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The Medieval and Early Modern Construction of Otherness in Literature

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Table of Contents

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Introduction

Letizia Vezzosi*

Abstract:

The volume examines the construction of otherness through portrayals of monsters, witches, and sorcerers in non-canonical texts aimed at popular audiences in Northwestern Europe during the late Middle Ages and early modern period. Drawing on street literature – such as sermons, ballads, pamphlets, and annals – as well as two demonological treatises, it investigates how vernacular media absorbed and reshaped learned theological and demonological discourses. Emerging from the PRIN 2022 project, the study highlights the interplay between elite and popular media in shaping collective perceptions of magic, monstrosity, and social marginality, with particular attention to the gendered portrayal of women as agents of otherness.

Keywords: Demonology, Magic, Otherness, Popular Texts, Witchcraft

The construction of monsters, witches, and sorcerers – as well as the processes through which otherness is defined and disseminated – has long been a fertile field for interdisciplinary inquiry. Throughout medieval and early modern times, the portrayal of monstrous beings or events, preternatural phenomena and illicit magical practices in Northwestern Europe developed and operated both as a reflection of prevailing social anxieties and as a potent instrument apt to reinforce moral and religious order. The present volume, which seeks to interrogate these processes through a close examination of non-canonical texts specifically produced for popular audiences, emerges from the PRIN 2022 research project entitled "Monsters, Sorcerers, and Witches of Northwestern Europe: The Medieval and Early Modern Construction of Otherness in Literature for Popular Audiences", which foresees the collaboration of scholars from the Italian universities of Siena, Turin, Naples "L'Orientale", and Florence. Object of the investigation is a geographically and chronologically coherent corpus of non-canonical texts that were produced throughout the late Middle Ages and the early modern era in some representative regions of Northwestern Europe – England, Northern Germany, and Iceland – most notably sermons, ballads, broadsheets, pamphlets, treatises, manuals, and annals. Most crucially, the survey aims at explaining how popular media accommodated and disseminated

* I would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions of Luca Baratta and Dario Bullitta in the compilation of the introduction to this volume.

Letizia Vezzosi, University of Florence, Italy, letizia.vezzosi@unifi.it, 0000-0002-7635-2657

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learned theological and demonological discourses (which contributed significantly to the stigmatisation and marginalisation of certain groups, most commonly women), how such discourses were filtered into popular culture and, concurrently, how popular non-canonical texts contributed to the construction of marginality and otherness in the districts of Northwestern Europe.

In similar fashion, focussing on categories of magic and witchcraft described and discussed in the most diverse medieval and early modern literary genres, the present volume intends to explore how Middle English sermons, Icelandic annals, and learned theological treatises may find parallel solutions in the construction of the demonological concepts which underlie the received image of the witch.

1. State of the Art

Over the past decades, scholars have increasingly recognised that the perception of the marvellous, the uncanny, and the magical provides a unique window onto the underlying structures of society. As Daston and Park (1998) assert in *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, the way in which a given society perceives and defines wonders is intimately connected to its broader paradigm for understanding reality. This insight is particularly evident when one considers the representation of the marvellous and the magical in medieval texts, which not only articulate the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural but also mirror the ethical, political, and religious tensions of a given age.

In medieval and early modern Europe, the marvellous was not merely an object of curiosity. As Platt (1999) and Jones and Sprunger (2002) have shown, miraculous events, monstrous births, and instances of diabolic magic were often read as portents of social disorder – a clear sign that the natural order had been disrupted. Cohen's (1996) seminal concept of the monster "as a cultural body" (Cohen 1996, 4) further emphasised that the ambiguous, multi-layered nature of monstrous figures allowed them to serve as vehicles for projecting collective anxieties. Simultaneously, the "cumulative concept of witchcraft" – elaborated by Levack (2006) – illustrated how popular and learned elements converged to shape a singular, pervasive image of the witch as an embodiment of evil and transgression.

Gender studies have played a crucial role in reinterpreting these phenomena. Bradbury (Bradbury, Moseley-Christian 2017) argues that the polarities exemplified by figures such as the Virgin Mary and Eve offer a dual framework for assessing the moral status of women. In this context, women frequently emerge in medieval texts as symbols of both redemption and sin; Bynum (1987) notably discussed how the same female body could be portrayed as a source of life through childbirth and as an emblem of fallibility through sexual transgression. This gendered dichotomy is not confined to theological treatises but is vividly dramatised in the popular sermons and annals of the period. McAvoy (2004) further contends that the stereotyping of women in these texts reflects broader cultural anxieties regarding female power and its potential to subvert established social orders.

The study of magic and demonology has similarly evolved over time. Early medieval scepticism of magic gradually gave way to a systematic denunciation of practices deemed heretical and diabolical. Russell's *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (1972) and Cohn's *Europe's Inner Demons* (1975) offer comprehensive accounts of how magical practices were increasingly conflated with demonic pacts and heresy. Texts such as Bernard Gui's *Practica inquisitionis heretice pravitatis* (1886) and Nicolai Eymerici's *Directorium inquisitorum* (1578) exemplified this shift by categorising magic into "simple" (or rustic) forms – associated with ignorance and deception – and learned necromancy, which involved the deliberate invocation of demons and was consequently subject to harsher condemnation. Kieckhefer's (1989) work underscored that, while these distinctions were sometimes blurred in practice, the tendency to attribute a demonic origin to magical acts was a central tenet of medieval demonological thought.

The multidisciplinary perspective of cultural history has further revealed how the interpretation of preternatural phenomena is deeply intertwined with processes of social marginalisation and exclusion. As Brown noted in *Marginal Figures in the Global Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (2021), abnormal events – whether births, deaths, or other cataclysmic occurrences – were frequently read as signs of a breakdown in social order, thereby justifying the stigmatisation of those associated with such phenomena. This insight is corroborated by studies on the role of popular literature in transmitting and reinforcing these ideas. For instance, the examination of ballads, sermons, and pamphlets (O'Mara, Paul 2007; Raymond 2011; Delcorno 2017) demonstrated how texts intended for wide audiences became vehicles for both the dissemination of learned theological doctrines and the consolidation of communal moral values.

2. Theoretical Background

An inquiry on the construction of otherness through depictions of magic, witchcraft, and monstrosity in popular texts requires a multifaceted theoretical framework that draws upon cultural, legal, and gender studies. In this regard, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's concept of the "monster as a cultural body" (1996), according to which monsters are not merely aberrations but serve as liminal figures embodying a society's deepest anxieties, historical traumas, and collective memory, is pivotal. Monstrosity is such, because it challenges established norms by representing the limits of human understanding, and at the same time its ambiguous nature provides a rich terrain for interpreting the social and political underpinnings of a given era. Cohen's approach finds a perfect balancing in Brian Levack's notion of the "cumulative concept of witchcraft" (2006), in which witchcraft is intended as the outcome of the fusion of diverse popular beliefs and learned demonological traditions – ranging from diabolic pacts to nocturnal sabbaths – into a cohesive system that was later institutionalised within legal and ecclesiastical frameworks. This cumulative process is crucial for understanding how disparate magical practices were synthesised into a unified, stigmatised construct. Another theoretical layer of this volume's framework comes

from gender studies, applied to both magical practices (Flint 1991; Briggs 1996; Young 2017) and instances of monstrous births (Niccoli 1987; Crawford 2005; Baratta 2016 and 2017), to explain and understand the mechanisms through which women became subjected to negative stereotyping and marginalisation. As a matter of fact, the image of the woman has been interpreted since antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages through the lenses of Christianity both as moral exemplars and embodiments of sin. Scholars such as Bradbury (Bradbury, Moseley-Christian 2017) and McAvoy (2004) have shown that the polarities of sanctity and sin – epitomised by typological figures such as the Virgin Mary and Eve – served as templates for assessing the moral status of women, and more interestingly proved that this dualistic portray reinforced prevailing stereotypes of female weakness and played a key role in excluding and marginalising women who deviated from established norms.

The dominant thought and morality in the medieval world were most commonly disseminated through *exempla*, which embody the spiritual and behavioural values of society. This is why numerous collections – both anonymous and authored – from the Middle Ages have come down to us. *Exempla* also recur in treatises that systematise the theoretical and theological, or even political, debates reserved for the learned, who were proficient in Latin and were able to write and correspond in that language. The treatment of marginal, monstrous, magical, or witch-like figures is not different inasmuch as innumerable treatises, written in Latin, are devoted to them and numerous Latin *exempla* have been collected in compilations starting from the twelfth century. However, these works are not confined to the elite or solely to erudite discussions; they boldly aim to inform society at every level. For this reason, not only it is plausible to conceive an interaction between elite literature and popular literature, but it is also crucial to re-evaluate the role of vernacular literature – especially the one addressed to broader audiences and delivered through oral performance – as instrumental in transmitting theological and moral instructions and established doctrinal issues to lay audiences, thus influencing public consciousness and helping develop collective cultural identity (Burke 1978): a special place in this regard has to be reserved to vernacular preaching (Fletcher 2009; Delcorno 2017).

3. Contributions to the Volume

Within this framework, the volume focuses on popular texts written in the vernacular addressed to wider audiences, which included individuals with the most diverse educational backgrounds and different social status. Middle English sermons and demonological treatises are analysed in their own context of production, but also in mutual relation with each other, as for instance in their parallel configuration of magic and witchcraft. Such comparative and contrastive reading provides useful insights into the mechanisms through which learned discourses were able to permeate popular beliefs and how medieval and early popular texts reformulated and accommodated elite discourse.

Such process of adaptation and accommodation is paramount in Baratta and Montori's article, in which James VI's *Daemonologie* is seen as a pivotal work that adjusts and filters continental demonological theories – above all, the cumulative concept of the witches' sabbath – to a Scottish context. Written in 1597 amid personal and political insecurities following the North Berwick witch trials, the treatise emerges as both a refutation of witch-sceptical arguments (notably those of Johann Weyer and Reginald Scot) and as an instrument for reinforcing royal authority and orthodox Christian values. The authors argue that the *Daemonologie* appropriates established European demonological constructs, particularly the notions of the diabolical pact and the sabbath, portraying witchcraft as a form of religious apostasy and moral inversion. Indeed, James VI presents the sabbath as a grotesque parody of the Christian liturgy, where the devil and his witches invert and mock the sacraments and rituals of the Church. However, the treatise was not merely a scholarly exercise; rather, it functioned as a deliberate political tool. By depicting witchcraft as an extreme form of disobedience against divine order, James VI sought to consolidate his image as a divinely ordained protector of the realm.

Baratta and Montori rely on sources like the *Malleus Maleficarum* and Bodin's demonological writings, the same that constitute the basis for Bullitta's contribution, which focuses on Samuel Meiger's *De panurgia lamiarum*, the only extant manual on demonological witchcraft in Middle Low German. Bullitta provides a detailed analysis of how Meiger's work – drawing on an extensive range of classical, biblical, and contemporary sources – categorises witchcraft as a transgression of all Ten Commandments. By combining theological discourse with vivid, gruesome anecdotes and historical testimonies, Meiger's text functions both as a catalogue of various forms of witchcraft and sorcery and as a didactic tool for promoting moral rectitude, also relevant for early modern witch-hunts and for conceptually understanding demonology. These treatises are characterised by a rational systematisation of features associated with magic, supernatural and witchcraft that have been overtly individuated since antiquity as collections of *exempla*, and morally edifying literature, as well as patristic and apocryphal texts. However, all these sources are in Latin. Therefore, it is exactly in sermons that one finds the exemplification of behaviours and characteristics later associated with demonic magic.

Accordingly, a separate strand of research in this volume examines the role of healing magic as depicted in sermons and popular texts, showing how the Roman Catholic Church attempted to regulate and repudiate magical practices, while simultaneously acknowledging their deep-rooted presence in popular culture. Specifically linked to the conception of magic are Poggesi's and Riviello's articles. In particular, Poggesi's article explores the representation of healing magic in Middle English sermons from the fifteenth-century, examining how popular healing practices were interwoven with official ecclesiastical discourse. Against the backdrop of a society where conventional medical care was scarce, these sermons served as a medium for both instructing the laity and reinforcing the divine origin of true miracles. Poggesi demonstrates that, although magical

healing practices were often condemned as demonic, they were also appropriated as legitimate means of combating illness, thereby reflecting the inherent ambiguity in the medieval distinction between miracles and magic. Poggesi's analysis offers new insights into the complex relationship between folk medicine, religious belief, and the dynamics of moral regulation.

The figure of Simon Magus is at the centre of Riviello's study that examines his portrait in Middle English prose sermons, highlighting how the character evolved from an archetypal magician in early Christian tradition to a symbol of demonic deceit and doctrinal error. By analysing a range of sermons that rework both patristic and apocryphal sources, Riviello demonstrates that the negative portrayal of Simon Magus served to reinforce the boundaries between authentic Christian miracles and diabolical magic, and argues that the transformation of Simon Magus's character contributed to the construction of witchcraft as an enemy of both religious orthodoxy and social order, thereby providing a critical link between ancient demonological traditions and later medieval witch-hunts.

More focused on one of the features later associated with witches (misbelief) and their practices (theft and execration of the Host) is Vezzosi's contribution, which examines the portrayal of the disbelieving woman in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Middle English sermons. Drawing on reworked Latin *exempla* – derived from sources such as the *Legenda Aurea* and *Speculum Laicorum* – the study reveals how these sermons depict women as morally flawed and susceptible to diabolic deception. By situating the narrative within a broader didactic framework, the article demonstrates that the representation of the disbelieving woman functions both as a cautionary tale and as a reinforcement of orthodox ecclesiastical values, highlighting the dual role of female figures as both moral exemplars and symbols of sin.

Complementing the above contributions, Lombardi's article focuses on selected episodes from the Icelandic annals – specifically, the *Annáll Gunnlaugs prests Þorsteinssonar í Vallholti* and the *Mælifellsannáll* – where rune magic is invoked. Through a comparative analysis with formulas found in Icelandic "black books" preserved in Reykjavík and Stockholm, Lombardi uncovers the narrative and rhetorical strategies employed in the Annals to frame magical practices within local judicial and religious contexts. The study reveals that, in Iceland, magic was not only a practical means of addressing everyday challenges, but also a potent symbol of the tension between the supernatural and social order. This contribution broadens our understanding of the regional particularities in the construction of magical phenomena and the interplay between legal and liturgical discourses in medieval Scandinavia.

The different contributions here gathered and devoted to magic and witchcraft and their representation in learned texts and popular literature both enrich our understanding of the cultural construction of the witch as the other and highlight the dynamic interplay between elite discourse and popular belief. Their findings concurrently advance theoretical debates on the nature of otherness and marginality and offer practical insights into the role of popular literature in mediating complex cultural phenomena. The integration of philological

analysis, cultural history, and gender studies provides a robust framework for elucidating the mechanisms through which the marvellous and the preternatural were mobilised to construct, contest, and ultimately transform social and religious identities in Northwestern Europe by interrogating the ways in which magical, monstrous, and preternatural phenomena were used to regulate social behaviour and reinforce communal values.

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"The Forme that he vsed in counterfeiting God": James VI's *Daemonologie* and the Theorisation of the Continental Witches' Sabbath*

Luca Baratta, Irene Montori

Abstract:

James's *Daemonologie* (1597) reflects his personal and political anxieties, emerging in the wake of the North Berwick witch trials, in which he was directly involved. By reshaping continental demonological concepts – especially the diabolical pact and witches' sabbath – he adapted European stereotypes to a Scottish context. In Daemonologie, witchcraft is framed as religious apostasy and moral subversion, with the sabbath depicted as a blasphemous parody of Christian liturgy. However, his version omits sensational elements like infanticide and cannibalism, focusing on theological concerns. This essay argues that James's construction of witchcraft was not merely theoretical but a strategic response to contemporary religious and political challenges, bolstering his image as a divinely appointed ruler.

Keywords: Continental Witchcraft Beliefs, *Daemonologie*, James VI, Sabbath, Scottish Witch-Hunt

> It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honor of kings to search out a matter.
> (*Proverbs*, XXV: 2)
>
> And hereunto I might add the disposition of King James, who was ever apt to search into secrets, to try conclusions, as I did know some who saw him run to see one in a fit whom they said was bewitched.
> (Goodman, *The Court of King James the First*, 1839, 3)

1. Introduction

James VI's *Daemonologie*, first published in Edinburgh in 1597, emerged from a climate of acute personal and political insecurity, reflecting the Scottish

* This chapter was jointly conceived, prepared, and written by the two co-authors, with Luca Baratta responsible for sections 2, 3, and 4, and Irene Montori for sections 1, 5, and 6.

Letizia Vezzosi, University of Florence, Italy, letizia.vezzosi@unifi.it, 0000-0002-7635-2657

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monarch's profound anxieties about his safety. The events that first aroused the King's suspicions and his interest in witchcraft began in the autumn of 1589, when Anne of Denmark, his betrothed, encountered a fierce storm while travelling to reach Scotland. At the time, Denmark was the first of the Nordic countries to engage in systematic witch-hunting and, when another violent squall struck in April 1590 during the royal couple's return to the British Isles, witches on both shores of the North Sea were accused of having caused those exceptional weather conditions by a demonic pact. Until this point, James was relatively uninterested in demonology. However, following these events, he became directly involved in witch trials and, in the last thirteen years of his resident monarchy in Scotland, continental demonological ideas were increasingly applied in the country. Before 1590, witchcraft was prosecuted as a criminal offence but was neither vigorously pursued nor associated with the demonic pact.

Written in the aftermath of the North Berwick witch trials, in which James played a direct role, *Daemonologie* confronts the witch-skepticism of Johann Weyer and Reginald Scot, whose works had challenged prevailing beliefs in witchcraft. James's treatise not only seeks to refute their arguments but also reinforces his theological and political authority. By appropriating and reshaping continental demonological constructs, particularly the cumulative concept of the diabolical pact and the witches' sabbath, he adapted European stereotypes to a Scottish context, using them to advance his political and religious agendas.

Witchcraft in *Daemonologie* is constructed as both a form of religious apostasy and moral subversion. The witches' sabbath is represented as a grotesque inversion of Christian liturgy, a blasphemous parody of sacred sacraments under the devil's influence. While James's reliance on the concept of diabolic contrariety reflects European demonological thought, his depiction of the sabbath is distinctive in its emphasis on how witches and the devil mimic and pervert Christian worship. James's primary objective in portraying the sabbath as a parody of Christian liturgy is to position himself as a symbol of true faith. This also explains the relative absence in *Daemonologie* of the more sensational and grotesque aspects commonly found in the continental witches' sabbath, such as infanticide, cannibalism and orgiastic rites. James prioritises instead the theological implications of the witches' acts as a direct affront to Christian authority.

To contextualise *Daemonologie*, the present contribution will first situate James's treatise within the broader demonisation process of witches in early modern Europe, shaped by a framework of beliefs that Brian Levack has termed "the cumulative concept of witchcraft" (2016 [1987]). The popularisation of the witches' sabbath, one of the fundamental elements of the cumulative concept of witchcraft, in sixteenth-century Scotland can be partially attributed to *Daemonologie*. Furthermore, James's personal involvement in the North Berwick witch trials during the 1590s amplified the treatise's influence on Scottish demonological regulations. This set Scottish practices apart from those in England, where witchcraft regulations became stricter, culminating in punishment by death, but accusations rarely mentioned the sabbath. After exploring the events of North Berwick, the final section of this article will examine the

presence and significance of the cumulative concept of witchcraft, particularly the sabbath, within *Daemonologie*.

The final aim of this essay is to demonstrate that James's integration of continental sabbath was far from a purely scholarly exercise for the construction of witchcraft in Scotland. Rather, it was a deliberate response to the political and religious realities of his time. By framing witch belief as the ultimate form of disobedience and heresy, James not only justified the persecution of witches, but also consolidated his image as a divinely appointed protector of Christian order and morality.

2. The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe

It is now widely accepted among historians of witchcraft that the demonisation of witches took place between the late fourteenth and the early fifteenth centuries. During this period, waves of demonologists gathered and fused a diverse collection of popular folklore, ultimately shaping the figure of the evil witch into a cohesive set of legends[1]. Within this perspective, beliefs about witches – partly surviving remnants of pre-Christian religions, partly the result of scholarly reinterpretation – were systematically structured and integrated into a coherent system, categorised according to judicial and theological principles. This body of beliefs, merged into a unified framework and accepted in trials as legal proof of the crime, coalesced into what Brian Levack termed the "cumulative concept of witchcraft" – a construct based on three fundamental elements: the pact with the devil, the night flight, and, most relevant to our discussion, the sabbath (2016 [1987], 32).

The pact with the devil represented the initial stage of the witches' allegiance to evil. Only through an explicit deal with Satan were the chosen ones granted the power to commit *maleficia*. The new witches rejected the Christian faith – often performing blasphemous acts as a symbolic gesture – and were rebaptised by their dark master, who used his nails or claws to scratch the body on a hidden part. Believed to be the permanent marking of the devil on his initiates to seal their obedience and service to him, it was searched for by doctors during trials, leading to accused individuals being meticulously examined[2]. As for

[1] It is impossible to provide a comprehensive account of the vast bibliography on the European witch hunt published in recent decades. Therefore, the following are merely some of the most influential academic works in the field: Murray 1962 [1921]; Bonomo 1985 [1959]; Kors, Peters 1972; Cohn 1975; Briggs 1996; Clark 1999 [1997]; Maxwell-Stuart 2000; Bailey 2007; Corsi 2008, 2013; Montesano 2012, 2023; Roper 2012; Levack 2013, 2015 [2004], 2016 [1987]; Millar 2017; Gibson 2023.

[2] On this topic, see Murray 1918b, the first scholar in the early twentieth century to compile and briefly analyse sources describing how the devil allegedly marked his initiates' body and the different forms that this hidden sign could take. Also, see Willis 1995, who clearly explains how the tradition of the *stigma diabolicum* was adopted in early modern England and subsequently adapted to align more closely with the country's religious, political, and cultural particularities. For further reference, see Golden 2006, vol. 4, Q-Z.

night flying, the belief that witches could soar through the air clearly had deep roots in popular tradition and was linked to various legends, one of which – of pagan origin – reported of women joining nightly rides alongside Diana, the Roman goddess of fertility[3]. But the cornerstone of the cumulative concept of witchcraft was the *sabbath*, i.e. the idea that after forging a pact with the devil, witches would periodically gather with him and one another to engage in a series of obscene and sacrilegious rites (ivi, 33-45)[4]. Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg vividly captures the central elements of this dark ritual in his seminal work titled *Ecstasies*:

> Male and female witches met at night, generally in solitary places, in fields or on mountains. Sometimes, having anointed their bodies, they flew, arriving astride poles or broom sticks; sometimes their arrived on the backs of animals, or transformed into animals themselves. Those who came for the first time had to renounce the Christian faith, desecrate the sacrament and offer homage to the devil, who was present in human or (most often) animal or semi-animal form. There would follow banquets, dancing, sexual orgies. Before returning home the female and male witches received evil ointments made from children's fat and other ingredients. (1990, 1)

The testimonies of the alleged participants in these nocturnal congregations exhibit a striking uniformity. From one end of the Old Continent to the other – and later, across the ocean – from the earliest trials in the early fifteenth century to the last ones held three centuries later, the representation of the sabbath remained largely unchanged from its original description: a midnight feast where, alongside instances of apostasy and cannibalism, attendees indulged in their most repressed instincts.

The development of the cumulative concept of witchcraft, outlined here in broad strokes, was the result of a long and complex process. It took different forms across time and space and exemplified a pivotal moment in the cultural history of the Christian West. Not coincidentally, the hundreds of recorded witch burnings and hangings could not have occurred until members of the rul-

[3] Demonologists usually agreed that the witch's ability to take to the skies came from the devil and recognised several different types of flight – especially bodily flight and flight in spirit. On the ways this founding element of continental witchcraft permeated the British Isles, and Scotland in particular, see Goodare 2020.

[4] In addition to Levack 2016 [1987], 37 ff., on the sabbath cf. Murray 1962 [1921], who provides a fascinating excursus on the witches' ceremonies of affiliation; Cohn 1975, 174-189, who offers a general overview of the earliest scholarly attempts to systematise the complexity of the phenomenon; and Ginzburg's several volumes devoted to the subject 1966; 1976; and 1990, especially 89-121. See also Bonomo 1985 [1959], 301-309; Trevor-Roper 1967 [1963], 145, 149, 153-154 and 160; Di Simplicio 2005, 301-349. Finally, see Ostorero, Paravicini Bagliani, Utz Tremp 1999, as well as Paravicini Bagliani 2002, whose archival research has been instrumental in establishing a clear geographical (the Western Alps) and chronological (the early fifteenth century) framework for the earliest documented accounts of the sabbath in Europe.

ing classes – particularly those who oversaw and controlled the judicial system – had consolidated various beliefs about witches' diabolical deeds and actively disseminated them through the publication of demonological treatises across the continent. Alongside the establishment of specific legal procedures that facilitated the prosecution and conviction of the accused, this intellectual codification of witchcraft was a fundamental prerequisite for the great witch-hunts that swept across late medieval and early modern continental Europe.

3. Witchcraft in England and Scotland

But what did happen about this in England? Tracing the stages through which the new doctrine of witchcraft – along with its monstrous and perverse offshoots – crossed the sea and landed beyond the Channel is no easy task. The prevailing impression is that the island remained largely insulated from the intellectual and legal currents that fueled the persecution of alleged witches on the continent[5]. The reasons for this discrepancy must be mainly attributed to two factors: the substantial independence of the local church (the country did not experience an inquisition, and papal authority remained limited)[6] and the fact that British people considered witchcraft and white magic to be two very distinct matters. While the first was used to inflict harm on others, the second served a variety of purposes, including curing sudden illnesses, identifying thieves, recovering lost or stolen goods, and foreseeing the future (Thomas 1971, 179-188). However, civil and religious authorities took different stances on these practices: medieval theologians, for instance, argued that all forms of magic – even those intended for good – necessarily involved an implicit pact with evil and should therefore be punished (Sharpe 1996, 70).

The first significant legal measure against witchcraft in England dates back to 1114 with the *Leges Henrici*, which decreed that killing a person through poison or magical arts was punishable by death. However, if the victim miraculously survived, the accused could be spared – provided they compensated the injured party for the physical and material harm inflicted (Kittredge 1929, 28)[7]. This was little more than a passing reference, and for the next four centuries, no further laws were enacted against those who practiced occult rituals, despite the wealth

[5] For an overall critical assessment of witchcraft in England, cf. the old and pioneering studies by Notestein 1911 and L'Estrange 1929 and 1933. See also Purkiss 1996; Gibson 1999, 2000; Burns 2003; Sharpe 2003; Gaskill 2005, 2008, 2010; Elmer 2016.

[6] A key point of divergence from continental Europe was England's distinctive judicial procedure. Its criminal justice system was based on an accusatorial process, in which the burden of proof rested on the prosecution and the judge was theoretically impartial. This stood in contrast to the inquisitorial system prevalent across the rest of the continent, where the accused bore the responsibility of proving their innocence, and the roles of judge and prosecutor were essentially merged. On these topics, see Darr 2011.

[7] For insights into the legal customs of medieval England – including those related to magic and witchcraft – during the reign of King Henry I, see Green 1986 and Huscroft 2005.

of documented witchcraft beliefs from this period. Notably, however, there are no written records mentioning the sabbath – an absence that is of particular interest to us here (ivi, 46-47)[8].

It was only during the reign of Henry VIII that witchcraft was formally given the status of a secular crime[9]. The *Bill ayēst conjuracōns & witchecraftes and sorcery and enchantments* was introduced in 1541 by the Tudor Parliament and stated the following:

> For reformation wherof be it enacted by the Kyng oure Soveraigne Lorde with the assent of the Lordes spirituall and temporall and the Comons in this present Parliament assembled and by authoritie of the same, that yf any persone or persones, after the first daye of Maye next comyng, use devise practise or exercise, or cause to be devysed practised or exercised, any Invovacons or cojurarcons of Sprites witchecraftes enchauntementes or sorceries to the intent to get or fynde money or treasure or to waste consume or destroy any persone in his bodie membres, or to pvoke [provoke] any persone to unlawfull love, or for any other unlawfull intente or purpose […], or for dispite of Cryste, or for lucre of money, dygge up or pull downe any Crosse or Crosses or by such Invovacons or cojuracons of Sprites witchecraftes enchauntementes or sorceries or any of them take upon them to tell or declare where goodes stollen or lost shall become, That then all and every suche Offence and Offences, frome the saide first day of May next comyng, shall be demyde accepted and adjuged Felonye. (*A.D. 1541-2. 33° Hen. VIII, c. 8*)[10]

As one can see, the document classified as a felony – meaning a crime punishable by death and the forfeiture of goods and chattels – not only the act of summoning spirits but also the practice of witchcraft, enchantment, or magic for the purpose of gaining wealth or causing harm to a person's body, limbs, or property[11]. Particularly noteworthy is that the law inherently assumed witchcraft to be a tangible act of hostility against the community rather than merely a pact with the devil: "whiche thinges cannot be used and excersised but to the great Offence of Godes lawe, hurt and damage of the Kinges Subjectes, and losse of the sowles of suche Offenders, to the greate dishonour of God, Infamy and disquyetnes of the Realme" (*ibidem*).

[8] It is widely believed among scholars that English witchcraft lacked rituals comparable to the continental sabbath. See, for instance, Kittredge 1929, 275; Rosen 1969, 190; Macfarlane 1970, 6; and Thomas 1971, 445. A different view is held by Sharpe 2013, 166-167 and Millar 2014, 164.

[9] For an account of the religious tensions in sixteenth-century England that led to the introduction of severe penalties for witchcraft, see Swain 1994, 3-4 and Sharpe 2001, 15.

[10] The entire text of the law can be read in *Statutes of the Realm* 1810-1828, vol. 3, pt. 2, 837.

[11] The *Act* also removed the benefit of clergy, a legal device that exempted the accused from the jurisdiction of the King's courts, from those convicted of witchcraft. On these specific issues, see Gibson 2003, 1-9.

In 1562, after resolving some of the most contentious religious and political issues left by the turbulent reigns of Edward VI and Mary I, Queen Elizabeth promulgated a new *Act agaynst Conjurac[i]ons, Inchantmentes and Witchecraftes*. In some respects, it was more lenient than its predecessor, mandating the death penalty only when actual harm had been perpetrated:

> […] wherby any person shall happen to bee killed or destroyed, that then as well every suche Offendor or Offendors in Invocacions and Conjuracions as ys aforesayd, their Concellors & Aidours, as also every suche Offendor or Offendors in Witchecrafte Enchantement Charme or Sorcerie whereby the Deathe of any person dothe ensue, their Aidours and Concellors, being of either of the said Offences lawfully convicted and attainted, shall suffer paynes of Deathe as a Felon or Felons, and shall lose the Privileg and Benefite of Sanctuarie & Clergie. (*A.D. 1562-3. 5° Eliz., c. 15, 16*)[12]

Lesser offences were instead punishable by a term of imprisonment, as one can grasp from another passage of the statute:

> […] if any person or persons, after the saide first daye of June nexte commyng, shall use practise or exercyse any Wytchecrafte Enchauntement Charme or Sorcerie, wherby any person shall happen to bee wasted consumed or lamed in his or her Bodye or Member, or wherby any Goodes or Cattelles of any person shall bee destroyed wasted or impayred, then every suche Offendour or Offendours their Councelloures and Aydoures, being therof lawfully convicted, shall for his or their first Offence or Offences, suffer Imprisonment by the Space of one whole Yere. (*Ibidem*)

Once again, the severity of the crime was determined by the harm inflicted on the victims of witchcraft rather than by any supposed pact with the devil. This distinction explains why witchcraft in England remained a secular offense: the accused were prosecuted under civil law rather than ecclesiastical law, and those sentenced to death were hanged rather than burned at the stake, as was common on the continent.

Following the new legislative intervention, three major witch trials took place in Elizabethan England. The first one occurred in Chelmsford in 1579 and was brought against Elisabeth Francis, Agnes Waterhouse and her daughter Joan: they were all sentenced to prison[13]. One particularly remarkable aspect of this case was the role of familiars – spirits that took the form of a cat, dog, toad, or

[12] The text can be read in *Statutes of the Realm* 1810-1828, vol. 4, pt. 1B, 446.

[13] Evidence of this comes from a leaflet written and published that same year, *The Examination and Confession of certaine Wytches at Chensforde in the Countie of Essex* (Anonymous 1566). For a modern account of the trial, see Notestein 1911, 33-41; Gibson 2000, 10-24; Mariniello 2002, 32. Elizabeth Francis, having avoided capital punishment in this trial, would later become the central figure in a new legal case that took place in 1579. As a repeat offender under Elizabethan law, she was sentenced to death by hanging alongside two other women (the case is summarised in Anonymous 1579).

even a mouse: it was supposed that witches received these creatures as gifts from the devil, from a fellow witch, or as an inheritance from their mother, and that they fed them with their own blood. Closely linked to this belief, which was quite common in English witch trials, was the idea of the devil's mark – a lump or skin growth that was insensitive to pain: according to contemporary sources, it was thought that the witch's familiars would feed by sucking nourishment from this fleshly excrescence[14]. The second trial was celebrated in 1582, took place in St. Osyth, Northeast of Chelmsford, and saw the hanging of the accused, Ursley Kemp[15]. The last great trial took place at Warboys, in Huntingdonshire, and ended in 1593 with the hanging of Alice Samuel and her daughter[16].

The three trials reveal a significant evolution in English demonology. With each judicial proceeding, the diabolical elements and the crimes attributed to witches progressively intensified. Another noteworthy shift occurred in how people responded to magic and witchcraft: in the mid-sixteenth century, accusations came from above – that is, from judges and the educated elite; on the contrary, by the end of Elizabeth's reign, accusations increasingly emerged from local communities, where witches were scapegoated as a way to explain everyday misfortunes and tragedies (Thomas 1971, 638). The judicial process also grew more severe. While two of the Chelmsford witches, who had only practiced *maleficium*, were sentenced to prison, Ursley Kemp from St. Osyth, who had used her familiars to cause illnesses and kill her neighbours, and Alice Samuel, who had gone even further by rejecting God in favour of Satan, faced death, the harshest of punishments. However, in none of these cases does one find the sabbath – an element that appears notably absent from the English context of this period.

It was *via* Scotland that the defining feature of the continental "cumulative concept of witchcraft" first entered the cultural history of the British Isles. In 1563, the country updated its book of *The Actis and Constitutiounis of the Realme* with an "ITEM" eminently titled *Anentis Witchcraftis*:

> ITEM Forsamekill as the Quenis Majestie and thre Estatis in this present Parliament being informit, that the havy and abominabill superstitioun usit

[14] On the role of familiars in assisting witches while practicing *maleficia* and on its being a recurring feature in English witchcraft accusations, see Wilby 2005.

[15] The events of St. Osyth were documented in a contemporary pamphlet titled *A true and iust recorde, of the information, examination and confession of all the witches, taken at S. Oses in the countie of Essex whereof some were executed, and other some entreated according to the determination of lawe* (Anonymous [W.W.] 1582). More recently, the case has been the focus of a brilliant study by Marion Gibson (2022).

[16] After Alice Samuel and her daughter were hanged in the Fens of England, their story was recounted in the booklet *The most strange and admirable discouerie of the three Witches of Warboys: arraigned, conuicted, and executed at the last Assises at Huntington, for the bewitching of the fiue daughters of Robert Throckmorton Esquire* (Anonymous 1593). According to Barbara Rosen, the Warboys witch trial "probably attracted more notice at the time than any other in the sixteenth century" (1969, 47). For a more recent critical analysis of the events, see Almond 2008.

> be divers of the liegis of this Realme, be using of Witchcraftis, Sorsarie and Necromancie, and credence gevin thairto in tymes bygane aganis the Law of God: And for avoyding and away putting of all sic vane superstitioun in tymes tocum: It is statute and ordanit be the Quenis Majestie, and thre Estatis foirsaidis, that na maner of persoun nor persounis, of quhatsumever estate, degre or conditioun thay be of, tak upone hand in ony tymes heirefter, to use ony maner of Witchcraftis, Sorsarie or Necromancie, nor gif thame selfis furth to have ony sic craft or knawlege thairof, thairthrow abusand the pepill: Nor that na persoun seik ony help, response or cosultatioun at ony sic usaris or abusaris foirsaidis of Witchcraftis, Sorsareis or Necromancie, under the pane of deid, alsweill to be execute aganis the usar, abusar, as the seikar of the response or consultatioun. And this to be put to executioun be the Justice, Schireffis, Stewartis, Baillies, Lordis of Regaliteis and Rialteis, thair Deputis, and uthers Ordinar Jugeis competent within this Realme, with all rigour, having powar to execute the samin. (*1563: Mary c.73: Anentis Witchcraft, The Actis and Constitutiounis of the Realme* 1566, fo. clxxiiii(r.), ca. viii.)[17]

The new law publicly made the practice of witchcraft a capital offense; nonetheless, contemporary sources reveal us that, at least during this period, there was no really significant indigenous concern for persecuting witches, with domestic cases remaining sporadic in numbers and being primarily political in nature or rooted in the traditional doctrine of *maleficium*[18]. Things changed dramatically in the winter of 1589 when, after spending six months' nuptial stay at the Danish court – during which he also met with Lutheran theologian Niels Hemmingsen (1513-1600), an authority among Renaissance demonologists – James VI returned to Scotland, bringing with him distinctly continental notions of witchcraft, particularly the demonic pact and the sabbath. His swift and direct involvement in the North Berwick affair then provided him not only with the opportunity to embody the role of the ideal inquisitor-king but also to demonstrate to his subjects that the line between good and evil was perilously thin – and that many chose the latter.

4. James VI and the North Berwick Trials

In October 1591, following a year of unprecedented revelations, a commission was established to investigate witchcraft, marking the official recognition of Scotland's first major wave of persecution[19]. Although the principal North Ber-

[17] Accurately transcribed, but with omission of title and punctuation, in Thomson, Innes 1875, vol. 2, 539, c. 9. The printed edition of 1566 is the only source for the acts of the 1563 Parliament, the manuscript registers having disappeared. See Goodare 1999.

[18] For insights into this specific cultural context, see Larner 1973 and Clark 1977. On Scottish witchcraft in the period, cf. Pitcairn 1833; Sharpe 1884; Legge 1891; Black 1938.

[19] The best historical sources for reconstructing the Berwick trials are the tenth volume of the *Calendar of State Papers, Scotland* (henceforth *CSPS*) and the contemporary pamphlet titled

wick defendants were charged with a number of individual crimes, running the whole gamut of traditional witch activities – including engaging in promiscuous sexual relations with demons and humans of both sexes, sacrificing unbaptised infants, and consuming dismembered body parts – the core of the trials was communal devil worship.

On Halloween 1590, over a hundred witches had supposedly sailed into the town in an armada of sieves and danced into the kirk to the sound of trumpets. The devil, a small black monster in gown and hat, addressed the assembly; "his faice was terrible, his noise lyk the bek of ane egle, gret bournyng eyn; his handis and legis wer herry, with clawes vpon his handis and feit lyk the griffon, and spak with a how voice" (Melville 1827, 396). Presenting his buttocks for the customary greeting he told them: "spair nocht to do ewill, and to eit, drink and be blyth, taking rest and eise, ffor ho sould raise thame up at the latter day gloriouslie" (Pitcairn 1833, 211). The proceedings reached their finale with the desecration of graves:

> thay opnit up the graves, twa within and ane without the kirk, and tuil of the jountis of thair fingaris, tais and neise, and partit thame amangis thame; […] The Devill commandit thame to keip the jountis upoun thame, quhill thay wer dry, and thane to mak ane powder of thame, to do ewill withal. (Ivi, 239)

There was worse to come. To his horror, James soon discovered that a good deal of this diabolical energy had been expended on his own behalf. The accused were said to have convened another meeting with the devil at Newhaven, near Edinburgh, where they allegedly received a recipe for a concoction made from the venom of a roasted toad, stale urine, and adder skin intended to contaminate the royal linen. They had also asked the devil to activate a wax image of the King which would then be destroyed by fire. Most amazing of all were the supposed plans for drowning James and his bride on their voyages to and from Denmark. Adopting a traditional procedure for raising tempests, covens of witches in Leith and Prestonpans had each taken cats, christened them, tied to them a corpse's parts and, on a signal, cast them simultaneously into the seas off Edinburgh. There was even a report that Danish witches were involved in trying to destroy James's flotilla, of which one vessel was in fact lost. Even this was not the end of the business. What had begun as a matter solely of witchcraft, albeit treasonable, was transposed into a political and dynastic key by the allegation that the toad poison and wax image had been specially commissioned by Francis Stewart, Earl of Bothwell, James's volatile cousin and figurehead of the ultra-Protestant opposition party. Each of the witches at Newhaven had apparently blessed the wax effigy with the words: "this is K. James the Sext, ordonit

Newes from Scotland, declaring the damnable life and death of Doctor Fian a notable sorcerer, who was burned at Edenbrough in Ianuary last. 1591. Which doctor was regester to the diuell that sundry times preached at North Barrick Kirke, to a number of notorious witches. With the true examination of the saide doctor and witches, as they vttered them in the presence of the Scottish king. Quotations from (or references to) other texts will be indicated within the main body of the essay as they appear.

to be consumed at the instance of a noble man Francis Erle Bodowell" (Melville 1827, 395)[20]. Bothwell protested his innocence but was committed to custody in May 1591. After his escape, a proclamation spoke of his having "gevin himself ower altogidder in the handis of Sathan" and consuled "nygromanceris, witcheis, and utheris wickit and ungodlie personis" (Masson 1877-1898, vol. 4, 643-644). The charges were never substantiated, but they certainly served to compound James's fears.

The complex tangle of interests involved makes it difficult to see what reality, if any, lay behind these alleged crimes or to apportion exact responsibility for the confessions extorted from the defendants. But it is clear that James himself, his previous conversations with Hemmingsen fresh in mind, had a good deal of influence, and the supposition must be that the presence for the first time of continental beliefs in Scottish indictments was his own work. It is evident from the pamphlet *Newes from Scotland* (1591), which reads very much like an official version of the trials, that he took a prominent part in interrogating the principals, and he claimed publicly that "[…] for these witches, whatsoever hath bene gotten from them hath bene done by me my selfe" (*CSPS*, vol. X, 572).

