing. Local historians and archivists, who were not necessarily members of the research group, also contributed to this enterprise. These historians have come not only from Hungary, but from Austria, Croatia, Romania, and Slovakia.

Despite the limitations of KLEIO, its use has provided a deeper understanding of the importance of locality in early modern witchcraft prosecutions, and has led to the publication of a number of local and regional studies of witch-hunting. The most notable of these studies includes an in-depth, historical-anthropological study of witch-hunting in a Calvinist region of Hungary (the town of Debrecen and the neighbouring county of Bihar);² a narrative-morphological analysis of bewitchment stories from the mostly Catholic county of Sopron; social-legal studies of the earliest, sixteenth-century, witch trials of the towns of Kolozsvár (Cluj in present-day Romania) and Sopron; wider regional statistical-legal studies of witchcraft inside and outside modern-day Hungary; and numerous studies of local witch-hunts in various urban and village communities, based on a case reading of trial documents and other local historical sources.

In addition to these local and regional studies, important statistical, bibliographical, social, and folkloristic summaries of the overall history of witch-hunting in early


modern Hungary have resulted from the work of the research group. Individual researchers have also investigated specific aspects of Hungarian witchcraft, including demonology, folk beliefs, methods of elite and popular healing, midwifery, criminal law, and the micro-sociology of local witch-hunts. In addition, some scholars working mostly in the earlier research tradition, and outside the witchcraft research group, have used witchcraft trial documents to illuminate various aspects of early modern material culture, such as furniture, building materials, and minerals.

19.1 The History of Witch-Hunting in the Kingdom of Hungary

One of the most important features of witch-hunting in the ancient kingdom in Hungary is that it seems to have remained relatively moderate in intensity. There is documentary evidence of 848 executions for witchcraft before 1800 in a population that


19.1.1 Early Modern Witch-Hunts

Witch-hunting in early modern Hungary coincided with an unstable period in the country's political history. The Ottoman Turks defeated the Hungarian armies at Mohács in 1526 and occupied Buda, the capital, in 1541. For the next 150 years the country was divided into three parts, and this division, together with the accompanying politico-socio-cultural developments that it engendered, provided the geopolitical setting for early modern witchcraft accusations. During this period the kingdom of Hungary was limited to the north-western part known as Upper Hungary, which was ruled by the Habsburg monarchy. The central and southern parts (approximately the area of the Great Hungarian Plain), was occupied by the Turks, and belonged to the Ottoman Empire, while the eastern part, Transylvania (today in Romania), became a more or less independent principality, ruled mostly by Hungarian noble dynasties. In the 1670s and 1690s the Turks were driven out of Hungary with the help of the Habsburg army, bringing the whole country, including Transylvania, under the rule of the Habsburg monarchy.

19.2 The Legal Foundation of Witch-Hunting

During the early modern period the prosecution of magic and witchcraft in the kingdom of Hungary acquired a new legal foundation. King Ferdinand I (r. 1526-1564)

\[4\] Hereafter, the statistical figures for early modern witch-hunting in Hungary are provided according to the unpublished register of the accused witches, created by Péter Tóth G., indicated as UROW in the following. The last survey of national relevance accessible in English before that is to be found in Klánik, 'Witch-Hunting in Hungary'; Klánik, 'Hungary'; and St. Kristof, 'Hungary'. The discrepancy in the statistical data given in these essays, as well as in the present survey, is due to the gradual increase in the archival findings on the one hand, and the constant refinement of the methods of interpreting historical data on the other. This is especially true for the possible number of capital sentences.
issued a decree against *incantatrixes* (enchantresses or witches) in 1527, and the *Constitutio Criminalis Carolina*, the criminal codex promulgated by Emperor Charles V in 1532, facilitated the prosecution of these offenders. In 1614 the Transylvanian Diet also issued a decree in order to punish 'sorcerers' and 'witches' to be found in that region. Witchcraft, however, has never been considered a *crimen exceptum*, that is, an excepted crime, in the kingdom of Hungary, and it was prosecuted together with other crimes in municipal, county, and landlords' courts. The most frequently used legal text was *Forma processus judicati criminalis seu praxis criminalis* (Form of the procedure of jurisdiction or the practice of criminal investigation), based on the teachings of the Leipzig Lutheran lawyer Benedict Carpzov, and codified for Austria by Emperor Ferdinand III in 1656. It was published in Latin in 1687 by the Catholic university of Nagyszombat, and appended to the *Corpus iuris* of Hungary in 1696. *Praxis criminalis* constituted the most important channel through which Western demonological ideas, including those of the sabbath and the demonic pact, entered Hungary. Although its publication history is not well researched, it went into a minimum of six editions (all in Latin and without any textual change) between 1687 and 1748. The late publication of this legal manual in Hungary may help to explain why Hungarian witch-hunting reached its peak only during the second half of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth centuries. Only then did witch trials become widespread in the country.

