Poisoner, Shapeshifter, Adulteress, Thief
Legends and Images of Witchcraft in Finnmark and Gotland

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*To my family, who got me started, and Marcus, who got me through.*

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## Abstract

This dissertation concerns legends of witches from fifteenth-, sixteenth-, and seventeenth-century Scandinavia. My aim is to demonstrate that the figure of the witch was deeply meaningful and spoke in the symbolic language of legends to anxieties surrounding womanhood, motherhood, and the social power of women to construct and maintain communities. In particular, I investigate several productive motifs and motif-complexes, including "edible witchcraft," shapeshifting, and magical milk-theft, showing how these tropes inform the construction of the witch figure as an anti-neighbor, anti-human, anti-wife, and anti-mother. I focus on how witchcraft legends functioned especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in two sites that each offer different types of sources for these legends: Finnmark, Norway's northernmost province, and Gotland, an island in the Baltic Sea that has since 1645 been a province of Sweden, and which previously was part of the Danish empire (as was the whole of Norway, from the sixteenth century until 1814). In Finnmark, I focus on the documentation of a series of witch trials that occurred over the course of the seventeenth century, Norway's worst outbreak of witch trials and on par, in terms of execution ratios, with the worst in Continental Europe during the whole period of witch trials (roughly the 1420s to 1700). On Gotland, I focus on visual evidence: church murals, dating to the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, that feature a legendary character known in English as the "milk-stealing witch" (in Swedish she is instead more typically called *tjuvmjölkande kvinnan*, 'the milk-stealing woman'). I draw also on legends recorded by folklorists in later centuries, especially, in the case of Gotland, on the legends and beliefs collected in the nineteenth century on the island by the enterprising P. A. Säve. I do not seek to present these sites as a comparison, but rather seek to demonstrate how the witch emerged in localized legends, at different times and in different genres, and yet drew on common tropes and motifs to explore similar themes of gender and social power.

# INTRODUCTION

The witch is an established character in Nordic legends. She—for, as I will discuss below, the imagined witch is stereotypically female—takes many forms and plays many roles, and narratives and beliefs about her are similarly malleable. Nevertheless, like all legends, legends about the witch tend nonetheless to be conservative in terms of content, both in superficial content—that is, the motifs they employ—and the deep structure that informs specific multiforms. This dissertation considers legends about witches from two locations in particular, Finnmark and Gotland, and examines them not just in their verbal format but also as they appeared in the context of Reformation-era witchcraft trials and visual productions on late medieval church walls. By examining these multimodal legends of witchcraft, which span several centuries, some of the deep structures about witch belief and narrative in Nordic folk culture begin to emerge. This dissertation will demonstrate that, though the witch takes different forms in different places, she speaks to persistent anxieties concerning gender organization, social power, and the relationship between humanity and the animal world. To illustrate some of this, I turn to a relatively modern multiform, told by a man named J. Wallin[1] and recorded by Gotlandic folklorist P. A. Säve in the mid-nineteenth century:[2]

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[1] This is probably Jacob Wallin (1779–1861), one of Säve's most effusive informants, but might also be Johan Wallin (born 1794); see Bjersby (1964, 202–206, 358).

[2] Readers of Swedish will note that the spelling and grammar in several of Säve's transcriptions differs from standard Swedish. This is because, firstly, the transcriptions rely on Säve's handwritten fieldnotes and are faithful to the speakers' spoken speech, which—as all ethnographers know—is frequently ungrammatical, in all languages; secondly, the Gotlandic dialect differs mildly from mainland Swedish and its orthography, particularly in the nineteenth century when Säve recorded these legends, was not standardized. Säve himself, or at any rate his publisher, seems to have felt that "bjäru" was the "correct" spelling for the creature featured in this legend (since the section in which this and related legends are printed bears that title), but "bjära" seems to be more common today and I have adopted this as my standardized spelling. Further discussions of the bjära and other milk-stealing witches' creatures, for which I employ the umbrella term "trollcat," can be found below in chapters 5 and 6.