Remarkable evidence of James's active and vicious personal campaign can also be found in a letter to Chancellor Maitland in April 1591:

> Trye by the medicinairis aithis gif Barbara Nepair be uith bairne or not. Tak na delaying ansour. Gif ye finde she be not, to the fyre uith her presesentlie, and cause bouell her pubblicclie. Lett Effie Makkaillen see the stoup tua or three days, and upon the suddain staye her in hope of confession. Gif that servis, adverteis; gif not dispatche her the next oulke anis, bot not according to the rigoure of the dome. The rest of the inferioure uitchis, of at the nail uith thaim. (Ivi, 557)[21]

When Barbara Napier was finally brought to trial on May 8, she was found guilty of consulting with witches but was unexpectedly acquitted of treason. On May 10, King James demanded the death penalty, but by the end of the month, he had decided to overturn the verdict on the grounds of an assize error. To ensure this outcome, he first consulted with the assizors and then personally presided over the proceedings. Both the involvement of the assize and the King's direct presence were exceptional. But Robert Bowes, the English ambassador, wrote: "the King is earnest about it; it may open the way to other matters, and he would be present at the hearing" (ivi, vol. X, 569). The dittay against the original jurors in the King's name was the fullest account of the North Berwick and other sabbaths yet offered in court. The accused chose to yield to the royal will, whereupon James lectured them:

[20] Margaret Murray suggested that Bothwell was in fact the devil who preached at North Berwick (1918a, 310-321), a theory shared by Montague Summers (1926, 8). William Roughead (1936, 144-166) and Helen Stafford (1953) were much more skeptical.

[21] The North Berwick trials also featured two prominent figures from Edinburgh: Barbara Napier, wife of Archibald Douglas, brother of the laird of Carschogill, and Euphame MacCalzean, daughter of a wealthy advocate.

> For witchcraft, which is a thing growen very common amongst us, I know it to be a most abhominable synne, and I have bene occupied these three quarters of this yeere for the siftyng out of them that are guylty heerein. We are taught by the lawes both of God and men that this synne is most odious, and by Godes law punishable by death: by man's lawe it is called maleficium or venificium, an ill deede or a poysonable deede, and punishable likewise by death. (Ivi, 572)

The speech openly shows that the kernel of his later arguments, and some of their logic, had already formed in his mind: he was persuaded "that such a vice did reigne and ought to be repressed" (*ibidem*). This conviction and the end product of his extraordinarily close contact with the North Berwick witches were the starting point of his academic research in demonology – an intellectual pursuit that, in 1597, culminated in the publication of the *Daemonologie*, the only book of its kind ever written by a monarch and one of the first defences of continental beliefs about witchcraft in English.

5. James VI's *Daemonologie*

Published in Edinburgh in 1597, James's work was conceived and developed within a context shaped by the Stuart monarch's profound personal anxieties regarding his safety[22]. The precise timing of its composition remains a topic of scholarly debate, as it could have been written any time between 1591 and 1597. Some scholars have favoured the earlier date, arguing that James's interest was sparked by the witchcraft examinations and trials of 1590-1591. Others have suggested a later date as a result of a subsequent wave of witchcraft prosecutions in 1597. At least two key arguments support an earlier date for the composition of *Daemonologie* (Normand, Roberts 2000, 327).

First, the preface of James's *Daemonologie* and the opening exchanges between the two speakers, Philomathes and Epistemon, present a "pressing topicality" (ivi, 328) that may suggest the work was written immediately after the examination of the North Berwick witches in 1590-1591. In the "Preface to the Reader", the King emphasises his urgency to publish the work, referencing "The fearefull aboundinge at this time in this countrie" and pressing "to dispatch in post" the treatise (James VI 1597, A2r). In the initial discussion in Book I (ch. I), Philomathes refers "of these strange newes, which now onelie furnishes purpose to al men at their meeting" (ivi, 2), to which Epistemon responds that "so cleare and plaine confessions in that purpose, haue neuer fallen out in anie age or cuntrey" (*ibidem*). Similarly, at the opening of Book II (ch. I), Philomathes alludes to the

[22] The first edition of the *Daemonologie* was published in 1597 in Edinburgh by the printer Robert Waldegrave. Two subsequent English editions were released in 1603 to coincide with James's accession to the English throne and to forerun the new *Witchcraft Act* that the Parliament would issue in 1604 (*A.D. 1604. 1 Jac. I, c. 12. Statutes of the Realm* 1810-1828, vol. 4, pt. 2, 1028). For an examination of the relationship of the Jacobean *Witchcraft Act* to the culture and society of seventeenth-century England, see Newton, Bath 2008.

frequent confessions of witches, noting "the dailie practicque, & confession of so manie" (ivi, 28). A sense of urgency and immediacy was conventional for authors of demonological treatises, whose writings were prompted by erroneous opinions of previous and recent thinkers. However, in James's case, the works he addressed – Weyer's 1563 work *De praestigiis daemonum et incantationibus ac venificiis* (*On the Illusions of the Demons and on Spells and Poisons*) and Scot's 1584 work *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* – were too distant to cause the monarch's immediate answer. James's experience of North Berwick witch prosecutions was more likely to be the stimulus to his demonological work.

Second, James's descriptions in Book II of some witchcraft practices have striking similarities to, and even verbal echoes of, details recorded in the dittays of the North Berwick trials from the early months of 1591 or of the pre-trial confessions and depositions of 1590. These parallels suggest that *Daemonologie* was written when these events were still fresh in James's memory. Notably, towards the end of the 1597 quarto preface, James tells his readers: "and who likes to be curious in these thinges, he may reade, if he will here of their practises, BODINUS *Daemonomanie*, collected with greater diligence, then written with judgement, together with their confessions, that haue bene at this time apprehened" (ivi, A4v). According to Normand and Roberts, the phrase "their confessions" likely refers specifically to the North Berwick witches rather than general confessions of witches at the end of the sixteenth century (2000, 328).

Within this context, James endeavoured to counter the arguments of witch-sceptics, namely Johann Weyer and Reginald Scot, whose demonological treatises questioned the existence of witchcraft, contrary to most European authorities and James himself. The monarch intended to contribute to the general international debate, and in the process, instruct those who were still doubtful or ignorant about witchcraft (Larner 1984, 16). Accordingly, *Daemonologie* takes the form of a philosophical dialogue between two characters: Philomathes, somewhat sceptical of the reality of magic and witchcraft, and Epistemon, who serves as the mouthpiece for the sovereign's ideas. Through his erudition and logical reasoning, Epistemon persuades Philomathes that witchcraft does exist and is intrinsically tied to dealings with the devil. In doing so, the treatise appropriates continental demonological constructs, most notably the cumulative concept of the diabolical pact and the witches' sabbath, to reinforce its claims.

Prior to the treason trials by sorcery, beginning in late 1590, Scotland had little familiarity with the concept of the demonic pact, a notion that held a central place in continental demonology. The trials not only introduced this conception to Scotland, but also cemented the idea of the witches gathering to worship the devil as a fundamental point of later prosecutions. Crucial to this development was the presence of King James, whose exposure to continental witchcraft theories during his visit to the Danish court – where witch-hunting was endemic – may have shaped his perspective. Though speculative, the monarch's six-month stay in Denmark likely influenced his growing interest in witchcraft, an interest that found expression in the trials and later in the publication of his *Daemonologie*. James's treatise contributed to popularising the witches' sabbath,

one of the fundamental elements of the cumulative concept of witchcraft, and their demonic practises in sixteenth-century Scotland.

The treatise is structured in three Books. The first Book of the work opens with the "description of Magie in speciall" (James VI 1597, 1), distinguishing the art of magic between necromancy and witchcraft; the second focuses on the "description of Sorcerie and Witchcraft" (ivi, 27); consequently, the encounter with the devil, the pact and the demonic mark, as well as the various rituals performed by Satan and his followers, make the centre of this Book. Finally, the third concludes with a "description of all these kindes of Spirites that troubles men or women" (ivi, 56), such as *incubi* and *succubi*[23].

Book I aims at dispelling any doubt about the existence of witchcraft by quoting several biblical passages in which magical practices are forbidden and condemned, then affirms that its practice is sin. It also provides a preliminary taxonomy of the occult arts, distinguishing between magic or necromancy, on the one hand, and sorcery or witchcraft, on the other hand. Despite the oppositions in motivation, learning, class and practice – necromancers, for instance, are male, learned magicians; witches instead are female and socially marginalised – both magical practitioners operate with diabolic assistance by making a pact with the devil. Christina Larner has argued that James imported the demonic pact (1984, 10; Goodare 2013, 304) from continental demonologists, both Catholic and Protestant, who saw magic and witchcraft as a species of idolatry. In chapter V of Book I, Epistemon asserts that

> […] although, as none can be schollers in a schole, & not be subject to the master thereof: so none can studie and put in practize (for studie the alone, and knowledge, is more perilous nor offensiue; and it is the practise only that makes the greatnes of the offence.) The cirkles and art of *Magie*, without committing an horrible defection from God. (James VI 1597, 15)

A commonplace of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century demonological thought is the devil as the counterfeit of God (Normand, Roberts 2000, 340). In Book I, this theme emerges prominently, to be further developed in Book II (ch. VI):

> For that is the difference betuixt Gods myracles and the Deuils, God is a creator, what he makes appeare in miracle, it is so in effect. As *Moyses* rod being casten

[23] Those are demonic spirits, which supposedly have sex with humans in male form (*incubi*) and female form (*succubi*), either by assuming the appearance of a body of air or animating a dead body (Normand, Roberts 2000, 412n). The etymology is from the Latin verb *incubare*, meaning "lying down". The gender difference is not an essential part of the nature of these demons since they can change from male to female, depending on the person with whom they want to have intercourse. Many demonologists, such as Krämer and Sprenger (*Malleus Maleficarum* 1971 [1487], part 1, q III) or Bodin (*De la Démonomanie des sorcieres* 1580, II vii), believed that such intercourse was possible, although how it occurs and how this sexual union could result in pregnancy were all matter of debate (Tyson 2011, 166). Weyer and Scot, on the contrary, refute the idea as imaginary.

> downe, was no doubt turned in a natural Serpent: where as the Deuill (as Gods Ape) counterfetting that by his *Magicians*, maid their wandes to appeare so, onelieto mennes outward senses: as kythed in effect by their being deuoured by the other. (James VI 1597, 22-23)

The devil as God's ape, as *simia Dei*, often recounted in demonological works at least as early as Tertullian, encapsulates part of the Renaissance's anxiety about spiritual deception. This motif resonates, for instance, in the first Book of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* with the sorcerer Archimago and in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Macbeth's distrust of the dagger, as well as Hamlet's of the ghost, is based on the belief that the devil is crafty and mimics God's powers to deceive our senses. In *Daemonologie*, the devil is a skilled imitator whose activities follow a principle of inversion of religious doctrine and practice.

Book II insists on witchcraft as the opposite of God's religion, of which both the devil and witches ape and mimic through their practices. In chapter III of Book II, King James writes that "the deuill as Gods Ape, counterfeites in his seruantes this seruice & forme of adoration, that God prescribed and made his seruantes to practise" (James VI 1597, 35). Witches, like devout Christians, meet in congregations; accordingly, the devil presides over these meetings, offering his twisted version of the sacraments (Normand, Roberts 2000, 339-340). In this regard, James's work is "neither original nor profound" (Clark 1999 [1997], 156) in presenting witchcraft as a diabolical inversion of divine worship. Indeed, James draws heavily from Heinrich Krämer's *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487) and Jean Bodin's *De la Démonomanie des Sorciers* (1580) (Levack 2008, 44).

The uniqueness of *Daemonologie* lies not in its demonological content. Rather, its distinctive contribution is its integration and adaption of the cumulative concept of witchcraft for a Scottish context. The treatise elaborates on three key elements of this concept – the diabolical pact, the witches' sabbath, and the witches' flight – most notably in chapters II to IV of Book II. Of particular interest is a passage in the third chapter of the second Book, in which James describes the sabbath of the witches:

> as the seruants of GOD, publicklie vses to conveene for seruing of him, so makes them in great numbers to conveene (though publickly they dare not) for his seruice. As none conueenes to the adoration and worshipping of God, except they be marked with his seale, the Sacrament of *Baptisme*: So none serues Sathan, and conueenes to the adorating of him, that are not marked with that marke, whereof I already spake. (James VI 1597, 35-36)

Not only do the devil and his witches assemble in the same manner as Christians, but the witches' sabbath actually exceeds that of Christian service since they convene in greater numbers. The relationship between Satan and witches is crafted as a heretical parody of the proper relationship between God and Christians. Aping God, the devil exerts his power with the instrument of the sacraments. The demonic pact is obviously parasitic on baptism, which represents God's covenant with the Church, and originally with the Old Testament

patriarchs. As Levack notes, the conclusion of the demonic pact was often a formal ceremony where the witches "agreed to reject their Christian faith […] and to be rebaptized by the Devil" (2016 [1987], 27). In return for renunciation of baptism, the devil promised material advantages and magical powers. Levack maintains that "They then paid homage to the Devil, either by bowing down (often backwards) before him or by kissing his buttocks. As a sign of their allegiance, the Devil imprinted a distinctive mark on the witches' bodies, usually in a concealed spot" (*ibidem*). The devil's mark symbolises a grotesque inversion of the holy stigmata, either an imitation of circumcision under the Old Law or the sign of the cross under the New (Clark 1999 [1997], 84). To convince his audience that the Christian faith is under attack in its foundations, James represents witchcraft as an unholy parody of Christian services. At the very heart of this sacramental inversion is, of course, the sabbath, where demonic spirits and witches gathered into assemblies to worship the devil collectively (Book II, ch. III):

> As the Minister sent by God teacheth plainely at the time of their publick conuentions, how to serue him in spirit & truth: so that vncleane spirite, in his owne person teacheth his Disciples, at the time of their conueening, how to worke all their kinde of mischief: And craues compt of all their horrible and detestable proceedinges passed, for aduancement of his seruice. Yea, that he may the more viuelie counterfeit and scorne God, he oft times makes his slaues to conveene in these verrie places, which are destinat and ordeined for the conveening of the servants of God (I mean by Churches) But this farre, which I haue yet said, I not onelie take it to be true in their opiniones, but euen so to be indeede. (James VI 1597, 36)

This is the first description on British soil of a witches' gathering resembling the continental sabbath. In his theological framework, the rites performed by Satan's followers are presented as the exact reversal, blasphemous and monstrous, of Christian liturgy. However, the bloodiest and most gruesome elements of the sabbath are omitted. The European sabbath had many distinctive characteristics, including naked dancing, cannibalism, infanticide, ritual intercourse with the devil and the prevalence of promiscuous heterosexual and homosexual activity among witches (Levack 2016 [1987], 38)[24]. None of these anti-social behaviours is recalled in James's description of the witches' summoning. The only concession reserved for this imagery is the repellent homage to the back of the devil, intended again as a perverse reversal of sacred Scriptures (Book II, ch. III):

> […] further, Witches oft times confesses not only his conueening in the Church with them, but his occupying of the Pulpit: Yea, their forme of adoration, to be the kissing of his hinder partes. […] So ambitious is he, and greedie of honour

[24] According to Levack, the emphasis on the erotic aspects of the sabbath, appearing in the accounts of Spanish, French, and Italian conventions, derives from the negative attitude of medieval and early modern Christianity towards sex (2016 [1987], 38).

> (which procured his fall) that he will euen imitate God in that parte, where it is said, that *Moyses* could see but *the hinder partes of God, for the brightnesse of his glorie* [marginal gloss: *Exo. 33*]. (James VI 1597, 37)

The Scriptures are the only declared model of authority for Christian doctrine throughout the treatise, and Epistemon is constantly drawing from the sacred Word to validate his statements. The sovereign source of meaning on the matter is the Bible and the Law of God. James's treatment of the *osculum infame* ("shameful kiss") in *Daemonologie* is a revealing instance of how he ingeniously reinterprets a feature of the sabbath, through the Scripture, to represent it as Satan's mimicking of religious practice. Accounts of the devil preaching in the pulpit and witches kissing his arse were commonly reported by continental demonologists[25] and in the dittays of the North Berwick trials[26] as a regular procedure at the convention. In *Daemonologie*, James accents the devil's imitation of the moment in Exodus 33, where Moses sees "the hinder partes of God", to reveal the diabolical nature of his aping of the sacraments in seducing his followers.

For this reason, among all the activities that allegedly took place at the sabbath – the feasting on horrid foods and human flesh, infanticide, and the orgiastic sex – King James highlights the obscene kissing, rather than mentioning the more repellent aspects of the gathering. Ultimately, James considers the sabbath as a form of inverse liturgy, where the diabolical mark corrupts baptism, the devil's preaching parodies the homily, and the homage to Satan subverts reverence for God. According to the monarch, witchcraft represents the ultimate rebellion against God, society and nature through the diabolical compact.

A corollary in the representation of the sabbath, as well as the final major component of the cumulative concept of witchcraft, was the belief that witches could fly. Flight was often used to explain the ability of witches to attend secret nocturnal gatherings in remote areas (Levack 2016 [1987], 41). Again, *Daemonologie* absorbs the continental stereotype of flying witches, although their agency is limited to short distances (Book II, ch. IV):

> [...] by diuerse meanes they may conueene, either to the adoring of their Master, or to the putting in practise any seruice of his, committed vnto their charge: one way is natural, which is natural riding, going or sayling, at what houre their Master comes and aduertises them. And this way may be easelie beleued: an other way is some-what more strange: and yet is it possible to be true: which is being carryed by the force of the Spirite which is their conducter, either aboue

[25] See, for instance, Bodin 1580, II iv, 83 and Guazzo 1608, I xii, 41.

[26] In one of the early trials, conducted in December 1590, for instance, one of the accused, John Fian, provides accounts of witchcraft close to those of continental demonologists, particularly of witchcraft as false religion. Fian's dittays are also interesting for the dense collocation of stereotypical activities at the sabbath, such as the devil preaching in the pulpit of North Berwick kirk and the witches kissing his arse, see Documents 19 and 20 in Normand, Roberts 2000. Kissing the devil's arse is also indicated in an examination of Agnes Sampson, see Document 1 in Normand, Roberts 2000.

> the earth or aboue the Sea swiftlie, to the place where they are to meet: which I am perswaded to be likewaies possible, in respect that as *Habakkuk* was carryed by the Angell in that forme, to the denne where *Daniell* laie; [marginal gloss: *Apocrypha of Bel and the Dragon*.] so thinke I, the Deuill will be reddie to imitate God, as well in that as in other thinges: […] But in this violent forme they cannot be carryed, but a shorte boundes, agreeing with the space that they may reteine their breath: for if it were longer, their breath could not remaine vnextinguished, their bodie being carryed in such a violent & forceable maner, as be example: If one fall off an small height, his life is but in perrell, according to the harde or soft lighting: But if one fall from an high and stay rocke, his breath wilbe forceablie banished from the bodie, before he can win to the earth, as is oft seen by experience. (James VI 1597, 38-39)

This belief in short-distance flight is unique to James, who once again associates it with the devil's intent to imitate God, grounding his argument in the sacred text[27]. His depiction of aerial transvection in *Daemonologie* echoes details found in the North Berwick cases. In John Fian's dittay, one of the most extended narratives of the North Berwick convention, the accused man confessed to having experienced "great ecstacies and trances", in which he was "carried and transported to many mountains as though through all the world" (Document 19 in Normand, Roberts 2000, 226), while his physical body lay at home in a trance[28]. Similarly, James writes that "some sayeth, that their bodies lying stil as in an extasy, their spirits wil be rauished out of their bodies, & caried to such places" (James VI 1597, 39). Based on this evidence, James's character Epistemon concedes that it is "possible to be true" that witches might be physically transported by the devil's force over short distances. However, the author of *Daemonologie* ultimately treats the question as one of little significance. While the notion of nocturnal witch flight to attend the sabbath receives considerable attention in most continental treatises, often debating whether witches were transported in their physical body or in dreams, James's discussion of the topic remains relatively brief. This perspective is also reflected in the testimonies from North Berwick, where conveyance to the witches' gathering need not always be supernatural. As Epistemon notes, there are more credible and natural ways by which one might attend the sabbath. Unlike Fian's trances, Geillis Duncan admitted to having travelled to a sabbath alongside other witches but did not in-

[27] While the short flight is James's peculiarity, the reference to the angelic transportation of Habakkuk into Babylon to carry the dinner to Daniel, who was in the lion's den (in the Greek apocryphal addition to the Book of Daniel, Bel and the dragon, and in the Vulgate Daniel 14:32-38), was often cited to discuss the witches' transvection by air, see Krämer and Sprenger 1971 [1487], part II q 1 ch. 3, 106-107; Bodin 1580, II iv, 89; Scot 1886 [1584], IX vi, 140-141.

[28] Fian was also found guilty of "suffering of himself to be carried to North Berwick kirk […] as if he had been soughand athwart the earth […] suffering of himself to be carried to the sea with Satan […] he was skimming over all the sea without land" (Document 19 in Normand, Roberts 2000, 226-228).

dicate having been conducted there by magical means[29]. Agnes Sampson also recounted that the devil "commanded her to be at North Berwick kirk the next night", yet she merely "passed there on horseback, convoyed by her godson called John Couper" (Document 20 in Normand, Roberts 2000, 243).

James's relative disregard for the specific details of the witches' sabbath, such as its most grotesque practices and the notion of flight, suggests that he was not primarily concerned with faithfully reproducing all elements of European demonological treatises. Instead, the monarch sought to emphasise for his Scottish audience those aspects that reinforced the perception of witchcraft as a diabolical crime and a fundamental rejection of true Christianity, without delving into the intricacies of the sabbath or magical transvection. "The prurient reader expecting to find salacious details of naked dancing, promiscuous sex between demons and witches, child sacrifice, or cannibalism would be sorely disappointed", Levack writes "His main concern in describing the sabbath was the way witches aped and mocked Christian services. James described the inversion of a Protestant service by drawing a contrast between the minister teaching how to serve God in spirit in truth and the devil teaching his disciples how to do mischief" (2008, 44). This explains why he dedicates significant portions of *Daemonologie* to the devil's power in recruiting and empowering witches, as well as to the way their conventions parodied the sacraments of the Church. This interpretation of James's intent is further supported by the North Berwick witches' confessions, which primarily focus on the witches' servitude to the devil rather than offering a detailed account of the sabbath.

By introducing the continental witch stereotypes, such as the devil's pact and the witches' sabbath, to Scotland, James frames witchcraft in a way that aligns with his political interests. Both witches and the devil are portrayed as agents of disobedience and religious apostacy, a characterisation that enables James to position himself as a defender of true Christian faith. A substantial portion of his treatise *Daemonologie* is consequently devoted to exposing the devil's perversion of Christian sacraments and the witches' blasphemous inversion of sacred rituals. The construction of witchcraft and the devil through a framework of opposition is a common theme in European demonological discourse. However, James's distinctive portrayal of the diabolical compact and the sabbath leaves no doubt that witchcraft constitutes not only dangerous evil and a serious crime but the very antithesis of Christian worship. The strongest statement in *Daemonologie* of the devil as "the verie contrarie opposite to God" (James VI 1597, 54) is in the last section of Book II, chapter VII:

> Doubtleslie who denyeth the power of the Deuill, woulde likewise denie the power of God, if they could for shame. For since the Deuill is the verie contrarie opposite to God, there can be no better way to know God, then by the contrarie; as by the ones power (though a creature) to admire the power of the great Creator:

[29] Cf. Document 1 in Normand, Roberts 2000, 136.

> by the falshood of the one to considder the trueth of the other, by the injustice of the one, to considder the lustice of the other: And by the cruelty of the one, to considder the mercifulnesse of the other: And so foorth in all the rest of the essence of God, and qualities of the Deuill. But I feare indeede, there be ouer many Sadduces in this worlde, that denies all kindes of spirites: For convicting of whose errour, there is cause inough if there were no more, that God should permit at some times spirits visiblie to kyith. (Ivi, 54-55)

This passage highlights another important concept that is widely expressed throughout the second Book of *Daemonologie*: the fact that witchcraft and every devilry are made under God's permission. Witchcraft is the result of diabolical power, but its existence derives from God. As it was for Job in the Bible, where God let the devil put the man into trial, so it is for witchcraft (Book II, ch. V): "since by Gods permission, he layed siknesse vpon IOB, why may he not farre easilier lay it vpon any other" (ivi, 45)[30]. God allows the relationship between the devil and witches since evil is necessary for good. All in all, James's main concern in describing the demonic compact and the sabbath is the way witchcraft apes and mocks Christian services.

Over the following century, accusations against witches and their confessions largely adhered to the framework established in James's *Daemonologie*. Scottish witches were consistently charged with making a pact with the devil, renouncing their baptism, receiving the devil's mark, and meeting with other witches. However, the most lurid aspects of the witches' sabbath, such as orgies, cannibalism, and infanticide, remained notably scarce in Scottish accounts, an omission that scholars attribute, at least partially, to James's influence (Larner 1984; Levack 2008). In this regard, Scotland never fully assimilated the continental notions of witchcraft. Indeed, the witches' sabbath in Scotland, as Levack asserts, remained "a very tame affair" (2008, 44). The sabbath, the nocturnal encounter with the devil, and the corollaries of infanticide and cannibalism endured as continental constructs but never fully entered the mainstream of Scottish witch belief. Thus, while *Daemonologie* introduced the cumulative concept of witchcraft to Scotland, the tameness of James's beliefs regarding the witches' sabbath still leave the extent of his involvement in Scottish witchcraft an interesting matter of scholarly controversy.

[30] Since patristic times, Job has been the exemplar of Satan's affliction of mankind, inflicting disease and loss with God's permission. Thus, it was extensively referenced in demonological works, as Scot noted, "These witchmongers, for lacke of better arguments, doo manie times object *Job* against me; although there be never a word in that storie which either maketh for them, or against me: in so much as there is not/ the name of a witch mentioned in the whole booke" (1886 [1584], V viii, 84).

6. Conclusions

James VI of Scotland had a significant, albeit complex, influence on witchcraft prosecutions in Scotland. The North Berwick trials catalysed a fervent six-year period of witch-hunting across the country, with notable surges in 1591 and 1597. While James was not the sole architect of these developments, his involvement conferred legitimacy upon the hunts. The publication of *Daemonologie* in 1597 further entrenched existing anxieties about witchcraft, inadvertently sustaining the fervour of prosecutions. However, James's influence was neither absolute nor uniform. Although he authorised commissions for trials, he occasionally intervened to restrain excessive zeal in local prosecutions, reflecting an ambivalent role in the broader phenomenon. Furthermore, while early scholarship suggested that James introduced continental demonological thought to Scotland following his marriage to Anne of Denmark (Larner 1984; Levack 2016 [1987]), more recent research indicates that such ideas were already present and that his engagement with Danish scholars on the subject was likely minimal (Goodare 2013). Comparative studies within the European context have re-evaluated the connections between Scottish witch panic and the witch-hunting in south-western Germany between 1587 and 1631 (Midelfort 1972).

According to Levack (2008), the most important aspect of James's involvement in the North Berwick trials was its role in politicising Scottish witchcraft and reinforcing his authority as a divinely ordained monarch. The publication of *Daemonologie* further supported this strategy, situating James within the broader intellectual tradition of demonology while consolidating his position as Scotland's godly ruler.

After 1597, however, his active engagement with witchcraft waned, particularly in England, where it held less immediate political utility. Consequently, the monarch's impact on English witch-hunting was negligible. Although his accession to the English throne sparked temporary public interest in witchcraft literature, this was more a reflection of curiosity about the new monarch than a genuine intensification of witch-hunting fervour. The 1604 *Witchcraft Act*, often linked to James's supposed preoccupation with witches, was in reality shaped by his advisors rather than by direct royal initiative. Crucially, James did not advocate for increased prosecutions, nor did the legislation significantly alter the identification or punishment of alleged witches. Unlike in Scotland, England saw no politically significant witch-hunts during his reign that might have compelled him to assume an active role. The only major trial during his reign saw James participate only peripherally, and even then, his intervention was incidental rather than strategic. By the time he ascended to the English throne, witchcraft prosecutions were already in decline, a trend that persisted throughout the seventeenth century. Thus, James had little, if any, substantive influence on English witchcraft trials or the broader cultural perception of witchcraft in England.

This shift did not indicate a move toward scepticism – an implausible development given his previous work – but rather a pragmatic realignment of priorities. James's early engagement with witchcraft was driven by his monarchic role, shaped by political considerations, theological convictions, and the prevailing

cultural milieu of his time. His actions and writings served to reinforce his public image, assert authority over political adversaries, and, at times, exert control over judicial proceedings, an approach consistent with the strategies employed by other early modern rulers navigating the intersections of power, religion, and supernatural belief. This also explains why James's conception with witchcraft aligns with broader continental early modern understanding of witchcraft, incorporating notions of the diabolic pact, the witches' sabbath, and nocturnal flight, while simultaneously adapted to the Scottish context. By wielding witchcraft trials and his demonological treatise as political instruments, James reinforced his authority as a protector and judge of Christian worship, standing against the devil and the "forme that he vsed in counterfeiting God" (1597, 36).

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Samuel Meiger's Middle Low German Manual on Demonological Witchcraft

Dario Bullitta

Abstract:

Samuel Meiger's *De panurgia lamiarum* (Hamburg, 1587) is the only manual on demonological witchcraft known to survive in Middle Low German. Drawing on a vast array of classical, biblical and contemporary material, Meiger demonstrates that witchcraft constitutes a transgression of all Ten Commandments and consequently defines it as "the mother of all sins". His volume – which combines theological discussion with a great wealth of gruesome anecdotes and historical testimonies of charms and evil eye performed throughout history – functions as a catalogue of all types of witches and sorcerers, who "violate and trample upon all the precepts of the divine law". In the present essay, I offer a fresh, in-depth analysis of Meiger's oeuvre developed in the course of the preparation of the first critical edition of the Middle Low German text.

Keywords: Demonological Witchcraft, Middle Low German, Lutheran Theology, Samuel Meiger, Witch Hunts

Et ecce Germania tot Sagarum Mater[1]

In his book on witch trials entitled *Cautio criminalis*, the Jesuit professor of moral theology Friedrich Spee von Langenfeld (1591-1635) campaigns for the innocence of the majority of witches, whom he encountered as confessor, lamenting, "Behold, Germany, mother of so many witches!". Published soon after the second major wave of witch hunts of the late 1620s, this apostrophe is especial-

[1] "Exstruendæ tamen pyræ sunt, & habendæ Sagæ, vndecunque, quarumuis Legum ingratiis accersantur. Præclara sane sententia! quæ ingentem hunc Sagarum numerum, quem cum piis & religiosis multis viris non audebam sine nota exotici sensus palam proloqui, manifesto calculo nobis addicit. Et ecce Germania | tot Sagarum Mater, quid mirum si præ mœrere oculos effleuit, ne videre possit? O cæcitas nostræ gentis! Ecce ipsimet Iudices clare clamant: seruetur æquitas, sequamur rationem, & Sagas non comburemus. Non ego quid contradicam scio; concedo enim: respondere non possum" (Spee von Langenfeld 1632, 162-163).

Letizia Vezzosi, University of Florence, Italy, letizia.vezzosi@unifi.it, 0000-0002-7635-2657

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ly directed against the German princes, who were allowing rash, unqualified judges to use torture at their own discretion. Here, Spee von Langenfeld alludes to the astounding number of witches that were being convicted within the Holy Roman Empire. According to recent estimates by William Monter, between 25,000 and 30,000 people were executed for witchcraft between 1560 and 1660; thus, approximately three out of every four witches executed in Europe during that century spoke a dialect of either High or Low German, and about six out of every seven European witches lived and died within the Holy Roman Empire (2002, 16). While the sad record of executions is held by the Moselle-Rhine Area (4,600) and Southwest Germany (4,200), Northern Germany (3,600) remains one of the most afflicted territories of the Holy Roman Empire and, more broadly, of early modern Europe (see Dillinger 2021 [2020], 94). The only work on demonological witchcraft to be written in Middle Low German was published in conjunction with the first major wave of German witch hunts, which took place in the 1580s and 1590s – three years after the infamous Rostock Witch Trials of 1584, the first of some breadth in the North, when 17 women and one man were executed in a span of two months (Müller 2019, 6). *De panurgia lamiarum, sagarum, strigum ac veneficarum, totiusque cohortis magicae cacodaemonia* (On the Deceitfulness of Witches, Soothsayers, Striges, Sorceresses, and All the Magical Retinue of Evil Spirits) was published in Hamburg in 1587 by the Lutheran pastor Samuel Meiger (1532-1610), a text that remains at present entirely unedited and, to a certain degree, understudied (see especially Feddersen 1938, 550-553; Lohmeier 1983, 46-56; Schulte 2009). Meiger writes his oeuvre in the Holstein variety of Middle Low German, first and foremost for the representatives of the local authorities – namely, the landlords, mayors, and bailiffs of the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, and by extension those of the Kingdom of Denmark and Norway – who were either unfamiliar or inexperienced in Latin and, in the 1580s, still used Low German as the written chancery language[2].

1. Samuel Meiger (1532-1610)

Samuel Meiger – the modernized form of *Meigerius*, in turn the Latinization of the German *Meyer* – was the son of Johann Meyer (1480-1561), a Lutheran pastor at Rendsburg (a village on the Kiel Canal) celebrated for having introduced

[2] "Darumme ick denn ock düsse Schrifft in dre Böke gedelet, in düdescher sprake hebbe an den dach geuen willen, dat ydt ock van den, so der Latinischen sprake vnkündich vnd vneruaren, möge gelesen werden" (Meiger 1587, xxix). Trans.: Therefore, I have also divided this writing into three books and wished to present it in the German language, so that it may also be read by those who are unfamiliar with and unskilled in the Latin language. Unless otherwise stated, translations are by the author. Due to the decline of the Hanseatic League, as well as the increasing prestige exercised by the Luther's translation of the Bible, Middle Low German would soon be irreversibly replaced by Early Modern High German, when the Central variety employed by Luther ("Lutherdeutsch") would become the normative language (see for instance Russ 1994, 16-17).

the Reformation on the North Frisian island of Strand, which at that time was a fiefdom of the Danish Crown. Through his father's outstanding achievements, Meiger was able to study theology at the University of Copenhagen with the aid of a royal scholarship. He enrolled at the age of 15 in 1547 and studied there for about 6 years. At the end of his studies (ca. 1554-1555), Samuel served as vicar, a temporary assistant of a Lutheran pastor, for the Dutch farmers on the island of Amager, just outside Copenhagen (see especially Boje 1966; Beyer 1999, 2001)[3]. In 1555, at the age of 23, he married his wife Gundel, and that same year he became pastor of St. Martinskirche in Nortorf in Holstein, where he remained at service for 55 years, that is until his death in 1610 (Sarnow 1955, 195)[4]. Samuel Meiger is best known for his magnum opus, the *Nucleus historiarum* (1599), an impressive universal compilation of over 1000 folio pages organized according to *loci communes* in Early Modern High German. The volume is dedicated to King Christian IV and was published in Hamburg during last years of Meiger's life[5]. A third work, *Speculum oeconomiae coniugalis* (1611), also in High German, is a dialogue on marriage and housekeeping that was published posthumously the year after Meiger's death.

2. Samuel Meiger's Main Sources

De panurgia lamiarum is a highly composite work in which some 150 classical, medieval, and early modern sources are mentioned[6], along with about 500 citations from the Lutheran Bible – among which Psalms (x61) and Isaiah (x24) are the most referenced books, especially by virtue of their overt condemnation of idolatry or magic[7]. However, the most significant sources are 15 Latin and 8 High German (chiefly coeval) treatises on demonological witchcraft – and to a

[3] In 1521, Christian II had invited Dutch farmers to settle on the island of Amager, near the Øresund (the Sound) by Copenhagen, so that they could more easily provide fresh vegetables to the Danish court (see for instance Bobé 1945).

[4] Samuel's brother, Albert Meyer (1528-1603), also studied theology for three years at the University of Copenhagen (1576-1579) with the support of Christian III. In 1553 he became pastor in Lindholm where he stayed until his death in 1603. In 1565, aged 37, Albert attended Caspar Peucer's lectures at the University of Wittenberg and, despite some conflicts, he continued to work within Peucer's circle until the end of his life. Interestingly, Albert was known for believing that alchemy and astrology did not contradict religion, thus arousing suspicion in his community, who accused him of being a believer in magic (Lohmeier 1976).

[5] The first 1599 edition was followed at least by two imprints published in Magdeburg in 1614 and in Wittenberg in 1659 and by a newly revised version edited in 1649 in Ulm by Martin Zeiller (1589-1661) (see Bullitta and Wolf forthcoming).

[6] The most commonly cited works of Latin prose are Pliny's *Historia naturalis* (x8), Cicero's *De diuinatione* (x6), Aristoteles' *Metaphysica* (x6), and Plutarch's *Vitae parallelae* (x5). The most cited Latin poems are Virgil's *Eglogae* (x7), Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (x4), and Lucan's *Pharsalia* (x3).

[7] These are followed by Matthew (x23), John (x23), Deuteronomy (x18), Job (x16), Luke (x15), Exodus (x13), Genesis (x13), Romans (x11), and Leviticus (x11), Ephesians (x10), 1 Samuel (x10), which are cited at least ten times throughout the volume.

lesser extent, on natural magic – that Meiger cites at least three times throughout the volume and were likely accessed by him first-hand. Moreover, mention should be made of a single Dutch source, Jacob Vallick's *Tooveren* (1559), which Meiger may have been able to read with a certain degree of confidence, given his experience as a vicar for the Dutch peasants on the island of Amager. Among all cited texts, Jean Bodin's *Daemonomania* (1581) represents the most authoritative source, being referenced in over 60 instances. As shall be seen, such prominence is confirmed by the author himself in his final peroration of the volume, where he admits to have taken great inspiration from Bodin[8].

Latin Sources

1) Jean Bodin, *De magorum dæmonomania* (1581) [x66];
2) Lambert Daneau, *Dialogus de veneficiis* (1574) [x15];
3) Johann Wier, *De præstigiis dæmonum* (1568) [x11];
4) Heinrich Kramer and Jakob Sprenger, *Malleus maleficarum* (1486-1487) [x9];
5) Giovanni Battista Della Porta, *Magiae naturalis* (1584) [x9];
6) Ulrich Molitor, *De laniis et phitonicis mulieribus* (1489) [x7];
7) Gerolamo Cardano, *De subtilitate* (1550) [x7];
8) Wilhelm Adolf Scribonius, *De sagarum natura et potestate* (1588) [x7];
9) Ludwig Lavater, *De spectris* (1575) [x6];
10) Niels Hemmingsen, *Admonitio de superstitionibus* (1575) [x4];
11) Jakob Heerbrand, *De magia disputatio* (1570) [x4];
12) Paolo Grillando, *Tractatus de hereticis et sortilegiis* (1536) [x3];
13) Kaspar Peucer, *Commentarius de praecipuis divinationum generibus* (1560) [x3];
14) Johann Brenz, *Evangelion quod inscribitur secundum Ioannem* (1554) [x3];
15) Cornelius Gemma, *De naturæ divinis characterismis* (1575) [x3];

High German Sources

1) Bartholomäus Carrichter, *Practica Auß den fürnemesten Secretis* (1575) [x6];
2) Reinhard Lutz, *Warhafftige Zeitung von den Gottlosen Hexen* (1571) [x5];
3) Jobst Höcker, *Der Teufel selbs* (1568) [x5];
4) Augustin Lercheimer [= Hermann Wilken], *Christlich bedencken* (1585) [x4];
5) Hiob Fincel, *Wunderzeichen* (1556) [x4];
6) Georg Lauterbeck, *Regentenbuch* (1557) [x3];
7) Johann Ewich, *Von der Hexen* (1585) [x3];
8) Jakob von Lichtenberg, *Hexen Büchlin* (1575) [x3];

Dutch Source

1) Jacob Vallick, *Tooveren* (1559) [x1];

[8] See the discussion below at §8.

3. David Chytraeus' Letter of Approbation

After assessing a draft manuscript of Meiger's oeuvre, David Chytraeus, Professor of Theology at the University of Rostock and a key figure of north German Protestant humanism, wrote to Meiger a letter dated 21 March 1587 that later partially printed as the Letter of Approbation to *De panurgia* (see Appendix 1)[9]. In his letter, Chytraeus praises Meiger on numerous occasions but also expresses reservations on his exuberant mélange of the "Saxon dialect" with the Latin idiom. While admitting that he is unable to judge the style of Middle Low German – as he himself was a speaker of Swabian, an Oberdeutsch dialect – Chytraeus exhorts Meiger to avoid mixing German with Latin clauses, words, and inflections, and instead preserve the German idiom in its purest form, a precious stylistic advice that was never followed by the author. Meiger excised Chytraeus' criticism from the published Letter of Approbation (see especially Leonhardt 2000, 115-117)[10].

4. Samuel Meiger's Dedicatory Letter

In his Dedicatory Letter, Meiger states that he could find no better way to express his gratitude to Frederik II (1534-1588) – King of Denmark and Norway and Duke of Schleswig and Holstein from 1559 to 1588, who may have received the volume just before his death – than dedicating to him his work on the evil of sorcerers and their punishments. Frederik II is described by Meiger as a zealous persecutor of the sins of the devil in general and of sorcerers in particular – an activity that earned him recognition both within his kingdom and abroad. Meiger presents this as a battle which Frederik II conducted with the utmost seriousness according to the praiseworthy Christian examples of the Kings of the Old Testament[11]. Naturally, Scriptural justifications for the hunting and punish-

[9] Chytraeus' correspondence of some 700 letters was published by his son, who was also called David (see Chytraeus 1614, the original letter to Meiger is published at 122-127). Meiger's volume may well have been known to Johann Gödelmann (1559-1611), who published his *Tractatus de magis* (1591) five years after *De panurgia*, with which it shares numerous references. Gödelmann was first student then professor of law at the Rostocker Akademie from 1583.