Municipal customs also provided a legal foundation for some local trials. For example, a clause in the customs of the seven free royal cities published in 1701 ordered that anyone abusing the sacraments and the pictures of saints, that is, using them for magical purposes, should be put to death. Where municipal law made no reference to witchcraft, as in the Transylvanian Saxon cities, local courts relied on to the *Constitutio Criminalis Carolina*. In early modern period most Hungarian witchcraft trials were held in the secular courts, but these tribunals often cited Exodus 22:18 to claim divine as well as temporal authority for proceeding against witches.

The long life and relatively frequent use of the water ordeal and other features of medieval criminal procedure testify to the survival of the accusatorial system of criminal justice well into the first half of the eighteenth century. But the increased reliance upon the production of material proof (such as 'magical' objects or instruments found with the accused person), the use of torture to extract confessions, and the taking of written depositions from witnesses, show that Hungarian courts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were gradually adopting some of the features of inquisitorial procedure, which was well established in most parts of Western Europe.5

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19.3 **Overall Chronology and Statistics**

As shown by a recent statistical assessment, it was the sixteenth century that saw the beginnings of a (more or less) regular witch-hunt in the kingdom of Hungary. It seems to have intensified during the 1580s and 1590s, reached one of its peaks towards the end of the seventeenth century, but only become truly massive during the first half of the eighteenth century.

The numbers of currently known accused witches in seven chronological periods are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Accused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1526-52</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1553-1600</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1601-50</td>
<td>544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1651-1700</td>
<td>783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1701-50</td>
<td>2297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1751-1800</td>
<td>592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1801-48</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The kingdom of Hungary has always been a multi-ethnic country. Upper Hungary had a fairly large population of Germans, Slovaks, and Czechs, while Germans and Romanians populated Transylvania, and, in the south, Croatians, Serbians, and—towards the end of this period—Slovaks, lived on the Great Plain. In addition to these minorities, Jews and Roma lived in various places throughout the country. Despite this wide ethnic diversity, the great majority (approximately 75 per cent) of those accused of witchcraft or instrumental in bringing the accusations were Hungarians. One explanation for this ethnic concentration is that witchcraft charges developed mainly among people who interacted with one another on a daily basis, unimpeded by linguistic or cultural barriers, and Hungarians formed the largest ethnic bloc in the kingdom.6

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6 UROW. The estimated per cents for other nationalities are very small: 9 per cent German, 7.5 per cent Croatian, 4 per cent Romanian, 2 per cent Slovakian, 1 per cent Roma, 1 per cent Polish—Ruthenian, and 0.5 per cent Serbian.
the early Transylvanian Lutheran synod of 1577 threatened any person involved in magical acts with death. The first religious treatises that discussed witchcraft as such came from Protestant authors. The Lutheran preacher Péter Bornemiszsa published *Ordógi kisírtekről a vagy röntenes utalatosságáról ez megfertéztetett világnak* (About the Temptations of the Devil, or the Loathsome Nature of this Infected World) in 1578. The book dealt with witch beliefs, related stories of witchcraft, and described various magical practices among peasants in north-west Hungary. The presence of the devil in the world and the danger he represented to Christians was also emphasized in the early Lutheran liturgies, such as the *Agenda* of István Melotai Nyilas, which was published in Várad (Oradea, in present-day Romania) in 1563. The liturgical work included a number of formulas for performing exorcisms.