> En Bond-hustru, som gerna ville ha mycket smör och mjölk och mer än hennes egna kor naturligen kunde gifva, fick af en gammal kärring det rådet att hon skulle skaffa sig "Bjäru", och så erhöll hon derjemte af kärringen underrättelse om sättet att skaffa sig Bjäru: hon skulle nemligen 3 Thorsdags-qvällar å rad gå på kyrkogården, blåsa in genom nyckelhålet och afsäga sig den Heliga Anda. Det gjorde Bondhustrun; och skulle så en Söndag, då allt Husfulket var gånget i kyrkan, försöka att göra "Bjäru". Bondhustrun gick då ut på ladan, tog fram 3 björke-"sprutar" (spröten) af en qvast som hon band i hop, och lindade så gamla pasar (trasor) och band derutom, och skapade så till ben af fyra små stickor, som hon satte under. Nu var Bjäran färdig att stiga opp; och då sade Bond-Hustrun: "Stig opp i fanens namn!" och Bjäran började resa på sig. —Men en dräng i Gården, som anat att hans Matmor hade före sig något "som inte var rätt som det skulle vara", hade henne ovetande blifvit hemma, låg uppe på ladu-"rinderna", och sade nu för sig: "Fall kull i Jesu namn!" och så föll Bjäran ikull. Bondhustrun sade åter: "Stig opp— —!" Men drängen fick så förr bjäran att falla kull igen. Detta skedde så om hvart annat många gånger: när Drängen slutligen såg att det fick lif igen, tog han förargad en plank-stump och kastade ner öfver bjäran. Då flydde Bond-Hustrun förskräckt sin väg; men visste intet om drängen, och denne låtsade heller ingen ting. (Säve 1959, 218–219)
>
> [A housewife, who wanted to have more butter and milk and such than her own cows could provide naturally, got advice from an old hag that she should get herself a bjäru, and she then also received from the hag information about getting a bjäru: three Thursday evenings in a row, she must walk around the churchyard, blowing through the keyhole and forswearing the Holy Ghost. The housewife did that; and then one Sunday, when everyone had gone to church, tries to make a bjäru. The housewife then went out to the barn, took three birch sprigs from a broom that she bound together, and twisted three old rags and bound those with the sprigs together as well, and then shaped legs out of four small sticks, which she placed underneath. Now the bjära was ready to stand up; and so the housewife said: "Stand up in the name of the Devil!" and the bjära began to rise. —But a farmhand at the farm, who had a feeling that his mistress had done something "that wasn't as it should be," had unbeknownst to her come home and lay up in the loft, and said to it, "Fall down in Jesus's name!" and the bjära toppled right over. The housewife said again: "Stand up [in the name of the Devil!]" But the farmhand made the bjära fall over again just as before. That sequence happened several more times; when the farmhand finished speaking and it took to life again, he took a wooden plank and angrily threw it down over the bjära. Then the housewife, frightened, fled on her way; but didn't know about the farmhand, who pretended nothing had happened.][3]

This witch is, thanks to the efforts of the farmhand, unsuccessful in her attempt to steal milk and butter from her neighbors, which is what her *bjära* (here sometimes spelled "bjäru"; see footnote 2) would have been able to do, and also goes unpunished; the farmhand, apparently satisfied with the

[3] Except where noted, all translations are my own.

outcome, takes no further action. In this respect the legend, among the vast numbers of milk-stealing witch legends populating Northern Europe, is unusual; most describe some retribution against the witch, as discussed in my final chapter below. Yet this single story contains a number of themes and motifs that will reappear in a variety of contexts throughout this study of witch beliefs and narratives in early modern Scandinavia.