[10] "De Oratione seu dialecto Saxonica, quam retines, nihil iudicare, dialecti illius imperitus, possum: sed tamen, purum et proprium Germanis sermonem, non tot latinis clausulis ac verbis, interdum ad Germanicam terminationem detortis mixtum, retineri rectius arbitrarer" (Chytraeus 1614, 127).

[11] "Wenn ick nu der velen woldaden gedencke, so my yuwer Kön. M. Her Vader, seliger Christmilder gedechtnisse bewyset, vinde ick nein ander noch beter middel, dadorch ick myn danckbar gemöte yegen J. Kön: Maiest. alse vederliken Lande vnd dögede Eruen, erkleren kan vnd mach, alse euen düsse schrifft van der Töuerers bößheit vnd straffe. Welckere ick denn ock J. Kön. Mai. [(C)xvii] der orsaken haluen hebbe willen vnderdenigest *dedicceren*. Dewyle beide inheimschen vnd frömden bekant, dat J. Kön. Mai: der Düuelschen sünde vnd den gemenen vynden Minschlikes Geslechtes, den Töuerern, hertliken vyendt ys, desüluigen ock mit högestem ernst nha Gades beuehle straffet, vnd sodan vnkrut vnd lastige

ment of witches permeate the entire work, including the Dedicatory Letter, the Preface, and even the Title Page of the volume. After his signature and before the place and year of publication, Meiger inserts the verses of Malachi 3:5, in which the God of justice testifies against those who have violated his covenant commandments, most notably sorcerers, necromancers, witches, and magicians for whom the law prescribes death[12]. Similarly, he evokes Exodus 22:18[13], Micah 5:12[14], and Leviticus 20:27[15], all biblical *loci* frequently recalled by late medieval and early modern demonologists in the literal sense of exterminating witches, rather than wishing to eradicate their heresies figuratively (see for instance Peters 1978, 67-68).

Meiger admits to having been terrified and held back for some time by the burden that producing a volume on demonological witchcraft would entail, and he often thought of passing such a heavy weight on to more capable and prepared scholars[16]. What finally prompted him to complete the task were, first and fore-

börden der Erden, alse ein Christilick Köninck vnd yuerer, wechnemen vnd vthraden leth, Na dem Exempel löffliker Köninge des olden Testamentes, de alle Töuerers, Warseggers, Tekendüders, vth *Iuda* vnd *Israhel* vtgeradet hebben" (Meiger 1587, xvi-xvii). Trans.: When I now recall the many good deeds that Your Royal Majesty's father – of blessed Christian memory – showed me, I find no other nor better means by which I can and may express my grateful feelings towards Your Royal Majesty, as the true ruler and virtuous honor of these lands, than precisely through this treatise on the wickedness and punishment of sorcerers. Consequently, I have also wished to most humbly dedicate it to Your Royal Majesty. For it is well known both at home and abroad that Your Royal Majesty is a sincere enemy of the devil's sins and of sorcerers, the common adversaries of humankind, that you punish these with the utmost seriousness according to God's command, and that, like a Christian king and ruler, you remove and eradicate such weeds and troublesome burdens from the earth, following the laudable example of the Kings of the Old Testament, who drove all sorcerers, soothsayers, and diviners from Judah and Israel.

12 "Vnd ick wil tho yuw kamen, vnd yuw straffen, vnd will ein snell Tüge syn wedder de Töuerers, Ehebrekers vnd Meinedigen, vnd wedder de, de gewalt vnde vnrecht dhon". Trans.: And I will come to you and punish you, and I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, adulterers, and perjurers, and against those who commit violence and injustice. Beside the title page, the verses are also paraphrased again in Book 1 (Book 1.2, 14-15), where Biblical precedents of witchcraft are presented.

13 "Einen Töuerer schaltu nicht leuen laten" (trans.: You shall not let the sorceresses live) is mentioned in ivi, Preface, xxviii; Book 1.2, 13; Book 2.10, 280; Book 2.11, 306.

14 "Jck will van der Erden alle Töuerers end Warseggers vordelgen" (trans.: I will destroy all sorcerers and soothsayers from the earth) is cited twice in Book 2.10 (ivi, 279-280).

15 "Wenn ein Man edder Fruwe ein Warsager edder Tekendüder syn wert, de schölen des dodes steruen, men schal se stenigen, er blodt sy vp eren kop" (trans.: If a man or woman becomes a soothsayer or a fortune-teller, they shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned, their blood shall be upon their own head) is mentioned in Book 2.10 (ivi, 280).

16 "Twar myner vnuormögenheit vnd swackheit bin ick my in keinen wegen vnbewust, sunder vöhre se my offtmals in düssem mynem vörnemende tho gemöthe, dat ick ock wol gedencke, ick scholde billick sodane last vorby geghan vnd anderen gelerderen, de vormögener vnd geschickeder syn desülue tho dragende vnd vththouörende, auergegeuen vnde heimgestellet hebben" (ivi, xxiv). Trans.: I am by no means unaware of my own inadequacy and weakness. Rather, they often come to mind in this undertaking of mine, so that I frequently think I

most, the dismissive opinions of some authors who mocked or ridiculed the danger of witchcraft – as for instance the Peripatetics' denial of the existence of demons mentioned by the skeptical physician Johann Wier in his *De præstigiis daemonum*[17]. Meiger must have had in mind other contemporary scholars, who believed that witchcraft was merely the result of melancholic fantasies – namely, derangements and lunacies of mentally ill people – and was not at all fit for capital punishment. According to Meiger, these people attribute all the damage without distinction either to natural causes or to the devil alone without accepting the existence of his fiendish subordinates or accomplices, namely sorcerers and witches, and are far too hesitant when punishing proven and convicted witches with temporal fire. Sorcery is seen first and foremost as apostasy and profanation of God's name – a sin that God will not leave unpunished. While physicians like Wier himself may be far too busy with their medical work to meditate upon such theological matters, Meiger deems "unchristian" those preachers who excuse the crime of witchcraft and punish it far too leniently[18].

should quite properly have let such a burden pass by me, and entrusted and committed it to other scholars who are more competent and able to bear and carry it out.

[17] "Religionis autem Christianæ sacram amplexus doctrinam, fideique indubitatæ confessionem, quemadmodum Aristotelis Peripateticorumque […] non esse dæmones in rerum natura contendentium, placita prorsus reijcio: sic & Platonis commenticiam distinctionem omnino approbare, autetiam Porphyrij, Pselli, Procli, Plotini & Iamblichi opinionibus subscriber nequeo, qui copiosè quidem de dæmonibus uerùm multa quæ non uidêre aut cognouêre, tanquam rei nota historiam conscripserunt" (Wier 1568, 35). Fifteenth centuries demonologists, like Heinrich Kramer, inherited the attempt to reconcile Biblical accounts of angels and demons with Aristotle's description of nature from Scholastic expositions, most prominently from *De malo* by Thomas Aquinas (see the discussion in Stephens 2003, 73-80).

[18] "Auerst hyrentyegen bin ick dennoch gelikewol sulckes vp my thonemende in mynem gemöte auerredet vnd bewagen, vth volgenden hochwichtigen vnd nodtwendigen orsaken: [(D)xxv] Thom ersten hebben my bewagen, etliker vorkerder lüde *iudicia*, de gar schimplick van Töurye ordelen vnd reden, vnd desülue nicht anders, alse oder Wyuer tandt mit den *Peripateticis* holden, edder mit etliken Gelerdern düsser tidt vor luttere Melancholisce phantasien vnd inbildingen achten, vnd neinerley wyse werdich am leeuende tho straffen vormeinen, Maken sick ock groth geweten daruan, warhafftige bekande auertügede Töuerschen mit dem tydtliken vüre thostraffende, de doch ane alle yegenrede (wo se sick nicht in der gnadentydt bekeren) ock des Helleschen vüres schüldich syn. Sodant vorachter der Töuerye bedencken nicht, wat de affall van Gade, vnd enthillginge synes düren weerden Gödtliken Namens vor eine schrecklike Sünde sy, de Godt nicht will vngestraffet lathen … Welckes denn den *Medicis* vnd anderen (de mit erer *profeßion* genoch tho dhonde vinden, vnd derenthaluen düssen vnd dergeliken Theologeschen hendeln so ernstlick nicht nadenken könen) etlicker maten na thogeuende syn mochte … Dat auerst sodane vorachtinge ock by etliken Predigern befunden, de de Töuerye helpen entschüldigen vnd gantz kolt desüluige sünde straffen, ys Vnchristlick, vnd nicht to dulden, dewile men de Godtlosen nichts [xxvi] achten moth, will men anders in Gades Hütten wanen, vnd vp synem hillige Berge bliuen" (Meiger 1587, xxiv-xxv). Trans.: Yet, notwithstanding, I have nevertheless resolved and persuaded myself in my mind to take such a matter upon myself, for the following highly important and necessary reasons: Firstly, I have been moved by the utterly mistaken judgments of some misguided people, who speak very scornfully of witchcraft and consi-

Meiger's objective is to punish the sorcerers who have been found guilty of witchcraft for their abuse of God's name while at the same time avoiding perpetrating distress, injustice or violence on innocents. Accordingly, he exhorts the local authorities – namely the magistrates and town councillors in service of the King and the dukes for whom the work is primarily intended – to act with caution when dealing with matters of witchcraft[19] and wishes "to ensure that they do not trouble and mislead their conscience with the blood and death of innocent people"[20]. Finally, Meiger prescribes the use of torture provided that there is complete information, strong conviction, as well as important and sufficient suspicion[21].

der it to be nothing other than, as the Peripatetics would have it, "old women's tales," or, as some modern scholars claim, mere melancholic fantasies and imaginations, and in no way consider it worthy of punishment by death. They also pride themselves greatly on this, that they refuse to punish true, publicly known, and proven witches with temporal fire, even though – unless they repent in their time of grace – they are indeed guilty of the eternal fire of hell. Such detractors of witchcraft do not reflect on what a dreadful sin it is – apostasy [the falling away] from God and the profanation of His sacred name – a sin that God will not leave unpunished ... Something similar is also, to some extent, found among physicians and others (who are sufficiently occupied with their own profession, and therefore cannot so earnestly consider these and the like theological matters). But, that such contempt is also found among certain preachers, who help excuse witchcraft and punish this crime in a very cold and feeble manner, is unchristian and not to be tolerated, since one ought not to esteem the ungodly as anything – if one would truly belong to God's house and wish to remain upon His holy mountain. Those who qualify for God's adobe should show no tolerance against the ungodly, a reference to Psalm 15:1 "Lord, who will dwell in your tabernacle? Who will stay on your holy mountain?", in which David meditates over the character of the men that will be received into the presence of God.

[19] "Dewyle ick nu düssen mynen *Scopum* tho Gödtliken Ehren vnd Christliker leue des Negesten geriechet hebbe, dat de mißbrukinge Gödtlikes Namens by rechtschüldigen Töuerschen möge gestraffet werden, vnd vnschüldigen neen plötzlick vnuall vnd vnrecht edder gewalt beyegenen moge, sunder dat de Ouericheit in Töuerschen handelen vörsichtichliken vmmeghan, vnd mit vnschüldigem Blode er geweten nicht beladen möge" (ivi, xxix). Trans.: Since I have now undertaken this task for the honor of God and out of Christian love for my neighbor, it is so that the abuse of God's name may be punished in truly guilty witches, and that the innocent may not be suddenly subjected to harm, injustice, or violence; but rather that the authorities may proceed with caution in witchcraft matters, and that their conscience may not be burdened with innocent blood.

[20] "Dat ick na dem vormögen, so Godt gifft, der Ouericheit erem geweten helpe raden vnde vörseen, vp dat se nicht mit vnschüldiger Minschen blode vnd dode, ere *Conscientien* vorunrouwe vnd erre maken" (ivi, (D2) xxvii). Trans.: That I, according to the ability God gives me, may help advise and guide the authorities and their consciences, so that they do not trouble or burden their consciences with the blood and death of innocent people.

[21] "Vp [(D3)xxix] dat se nicht vnbedacht sodane beklagede ankasten, vnd der pynliken tortur vnderwerpen, ydt sy denn, dat vullenkamene narichtinge vnd auerwisingen, vnd starcke wichtige nögehafftige vormodingen syn vörher geghan" (ivi, (D3)xxix). Trans.: So that they do not imprudently accuse such defendants and subject them to painful torture, unless there is first complete information and proof, as well as strong, important, and necessary suspicions.

5. Book 1: "Van der Töuerschen geschwindenlist vnd geschicklicheit quadt tho donde"

Book 1 is entitled "Van der Töuerschen geschwindenlist vnd geschicklicheit quadt tho donde" (On the Cunning and Skilfullness of Witches in Doing Evil) and contains 14 chapters that serve as an introduction to Book 2. Meiger draws examples from the Scriptures as well as from ancient, medieval, and contemporary history in order to prove that witchcraft has always existed and warns his readers that its practice has increased exponentially in recent decades (Chapter 2)[22]. Sorcery is essentially apostasy and should by no means be confused with superstition and especially not with natural magic, which, following one of his main sources, the Neapolitan philosopher Giovanni Battista della Porta's *Magiae naturalis* (Naples, 1584), should instead be considered a fine craft that honors God, as can be seen by the disciplines revolving around it, such as physics, medicine, and astrology, which explore and exploit the secrets of nature to serve humanity (Chapter 3)[23].

Meiger then addresses a significant question, frequently discussed in demonologies, as to whether the devil exerts his evil directly upon men or through mediation. He warns the readers that some scholars of the former opinion have spread the dangerous delusion that heresy is, in fact, an insubstantial and meaningless activity and proves that the devil uses witches as his very means to exert evil (Chapter 9). He believes that witches can harm pious Christians but only if God permits it and mentions a passage in the *Tischreden* in which Luther himself admits that his illnesses were caused by the devil through witchcraft, a condition that must have been allowed by God (Chapter 10)[24]. While Meiger suggests that

[22] "Daruth nu de Christlike Leser genochsam spören vnd vormercken kan, dat düsse Düuelskunst nicht vpgekamen sy, sunder vör vnd allewege im swange geghan, vnd im gebruke gewesen, Darümme men nu so vele weiniger sick darff vorwunderen, dewyle der Werlt auent herinn drenget vnd nalet, vnd de Düuel den schnoue rücket, dat ydt mith syner kunst balde wil afflopen vnde ein ende nemen" (ivi, 22). Trans.: From this, the Christian reader can clearly perceive and observe that this devil's art did not newly arise but has always existed and been in practice from the very beginning. Therefore, one should all the less be surprised, since the end of the world is drawing near and approaching, and the devil is intensifying his efforts, wishing to bring his art quickly to completion and to an end.

[23] "De Erste *Species* alse *Magia Naturalis*, Js ein fyn *studium*, welckes de heimlicheiden der Natur, vth der *Physica*, *Medicina* vnde *scientia Astrorum* vthkluuet vnde vthsocht […] Desse *Magia Naturalis* ys mit nichten Töuerye, sunder ein leefflick *studium*, gerichtet tho des Almechtigen Gades ehren, dorch erforschinge der heimlischeiden, in der Natur vorborgen, Jn welckeren heruörlüchten jdele Voetstappen der högesten gewalt, wyßheit vnde Barmherticheit Gades" (ivi, 27-28). Trans.: The first category, namely natural magic (*magia naturalis*), is a fine pursuit, which investigates and explores the secrets of nature, drawn from physics, medicine, and the science of the stars [astronomy] […] This natural magic is by no means witchcraft, but rather a noble study, aimed at honoring the Almighty God by investigating those secrets hidden in nature, in which shine forth the clear traces of God's highest power, wisdom, and mercy.

[24] "Vnd ick holde jdt daruör, dat myne swackheit my dorch vorhengede Töuerye beyegene", "Et ego infirmitates meas non esse naturales, sed meras fascinationes puto" (Luther 1912-1921, vol. 3, 2982b). Trans.: And I believe that my affliction was brought upon me by sorcery previously committed against me.

guardian angels can protect against the evil of witchcraft (Chapter 11), he denies with conviction the fact that witches can cause bad weather, to going so far as to contradict Luther's own authority (Chapter 12)[25]. In fact, he asserts that while witches believe they have power over the elements, it is actually the devil who produces storms and hail with God's permission. Meiger then mentions the well-known mountains on which the most infamous sabbaths are said to take place on the vigil of 1 May, Walpurgisnacht ("Meidagenacht"): the Atlas Mountains of North Africa, as related in classical sources, the Brocken (Saxony-Anhalt), the Hörselberg (Thuringia), and the Black Forest (Baden-Württemberg), which are populated by what Meiger defines "Hochdüdeschen Hexen" (High German witches). Interestingly, there are no reports of sabbaths in the North German Plain, neither in Meiger nor in his sources and we know from the transcripts of the abovementioned "Low German" witches executed at Rostock in 1584 that they confessed to having been transported to the great sabbath that took place regularly at the Brocken Mountain, some 300 km away from their Hanseatic city (see Müller 2019, 11).

While several scholars believed that witches only dream of flying to the sabbaths, Meiger does not exclude the possibility of the physical flight, yet he also asserts that there is absolutely no certainty and warns the authorities not to believe every witch that claims to have participated in them[26]. He then proceeds to describe the morphology of a classical sabbath, as found in Bodin's description of the great 1564 nocturnal assembly held near Poitiers[27]. Three times a year, an

[25] Luther is cited from the Jena edition, the second major Latin edition after Wittemberg "Secundo, possunt tempestates, tonitrua concitare, perdere fruges, occidere pecora. Item, butyrum, lac, caseum alijs furari, id est, ex poste uel bipenne, uel mantili, mulgere" (Luther 1556, cxxv).

[26] "Jdt ys eine *articulus fidei*, wolde ock der Ouericheit nicht raden, vp sodane wörde, dar neine andere gewisse starcke vormodinge syn, strackes vorthouarende, alse wenn eine Hexe schal gerichtet werden, dar se wor vth hate vp vnschüldige Personen müchte bekennen, se hedde se mit in erem Dantze geseen, were mit vp dem Blocksberge gewesen, edder im Swartzwalde, dar de Hochdüdeschen Hexen eren Münsterplatz schölen holden, vp dem Hörselberge, edder dem groten Berge *Athlas* se hedde geseen. Dar schal de Ouericheit nicht stracks vp sulke blote vthsage vortuaren, desüluigen inteen, vnde der tortur vnderwerpen laten, ydt were denn sake, dat de dinge gantz bekandt, vnd se de Gadeslesteringe vnd anbedent sampt der vormischinge mit dem Düuel wercklikeu vnd warhafftigen hedden mit geholden" (Meiger 1587, 150). Trans.: This is an article of faith, and I would by no means advise the authorities to act at once, on such words, unless there is some other certain strong suspicion, as is often immediately done when a witch is to be judged – that because she, perhaps out of hatred, might confess against innocent persons, that she saw them with her in her dance, that they were with her on the Brocken, or in the Black Forest, where the High German witches are said to hold their cathedral square, on the Hörselberg, or on the great Atlas Mountain, that she saw them there. The authorities should not proceed at once on such bare testimony, nor immediately detain nor subject such persons to torture, unless the case is such that the matter is entirely known, and that they truly and verifiably participated in blasphemy against God and worship, as well as in intercourse with the devil.

[27] "Alterum exstat exemplum insignius executionis illius quæ facta est Pictauii anno M.D.LXIIII. cuius executionis historiam cùm à multis in eodem loco, tum etiam à Pictonum

innumerable number of witches and sorcerers appeal to the devil, who manifests himself in the guise of a billy goat. They then kiss his rear (the so-called *osculum infame*) and engage in a circular dance turning themselves back to back, so that the participants are not able to recognize one another. They then banquet on sumptuous food and drinks for about 3 hours and engage in intercourse with the devil and other demons throughout the night. Finally, the devil provides each participant with a special gift – most commonly magic powders – so that they can harm people and livestock. If, in the days following the sabbath, the devil happens to discover that the participants have perpetrated no evil with his fiendish gifts, he beats them severely, yells at them, and urges them to take revenge[28].

Præside Saluerto didici (qui tum ad iudicium ferendum cum Dauentonio Pictonum Præside & iudicibus alijs fuerat accitus) & omnes in ea regione tenent. Tres viri cum fœmina vna Magi damnati & igne concremati sunt viui, cùm fuissent euicti necis hominibus plurimis pecudibusque importatæ opera (vt fatebantur) diaboli subministrantis puluere quos humi stabulorum, ouilium, domorumque limini sudbebant. Narrauerunt autem isti se ter in conuentum maximum solitos proficisci, quò conueniebant Magi innumerabiles ad compitalem quamdam crucem quæ ipsis vsum præbebat signi: ibi præesse hircum ingentem nigrum, adstantes ratione humana compellantem, in eius ambitum saltare omneis, tum vnumquemque posteriores illius partes cum ardente candela osculari: hoc facto, hircum absumi igne, de cuius cinere singulos capere, vt eo bouem inimici necarent, huius ouem illius equum, hunc hominem languore, illum morte afficerent: postremó diabolum voce terri[167]bili hæc verba intonare, vlciscimini vos, aut mortem oppetetis: ita singulos ope diaboli redire quà venerant. Non est autem leuiter prætereundum illud, quod ter quotannis sacrificium istud diabolo tenentur facere, imitantur enim sacrificium hirci lege diuina imperatum, Leuit. xvi. & præceptum illud vt mares singuli ter quotannis solennibus ferijs compareant coram Domino" (Bodin 1581, 166-167).

[28] "Wente *Bodinus* settet düsse *Preces*, de de Hexen in eren thosamen kümpsten schölen holden. Erstliken beden se den Düuel an, de sick vor anderen in gröte anseenliker heruör gedan, vnd in gestalt eines Bockes gestellet hefft. Darna küssen se eme den Hindersten, darin en denn recht geschüth, de den Söne nicht küssen willen, dat se dem stinckende Düuelsbocke dat hinderlock küssen. Denn schölen se anuangen eren Dantz, vp dat se also einen *appetit* yegen de Maltydt krigen, Wowol *Bodinus* schrifft, dat eine der anderen im dantze den rüggen tho kere, vp dat eine de andere nicht erkennen schöle, welckes wol so syn mach. Jck auerst scholde gelöuen, de Düuel scholde nicht vorhöden willen, dat eine de andere nicht kende vnd vthgeue, wenn schyr morgen eine vthgedenet vnd angegrepen wurde. Darna schölen se eten vnd drincken in aller auerfloth, ane dat neine kost schö[(Aa)151]le gestolen syn, wenn se nu dat lyff wol hebben vthgeuüllet in der korten tydt (denn *Bodinus* meinet, se syn man dre stunde byeinander, welckes ick an synen ordt stelle) so schöle de vormischinge gescheen mit eren Boleren, vnd driuen ere vntucht, vnd wenn düsse dinge vorrichtet syn, so geue de Düuel einer yderen besunderigen giefft, darmit möthen se anlauen, Minschen vnd Vehe schaden tho donde, daruan se ock vp de negeste thosamende kumpst möthen rekenschop dhon, weme se mit erem puluer hebben schaden bygebracht. Vnd de befunden werden, dat se nein böses darmit hebben gedhan, de krigen etlike slege, vp den afftoch schriet he enen alle tho, darmit wreket yuw, wreket yuw, darmit kütschet he mit en wech mit einer yderen tho huß, de he entlick na Hekelueldt vören wert" (Meiger 1587, 150-[Aa]151). Trans.: For Bodin lists these prayers that the witches are supposed to recite in their gatherings. First, they pray to the Devil, who makes himself especially prominent above all others and appears in the form of a billy goat. Then they kiss him on the rear, in which case those who do not wish to kiss the Son must instead kiss the stinking rear of the Devil's goat. Then, they

Skeptical scholars such as the aforementioned Johann Wier and Giovanni Battista della Porta, two of the main sources consulted by Meiger, argued that the flying ointments – namely psychedelic plant-based ointments – merely induced delirium and the sensation of flight but do not allow the physical flight to the sabbath. It is precisely this flight skepticism that would be the starting point for the breakdown of the belief in witchcraft (see for instance Bailey 2015, 383-388). In order to verify if such covens have actually taken place, Meiger suggests that the local authorities send reliable people to inspect the specific mountain the day following the sabbath, where the fiendish dances have taken place, to see whether the footprints of the Satanic dancers can still be seen in the dew (Chapter 13)[29].

6. Book 2: "Dat Töuerye eine Düuelsche Sünde sy, de wedder alle teyn Gebade Gades strydet"

Book 2, entitled "Dat Töuerye eine Düuelsche Sünde sy, de wedder alle teyn Gebade Gades strydet" (How Witchcraft is a Diabolic Sin that Violates All Ten Commandments) is the actual body of the theological, and to a lesser extent legal, argumentations of the book. In 12 chapters, Meiger attempts to prove how witches sin against all Ten Commandments. Following the Lutheran Catechetical order, the first 3 transgressions are directed against God himself, while the following 7 are directed against people:

- The first Commandment ("You shall have no other gods") is violated because of the witches' full and conscious renouncement of the grace

should begin their dance, so that they will develop an appetite for the feast. Although Bodin writes that each one must turn their back to the other in the dance, so that they cannot recognize each other, which may well be so, I, however, would believe that the Devil would hardly want to prevent one from recognizing and revealing the other, if by daybreak one were to be denounced and arrested. After that, they are supposed to eat and drink in great abundance, although no food is actually stolen. When their bodies have been well filled in this short time (for Bodin maintains that they are together for about three hours – which I will let stand as he says), then they should proceed to intercourse with their paramours and commit their lewdness. And when these things are completed, the Devil gives each and every one a special gift, with which they are to go forth and harm people and livestock, and for which, at the next gathering, they must give account – whom they have harmed with their powder. And those found not to have caused any harm with it receive several blows. As they depart, he shouts after each of them, "Avenge yourselves! Avenge yourselves!" And so he sends each one home, though he secretly takes [leads] one or another to Hekelwald.

[29] "Eine gerigne nahrichtinge, der warheit thom besten, könd van der Ouericheit lichtliken gescheen, de der örde an den benanten Bergen wanen, dar de Hexen ere Dantzlpätze hebben schölen, dat se den morgen dorch warhafftige Lüde de Berge bauen allenthaluen besichtigen lethen, efft men im douwe ock veler Dantzerschen voetsparen vinden vnde erken[152]nen konde" (ivi, 151-152). Trans.: A slight investigation, in the interest of truth, could easily be conducted by the authorities who suspect that, on the named mountains where the witches are supposed to have their dancing places, they should have trustworthy people inspect the mountains everywhere the following morning, to see whether, as is claimed, they could indeed find and recognize the footprints of many dancers.

of New Covenant they received from the Lord through baptism, as they enter into a pact with the devil (Chapter 1)[30];

- The second Commandment ("You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God") is violated through the constant desecration and blasphemy of God's Name (Chapter 2)[31];
- The third Commandment ("Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy") is violated through their deceitfulness in showing contentment and interest in hearing God's words at Church (Chapter 3)[32];
- The fourth Commandment ("Honor your father and your mother") is violated through their exertion of fiendish powers against all humans, ruthlessly slaughtering elderly people and even young children, who are normally spared at war (Chapter 4)[33];

[30] "Thom Ersten sündigen de Hexen wedder dat Erste Gebott, in deme dat se treden vth dem vorbunde, den se mit Gade erem HEren in der hilligen Döpe geslaten vnd vpgerichtet hebben, vnde dhon datsüluige bedechtlick, vngedwungen, ane yenninge orsake, dar se doch dorch ere Vadderen angelauet, dem Düuel vnn synen wercken gantz tho entseggende" (ivi, 165). Trans.: Firstly, witches sin against the First Commandment in that they break the covenant which they entered into and established with God their Lord in holy baptism, and they do so knowingly and willingly, without any compulsion or cause, even though through their godparents they have professed to renounce the devil and all his works completely.

[31] "Dat de Hexen sündigen wedder dat Ander Gebott, vnde mißbruken den düren Namen Gades, vnde enthilliget en, ys leider althobekant, welcke enthillinge synes hogen Namens de rechtuerdige Godt nicht will vngestraffet lathen, edder de vnschüldich holden, de synen Namen vnnütliken vören" (ivi, 179). Trans.: That the witches sin against the Second Commandment and misuse the holy name of God, and profane it, is unfortunately all too well known. Such profanation of His exalted name the righteous God will not leave unpunished, nor will He hold guiltless those who use His name in vain.

[32] "Thom Ersten stellen sick de Hexen Godtfrüchtich, vnd hebben den schyn der Godtselicheit, dar se doch dersüluigen krafft vorsaken. Se vinden sick erst vnd latest gern in der Kercken, vnd datsüluige vth hüchelye. Se drengen sick vnder de gemeine Gades, dar se doch van den Schäpken Christi nicht syn, de synen stemmen gerne hören. Se stellen sick an, alse were ydt ehn ein hoch ernst mith vlitigem tho hörende des Wordes Gades, lathen den Prediger nümmer vth den ogen, stellen sick an alse weren se[194]der hungerigen Brudt geste, den ydt doch vmme den Brüdegam nicht tho donde ys. Se reden gerne Worde, stellen sick hillich vnd andechtich, dat einer swöre, ydt were en ein ernst vmme dat leue Wordt" (ivi, 193-194). Trans.: Firstly, the witches present themselves as God-fearing and have the appearance of piety, though they have renounced its true power. They are often found, willingly, at the church, and this out of hypocrisy. They mingle among the congregation of God, though they are not among the sheep of Christ who gladly hear His voice. They act as if it were a matter of utmost seriousness to diligently listen to the Word of God, never taking their eyes off the preacher, behaving as though they were hungry wedding guests, though it is not the Bridegroom they seek. They speak readily of the Word, and conduct themselves as holy and devout, so that one would swear they were truly earnest for the dear Word.

[33] "Nu sündigen vnde auerghan düsse elende vnd nidesche bößhafftige Minschen, düsse gemeine Regel so gantz sehr vnd allermaten, dat se sick aller natürliken Affecten entblöten, vnd vorschonen neines olders, neiner Personen, ock der olden nicht, so vnuormögen alse se ock syn, nener Kinder, so zart vnd yunck alse se ock syn, derer men sick in Kriges hendelen erbarmet, Se holden manck en allen nein vnderscheit, sunder bewysen ere gifftige bößheit wit Töuerye an densüluigen" (ivi, 201). Trans.: Now these miserable and envious, wicked

- The fifth Commandment ("You shall not murder") is violated by the very nature of sorcery, defined by Meiger as an invention of the devil to harm humanity. It is especially emphasized that how no other commandment is more clearly and openly abused by witches than the fifth (Chapter 5)[34];
- The sixth Commandment ("You shall not commit adultery") is violated through the witches' disregard for their oath of marriage to their original bridegroom, Christ, to whom all Christians are consecrated and bond in marriage through baptism, when they consciously decide to give themselves to the devil and engage in sexual intercourse with him (Chapter 6)[35];
- The seventh Commandment ("You shall not steal") is violated through the witches' robbery of livestock or damage and sabotage of cattle and crops through sorcery (Chapter 7)[36];

people sin and transgress this common rule so completely and in every way, that they strip themselves of all natural affections and spare neither parents nor persons, not even the old ones, however helpless they may be, nor children, however tender and young they may be – those for whom even in war one feels pity. They make no distinction among any of them, but instead demonstrate their poisonous wickedness with sorcery against all alike.

[34] "Dewile ane jennige Wedderrede de Töuerkunst ein fundt des Ertzvyndes des Düuels ys, tho högestem schaden vnde nhadeile dem gantzen Minschliken geslechte anuencklick erfunden, vnd namals bösen Minschen ingegeuen: So kan datsüluige in keinem Gebade heller vnde ogenschinliker erwyset vnd wargemaket werden, alse in düssem Vöfften Gebade vnd mißhandelingen daryegen" (ivi, 213). Trans.: Since, without any contradiction, sorcery is an invention of the arch-enemy, the devil, devised from the very beginning to the greatest harm and detriment of all humankind, and later imparted to wicked people, this can be proven and demonstrated nowhere more clearly and evidently than in the Fifth Commandment and in the offenses committed against it.

[35] "Also vorholden sick de Hexen ock, vorgeten balde des geslaten bundes in der Döpe, ja aller ertögeden woldaden, mit welckem se van erem getrüwen Brüdegam auerschüddet syn, geuen sick thom Düuel, van welckem se na gedaner entsegginge flegen scholden na vormöge eres Eydes, tho deme gesellen se sick, vorlaten eren Brüdegam Christum, dhon sick dem Düuel nöge, alse vor tüchtigen ohren wol tho vormeldende, ya se boleren mit em" (ivi, 238). Trans.: Thus the witches conduct themselves, soon forgetting the covenant made in baptism – indeed, all the benefits and good deeds with which they have been showered by their faithful Bridegroom. They give themselves to the Devil, from whom, after their renunciation, they should have fled according to their oath. Instead, they join with him, abandon their Bridegroom Christ, and devote themselves to the Devil, as can well be made known before trustworthy witnesses – indeed, they even consort with him as lovers.

[36] "Thom Ersten, sündigen de Hexen yegen dyth Söuende Gebodt in deme, dath se den armen Hußlüden den segen, so en Godt an dem Vehe bescheret, also mit erer Töuerye affstriken vnde benemen, dath se neen Veh vaken könen thotügen vnde vpvöden, wenn jdt rede drechtich vnd fruchtbar ys geworden, dat ydt desüluige frucht tho vntyden moth vorsetten vnde werpen" (ivi, 246). Trans.: Firstly, the witches sin against the Seventh Commandment in that they with their sorcery rob the poor householders of the blessing that God has bestowed on their livestock. By their magic, they take away and deprive them so that they are often unable to properly feed and raise their cattle. Even when the livestock becomes healthy and fruitful, they cause this fruitfulness to be spoiled and cast aside out of season.

- The eighth Commandment ("You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor") is violated through the witches' perpetration of evil, which has caused their ill fame and has irreversibly disgraced their names (Chapter 8)[37];
- The ninth and tenth Commandments ("You shall not covet your neighbor's house nor wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor") are clearly violated because, besides harming their neighbors, in Meiger's own words, such "evil beasts" attempt to enjoy and exploit their privileges (Chapters 9-10)[38].

Meiger concludes his discussion on the capital sins by reasserting that sorcery is first and foremost apostasy, namely the abandonment of the highest Majesty of God, a notion that is very likely derived from the notorious *Malleus maleficarum* (The Hammer of Witches) by Heinrich Kramer (also known as Institoris) and Jakob Sprenger (1486-1487), the fourth most cited source in the volume (Chapter 9)[39]. It is implied that, by leaving and renouncing God and sealing the pact with the devil and pledging themselves to his service, witches commit the spiritual crime of apostasy, which theologically is a more grievous sin than heresy, and a treason against God that is worthy of the most severe punishment[40]. Meiger then takes the stern tone of an Old Testament Prophet and addresses directly those judges who proved themselves far too weak and indulgent at witch trials:

[37] "Düsses eddelen Schattes berouen sick nu vorerst süluen düsse vyeade Minschlikes geslechtes. Wente wenn ere bößheit heruör brickt vnd bekandt wert, bringen se sick süluen in vtherste vorachtinge. Se mochten truwen, wenn se wolden, an Godt einen Vader hebben, vnd van allen Minsschen geleuet, in ehren vnd werden geholden werden, auerst daruör laten se sick alse eine Mißgebordt vnde affgesechte vyende des Minschliken geslechtes, myden, nyden vnd haten" (ivi, 260). Trans.: These wretched people first and foremost deprive themselves of this noble treasure. For when their wickedness comes to light and becomes known, they bring themselves into utter contempt. They could trust, if they wished, that they would have God as a Father and be loved, honored, and esteemed by all people; but instead, they allow themselves to be shunned as outcasts and despised enemies of humankind, to be avoided, envied, and hated.

[38] "Vnd ys dyt in düssen bösen Bestien thom högesten tho vorwunderende, wenn andere mißgünstige eres Negesten schaden söken, dhon se datsüluige mit erem vordeele vnd sick tho framen, söken darinne er geneet" (ivi, 267). Trans.: And it is most astonishing in these evil creatures that, whereas others who begrudge their neighbors and seek to harm them do so for their own advantage and benefit, these witches seek harm purely out of malice.

[39] See above at §2.

[40] "De wille wy gerne in erer meininge vngehindert lathen, vnd den leuen Godt vor se bidden, dath se vth düsser geringen erkleringe erer der Hexen Sünde yegen Gades Gebade mögen eines beteren beleret werden, vnd erkennen dat Töuerye ein affal van Gade, vorlettinge der högesten Mayestet Gades, vnd ein Born der Affgöderye vnde aller bößheit ys" (Meiger 1587, 270). Trans.: We would gladly leave them undisturbed in their opinion and pray to the dear God for them, that through this brief explanation of the witches' sins against God's commandments, they may be better instructed and come to recognize that sorcery is an apostasy from God, an offense against the highest Majesty of God, and a source of idolatry and all wickedness.

> Come now, you gentle advocates of witches! By considering this a trivial sin – against which the Holy Spirit thunders – you are making yourselves partakers in their sins! Make sure that with take care that with your soft steps and indulgence, you do not further cause what has already happened far too often that your scab does spread further. Repent! Repent, while there is still time to turn back, so that this curse does not affect you too! Each individual has enough of his own sins to bear and none needs to burden himself with the sins of others.[41]

As in the Dedicatory Letter, Meiger concurrently reminds the authorities of the legal principle that, in cases of criminal jurisdiction, the evidence must be, in his own words "as clear as daylight and judges should be extremely careful not to rely on loose suspicion or uncertain evidence in order to avoid the shedding of innocent blood"[42]. Meiger is well aware that torture can force false confessions and cause judicial murders, and that, while witches are being tortured, they accuse other people simply to escape unbearable agony. Meiger himself was a witness of numerous people, who had been crippled for life through torture. Consequently, he prescribes torture only as an *extremum remedium*[43].

[41] "Kamet nu ghy zarten *Procuratoren* der Hexen, vnde holdet ydt vor ringeschetzige Sünde, daryegen de hillige Geist so donnert, vnde maket yuw frömder Sünden mede deelhafftich, Seht tho dat gy mit yuwen lisen treden vnde beschoninge nicht wyder orsake geuen, dath mehr alse allthovele alrede gescheen ys, dat ere Kreutet nicht wyder vmme sick frete. Keret, keret vmme, dewyle noch wendens tidt ys, dat yuw de flöck nicht mitdrepe, Ein yder hefft an synen egen Sünden doch genoch tho dragende, dath he sick nicht mit frömden darff beladen" (ivi, 302).

[42] "So veele nu angheit vnde belanget der Juristen Regel, de thouören ys angetagen, alse dat in Halssaken de tüchenissen schölen klarer syn, alse dat middagige Sünnenlicht: Bekenne ick, dat de Juristen darmede gantz nödige vorsehinge hebben dhon willen, dath nein vnschüldich Blodt ane nögehafftige vörherghande tüchenisse mochte vorgaten werden. Sulckes schal vnde moth truwen ock in Töuerschen hendelen (so vele mögelick ys) allwol in acht genamen werden, dat men thosch, dat men nicht vp losen archwan edder vngewisse tüchenisse buwe" (ivi, 299). Trans.: So far as concerns and pertains to the rule of lawyers, which must be observed, namely that in capital cases the evidence should be clearer than the midday sunlight: I acknowledge that the lawyers, in this matter, have wanted to provide a very necessary warning, so that no innocent blood might be shed in the absence of clear and convincing prior testimony. The same must and ought truly to be observed, as far as possible, in witch trials: that one should not proceed or build a case on loose suspicion or uncertain evidence.

[43] "Wedderümme, dewile denn ock de Tortur vnd pynlike affrage eigentlick tho dem ende ys erfunden, dat se ein *extremum remedium*, edder vtherste thoflucht vnd nodtwech des Richters wedder de vngeholdene bößheit sin schal, moth he truwen, wenn he berüchtigede vnn gefangene Personen vth erheffliken orsaken pinigen vnd recken leth, darmede na gelegenheit vornüfftigen vnd vnderscheidtliken vmmeghan" (ivi, 312). Trans.: On the other hand, since torture and painful interrogation were in fact devised for the very purpose that they should be an extremum remedium – that is, a last resort and necessity of the judge against the unyielding wickedness – he must, indeed, when he has notorious and imprisoned persons tortured and stretched for compelling reasons, do so with prudent and discriminating caution according to the circumstances.

7. Book 3: "Wo eine Christlike Ouericheit mit sodanen gemeinen Fienden Minschlikes geslechtes vmmeghan schöle"

Book 3, entitled "Wo eine Christlike Ouericheit mit sodanen gemeinen Fienden Minschlikes geslechtes vmmeghan schöle" (How a Christian Authority Should Handle Such Common Enemies of the Human Race), concludes the discussion by providing advice and directions to the prescribed authorities at witch trials. Firstly, Meiger demonstrates with several examples the existence of wicked, yet less worrying, spirits such as poltergeists, ghosts, lares, familiar spirits, and water nixies, which are often maneuvered by the devil to scare and fool people, rather than harming them (Chapters 1 and 2). He then advances that demons cannot read the future in its entirety, since they are not allowed to know God's plan completely (Chapter 3) and warns readers that far too often uneducated people attribute mysterious natural phenomena to sorcery. More importantly, in many instances, the accusers of witches are highly corrupted men, defined with the Latin epithet *mancipia ventris* ("the slaves of the stomach"), who indulge in overeating, overdrinking or fornication[44] or women, who, wishing to become slander and pale, put themselves through very restrictive and dangerous diets and subsequently lay the blame for their poor health on witchcraft (Chapter 4)[45]. Finally, Meiger illustrates 3 known remedies or better antidotes to overcome witchcraft:

[44] "Sodane *Mancipia ventris* syn altho vele betouert dorch den fraß, sup vnd Hörendüuel, dat se er vorstandt, sinne, kreffte vnd gesundtheit wol möthen vorlesen, ock vaken ander Seelen schipbröke liden, welckes nicht kan vthebliuen, wenn se noch thor auerfloth vnschüldige Personen laten vmmebringen" (ivi, 384). Trans.: Such *mancipia ventris* (slaves of the belly), are so often enchanted by gluttony, drunkenness, and whoring, that they may well lose their understanding, reason, strength, and health – and often suffer shipwreck of the soul besides – which cannot fail to happen as long as they continue to have innocent persons put to death out of excess. The epithet occurs in the description of Starkaðr (Starcatherus) in Book 8 of Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum* "Aversans lucem, latebrae sordentis amator,/ mancipium ventris miserabile par que putaris/ sordida cum siliquis lambenti farra catello" (1931, vol. 1, 227).