The first Hungarian Calvinist demonology was included in *Confessio Ecclesiæ Debrencinæsis* (Confession of Faith for the Church of Debrecen), which appeared in 1562. The work was compiled under the direction of Péter Meliész Juhász, who became the first bishop of the Calvinist Church in Hungary. Meliész, who was a follower of the teachings of the German Lutheran theologian Johann Brenz, manifested a high degree of scepticism regarding the reality of diabolical witchcraft. His demonological ideas laid the foundation for a vigorous and long-lasting sceptical tradition among Hungarian Calvinists. Although Calvinist liturgical manuals also testified to the everyday works of the devil, and even contained a ritual of exorcism, scholarly scepticism pervaded contemporary Calvinist theology. It characterized, for example, the two comprehensive treatises on demonology, both titled *Disputatio theologica de lamiis veneficis*, which were compiled by two students of Calvinist theology, Joanna C. Mediomontanus and Andreas P. Csehi, and were published in Várad in 1566. Both of them relied on the work of the sixteenth-century sceptic Johann Weyer, and almost entirely rejected the diabolical ideas that characterized the *Malus maleficarum* as well as the credulous tract on witchcraft by the English Protestant demonologist, William Perkins. One point, however, on which Mediomontanus and Csehi agreed with Perkins, was that they both condemned any kind of ‘witch’, even one who was a victim of diabolic illusions or a humble practitioner of popular ‘white’ magic, such as love magic, healing, or divination. For them it was the intention of those witches and sorcerers to use diabolical power that made them guilty of a spiritual crime.

Seventeenth-century Hungarian Calvinist views on witchcraft were not altogether sceptical or homogeneous. A Calvinist synod held in the town of Margita in Bihar

county in 1681, for example, threatened all sorcerers and those who consulted them with excommunication. This injunction appears to have functioned as a catalyst to witch-hunting in the region. The synod was chaired by Bishop Mátyás Nőgrádi, a Calvinist preacher in Debrecen, who published his *Lelei probák* (Spiritual Touchstone) in 1551. This book included a short treatise, *Az ordógi praktikárdal mint kellyen ítéleti embernek* (How to Judge Devilish Practices). Although Bishop Nőgrádi argued for a rather prudent and careful handling and investigation of village witchcraft accusations, he analysed certain forms of the witches’ pact with the devil, and even categorized them into types, and he gave greater credence to them than did his colleagues. It may be relevant to note that Bishop Nőgrádi had travelled to England in the mid-1640s, when Matthew Hopkins, the notorious witchfinder, was conducting the largest witch-hunt in English history. Nőgrádi may have also been influenced by the demonological treatise of William Perkins, *The Damned Art of Witchcraft* (1608), which he cited in his own work.

Although the majority of Hungarian Calvinists rejected the idea of the witches’ pact and the sabbath, considering them nothing but illusions or the product of melancholy, they condemned all forms of everyday popular magic, especially those of popular healers and cunning people. The Debrecen Calvinists also published *Lex politica Dei* (The Public Law of God) in 1610, which was a collection of the laws in the Hebrew Bible condemning sorcery and divination. The Calvinists made their strongest case against the practice of popular magic of this sort when discussing the origin and curing of illnesses, especially the plague. Seventeenth-century Calvinist preachers in Debrecen all insisted that popular healers and midwives who employed magical practices deserved severe punishment.

Despite the harshness of these condemnations, Hungarian Protestant demonology manifested a rather ‘gentle’, sceptical attitude towards witchcraft. There is still research to be done on this question, but we already know that, for example, a group of seventeenth-century Protestant students studying in Wittenberg and Jena imported an explicitly anti-diabolical, anti-demonological concept of magic. Georgius Fridericus Magnus, a so-called ‘Hungarian’ (Latin for Hungarian but also for the greater kingdom of Hungary at the time) from the city of Pozsony (Bratislava in present-day Slovakia) defended the propositions of Johann Weyer and Kaspar Peucer in his *Disputatio physica de magia* (Physical Dispute about Magic), held in Wittenberg in 1665, and denied the possibility of the witches’ pact with the devil. Later in the century Johannes Surmann, who came from Beszterce (Bistrița in present-day Romania), supported the arguments of the late-seventeenth-century Dutch sceptic Balthasar Bekker in his De
daemonologia recentiorum auctorum falsa (About the False Demonology of Recent Authors) of 1692. Gottfried Roech, another ‘Hungricus’ from Körömbénya (Kremnica in present-day Slovakia), also rejected a diabolical ‘interpretation’ of magic in his Exercitatio historico philologica de cultu Simonis Magi (Historical-philological Exercises on the Art of Simon Magus), published at Jena in 1683. Eighteenth-century scholarly writings, including Reskényi ut (The Narrow Road, 1719) by Imre Pápai Páriz contributed to this skeptical trend in the Hungarian Protestant tradition. These works also recommended the punishment of any form of popular or white magic.\textsuperscript{13}