The "old hag" (*gammal kärring*) who distributes information is suggestive of the actual social networks of women that proved to be crucial in witch trials throughout Europe, including those I examine in this dissertation; these networks comprised friendships, enmities, and relationships of varying intensity and kinship, among which spread accusations, rumors, stories, and also folk magical techniques (which could be mistaken for or interpreted as proof of witchcraft by the learned male circles of the courts). With her age and her secret knowledge, she also represents an important stereotype of the witch, a stereotype developed in the early modern period by a complex negotiation of ideas between the innumerable folk cultures of Europe and the slightly more homogenized elite culture practiced by, among others, priests, doctors, and lawyers. An elite contribution to this stereotype, which played a large role in encouraging large scale persecutions, was perceiving witchcraft as a group crime: the transmission of how to make a bjära from one woman to another hints at the kind of women's conspiracy that many early modern judges feared, and which will be examined in more depth especially in chapter 2. However, "real" witches in both trial situations and legends are in fact more likely to be specific housewives than undifferentiated old hags (and indeed the main witch in this story is not the *gammal kärring* but rather the *bond-hustru*, literally the farmer's wife), and this has important implications for how to understand the witch's deep meanings in Nordic legendry.

Another broad theme this legend points to, which I will discuss in depth in chapter 6, is motherhood—or rather a twisted version of motherhood. The witch's familiar—here a milk-stealing creature known often as a "trollcat" but called on Gotland a bjära[4]—is a kind of demonic child, created with female domestic materials like brooms and rags and used to collect milk, butter, and other materials from neighboring farms, which it then brings to its "mother." Its generation and its behavior stand in opposition to proper Christian children, whose creation was, in the early modern period, mostly attributed to men, and who received milk *from* their mother, rather than the other way around.[5] The charm the witch uses to bring the bjära to life, "Stand up in the name of the Devil," suggests another recurring element to this trope, namely that when a male figure is involved in the creation of a trollcat it is not the woman's husband but the Devil: the Scandinavian milk-stealing witch is a figurative, if not literal, adulteress. The four "legs" the witch makes out of sticks indicate another common feature not just of witches' familiars but of witchcraft in general, namely a recurring theme of animality. Witches themselves frequently shapeshift into animal forms, the Devil often appears with bestial features or as an animal, and of course trollcats and other familiars often resemble cats, hares, and other animals, all themes I explore in (especially) chapters 3 and 6.

Finally, this legend, like most milk-witch legends, portrays the witch as a rather pathetic figure, ultimately unsuccessful in her ventures and diminished by an intrepid male figure, here a farmhand. The responsibilities thrust upon men in controlling women are a mostly overlooked aspect of witch legends, and I take up a consideration of how milk-witch legends speak to correct *male* behavior, as well as female behavior, in chapter 5. In broad strokes, the male/female roles of the characters in

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[4] "Trollcat" and "bjära" are in fact only two of a great many names recorded across the Nordic region for this type of witch's familiar, examined in detail by Jan Wall in a two-volume work, *Tjüvmjölkande Väsen* (Wall 1977–1978). See esp. table 7 in volume 1 (Wall 1977, 204–207).

[5] See especially Purkiss (1996, 134) for discussion.

this legend mirror the real and dreadful situation many accused female witches found themselves in during the period of the witch trials, when (mostly) women were chastised by (entirely) male authorities for purportedly diabolic activities, even to the point of torture and death. I do not mean to suggest that the farmhand in the story or the frustrated housewife represent the very real men and women of the trials, but in both cases we see an essential truth of Scandinavian witchcraft belief and legends, that in many ways they are fundamentally about female power, male reactions to that power, and relationships between the sexes. The ways in which these difficulties are expressed, via both witch trials and legends, vary greatly over time and place; for instance, the seventeenth-century witch judges certainly did not pretend, as the farmhand does here, that "nothing had happened." Yet the very fact that such legends continued to be told more than a century after executions had ended (Norway executed its last witch in 1695, Sweden in 1733[6]) proves that the figure of the witch continued to be productive; elites may have changed their opinions of the witch over the eighteenth century, transforming her from menace to fraud, but she continued to pester the countryside.