[45] "Geliker gestalt vorseen ock vele Fruwen und Junck[(Gggij)385]fruwen ere gesuntheit, welckere, vp dat se mögen small vnn bleeck syn, er liff vnd leuent bauen de mate vnd mit gewalt insnören, dröge Gorte, harde Rinde vam Brode, Kasseberen blade, ja Bly vnn andere vnnatürlike dinge insluken, sick ock na geholdener mältidt dwingen, de ingenamene spise wedder van sick thoguende, daruan denn dat Liff nicht allene nene födinge, sunder ock mein gudt geblöte bekamen kan, Wenn se denn den Magen vnn de Leuer in erer blötenden jöget vorstoppet vnn vordoruen hebben, vnd darauer in kranckheit vallen vnd hensteruen, so hebben jdt stracks de Töuerschen gedan" (Meiger 1587, 384-385). Trans.: In the same way, many women and young ladies take such care of their health that, so they might appear slim and pale, they bind and confine their bodies beyond measure and with force, swallow dry herbs, hard crusts of bread, cassia leaves – indeed, even lead and other unnatural things – and after a meal, compel themselves to expel the food they have taken in. From this, the body not only receives no nourishment but is also deprived of good blood. When, then, they have blocked and ruined their stomach and liver by these bloodletting practices and subsequently fall ill and die, it is immediately blamed on the witches.

- The first, *Cura diabolica*, is the one sought by the devil and is strongly discouraged since fighting sorcery with more sorcery would lead to the eternal perdition of the soul[46];
- The second, *Cura naturalis*, is the one sought by doctors and physicians, who can heal people from afflictions of the natural order but can the damage caused by witchcraft[47];
- The third, *Cura divina*, is a spiritual assistance not derived from the magical properties of herbs but rather from the garden of delights of the Word of God. With Ephesians 6: 11-13, Meiger advises God's soldiers to always be alert and dressed in full armor, ready to battle with Satan and his evil forces: "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of this darkness, against spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places"[48]. The *Cura divina* requires a firm faith and life of good works,

[46] "De erste wert genömet *Diabolica*, de by dem Düuel gesocht wert, Alse wenn ein thogeföget Töuerschade van Töuerschen wedderümme benamen wert, dartho se denn etwan sick süluen gerne plegen anthobeedende, dat eine gewisse vormodinge, dat solcke Hexen syn, vnd süluen den schaden mögen gedhan hebben […] Desüluige erste art der *Cura* ys den Christen by högester vngnade Gades thosökende, im ersten Gebade vorbaben, Denn Godt will in nöden allene angeropen syn, ock bedarue wy sodaner elenden hülpe nicht, dewile wy sulckeinen Godt hebben, de allene helpen vnd vam dode reden kan" (ivi, 387). Trans.: The first is called the Diabolical cure, which is sought from the Devil, as when a bewitchment caused by witches is again named and treated by witches themselves – to which they sometimes willingly turn, seeking help, driven by a certain presumption that such witches exist and that these very persons have caused the harm themselves […] Such is the first form of cure, which Christians, at the greatest peril of God's wrath, must entirely avoid in the foremost commandment. For God wills to be invoked alone in times of need; nor do we require such wretched help, since we have a God who alone can help and save from death.

[47] "De andere *Cura* geschüth natürlick van *Medicis* vnd *Physicis*, de könen thogeuögede schaden in Senen, im Blode vnd Aderen benemen vnd heilen, alse hyrthouören van dem *Bartholomæo Charrichter* vth syner Practica ys angetagen. Ock willen etlike, se könen de benamene Manheit mit Arstedye wedder thowege bringen, wowel *Bodinus lib. 3.* in der meninge ys, gelyck alse de Hexen neinen natürliken kranckheiden könen helpen, so weinich könen ock de Arsten betouerde schaden wechnemen, welckes ick an synen ordt will gestellet hebben" (ivi, 393). Trans.: The second cure is provided naturally by doctors and physicians. They can remove and heal inflicted harm in the sinews, blood, and veins, as is reported here by Bartholomaeus Carrichter in his medical practice. Some even claim they can restore men who have been named (as bewitched) to health through medication. However, Bodin in Book 3 is of the opinion that, just as witches cannot heal any natural illness, so too can doctors do very little to remove harm caused by bewitchment – which I shall leave to be addressed in its proper place.

[48] "De drüdde *Cura* vnd art ys eine Geistlike hülpe, vnd de alldergewisseste, de nicht gegründet ys vp de krafft vnde werckinge der genömeden Krüder, sunder de genamen wert vth dem Lustgarden Gödtlikes Wordes, darinne vns de hillige Geist dorch syne wercktüge rades genoch gifft vnn apenbaret, in sunderheit auerst in der Epistel an de Epheser im 6. Capittel mit düssen wörden: Thom latesten mine Bröder, weset starck in dem HEren, vnd in der macht syner stercke, Theet an dat Harnesch Gades, dath gy besthan könen yegen den listigen an-

prayers and soberness and is seen by Meiger as the sole Christian antidote against the wickedness of Satan and his fiendish beasts[49].

8. Samuel Meiger's *Besultrede*

Finally, in his *Besultrede* or *Peroration*, Meiger stresses how he has felt the urge to prepare the present volume in response to the increase of inaccuracies concerning witchcraft and in order to properly inform the prescribed authorities of the crime's abominable nature, being a crime directed against God that transgresses all Ten Commandments. Meiger identifies Jean Bodin's *Dæmonomania* (1581) as his greatest source of inspiration, a book that appeared in Latin only 6 years before *De panurgia* and that was given to him as a present by a certain "trusted friend"[50]. These very last pages accentuate Meiger's somewhat "mitigated

lop des Düuels. Wente wy hebben nicht mit flesche vnde blode thokempende, sunder mit den Försten vnn geweldigen, Nömlick mit den Heren der Werlt, de in der düsternisse düsser Werlt herschen mit den bösen Geisteren vnder dem Hemmel. Vmme des willen so ergripet dat Harnesch Gades, dath gy wed[397]dersthan könen an dem bösen dage, vnd dat veldt beholden mögen" (ivi, 396-397). Trans.: The third cure and manner is a spiritual help, and the most certain of all, which is not founded on the power and efficacy of the mentioned herbs, but is drawn from the garden of delights of God's Word, wherein the Holy Spirit, through his instruments, gives and reveals to us counsel enough – especially in the Epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 6, with these words: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Therefore, take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day and keep the field.

[49] "Im Gebede, im gelouen, in der leue vnd früchten Gades, in der demodt, tucht vnde soberheit, Darinne schaltu dy vinden lathen, vnd seen dy vör, dat dy dyn geweten nicht vörsätliken mit Sünden beladest, sunder öue eine gude Ridderschop, dath du beholdest den gelouen vnd ein gudt geweten. So wert de Düuel einen feilstreke an dy dhon. Wenn men im Crütze ein gudt geweten hebben kan, so ys dat Krentzelyn wol daruan thobringende, wo vyendtseligen ock de Düuel edder syne Bestien einem thosetten" (ivi, 399). Trans.: In prayer, in faith, in the love and fear of God, in humility, discipline, and sobriety – therein you should let yourself be found, and take care that you do not willfully burden your conscience with sins, but rather as a good knighthood, that you maintain the faith and a good conscience. So, the Devil will find no weak spot in you. If, in the cross, one can have a good conscience, then the cross is indeed beneficial, even if the Devil or his beasts attack someone with all hostility.

[50] "Dyt kan ich mit warheit reden, dat düsse Arbeidt vth Christlikem yuer vörgenamen ys worden, dewyle ick hen vnd wedder vele vnrichticheit gespöret vnd wol geseen hebbe, dat ydt mit der Töuerye by etliken darhenne gekamen ys, dat se vor neine edder yo geringe vnde kleine Sünde van hogen vnd syden vast geholden wert. Jck moth ock *ingenuè* bekennen, dat ick in düssem Arbeide vortthouarende sehr bin gestercket geworden, do my des hochgelerden *Iohannis Bodini*, der Rechten Doctoren *Dæmenomania* van einem vortruweden Fründe ys thogestellet worden" (ivi, 407). Trans.: This I can say truthfully: that this work has been undertaken out of Christian zeal, since I have, time and again, noticed and clearly seen much injustice, so that, through sorcery, it has come to pass among some people that they hold it to be no or only a very minor and little sin, both by high and by humble people alike. I must also honestly confess that,

theory" of witchcraft: while on the one side he urges the authorities not to spare true witches that were proven guilty both before Divine and Imperial Laws, on the other, he begs them not to rush in careless tortures and torments exclusively on the grounds of trivial, uncertain, unfounded, and at times outright false allegations and accusations, since he himself had been an unfortunate witness to the death or lifelong maiming of numerous innocent people.

in continuing this work, I have been greatly strengthened when [a volume of] the highly learned Doctor of Law Jean Bodin's, [whose] *Daemonomania* was presented to me by a trusted friend.

Appendix 1

*DAVIDIS CHYTRÆI EPISTULA APPROBATIONIS

DAVID CHYTRÆVS SAMVELI MEIGERIO S.D.

LEgi lucubrationem de Magorum ac Veneficarum Panurgia tuam, de qua, cùm amoris quadam erga me tui abundantia vel potius beneuolentiæ errore adductus, iudicium & sententiam meam scisciteris, non grauatè, quid de partibus quibusdam mihi legenti in mentem venerit, significabo. Ac primùm, valde mihi probatur DECALOGVS veneficarum tuus, quem in secundo libro instituisti, vbi, quàm fœdè ac horribiliter maleficæ, omnia legis diuinæ præcepta violent ac conculcent, ordine demonstras, & magna exemplorum veritate ac copia illustras.

Deinde placet, quòd originem ac fontem Magiæ primùm ac deinde generationem, & Genera ac formas illius diuersas & dißimiles, accuratè distinguendas esse iudicas. Πάντεσ ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει *inquit Aristoteles Metaphysica ordiens; & occulta præcipuè ac futura cognoscendi & prospiciendi desiderium mirificum natura omnibus hominibus inest. Quod cùm luce cœlestis doctrinæ ac vere Philosophiæ, ceu lucis diuinæ radio regitur, & ad verum finem refertur, eximiam laudem ac celebrationem apud Deum & homines meretur. Vult enim Deus pulcherrimum hoc mundi theatrum à se conditum, & abditas in eo ac latentes rerum causas, vires ac effectiones, ab hominibus peruestigari ac cognosci, vt ipsius DEI sapientem, bonitatem ac potentiam celebrent. Et in lege æterna, Deus, non solum, quid in præsentia agendum sit, verùm etiam futura rectè factorum præmia, & scelerum pœnas fatali ordine sequentes prædicit, & de secuturo iudicio ac æternis impiorum pœnis & piorum Gloria, vaticinationes edidit, quas vult à nobis considerari, non vt curiositatem inanem, sed assensionem de prouidentia alant, & metu* [xx] *pœnarum homines à sceleribus deterritos, ad pietatis & virtutu decus maiori cura colendum exuscient ac inuitent.*

Hanc igitur naturæ à Deo conditæ explicationem, & Generationum ac corruptionum, aliarumque mutationum in natura & imperijs causas, vices, periodos, effectiones, qui scrutabantur, a Græcis sapientes & philosophi: à Persis, MAGI, fortè ab חגח *quod meditari, cogitare, inquirere significat, vocabantur, sicut Cicero, MAGOS, sapientum ac doctorum genus in Persis habitum esse testatur: & Magiam hanc naturalem vulgò adhuc appellant, ad quam, Physicorum ac Medicorum prognosticæ, ad ipso naturæ ordine & signis diuinitus in natura conditis sumpta, Item Astronomicæ prædictiones Eclipsium, magnarumque, coniunctionum: Imò etiam politicæ diuinationes, iniustis & sceleratis pœnas certò secuturas denunciantes (quæ omnes diuinitus approbatæ & concessæ sunt,* ειμαρμένον γὰρ τῶν κακῶν βολευμάτων κακὰς ἀμοιβάς ἐςι καρπόθαι βροτοῖς*) referri queunt.*

Postea cum luce cœlestis doctrine & veræ Philosophiæ relicta, Magi superstitiosas ac Diabolicas artes colerent: translata est honestißima olim & amplißima Magorum

appellatio, ad eos, qui vel curiosas artes exercent, vim aliquam monstrandi futuros euentus sine causis naturalibus & sine ordinatione diuina, rebus tribuentes: quo, tota Hetruscorum ac Romanorum, qui nihil inauspicati gerebant, Aruspicina: Græcorum, Geometria, Capnomantia, Pyromantia & similes vanißimi ritus, nobis ignoti, pertinent; vel impia cum Diabolis, hostibus DEI ac generis humani fœdera faciunt, plurenque hac conditione, vt homines se ipsis dedant, & vicißim Diaboli, certis ritibus ac verbis euocati, vel ipsi assumpta specie adscititia compareant & ad quæsita respondeant, vel picturas rerum quæ requiruntur, monstrent: & pulueribus vel herbis venenatis, aut simulacris vel characteribus insculptis & alijs ritibus & verbis sacris aut barbaricis recitatis, efficiant ea quæ confœderati incantatores flagitant. Huius infamis & Di[(C3)xxi]*abolicæ Magiæ gradus rursum tres aut quatuor discernendos esse cordati consent, qui, etsi omnes in hoc capite congruunt, quòd à vero Deo ad Diabolos hostes Dei defecerunt, ideoque criminis lasæ Maiestatis diuinæ rei, pœna grauißima digni sunt: tamen alij alijs, communi hominum vitæ perniciosiores, ac societati humanæ pestilentiores sunt. Deterrimi enim haud dubiè latrones VENEFICI sunt, qui venenis illitis, defoßis, pabulo vel potui mixtis, vel alijs malis artibus, Diabolo expediente, pecudes, segetes & Hominum etiam ipsorum valetudinem ac vitam lædunt & perdunt. Nec multò his meliores INCANTATORES, qui conceptis verbis pronunciatis, & characteribus, vel simulachris, vel herbis alijsúe rebus adhibitis, Diabolo reuera expediente ea quæ moliuntur, morbos alijs tabificos infligunt, vel virilitatem adimunt, vel tempestates ac grandines segetibus ac vineis perniciosas excitant. Nam mulierculas, quæ carminibus cœlo se deducere lunam vel homines in lupos aut feles conuertere, & vsitatum naturæ cursum mutare arbitrantur, Diabolum colludentem & fascino ac præstigijs quædam illis similia oculis obijcientem, ludificari potius, quàm reuera, quæ illæ conantur, efficere crediderim. Arioli ex Crystallis, Speculis, cribro vel annulis, vel mortuorum animabus euocatis, ad quæsita respondentes, cùm non fallunt sciscitantes, sibi ipsis magis quàm alijs exitiosi sunt, ac lege diuina, non minus, quàm priores, tolli de terra iubentur.*

De Sagis verò illis ac anubus miseris, quæ cum Diabolis se colludere, choreas ducere, concumbere, Scopis insidentes per Caminos euolare somniant, disputationem tuam libenter legi, & prudentiam ac circumspectionem laudo, quòd in re dubia, nec satis exploratè perspecta & cognita, ἐπέχειν & qua in vtramque partem dicerentur, colligere, & iudicium lectori potius relinquere, quàm tuum aliquod interponere maluisti.

Imprimis verò delectabit in tuo volumine candidum lectorem, tanta HISTORIARUM insignium, maximeque mirabi[xxii]*lium, quas vbique intexuisti, varietas & copia locupletißima, cui velut amplißimo oceano, etsi ex aspersa tenui guttula parum accedere potest; tamen hanc de hospite Marchico historiam, si eam forte non dum habes, adiungo. Scis Ioachimo I. Electori Brandeburgensi nuptam fuisse Ioannis Daniæ regis filiam Elisabetham, cui, vt alimenta se mortuo regia haberet, oppidum ad Sueui & Haueli fll. confluentem maritus attribuit, inquo oppido, ipsa adhuc viuente, miles quidam per Marchiam inter faciens, cùm morbo impeditus detineretur, decumbens, tradidit crumenam pecunia refertam Hospitiæ asseruandam. Post aliquot dies, cùm conualescit, repetit saccum. Mulier auara, cùm ægrè tantam prædam amitteret, deliberat cum viro, vtrum reddere debeat. Ineunt consilium, vt*

mulier neget depositum. Quare cùm miles suum repeteret, illa confidenter negat se quidquam accepisse, simulat se mirari impudentiam militis, qui ausit flagitare, cùm nihil dederit adseruandum. Miles indignitate rei motus, obijcit vicißim hospitæ perfidiam. Quare maritus tanquam defensurus suam coniugem, extrudit militem domo. Is ante fores irritatus scelere hospitiæ stringit gladium, velut impetum facturus in virum & ferit ianuam. Hospes implorat fidem vicinorum, & queritur suas ædes oppugnari, accurunt lictores, & militem, quòd vim publicam fecisset, abducunt in carcerem. Post aliquot dies Senatus oppidi aliò mittit narrationem facti, & sententiam perscribi petit. Constabat ædes publicè oppugnatas esse. Quare fertur sententia, vt miles vltimo supplicio afficiatur. Cumque iam instaret dies iudicij, venit diabolus in carcerem ad captiuum, indicans ei, quam sententiam Iudices læturi sint, & pollicetur se hoc periculo eum liberatum esse, hac conditione, vt se diabolo ledat. Miles constanter respondet, se potius moriturum esse, quamuis sit innocens. Cùm verò diabolus verbis multis exaggerasset periculum, nec tamen inflexisset militis animum, tandem pollicetur ei liberationem, sine vlla conditione. Et, cùm veneris, [xxiii] *inquit, in iudicium, dic te imperitum esse forensium negotiorum, & patrono indigere, ibi astabo cæruleo pileo tectus, & ornato pennis. Pete igitur vt me iubeant causam dicere. Miles qui hoc sine impietate facturus videbatur, ait se hoc consilio vsurum esse. Postridie in iudicium ducitur, adest etiam orator tectus cæruleo pileo: ibi cùm actor peteret militem propter vim publicam capitali supplicio affici, miles respondit, se imperitum forensium negociorum petere, vt liceat isti suo aduocato pro se dicere, concedunt iudices. Ibi diabolus de Iure eruditè disputat, non esse capitali supplicio afficiendum eum, à quo non sit ortum rixæ & tumultus initium, ait ab hospite militem vi extrusum & spoliatum esse, iubet quæri saccum & locum monstrat. Ibi cùm hospes vehementer negaret, addens etiam diras imprecationes, vt ipsum abreptum diabolus perderet, si fecisset. Hanc imprecationem cum inuocatione diaboli, cùm aliquoties reperiuisset, ibi causidicus omissa iam disputatione forensi, adoritur hospitem, & comprehensum per fenestras & medium forum omnibus perhorrescentibus, cum fragore abducit, nec postea vnuquam corpus hospitis inuentum est. Hæc historia me adolescente ad præceptorem meum è fide dignis Wittebergam perscripta, & alibi etiam è me commemorata est. Quam, ne prorsus ἀσύμβολος viderer, tuis adiungendam existimaui.*

Bene & feliciter vale.

Rhodopoli Die S. Benedicti,
21 Martij Anno 1587.

Dauid Chytræus
[xxiv]

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DAVID CHYTRÆUS' LETTER OF APPROBATION

DAVID CHYTRÆUS TO SAMUEL MEIGER, GREETING.

I have read your nocturnal treatise on the *Deceitfulness of Sorcerers and Witches*, about which – moved by a certain abundance of your affection for me, or rather, to speak more accurately, by the error of your benevolence – you now ask my judgment and opinion. Not reluctantly, I will declare what has come into my mind as I read certain sections. Firstly, your DECALOGUE of Witches, which you have established in the second book, pleases me greatly; wherein you show, in order, how vilely and horribly the witches violate and tread upon all the precepts of Divine Law, and you illustrate this with great truth and abundance of examples. Secondly, I am pleased that you judge it necessary to distinguish carefully the origin and source of magic first, and then its origin, and the diverse and dissimilar types and forms of it. Πάντεσ ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει ["All men by their very nature feel the urge to know"], says Aristotle at the beginning of the *Metaphysics*; and the marvelous desire to know and to foresee hidden things and, above all, future things is present by nature in all men. When this is directed by the light of heavenly doctrine and true philosophy, as by a ray of divine light, and is referred to the "True End", it earns the highest praise and commendation among God and men. For God indeed wishes that this most beautiful theatre of the world, created by himself, and the hidden and secret causes, powers, and effects in it, be sought out and known by men, so that they may celebrate the wisdom, goodness, and power of GOD Himself. And in the Eternal Law, God not only foretells what is to be done in the present, but also the future rewards of rig deeds, and the punishments for crimes that follow in unfailing order, and He has disclosed prophecies concerning the coming judgment, about the eternal punishments of the wicked and the glory of the pious, which he wishes us to consider, not as vain curiosity, but so that they may foster assent concerning providence, and so that, through the fear of punishments, men, deterred [xx] from crimes, may be aroused and incited to worship with greater care the honor of piety and virtue.

Therefore, the explanation of nature as created by God, and of generations and corruptions, and of the other causes, vicissitudes, cycles, operations, and changes in nature and kingdoms, was investigated by the Greeks, who called those who investigated these things "wise men and philosophers" and by the Persians, MAGI – perhaps from the word חגה which means "to meditate, to consider, to inquire" – as Cicero testifies, MAGOS were considered a race of wise and learned men among the Persians. People still commonly call this "natural magic" – to which belong the prognostications of natural philosophers and physicians, derived from the very order of nature and from the signs divinely placed in nature; likewise, the astronomical predictions of eclipses and great conjunctions; indeed, even political divinations, declaring with certainty the punishments that will follow for the unjust and the wicked (all of which are divinely approved and permitted εἰμαρμένον γὰρ τῶν κακῶν βολευμάτων κακὰς ἀμοιβάς ἐςι καρπόθαι βροτοῖς ["For it is fated for evil deeds to bear evil rewards for mortals"] – can be included here.

Afterwards, when the light of heavenly doctrine and "True Philosophy" was abandoned, the Magi began to practice superstitious and diabolical arts. The once most honorable and once most celebrated name of Magi was transferred to those who either practiced curious arts, attributing to things a certain power of showing future events without natural causes and without divine ordinance; hence, all the divinations of the Etruscans and Romans, who did nothing without seeking omens – the haruspicy; of the Greeks, Geometry, Capnomancy, Pyromancy, and similar most vain rituals, unknown to us, also belong here. To those who make impious alliances with the Devils, the enemies of GOD and the human race – most often on the condition that men give themselves over to the Devils, and in return the Devils, summoned by certain rites and words, either appear themselves in some assumed form and answer questions, or show images of the things sought after. By means of poisonous powders or herbs, or images or engraved characters, and other rites and sacred or barbarous words recited, they bring about what their confederate sorcerers demand. Of this infamous and Di[(C3)xxi]abolical Magic, the prudent agree that three or four degrees should again be distinguished; who, although all agree in this point – that they have defected from the true God to the Devils, the enemies of God, and are therefore worthy of the heaviest punishment for the crime of violating the Divine Majesty – yet, some are more pernicious to ordinary human life and more pestilential to human society than others. For there is no doubt that the most wicked – the POISONERS – are nothing but robbers, who with poison, either smeared, buried, mixed with fodder or drink, or by other wicked arts, with the aid of the Devil, harm and destroy cattle, crops, and even the health and life of men themselves. And the ENCHANTERS are not much better, who – by uttering prescribed words, and using characters, images, herbs, or other such things, with the Devil truly assisting – inflict wasting diseases on others, deprive men of virility, or stir up storms and hail destructive to crops and vines. For the little women who think – to bring down the moon from the sky with their spells, or to turn men into wolves or cats, or to change the usual course of nature – are, as I believe, only deluded by a colluding devil who casts before their eyes things similar by means of fascination and tricks, rather than being truly able to accomplish what they attempt. Fortune-tellers, using crystals, mirrors, a sieve or rings, or summoning the souls of the dead to answer questions, when they do not deceive their questioners, are more destructive to themselves than to others, and by divine law, just as much as the aforementioned, are commanded to be removed from the earth. As for those witches and miserable old women, who dream that they collude with devils, dance, have sexual intercourse, and, mounted on broomsticks, fly through chimneys – I read your discussion on these matters with pleasure, and I praise your prudence and caution, that in such a doubtful matters, not sufficiently explored or understood, you have chosen to ἐπέχειν "suspend judgment" and to collect what is said on either side, and to leave the judgment rather to the reader, than to interject any of your own.

Especially, the candid reader will be delighted in your volume by such a great variety and most abundant wealth of remarkable STORIES, and above all

mar[xxii]velous ones, which you have woven everywhere throughout. To which, as into a vast ocean, even if only a tiny drop from a sprinkling can be added.

In any case, this story of a story about a guest in the Margraviate of Brandenburg, if you do not yet have it, I add here. You know that Elizabeth, daughter of John, King of Denmark, was married to Joachim I, Elector of Brandenburg. To her, that she might have royal support after his death, her husband assigned a town at the confluence of the rivers Spree and Havel [Spandau][1]. in which town, while she was still alive, a certain soldier travelling through the Margraviate, being held back by illness, as he lay ill, handed over a purse filled with money to the hostess to keep. After a few days, when he recovered, he demanded back the purse. The greedy woman, unwilling to part with such a great loot, deliberated with her husband whether she should return it. They agree on a plan: that the woman should deny having received the deposit. Therefore, when the soldier came to reclaim his property, she confidently denied having received anything, pretending to be astonished at the soldier's audacity, who dared to demand something when he had given her nothing to keep. The soldier, outraged by this fraud, in turn accused the hostess of treachery. The husband, as though to defend his wife, threw the soldier out of the house. Angered by the hostess's crime, the soldier, standing before the door, drew his sword as if to attack the man and struck the door. The host called for the help of the neighbors, complaining that his house was being attacked. The constables quickly arrived, and, because the soldier had committed public violence, they led him away to prison. A few days later, the Senate of the town sent an account of the affair elsewhere and asked for a written judgment. It was established that the house had been publicly attacked.

Therefore, a verdict was given that the soldier should suffer the ultimate punishment. And when the day of judgment was already approaching, the Devil came to the captive in prison, telling him what sentence the judges would pass and promising that he would deliver him from that danger on the condition that he would give himself over to the Devil. The soldier steadfastly replied that he would rather die, even though he was innocent. But when the Devil, with many words, had exaggerated the danger and still could not sway the soldier's resolve, he finally promised him release with no conditions. "And when you come to court," [xxiii] he said, "say that you are unskilled in legal matters and need an advocate. There I shall stand, wearing a blue cap adorned with feathers. So, ask them to allow me to plead your case." The soldier, thinking this not impious, agreed to follow the advice. The next day he was led into court, and also present was an orator wearing a blue cap; there, when the prosecutor pressed that the soldier should receive the death penalty for public violence, the soldier responded that he was unskilled in legal matters, and asked that his advocate be permitted to speak for him; the judges agreed. There the Devil skillfully argued the law, saying that a person should not be punished with death who was not the origin or

[1] The same story is related in Johann Gödelmann, *Tractatus de magis* (1591), 9-11 [Chap. 1.1; *De malitia diaboli*].

true cause of the quarrel and disturbance. He claimed that the soldier had been violently expelled and robbed by the host, and ordered the purse to be sought, even pointing out the place. When the host strongly denied everything, even adding terrible imprecations – that, if he had done so, the Devil might seize him and destroy him – since this invocation of the Devil was repeated several times, the advocate – now abandoning legal arguments – attacked the host, and, seizing him, carried him off through the windows and into the middle of the square, to the horror of all, and with a crash. The body of the was never found thereafter. When I was a young man at Wittenberg, I wrote out this story for my teacher, drawing from reliable witnesses, and I have retold it in other contexts, too. I add it here to your collection. In order not to appear completely ἀσύμβολος ["uncontributing"], I thought it should add it to your collection.

Farewell, and may you prosper.

On St. Benedict's Day in Rostock,
March 21, 1587.
David Chytræus

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Episodes of Magic and Witchcraft in the Icelandic Annals: *Annáll Gunnlaugs prests Þorsteinsonar í Vallholti*, and *Mælifellsannáll*

Maria Cristina Lombardi

Abstract:

In medieval and post-medieval Scandinavia, the lack of medical care and the hard-living conditions, especially in rural areas, led to a widespread use of folk medicine and home remedies. Certain marginal individuals were considered particularly skilled in healing and were consulted by people. Later, with the coming of Lutheranism, many of them were accused of witchcraft and imprisoned. They often underwent trials and sometimes were sent to death. Such episodes are registered in the Icelandic local *Annálar* together with court trials and legal documents. This paper presents some episodes in *Annáll Gunnlaugs prest Þorsteinsonar í Vallholti* and in *Mælifellsannáll* where rune magic is used. The episodes are compared with some formulas of Icelandic black books whose manuscripts are preserved in Reykjavík and in Stockholm.

Keywords: Icelandic Annals, Magic, Sorcery, Witch-Hunt

1. Introduction

Our contribution to the common project[1] regards a particular genre of texts, the Icelandic Annals, historical sources which shape the general history of the country. Besides political and historical facts, they contain occurrences of extraordinary events such as floods, volcanic eruptions (that of Hekla 1636), pestilences, disasters on land and sea, comets, but also apparitions of various kinds, the spontaneous ringing of bells, the appearance of monsters in the sea, rivers and lakes, as well as ghost stories.

Iceland was a rural society with no towns or villages and the local authority was the district commissioner or sheriff or lawman, who was also the local judge. There were 20 of these districts, each divided into several communities or parishes. Some cases (of suspected magic) never went beyond the parish court. Then, after executions had taken place according to the decision of the lawmen,

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Letizia Vezzosi, University of Florence, Italy, letizia.vezzosi@unifi.it, 0000-0002-7635-2657

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in some witch cases the law council ratified death sentences. After 1663, all cases where guilt meant a death sentence, had to be put to the law council of the general assembly, and later they had to be presented in Copenhagen. Denmark ruled the country at that time.

Icelandic Annals are mainly of two types: the so-called "ancient Annals", which date from the beginning of the settlement to 1578, and the so-called "recent Annals", which start with *Skarðsárannál* and reach 1800. Recent Annals have been edited by the Icelandic Literature Association.

Earlier Annals (1106-1402) have been copied, as the editor Gustav Storm has shown, from earlier sources. Recent Annals, which will be taken into consideration here, were compiled from contemporary sources which are now lost, chiefly from private letters written by various people (mostly bishops, priests or sheriffs). Some events are described according to the authors' own views and observations: in fact, in their introductions they often say that they only included things that they considered true or probable, and which were supported by good authority. It would be interesting to know what they rejected as untrustworthy, so as to understand the criterium they applied. But that was an age of superstition.

2. Annals and Witch Hunts

Recent Annals (*Annálar 1400-1800* 1922-1927) are among primary and main sources on the Icelandic witch hunts, together with the records of the Icelandic Parliament (*Alþingisbækur Íslands* 1912-1991) and those of some local courts. A few have been published, however unpublished manuscripts preserve considerable additions to these sources.

Some annals are more detailed and partly narrative. They tell of longer episodes and show, so to say, a marked storytelling vocation. From such materials a number of folktale collections have been reworked, contributing to develop an important literary genre for popular audiences[2], as *Íslenskar sagnir og æventyri*, by Einar Guðmundsson. Annals can therefore be defined as productive texts.

Annals and trial records reveal significant differences from the prosecutions in Europe and open up important insights into the nature of magical practice in Iceland. Firstly, the diabolism that played such a large part in the accusations in Europe is practically not found in Icelandic court cases. Although Halldór Finnbogason from Borgarfirði was burnt in 1685 for reciting "Our father who art in Hell" etc., his crime was blasphemy rather than witchcraft, not mentioned in the records (*Annálar 1400-1800*, vol. 1, 403-404).

We have only several episodes on rumours about pacts with the devil and suspected nocturnal flights to secret places to hold diabolic Sabbaths such as

[2] See Einar Guðmundsson, 1932-1947, 131-137 where this story is reported with amplifications and changes.

the one reported by the *Annáll Ara prófasts Guðmundssonar and Magnúsar prests Arasonar a Mælifelli* (called *Mælifellsannáll* 1678-1738[3]), which cost the life of a mother and a son.[4]

> Strýktir tveir galdramenn á alþingi úr Húnavatnsþingi, baðir af Skagaströnd. Brennd a Vestfjörðum Þuríður Ólafsdóttir og Jón son hennar; voru sögð flækt við galdur; hafði konan verið alla sína daga í Skagafirði, og aldrei dreift við galdur, en veik fyrst til veru vestur vorið 1677, sem aðrir fátækir, með syni sínum, illa kynntum Jóni, þó fyrir utan galdrarykti. Skyldi sonur hennar hafa sagt, hún hefði farið yfir vatnsföll öll norðan fyrir utan hesta eða ferjur, og brúkað galdur til, og svo hefði hún galdra með áð fara. Var lygum hans trúað og síðan tekin bæði og brennd, hvað hann meinti, eigi mundi verða. (*Mælifellsannáll* in *Annálar 1400-1800,* vol. 1, 550)[5]

The form is usually concise, sentences are short and the style is very repetitive. Besides being one of the few cases hinting at mysterious flights to secret diabolic meetings, such an episode is outstanding since Þuríður Ólafsdóttir was the only woman burnt in Iceland; this is an important specific Icelandic factor of magic: the inversion of the ratio of females to males who were accused and sentenced. In Denmark, about one thousand people were burned at the stake and 95% of these were female; in Iceland, 21 people were burned (out of about 134 brought to trial) and of these, only one was a woman, the above mentioned Þuríður Ólafsdóttir. Another factor – perhaps the most salient – is that a third of the cases involved the possession and use of magical staves or signs, as well as magic books (called "grimoires") or leaves. Here we are examining the magic formulas and signs (runes, sigils) contained in a few extant Icelandic manuscripts of grimoires (one preserved in the Historiska Museet in Stockholm which was never edited) in order to compare them with the accusations of possessing leaves or books with magic staves reported in contemporary Annals.

Around 1630, at the general assembly at Þingvellir, a Dane named Olafur Pétursson insisted that the Allthing would decide whether papers, alphabets,

[3] Magnús Arason was born in Mælifell 1667. The manuscript was copied by Gísli Konraðsson, Lbs 1300 8vo. Ari died in 1717. These Annals had been started by Ari, the father, and continued by the son (as Gísli Konraðsson writes in his introduction).

[4] The episode was written at the year 1632 by Ari Guðmundsson (from Flatatunga i Skagafjörð) who attributed it to the year 1678, which is also the beginning of that Annal.

[5] Trans: Two sorcerers were executed at the Althing from Húnavatnsþing, both from Skagaströnd. Burned in the Westfjords, Þuríður Ólafsdóttir and her son Jón (he was Helgason) were said to be involved in witchcraft; the woman had lived all her days in Skagafjörður and had never practiced witchcraft. She first moved to the West in the spring of 1677, as other poor people did, with her son, known as Jón, without rumours of witchcraft. Her son was supposed to have said that she had crossed all the rivers in the North without horses or ferries, and that she used witchcraft to do so, as she used witchcraft to travel. His lies were believed, and they were both were arrested and burned, something he did not imagine would happen. Unless otherwise stated, translations are by the author.

figures, and "characteribus" should be tolerated in the country. The direct cause of the question were some pages from a grimoire that a certain Gísli Snæbjarnarson had admittedly written and received from others.

3. Comparing Grimoires and Annals

Grimoires with magical staves occur in 62 recorded witchcraft cases between 1554 and 1719. Three of these grimoires survive from the burning time of the sixteenth century: the *Galdrabók* preserved in Stockholm at the Kungliga Biblioteket (ATA, Amb 2), the *Galdrakver* in the National University Library of Reykjavík (Lbs 143) and the manuscript AM 434 12mo in the Arni Magnusson Institute in Reykjavík, with texts and drawings (AM 434).

The *Galdrabók* describes a number of magical similar to those hinted at in the Annals. Accusations and executions for possessing leaves and tablets or other materials with runes or signs carved on them were among the most frequent. An example is shown by *Annál Gunnlaugs prests Þorsteinssonar í Vallholti*[6], in the year 1649, which reports a case where runes are explicitly mentioned:

> Þar aftekinn annar maður, er Jón hét; hafði átt barn við stjúpdóttur sinni, meðkenndist aldrei né iðraðist, það menn mættu sjá; tók öxin eigi á háls honum og vafðist upp í eggina; marðist höfuðið af um síðir í 30 höggum. Fannst hausskel af manni í skó hans öðrum, er hann var dauður og rúnir á, en í öðrum tréspjald og þar einninn á rúnir. Hann var grafinn; vildi þá ganga aptur, tekinn svo og brenndur. En konan meðkenndist, iðraðist, og var drekkt þar á þinginu. (*Vallholtsannáll* 1626-1666 in *Annálar 1400-1800*, vol. 1, 336)[7]

The same episode is recorded, however in less detail, also by *Eyrarannáll*, written by Magnús Magnússon, but for the following year 1650:

> I skó þess manns, sem á þessa árs alþingi réttaður var frá Jökli fannst eikarspjald með galdurstaf og hárguð hausskel af manni; varð ei krassað af honum höfuðið i 30 höggum: vafðist exin upp sem í stein hjyggi; var hans dauði kroppur brenndur. (*Eyrarannáll* in *Annálar 1400-1800*, vol. 3, 265)[8]

In a footnote we are informed that the same sexual story (about Jón Sýjuson) is recorded in *Vallhollholtannál* (vol. 1, 336) and in *Seiluannál* (vol. 1, 294). The

[6] Gunnlaugr Þorsteinsson was probably born in 1601.

[7] Trans: Another man, whose name was Jón, was arrested there; he had had a child with his stepdaughter, never felt sorry or repented, that people could see; the axe did not crush his neck and wrap it up in the egg; his head was finally crushed off in 30 blows. A man's skull was found in one of his shoes, when he was dead, with runes on it, and in another, a wooden magic tablet with runes on it. He was buried; then he wanted to walk away, then he was captured and burned. But the woman confessed, repented, and was drowned there at the assembly.

[8] Trans: In the shoe of the man who was tried at this year's Alþing from Jökul, was found an oak tablet with a magic stave and a human skull; his head was not crushed by 30 blows: the axe wound up as if in a stone; his dead body was burned.

latter, *Seiluannál*, is regarded as the primary source[9]. In fact, only *Seiluannál* (written by Halldór Þorbergsson, from Seila í Skagafirði, 1652-1658) indicates the man's name:

> […] annar maður, að nafni Jón, kallaður Sýuson; stjúpdóttir hans kenndi honum barn; meðgekk aldrei. Var margt talað, að á honum_dauðum hefðu fundizt *rúnastafir í skónum á eikarspjaldi* og hárguð hausskel af manni; varð ei krassað af honum höfuðið i 30 höggum, vöfðust öxarnar upp sem í […]; dó illa. Þeirri konu drekkt þar á þinginu. (*Seiluannál 1641-1658* in *Annálar 1400-1800,* vol. 1, 294; emphasis added)[10]

Thus, what is really specific in Icelandic magic is the combination of words, acts and rune-staves. In this respect, we can discern a direct line of continuity with the magic of the saga accounts and a tradition that is very different from anything to be found in mainland Europe. The sigil *Ægishjálmr* is a clear example of this trend and continuity. In the Eddic lay *Fáfnismál*, Fáfnir tells that he wore the *Ægishjálmr*. And in *Hrafnkelssaga,* the anonymous author describes Hranfkell wearing it.

4. Executions in the Westfjords

If we look at the list of executions for witchcraft recorded in the Annals, it is quite evident that most cases originated in the Westfjords with the joining areas coming soon after. Farther to the South or to the East they are much fewer. The following possible reasons of such a concentration in the North have been suggested.

The Westfjords are a geographically isolated area and ancient knowledge may have survived there longer than in regions closer to the Bishops' seats. In addition, the Westfjords had contacts with foreign fishermen and whalers. Lots of incantations and magic formulas in magic books, and several episodes narrated in the Annals have to do with cases where foreign fishermen were suspected of magic, condemned, or punished, or vice versa, they accused certain Icelanders of having used magic, cast spells or whatever to prevent them from fishing in Icelandic waters.

In particular, the region of Strandir, in the Northern Westfjords, has been associated with sorcery for centuries. Far from the main centres of administration and from the two episcopal seats, its landscape and the harsh climate with people constantly fighting against natural elements had kept the population in close contact with nature and old traditions. During the witch craze of the

[9] "Frásögn (um Jón Sýjuson) er i Seiluannál (I, 294) og Vallhollholtsannál (I, 336), en Seiluannál liklega frumheimildin" (*Annálar 1400-1800*, vol. 3, 265, n. 1).

[10] Trans: […] Another man, named Jón, was called Sýuson; his stepdaughter bore him a child that he never admitted was his. It was often said that on his death rune letters had been found in his shoe on an oak tablet and a hairy skull of a man; his head was not crushed by 30 blows, the axes wound up as if stone in it: he died badly. That woman was drowned at the thing.

seventeenth century Strandir was presented (in the Annals) as the main home of sorcerers and no place in Strandir has such a rich history as the nethermost community of Trékyllisvík[11]. The Icelandic witch craze started here with unexplained mysterious events in the church of Arnes which led to three men dying in a fire in 1644.

Three executions were based on the same accusation, namely for causing an illness to the same family. These three cases, like many others, are little convincing: evidence was non-existent, the accusations were vague and often resulted from unexplained illnesses that were later connected with visits to a parish or a farm. Often the accused could not defend himself because he was only allowed to swear if a majority of twelve of his peers swore that they thought his oath would be reliable. If this did not occur, the accused was judged guilty. In these small communities it was difficult to find such individuals without preconceived ideas about a case in question.

Also in Strandir, near Húnavatnsþing, according to *Mælifellsannáll* written by Ari Guðmundsson (for the years 1678-1702) and by Magnús Arason (for the years 1703-1738) both from Mælifell í Skagafirði, 1678-1702, 1703-1738, a case of magic involved Árni Jónsson and his wife, called Gadra-Imba (Ingibjörg of magic) in 1679 (vol. 1, 551-552).