The demonology of the Hungarian Catholics in the early modern period has not received much scholarly attention. To be sure, the Malleus maleficarum was known in early modern Hungary. The libraries of the various Jesuit colleges in Upper Hungary had copies of this notorious witchcraft manual, as did Miklós Zrínyi, one of the greatest poets and writers of the seventeenth century. The trials that took place in Somorja (Šamorin in present-day Slovakia) in 1691 made an explicit reference to the Malleus, but the book apparently did not exert a significant influence on witch-hunting in subsequent years. During the same century, copies of Martin Del Rio’s Disquisitionum magicae libri sex (1599) could be found in some of the libraries of the Jesuit colleges in Upper Hungary, as could copies of Jean Bodin’s Daemonomania (1580). Otherwise, the criminal courts in Catholic regions relied mainly on Praxis criminalis in prosecuting cases of witchcraft during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Towards the end of the prosecutions, courts relied on other legal guides, such as István Huszty’s Jurisprudentia practica (The Practice of Jurisprudence), published in 1758, which included chapters on the practice of magic, and recommended the use of torture when prosecuting witches.

Rituals of exorcism were routinely included in Catholic liturgical manuals. Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries (often Italians or southern Slavs) performed these rites on both noble and peasant demonic in the seventeenth century. Catholic rites of exorcism differed significantly from those of Calvinists, which relied exclusively on the methods of prayer and fasting. But Protestants and Catholics agreed in their condemnation of both witchcraft and popular magic, in eighteenth-century printed collections of sermons, such as Zsigmond Csázy’s Evangélium trombita (The Evangelical


\textsuperscript{15} On Mediomontanus and Mount St Gellért see Klániczay, ‘Hungary’, 232–3, 249.


\textsuperscript{15} On Mediomontanus and Mount St Gellért see Klániczay, ‘Hungary’, 232–3, 249.

resettlement of this area after the end of Ottoman rule caused considerable social and cultural turmoil in these communities.19

The popular image of the Hungarian sabbath was based not so much on foreign demonological concepts as local, originally non-diabolical, beliefs. Beliefs in the Hungarian tálós—who was a sort of shamanistic sorcerer—and south-eastern Slavic and Romanian fairies and sorcerers such as kresnik and zduhač influenced these popular notions of witchcraft. Either learned demonologists diabolized these supernatural beings, or local accusers and judges referred to them in the trials in order to prove the suspicious supernatural connections and malevolence of accused witches.20 The witches' sabbath, as represented in confessions and legal depositions made by town and village dwellers in early modern Hungary, tended to be like a community feast, with excessive eating and drinking, playing music, and dancing in houses, churchyards, or the local tavern. In the majority of cases the sabbath resembled a rather profane feast in which the devil was not present. When, however, the devil was in attendance, he was imagined either as a he-goat (as in the trials at Szeged in 1728) or as having horse legs (as in the Pozsony area). Sometimes he took the shape of a human being, either a tall black man, a priest, or a handsome peasant lad. According to the testimony of some witnesses, he wore Hungarian dress in regions inhabited by Germans and German dress in predominantly Hungarian areas. He could also be represented as an ordinary animal, such as a dog or cat.21

19.6 A Statistical Profile of Hungarian Witches

According to our present knowledge, a total of 4,592 accused witches were brought to trial between 1243 and 1800 in the kingdom of Hungary. The total number of trials was 2,291. These figures should be considered minimum totals, since the exploration of witchcraft trials in different archival collections is still ongoing. For the entire period, the great majority of the accused witches were women (3,962 or 86 per cent). Local studies provide similar gender distributions: only eleven men (roughly 9 per cent) were brought to trial in the city of Debrecen between 1575 and 1739, and eight (roughly 5 per cent) in the villages and towns of Bihar county between 1591 and 1766.