The themes I explore in this dissertation—themes related to the production and meaning of food, motherhood and family structures, and the relationship between the human and animal worlds—all speak to the fundamental function of the witch as a legendary character in Scandinavia. A basic question at the heart of my dissertation is: what does the witch *mean* in Scandinavian folklore? In many ways my answers echo those of scholars who have looked at witchcraft elsewhere in Europe, which should not be particularly surprising, since Scandinavia was—and is—of course part of that continent (this will be discussed further below). The stereotype of the witch in Scandinavia, as elsewhere in Europe, was a female worker of magic, dangerous firstly to her neighbors and

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[6] These dates should not be taken as the dates of the final witch *trials* in these countries, and still less of declining general belief. With regard to the decline of witchcraft trials in Scandinavia particularly, see Knutsen (2006).

secondly—particularly in elite perceptions—to her broader community. She was in every sense a breaker of boundaries, ignoring the constraints of her gender, religious edicts, cultural mores, and even the laws of physics, transforming herself into animal shapes or taking flight. Scandinavian legends about witches reveal the fault lines in her society, lines uncertainly rimming social power, gender organization, and the construction of family and community. In crossing these lines, the witch reveals them; by transgressing, she shows the boundaries to exist—if also to be alarmingly porous. Witch legends and beliefs emerged out of the fraying of boundaries that were symbolic but structurally fundamental to early modern Scandinavian societies, in ways that were particular to the particular boundaries in question; thus, while (for instance) the theme of animality recurs in both Finnmark and Gotland—and elsewhere—it is employed differently, to express different if related concerns about the distinctions between humans and animals and the social power and responsibilities ascribed to men and women. Some of the differences in how these shared motifs are employed also, to be sure, relate to the different modalities I examine at each site; the trials of actual human beings and the more abstract representations in church artwork are bound to inflect the usage of motifs and narratives.

## On the Edges: Finnmark and Gotland

This dissertation examines early modern legends of witches in Scandinavia, focusing on the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries in two distinct places: Finnmark, the northernmost province of Norway, and Gotland, an island in the Baltic Sea that has been part of Sweden since 1645 but maintains even today some separate identity and culture (Rebas 2012, 240–241). Importantly, for the period I focus on in this dissertation, both places were parts of an ambitiously colonizing, centralizing Kingdom of Denmark. Nevertheless, Finnmark and Gotland are separated by language and culture, and their experience with witchcraft varies significantly: while Finnmark

experienced one of Scandinavia's worst periods of witch hunting, Gotland had very few trials indeed, and no major panics. My sources and therefore my foci also differ for each site: I focus on the seventeenth-century trial records and a late-century summary of the trials for Finnmark while my sources for Gotland comprise several late medieval wall paintings and legends recorded much later, largely in the nineteenth century, by the enterprising Gotlandic folklorist P. A. Säve. The expressive cultures of witchcraft in these two places are, in other words, entirely distinct from each other. And yet both draw on beliefs and legends about witches that are common to Scandinavia, the Nordic region, and in many cases Europe generally. Additionally, despite their differences, Gotland and Finnmark exhibit important similarities as well: both were, paradoxically, simultaneously cosmopolitan and rural; strategically central yet culturally (and geographically) marginal; and both, at different points in the early modern period, experienced acute economic peril and significant challenges to local power structures that impacted in crucial ways how witchcraft legends developed, sometimes into bloody action. Expressions of witchcraft differ in their modalities, but reflect shared traditions and display overlapping concerns with women's social power—particularly women's roles as wives, mothers, and neighbors. Both of my data "sets" were sanctioned by authorities and produced by institutionalized elites, but can be fruitfully mined for the folkloristic knowledge bases that informed, affected, and reacted to elite constructions like witchcraft trials and church doctrine.