> Um vorið var haldin prestastefna að Spákonufelli um það galdrarykti, sem Árni prestur Jónsson hafði fyrir orðið. Var honum dæmdur tylftareiður, og átti hann að hafa 4 leikmenn til fangavotta, tvo úr Húnavatnsþingi og aðra tvo úr Hegranesþingi. Reið hann um sumarið til þeirra presta, sem honum voru nefndir til eiðvættis, og með því hann fékk engan þeirra, að fráteknum einum, þá kom hann sér í skip engelskt á Austfjörðum, og sigldi til Englands. Skrifaði hann til Íslands sumarið eptir og segist eiga örðugt að fá sér kost og klæði, því sér sé þar tíðkað erfiði ótamt og andaðist þar árið síðar. Kona hans Ingibjörg meintist helzt völd af því, sem manni hennar var kennt; hún var Jónsdóttir. Var þá mælt hún hefði verkmeistari verið til þessa, ásamt djöflinum, sem hún síðar sýndi merki til. Fór hún líka austur og hleypti þar vanheilsu á tvo presta, er hún fékk eigi það hún umbað. Eitt sinn falaði hún kú snemmbæra að manni þar, hverja hann mátti eigi missa, en bauð henni að taka einhverja af hinum 6, sem hann átti, fyrir ekkert; það vildi hún eigi, en um morguninn eptir lágu þær alla dauðar. (*Mælifellsannáll* 1679 in *Annálar 1400-1800,* vol. 1, 551-552)[12]

[11] From there sailed a fleet to engage in the only naval battle of Icelanders on 25 June 1244.

[12] Trans: In the spring a meeting of priests was held at Spákonufell about the rumour of witchcraft that priest Árni Jónsson had spread. He was sentenced to twelve years of prison, and he was to have 4 laymen as witnesses, two from the Húnavatnsþing and two from the Hegranesþing. In the summer he rode to the priests who were named for him to swear oaths, and since he did not get any of them, except one, he got on an English ship in the Eastfjords and sailed to England. He wrote to Iceland the following summer and said that he had difficulty getting food and clothing, because he was accustomed to hard work there, and he died there ‖ the following year (it was 1681). His wife Ingibjörg was believed to be most powerful in the things her husband was learned; she was Jónsdóttir (the daughter of Reverend Jón Gunnarsson at Tjörn in

The place name itself (a real place in Iceland) evokes magic: Spákonufell the mount of the prophetess (the *völva*). It is also noteworthy that of the few cases of diabolism, two involved women. And not for the writing of magic staves, books and so on, but for pacts or intercourse with the devil.

The following list with names and relative accusations of the 21 executed for magic in Iceland highlights the geographical concentration in the Northwest of the country as well as the inconsistency of evidences for the death punishment[13].

Jón Rögnvaldsson 1625
Burnt in Eyjafjörður, North Iceland, for raising a ghost and possessing papers with runic characters. Denied all accusations.

Þórður Guðbrandsson 1654
Burnt in Trékyllisvík, Strandir, for causing strange occurrences in the community. After imprisonment he confessed to having met the devil in the guise of a fox and sent it to Trékyllisvík.

Egill Bjarnason 1654
Burnt in Trékyllisvík, Strandir, after confessing that he had killed a sheep with magic and made contract with the devil.

Grímur Jónsson 1654
Burnt in Trékyllisvík, Strandir, after confessing that he knew magic runes and had killed a sheep with a magic character.

Jón Jónsson sen. 1656
Burnt in Ísafjörður, admitted in custody that he owned grimoires and that he had used them against the Rev. Jón Magnússon.

Jón Jónsson jun. 1656
Burnt in Ísafjörður. Admitted having used magical signs and among other things, having used farting-runes (Fretrúnir) against a girl and caused the sickness of Rev. Jón Magnússon.

Þórarin Halldórsson 1667
From Ísafjarðarsýsla, the Westfjords
Westfjords for having caused the illness of Helga, wife of Rev. Páll Björnsson in Selárdalur. Admitted that he had tried to gain some knowledge of the occult.

Svarfaðardalur (†1670) and generally called Galdra-Imba. There are various legends about her in the east, in addition to the one mentioned here). It was then said that she had been a master in this, together with the devil, to whom she later showed signs. She also went east and caused illness to two priests there, when she did not get what she wanted. Once she demanded a cow that was calving to a man there, but he could not lose it, instead he offered to let her take any of the other 6 he had, for free; she did not want that, but the next morning they were all dead.

[13] The names of the executed are present in Magnús Rafnsson 2003, 35-37.

Erlendur Eyjólfsson 1669
Burnt in Húnavatnssýsla county in North Iceland for having taught Jón Leifsson magic. Admitted that he had handed Jón a stave called Ausukross.

Sigurður Jónsson 1671
Burnt in Þingvellir after a trial in Ísafjarðarsýsla county. Admitted among other things that he had fought a ghost and frightened it off with the help of herbs and his own semen.

Páll Oddsson 1674
From Húnavatnssýsla county, burnt at Þingvellir. Denied all knowledge of magic but was convicted because of rumours against him.

Böðvar Þorsteinsson 1674
Burnt at Þingvellir after having admitted that he had prevented a ship in Snæfellsness from fishing.

Magnús Bjarnason 1675
Admitted that he had caused the sickness of Helga, Páll Björnsson's wife, in Selárdalur, Westfjords.

Lassi Diðriksson 1675
Condemned in connection with the sickness of Helga in Selárdalur. Denied all charges and was generally thought innocent. Burnt at Þingvellir.

Bjarni Bjarnason 1677
Supposed to have caused a woman's illness in the Westfjords. Denied all charges but was burnt at Þingvellir.

Þorbjörn Sveinsson 1677
A thief who was found in possession of magical signs. Admitted that he had used sorcery to try to find out who had stolen from him and to make a sheep easier to handle. From Mýrasýsla county in the West, burnt at Þingvellir.

Stefán Grímsson 1678
Admitted freely after a death sentence was passed, though for none of the things he was accused of. Burnt in Húnavatnssýsla county.

Jón Helgason 1678
Burnt in Barðastrandarsýsla county in the Westfjords for having caused the sickness of Helga in Selardálur.

Þuríður Ólafsdóttir 1678
Mother of Jón Helgason, burnt for the same offence based on the words of Rev. Páll Björnsson.

Ari Pálsson 1681
From Barðastrandarsýsla where he was rumoured to have practiced magic, burnt at Þingvellir after failing to get his peers to swear his innocence. After conviction he admitted knowing how to find out if a woman was a virgin.

Sveinn Árnason 1683
Burnt at Arngerðareyri in the Westfjords for having caused an illness which the daughter of Páll and Helga in Selardálur suffered from.

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Healing Magic in Middle English Sermons

Laura Poggesi

Abstract:

Healing magic is one of the most ancient forms of magic of which we have written evidence in the European vernaculars. Allusions to this kind of magic are to be found in medical texts as well as religious works. The debate surrounding the legitimacy of magical healing practices emerged in the aftermath of the Fourth Lateran Council, resulting in a number of contrasting positions. This essay explores the attitudes of late medieval English preachers towards the use of healing magic through the analysis of six Middle English sermons selected from four fifteenth-century sermon collections. The aim is to unveil the techniques of representation of magic practices for therapeutic purposes which gradually lead to the stigmatisation of a behaviour that reached its peak in the following centuries.

Keywords: Healing Magic, Late Medieval Preachers, Medicine, Middle English Sermons, Witchcraft

1. Healing Magic and Late Medieval Church

Magic has been a part of human life since the earliest days of world's history. People at all levels of society relied on magic whenever they had to face challenges in everyday life that could be hardly overcome with "conventional" means – as to ensure a good harvest or to ward off misfortune – or else as a form of esoteric knowledge possessed by a select group of individuals. The advent of Christianity and the faith in one and almighty God did not prevent men and women, even Christian believers, from using magic, and in fact, a rather strong relation between magic and religion can be observed especially from the early Middle Ages onwards. Although magic is always condemned in the Old Testament, and although early Christian authors looked at magic with suspicion, fearing it for its bad outcomes and highlighting the contrast between the power of God and that of magicians – the first being true and good, the latter being false and a demonic or pagan craft – some aspects of Christian religion intertwined with magical practices, and unofficial rituals and beliefs began to spread along with orthodox customs (Rider 2012, 8; Kieckhefer 2014 [1989], 33-42). It is thus clear that the border between magic and religion was rather blurred, for which reason medieval Church had the arduous task of separating these two domains. The fruits of the theological debate that arose can be grasped by looking at reli-

Letizia Vezzosi, University of Florence, Italy, letizia.vezzosi@unifi.it, 0000-0002-7635-2657

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gious literature produced between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries, when on the one hand an increasing number of texts about magic began to circulate in Europe, and on the other hand the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) sanctioned the need for a spiritual and educational reform, which led the Church to take a closer look at the rituals spread among the population (Rider 2012, 12).

Healing magic is one of the most emblematic forms of magic, as it responds to the innate human need to combat or prevent suffering and death. Written sources from medieval England are particularly representative of this facet of magic, as the high number of healing charms interpolated among medical recipes contained in manuscripts ever since the Anglo-Saxon period demonstrates[1]. A tangible Christian element is often present in this kind of incantations, for example through invocations to Christ or the Saints, or in *historiolae* derived from biblical episodes; therefore it is not always easy to distinguish between a proper charm and a prayer. Moreover, stories of marvellous healings are recorded in the Bible itself, although in this case, being Christ the author of the recovery, they fall within the category of legitimate miracles[2]. While the distinction between miraculous healings and curative magic was a palpable one, establishing whether other elements, such as herbs and amulets, worked naturally or by an occult power pertaining to the demonic world was not always a straightforward operation. From the thirteenth century, the debate surrounding the nature and legitimacy of the various forms that the treatment of illnesses could take intensified among well-educated clergy, and resulted in the production of an increasing number of theological treatises that reveal that the positions of the Church on these issues were not always unequivocal.

In an article published in 2011, Catherine Rider analysed how healing magic was portrayed in some theological writings produced in Europe between the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries. Inspired by the results achieved by the historian, this essay takes a different perspective by looking at this issue from the point of view of later medieval English preachers through the analysis of a selection of fifteenth-century Middle English sermons. It has been already pointed out that magic was perceived as a demonic and wrong activity by educated clergy, and consequently as a concrete menace to faith and the salvation of the soul. It is thus evident that the clergy's task could not be limited to the theoretical discussion of the topic, but had to extend to the practical dimension, providing guidance to parish priests and their lay communities on how to avoid falling into the tricks of magic. As the most representative literary genre of religious education, sermons are an invaluable source of information for the study of the dissemination of theological debate from the inner circles of learned clerics to the lay population.

The pastoral manuals examined by Rider (2012) are an expression of the program of spiritual renovation promoted by the Fourth Lateran Council,

[1] It is no coincidence that medical recipes and healing charms not only share the same aim – to provide a remedy against an illness – but are also strictly related text-types.

[2] The same is valid for healings performed by the Saints and narrated in hagiographies.

which, as we have already mentioned, aimed to improve religious education of both the clergy and the laity. The texts quoted by Rider reveal contrasting positions between those who showed a more tolerant attitude, such as Thomas of Chobham – a thirteenth-century subdeacon of Salisbury Cathedral who, in his *Summa confessorum*, saw in a good light the recitation of prayers over the collection of medicinal herbs if they were meant to honour God[3] – and those who resolutely argued against any kind of healing practices that resembled magic, as the Dominican John Bromyard (d. 1352)[4]. However, all these authors seem to agree on one point: the diffidence with which they looked at magical words or "characters", considered as signals to communicate with the devil, or at least as something that eludes thorough human comprehension[5].

Another moralizing tract, not mentioned by Rider, but nonetheless extremely relevant for our purposes, is the *Fasciculus Morum*, a fourteenth-century manual on the seven deadly sins and the corresponding cardinal virtues written by an English Franciscan, which constitutes one of the most important sources for later Middle English sermons. Chapter V of the *Fasciculus Morum* deals with the sin of avarice, and quotes:

> Set istam fidem inpugnant et sibi contrariantur, quod dolendum est, hiis diebus tam homines quam mulieres qui contra ordinacionem Dei et Ecclesie diabolo instigante quod propriissimum est Deo omnium Creatori attribuunt creaturis, scilicet futura contingencia scire et predicere, sanitatem et infirmitatem cum fictis carminibus inponere et destruere. Cuiusmodi sunt qui dicuntur incantatores, qui artem suam verbis excercent, anglice *tilsters*, qui cum carminibus et aliis miseriis suis sanitatem promittunt. (Wenzel 1989, 576)

Once again, the accent is put on the occult and subversive power of words through which charms work, and which are consequently the symbol of the deceptions of the devil, an aspect that, as we will see later in this essay, is strongly emphasized in Middle English sermons. Although magic is rarely a major topic in Middle English sermons, suggesting that it was not one of preachers' main concerns (Rider 2012, 138), the use of magical curative practices is occasionally

[3] "Nec in collectionibus herbarum quae medicinales sunt aliquas observationes vel incantationes liceat attendere nisi tantum cum symbolo divino aut oratione dominica, ut tantum deus creator omnium et dominus honoretur" (Rider 2012, 95).

[4] Referring in particular to women enchantresses, Bromyard said: "Illud quod faciunt est contra prohibitionem legis divine, canonici et civilis […] et contra doctrinam totius ecclesie. Ergo si bonum esset quod faciunt, cessare tamen deberent propter tot prohibitions, et ne factum illorum ab aliis in exemplum vertatur perniciousum" (ivi, 99).

[5] In this regard Thomas of Chobham said "In tribus enim dicunt phisici precipuam vim nature esse constitutam: in verbis, et herbis et lapidibus. De virtute herbarum et lapidum aliquid scimus, de virtute verborum parum vel nihil novimus" (ivi, 101). Also Augustine in Book II of *De civitate Dei* talks about this kind of incantation: "Ad hoc genus pertinent omnes etiam ligaturae atque remedia quae medicorum quoque disciplina condemnat, sive in precantationibus sive in quibusdam notis quos caracteres vocant […] non ad temperationem corporum sed ad quasdam significationes aut occultas aut etiam manifestas" (Greene 1995, 90-93).

addressed in these writings. The analysis of Middle English sermons proposed in the following paragraphs is meant to bring new light on this subject and to investigate how and in which contexts healing magic is represented in sermon literature from fifteenth-century England.

2. The Corpus

The sermons selected for this research come from four fifteenth-century collections representative of preaching literature of late medieval England. The first and most famous is the *Festial*, a collection of sermons *de tempore et de sanctis* written as a means of religious instruction for unlettered clergy by John Mirk (d. 1403), prior of the Augustinian abbey of Lilleshall. Two main redactions are known to have been produced – an older one, that represents Mirk's original plan and in which the sermons are arranged according to the liturgical year; and a more recent redaction, where the sermons of the *temporale* and those of the *sanctorale* forms two separate sections, and which served as a base for a still later educated reworking now extant in at least two codices[6]. The success enjoyed by the *Festial* is demonstrated by the high number of manuscripts that contains it, which includes more than twenty witnesses. The sermons of the *Festial* analysed here are quoted from Susan Powell's critical edition of manuscript London, British Library, Cotton Claudius A.II. (2009-2011).

Partially linked to the collection by Mirk, is the cycle of dominical sermons preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library, eMusaeo 180 (henceforth O), a manuscript of the second half of the fifteenth century, which contains fifty-nine *de tempore* sermons based on the Scriptures according to Sarum use. As demonstrated by its editor (Morrison 2012), the Oxford manuscript is the best witness of this collection, which can also be found in three other codices.

The third collection is the one extant in manuscript 36791 of the British Library, which represents the unique copy of the fifteenth-century sermon cycle for the *temporale* and the *sanctorale* known as *Speculum Sacerdotale* (*SS*). As has been pointed out by Edward Weatherly (1936, xxxix-xl), author of the sole critical edition of this manuscript published so far, the *Speculum Sacerdotale* falls within late medieval preaching literature of the kind of Mirk's *Festial*. Almost coeval and coming from the same geographical area, both collections share the same structure, as they begin with Advent and follow the liturgical year, and the same aim: to provide preaching material in the vernacular for the use of parish priests. The common background notwithstanding, textual evidence led Weatherly (ivi, xliv) to conclude that neither collection influenced the other.

[6] With regard to Mirk's *Festial*, the reader may refer to the studies by Wakelin 1967 and Heffernan, Horner 2005, 4059-4060. For an analysis of the *Festial*'s revision witnessed in mss Harley 2247 and Royal 18.B.xxv of the British Library see Steckman 1937 and Fletcher, Powell 1978.

The last text used for our analysis is titled *Jacob's Well* (henceforth *JW*), and is preserved in a single manuscript: Salisbury, Cathedral Library, 103. The title of this anonymous set of ninety-four sermons, the first fifty of which have been published by Brandeis (1900), alludes to the *fons Jacob* quoted in the Gospel of John (4:6). The well, filled with muddy water, is a metaphor for the human body corrupted by sin. By employing this metaphor, the author of these sermons, written in the first quarter of the fifteenth century, provides his Christian community with a set of instructions on how to purify their bodies from the mud of sin and obtain God's grace.

These collections of sermons are well representative of the themes dealt with in late medieval English preaching texts in the vernacular. Two of them – the *SS* and *JW* – are now extant in unique manuscripts, neither of which can be considered the holograph, as some scribal errors indicate; while the other two, especially the *Festial*, enjoyed larger success. The fact that O and its three brother manuscripts had been copied by the same scribe has induced scholars to postulate that they were produced for retail (Fletcher 1980, 516; Morrison 2012, vol. 1, xxi), which is a proof of their popularity. Whether these collections were meant for oral delivery or private reading, or whether they were addressed to a lay audience or to parish priests, they are a concrete testimony of how the salient topics of faith discussed in the highest ecclesiastical circles were filtered and proposed to the community of the less educated Christians; and healing magic – being a topic of theological debate – was no exception.

3. Representations of Healing Magic in Sermon Literature

An investigation of the representations of healing magic in late medieval sermons could not be separated from a more general reflection on the perception of sickness in this historical period. Medieval people, indeed, looked at illness not only as a condition of physical disease, but also – and especially – as a symptom of the corruption of their soul and as a metaphor for sin; consequently, physical healing corresponds to spiritual cleansing (Kieckhefer 2014 [1989], 35). As one might expect, these images are particularly productive in instructive religious literature such as sermons, which aim to educate people on religious issues; and over time specific sins became associated with specific maladies: thus, for example, dropsy indicates avarice, blindness is pride, and leprosy heresy (Mazzini 1998, 170). At the same time, sermons' authors are resolute when they explain how sicknesses of the soul can be cured, as only the intervention of God makes the process of healing possible. As a result, the representations of Christ as the good doctor are extremely frequent[7]. As will be discussed below, magic healings received a very different treatment.

[7] In at least three sermons of manuscript O Christ is defined as "the connyng leche" (the powerful doctor), "maister leche" (master doctor) or "grete leche" (great doctor). See Morrison 2012, vol. 1, 30-31; 100-101; 122-123.

3.1 Medicine and Witchcraft

Magic is mentioned in relation to healing practices in two sermons of *JW* that are part of a series of sermons on the seven deadly sins[8]. The first of these two is Chapter XIX, which along with Chapters XVIII and XX, discusses the sin of avarice and the various forms it takes. In particular, sermon XIX deals with five "fote brede of þe wose of coueytise"[9], namely simony, theft and robbery, sacrilege, false accusations, and wickedness, each of which is, in turn, characterized by various degrees of intensity (*inche*). Describing wickedness, the author of the sermon states:

> Þe fyfte fote brede wose in þis coueytise is wyckydnesse, & þat is many inche thycke. On inche is renayning; whan a man forsakyth god, & becomyth a iewe or a sarazene, to be ryche; þis is wyckydnesse. An-oþer inche is wyche-craft, charmys, experimentys, conuracyouns and to rayse þe feend. All þis is wykkydnesse of mawmetrie[10]. (Brandeis 1900, 131-132)

The evil actions recorded here are cleverly labelled as *mawmetrie*, a term which may indicate either idolatry in the strict sense or a subterfuge of the devil (see MED s.v. *maumetri(e*, 1). Magic is thus represented as a diabolic craft and a form of false belief in line with the medieval Christian thought which look at magic as the work of demons or a deceitful pagan practice that threaten God's law (Kieckhefer 2014 [1989], 35; Gasse 2024, 48-49).

A similar description of the sin of avarice occurs in the fourteenth-century *Ayenbite of Inwit*, a Middle English translation of the *Somme le Roi* (1279), an Old French treatise written by Frere Laurent at the request of King Philip III, meant as a source of religious instructions for the laity in accordance with the program of spiritual renovation promoted by the Fourth Lateran Council. Here, the seven deadly sins are represented as the heads of the monstruous beast of the *Apocalypse*, which further bifurcate in smaller pieces. The opening section on the seventh branch of avarice from *Aynebite* quotes:

> Þe zeuend boȝ / of auarice: ys wyckedhede. Ich clepie wychkedhede: huanne þe man / is zuo wykhed / and zuo moche dyeuel: þet him ne dret naȝt / to done / ane greate zenne / dyadlich / and orrible. oþer grat harm / to oþren / uor a lite wayn / oþer uor ureme / to him. Þes boȝ / heþ manye tuygges. Þe uerste

[8] These are Chapters XI-XXIV, which deals respectively with: XI-XII pride (*De superbia*), XIII envy (*De inuidia*), XIV-XV wrath (*De ira*), XVI-XVII sloth (*De accidia*), XVIII-XX avarice (*De cupiditate*), XXI-XIII gluttony (*De gula*), XXIV lust (*De luxuria*).

[9] Trans: "Five foots [of depth] of the mud of avarice". This is part of the metaphor of the well full of mud representing the sinners' body on which the entire collection of sermons of *JW* is based. Unless otherwise stated, translations are by the author.

[10] Trans: The fifth foot of this avarice is wickedness, and it is very much thick. One level of thickness is apostasy, when a man forsakes God and becomes a Jew or a Saracen to be rich; this is wickedness. Another inch is witchcraft, charms, experiments, conjurations and evoking the devil. All of this is wickedness of idolatry.

> is. huanne / eny uor drede / of pouerte. oþer uor couaytise / uor to wynne: uorzaȝþ [renayþ] god / and þe cristene bileaue. and becomþ bougre. oþer ieu. oþer sarasin. To þise zenne / bolongeþ / þe zenne: of ham / þet uor pans / makeþ to clepie / þane dyeuel. and makeþ þe enchauntemens. and makeþ to loky ine þe zuord. oþer ine þe nayle / of þe þoume. uor to of-take / þe þyeues. oþer uor oþre þinges. And of ham alsuo / þet makeþ / oþer porchaceþ / be charmes / oþer be wychecreft. oþer be kueadnesse / huet þet hit by[11]. (Morris 1866, 43)

The main arguments are the same in *Ayenbite* and *JW*: wickedness is a branch of avarice in both texts, and both refer to apostasy, witchcraft, treason, destruction of cities, causing discord, false accusations and homicide as kinds of wickedness, thus suggesting that they derive from a common tradition of religious writings[12]. However, in dealing with witchcraft, *Ayenbite* focuses on the practice of charms for money, an aspect which is touched only incidentally in *JW*, where wicked actions made for financial gain are ascribed only to the abandonment of the Christian faith to become Jews or Saracens. In the same way, while *Ayenbite* lingers over the condemnation of locator and love magic, without mentioning healing magic but referring only to vague *enchauntemens* – suggesting that for its author it could have been acceptable (Gasse 2024, 58) – in *JW*, the practices related to witchcraft include the *experimentys*, a term likely used here to denote "a feat of magic or sorcery" (MED s.v. *experiment*, 4b). The author of this sermon, therefore, openly condemns this kind of magic, likening it to sorcery and conjurations of the devil, which are dangerous practices for the salvation of one's soul.

The second example is taken from sermon XXIV of *JW*, which deals with lechery, described by the author as "an vnleeful lust þat comyth of freelte of þe flesch, & defoulyth bothe þe body & þe soule" (Brandeis 1900, 158)[13]. As in the case of avarice, lechery may take various forms in thoughts, words, and actions[14]. Lecherous actions are thus described:

> þe iij. fadome is dede of leccherye, whanne þou perfourmyst it in dede, or art a bawde, & helpyst oþere to þe dede of leccherye, or howsyst hem, or counfortyst hem in here synne, or mayntenyst or stirrest oþer þer-to by charmys, wicche-

[11] Trans: The seventh bough of avarice is wickedness. I define wickedness when the man is so evil and devilish that he fears not to commit any great deadly and horrible sin, or to provoke great harm to others. This bough has many twigs: the worst is when one, fearing poverty or for avarice, in order to gain wealth, forsakes God and the Christian faith and becomes a heretic or a Jew or a Saracen. To this sin belong the sins of those who evoke the devil and perform enchantments and look in the nail of the thumb to unmask thieves or other things. And among them there are also those who do or purchase by charms or by witchcraft or by wickedness what they want.

[12] It is worth mentioning that one of the sources of *JW* is the *Speculum Vitae*, itself a Middle English verse adaptation of the *Somme le Roi*.

[13] Trans: A forbidden desire that arises from lewdness of the flesh and devours both the body and the soul.

[14] The description of sins structured in divisions and subdivisions is typical of medieval moralistic manuals (Carruthers 1991, 22).

> craft, or sorcerye, ȝif þou be feble, and many noȝt do it; in bostyng and auauntyng of þi leccherye, in making þe strong to leccherye wyth metys, drynkes and medycynes, in making þe gay in aray, & fayr heer, & glew in face, more þan kinde of þi-self askyth, & all for to be plesaunt to oþere more þan to þi wyif & husbonde, to styrren hem to þi lust[15]. (Ivi, 158-159)

Unsurprisingly, witchcraft is quoted among lustful deeds. As has been shown by Kieckhefer (1991), erotic magic was widely employed at all levels of medieval society, and it could take different forms, from "sex-inducing" to "sex-enhancing" and "love" magic. Evidence of such practices has come down to us in charms preserved in medical manuscripts as well as in religious and civic legal provisions and records of witchcraft trials ever since the early Middle Ages. The author of our sermon quotes, along with generic "charmys, wicche-craft, or sorcerye" that induce people to commit lecherous actions, the use of *medycynes*, referring not to medicaments with healing properties, but rather to potions or other preparations, likely derived from herbs or animal products, that are able to transform a man or a woman's physical appearance, making them appear more attractive. The term *medycyne* acquires thus a negative connotation. This shade of meaning is quite uncommon in Middle English: no instances of it are recorded in the MED (s.v. *medicin(e)*, while the OED (s.v. *medicine* 1.c) quotes only two examples from before the sixteenth century in which this word is used in similar contexts. It seems that the author of *JW* wants to warn his readers (or listeners) against the potential diabolic motive that lies behind the surface of the ostensibly beneficial effects of some medical preparations[16].

Although the two sermons discussed above do not delve into the details of the forms of healing magic, they do suggest that the appeal to this kind of practices was quite common. Their author's stance on this issue is resolute: irrevocable condemnation as illicit and against the faith on the true God.

[15] Trans: The third level is lecherous deeds, when you perform it in actions or are an intermediary and you help others in committing actions of lechery, or house them, or encourage them in their sin, or support or prompt the others to this sin through charms, witchcraft or sorcery, if you are weak and you can't do it yourself. In boasting and speaking arrogantly of your lechery, becoming steadfast to lechery through food, drinks and medicines, becoming wanton in your aspect and neatly combed and glowing in face, more than your own kind requests; and all for to be pleasant to the others more than to your own wife and husband, to move them to your lust.

[16] It is worth noting that this passage of *JW* draws heavily on the late fourteenth-century Middle English short text known as *Litil tretys on the seven deadly sins*, which in describing perversion, a form of lechery, states: "[…] in encresynge þe freelte of þe flesch to lykyng with hote metis & drynkis with spicys & medycynys […]" (Van Zutphen 1956, 24; trans: In increasing lewdness of the flesh to please with hot food and drinks, with spices and medicines). The relation between the *Litil tretys* and *JW* has been investigated by Carruthers (1991).

3.2 Sorcerers and Demons as False Healers

A negative representation of healing magic emerges also in two sermons of the *Festial* that feature two sinister figures associated with witchcraft and devilish powers. The first is a sermon for the feast of Saints Peter and Paul (*De festo Sancti Petri et Pauli apostolorum*), which, as is frequently the case in sermons for this occasion, tells a story with Simon Magus as the protagonist. This essay will not linger over the character of Simon Magus, which is explored in depth by Carla Riviello in this volume, but the presentation of the sorcerer in this sermon is particularly relevant for our purposes. Dealing with the contrast between Saint Peter and Simon Magus, the author of the sermon says:

> Þan wente Petur to Rome and was þer fyve and xxti ȝeres pope, and turned muche pepul to criston fayth. Bot þan com þer a fendes lyme was called Symon Magus, þat was so perfette in þe develes crafte þat he made men, somme blynde and some deff and dowme, crokyd, halte and seke. So whatte for fere, whatte for wondyr, þe pepul leved mych in hym. Þan come Petur aftur and helud alle þoe þat Symon hyrte and badde þei schulde not leue on hym for he was fals and wroghte be þe fendes crafte alle þat he dudde[17]. (Powell 2009-2011, 172)

Simon Magus is thus presented as an agent of the devil (*fendes lyme*) and as perfect in diabolic craft, by whose means he is able to make people get sick. It is immediately made clear that Simon Magus' supernatural power is not inherently his own but is rather the work of the devil. This aligns with the definition of demonic magic given by Kieckhefer, who claims that this is "a perversion of religion. It was religion that turned away from God and toward demons for their help in human affairs" (2014 [1989], 9). No matter if Simon's magic hurts people, he succeeds in finding disciples. Only the miracles performed by Peter have the capacity to genuinely restore health to the sick. Herein lies the distinction between magic and miracle, the former being false and the devil's work, while the latter a manifestation of divine power and benevolence. It is thus apparent that Mirk's intention here was to warn his audience against demonic magic, since only God and Saints' miracles can really help people.

In line with this perspective is the sermon preached for the feast of Saint Bartholomew (*De festo sancti Bartholomei*). After an explanation of the meaning of the name *Bartholomeus* from a Christian perspective, the saint is presented as having "so grette power overe fendes þat be hys monycion and commaundement he suspenduth hem of þe power þat þei haddyn in Goddys creatures, boþe in

[17] Trans: Then Peter went to Rome and stayed there for twenty-five years as Pope and converted many people to the Christian faith. But then there comes an agent of the devil who is called Simon Magus, who was so perfect in the devil's craft that he made men some blind and some deaf and dumb, paralyzed, weak and sick. So that some for fear and some for wonder, people began to believe in him. But then Peter comes after him and healed all those that Simon hurt and warns them not to believe in him as he was false and all that he did was the craft of the devil.

men and wommen and oþur mawmentys" (Powell 2009-2011, 214)[18]. The narrative on how Bartholomew defeated a fiend then follows:

> We reduth of þis, how þat Bartholomew com to þe londe of Ynde and ȝode into þe tempul in þe wyche was a mawmete þat was kallyd Astorothe, þat was an ymage made of golde an syluor, of ston or of tre, be monys handes, and sette vp in þe tempul. Þanne a fende ȝode into þis ymage and ofte wolde speke to hem þat dyd hyt worchep, so þat be suche schauntement of falce wordys he makuth þe pepul to levon þat hit was here god and none othyr. And ȝete to make þem to haue þe more beleue in hym, he made hem mony crokyd, seke, halte and blynde, deff and dome, and many othyr weyes seke, and þen wolde he bydde bryngon hem to hym. And whan þei weron broghte to hym, he losed hem of þe sekenesse þat he leyde vpon hem, and so semyng to hem þat þei were helud be hym. Bot þe sekenesse þat God sent vpon any man, þat he myhte notte helon be no crafte þat he cowþe done[19]. (*Ibidem*)

The story continues with Bartholomew unmasking the devil and vanquishing him, thereby proving his deception. The saint heals all those who had been affected by Astaroth's charms and converts them to the only true faith: that in Christians' God. The passage quoted above condenses all the salient points that are the core of the late medieval theological debate surrounding healing magic. In the first place, we notice the contrast between the truth of God and the falsehood of both the pagan idol and the devil, which is made apparent when we read that Astaroth acquires an entourage "by suche schauntement of falce wordys", where words play a crucial role in this magical-demonic deceptive process. This is further emphasized by the fact that the healings performed by the demon are just a simulation, as his real power is to hurt them and make them fall ill. Once again, Mirk wants to caution his readers to mistrust what may appear as miraculous cures, highlighting – by his last sentence – that only God and his apostles are able to work such miracles. Unfortunately, he does not provide any specific clues as to how to recognize the devil's false enchantments, a task that is perhaps beyond the concerns of parish priests and the laity.

[18] Trans: So great a power over demons that his directions and commands stop the power that they had over the creatures of God, both over men and women and other pagans.

[19] Trans: We read of how Bartholomew came to India and went to a temple where a pagan god named Astaroth was venerated. He was an image of gold and silver, made of stone or wood, with many hands and was placed in the temple. A fiend entered this image and frequently spoke to those who came to worship him, so that by enchantments of false words he made people adore him (and believe) that he was their god and no one else. And as more and more people believe in him, he made them paralyzed, fell sick, weak and blind, deaf and dumb, and sick in many other ways. And so, he made people to be brought to him, and when they came, he healed them from the sicknesses he caused them, so that they believed he was their healer. But the sicknesses sent by God upon any man could not be healed by no craft other than one that God himself could master.

3.3 Is Healing Magic a Real Form of Medicine?

An interesting representation of magic used for healing purposes is proposed by a sermon of the *SS* titled *Vigiliae festorum*, which was to be preached on the eve of a religious holiday. The sermon deals with the behaviour that the good Christian should observe on such occasions; namely, an attitude of renunciation. In this regard, the author tells an *exemplum* taken from the tenth chapter of Book I of Gregory the Great's *Dialogi*. The *exemplum* narrates of a woman who, gripped by an impetus of lust, on the evening before the inauguration of an oratory for Saint Sebastian is unable to abstain from having intercourse with her husband. The next day, during the ceremony, the woman becomes possessed by a demon, as depicted in the sermon:

> a wickid spirite began for to have dominacion in the womman and be-gan foulye to vexe hure afore alle the peple. And when the preste of the oratorye sawe and behelde hure, he brouȝt a cloþe for to be inhyed and so couered hure, and for-thy the deuel entrid in-to hure. […] he tolde howe that he hadde grete drede of hure þerfore. Then hure nyȝeboures lovynge hure more for heleþe of body then of sowle pursued for to haue hure commyttid unto the hondis and craftis of nygremancy and to sorcerours for to put remedy unto hure. And for a tyme with sorcerye sche was profetid. And she was ladde to a flode and in-to the water, and there these sorcerours be-gan for to do with here incantaciouns for to drenchyn the devell that hadde entryd in hure. And þrouȝ the marvelous dome of God oone was put out fro hure þrouȝ þat vnlawefull crafte, but a-noone a legion sodeynlye entrede in-to hure[20]. (Weatherly 1936, 94-95)

The woman's friends, seeing her in such an altered state, are understandably concerned about her physical health, and quite surprisingly their first action is to bring her "unto the hondis and craftis of nygremancy and to sorcerours" instead of searching for the *grete leche*, failing to recognize the menace of demons and the priority of the soul over the body. Whether at first the sorcerers' craft appears to be effective, the situation rapidly degenerates. It is only through the intervention of Bishop Fortunatus that the woman is finally untied from the demon. The description of this passage is extremely interesting. The verb *profiten* reveals an accurate choice of the terminology on the part of the anonymous author of this sermon, as it is used to indicate something that is useful in a physical sense (both in terms of material advantages and of gaining beneficial effects

[20] Trans: A wicked spirit started to have control over the woman and began to torment her in front of the other people. And when the priest of the oratory saw and looked at her, he took a cloth and he covered her with it, therefore the devil entered in her […] he told that was so much scared of her. Afterward, her friends, caring more for the health of her body than for that of her soul, conducted her to the hands and craft of necromancers and sorcerers to heal her. And for a time, she benefited from sorcery. And she was brought to a river and into the water, and there the sorcerers began to recite their incantations to drown the devil that entered her. And through the marvellous power of God, a devil was driven out from her thanks to that unlawful craft, but anon, a legion entered her again.

from medical treatments) as well as something which is spiritually helpful (see MED s.v. *profiten*, 1). Moreover, here, unlike in Mirk's sermon on Saint Bartholomew, we read a description of the magic ritual performed by the sorcerers: a ritual that takes place on a watercourse – clearly evocative of holy water – and which resembles a genuine exorcism. The incantations are then defined as an *unlawefull crafte*, another smart linguistic choice; indeed, the corresponding passage in Gregory's *Dialogi* reads as follows:

> Ducta itaque est ad fluuium atque in aquam mersa, ibique diutinis incantationibus agere malefici moliebantur, ut is qui eam inuaserat diabolus exiret. Sed miro omnipotentis Dei iudicio, dum peruersa arte ab ea unus repellitur, in eam subito legio intrauit. (I, 10, 82)

While Gregory focused on the wickedness and depravity of witchcraft (*perversa arte*), the preacher of the *SS* emphasizes its unlawfulness, alluding to those canon laws that prohibited the practice of magic, and presenting the more occult aspect of magic, something we have not seen in other sermons. We can thus infer that the position of this sermon's author regarding healing magic conforms to the more rigid ones advocated by Saint Augustine and John Bromyard.

An additional aspect worthy of mention is the description of the behaviour of the clergymen of the story in dealing with the cursed woman: on the one hand, there is the parish priest, totally unable to handle the situation, who covered her with the altar's cloth in a theatrical and almost comic scene, actually helping the demon to take possession of her and soon leaving her at her fate admitting that he was scared; on the other hand, there is Bishop Fortunatus, God's agent, who, with his prayers, is the only one able to heal the woman's soul. Although these episodes are taken from Gregory's narrative and left almost unchanged, it seems that the author of our sermon does not waste the opportunity to make a subtle criticism towards less-educated clergy, helpless in front of a dangerous activity as demonic magic.

To close the circle of reflections on healing magic that emerge from late medieval English preaching literature, it will be introduced a sermon that, to certain extent, summarizes the main points of the theological debate on the subject. The text is a sermon for the *Dominica iii post festum sanctae Trinitatis* contained in the Oxford manuscript. Here, the preacher, dealing with avarice, says:

> Firste I sey, and a man scholde grownde hym fectually in good lyvyng, then he muste ever turne his hert withe a speciall luffe to his God. For ȝe se be experiens, þere is no þing for to luf hertily but if it be for some vertu þat is fownde therein: as flowrs, the be beloved for þei comforte the syȝt of man; frute is beloved for the fedyng of hem is comfortabyll to some men; erbis and precius stonys be belovid for þe vertu that thei haue in medicynis to the helpyng of mankynde. Therfore me thynkethe that every cristen man and woman, thei ouȝte to haue there speciall luffe to owre souereyne sauiour Criste Ihesu, for þe goodness and the swetnes of hym is an everlastyng comforthe to all aungels and to þe holy cowrte of heven.

> For his vertu passithe all erbis and precious stonys in medicyns.[21] (Morrison 2012, vol. 2, 252-253)

The message of the author of this sermon is clear: it is impossible to deny the medical properties of plants and stones, and it is reasonable for people to rely on the virtues of these natural elements to restore health. However, the good Christian should know that there is no herb nor medicinal preparation that may surpass the power of God, for which reason, he or she must trust in his benevolence to regain true health, that is spiritual health.

4. Conclusion

The Middle English sermons considered for this study are only a small part of preaching literature produced in England between the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries. However, despite the fact that the discussion over healing magic was undoubtedly preponderant in the theological treatises that circulated among the higher ranks of the educated clergy, the authors of these sermons find a way to introduce the subject making it available and understandable also to less-educated priests and the laity, in conformity to the precepts of the Fourth Lateran Council.

From the analysed texts it is evident that healing magic is never the main topic of the sermons: sometimes it is discussed as one of the several shades assumed by a mortal sin – as with the sermons of *JW* – while in other instances it emerges as a narrative device of *exempla*. In any event, it is always represented as something negative, dangerous and pertaining to the devil's world, from which the only hope of salvation relies on the true power of God. In general, the topic plays a marginal role within the sermons and rarely do they offer detailed descriptions of the practices of magical healing. This seems to contrast with the lengthy digressions on magic found in pastoral manuals, but may be explained in two ways: on the one hand, as was pointed out by Rider (2012, 138), this indicates that dealing with magic was not perceived by the preachers as an urgent priority; on the other hand, the very mention of healing magic, albeit without exhaustive examination, signifies that it was a contentious issue. This suggests that the preachers were cautious in their approach, seeking to avoid any potential misinterpretation among their listeners or readers.

[21] Trans: First, I say, a man should ground himself in good living and turn his heart to God with special love. You see by experience that there is nothing to love deeply except for its virtues: thus, flowers are loved because they comfort men's sight, fruits are loved because they nourish men, herbs and precious stones are loved for the virtues they have in medicine to help humankind. Therefore, I think that every Christian man and woman should reserve special love to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as his goodness and benevolence is an everlasting comfort to the angels and the holy court of Heaven. Because his virtues overcome all the herbs and precious stones in medicine.

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Simon Magus in Middle English Prose Sermons: A 'bad guy' Among Magic, Heresy and Simony

Carla Riviello

Abstract:

The character of Simon Magus in the Middle English prose sermons is particularly interesting. As far as in his original characterisation produced by late Christian society, magic serves as a central element of several strongly stigmatised traits in the ethical-religious thought of the time, later, in other historical-cultural contexts of medieval Europe, these traits, variously adapted, will still be valid for the construction of an anti-social enemy, a dangerous Other to be fought and destroyed. The aim of this paper is to provide a preliminary analysis of how English preachers of late Middle Ages transposed and reworked the plurality of negative aspects traditionally attributed to Simon Magus.