About two thirds or 3,444 of the accused witches were Hungarian, while most of the rest were German (438), Croatian (340), and Romanian (233). There were small numbers of Slovaks (92), Roma (47), Poles–Ruthens (41), and Serbs (18) as well.22

The exact number of executions cannot be determined. According to the most recent research, only 848 witches or roughly 51 per cent of those whose final sentences were known were given capital sentences. One should, however, take into consideration the fact that the final sentences are not known for roughly 64 per cent of the total number of accused witches. The majority of those not sentenced to death received corporal punishment or were banished from their communities either temporarily or permanently. The remainder were acquitted. Local rates of capital punishments varied. In the Calvinist city of Debrecen only 27 per cent of those whose sentences are known were executed, mainly by burning, while in the predominantly Calvinist county of Bihar the comparable figure was 38 per cent.

19.7 Chronological Patterns of Witchcraft Prosecutions

Early modern Hungarian witch-hunting tended to increase in intensity during periods of peace that set in after or between wars and internal rebellions. These periods also coincided with periods of devastating plague epidemics and their immediate aftermath. Witch-hunting reached its first peak in the 1580s, a peaceful period that coincided with a plague epidemic. The intensity of prosecutions decreased during the Fifteen Years' War with the Turks (1591–1606) and also during the anti-Habsburg uprising of István Bocskai (1604–6).

The 1620s saw a new spike in the number of prosecutions. Although this was a time of rebellion, when Gábor Bethlen, Prince of Transylvania, led three campaigns against the Habsburgs, many individual trials were held in years of peace and in regions unaffected by military conflict. A decree issued by the Transylvanian Diet in 1614 to punish sorcerers, coupled with the outbreak of the plague, most likely contributed to the intensification of witch-hunting during these years.

Another increase in witch-hunting occurred after 1690, when the Ottomans were finally driven out of the country. Witch-hunting reached its highest peak in the first half of the eighteenth century, after the end of the War of Independence against the Habsburgs (1703–11). The two greatest plague epidemics of the eighteenth century, which took place between 1709 and 1711 and between 1738 and 1745, also seem to have contributed to this intense period of witch-hunting.

19.8 Decriminalization and Late Witch Trials

Although witch-hunting declined somewhat in the middle of the eighteenth century, it did not register a significant reduction in intensity until the Habsburg empress Maria Theresa took steps to stop the prosecutions after 1758, and until Hungarian witch beliefs underwent a profound transformation.

The person who was primarily responsible for the change in official policy was Gerard van Swieten, Maria Theresa's enlightened court physician. After having examined personally a Slovenian woman (a certain Heruzcina) accused of witchcraft, van Swieten submitted a mémoire to the empress in 1758, arguing that the charges against this woman were based on false beliefs. In order to avoid future miscarriages of justice of this sort he suggested that the government end all such prosecutions. In keeping with his recommendation, the royal court reversed a number of local, municipal sentences passed against accused witches, and in 1768 a royal decree prohibited the execution of witches.23 This decree did not, however, bring an immediate end to all witchcraft prosecutions in Hungary. County magistrates, who presided over their own criminal courts and resisted the centralizing efforts of the Habsburg rulers, continued to hold witchcraft trials during the last three decades of the eighteenth century, and in some regions even into the early years of the nineteenth century.

In addition to this change in royal policy, local magistrates began to interpret witchcraft as an imposture or the product of illness rather than a supernatural, diabolical act. This is what happened in the city of Debrecen, where prosecutions for

22 UROW.

23 Kraniczay, 'Hungary', 235; Lilla Kollar and Péter Tóth G., 'Die Dekriminalisierung der Magie und der Kampf gegen Aberglauben in Ungarn und in Siebenbürgen 1740–1840', unpublished manuscript; UROW.
witchcraft ended well before the decrees of Empress Maria Theresa. A large volume of educational literature, including popular scientific texts, schoolbooks, and chapbooks, ridiculed witch beliefs as superstitious, and attributed its effects to natural causes. Lawyers used these attacks on traditional witch beliefs to defend witches at their trials, and they were successful in winning a number of acquittals in the mid-eighteenth century.

19.9 ACCUSERS AND ACCUSED:
A Micro-sociology

Accusations of witchcraft in early modern Hungary must be studied in their proper local, social, and cultural context. In many cases witchcraft charges involved other offences or crimes, such as adultery, fornication, arson, or malevolent curing, and they often reflected ‘dangerous’ social relations between the accused witches and their accusers.