Major outbreaks of witch trials depended on a number of factors, one of which—discussed in the "An Exceptional Crime" section below—was often an absence of powerful authorities, whether through weak central governments, distractions like wars that drew attention away from local conditions, or insufficient judicial protections. At first glance, neither Finnmark nor Gotland seem to fit this description; both were under Danish rule for much of the period under discussion and both subject to increasingly invasive efforts to reform popular religion, with attendant measures to

strengthen the powers of the state. Taking a closer look, however, both places *do* exhibit some features of distance from centralizing powers: Finnmark by virtue of sheer physical distance from Copenhagen, the seat of power in the Danish kingdom, and Gotland by the deliberate marginalization, both politically and economically, of its countryside in favor of the German Hanseatic town of Visby.[7] Yet, of the two sites, Gotland evaded trials, while Finnmark experienced one of the most intensive series of trials in the whole of Scandinavia. On the other hand, Gotland produced a large number of witch legends, both visual and oral. In other words, the similarities between Gotland and Finnmark's economic, religious, and political struggles did not produce the same results, but the legends of witchcraft as expressed on the one hand visually and orally and on the other in beliefs, accusations, and trials draw on a shared Nordic vocabulary of alterity, a vocabulary each place employed differently, reflecting their different circumstances. In broad outlines, the efforts undergirding both the production of murals on Gotland, the trials in Finnmark, and the oral legends in both places (and throughout Scandinavia) are similar, and have to do with the establishment, definition, and maintenance of gendered order in a context of heightened religious concern with the Devil and his ability to sow chaos.

I will examine the particular histories of Finnmark and Gotland further in chapters 1 and 4, respectively, but it is important also to lay out the broader European historical context, particularly with regards to attitudes towards magic and witchcraft—and the most explosive aspect of it, namely the witch trials that occurred in waves from roughly 1420 to 1700. This will of necessity be a very brief overview of a complex phenomenon; it is not my intention to offer original analysis here or be

[7] It is an anachronism to refer to "Germany" in this time period; the territory of what is today that country (and parts of several others) was then the Holy Roman Empire. However, for the sake of simplicity I will refer to "German" and "Germany" to refer to the German-speaking heartland of the empire.

wholly comprehensive, but merely to provide an overview of the history that informed Scandinavian legends of witchcraft in the early modern period.[8]

## Historical Context

It should be made clear that I subscribe to the commonly held position among folklorists that any particular piece of folklore cannot be fully understood if divorced from its cultural context. In this case, since I am restricting my study to the past, I can approach the cultural context only remotely, and am bereft of much of the situational context folklorists now prefer when analyzing expressive vernacular culture. At the extreme some might find this position hopeless; if legends—the genre at the heart of my study—"appear as products of conflicting opinions, expressed in conversation" and if "in the case of the legend, interpretation from the story content itself is not enough—all of the preliminaries that lead to the story and the story's frame are also needed for analysis," as Linda Dégh professes (Dégh 2001, 2, 53), I cannot proceed; almost none of the relevant and necessary situational context has been transmitted through time. If, however, we broaden our scope to admit *broader* cultural, social, and historical factors as significant pieces of context, we may permit analysis to go forward, though understanding that it cannot be as certain or precise as it might have been otherwise. To that end, I here lay out some of the broader historical context.

Before turning to the history of witchcraft trials, however, it will be helpful to remember that one way of understanding many witchcraft trials is through the sociological and folkloristic framework of a "moral" or "rumor panic," that is, a typically violent incident triggered by some specific event that

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[8] For comprehensive overviews, see Brian Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (Pearson, 2006 [3rd edition]); Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Period of the Witch Trials* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), and Robert Thurston, *The Witch Hunts: A History of the Witch Persecutions in Europe and North America* (Routledge, 2013 [2nd edition]). In *Dei europeiske trolldomsprosessane*, Rune Hagen provides a swift overview of European witch trials generally and a more specific overview of Norwegian trials (Hagen 2007).