Keywords: Heresy, Magic, Middle English Sermons, Otherness, Simon Magus, Witchcraft

In Middle English prose sermons the figure of Simon Magus is particularly interesting because, if in his original characterisation produced by the late Christian society magic serves as a catalyst for stigmatised traits in the ethical-religious mindset of the time, in later centuries, in other cultural and historical contexts of medieval Europe, these traits, variously adapted, would still prove valid for the construction of an anti-social enemy, a dangerous Other to be fought and annihilated.

Appropriately, in a contribution aimed at illustrating "the patristic-medieval traditions and historiography" inherent in the figure of Simon Magus, Ferreiro states: "Simon Magus was transformed by the Church into the quintessential 'bad guy' – who allegedly embodied and engendered every imaginable form of doctrinal error and moral depravity" (2005, 9).

A certain Simon appears for the first time in *Actus Apostolorum* 8:9-24 (*Act*) as a magician-enchanter who seeks to purchase with money what the apostles received as a gift from God for their faith. The episode recounts how, in a town in Samaria, a man named Simon is admired by the crowd for the magic he performs. The apostle Philip's preaching, however, turns out to be so convincing that men and women are persuaded to be baptised, and among them was Simon, who in turn was amazed to witness astonishing manifestations of the divine on Earth. Then Peter and John also arrived in the region and enabled the believers to receive the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands; Simon offers them

Letizia Vezzosi, University of Florence, Italy, letizia.vezzosi@unifi.it, 0000-0002-7635-2657

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money to acquire the same power; Peter's indignant response[1] and Simon's feeble request to pray for him close the episode.

The material offered in this short narration is particularly relevant if we think that later tradition, from the sixth century onwards, will coin the term "simony", defined as the purchase and sale of spiritual goods and ecclesiastical offices, from the name of Simon Magus – a practice that, depending on the case, the medieval Church implemented, tolerated, or vehemently opposed[2].

And again, this self-styled sorcerer – who believes that the power to perform miracles can be bought – by deception and subterfuge, evidently aspires to replace the apostles, claims a divine power he does not possess, and is therefore classifiable as a heretic. Christian apologists from second-third centuries, as Justin, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, attribute to Simon Magus not only the ability to deceive the masses through various types of magic, but also the conception of Gnosticism, a heretical theological and philosophical movement, in the spread of which he seems to be joined by a certain Helena, a redeemed prostitute[3]. Identified as "the father of all heresies", the character of Simon Magus will retain this distinctive trait even in later centuries, when the Gnostic heresy will have declined and been replaced by other theological interpretations, but will still be perceived as an impending threat to the orthodoxy of Christian doctrine.

Concurrently, in contrast to the canonical tradition, the apocryphal tradition further develops the dichotomy, already present in *Act*, between the apostles, who have received the true gifts of the Holy Spirit and practise true spirituality, and Simon Magus, who has confused material reality with spiritual reality. The portrayal of magic as an opposing sphere to doctrine, i.e. the contrastive distinction between the truth of the apostles and the devil-inspired magic of Simon Magus, is dealt with extensively in numerous apocryphal works (second-third century), such as *Actus Petri cum Simone* (*ActusP*, Lipsius, Bonnet 1959, 45-77), the first

[1] "pecunia tua tecum sit in perditionem quoniam donum dei existimasti pecunia possideri" (Act 8:20). Here and on the following pages, references and quotations from the Bible are taken from Weber, Gryson 2007.

[2] Cf. Schieffer 2000.

[3] For a broader overview of the sources, see Ferreiro 2005, 35-54, 83-132, as well as Tuzlak 2002 on the long-lasting link between magic and heresy in the representation of the character. The association of Simon Magus with Gnosticism probably originated from a misunderstanding attributed to Justin: in *Apologiae pro christianis*: *Apologia Maior* 26,1-3; 56,1-2 (Marcovich 1994), the apologist mentions a certain Simon who was worshipped as a god, and also reports having seen a statue with the inscription *Simoni deo sancto* on the banks of the Tiber. Later studies have since found out that the inscription on the statue should rather be read as *Simoni sanco deo*, and that the statue was dedicated to Semo, a deity of the ancient Sabines (Weiss 2017; Bremmer 2019, 249). Justin's information is, however, taken up and expanded upon by Irenaeus, who in *Adversus Haereses* I, 23, 1-3 (Rousseau, Doutreleau 1979) defines the Gnostics as followers of Simon; Gnosticism was considered the most serious doctrinal threat to Christianity, and Simon "the father of all heresies"; later on, along the same lines, in *Refutatio omnium haeresium* VI, 7, 1-9,2 (Marcovich 1986) Hippolytus accepts the character designation as "Simon Magus" and proposes a more detailed presentation of the heretic's philosophical thought.

edition of which presumably dates back to the end of the second century, or *Passio sanctorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli* (*Passio*, Lipsius, Bonnet 1959, 177-222), to name only the most important ones, as well as in *Pseudo-Clementines* (fourth century): *Homilies* in Greek (Rehm, Strecker 1992) and *Recognitiones* (Rehm, Strecker 1994), in the Latin translation by Rufinus[4]. In varying sequences, the prodigious abilities of Simon Magus are exposed and annihilated by the steadfastness of the apostle Peter, often joined by Paul. The *Act*'s exchange of jokes turns into a repeated clash at different times, as the core of the story moves to Nero's Rome: depending on the versions, several types of miracles and spells are reported. From time to time, the two contenders display their extraordinary abilities to a crowd responding to the wonder of prodigious acts, as well as to Prefect Agrippa and Emperor Nero. On several occasions, the apostle asserted the power of the Lord over the machinations and deceptive tricks of Simon Magus, driven by the devil; the truth of the doctrine became clear to some of the people who witnessed these wonders, even to those who had previously been followers of Simon, because they were fascinated and erroneously convinced of the validity and power of his diabolical magic – among them were prominent personalities such as Senator Marcellus, Livia, Nero's wife, and Agrippina, Agrippa's wife. The political authorities, however, refused to acknowledge the evidence and issued capital sentences for Peter and Paul, even after blatant unmasking of Simon Magus: the "magical" flight with which the impostor was supposed to demonstrate his ability to reach the heavenly realm was interrupted when, by praying, Peter commanded the demons that were supporting him to drop him, and Simon Magus inevitably plummeted to the ground.

If patristic texts identify Simon Magus as the enemy to oppose – motivated by the contingent need to defend Christian doctrine from the attacks of heretical cults and, in particular, to fight Gnosticism – the apocryphal documentation, addressed to a different type of audience (Thomas 1992), aims at focusing on the conflict between magic and miracles in order to prove unequivocally how the truth of miracles invariably prevails over the falsity of magic, and how the beneficial function of the divine prodigy is always superior to the harmful, if not useless, effects of enchantment[5].

[4] For a more detailed presentation of *Pseudo-Clementines*, see Bremmer 2017, while for the identification of the passages therein devoted to Simon, see the concordances compiled by Strecker 1986, 1989, s.v. Simon Magus. It is worth noting, however, that in these works ample space is allocated to complex theological disquisitions in recounting the dispute between Simon and Peter, and Simon's dangerousness is insisted upon by emphasising his multiple skills: he is described as a powerful orator, well versed in dialectical arts, as well as in magical arts.

[5] In a study aimed at historically contextualising the late antique apocryphal sources that constructed the narrative material relating to this character's exploits from the second century onwards, Bremmer writes: "In the specific case of Simon Magus, the notion of 'magician' is gradually amplified to include 'murderer' and 'arch- heretic', while at the same time becoming a useful explanation for the selectivity and lability of Christian adherence and commitment, constantly perceived and feared by Church leaders. If only there were

These instances, in their versatile universality, are also valid for other contexts. Thus, in medieval England, Old English homilies greatly exploit those episodes that emphasise the inferiority of Simon Magus and his magical practices compared to the apostles and the miracles they are able to perform. Between the ninth and eleventh centuries, in particular, in the generic stigmatisation of magic, the church appears to be primarily committed to insisting on the opposition miracle *vs* magic, divine prodigies *vs* magical-diabolical prodigies, such as to highlighting and defining the clear separation between the sphere of good and evil.

In this perspective, the quarrel between Peter and Simon provides a poignant exemplification, so much so that material from *Passio* appears reworked in two homilies aimed at sanctifying the day dedicated to Peter and Paul: *Spel Be Petrus ond Paulus*, *Blickling Homily* XV (Kelly 2003), and Ælfric's *III Kalendas Iulii Passio Apostolorum Petri et Pauli*, *Catholic Homily I,* XXVI (Clemoes 1997); similarly, in some texts from *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric mentions Peter's victory over Simon Magus: in *De Auguriis* (LS, 16 ll. 72-75, Clayton, Mullins 2019) as well as in *VIII Kalendas Martii: Cathedra sancti Petri apostoli* (LS, 9 ll. 194-198, ivi), a homily solely dedicated to Peter. Finally, Wulfstan, in *De temporibus Anticristi* (Napier 1883, XVI), presumably drawing on Ælfric – and so, once again, on the narrative of *Passio* – relates the story in a typological perspective: the narrative is inserted within a homily dedicated to the Antichrist and is cited as an *exemplum* to illustrate the theme of deception; Wulfstan gives the narration a temporal depth that goes from the vexations suffered by the Jews in Egypt to the apostles of Christ, up to the present time, actualising the need to fight the magic fostered by the devil[6].

The tradition of Middle English prose sermons, on the other hand, repeatedly draws on the varied heritage of wickedness represented by Simon Magus. According to the data provided by O'Mara and Paul in *Repertorium of Middle English Prose Sermons* (REP), the figure appears in 16 texts, compiled and transmitted between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The conflict between Peter and Simon Magus in Nero's Rome is evoked in five sermons intended, again, to celebrate Peter and Paul on 29 June:

no magicians, then… The case thus well illustrates that witchcraft stories, which so often seem timeless and ahistorical, are always intimately inflected with current social macro-tensions, while actual accusations, even if they resonate with these, are best viewed as reflections or reproductions of local micro-tensions" (2019, 264). The fortune of this character in medieval tradition is also testified by a copious iconographic documentation, cf. Ferreiro 2005, 307-335, as well as <https://theindex.princeton.edu/s/SimpleSearchWorksOfArt.action#scrollToAnchor> (03/2025).

[6] For a more in-depth examination of the Old English accounts of the portrayal of Simon Magus, see Lendinara 2001, 650-657; Riviello 2023.

BL/Claudius A.ii/045
London, British Library, Claudius A.ii/045 (86r-87v): *De festo sancti Petri et Pauli apostolorum*, in John Mirk, *Festial* (REP II, 1001-1003; Powell 2009-2011, vol. 1, 170-174; 2011, vol. 2, 387-390).

BL/Add 36791/046
London, British Library, Additional 36791/046 (95r-96b): *Peter and Paull*, in *Speculum Sacerdotale* (REP I, 422-423; Wheaterly 1936, 168-170).

*BL/Harl 2247/064
London, British Library, Harley 2247/064 (166r-169v): *In festo sanctorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli*, in *Festial* (REP II, 1179-1180)[7].

*BL/ Sloane 3160/023
London, British Library, Sloane 3160/023 (59r-60v): *De duobus apostolis Petro et Paulo* in an anonymous series of sermons (ivi, 1511-1512).

*Bodl/Hatton 96/032
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 96/032 (43r-45v): *In die sanctorum Petri et Pauli* in an anonymous series of sermons (REP III, 2007-2008).

In other cases, Simon Magus briefly appears as an active character in short episodes still related to Peter's life. So, in:

*Bodl/Hatton 96/017
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 96/017 (26v-27r): *In cathedra Sancti Petri* (ivi, 1992-1993).

or in:

BL/Claudius A.ii/046
London, British Library, Claudius A.ii/046 (87v-89r): *Denarracio de morte Neronis*, in John Mirk, *Festial* (REP II, 1003-1004; Powell 2009-2011, vol. 1, 174-178; 2011, vol. 2, 390-392).

or, again, in an *exemplum* taken from the life of St. Clement, inserted in:

Salisbury/103/056
Salisbury Cathedral Library 103/056 (113v-117v): *De ieiunio et delectatione et continencia coniugalis* in *Jacob's Well*, ch. 56. (REP IV, 2377-2379; Atchley 1998, 113-126).

[7] It is worth mentioning that the sermon shows some discrepancies with the version of BL/Claudius A.ii. Here and elsewhere, the asterisk indicates the sermons which have not yet been published.

The remaining cases are *temporale* sermons written for various occasions, in which Simon Magus is simply quoted in examples relating to simony, greed, and imposture[8]:

Cam/Corpus/357/001
Cambridge, Corpus Christ's College 357/001 (II, 1-13v): *Quinquagesima*, Lc 16:2 *Redde racionem villicacionis tue*, Thomas Wimbledon (REP I, 55-61; Knight 1967).

Salisbury/103/019
Salisbury Cathedral Library 103/019 (42r-44v): *De cupiditate* in *Jacob's Well*, ch. 19 (REP IV, 2308-2310; Brandeis 1900, 126-133).

BL/Egerton 2820/001
British Library, Egerton 2820/001 (4r-121v): Mt 15:13 *Omnis plantacio quam non plantauit pater meus celestis eradicabitur* (REP II, 1079-1081; Hudson 2001, 1-143).

CUL/Add 5338/003
Cambridge University Library, Additional 5338/003 (73r-75v): *Dominica tercia. Euangelium*, Mt 11:7 *Quid existis uidere in desertum* (REP I, 8-10; Evans 1986, vol. 1, 150-163; vol. 2, 53-79).

Lond/Lamb/392/015
London, Lambeth Palace Library 392/015 (198v-202r): *Dominica iii quadrigesime*, Lc 11:14 *Erat Ihesus eiciens demonium* (REP II, 1560-1562; Evans 1986, vol. 1, 380-388, vol. 2, 358-376).

*Man/Engl. 109/006
Manchester, John Rylands University Library, English 109/006 (12r-14): *Dominica 5 post octavam penticostes*, I Pt 3:15 *Christum sanctificate in cordibus vestris* (REP III, 1063-1605).

*Longleat/ 4/036
Warminster, Longleat House 4/036 (74r-76r): *The Fyfthe Sonday aftyr* þe *Trynyte*, Lc 5:1 *Cum turbe uenereunt in Ihesum ut audirent uerbum dei et ipse stabat secus stagnum Genasareth* (REP IV, 2552-2554).

[8] On the distinction between *temporale* and *sanctorale* (i.e. *sermones de tempore* and *sermones de sanctis*), see Spencer 1993, 23-33. On the relatively small number of *sanctorale* sermons in Middle English production compared to *temporale* sermons, see O'Mara 1998, and, especially for those dedicated to the apostles, O'Mara 1997.

*Longleat/ 4/047
Warminster, Longleat House 4/047 (98r-100r): *The xvi Sonday afte* þe *Trinite*, Lc 7:11 *Ibat Ihesus in ciuitatem qui vocatur Naym* (ivi, 2573-2575).

In this paper, an attempt will be made to provide a preliminary analysis of how English preachers from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had transposed and reworked the plurality of negative aspects traditionally attributed to Simon Magus. Therefore, already published sermons will be treated, with particular attention to the *sanctorale* ones, while the analysis of texts not yet published will be postponed to a second phase of the research.

The extensive apocryphal material offers a limited reworking in the records investigated here: *De festo sancti Petri and Pauli apostolorum*, followed by *Denarracio de morte Neronis* in John Mirk's *Festial* 45, 46 and *Peter and Paull* in *Speculum sacerdotale* 46. Belonging to collections that include both *sanctorale* and *temporale* sermons, these texts show significant differences in the reworking of the narrative.

Festial, compiled between 1382 and 1390, together with two preaching manuals – *Instructions for Parish Priests* in vernacular (Kristensson 1974), and *Manuale Sacerdotis* in Latin (Girsch 1990) – resulted from a pedagogical project pursued by John Mirk, an Augustinian Canon animated by the desire to provide useful preaching tools for parish priests who were not particularly well-educated[9]. The main source for the commemoration of Peter and Paul is to be found in the hagiographies dedicated to the two saints in *Legenda Aurea* by Jacobus de Voragine (Powell 2009-2011, vol. 2, 287; Maggioni 2007, LXXXIV; LXXXV)[10].

In the sermon 45, after presenting the two martyrs with their main characterizing features (Powell 2009-2011, vol. 1,170-172, ll. 1-76), the narrative focuses on the confrontation with Simon Magus (ivi, 172-173, ll. 77-118), followed by the death of the apostles at Nero's behest (ivi, 173, ll. 119-131) and an *exemplum* concerning the consecration of St Peter's Church in Westminster (ivi, 173-174, ll. 132-161).

[9] Presumably, the sermons were intended to be delivered in the parish of St. Alkmund, Shrewsbury. Later on, Mirk became prior of Lilleshall Abbey, Shropshire. The success and wide circulation of this work during the following centuries are confirmed by several printed editions, starting with Caxton's edition of 1483, as well as by a remarkably rich manuscript tradition, which can be divided into two groups, conventionally referred to as *A* for those codices that probably bear a structure very close to that conceived by Mirk, and *B* for the texts belonging to a later revision. For a broader overview of the work, see Powell 2009-2011, vol. 1, xix-cxxvii, whose edition, based on Cotton Claudius A. ii, also includes quotations and references to the sermons under examination. An earlier edition by Erbe 1905 is based on Oxford, Bodleian Library, Gough Ecclesiastical Topography 4.

[10] As widely acknowledged, the fortune of this work in late medieval England is also documented in the collection *The Gilte Legende* of 1438, revised from a French translation (Hamer, Russell 2006-2012, vol. 3, 1-56), as well as in the translation published by Caxton in 1483 (Jeremy 1946; Ring 2017, 120-126).

The struggle between the apostle and the magician is entrusted to a few hinted or briefly narrated episodes.

Having arrived in Rome where he will serve as pope for 25 years, Peter converts many people to the Christian faith, while Simon Magus, backed by the devil, attempts to deceive and frighten people with evil tricks and lies that the apostle punctually unmasks, restoring the truth and undoing the damage done by the impostor:

> Þan wente Petur to Rome and was þer fyve and xx'ti' ȝeres pope, and turned muche pepul to criston fayth. Bot þan com þer a fendes lyme was called Symon Magus was so perfette in þe develes crafte þat he made men, somme blynde and some deff and downe, crokyd, halte and seke. So whatte for fere, whatte for wondyr, þe pepul leved mych in hym. Þan come Petur aftur and helud alle þoe þat Symon hyrte and badde þei schulde not leue on hym for he was fals and wroghte be þe fendes crafte alle þat he dudde. (Ivi, 172, ll. 77-84)

Simon then decides to use a vicious dog to attack and destroy Peter, as a reaction to the repeated humiliations inflicted upon him by the apostle (the latter had even managed to resurrect a dead man, revealing the failure of Simon's attempt), but Peter manages to neutralise the threat and reverse the situation. He blesses the dog and the animal turns against Simon:

> Þan was þys Symon so w[r]oth wyth Petur for he myght not han hys wylle forth for hym and namely for he myght not reysyn a dede body to lyve þat Petur reysed aftur hym, he teyhed a fende in lyknes of an hoged dogge þeras Petur schulde come, to han wyried Petur. But whan Petur hadde blessed hym and lette þis dogge lose, þe dogge anone lepp to Symon and pullyd hym down vndyr hys fette and wolde han wyried hym. Þan Petur badde: 'Nay, he schal do no harme to hys body', but he rent so hys clothes þat Symon ȝode nakyd away, and þan he schapyd alle þe wyse þat he coude to han Peter dedde. (*Ibidem*, ll. 84-93)

After this victory, during the night, Peter has a vision: Christ announces to him that Simon and Emperor Nero have decreed his death, and that Paul will join him to share his martyrdom (*ibidem*, ll. 94-98); Peter thanks Christ and chooses Clement as his successor; then, having welcomed Paul with joy, prays with him for the people (ivi, 173, ll. 98-103).

Meanwhile, Simon beguiles Nero, persuades him that he is the son of God, and announces that he will prove his divine nature by flying over the crowd at the Capitol:

> So þis mene whyyle Symond hadde so enscharmyd þe emperoure þat he leved on hym so þat he wende he hadde ben Goddys Sonne of heven. Þan sayde Simon to þe emperoure: 'Þer ben in þis cite too men of Galile –þe tone hatte Petur and þat othur hatthe Paule – þe wyche done me so myche desese þat I may not for dedeyne lyven no lengar in erthe. Wherefore commawnde alle men þat þei ben redy such a day at Capytolion, and þere in sygh of ham alle I wil flen into heven'. (Ivi, ll. 104-111)

In turn, Peter, prompted by Paul, orders the demons supporting the magician to let him fall and Simon Magus dies, crushing and snapping into several parts:

> So whan þe pepul was gedred, Symon ȝode vp into þe toure of Capytolion[11]. And whan he was þere, cam too fyndes lyke too angellys and setton on hys hedde a crowne of lorelle, and sone aftyr þei bere hym vp into þe eyre lyk he hadde flowun. Þan spake Petur to Poule: 'Poule, broþer, loke vp and see' [Þan sayde Poule to Petur:] 'It lyght to þe commaunde and me to praye'. Þan sayde Petur. 'I commande ȝow fendys þat beren þat man þat ȝe lowson ȝoure holde from hym'. And þan anone Symon fel downe and al to-braste on pesus. (*Ibidem*, ll. 111-118)

In his account, Mirk not only summarises and omits some episodes, compared to the version in *Legenda Aurea*, but also proposes a different sequence. Leaving aside the antecedent in Jerusalem (*LA* LXXXIV, 37-58), the action is set in Rome; the vision of Christ and the subsequent arrival of Paul do not occur as soon as Peter arrives in the city (Powell 2009-2011, vol. 1, 172-173, ll. 94-103; *LA* LXXXIV, 63-66), but between the incident with the dog (Powell 2009-2011, vol. 1, 172, ll. 84-93; *LA* LXXXIV, 124-132) and the final section (Powell 2009-2011, vol. 1, 173, ll. 104-118; *LA* LXXXIV, 134-147). Other confrontations and discussions between the apostles and Simon in the presence of Nero are omitted (*LA* LXXXIV, 83-105), and the association between the emperor and the magician is presented seamlessly; the magician's deceptions to appear trustworthy in the emperor's eyes are reduced to the essentials: being able to change his appearance is enough to demonstrate that he is indeed the son of God ("So þis mene whyyle Symond hadde so enscharmyd þe emperoure þat he leved on hym so þat he wende he hadde ben Goddys Sonne of heven", Powell 2009-2011, vol. 1, 173, ll. 104-106); while in *LA* Simon also stages a fake beheading before Nero (LXXXIV, 70-78), pretends to be ubiquitous (LXXXIV, 79-80) and is welcomed back to court a second time after being driven away from the city (LXXXIV, 132-133). This reworking, clearly tailored to the requirements of a sermon that was meant to retain the audience's attention, eliminates redundancies, avoids precise but superfluous contextualisations[12] and, at the same

[11] Powell writes: "Mirk's *toure of Capytolion* (ll. 111-112) is either a misunderstanding or a conflation of Jacobus' statement that he either went up a high tower or, according to Linus, ascended the Capitoline hill" (2009-2011, vol. 2, 389). Cf. "Statuto igitur die turrim excelsam uel, secundum Linum, Capitolium conscendit et inde se deiciens coronatus lauro uolare cepit" (*LA* LXXXIV, 135).

[12] For instance, the episode of the vicious dog tamed by Peter is presented as Simon's immediate reaction to a yet another humiliation he had suffered: the attempt to resurrect a dead man that had failed on the part of the magician and succeeded through the intervention of the saint. Even in *LA*, in the timeline of the story, this episode (LXXXIV, 106-123), precedes the other (LXXXIV, 124-132), but it is much broader in scope than the shortness of the two random sentences proposed by Mirk ("Þan was þys Symon so w[r]oth wyth Petur for he myght not han hys wylle forth for hym and namely for he myght not reysyn a dede body to lyve þat Petur reysed aftur hym", Powell 2009-2011, vol. 1, 172, ll. 84-87). In yet another dispute between the two, in front of a crowd ready to acclaim the winner and stone

time, allows the two main contenders to be placed at the centre of the tale and symmetrically flanked, only in the final section, by the two supporting figures: Paul for Peter and Nero for Simon, while other characters such as Marcellus or Prefect Agrippa are completely excluded.

Another relevant fact is the threatening wickedness of Simon's magic that affects the bodies of others with various kinds of infirmities – deafness, blindness, paralysis, etc. Generally speaking, in the main texts of the apocryphal tradition, the confrontation between Simon Magus and Peter tends to highlight the uselessness of the magical prodigies performed by the former against the comforting benefit of the miracles performed by the latter. In *Passio*, while Simon impresses the crowd with foolish wonders such as making stone statues laugh[13], the apostle heals the sick and restores life to the dead[14]; similar are the

the loser, Simon, through his spells, makes the head of a corpse move (*LA* LXXXIV, 109), while Peter, having clarified that it is "plene figmenta dyaboli" (*LA* LXXXIV, 113) because the dead man does not get up and walk, performs the true resurrection (*LA* LXXXIV, 115-117) and, magnanimously, asks the onlookers not to rage against the loser (*LA* LXXXIV, 118-120). Then Simon goes to the house of Marcellus, Peter's disciple, and ties a huge dog to the door ("Tunc Symon […] iuit ad domum Marcelli discipuli eius ligauitque maximum canem ad ostium domus eius", *LA* LXXXIV, 124). In the sermon, however, the episode of the dog acquires a different significance, somehow framing the episode of the resurrection, while Simon's fury, *wroth*, marks the causal succession of the two events and seems to anticipate the ferocity of this demonic animal ("a fende in lyknes of an hoged dogge", Powell 2009-2011, vol. 1, 172, l. 87). With the location of Marcellus' house omitted, the narrative then repeats the central elements of the tradition: Peter cancels the threat, blessing the animal and setting it free, and the dog, without any further indication, immediately understands that Simon is the enemy, the one against whom he should turn his fury; the saint, however, breaks the reversal of the situation and bids the animal not to injure Simon: the dog therefore only tears his clothes ("þan Petur badde: 'nay, he schal do no harme to hys body', but he rent so hys clothes þat Symon ȝode nakyd away", *ibidem*, ll. 91-92, so also: "Accurrens autem Petrus cani clamauit ne ei noceret et canis quidem corpus eius non lesit, se adeo lacerauit ut ille nudus penitu remaneret", *LA* LXXXIV, 129); therefore, the episode ends with the ignominious escape of the naked Simon as well as with Peter's acclaimed triumph. In *LA*, both confrontations are punctuated by the exemplary behaviour of Peter who, despite his victory, declares that he does not want to rage against his hideous adversary, in the first case directly recalling Christ's teachings and the invitation to overcome the Mosaic law of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" cf. Mt 5:38-52 or Lc 6:27-31 ("Satis est illi ad penam quod agnoscit se in suis artibus superatum. Magister autem noster nos docuit ut pro malis bona reddamus", *LA* LXXXIV, 119-120); Mirk chooses, however, to dwell more comfortably on the second episode, perhaps because the grotesque dynamism of the scene in which Simon runs away naked proposed a punishment with even hilarious overtones, evidently effective in keeping the audience's attention. For a more detailed analysis of this episode in late antique and medieval sources, see also Ferreiro 2005, 187-194.

[13] Cf. "faciebat enim serpentem aereum mouere se, et lapideas statuas et aereas ridere et mouere, se ipsum autem currere et subito in aëre uideri" (*Passio* ch. 11).

[14] Cf. "Contra haec Petrus infirmos curabat uerbo, caecos uidere faciebat orando, daemonia iussu fugabat, interea et ipsos mortuos suscitabat" (*Passio* ch. 12). In *Recognitiones*, Peter himself clarifies the difference "Nam dic, quaeso, quae utilitas est ostendere statuas ambulantes, latrare aereos aut lapideos canes, salire montes, volare per aerem, et alia his similia, quae dicitis fecisse Simonem? Quae autem a bono sunt, ad hominum salutem deferuntur, ut

prodigies that Simon performs in Jerusalem in *LA* ("Serpens quoque eneos faciebat mouere, statuas eneas et lapideas ridere et canes cantare", LXXXIV, 43), where later, defeated and unmasked by the apostle ("Contra hunc igitur Petrus disputabat et omnia eius meleficia detegebat", LXXXIV, 57), he throws the books of magic into the sea to avoid being identified as a magician and flees to Rome (LXXXIV, 58)[15]. In this case, on the other hand, Simon represents an indistinct threat to those who run into him, and many are prepared to believe in his powers out of fear, *fere*, not only out of amazement, *wondyr* (Powell 2009-2011, vol. 1, 172, l. 81), as something extraordinary that goes beyond the sphere of the tangible; his figure takes on the features of an imponderable wickedness, far removed from the sloppiness of a magician who makes inanimate objects move or is able to fly. The opposition evil *vs* good appears even more persuasive, and the link between the behaviour of the two takes on the characteristic of consequentiality; beyond the contrast between useless and useful, in relation to Simon's actions, Peter's actions become contingent, necessary: the apostle must heal, repair the damage done by the magician.

Finally, while in general Simon's magic is clearly inspired and supported by the devil[16], in our sermon this proximity is openly expressed several times. The character is immediately presented as "fendes lyme", "follower or agent of the devil"[17] and it is stated that he operates "þe develes crafte" (*ibidem*, l. 79), "þe fendes crafte" (*ibidem*, l. 84), synonymic locutions which indicate "magical abilities" intended as "devilish artifices"[18]; the animal that is supposed to attack

sunt illa quae fecit dominus noster, qui caecos videre fecit, surdos audire, debiles [et] claudos erexit, languores et daemones effugavit, mortuos fecit resurgere, et alia his similia quae etiam per me fieri videtis" (Rehm, Strecker 1994, 3, 60).

15 It is worth noticing that, in *ActusP,* Simon is able to bring about death by speaking into the victim's ear ("et continuo Simon ad aurem pueri locutus est sine uoce fecit tacere et mori" ch. 25); and yet, this is a single episode fostered by a third party: the prefect, in order to establish who is the stronger among the two contenders, orders Simon to make a slave die so that Peter can resurrect him.

16 For example, Augustine refers to Simon as a "figura diaboli" ("Petrum etiam, inquit, apostolorum caput, caeli ianitor et ecclesiae fundamentum, extincto Simone, qui fuerat diaboli […]. magus Simon figura erat diaboli", *Epistula* XXXVI, 21, Daur 2004); in *LA*, Peter claims that the magician is both human and diabolical ("Addiditque Petrus quod sicut in Christo sunt due substantie, scilicet dei et hominis, sic et in isto mago sunt due substantie, scilicet hominis et dyaboli", LXXXIV, 82), according to what has already been reported in *Passio* ch. 22.

17 More precisely, in *MED,* for the noun *lim* (4), we read: "A Christian or good man considered as a member of the body of Christ; cristes ~, ~ of crist (holi chirche, the regne of god); also, by analogy, a follower or agent of the devil, a heathen, a sinner; antecristes ~, develes ~, fendes ~, ~ of satanas (antecrist, the fend)". With Spencer, it is also interesting to observe how this construction is similarly recurrent in Wycliffian texts, although *Festial* is not ascribable to Lollard production (1993, 294, 480-481, n. 77). Powell, appropriately observes that the didactic attention for a rather uneducated audience seems to set the orthodox Mirk above the controversies against the Lollards, even though his texts were later used to support orthodox thesis (2009-2011, vol. 1, xliii). On this subject, see also Fletcher 1987.

18 Cf. *MED* s.v. *craft* 3c.

Simon is in fact a demon given the appearance of a ferocious dog "a fende in lyknes of an hoged dogge" (*ibidem*, l. 87), whereas in *LA* it is more simply a "maximum canem" (LXXXIV, 124). Moreover, whereas in *LA* the fact that the demons are the ones who support Simon's flight is made explicit only by Peter's prayer[19], in the sermon the demons appear already at the beginning of the scene; taking on the appearance of angels, they crown him with laurel before the flight "too fyndes lyke too angellys and setton on hys hedde a crowne of lorelle, and sone aftyr" (Powell 2009-2011, vol. 1, 173, ll. 112-113)[20]. By immediately defining the function of the demons, the mechanism that makes the flight possible is immediately revealed: what to the crowd might appear an extraordinary prodigy is actually declared to be a mere illusion of the devil. The rendering of the flight is also entrusted to the adverb *lyke*: "and sone aftyr þei bere hym vp into þe eyre lyk as he hadde flowun" (*ibidem*, ll. 113-114).

Thus, the emphasis on the constant presence of the devil also serves to outline the context of mendacity, of fake reality in which Simon acts, already defined *fals* (ivi, 172, l. 83) at the beginning of the narration; like the devil, this character has the disturbing, unsettling ability to give the visible a falsely true appearance.

In reworking the narrative material, Mirk seems to be driven, above all, by the pressing need to invite the believers to look beyond the deceptive appearance of the tangible, to recognise and avoid the devil's deceptions.

The character of Simon Magus also appears in *Denarracio de morte Neronis*, a sermon that, in some codices of *Festial* (group A) is inserted after the one dedicated to Peter and Paul. Probably unrelated to Mirk's original structure[21], the text further reworks some material of *LA* (Powell 2009-2011, vol. 2, 390; *LA* LXXXIV, 212-250), in which, however, the vile actions that lead Nero to his death are included as a digression in the hagiography dedicated to Peter[22]. The textual autonomy granted in *Festial* to these wicked deeds of the emperor imposes a different reorganisation of the narrative and, unlike *LA*, offers Simon Magus a rather significant space.

After admonishing the parish priests to avoid, in their sermons, unhealthy matters that might poison the audience's souls (Powell 2009-2011, vol. 1, 174-175, ll. 1-19), with a related *exemplum* (ivi, 175, ll. 20-31), Nero is presented as an exemplification of those who are unable to recognise grace and salvation in

[19] Cf. "Adiuro uos, angeli Sathane, qui eum in aera feratis, per dominum nostrum Ihesum Christum ut ipsum amplius non fertis, sed correre dimitatis" (*LA* LXXXIV, 146); the account is similar in *Passio* ch. 55.

[20] In *LA*, on the other hand, Simon's flight apparently starts autonomously: "Statuto igitur die turrim excelsam uel, secundum Linum, Capitolium conscendit et inde se deiciens coronatus lauro uolare cepit" (LXXXIV, 135); so also in *Passio*: "Tunc ascendit Simon in turrim coram omnibus, et extensis manibus coronatus lauro coepit uolare" (ch. 54).

[21] Thus Powell, who assesses it as "either as a long *narratio* to be added to the sermon for the feast-day of SS Peter and Paul or as part of the sermon itself" (2009-2011, vol. 1, xxix-xxx).

[22] In *LA* the story is introduced by noting: "Quorum scelerum aliqua hic bruiter inseramus" (LXXXIV, 211).

the Christian word (ivi, 174, ll. 1-5 and 175, ll. 32-34) and Simon Magus appears as the primary author of this miscalculation:

> Þus was þis emperoure Nero preched and taght be Petur and Paule. Bot for he sette not be here lore, God suffred Symon Magus so betraylon and encharmyn hym þat he loste hys kynde wytte þat God ȝaf hym, and ȝaf hym alle to foly aftur, and lafte it neure til he was vndone þerfore, and how ȝe schul here. (*Ibidem*, ll. 34-39)

Introduced by the formulaic phrase "and how ȝe schul here" (*ibidem*, l. 39), there follows an account of the many horrors committed by Nero until his deserved demise (ivi, 175-177, ll. 40-92). Then there are the gruesome deaths, "foule ende", of other terrible sinners: Herod, responsible for the massacre of the innocents (ivi, 177, ll. 93-95); Pontius Pilate who condemned Christ (*ibidem*, ll. 95-97); all those who persecuted the apostles (*ibidem*, ll. 95-99), up to the unfortunate flight of Simon Magus:

> Þer Symon Magus for he betryled þe pepul to holdon hym an holy man and to belyven in him, for þe heygh pride þat he was inne he fel doune not only to þe erthe bot depe into helle. (*Ibidem*, ll. 99-102)

The ignominious death of the one who at the beginning is indicated as the inspirer – and so the indirect perpetrator – of the emperor's wickedness, closes the list of famous departures, leaving room for an *exemplum* taken from *Vitas Patrum* (*ibidem*, ll. 105-145) that concludes the sermon, illustrating the departure of the soul from the body.

The twofold reference to Simon Magus seems to frame the succession of Nero's crimes; addressing an audience familiar with the story, the preacher uses it effortlessly both at the beginning of the narration and in the final examples; he interweaves it with that of Nero, recalling in a few lines the essential elements: antagonist of Peter and Paul, he deceives and enchants the emperor – "betraylon and encharmyn him" (ivi, 175, ll. 36-37) –, deceives the people and induces them to believe in his holiness – "he betryled þe pepul to holdon hym an holy man and to belyven in him" (ivi, 177, l. 100) –; victim of his pride, falls from above and lands in Hell. Alluding to the flight just to mention the fall, the spatial contrast between the height of his pride, "þe heyȝh pride" (*ibidem*, l. 101), and the depth of the infernal abyss into which he plunges "depe into helle" (*ibidem*, l. 102), though obvious[23], even in referring indirectly to the pride of Lucifer and the rebel angels, sums up in an extremely effective way the story of this charac-

[23] Ælfric had already proposed it: "petres geþyld geþafode þæt ða hellican fynd hine up geond þa lyft sume hwile feredon þæt he on his fylle þe hetelicor hreosan sceolde; 7 se þe lytle ær beotlice mid deoflicum fiþerhaman fleon wolde þæt he ða færlice his feþe forlure; Him gedafenode þæt he on heannysse ahafen wurde. þæt he on gesihðe ealles folces hreosende þa eorðan gesohte" (CH I, XXVI ll. 244-249). Trans: "Peter's patience allowed the hellish fiends to bear him somewhile up through the air, that in his fall he might descend the more violently; and that he, who menacingly a little before would fly with devilish wings, might

ter: a dangerous charlatan who acts by deceiving others, professing a false privileged closeness to God only to be unmasked and defeated in a definitive and exemplary manner.

Finally, the short sermon *Peter and Paull* from *Speculum sacerdotale* (Weatherly 1936) mainly focuses on the martyrdom of the two apostles. The entire collection could be considered a kind of compendium from which the preachers would have selected useful material, rather than as a sequence of texts conceived for direct preaching; this hypothesis is based both on the absence of formulas that would refer to the rhetoric of speech, and on the repetition of certain topics[24]. In fact, the narrative is constructed through quick brush strokes, and seems to respond to the urgency of recording information, signalling elements to be developed at a later date, rather than to the demands of a linear narrative.

The two references to Simon Magus emphasise the causal connection between the magician's actions and the death of the apostles. Having contextualised the killing of Peter and Paul on the same day (Weatherly 1936, 168, ll. 29-35), in the succession of rapid news about Peter's life, his arrival in Rome is justified by the need to confront Simon Magus:

> Symon Peter, the sone of Iohn of the prouince of Galile [...] after the bisshopriche of Antioche by vii. yere prechid in Ponto, Galathia, Asia, Capadocia, *and* Bitinia. And for ou*er*comen a wycche namyd Symon Magus he ȝede to Rome, and there he dwellyd pope xxv. yere *and* there he was crucified by Nero for the feithe of Crist with his hed do[w]nward to the erþe and his feet vpward, saiyng*e* he was vnworthi to be crucifed as his lord God. (*Ibidem*, ll. 36 and 169, ll. 1-8)

It is worth mentioning that the information partly takes up a passage from *LA* that Jacobus, in turn, quotes from Isidore[25]. Hence, when describing Paul's martyrdom (*ibidem*, ll. 8-11), we are reminded that Nero's hostility towards the apostles was triggered by the death of Simon Magus, who fell to the ground:

suddenly lose his footing. It was befitting him to be raised up on high, that, in the sight of all the people, falling down, he might seek the earth" (Thorpe 1844, 381).

[24] More precisely, the seventy chapters of *Speculum sacerdotale* include, as in *Festial*, *temporale* and *sanctorale* sermons, alongside some sermons intended for Lent and theoretical-practical instructions concerning penance (ch. 22 and 23); it survives in a unique codex, BL/Add 36791, and is considered a translation from a Latin model, probably very close to the collection contained in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlison A. 362 (Spencer 1993, 22, 365 n. 8; O' Mara 1998, 261). As regard the structure of the sermons, Fletcher observes: "*Speculum sacerdotale* [...] contains for the greater part themeless sermons which owe almost nothing to modern form, and in which exempla feature prominently" (1989, 26). References and quotations are from the critical edition of Weatherly 1936.

[25] Cf. "Ysidorus in libro de ortu et obitu sanctorum sic ait Petrus postquam Antiochenam fundauit ecclesiam sub Claudio cesare contra Symonem magum Romam pergit ibique predicans euangelium XXV annis eiusdem urbis pontificatuum tenuit. Tricesimo sexto autem anno a passione domini a Nerone deorsum ut ipse uoluit, crucifixus est.' Hec Ysidorus" (*LA* LXXXIV, 203-205). The reference is to *Liber de ortu et obitu sanctorum* 67,4-5 (Isidoro de Sevilla 1985).

> But he [Poule] was hedyd in the same day that Peter was crucified and that for this cause, *scilicet*, for they cast down Symon Magus as he fley in the eyre. For this Simon Magus callyd hym the sone of God, and he seide he wold as sone of God ascende vp as to his fader. And in dede he was reysid vp þrouȝ wicchecraft and began to fle and go vpward. Then Peter beholdynge this knelyd down[26] and made a prayere to God, and when his prayere was made, Simon Magus felle downe and brake his thies and dyede. *And* they that flowe with hym faylis schame-fully *and* fowly. And Nero seeynge þat this man was thus loste, he sorowyd *and* seide to the apostles: 'ȝe haue done to me suspectly, and þerfore I schall nowe destroye you'. (*Ibidem*, ll. 12-24)[27]

Therefore, the scene of the flight serves to explain the death of Peter and Paul and is introduced by a reason clause that mentions first the fall and then the final outcome – "for they cast down Symon Magus as he fley in the eyre" (*ibidem*, ll. 14-15) – in an inverted temporal succession. The account of the events excludes topographical indications, references to the attending audience – the crowd, Nero or Paul – as well as any manifest involvement of the demons. However, the fundamental facts are present: Simon's claim to be the son of God, his use of magic to fly, and then Peter's prayer that interrupts the flight and causes Simon's death. The *Speculum* sermon leaves out the various confrontations that help unfolding the tale and chooses to simply mention the beginning of the story and then dwell on the end, re-proposed in its essence: the victory of faith over magic, the triumph of Peter's *prayere* (*ibidem*, l. 19) over Simon's *wicchecraft* (*ibidem*, l. 17). Compared to the *Festial* sermon, Simon's connection with the devil is not made explicit here, while magic is identified as an infamous and negative aspect of the character; the apostle's antagonist is already presented in the first quotation as "a wycche namyd Symon Magus" (*ibidem*, l. 4), perhaps also for those who were not aware of the meaning of the Latin word and considered the designation of *Magus* as part of the name, thus desemantised as compared to the original etymology[28].