Early modern Hungarian witchcraft accusations reveal three main patterns. The first is what may be called ‘accusations from above’, which occurred when a wealthy person or one of higher social or political status accused a person of lower status. This pattern was evident in politically initiated witch trials within the Transylvanian high nobility. Among the princes who accused family members of their political enemies of witchcraft were Sigismund Báthory, who blamed the mother of Boldizsár Báthory, whom he had murdered, for causing his impotence; Gábor Bethlen, who, after having taken power from the murdered Gábor Báthory in 1612, accused the sister of the latter as well as two other noblemen of his entourage; and Mihály Apafi, who initiated a very large witch-hunt between 1679 and 1686. Apafi’s main target was the wife of his exiled rival, Pál Bélö, whom he accused of inflicting a serious illness on the prince’s wife, Anna Bornemisza, in revenge for her husband’s defeat.

This pattern was also apparent in early modern urban and village witchcraft. For example, in the city of Debrecen, well-to-do burghers (artisans and merchants) accused their lodgers, their house servants, or even city beggars of witchcraft in dozens of cases. These accusations seem to have formed part of an explicit local socio-political campaign against the poor. A variant of this pattern was evident when so-called ‘honest’ Calvinist citizens in Debrecen accused adulteresses, drunkards, thieves, and ‘blasphemous’ women of witchcraft. The latter group comprised fifty-three people, roughly 36 per cent of the total number of Debrecen witches. Another variant of this pattern, in which

a person of ‘superior’ social or moral status accused a subordinate of witchcraft, occurred when young female servants were accused of witchcraft (mostly love magic) and fornication by their landlords, hosts, or their mostly male acquaintances or clients.

Another manifestation of this pattern can be seen in two other forms of social conflict in the eighteenth-century frontier world of the Great Plain that were closely connected to its resettlement and the restructuring of its social world. The first was evident when local village or town dwellers accused strangers or newcomers of witchcraft, a very common phenomenon in the period. The second was apparent when formerly privileged social groups, such as the hajdú (Haiduk) nobles who had lost their administrative, economic, and military liberties after the end of the Turkish occupation, accused their peasant neighbours of witchcraft. Suffering the loss of their ancient privileges, the nobles apparently used witchcraft accusations to retaliate against people of lower social status who had recently settled in their communities.

The second main pattern of witchcraft accusations might be labelled ‘acquisitions from below’. It was evident when a socially disadvantaged party accused a person of higher social or economic status. This pattern was most common in witch panics. We find it, for example, in the city of Szeged in 1728, when a poor wise woman and beggar accused a highly esteemed former judge, Dániel Rósa, of witchcraft. Town and village magistrates and judges were also accused during the witch panic in the villages of Ottomány and Nagykerek in 1734, and in the Kiskunhalas panic of 1734.

Another manifestation of this pattern was evident when fourteen- to sixteen-year-old house servants or kitchen maids, and even younger children accused their landlords, hosts, and even parents or grandparents of witchcraft. Some of these accusations from below also occurred during witch panics, as in Kolozsvár towards the end of the witch-hunt that lasted from 1615 to 1629. Others, however, occurred in trials when only one person was accused, such as in Debrecen and the county of Bihar during the first half of eighteenth century.

Accusations from socially subordinate groups also occurred during periods of moderate witch-hunting. In some trials in eighteenth-century Debrecen lodgers accused their hosts of witchcraft. In an even larger number of cases, patients and clients accused wise women, midwives, and healers who had failed in their efforts to

23 Kristóf, Ordódi mesterséget nem cselekedtem, 133–4, 162–70, 171–5. For the trial of a young servant from Nyíregyháza in 1728–9, accused of fornication and witchcraft, tortured, and then banned from the county, see György Szabóasály, ‘Egy fiatal hajdúnő és a közösség: Fedor Mária Törzséte’ [A Village Witch and the Community: The Story of Mária Fedor], in Szabóasály, ed., Tanulmányok az egymenese és magyar történetünk köreiből VI (Nyíregyháza, 2008), 41–54.
cure them. Cunning folk, who were mostly women in early modern Hungary, were called either *tudós* (wise), *orvos* (doctor), *tudós asszony* (wise woman), *orvosasszony* (doctor/medicine woman) or, referring more to the practices of divination and fortune-telling, *néző* (seer). Witchcraft accusations against cunning people reflected a broader transformation of the healing and medical culture in Debrecen, in which popular healers and experts of magic gradually suffered a loss in prestige. Debrecen was not an isolated case. Witchcraft accusations against wise women and cunning people occurred in South Transdanubia, Nagyvásárhely (Baia Mare in present-day Romania), Kolozsvár, and in many other local communities throughout the country. They show, among other things, that relationships between patients and healers or diviners were not always amicable during this period.