is interpreted by the community in the framework of a shared tradition (Victor 1998; see also Ellis 1990; 2000). In a sense, any particular witchcraft trial is a literal realization of the legend tradition, an interpretation of particular events and people in the context of witchcraft beliefs and narratives. Conversely, the trials informed the tradition, both in the general sense—the realization of fears of witches could further solidify fear of witchcraft—and in the particular sense, that specific motifs were "actualized" and almost institutionalized. The following historical overview should not obscure the folk beliefs that contributed and responded to the trials, nor—though this history is more directly relevant to chapters 2 and 3—is it irrelevant to my later chapters, which move away from specific trials of actual people and into the more abstract category of visual and verbal legends.

### *The European Witchcraft Trials*

The era of major witch trials in Europe is roughly contemporaneous with the early modern period, and overlaps the religious upheaval of the Reformation (including both Protestant and Catholic Counter Reformations). There are vast differences within that broad period, however, with different regions experiencing surges of interest in and fear of witches at different times and to different degrees, with some areas (like Ireland) escaping all but unscathed and others (like parts of the Holy Roman Empire) distinguished by massive, bloody witch hunts that could subsume entire towns. Although identifying any broad pattern to when and where witch trials erupted is difficult, in general the trials moved outward, as the years progressed, with early outbreaks in the western Alps, a central—and most virulent—phase in the sixteenth century in western and central Europe (Scotland, an outlier geographically, also executed most of its witches in this major phase), and a later phase along the edges of Europe and its new overseas colonies. In general, Scandinavian witch trials follow this geographical and temporal pattern, with most of its witch trials occurring in the seventeenth century. With the major exceptions of the Swedish "Blåkulla trials" (1668–1676) and the panics

included in the seventeenth-century Finnmark trials, in addition to a few smaller panics elsewhere, the Nordic region largely escaped large-scale witch prosecutions. However, it cannot be said that magic and witchcraft were not major concerns. As Stephen A. Mitchell has documented in his 2011 volume, *Magic and Witchcraft in the Nordic Middle Ages*, since the medieval period the supernatural abilities and purported activities of people produced not only literature, images, and legends, but also legal opinions and actions in Scandinavia, and these concerns did not lessen in the slightest in the context of increased scrutiny of the Devil and his human servants in the early modern period.

### *Bad Moon Rising: Folk and Elite Conceptions of Witchcraft*

Broadly speaking, historians are agreed that Europe's witchcraft trials were at least partially the result of fears among the learned and elite classes that the Devil was active and acting aggressively on earth, recruiting human servants away from the proper practice of the Christian religion and granting his followers control over lesser demons who would perform works that, because the demons were invisible, looked like magic. In this theological interpretation, witchcraft became grafted onto heresy, which itself had become a major concern of the Church in the later Middle Ages—indeed many of the elements that would later become staples of "diabolical witchcraft," such as nocturnal group meetings, worshipping the Devil, and transvection on demonic animals, first emerged in the context of medieval heresies (Russell 1984, chapter 4, esp. 100; Peters 2002, 211–215). The development of diabolical witchcraft was uneven, but gradually coalesced between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries and suspiciously regarded the myriad folk customs, beliefs, religious practices, narratives, and magical practices maintained by the countless folk groups of Europe's lower classes and peasantry. All such popular practices and beliefs might strike the righteous as paganism, heresy, or witchcraft.

Generally speaking, the folk cultures of Europe understood maleficent magic in less awesome terms than the elite: when they attributed an event to witchcraft it was typically understood in terms of neighborly disputes. The events themselves could certainly be devastating to those involved—the illness or death of livestock, children, or adult relatives; theft of goods and property; crop-destroying or ship-sinking storms, for instance—but rarely were the miscreant's powers attributed to Satan in the first instance, or understood as part of a much larger diabolical conspiracy aimed at the heart of Christianity and its earthly kingdoms. Such common beliefs in malevolent "small" magics or *maleficia* (sg. *maleficium*) both predated and outlasted the witch trial phase, as recent research has shown.[9] The trials themselves resulted from the confluence of elite notions of diabolism with folk beliefs in witchcraft: in brief, the period of the witch trials happened when judges and authorities not only concurred with the masses that witchcraft occurred but imposed a theological superstructure onto those beliefs.