In an overall assessment, these three examples seem to indicate how the timing and rhythm of the sermon do not allow for lingering on overly rich and articulate narrations. The reworking calls for identifying and proposing only the essential elements of a story known to the believers. Overlooking the fascination of a narrative that also tends towards the fantastic and marvellous element, the focus is on the edifying and didactic value of the *fabula*. Hence the perverse, deceitful and demonic nature of Simon is highlighted (*Festial* 45); his magic is

[26] The act of kneeling is not mentioned in *LA*; in the apocryphal tradition the act is attributed to Paul, e.g.: "Paulus ad Petrum dixit: Meum est genibus positis deum exorare […] et positis genibus orabat Paulus" (*Passio* ch. 56).

[27] The sermon ends with an additional reference to the martyrdom and the account of the burial with references to the places where the relics of the two saints are kept (Wheaterly 1936, 169, ll. 25-39, 170, ll. 1-5).

[28] In Old English documentation, however, the Latin term *magus* is usually translated with the corresponding noun *dry*.

indirectly hinted at as the cause of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul (*Speculum* 46) and even in the account of Nero's death, Simon Magus seems to inspire the execrable acts performed by the emperor (*Festial* 46). But above all, even in the different choices employed for the reworking, the three sermons always present the parable of an arrogant impostor who evades the truth of doctrine in order to self-affirm as another divinity: Simon's grotesque and ignominious fall seals Peter's definitive supremacy[29]; the martyrdom that Nero will inflict on the apostles as a consequence of this event gloriously concludes the earthly life of the two saints, celebrating their work. The flight scene appears therefore inescapable because it expresses the absolute condemnation of any form of insubordination to the church, forms that seem to lead from diabolical magic to heresy.

A further reference to Simon Magus, again drawn from the hagiographic tradition, is in an *exemplum* reworked from the life of St Clement and included in *Jacob's Well*, ch. 56 *De ieiunio et delectatione et continencia coniugalis* (Atchley 1998, 123-126)[30]. The character is referred to as a master of falsehood by Faustus and Faustinus, the saint's brothers, who soon realise their error and abandon him to follow Peter:

> we wer[e] born on borde of þe schypp & seld[e] to an honest wydewe clepyd *Iustyne*. sche sende vs to scole & after we were w[yth] *Symon magus* and we seyn his falsness[e]. we fledde fro hym to seynt *Petyr.* (Ivi, 125)[31]

In cases where only very brief references are dedicated to Simon Magus, they mainly refer to the episode in Act 8: 9-24 rather than to the apocryphal tradition. His magical abilities are not explicitly mentioned; they remain in the background, as an echo in his Latin name for those able to recognise it, as well as in the portrayal of a character inclined to boast of roles and powers that do not belong to him.

[29] Appropriately, O'Mara notes that, in many sermons dedicated to the apostles, they "are forced into vindicating themselves and the truth of their mission by performing miracles in such a way as to outclass their pagan opponents" (1997, 158).

[30] Founded in a unique mid-fifteenth century manuscript, Salisbury 103, the *Jacob's Well* is supposed to have been written in the early fifteenth century by a clergyman, maybe a priest, in the form of a long 'traditional' sermon. Probably "it is one of those vernacular works of popular religious instruction written mainly for preachers and teachers, but which could as so be used by lay people preparing for confession" (Carruthers 1998, 219); it consists of 95 chapters arranged according to an allegorical structure that echoes the image of Jacob's well in the parable of the Samaritan woman (Io 4:6): the muddy water must be progressively purified through various actions until it becomes completely clear, i.e., transformed into the saving water of grace. For a broader presentation of the text, see Brandeis 1900, 5-13; Carruthers 1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1998; Atchley 1998, 1-66, including hypotheses regarding the liturgical period for which the sermons were intended and the type of audience to whom they were addressed. On the distinction between traditional and modern sermons, see among others Murphy 1974, 303-355 and Spencer 1993, 228-247.

[31] See the corresponding passage in *LA*: "Tandem philosophie operam dedimus et Symoni cuidam mago nobiscum educato adhesimus. Cumque eis fallaciam cognouissemus ipsum omnino dereuimus et Petri discipuli per Zacheum effecti sumus" (CLXVI, 89-90).

Thus, in Thomas Wimbledon's long text, *Redde racionem villicacionis tue* (Knight 1967)[32], presumably compiled in 1387, Simon Magus is referred to as an impostor. Like Judas among the apostles, Simon blends in among Christ's disciples without being one, and is therefore an emblematic representative of those who hold an office without having the right to it, without being capable of doing it, without honouring it[33]:

> To swiche spekeþ þe p*r*ophete Ysaye: "Hoo art þ*o*u her*e*, or as who art þ*o*u here?" Here þ*o*u art ocupienge þe place of Petir, o þ*er* of Poul, o þ*er* of Thom*a*s, o þ*er* of Martyn. But how? As Judas was among þe apostelis, as Symound Magus was amonge disciplis. (Knight 1967, 79, ll. 290-294)

Elsewhere, he is mentioned in reference to simony and is often accompanied by the Old Testament character Gehazi, servant of prophet Elisha (IV Rg 5:1-27) in a typological parallel widely exploited in medieval exegesis[34].

In another sermon from *Jacob's Well*, ch. 19 *De cupiditate* (Brandeis 1900, 126-133), in the section dedicated to the deadly sins[35] Simon Magus is referred to as the initiator of this practice, as already reported in Act 8, 18:

[32] The Knight's edition proposes the text based on Cam/Corpus 357 and collected with other copies; cf. also Owen 1966, while the earlier edition of Sundén 1925 is based on Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 57.

[33] The sermon offers an extensive discussion on how to prepare for the Last Judgement. Following, rather precisely, the form of the "modern" sermon, Wimbledon presents the traditional division of medieval society into three classes, listing the tasks and duties of each in order to denounce the various abuses committed by each class and exhort repentance in the imminence of the end of the world. Three fundamental questions are posed to each class: "how hast þ*o*u entr*e*d?", "how hast þ*o*u r*e*ulid?", "how hast þ*o*u lyuyd?" (Knight 1967, 70, ll. 146-147). In particular, the quoted passage is introduced by the third question posed to the clergymen. Wimbledon laments their corruption, the fondness for worldly pleasures of the ecclesiastical hierarchies, as well as the lack of a true spiritual vocation evident in so many religious ministers. On the wording and context in which the sermon was drafted and presented, as well as its subsequent fortune and manuscript tradition, see Knight 1967, 1-53; Horner 1998, 263-265; Walsham 2007; O'Mara 2010.

[34] It is worth recalling that Gehazi is the servant of prophet Elisha who, through deceit, requests and receives from Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, the gifts that the latter had offered to the prophet in gratitude for being healed of leprosy. Elisha therefore curses the servant, who will be struck with leprosy forever along with his lineage: the physical punishment clearly evokes the spiritual sin, as Gehazi is consumed by the leprosy of greed and avarice. On this topic, see among others Horner 1965; Brodie 1986.

[35] More precisely, in the complex structure of the work, the seven deadly sins are each presented according to specific aspects that shape them (ch. XI-XXIV). Three chapters are specifically dedicated to greed (ch. 18-20), in which, according to a complex spatial metaphor, the sin is broken down into three parts,"thre sqware": (1) covetous desire, (2) avarice and (3) greediness. Moreover, as outlined in REP IV, 2307: "These three squares are thirteen feet broad: (1) idolatry, (2) ambition, (3) niggardliness (4) treason, (5) usury, (6) simony, (7) theft, (8) sacrilege, (9) false litigation, (10) wickedness, (11) dishonest trading, (12) 'craft of foly', (13) 'foly play' ". The presentation of the 13 feet is divided as follows: ch. 18, 1-5; ch. 19, 6-10, ch. 20, 11-13. The simony is mentioned as the sixth foot which is six inches thick.

> Symon mag*us* began þis symonye. Act*a* viij. c°. […] Gyezi, þe seruau*n*t of helyse þe p*ro*phete, was a mesell, for he took swiche ȝiftes. iij R*egum* V. (Brandeis 1900, 127, ll. 30-33)

Even in some sermons belonging to the Lollard production, the vigorous stigmatisation of simony significantly involves the figure of its eponymous 'founder'.

In a long anonymous sermon published by Hudson, *Omnis planctatio quam non plantauit pater meus celestis eradicabitur* (Mt 15:13)[36], Simon Magus is mentioned several times when the preacher explains what simony means, stigmatising those clergymen who hold important offices but always perform their duties improperly, inadequately, and claim to exercise powers they do not have or have not obtained according to fair procedures (Hudson 2001, 78-86, ll. 1688-1825). The discussion proceeds by means of illustrative references that interweave above all the story of the donation and relative concessions bestowed by Emperor Constantine to Pope Silvester[37] and the biblical episode involving Elisha, Namaan and Gehazi, alongside brief quotations of other characters from the Holy Scriptures, among whom Simon Magus appears several times. The vehement condemnation of clergy who engage in and justify simony thus contextualises the current situation, creating a sense of temporal continuity with events from the Holy Scriptures as well as with later historical episodes.

In particular, in addition to the parallelism with Gehazi, the impostor is here placed next to Judas, the traitor *par excellence*, the one who pretends to be close to Christ in order to secretly betray him for money:

> And what bi Giezi and bi Balaam, what bi Iudas and Symon Magus, þat weren symonyans acursid of God and ysmytun wiþ Goddis veniaunce, what bi many fair euydencis of scripture and resoun þat such a man ouȝte to haue had, he hadde many grete warnyngis of hidousnesse and peril of þis synne ouer þat hise predecessours hadden; and al þis aggreggide his synne. (Ivi, 80-82, ll. 1737-1743)

He is therefore presented as an actor in the sin of simony that is intended to be justified:

[36] Beginning with the verse from Matthew, the long sermon addresses a number of topics peculiar to Wycliffian circles, focusing particularly on the heresies of the new sects, the danger of idolatry in the veneration of saints, as well as on simoniacal practices and the various ways in which clergy steal from the church, adopting dishonest attitudes toward the faithful. For a presentation of the manuscript tradition as well as for further information and hypotheses on the redaction, contextualisation and use of the text cf. Hudson 2001, xv-lxvi. The scholar proposes the edition based on BL/Egerton 2820, in parallel with the treatise *Fundamentum aliud nemo potest ponere*, transmitted in London, Lambeth Palace Library 551, postulating that the two texts could be attributed to the same hand on account of the close correspondence of the arguments.

[37] The relationship between Constantine and Sylvester, also recounted in *LA* XII, 27-68, seems to be a recurring theme in both Wycliffe's writings and those of his followers (Hudson 2001, 270).

> For I haue knowe þat þo þat han had þe name of riȝt grete clerkis han bisied hem to excuse Symon Magus as giltles of þis synne, for koude þei neuere se hou þei myȝte haue ony rest wiþ her conscience if Symon Magus shulde be dampned, for he wende wickidli þe ȝifte of God to be had bi monei, and þei knewe wel þat þe more part of þe clergie doiþ more þan þis. (Ivi, 82, ll. 1768-1773)

and as the one who was damned by Peter for this sin; in this occurrence the simoniacs are also referred to as "heretics" and "false", two characteristics that generally accompany the characterisation of Simon Magus:

> And wondre þou not, alþouȝ couetouse clerkis encumbrid in þis synne, þat ben redi to dampne hooli scripture as for fals and heresie, dampne þe sentence of synt Petir demynge Symon Magus worþi to be dampned for þis dede. For it were a ful greet ese for her encumbrid conscience and Symon Magus myȝte be excusid here. (*Ibidem*, ll. 1776-1780)

In a sermon dedicated to the third Sunday of Advent, *Quid existis uidere in desertum* (Mt 11:7), the Simon who in *Act* asks Peter to acquire the gifts of the Holy Spirit with money is compared to the greedy Old Testament Gehazi. This is a text belonging to an anonymous *temporale* collection (Evans 1986)[38] which, compiled in the Lollardian milieu, employs material from the Wycliffian sermon group[39], alongside translations of large sections of *Sermones moralissimi* of Nicholas de Aqueville, a Franciscan preacher active in the late thirteenth century (Odelman 2018).

Simony is presented as one of the seven ways, *manyeris*, through which the believer can stray from God to follow the devil (Evans 1986, vol. 1, 160-161, ll. 152-173; Odelman 2018, 40, ll. 95-108)[40].

The argument is first exemplified by the episode of Gehazi, narrated in a rather detailed manner:

> Also on þe sexthe maner sum wendyn owt by symony, and so ȝede owt Geyȝy, Eleyeys seruawnt, þat ran after Naaman Sirus, þe wech Elisee his lord had helyd hym of hys lepre, and tok of hym too talentis of syluer and dubbyl cloting. And

[38] It is worth noting that the edition includes twenty-three temporal sermons contained in CUL/Add 5338 and Lond/Lamb/392. The two manuscripts share ten sermons, including the *Quid existis uidere in desertum*, which Evans presents *en face*. Since the sermon is preserved in whole in CUL/Add 5338, the quotations follow this manuscript.

[39] For a broader presentation of the collection, see Evans 1986, vol. 1, 11-132, as well as Spencer 1993, 279-285 with specific reference to the manuscript tradition, and Hudson 1983, 109-110 for the relationship to Wycliffian sources.

[40] More precisely, the *manyeris* are, following the source: *superbia = pryde*, *inobedentia = vnbuxumnesse*, *invidia = enuye*, *luxuria = lecherie*, *idolatria = idolatrie*, *simonia = symony*, *avaricia et cupiditas = auarice*. Simony is placed between idolatry, which is closely linked to magic or a series of deviant practices to be condemned (Evans 1986, vol. 1, 156-160, ll. 101-151, 40, ll. 82-94), and avarice (ivi, 162, ll. 174-188, 42, ll. 116-123), whose exemplary representative is Judas.

> þerfore he ȝeede owt from Elye ful of mesylrye, [as whiȝt] as snowe, ffor at þe preyere of hys lord þe mesylrye feel to hym and to al hys sed for euyr. (Evans 1986, vol. 1, 160, ll. 152-158)

it then proceeds to expand the source with a heated invective against the corruption of the church, according to the Lollard perspective[41]:

> Be Gyesy bene coueytows popus and cardinalys, alle beschopys, prelatys, personys and prestys vndirstonden, þat bene coueteows, and þe symonyentes, þat sellyn beneficys to þe byschopys for þe furst fruytys and to oþer lower [men], for mony, for seruyse, or for preyere, and þat sellen ordres, weddyngys, schryftys, absolucions, indulgence, pardon, or ony of þe seuene sacramentys, ffor [halw] yng of cherchys, of auterys, or ony oþer goostly thyng, as for massys seying or for Godys word prechyng, thorw þe weche hele of sowle is getyn. Alle these wendyn owt of þe seruyse and þe companye of God into þe seruyse of þe deuyl thorwe symonye, and ben acursyd erytykys and antecrystys clerkys a[nd] sty[n]kyng mesellys befor God and his angelys. (*Ibidem*, ll. 158-171)

and it ends with a reference to Simon Magus and his foolish request to Peter: "And so ȝede Symon Magus owt, þat wolde bowȝt þe Holy Goost of þe apostolys" (ivi, 160-162, ll. 171-173).

As in the Wimbledon's text, the simoniacs are associated with heretics.

Finally, in another sermon of the same collection dedicated to the third Sunday of Lent, *Erat Ihesus eiciens demonium* (Lc 11:14), simony is once again mentioned and presented, in this case, as one of the four ways in which the devil makes men sinners, blind and deaf (Evans 1986, vol. 1, 380-388; vol. 2, 358-376)[42]. As in the source[43], here the sin is connected with greed or avarice, and the

[41] See the passage: "Sexto alii exeunt per simoniam, sicut exiuit Giesi, seruus Helisei, qui cucurrit post Naaman Syrum, quem Heliseus, dominus suus, curauerat a lepra sua, et accepit abeo duo talenta argenti et duplicia uestimenta, ut habetur IIII Re. V, et dicitur quod *egressus est ab eo*, scilicet, ab Heliseo (qui interpretatur Deus meus), *leprosus* fuit *quasi nix*, quia *lepra Naaman adhesit* ei *et semini* suo *in sempiternum*. Per Giesi signatur miseri sacerdotes symoniaci, qui uendunt confessiones hominibus et benedictiones et sacramenta ecclesie, quibus acquiritur sanitas anime et corporis. Aliquando isti exeunt a uero Heliseo, id est consortio Christi, qui est Deus noster, tamquam leprosi quia fetidi sunt coram Domino et angelis eius odiosi. Similiter ita exiuit Symon magus, qui uoluit emere Spiritum sanctum ab apostolis ut uenderet ipsum, ut habetur Actuum VIII." (Odelman 2018, 40, ll. 95-108). It should be noted how the circumscribed reference to "miseri sacerdotes symoniaci" is amplified in the sermon into more categories to stigmatise, while the further reference to Elisha is eliminated to include other categories of outcasts, notably "eretykys and antecrystys clerkys". Interestingly, this sermon also forms the basis of other Middle English reworkings, cf. Spencer 1993, 251-255, 347-351.

[42] In this case the sermon, absent from CUL/Add 5338, is edited from Lond/Lamb/392.

[43] See the correspondent passage: "Tercium est symonie, uel cupiditatis et auaricie. Isto occupatus fuit Ananias et uxor eius quoniam unam partem de precio agri sui, quem uendiderant retinuerunt, ut habetur· Actuum V. Similiter isto demone repletus fuit Simon magus, qui uolebat emere Spiritum sanctum de pecunia a beato Petro, ut posset eum uendere, cum uellet, ut habetur Actuum VIII: Et *dixit* ei *Petrus*: *Pecunia tua tecum sit in perditionem*" (Odelman 2018, 192, ll. 95-101).

character is found side by side with Ananias and Sapphira, figures of the New Testament who exemplify the sin of greed, cupidity, which is also closely connected with simoniacal practices[44]:

> Þe þridde fend is þe spirit of symony, of coueitise or of auarice, and wiþ þis wern Ananye and Saphire his wijf ocupied, and sodeynly þei wern ded, for þat þei wyþheldyn oo part of þe prise of þe feld þat þei soldyn. And wiþ þis deuyl was Symon Magus fulfillid, þat wolde haue bowt þe Holy Goost for money, þat he schulde now sille hym to whom þat he wolde; to whom Petir seide þus, Peccunia tua tecum in perdicione Actum, viij. (Evans 1986, vol. 2, 386, ll. 150-156)

The tentative picture that can be drawn from the analysis of these findings yields a variegated yet coherent and essentially unified representation of the character. The Simon Magus proposed by the analysed sermons does not have the intellectual depth of the antagonist who argues and articulately expounds his aberrant reasons, as for example in *Pseudo-Clementines* or in some Old English homilies. Deprived of the fantastic-miraculous component implied in the accounts of hagiographic documentation, he emerges as a gloomy, dangerous figure, at times repellent to a good Christian.

However, in celebrating Peter and Paul, the *sanctorale* sermons seem to follow the line already traced by the corresponding homilies in Old English, reworking material from the apocryphal tradition through the mediation of later popular works such as *LA*. More than on individual episodes, however, the focus is on the exemplary punishment, the spectacular and public death that is owed to those who claimed to possess false powers and mendaciously proclaimed themselves privileged intermediaries with the divine. In this perspective, the representation is linked to that proposed in the *temporale* sermons, where Simon Magus is an impostor, a seller of goods that he does not possess and that cannot be purchased with money. Far from the truth of the doctrine, the character embodies a representation of magic placed in a marginal zone with the deadly sin of greed, of which simony is a manifestation, as well as with heresy.

In other words, if "the sermon was a vehicle not only to purvey religious teaching, but also a means to enable social cohesion as well as to offset heretical leanings and to provide a bulwark against the spiritual or political enemy, whomsoever that might be" (O'Mara, Stoop 2022, 18), for Middle English prose sermons Simon Magus is among those enemies, and he is just as much of an enemy to the Lollard tradition as he is to the orthodox one.

[44] Act 5,1-11 relates the episode in which they are involved: they are an elderly couple who had decided to sell a field they owned and donate the profits to the early Christian community. Ananias, however, delivers only part of the money to Peter, pretending it to be the entire sum, and dies instantly in front of the apostle, who in turn knew of the deception. The same fate is met by his wife Sapphira, who continues to lie about the amount raised from the sale. Guilty of denying the truth to the Holy Spirit out of greed, the couple is repeatedly mentioned in medieval texts as exemplifying avarice, also in reference to simony.

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The Figure of the (disbelieving) Woman in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-century Middle English Sermons

Letizia Vezzosi

Abstract:

This paper investigates the figure of the disbelieving woman in fourteenth and fifteenth-century Middle English sermons, showing how Latin exempla – drawn from sources such as the *Legenda Aurea*, the *Speculum Laicorum* or authors such as Caesarius, Ètienne de Bourbon or Jacque de Vitry, and so on – reworked to serve ecclesiastical and didactic purposes. Particular attention is given to how these sermons depict women as morally flawed and prone to diabolic deception, thereby reinforcing stereotypes of female weakness, but also subtly constructing a bad allure around the female human being. At the same time, the narrative choices transform individual episodes into universal moral lessons on faith, repentance, and transubstantiation.

Keywords: Disbelieving Woman, Eucharist, Exempla, Gender, Middle English Sermons

The figure of women in Middle English homiletic literature occupied a central and multifaceted role, reflecting medieval theology's ambivalence towards women and the cultural anxieties surrounding gender, morality, and power. In sermons, Saints' lives, and other didactic texts, women were frequently depicted through the polarizing archetypes of the Virgin Mary and Eve, that is, the contrasting images of sanctity and sin, as moral exemplars and cautionary icons, in that Mary represented the epitome of obedience, chastity, and humility, reinforcing the virtues expected of women, while Eve was associated with disobedience, temptation, and the Fall, a model that often underpinned the stereotype of women as morally frail or prone to sin. Thus "Mary and Eve often served as the essential polarities through which the moral status of all women could be measured" (McAvoy 2004, 34). This duality was further explored in works like *Ancrene Wisse*, which, although (or maybe because) it was directed at women pursuing spiritual lives, repeatedly emphasizes the need to guard against traits deemed "feminine" weaknesses, such as gossip, vanity, and desire. In doing so, these works nourished an entrenched suspicion of women's potential to deviate from the prescribed path of virtue (Savage, Watson 1991).

Accordingly, medieval homiletic literature often employed women's figures to reinforce moral lessons for mixed-gender audiences, framing feminine quali-

Letizia Vezzosi, University of Florence, Italy, letizia.vezzosi@unifi.it, 0000-0002-7635-2657

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ties as both central to societal order and as potential sources of moral disorder. A very typical example of this is how the very same body of a woman could be constructed "as both a source of redemption through childbirth and a source of fallibility and sin through sexuality" (Bynum 1987, 128). In the later medieval period, this moral duality of the female figure contributed to the conceptual foundation for the "evil woman". The imagery associated with Eve – curiosity, temptation, and defiance – fed directly into fears of women possessing dangerous, subversive knowledge, making them susceptible to association with the supernatural.

In this very period, that is from the end of fourteenth century, significantly in coincidence with this change of perspective towards the female figure, the two systems of magic, which had been systematised since Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* into *superstitio* (often mild, unlearned forms, rooted in ignorance or misplaced devotion)[1] and *magica daemonum invocation* (formal demonic pacts, i.e. necromancy), began to be associated by the ecclesiastical authorities and thus merge: common magic practices, which were regarded as suspicious, but also tolerated as simple errors by late-antique and early medieval Christian authorities (Flint 1991), and learned necromancy, operated through invocations of demons by educated people, even clerics (Bailey 2001), which had always been strongly condemned as an act of heresy and at the same time feared[2] since it implied invocating and involving demons, which was *per se* an act of adoration (*latria*), that is heresy (Kors, Peters 2001, 118). This tight connection between some magic[3] system and heresy is further and more exhaustively stated in the works of the Dominican Nicholas Eymerich:

> Ex hiis patet quod sola demonis inuocacio, etiam sine sacrificio, apostata est a fide, et per consequens heresis (1578 [1376], fol. 143r)

[1] This term indicates the system of common spells, charms, blessings, potions, powders, and talismans employed by many people at all levels of medieval society, including, it should be noted, many clerics, about whose exact nature clerics could be caught in uncertainty and ambivalent judgement (Kieckhefer 1989, 186).

[2] In this respect, the decree *Super illius specula*, by Pope John in 1326 is insightful: he explicitly condemned (and excommunicated *ipso facto*) all sorcerers who "cum morte foedus ineunt et pactum faciunt cum infrno, daemonibus namque immolant, hos adorant, fabricant ac fabricari procurant imagines, annulum vel speculum vel phialam vel rem quamcunque aliam magice ad daemones inibi allegandos ab his petunt, responsa ab his recipiunt et pro implendis pravis suis desideriis auxilia postulant" (Hansen 1901, 5). The tools mentioned in this decree belonged to complex ritual magic, different from the herbs, stones, and simple charms of the common tradition. Therefore, it is undoubtful that the magic the Pope feared and referred to was learned necromancy.

[3] We should not forget that the terms *magia*, *magica*, and *ars magica* were standard in educated language throughout the Middle Ages, as Saint Augustine and Isidore of Seville had discussed the concept of magic at some length but it was mainly used as a polemical term: thus heretics' miracles were called "magical" by the Church as well as Lollards defined Catholic practices as magical (Ward 1982, 12), in the sense that orthodox rituals were "false belief" and thus belongs to the "devil's craft" (Thomas 1971, 62).

As a matter of fact, common or popular magic practitioners, the sorcerers, were often regarded not as powerful agents of evil in their own right, but as unfortunate victims of the deceits and temptations of the devil (Brown 1972), and their practices themselves rather as harmful and illusionary than morally negative (Kieckhefer 1989). This is evident in Bernard Gui's *Practica inquisitionis heretice pravitatis* (early fourteenth century) – a summation of his experience and the first truly comprehensive instructional manual for inquisitors – and Nicholas Eymerich's vast inquisitorial manual *Directorium inquisitorum* (1376), which both addressed issues of superstition, sorcery, and necromancy, differentiating, although not constantly[4], between more "ignorant" forms of superstition and the deliberate invocation of demons. Following their statements, superstitious practices involved deception (*decipiunt*) rather than conscious demonic pacts (*minus evidens pactum cum diabolo*). Those who practiced such "popular magic" (*carminibus, phylacteriis, vel aliis superstitionibus*) did it out of ignorance (*nescientes*), believing that it had healing power (*remedium*).

> Item inquirat [inquisitor] diligenter de sortilegiis, ariolis, incantatoribus, et aliis huiusmodi superstitionibus, qui simplicem populum decipiunt, facientes eos intendere remediis illicitis potius quam divinis […] (Gui 1886, 306)

> […] plures reperiuntur tam viri quam mulieres qui carminibus, phylacteriis, vel aliis superstitionibus intendunt quasi pro remedio, nescientes se laqueum diaboli incurrere […] (Ivi, 307)

> Circa superstitiones autem dicendum est quod quaedam sunt minus evidens pactum cum diabolo habentes, quando scilicet simplices mulierculae vel rustici quibusdam carminibus vel inanibus ceremoniis utuntur, crediturі in eis esse remedium: … aliae vero sunt apertissime pactum cum malignis spiritibus contrahentes. (*De superstitionibus* in Eymerich 1578 [1378], f. 264r-v)

Contrarily, the necromancer had always been conceived as a powerful figure, who knowingly and purposefully engaged in rituals to summon and command demons. They acted out of learned deliberate necromancy, reclaiming much of the human agency in magic, and thus incurring considerable human culpabil-

[4] As a matter of fact, it is sometimes difficult to draw a precise line, as in many cases, "simple" sorcery or superstitious practices are discussed in general terms in medieval authors, rather than providing a single short passage cleanly contrasting "common magic" vs. "learned necromancy". It will be highly helpful to keep in mind that "the people in medieval Europe who used, feared, promoted, or condemned magic, and who identified magic as such, not only assumed it worked but could give (or assumed that authorities could give for them) reasonably specific explanations of how it worked. Not all those who shared these assumptions were rational in the sense of being bookish, given to abstraction, or even particularly deliberative, yet they normally used words in ways that had reasonably specific meaning, and their language reflected the way the world made cognitive sense to them" (Kieckhefer 1994, 814).

ity[5], through his deliberate invocations of demons (*expresse invocant daemonia*) and his power on them (*putant se imperare eis*). They were not tricked into falling into the devil's traps, but deliberately and consciously entered into pacts with the devil and involved of demoniac forces through invocation, adoration or reverence or with homage done or to be done to them, or with any sort of sacrifice or offering (Gui 1886, 292).

> […] magia quae dicitur 'nigromantia', in qua non simpliciter utuntur incantationibus aut observantiis vanis, sed expresse invocant daemonia, iis sacrificant, et putant se imperare eis […] (*De superstitionibus* in Eymerich 1578 [1378], f. 264r-v)

Although Eymerich distinguished in many passages between "simple" or "rustic" uses of spells or incantations – misguided by the demon, hidden or unrecognized – and "openly" demonic pacts or wilful necromantic conjurations, nevertheless he classified nearly all such magic as demonically inspired, thus building a solid conceptual framework into which to fit the practices and the practitioners of common sorcery, as increasing attention came to focus on them. During the fifteenth century, the unwitting confusion between elite necromancy and common or popular magical practices ended into a conflation visible in the letter of 1437 from Pope Eugenius IV to all papal inquisitors and in such works as the Dominican theologian and ecclesiastical reformer Johannes Nider's *Formicarius* (1437-1438), which according to Bailey (2003) could have functioned as a kind of preacher's manual, with stories tailor-made for use in sermons, and *Preceptorium divine legis* (1438)[6]: indeed the performance of common sorcery, involving only a few words or simple gestures and aimed at curing or causing illness or affecting the weather, was equated with hidden yet necessary acts of worship and postulated a pre-existing pact between the sorcerer and the demons that made such magic possible, much alike necromancy.

> Demonibus immolant, eos adorant, ab ipsis responsa prestolantur et acceptant, illis homagium faciunt et in signum desuper chartam scriptam vel quid aliud tradunt cum ipsis obligatoria, ut solo verbu, tactu vel signo maleficia, quibus velint, ilis inferant sive tollant, infimitates sanent, aeris intemperiem provocent et super aliis nefandis pacta firmant seu quod talia conceperint praesumptores extant, imagines vel alia constituunt fierique procurant, ut ipsi daemones inde constringantur. (1437 Letter from Pope Eugenius IV in Hansen 1901, 17)

[5] In particular, in the formula for abjuration that Gui proposed for sorcerers, he explicitly included in the list of acts to be forsworn "all divination or invocation of demons, especially with adoration or reverence exhibited to them, or which will be exhibited, or with homage done or to be done to them, or with any sort of sacrifice or burnt offering" (1886, 5).

[6] It is worth remembering that Nider's works served as a major source of information for the infamous *Malleus maleficarum* written in 1486 (Tschacher 2000).

> De hoc etiam infra dicetur non autem faciunt ista immediate maleficorum opera actione propria et immediata, sed talia fiunt per demones qui visis maleficiis immediate ex pacto dudum cum maleficis a principio mundi et tempore veteris idolatrie habito sciunt qualem effectum debent ad intentionem maleficorum procurare. (Nider 1476 [1438], 1.11.v)

While since antiquity there had always been a distinction between "magic" operated through the wondrous powers, i.e. *mirabilia*[7], and "magic" linked to forces of supernatural order, at this point of time, both systems of magic face the same theological stance that the involvement of demons is not just a sin, but a direct betrayal of the Christian faith[8].

This change of perspective on common magic practice had a serious side-effect on the conception of the woman, fostering further the idea of the evil woman as a witch. As a matter of fact, it is well known and no issue of debate that women had long been active in the common tradition of medieval magic as village healers, wise women, and soothsayers, in other words they had had relevant roles in common or popular magic practices (Harley 1990). On the contrary, as examples of human weakness and "simplicity", they were not considered to have the competence to engage in demoniac magic or necromancy, from which simple uneducated people were also excluded, since they were incapable of accessing to literacy, training and command of complex rituals unlike learned educated (male) necromancers. Accordingly, they were mentioned in Gui's and Eymerich's treatises as those simple uneducated (*simplices mulierculae vel rustici*) engaging with common magic practices such as the use of healing charms and potions (*plures reperiuntur tam viri quam mulieres qui carminibus, phylacteriis, vel aliis superstitionibus intendunt quasi pro remedio*). For the same reason, Nider in his works listed exempla of great male necromancers such as Stedelen or Sclavius or Hoppo, who through complex rites and invocations could compel an essentially unwilling and dangerous demonic agent to come and serve them, but no female powerful necromancers. When the idea that magic, any system of magic, operated thanks to the intervention of demoniac forces, women practitioners of common magic began to be in limelight, not because in the view of most clerical authorities they had such a special training or the capacity for such knowledge to gain terrible power over demons (Opitz 1995, 151-152) nor because they were more susceptible to evil as a result of women's mental and spiritual weakness

[7] I refer to the so-called natural magic, as already educated writers from the thirteenth century used to name these phenomena, thus reclaiming a classical sense of the term "magic", but also reaffirming the notion of this kind of practices as "part of natural science": "in ea parte naturalis scientiae, quae vocatur magica naturalis" (Alvernus 1674, i. 1.46). See Le Goff (1988 [1985], 27-44) for the discussion on the relationship between the categories *mirabilis*, *magicus*, and *miraculosus* and Thorndike (1915) for the general development of views on magic in the high Middle Ages.

[8] This was not new. Already in Augustine's *De civitate Dei* and in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* every operation through demons was to be considered magical, although Augustine and his early medieval successors did not give the term "magia" explicit definition.

and heightened carnality as long theorised in Christian doctrines, but because they must have sealed a binding pact with the devil as proved by the success of their magic practices.

This is visible in the figures for those accused of witchcraft. Prior to 1350, as notions of common sorcery and necromancy were only beginning to collide, men constituted over 70% of the accused. In the second half of the fourteenth century the percentage of men accused fell to 42%, while women took over the majority with 58%, and during the fifteenth century the percentage of women continued to rise to 70% to reach over 80% during the era of the great witch-hunts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Kieckhefer 1976, 106-147), when even the men being accused were mostly associated with female witches in some way, often as their husbands or sons (Levack 2016 [1987], 133-134). Later treatises from the end of the fifteenth century went on to give several explanations for why women were more inclined to witchcraft than were men, all focusing on women's inferior physical, mental, and moral capacity and thus definitively sanctioned the proclivity of women toward witchcraft, among them *in primis* the profoundly misogynist *Malleus maleficarum* (1487) or, a century later, *De magorum dæmonomania* by Jean Bodin (1581), which created and defined the stereotype of the female witch[9].

The ecclesiastical and theological debate as well as the treatises and manuals were not accessible to everyone and exclusive domain of those who at least had competence of Latin, in other words they were addressed to the educated élite and mainly to the ecclesiastical authorities themselves. How to let such philosophical-theoretical speculation arrive to everyone and guide their judgment and their behaviour in relation to magical practices. Preaching from the pulpit could serve as an effective means of reaching the widest possible audience in the transmission and dissemination of the theological principles and the moral precepts and behavioural instructions established by the Church (Bailey 2003), inasmuch as it could be regarded as "the most influential and pervasive mass medium of religious and moral instruction in late medieval society" (Delcorno 2017)[10]. In this particular case, sermons could be the vehicle through which theological learning influenced and informed people's thought and conception of common magic as a suspicious practice firstly, as a spiritual crime and an act of apostasy later, and then as a definite and persecuted crime (Bailey 2001) to the extent that it was a challenge to the established society and also government (Young 2017). At the same time, sermons could also mould the image of women practising magic differently – from soothsayers, healers and wiser to evil witch – as the conception of magic gradually changed.

[9] For a detailed list, see Bullitta (this volume) and Baratta, Montori (this volume).

[10] Sermons are traditionally defined as "an oral discourse spoken in the voice of a preacher who addresses an audience to instruct and exhort them on a topic concerned with faith and morals and based on a sacred text" (Kienzle 2000, 151).

To have an idea of how females were pictured in homilies, I looked through the catalogue of homilies collected in the A *Repertorium of Middle English Prose Sermons* by O'Mara and Paul (REP 2007), which contains details of over one thousand Middle English prose sermons in more than one hundred and fifty (both edited and unedited) manuscripts, mainly from the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, each of which is described according to their authorship, occasion, summary of content, exempla, and biblical citations. As one could expect, the most relevant sections are the exempla, which are meant to strengthen the comment of theological dogma or issues introduced through passages from the Holy Scripts or Psalms or connected to the occasion of the homily. These were not *ad hoc* fabricated stories but, rather, mostly reworkings of narratives already present in collections of exempla and moral tales in Latin circulating at the time, such as the *Gesta Romanorum*, the *Speculum Laicorum, Alphabetum Narrationum, Vitae Patrum, Dialoguess of Gregory,* Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus Miraculorum*, Jacque de Vitry's *Exempla,* William of Waddington's *Manuel des Péchés*, Robert Mannyng of Brunne's *Handlying Synne*, Thomas de Cantimpré's *Bonum Universale de Apibus*, Odo de Cheriton's *Fables* and *Exempla*, just to mention some of them. What is particularly interesting is the very selection made by the authors of Middle English sermons, which betrays an ulterior purpose beyond the merely edifying project.

The first interesting fact concerns how often and why women were the protagonists of the exempla. First of all, they were on the whole rarer than men (less than 200 mentions of women in more than one thousand sermons), and if Saints and the Virgin Mary were set aside, namely the stereotype of female sanctity, usually mentioned in the main corpus of the homily, only 86 mentions of women remained for the exempla and were predominantly negative unlike men, who showed a broader range of representations in sermons. In this respect, it is quite striking that, as negative example, they far exceed the male negative examples (67 vs. 21). Not only were they sinners, but unlike most male sinners, sinful women were rarely portrayed in the act of confessing or contrite in their repentance (only 9 instances): usually, unlike their male counterparts, they did not repent through confession and were therefore excluded from salvation. To my knowledge, there is one example where the opposite happens: MS Salisbury 103 n. 27, containing an episode in which a brother and sister were condemned to be burned for having killed a blacksmith, but he was reduced to ashes, while she repented and remained unharmed.

Women's sins were also of a special kind. According to the prevailing order of frequency, sinful women were described as lecherous, disbelieving, given to idle or quarrelsome chatter, and gossipy; they were also labelled as prostitutes, incestuous, prone to infanticide, adulterous, seductresses of pure men (i.e. clergy), murderous, cannibalistic, vain, and either possessed by the devil or submissive to his will. On the other hand, men were culprit of covetousness, swearing, pride, but more often associated with unspecified sins mentioned just to highlight their confession and repentance. When they succumbed to the sins of lust, adultery, or incest, they were typically portrayed as victims of female se-

duction, and thus not as active agents of their own damnation, except insofar as their weakness was concerned. Indeed, there were narratives in which both a man and a woman, often guilty of the same sin, were featured, but only the man repented and attained salvation, while the woman refused to confess and was left to perdition. An exemplar of this phenomenon is provided by MS Salisbury 103 n. 059, which records two exempla of the sin of lechery – one following the other – where a woman and a man commit the sin but with markedly different outcomes. In the first exemplum, a nun from the diocese of Cologne, having engaged in lechery, conceived and bore a child, which she then killed. After her death, she appeared to a kinswoman bearing the child and declared that praying for her would be futile because she was damned; she asserted that had she confessed, forgiveness would have been granted. In the subsequent exemplum, a man who had engaged in lechery for seventy years repented through the intercession of St. Andrew and fasted for six months on bread and water; ultimately, he died and was saved.

There were also recurring situations where the man takes on and atones for the woman's guilt, usually that of his mother. One good example is the shortened and incomplete version of an episode present in the "Commemoration of All Souls" in Jacopo da Varagine's *Legenda Aurea*. There are two versions, BL/Add 36791/061 and BL/Lans 379/003, containing mainly the same text: A widow, despairing of her poverty, agreed to carry out the devil's commands: 1) to seduce clerics who came to her home, 2) to invite poor men into her house by day but drive them out at night, 3) to disrupt prayers in church by laughing, and 4) to avoid confessing any of these sins; in return, the devil promised to make her rich; as she lay dying, she revealed the pact to her son, who urged her to confess and vowed to perform her penance on her behalf, but, since she died before the priest could arrive, her son confessed her sins and completed seven years of penance for her, after which he was rewarded with a vision of her in a state of salvation. The archetypal model for sinful women was undoubtedly Eve. Indeed, women were frequently associated with deception, deviation from righteousness, and disobedience, and men were often their victims, as evidenced in sermons where men of faith – whether they are monks, churchmen, or even the women's own relatives – are led astray onto the path of sin by sinful women.

Very often, female figures are tarnished by sins that, though seemingly trivial in our eyes, ultimately lead to severe punishments. At times, the gravity of these sins became apparent when they were associated with diabolic figures; at other times, they simply served to confirm the inherent weakness of women. Thus, sermons concerning idle gossip, such as MS Salisbury 103 n. 23 and n. 62, where a girl and a nun were punished because of "idle words" and quarrelsome talk respectively. However, if any sin – or a cluster of sins – was chiefly associated with women, it was clearly the sin of the flesh. This is remarkable, not last because it encompassed witchcraft when it was explicitly mentioned among sins: for instance, the sermon Bodleian Library eMus 180/055 *Dominica xiiija Post Festum Sancte Trinitatis* listed all the sins of the flesh, among which witchcraft was mentioned together with lechery and faith in false gods (ff. 119-126).

The number of sermons portraying the sinful woman as engaging in lascivious, incestuous, or similar transgressions far exceeds that of any other sin.