Occasionally accusation from below reached the highest levels of society. For example, Anna Benkő, a Transylvanian noblewoman, was accused of witchcraft in the middle of the eighteenth century. Her trial involved both accusations from below, since it was servants and housemaids who accused her of various magical practices, and those from people of equal social status, namely her noble relatives who wanted to get her fortune.20

The main pattern of witchcraft accusations involved individuals who had the same social status or occupation or possessed magical power. Many of the accusations of this kind reflected competition among cunning folk; a large number of witchcraft accusations in Hungary originated in this kind of magical status rivalry. Almost all the victims of the first witchcraft trial in Kolozsvár in 1656 were cunning folk who accused one another of witchcraft. The same was true in the early modern Debrecen trials, in which roughly 31 per cent of all the accused witches were practitioners of popular or magical healing. During these trials local wise women brought charges against other wise women, midwives accused other midwives, and city barber surgeons and licensed midwives testified against their popular equivalents, stigmatizing them as 'diabolical' and therefore illegal. These kinds of witchcraft accusations, as mentioned above, reflected the reorganization and institutionalization of the local health care system in Debrecen during the eighteenth century. Rivalry among wise women and midwives was also apparent in the Hódmezővásárhely and Nagyvásárhely witch trials.21

Same-status accusations and magical status rivalry contributed to the development of witch-hunts in various ways. In some eighteenth-century hunts, the magistrates forced cunning folk to furnish 'proofs' of alleged agreements with the witches, according to which the latter had agreed to bewitch people so that the cunning folk would have more patients to cure. These charges were based on the well-known adage in Hungary that 'Who can lift the spell, can cast it as well.'

A specific group of Hungarians cunning men known as *tudós pásztorok* or wise shepherds also found themselves accused of witchcraft, either by their village clients or their shepherd colleagues, during the seventeenth and especially the eighteenth century. A peculiar charge brought against them testified to popular beliefs in so-called werewolves, humans who were believed to be able to transform themselves into wolves. Such charges were made throughout the early modern period.22 Charges against shepherds for practising witchcraft and acting as werewolves may have reflected the decline of the ancient practice of cattle-herding in the eighteenth century. Another aspect of the economic and social transformation of Hungary that occurred after its Turkish occupation was the undermining of the traditionally high prestige of the shepherds, who had reputations as popular healers. The resettlement and the profound economic–political reorganization of the country under the returned Habsburg rulers and the newly established institutions of absolute monarchy were responsible for this development.23

In sum, charges of witchcraft were used by individuals belonging to many different social groups to advance their interests and resolve their social conflicts. These charges were not limited to one social group, nor did they reflect a particular type of social

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21 Kristóf, Órdög mesteresség nem csak indokolhat, 143–70, and Kristóf, '"Why Women?" Sinners and the Poor', 147; Klánicsay, 'Hungary', 239; Klánicsay, 'Mely öröktől volt nyomlata', 129; Sándor, 'Hódmezővásárhely egészségtárgyai kultúrája', 163–30; Kiss, 'Ante Clarum Bódi (Egy 1966-beli i amerikai


23 Klánicsay, 'Hungary', 254, Kristóf, Órdög mesteresség nem csak indokolhat, 85–86. For an analysis of the witchcraft trial held in 1559 of a shepherd from the village of Vassar, accused of magical (and unsuccessful) healing, and sending wolves to kill his enemies see József Hidi, 'Az újapáthás korokra (1697–1847)' [The Period of Rebuilding (1697–1847)], in József Hidi and Zoltán Mezei, eds, Vassar története (Vassar, 2010), 122–4.
conflict. Charges of witchcraft penetrated early modern Hungarian society as a whole and reflected the transformation of that society during the early modern period.32

19.10 Future Research

One large gap in our knowledge of witch-hunting in Hungary is the way in which the prosecutions in the ecclesiastical courts corresponded to, contributed to, or overlapped with those of the secular courts. Early modern ecclesiastical records often dealt with offences related to witchcraft, and these have not been adequately explored. Some work has been done on the records of Calvinist tribunals, but very little has been conducted in the ecclesiastical records of other religious denominations.