### *An Exceptional Crime: The Legal Context*

In the older legal systems of Europe, which scholars call "accusatorial," individuals would accuse suspects and trials were generally brief and restricted—the role of the court was essentially reactive. If charges could not be proved, the accuser might have to suffer the punishment that would have been inflicted upon the guilty (a practice with Biblical precedent, e.g. Dan. 13:61), a situation that doubtlessly dampened enthusiasm for pursuing suspected neighbors, particularly with the

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[9] See, e.g. part 2, "Witchcraft After the Witch-Trials," by Marijke Gijwijt-Hofstra, in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); part 3, "The Witch, Her Victim, the Unwitcher and the Researcher: The Continued Existence of Traditional Witchcraft," by Willem de Blécourt, in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); and *Witchcraft Continued: Popular Magic in Modern Europe*, ed. Willem de Blécourt and Owen Davies (Manchester University Press, 2004). More specific studies of particular areas exist as well, of for instance England (Davies 1999), the Bocage in France (Favret-Saada 1980), and Sweden (Van Gent 2009), among others.

notoriously difficult-to-prove charge of maleficium. In some places, accusatorial approaches continued throughout the early modern period, including in much of Scandinavia, thus contributing to the region's lesser number of trials and executions. Beginning in the thirteenth century, however, some jurisdictions began adopting and adapting older Roman approaches to justice, or "inquisitorial" systems of law.[10] In these more proactive systems, state or church authorities took a more proactive approach, seeking out misdeeds, instigating investigations, and pursuing suspects through criminal procedures.[11] The use of torture in cases of severe misdoing became established in inquisitorial procedure, and in many places witchcraft was classified as a *crimen excemptum*, an exceptional crime so heinous that normal checks against an overuse of tactics like torture were suspended (Kallestrup 2018, 19–20). The Catholic Church, various secular authorities, and eventually the Protestant monarchies of post-Reformation Europe (which married church and state explicitly) all employed inquisitorial procedures in various times and places. State control over the application of the law varied, and the degree of involvement from centralizing governments is one major factor in the development of the witch trials.

Paradoxically, despite elite concerns with diabolical witchcraft and a slew of new laws from many countries advancing the death penalty for swearing allegiance to the Devil, the more centralized the judicial system became the less frequently death sentences were carried out, and the less likelihood there was of major panics overtaking large portions of the population. The powerful Parlement of

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[10] Speaking more generally than legal opinions about witchcraft, Lars-Olf Larsson notes that the Scandinavian countries did adopt some features of Roman law, despite the fact that various of these regulations were "in clear conflict on a number of stipulations with 'old law and custom'" (Larsson 2016, 41).

[11] For a more complete overview of these legal developments, see Levack (2006, 75–80); with particular reference to Scandinavia, see Ankarloo (2002, 63–69) and chapter 4, "Comparing procedures against witchcraft in the Roman Inquisition and the Danish secular courts," in Louise Nyholm Kallestrup, *Agents of Witchcraft in Early Modern Italy and Denmark* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2015, 53–62). See also Kallestrup (2018, 27–29).

Paris, for instance, which governed the courts for half of France, depressed the number of executions and panics in that country, while the far less centralized Holy Roman Empire saw the period's worst outbreaks by far, with panics concentrated in particular areas whose leaders, for one reason or another, allowed or encouraged witch trials to consume hundreds of lives (Monter 2002, 22–29; 40–41; see also Hagen 2015a, 236–241). In other words a broad attribution of "witch hunting" to authorities is too simplistic, but it is true that local authorities, perhaps genuinely alarmed by a perceived diabolical conspiracy in their midst, played crucial roles in witch trials, usually when their powers were not checked by higher state (or church) authorities. Such a dynamic, as I will discuss further in chapter 1 and as Liv Helene Willumsen has shown, largely accounts for why Finnmark is such an outlier in Norwegian witch trial history: the geographic distance between Finnmark and the capital city of Copenhagen allowed local authorities to act with more impunity than their counterparts could elsewhere (Willumsen 2013, 232).