These representations of female figures seem not merely to serve as examples of the wicked woman and warnings against the dangers they pose, but rather to foreshadow the characteristics of that wicked woman whose evil lies precisely in being an ally or collaborator of the devil, characteristics that later became stereotyped in the figure of the witch at the end of the fifteenth century throughout the sixteenth century, although sermons seldom mentioned the word "witch" directly, unlike their sources.[11] That every magical occurrence concealed the devil became increasingly explicit in the case of "marvellous" events, where the devil's deceptive strategies were clearly articulated. Unsurprisingly, he was said to disguise himself as a beautiful woman when he intends to lead a righteous man astray, especially ecclesiastics (cf. MS Salisbury 103 n. 036, and MS Harley 2247 n. 049).

Further evidence comes from exempla concerning the disbelieving woman, whose signature act was host desecration: that is, the theft and misuse of consecrated hosts. The sin of disbelief was invariably linked to the mystery of the Eucharist; in particular, two occasions – Easter and the Feast of Corpus Christi – served as the focus of sermons featuring exempla of women who did not fully believe in the mystery of the host's consecration and who regarded the administration of the Eucharist with scepticism. A small group of sermons has been identified: Bodleian Library e Musaeo (Bodl eMus) 180/022, Bodleian Library e Musaeo 180/029, Bodleian Library e Musaeo 180/031, Bodleian Library, Graves (Gr) 54/028, Bodleian Library, Graves 54/034, British Library, Claudius A.ii./041 (C), British Library Harley (H) 2247/035, Gloucester, Cathedral Library (Gl) 22/004, and Shrewsbury School (Sh) III/004[12]. These collections of sermons date from the beginning (Bodl eMus 180, Gl 22,) to the end of the fifteenth century (Gr 54, H 2247, Sh3).

Among these sermons, three could be grouped as they all represent a version of the famous exemplum well known as Saint Gregory's miracle of the mess, to which Ælfric referred to in his sermon *De Sacrificio in die Pascae* (CHom ii, 155/167-73): eMus 180/31, C 041 and Gr 54/028. The episode was narrated in *Vita Beati Gregorii Papae* by Paul the Deacon and retold in the *Golden Legend*: it was the story of a "doubting woman" who brought to church the bread she had

[11] Among Middle English sermons, I found very few examples mentioning directly a witch. MS Salisbury 103, no. 029, is one such case: its exemplum – taken from Caesarius – recounts the story of a witch who refused to confess before her death. Consequently, her coffin was sealed with three iron chains and a lid made of lead and iron, and it had to be kept in a church for three days, guarded by her children (a monk and a nun), to prevent the devil from taking her to hell – a fate that ultimately befell her. In contrast, their sources often mention both male and female practitioners of magic, following a common pattern in which women are simply labeled as witches, while men are depicted as engaging in magical acts or defined as performers of magic (Herbert 1910 [1883]; Tubach 1969).

[12] Other sermons are related to this group: for instance, British Library Harley 2247/048 resembles closely C/041, except for the episode of the woman Lasyna o Lasma which occurs in both C/041 and Gr 54/028.

baked herself to be used for Mass. When she came up to receive Communion, Gregory noticed her smiling incredulously, and upon inquiry, the woman told him that she could not believe that bread she had baked herself could become the Body and Blood of Christ simply through the words of consecration. Hearing this, he prayed urgently that her unbelief might be healed, and suddenly a host changed to the appearance of actual flesh and blood approximating a human finger. Seeing this, the woman's faith in the Real Presence was restored, and she knelt down, weeping in repentance.

In all three versions, the episode was essentially reported essentially in the same way, with only minor variations regarding the inclusion or omission of the woman's name (present as *Lasyna* in C and *Lasma* in Gr 54, but not in Bodl eMus 180), the title or occasion of the sermon (in Gr, *Ad secundam missam*), the context in which the exemplum was used[13] and the restoration of the host in the form of bread (in Bodl eMus it is Gregory 's praying, while in C and Gr 54 the woman's act of faith). It is worth noticing that the theme of the woman laughing when receiving the consecrated Host because of her disbelief in it also occurred in exempla from the *Speculum Laicorum* and British Library Harley 2851 f. 106b, which could have well played a role. Here is the passage from eMus 180/031, which shows the typical structure of the exemplum, articulated in three parts: first, a reference to its source (often introduced with evidentials, encoding whether knowledge comes from direct perception, inference, hearsay, etc.: *We rede in þe lyffe of seynt Gregory*); second, the development of its narrative; and third, a concluding formula that reinforces the value or function of the account (*echon of ȝow schall do at þis holy tyme*):

> We rede in þe lyffe of seynt Gregory þat þer was onys a 'good' woman in Rome that, aȝenst every Sonday, sche made a certen of [215] obleys and browȝte hem to seynt Gregori in maner of an offeryng, of the whiche seynt Gregori made Goddis body on the awtur. Then it befell on a day þis woman I wolde be howselyd after masse among oþer pepill. So when seynt Gregory cam to hyr withe Goddis body and seyde þese wordis, 'Goddis body myȝte kepe þi body and þi sowle into þe lyfe þat ever schall last', sodenly this woman lowȝe þat all þe pepyll herde. Anon seynt Gregori toke þe sacrament frome hyr mowþe and leyd it aȝene on þe awter, and askyd þe woman whi sche lowȝte þat tyme. 'For ȝe callyd Goddis body þe same brede þat I made withe myne hondis.' Then seynt Gregori, for hir mysbeleve, made a prayer to almyȝti God to schewe some myrakyll. And anon, þe ost, as it ley on þe paten, turnyd into the likenes of a crucyfix, all blody. And so he turned þis woman into þe ryȝt beleve, and moche other pepyll. Seyng all þe pepyll þat, seynt Gregori prayed aȝene and it turned aȝene into the likenes

[13] In C, it appeared within a series of exempla concerning the host, including the miracle of Odo of Canterbury – which also appeared in H 2247/048, though that version omitted the very episode of the woman Lasma.

of brede as it was before. And then þis woman withe grete reuerence reseyvid this blissed body into hyr sowle, as echon of ȝow schall do at þis holy tyme[14].

The sermons on the host found in Sh 3/004 and Gr 54/034 partly reworked, in an original manner, independent from each other, themes circulating in medieval exempla collections, specifically Tubach #2644 and #2689, focussing on the woman's disbelief: a woman clandestinely took the host home, concealing it in a larder; the following day, she discovered, in its place, a bleeding child; when the fraud was uncovered, a priest was summoned, and the woman confessed that she took the consecrated host because she did not believe in the mystery of the Eucharist. A more complex reworking of the misbeliever-theme was represented by sermons H 2247/035 and Gl 22/004, which essentially revisit one of the recurring narrative motifs found in numerous exempla circulating in the Middle Ages from the twelfth and thrithteenth centuries onward: the theme of the theft and concealment of the host, here embedded in a narrative framework (*I rede in a Cronycle þat þere was a lady*) reminiscent of the incipit of St. Gregory's miracle, such as in Bodl eMus 180/031 (*We rede in þe lyffe of seynt Gregory þat þer was onys a 'good' woman*). The exemplum, attributed to a chronicle (*I rede in a Cronycle*), introduces the protagonist and her key triggering trait using a fairytale formula: þere was a lady on a tyme þat was not perfite in þe faith (there was a woman in a time who was not perfect in the faith). She secretly took the consecrated host home and buried it beneath a pear tree near the window of her hall. The following Christmas, her husband hosted a dinner attended by the bishop and other dignitaries. One gentleman observed that the tree was in bloom and laden with pears and was astonished by the marvel (*whereof he marvelid gretely*), a wonder (*þat marveil*) which he wanted to show the others. Therefore, he broke one branch but, upon breaking it, blood flowed from it. When the woman confessed to the bishop, he excavated beneath the tree and recovered the host, which remarkably resembled *a faire manchilde* bearing five wounds. The bishop then carried the host to church and delivered a sermon urging its restoration.

[14] Trans.: We read in the life of Saint Gregory that there was once a good woman in Rome who, every Sunday, made a certain number of [215] oblays (wafers) and brought them to Saint Gregory as a kind of offering, from which Saint Gregory made God's body on the altar. Then it happened one day that this woman wanted to be houselled (receive communion) after Mass among other people. So when Saint Gregory came to her with God's body and said these words, "God's body might keep your body and your soul unto the life that shall ever last," suddenly this woman laughed, so that all the people heard. At once Saint Gregory took the sacrament from her mouth and laid it again on the altar, and asked the woman why she laughed at that time. "Because," she said, "you called God's body the same bread that I made with my own hands." Then Saint Gregory, for her disbelief, made a prayer to Almighty God to show some miracle. And immediately, the Host, as it lay on the paten, turned into the likeness of a crucifix, all bloody. And so he turned this woman to the right belief—and many other people also. Seeing all that, Saint Gregory prayed again, and it turned again into the likeness of bread, as it was before. And then this woman, with great reverence, received this blessed body into her soul—as each one of you shall do at this holy time.

Subsequently, the woman confessed, and the next day she received the same host, after which she ascended to heaven.

It is undeniable that the sermon echoes the exemplum found in no. 33 of H 2316 – a theological miscellany primarily based on the *Legenda Aurea* (folios 16b-24b, 28b-32, 37-52) – which, in turn, is attributed to Aesop ("Narrat Esopus quod dux Peyters duxit uxorem"). This exemplum reports how a duchess, harboring hatred in her heart, dared not swallow the Host at Easter but instead took it home and concealed it in a hollow tree. On Low Sunday, her husband's brother, an archbishop, observed the tree brimming with leaves, blossoms, and fruit, and was struck by a wondrous fragrance – a perception later shared by his companions upon receiving absolution. Eventually, the duchess was compelled to confess, and a bleeding child was discovered at the site where she had hidden the Host (Herbert 1910 [1883], 576-577).

However, the deviations from this model are highly significant, notably the apparent downgrading of the protagonist's social status from duchess to an unspecified woman, which ultimately broadened the scope of the moral instruction by transforming the event from an exceptional, individual occurrence into one of universal relevance. Furthermore, the blooming of the tree echoes another highly circulating motif, i.e. the power of the Host of enhancing the quality of the place that hosts it, as a metaphor for the effect on the spiritual virtues of the believer who receives the Eucharist. This motif attains its fullest expression in the *exempla* of the beehive, in which the host was cast aside to demonstrate its mortality, yet, paradoxically, an explosion of productivity ensued. One cannot help but note that in the Latin collections, which undoubtedly served as inspiration for these sermons, the protagonists are predominantly men – typically depicted as *rustices* or peasants[15] – with only one narrative-type featuring a female protagonist[16]. Particularly noteworthy is the exemplum n. 55 in British Library, Burney 361 f. 156b, maybe taken from the writings of Petrus Damianus, in which a man was shown throwing the host into a beehive on the suggestion

[15] Cf. British Library Additional 11284 f. 35 (first half of the fourteenth century version of the *Speculum Laicorum*), British Library Additional 339556 f. 28 (a fourteenth century collection of 762 exempla, compiled from various sources for the use of preachers, and arranged in groups according to subject) and British Library Sloane 2478 f. 34 (a thirteenth and fourteenth collection of miracles of the Virgin, extracts from the lives of Saints), each containing a version of the same narrative: 1) a rustic or farmer lays the Host in a bee-hive ; bees make a shrine of honeycombs for it, with the attribution to "Eefert Odo de Seriton"; 2) A farmer retains the Host, and is about to put it in his beehive, when the bees fly out and sting him, and bearing the Host back with them enshrine it with honeycombs, with the specification that "Audiui aliquando referri in publico sermone" bees enshrine the Host, hidden in a hollow tree by a man in Germany.

[16] It is the exemplum taken from Jacque de Vitry in British Library Harley 463 f. 22, which is echoed in the version of Caesarius's *Dialogus Miraculorum* in British Library Additional 18364 f. 40 (fourteenth century) and in that of Étienne de Bourbon's *Anecdotes* (exemplum 317). The core of the narrative is: a woman hides the Host in a hollow tree; she forgets it for a year, and then finds that bees have built a shrine of honeycombs round it.

of a witch. The transformation of these narrative elements in the Middle English versions appears to be anything but accidental: on the one hand, it seems to reflect a form of censorship of elements considered potentially dangerous – such as the figure of the witch, whose malign exceptionality was substituted by the marvellous, as the blooming due to the presence of the Host was described – and, on the other hand, it emphasizes the focus on women as execrators of the sacrament. This hypothesis appears further substantiated when one considers the motif of bleeding provoked by breakage, such as the breaking of a branch, which clearly symbolizes the host in this sermon. The bleeding of the host was found in a narrative model already well established in early fourteenth-century collections of *exempla*, in which the protagonist is defined as a sorceress, as attested in Burney 361 f. 149[17]. Here below the excerpt from H 2247/035:

> I rede in a Cronycle þat þere was a lady on a ty|me þat was not perfite in þe faith · So it fortmed whan | she was houselid prevely she toke þe sacrament & bare it | home · And whan she had oportunyte & leyser she beryed it | vndir a pere tree rote not ferr from þe hall window | Than at Cristemas folowyng The husbond of þis | vngracious lady desired þe bysshop of þe Cytee & oþir | gentylles of þe cuntrei to dyne with hym on a day assig= | ned · And when þei were at mete A gentyll man | þat wa þere se þe pere tree full of blossummes & floures | floresshed · whereof he marvelid gretely · A-non he ca|me to þe tree · & it was full of feir lusty & ripe peres | Then þe getyll man went to þe tree & brake a bra= | anche with þe ripe frute to schewe þe bisshop & þe gentilles | [f. 103r] of þat marveil · And whan þe bogh was broke fro þe tree | all was on blode and all blody with þe frute · þe braunche | was brought vn-to þe lordes & gentilles · Thi perceyved | þat synfull lady · Sche rose from þe borde & fell down | on hir knees biforn þe bisshop be-sekyng hym of councell | and grace and þere openly tolde hym what she had do · | Then þe bisshop with grete Reuerence delvid in þat place · | where þat synfull lady had beried þe sacred hoste & As | god wolde þe bysshop founde it vndir a rote of þe pere tre | in symylitude of a faire manchilde blody with · v · woundes | The bysshop with grete Reuerence toke it vp & bare it to þe | chirch · The lorde þe lady & all oþer folowyng & weping | Where þe bysshop made a sermon praying all þe pepl | with hym devoutely þat þei wolde beseke god enterely | þat it myght be turnyd a-geyn vndir þe forme of brede · | and so it did · Then was þis lady clene confessed of | hir horrible syn & with grete Repentaunce she was how= | selid þe next day with þe same sacrid oste · & after went | to blisse · So therfore oweth no man to mistrust of þe | power & myght of god · ffor withoute ffeith & perfite lo= | ve may no man fully plese god[18].

[17] Here the story is about a sorceress who breaks the Host into four parts, meaning to use it for incantations; however, when it starts bleeding, she wraps it in linen, then in wool, and finally hides it in a hole in the church-wall, but blood still flows; therefore, in terror she confesses to the priest.

[18] Trans.: I read in a chronicle that there was a lady at one time that was not perfect in the faith. So it happened that when she was houselled, she secretly took the sacrament and bore

Two sermons, eMus 180/029 and Gl 54/004, both for the same occasion – *Sermo in die Pasche* – have the same example, likely derived from the same source of British Library Harley 206, about a woman prompted by the devil to test the Eucharist, who brought it home in a napkin (*in eius manforam*, glossed as *napkyn* in Harley 206 f. 98b) from Easter communion. The version in British Library Harley 206 differs from the others because here the woman put the Host first in boiling water, then tried to bake it in the oven, when she heard a boy's voice calling his mother and saw the Virgin taking the Child-Christ out of the oven. In Bodl eMus 180/029 and Gl 54/004 the woman hid the Host together with a precious stone and did not test the Host, but found a child at its place. The narrative frame is the miracle of the Host by Gregory the Great, but then the narration is moulded around other motifs. The *exemplum* begins by setting the stage for the event – that is, by presenting the social status of the woman (*þis marchaunte had a wife*), the social standing of her husband (*a worthi and a nobyll marchaunte*), and the location where the host will be hidden (*in þe whiche iewell þere was a precius stone callyd a serpentine*). Yet, as it is typical, the woman is portrayed in her imperfect state as a Christian (*a wyfe þe whiche had not very stedfaste beleve in the blessyd sacrament*), with only a brief allusion to the cause of her disbelief – namely, the devil's deception (*by þe temptacion of the devyll*) – and a similarly cursory mention of how she stole the Host by hiding it in her mouth at Easter mass. This seemingly trivial detail gains a different significance when compared with other Latin *exempla* in which the Host is likewise concealed in the mouth: in all such cases there were mainly men who stole the Host keeping

> it home. And when she had opportunity and leisure, she buried it under a pear tree root not far from the hall window. Then, at Christmas following, the husband of this ungracious lady invited the bishop of the city and other nobles of the country to dine with him on an appointed day. And when they were at meal, a gentleman that was there saw the pear tree full of blossoms and flowers in bloom, whereof he marvelled greatly. At once he came to the tree, and it was full of fair, lush, and ripe pears. Then the gentleman went to the tree and broke a branch with the ripe fruit to show the bishop and the nobles [f. 103r] of that marvel. And when the bough was broken from the tree, all was full of blood and all bloody with the fruit. The branch was brought to the lords and nobles. That sinful lady perceived this. She rose from the table and fell down on her knees before the bishop, beseeching him for counsel and grace, and there openly told him what she had done.
>
> Then the bishop, with great reverence, dug in that place where that sinful lady had buried the sacred Host, and as God willed, the bishop found it under a root of the pear tree in the likeness of a fair male child, bloody with five wounds. The bishop, with great reverence, took it up and bore it to the church, the lord, the lady, and all others following and weeping. There the bishop gave a sermon, praying all the people with him devoutly that they would beseech God earnestly that it might be turned again into the form of bread — and so it did. Then was this lady fully confessed of her horrible sin, and with great repentance she was houselled the next day with the same sacred Host, and afterward went to bliss. So therefore ought no man to mistrust the power and might of God, for without faith and perfect love, no man may fully please God.

it in the mouth[19], and the theft was usually done to employ it in love charms[20]; moreover, in case of the Host theft, the more widely circulated version sees a priest committing the crime[21]. The long *exemplum* focussed on what follows the transformation of the Host into a one-year old child with bleeding wounds (*a grete mervell*), for which only authoritative people (Thomas of Aquinas and Pope Umbertus) could only give advice. It ends with a religious procession and the woman's full confession after which the Host appears instead of the child. Here follows the excerpt from eMus 180/029:

> A glorius exsampyll we haue hereof in the sermons of | seynt [p. 261] Gregory, the whiche ensampyll was [one] of þe cawsys þat þe feste of Corpus Christi was firste ordend and fownde. Þere was some tyme in þe cite of Alquyne a worthi and a nobyll marchaunte that had a [60] worthy iewell, in þe whiche iewell þere was a precius stone callyd a serpentyne. And þis marchaunte vsyd every ȝere, after Wit Sonday weke was done, for to make to his frendys a grete feste. And at þe principall tyme of þe feste, for a grete ryalte he wold schewe this [65] iewell. And it was so þat þis marchaunte had a wyfe þe whiche had not very stedfaste beleve in the blessyd sacrament on þe awtyr, þat it scholde not be þe very body of Criste by þe temptacion of the devyll, but evermore dowtid therein. And on Ester Day when sche had resceyvid þis blessid sacrament, sche kepte it styll al hole and sownde [p. 262] in hyr mowþe. And so prevely when þe preste was gone, | sche toke it [71] owte of hyr mowþe [and put it] into a feyre kerchefe, and so browȝte it home and put it into þe cofyr there as þis ryall iewell was withe þe serpentyne. So it befell vpon þe day before rehersyd þat þis marchaunte at þe [75] princypall tyme of þe feste bad his wyffe go fetche hym þis iewell. And when sche came to þe cofyr and had openyd þe lydd, þen sche fonde there a feyre chyld sprawlyng in hyr kerchyfe. And so þat soden syȝte cawsyd hyr for to be in grete feere, and so sche made a grete crye and a grete noyse. And þe chylde semyd to be a ȝere of age withe a [80] grete wounde on his ryȝte syde, and in every honde and fote a grete wounde. And so by þe noyse þat sche made þe marchaunte withe moche oþer pepyll carne vp and sawe þis syȝte. And so þereof þei had grete mervell, and

[19] For instance, MS Royal D I f.66b (n. 27) MS Royal D I, which could be one of the sources used by the author of *Speculum Laicorum* and contains what appear to be the Latin texts used by William of Waddington for five of the tales in his *Manuel des Péchés* (Herbert 1910 [1883]) and MS Harley 2851 f. 105b: they contain an example of a rustic bee-keeper who retained the Host in his mouth for magical purposes, the feminine versions of which is Harley 463 f. 22 (n. 190), where a woman keeps the Host in her mouth, meaning to use it in divinations, but it grows into her palate and stops her speech, and MS Harley 463 f. 22 (n. 191).

[20] In British Library Sloane 2478 f. 15 it is reported that a woman at "Brugelac" in Gascony tries to retain the Host in her mouth, meaning to use it as a love charm; but it leaps through her cheek to the altar.

[21] This episode is found in Caesarius's *Dialogus Miraculorum* (cf. the fourteenth century manuscript British Library, Additional 18346 f. 38, col. 2.). In this regard, one should recall exempla in which a woman receives a Host from a priest's hands to put it in the fields with the intention of protecting her crops (cf. British Library Additional 18346).

þei wyste not what was beste for to doo. And at þe [p. 263] laste þei rememberyd þem | of an holy man callyd mayster Thomas of [85] Alquyne, a notabyll and a famus doctur of diuinite. And he was an holy lyver. [And they desyred hym gretly to com theder]; and when he saw this syȝte he had grete mervell þereof. And þen he inqueryd of þe woman how it was. And when sche had confessyd þe trowþe, he ioyned hyr þat 'sche' schold take þe streyȝte wey vnto Rome, and the [90] chylde in hyr armys lappyd in þe same kerchefe, and þat sche scholde schewe it to þe pope Vrbane þe fowrte þat was pope at þat tyme, and þere of hym and of his cowncell to seke a remedye.

And so they toke þe wey to Rome, bothe sche and hyr husbonde, and ever as þei went by the wey þe chylde wexed more and more. And [95] when þei came before þe pope, he had grete mervell of þe infydelyte and incrudelyte of þe woman; and also he mervelyd moche of þe grete myrakyll þat God schewyd þere. Þen þe pope, |withe þe cowncell of [f. 264] his cardynalls, remisyd and remyttid þe examynacion and þe endyng of þis matter to þis for-seyde famus doctur, and so delyvered þem a comyscion. [100]

And so þei turned home aȝene and ever þe childe incresyd more and more. And when þei came home þis holy man resceyvyd þe popis comiscion þe whiche was directe vnto hym. And on þe morowȝe he commawndyd al þe cite to com and go in procession, and the woman withe þe childe in hir armys, [lappyd in þe kerchefe], schewing hym [105] vnto all pepill. And when þe procession was done, þis holy man made a sermon to al þe pepyll of þis same myrakyll. And when þe sermon was done, he remisyd hym to the hyȝe awtyr and toke þe chylde with þe kerchyfe owte of þe womans hondys and leyde him vpon þe awtyr, and made þis woman openly to confesse hyr in every degre, withe all [110] the hole cyrcumstance lyke as sche had done, as it is before rehersyd. And þen þis holy man seyde vnto the woman: | 'I mervell gretly how [p. 265] þu durste be so bolde to serche þe prevetyse of God. And sen þu wolde not resceyve hym at þat tyme as he was in þe forme of brede, þerfore þu schalt resceyve hym in soche a forme as he is in now.' And [115] þerevpon he toke vp þe chylde and offerid him to þe woman. And as sone as it towchid hyr lyppis, þe good Lorde turned himselffe into þe forme of brede aȝene.

The final sermon provides an even more striking instance of the adaptation and fusion of the Latin *exempla* that served as both reference and inspiration, all framed within a specific argumentative and didactic focus on disbelief or false belief. The motifs interwoven in this sermon are manifold: the female personification of unfaith, the intervention of the devil and the false idea that the Host was simple bread, the theft of the Host – which, rather than being swallowed, was held in the mouth and thus taken away from the church, much alike the previous sermon – and the cutting of the host, first by the devil to prove it was just bread, and later by the woman to whom a one-year old child appeared with bleeding wounds at his feet, hands and chest. The *exemplum* concludes with the unveiling of the devil's deception, demonstrated both by the bleeding of the host, and by the intervention of the Child Christ, who restrained the woman's hand as she, incited by the devil, was about to commit suicide and thereby dammed her own soul.

Set within the same narrative framework that underscores the credibility of the account through the authority of its protagonist – Gregory the Great – the narrative begins with the customary introduction of the protagonist, who, contrary to the norm, is initially portrayed as a devout believer. Indeed, the event is described as glorious[22] (*glorius exsampyl*) both because it was credited with the establishment of the Corpus Domini feast and (perhaps) because it expressed the author's stance who wanted to present as well-known the reason that led the woman to become a disbeliever – namely, the devil's intervention, who, envious of her steadfast faith and disguised as a priest, instilled in her the doubt that the Host was merely ordinary bread, urging her to take it home to verify it. The author of the sermon drew on the same sources as the preceding one, reworking them further and completely changing perspective. A substantial portion is devoted to describing the devil's actions – his disguise and his twisted, insidious rhetoric aimed at capturing the soul of the believing woman. In fact, one might argue that the devil emerges as a central figure – if not the main co-protagonist – executing two deceptions: first, leading the woman to desecrate the Host, and then inducing her to succumb to guilt and contemplate suicide. In contrast, the woman is portrayed as a helpless victim of the devil's deceptive arts, which only Christ in the form of the Child – the true protagonist – managed to thwart. The connection among these sermons on the mystery of transubstantiation is confirmed by recurring narrative elements, such as the Christ Child's age, the wounds, and the narrative framework (including the presentation formulas), undoubtedly reflecting the reciprocal influence of Latin sources. It is equally evident that some of the sources for the "miraculous" event were different. There is one Latin *exemplum* recounting an episode in which the Host was not broken[23] but cut with a knife, a deed attributed solely to the Jew: it is recorded in British Library Additional 11284 of the first half of the fourteenth century containing the example of the *Speculum Laicorum*, where it is said that a Jew in Germany stroke the Host with his knife and blood streamed forth (f. 35). Here below the passage containing the exemplus from Bodl eMus 180/022[24].

> And þat I may preve by a glorius exsampyl in the sermons of seynt Gregory þe whiche he made in grete worchyp of þe blessid sacrament on the awtyr (and it was also one of the cawses why þat the holy feste [160] of Corpus Christi was firste ordende and fownde), and seyde þus. There was some tyme a woman, and sche was ever in perfit beleve on the blessid sacrament on þe awter, and ever sche

[22] The adjective 'glorious' was first attested in religious text, precisely in 1382 in Wycliff's Bible, with the meaning of "ostentatious, fond of splendour". Its usage continued to be connected with religious vocabulary up to 1400 when it started to occur in romances with the connotation of "illustrious, renowned". OED s.v. *glorious* and MED s.v. *glorious*.

[23] See note 22.

[24] In this regard, it is worth mentioning the episode of Sternberger Hostienschänderprozess about five Jews – five like the wounds of Christ – who were accused of piercing the host with nails and knives ("mit nodeln gestochen / mit messern gestochen") (Chiara De Bastiani, personal communication).

had in hyr prayers to the blessid sacrament þis maner of sayng: 'O þu blessid Lorde Ihesu I [f. 125v] Crist, very flessche and bloode in forme of brede.' Þen consideryng þe [165] fende how stedfastly þat sche was sett in þe feiþe of Criste, and also of the sayng of hyr gracius wordis to þe sacrament, wherefore he had grete envy to þis woman.

And so it befell in þe begynnyng of Lent þat þis woman went to þe chyrche to be schreven. And as sche enterid at þe chyrche style þe [170] devill came to hyr in the lykenes of the holy-watyr clerke of þe chirche and seyde to hyr, 'Woman, whydyr goiste þu?' And sche seyde: 'I go to þe chyrche to be schreven of my synnys þat I may be abyll and worþi to resceyve at Ester my saviowre Ihesu Criste his flessche and his blode in forme of brede.' But then the devill was woode and angry [175] and seyde: 'Þu arte but a foole, for | knowe more pen pu. Am not I the paressche clerke of the chirche? For to sey that it is as þu sayste, it is [f. 126r] not so, and þat I wyll make a | large preve before the. Loke when þu haste take þat brede of þe preste on Ester Day þat þu bring it home, and þen schalt þu see verely that it is but brede and noþer flessche ne [180] blode, as þu sayste.' Wherevpon þe woman gafe grete credens to þe fende and þow3te it scholde be so as he withe his falsenes had informyd hyr. Notwithstondyng 3it sche went into þe chyrche [to hyr gostly fadur] and made a cowntenaunce of holynes; but sche thow3t oþerwyse, and so contenewyd till Ester Day was come.

[185] And when sche had resceyvid þat blessid sacrament, sche kepte it prevely and brow3t it home to hir place hole and sownde. And then to hyrselffe sche seyde: 'Now sothely I wolde þat þe clerke were here þat I my3te see þis prevyd þat it is not so as holy chyrche haþe taw3t me.' But in certeyne, anon as sche had seyde these wordis, þe fende cam to [f. 126v] hyr in þe lykenes afore-sayde. I Þen anone seyde sche: 'Let me se [191] what prefe þat þu canste make þat þis is not þe very flessche and blood of Crist.' And þerewythe þe devyll toke hyr a knyfe and bad hyr smyte it or cut it in two, 'And þen schalte þu see that it is but brede.' 'Nay', seyd sche, 'cut it þiselffe.' þen seyde þe devill: 'If I scholde do þat dede myselfe, þu wilt sey þat þere is some wylis or some sotelteis in [195] me, if it com not to þe conclucion as we spake of before.' The intent of his wordis was for þis cawse: he had no powere to make so large a profyr, and therfore he bad þe woman not spare but cut it atwo. And þen sche dyd acordyng as þe fende bad hyr. And withe the stroke þat sche stroke, sodenly there stode vp a lytyll childe as it had ben a 3ere [200] of age. And in every honde and foote and [in] his syde he had a grete wounde, and ever þe woundis blede. And þe childe lokyd as pituosly vpon hyr I as who seythe: 'þu haste hurt me sore.' Wherfore þe [f. 127ar] woman cryed lowde, and withe grete lamentacion sche seyde to þe fende: 'Alas, þu cursyd creature! What haste þu made me to do? For [205] ever I haue had my feythefull beleve in þe blessyd Lorde Ihesu Criste his flessche and his bloode in forme of brede. And for þis dede that I haue done, now schall I be dampnyd.' 'Nay! Certen', seyde þe fende, 'and þu wilt take þe same knyfe and smyte þiselffe to the herte, þen schalt þu be saffe, or els þu arte but dampnyd.' 'Why! Trowyste þu', [210] seyde sche, 'if I do so that I may be savyd?' '3ee, certen', seyde he. 'Now forsoþe', seyde sche, 'I had lever styke myselfe to the herte withe þis knyfe raþer þen my

sowle scholde peressche for þis myschevos dede.' And therewithe sche purposyd to smyte hyrselfe to þe herte withe þat knyfe. And sodenly þat blessyd Lorde in þe [215] lickenes of a chylde withe a lawȝyng I chere toke the woman by the [f. 127av] honde and helde hyr so fast þat sche myȝt not bryng hyr purpose abowte. And then þe good Lorde commawndyd the fende to passe to þe peynes of hell. And anone þe devyl voyded frome thens and bare awey [220] an ende of þe howse withe hym. And then came in moche pepyll and saw this same syȝte, and ever þe good Lorde stode styll in þe same symylytude afore-seyde. And þen cam in the curate of þe chyrche, and by a sovereyne commawndement he cawsid moche pepyll for to [225] come thedyr. And withe grete reverence he toke vp þis giorius Lorde in a solempne procession and so browȝte þe good Lorde to the chirche. And þe woman folowyd aftyr withe grete contriscion, cryyng to God for mercy. And anone in the syȝte of all pepil, þe blessid Lorde turned into þe forme of brede aȝene, and withe þe same glorius oste [G, p. 208] sche was howselyd and so sche resceyvyd hym to hyr everlastyng [231] saluacion[25].

[25] Trans.: And that I may prove by a glorious example from the sermons of Saint Gregory, which he made in great honor of the Blessed Sacrament on the altar (and it was also one of the reasons why the holy feast [160] of Corpus Christi was first instituted and founded), and he said thus: There was once a woman who always held perfect belief in the Blessed Sacrament upon the altar, and she always had this saying in her prayers to the Sacrament: "O you blessed Lord Jesus Christ, true flesh and blood in the form of bread." Then, when [165] the devil saw how steadfastly she was rooted in the faith of Christ, and heard her gracious words spoken to the Sacrament, he became greatly envious of this woman.
And so it happened that at the beginning of Lent this woman went to church to be shriven (confessed). And as she entered at the church gate, the [170] devil came to her in the likeness of the holy water clerk of the church and said to her: "Woman, where are you going?" And she said: "I go to church to be shriven of my sins so that I may be able and worthy to receive at Easter my Savior Jesus Christ—his flesh and his blood in the form of bread." But then the devil was furious [175] and said: "You are a fool, for I know more than you. Am I not the parish clerk of the church? And I say that what you believe is not true, and I will prove it to you clearly. When you have received that bread from the priest on Easter Day, take it home with you, and then you shall see plainly that it is nothing but bread, and neither flesh nor [180] blood, as you say." Whereupon the woman gave great credence to the fiend and thought it might be as he, with his deceit, had led her to believe. Nevertheless, she went into the church [to her spiritual father] and made a show of holiness; but in her heart she thought otherwise, and so she continued until Easter Day came.
[185] And when she had received the Blessed Sacrament, she kept it secretly and brought it home whole and unharmed. And then she said to herself: "Now truly I wish the clerk were here so I might see this proven, that it is not as Holy Church has taught me." But surely, as soon as she had spoken these words, the devil came to her again in the same likeness as before. And then she said: "Let me see [191] what proof you can offer that this is not truly the flesh and blood of Christ." And with that, the devil gave her a knife and told her to strike it or cut it in two: "Then you shall see that it is nothing but bread." "No," she said, "you cut it yourself." Then said the devil: "If I do it myself, you will say that there is some trick or cunning in [195] me if it does not come to the conclusion as we spoke of before." (The meaning of his words was this: he had no power to carry out such a great act, and therefore he bade the woman not to hold back but to cut it in two herself.) And so she did according as the fiend told her. And with the stroke that she struck, suddenly there stood up a small child, as if it were about a year [200] old. And on each hand and foot, and in his side, he had

In conclusion, Middle English sermons served not only as tools for disseminating theological and moral principles to a broad audience but also as reflections of the theological debates of their time. Examples of the theft of the host are paradigmatic of this process: in fact, this very crime was one of the actions most frequently attributed to witches. The softening – or even complete omission – of certain elements present in the corresponding Latin *exempla* can readily be explained by their didactic function: to concentrate attention on the salvific power of faith and on the deception of the devil lurking behind every act of desecration, while simultaneously avoiding any reference to the magical powers ascribed to the Host, so as not to reinforce the popular beliefs prevalent at the time. At the same time, although their primary aim was to reinforce moral lessons, the treatment of some themes circulating in well-known Latin collections took to extremes some features, that anticipated characteristics later solidified in the image of the witch: not only women are mostly represented as sinful, but the figure of the sinful woman – lecherous, irredeemable, and linked to diabolical relationships – prefigured the traits that would define a woman as a witch in the treatises of the late fifteenth and sixteenth century. It is not surprising that only women stole the Host in sermons: the theft of the Host was indeed one of the most frequent accusation in Inquisitors' treatises:

> Quinque Magarum quæsitores narrant interalia se quæstionem de Maga habuisse, quæ fatebatur se consecratam hostiam quam oportuerat deglutiuisse, sudario exceptam in poculo vbi bufone m alebat condidisse, puluerésque sibi à diabolo datos adiecisse vt certis vocibus (quas reticeri præstat) enuntiatis ad enecandas pecudes limini ouilis substerneret. Deprehensa itaue & euicta viua concremata eſt. (Bodin 1590, 385)

a great wound, and the wounds bled continually. And the child looked upon her with such a sorrowful gaze, as if to say: "You have wounded me sorely." Wherefore the woman cried out loudly, and with great lamentation she said to the devil: "Alas, cursed creature! What have you made me do? For [205] I have always held faithful belief in the blessed Lord Jesus Christ, his flesh and his blood in the form of bread. And for this deed I have done, now I shall be damned!" "No indeed," said the fiend, "if you will take that same knife and strike yourself to the heart, then you shall be saved; otherwise, you are damned." "What? Do you believe," [210] said she, "that if I do so I may be saved?" "Yes, certainly," said he. "Well then, truly," she said, "I would rather stab myself to the heart with this knife than let my soul perish for this wicked deed." And with that, she intended to strike herself to the heart with the knife. But suddenly the blessed Lord, in the [215] likeness of a child with a joyful expression, took the woman by the hand and held her so tightly that she could not carry out her intention. Then the good Lord commanded the fiend to depart to the torments of hell. And at once the devil fled from there, carrying away [220] with him part of the house. Then many people came in and saw this sight, and the good Lord still stood there in the same form as before. And then came the curate of the church, and by a special command he summoned many people to [225] gather there. And with great reverence he lifted up the glorious Lord in a solemn procession and thus brought him to the church. And the woman followed behind with great contrition, crying to God for mercy. And immediately, in the sight of all the people, the Blessed Lord returned to the form of bread again. And with that same glorious Host, she was given communion, and so she received him unto her everlasting [231] salvation.

> Verùm longè grauior eorum est superstitio qui chartaceos orbiculos de collo pendentes, aut consecratam hostiam in pera circumferunt (vt penes gentilem Præsidem deprehendit hostiam carnifex, qui in patibulo montis falconis suspendit eum). (Ivi, 665)

The *exempla* depicting the disbelieving woman serves a dual purpose: they both reinforce ecclesiastical authority and underscore the sacred mysteries of the Eucharist, while also emphasizing a gendered model of sin (and redemption). Notably, the censored versions of these exempla heighten the association between misbelief, the theft of the host, and the female figure. Thus, while they offer a didactic lesson on faith and repentance, they also reinforce traditional gender stereotypes upon which later the image of the witch will hinge.

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Contributors

Luca Baratta (<luca.baratta@unisi.it>) is Associate Professor of English Literature at the University of Siena, where he is also Chair of the Language Centre. He is the author of *"A Marvellous and Strange Event". Racconti di nascite mostruose nell'Inghilterra della prima età moderna* (2016), *The Age of Monsters. Nascite prodigiose nell'Inghilterra della prima età moderna: storia, testi, immagini (1550-1715)* (2017), and *Senza testa / Headless* (2018). In 2019 he published the first critical edition of Thomas D'Urfey's *The Comical History of Don Quixote – Part I*. From 2018 to 2024 he was a member of the Executive Board of the Italian Association of Shakespearean and Early Modern Studies. His research interests focus on the social and cultural history of early modern England.

Dario Bullitta (<dario.bullitta@unito.it>) is Assistant Professor of Germanic Philology in the Department of Humanities at the University of Turin, where he teaches courses on Old Norse Philology, History of the Scandinavian Languages in the Middle Ages, Textual Criticism, and New Testament Apocrypha. His research focuses on Old West Norse and Old East Norse biblical, apocryphal, hagiographic and theological literatures and on the identification of their Latin sources. He is editor of the Old Norse *Visio Pauli* and *The Gospel of Nicodemus* and is currently working on the *Dormition of the Virgin* by Pseudo-Joseph of Arimathea. He is a member of the editor board of the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*.

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Maria Cristina Lombardi (<mclombardi@unior.it>) is Full Professor of Nordic Languages and Literatures at the University of Napoli "L'Orientale" and Member of Accademia dei Lincei. Main research fields include Scandinavian languages and literatures, Nordic philology, rhetorical figures in medieval Icelandic poetry, modern and contemporary Swedish literature, and translation studies.

Irene Montori (<irene.montori@unina.it>) is Lecturer in English literature at the University of Naples "Federico II". In 2024 she was post-doc research fellow at the University of Siena, where she worked within the PRIN project *Monsters, Sorcerers, and Witches of Northwestern Europe: The Medieval and Early Modern Construction of Otherness in Literature for Popular Audiences*. She is the author of *Milton, the Sublime and Dramas of Choice: Figures of Heroic and Literary Virtues* (IASEMS Mariangela Tempera Book Prize, 2021).

Laura Poggesi (<laura.poggesi@edu.unige.it>) is Adjunct Professor of Germanic Philology at the University of Genoa. As post-doctoral research fellow of the University of Florence, she has studied the modalities in which magic and witchcraft are represented in Middle English sermons. Her main research interests include sermon and medical literature in Middle English, textual criticism, and translation of medieval texts from Latin into the vernacular. She is author of the first critical edition and Italian translation of the fifteenth-century collection of Middle English medical recipes contained in Cambridge, Trinity College Library, MS R.14.32, titled *Farmacopea inglese tardomedievale. Edizione e traduzione delle ricette mediche dal MS R.14.32*.

Carla Riviello (<carla.riviello@uniroma3.it>) is Associate Professor of Germanic Philology at University of Roma 3. Her fields of research include translations strategies in Old High German, vocabulary of pain and emotions, stylistic strategies in Old English and Old Saxon poetry, magic and marginality in Anglo-Saxon England.

Letizia Vezzosi (<letizia.vezzosi@unifi.it>) is Professor of German Philology at the University of Florence. She is the co-founder and co-director of the online journal *Medioevo Europeo* and member of the advisory board of the journal *LEA*. Her research interests include historical linguistics, philology, and medieval studies, especially concerning Old and Middle English and Middle Dutch language and literature.

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LETIZIA VEZZOSI is Professor of Germanic Philology at the University of Florence. She is the author of studies on Old and Middle English and Middle Dutch, including the first Italian introduction to Middle Dutch and the recent volume *Non solo agiografia: il poema di Saint Erkenwald*. She is co-editor of the journal "Medioevo Europeo".

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