Another gap is the importance of gender in understanding witchcraft prosecutions. Some Hungarian studies have investigated the influence of Calvinist concepts of female weakness and fallibility with those of diabolic temptation, but the views of Lutherans and Catholics regarding the connection between witchcraft and women remain relatively unknown. The degree to which clerical stereotypes of women coincided with popular attitudes towards women accused of witchcraft remains largely unexplored.

There is also a need for a better understanding of the cultural language of witchcraft narratives and the particular social and cultural context in which they were produced. For example, the locations where witches were thought to assemble might refer to specific sites in the local landscape, or more generally to locations such as private vineyards, whose access was restricted by law.33 Gestures and ceremonies mentioned in the trial documents might refer to forms of legal ritual, while the dramatic character of these narratives made them appear to constitute a 'theatre of blood and pain'.34 Finally, more attention needs to be paid to the construction of witchcraft narratives. In this respect the methodologies of microhistory, critical discourse analysis, and linguistic analysis will continue to contribute to a deeper understanding of the subject, and bring us to a deeper knowledge of the mental world of those who initiated witchcraft prosecutions and those who staged them.35

Further Reading


32 A thorough analysis of local conflicts resulting in witchcraft accusations in Hungary would show a broader perspective than the one proposed by Robert J. W. Evans, The Making of the Habshug Monarchy 1550–1700 (Oxford, 1979), 41, according to which witchcraft charges went hand in hand with efforts at social control, and formed 'another aspect of the pursuit of settled hierarchy' in Hungary and in Central Europe. A considerable number of the above-mentioned 'dangerous relations' involved in such charges would also testify to the subversive function of witchcraft, itself very much present in early modern Hungary.

Kristóf, Ildikó, 'Ordógi mesterségei nem cselekedtem': A boszorkányüldözés társadalmi és kulturális háttére a kora újkor Debrecenben és Bihar vármegyében [I Have Not Done Any Diabolic Deed: The Social and Religious Background of Witch-hunting in Early Modern Debrecen and Bihar County] (Debrecen, 1998), with a summary in English.


Pócs, Éva, Fairies and Witches at the Boundary of South-Eastern and Central Europe (Helsinki, 1989).


Pócs, Éva, Between the Living and the Dead: A Perspective on Witches and Seers in the Early Modern Age (Budapest, 1999).

Pócs, Éva, 'Tündérek and the Order of St Ilona, or, Did the Hungarians Have Fairy Magicians?' Acta Ethnographica Hungarica, 54 (2009), 579-96.

Szebehelyi, Bánkai, ed., The Role of Magic in the Past: Learned and Popular Magic, Popular Beliefs and Diversity of Attitudes (Bratislava, 2005).


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**CHAPTER 20**

**WITCHCRAFT TRIALS IN RUSSIA: HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY**

**VALERIE KIVELSON**

In 1648 Vasili Pavlov, a military man in the service of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, came to the court of the governor-general of the frontier fortress town of Belev to denounce his bondsman for working magic against him. The accusation was framed as a humble petition—as convention dictated—addressed directly to the tsar from his suppliant 'slave':

> To Sovereign, Tsar, and Grand Prince Alexei Mikhailovich, your slave Vaska, son of Andrei Pavlov, petitions.

In this year, 1648, my bondsman, Ivashka Ryzhei, threatened in the presence of my [other] bondsman, Gavrillo Filipov, saying "if my master is ever mad at me for any reason, then I will stand in the threshold or wherever, and say [a spell], and he will be able to do nothing to me. And as to the female sex, whomever I want, even if it is a boiarinitsa (mistress/noblewoman), my spells will cause [her] to fall in love with me.'

The horrified master took what he saw as appropriate steps:

> So I beat him and ordered him to write what he had boasted of in front of my bondsman. He wrote it out with his own hand in the presence of people, my peasants. Merciful sovereign, tsar, and grand prince...have mercy on me, your slave. Order, sovereign, that my man Ivashka Ryzhei be questioned and his criminal letter taken as evidence.

In many ways, this case typifies the prosecution of witchcraft in Muscovite and early imperial Russian courts. Initiated by petition, denunciations very often grew out of domestic tensions or hostilities between masters and serfs, slaves, or other dependents. They were normally heard in secular courts, overseen by the tsar or the centra.