### *Politics and Religion: The Reformation*

The witchcraft trials started before the technical beginning of the Protestant Reformation in 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg, and continued fitfully even after the major wars of religion had burned themselves out in the seventeenth century. However, it cannot be denied that the two phenomena—witchcraft trials and Reformation—are linked: as Brian Levack points out, the 130 years of the Reformation (1520–1650) correspond with the most intense years of witch prosecution (Levack 2006, 110). The precise nature of the relationship between the Reformation and the age of witch trials has been the subject of scholarly debate, and specific regions and even individual jurisdictions were influenced differently by the moralizing programs advanced by reformers, of all denominations. However, certain broad trends that contributed to the intensification of witch prosecution can be identified, as laid out

especially by Levack (2006, chapter 4; see also Klaits 1985, chapter 3, esp. 59–65). These include: confessionalism; the internalization of sin; and the popularization of demonology, particularly fear of the Devil.

Confessionalism refers to the increasingly strong conflation of church with state and the reforming drive to ensure the pious behavior of everybody within a political area. Specific confessions, issued by religious leaders, sought to define communities of behaviors, contra nonbelievers or heretics (see Wandel 2011, 165–171). In general, the Reformation (both Protestant and Catholic Counter-Reformation) sought to reform not just church infrastructure, doctrine, and liturgy, but also popular practices, belief, and even private behavior, and it became the charge of secular institutions—especially in Protestant areas—to enforce such reforms. Such attention paid to the minutiae of religious expression and private behavior, and of course the charged tensions between fracturing faith communities, encouraged an atmosphere of watchfulness, guilt, and accusation that, thanks to the efforts of preachers, spread broadly throughout the population. The goal was the creation and maintenance of purportedly "godly" states (Levack 2006, 119–120; Klaits 1985, 59–60). Politics and religious expression became completely entwined, and earthly monarchies, in theory, mimicked and supported the heavenly kingdom of God. The analogy extended farther down the social scale, as well: as God was to heaven and the king was to his kingdom, so each individual patriarch was to his family and household (Wandel 2011, 128; Koefoed 2018, 325–327; Brauner 1995, 78). Robert Muchembled understands the relationship between micro- and macro-models of patriarchal authority as foundational to the development of the early modern state: "The strengthening of the authority of the state *was achieved through* that of husbands over wives and fathers over children" (Muchembled 2003, 89, emphasis added). Thus the strengthening and refinement of the patriarchy

was not purely cultural or social, but political and religious as well, and inseparable from the specific denomination espoused by the state.

The intrusion of the twinned institutions of church and state into private behavior, expressed and enforced by laws, ordinances, catechisms, sermons, and more (see Koefoed 2018 for a discussion of how this worked in a Danish context), meant that both piety and its opposite, sin, were internalized more than ever before, and again Muchembled understands this as central to the development of modern Western society: "This personalization and internalizing of sin was the foundation stone of the modernization of the West" (Muchembled 2003, 109). This had direct consequences for how witchcraft was understood. "All over early modern Europe," as Stuart Clark puts it, "as part of what was thought to be indelible religious training, children and adult confitents of every class and creed were supposed to internalize an image of the crime [of witchcraft]" (Clark 1997, 502). Demonic possession, in which a demon moved into a person's body, is perhaps the most literal expression of this internalization of sin, but throughout the early modern period a general mistrust of the body grew, particularly those parts and functions associated with reproduction and expulsion of waste (Muchembled 2003, chapter 3). Not just the state, not just the kingdom and household, but every individual body became a battleground in a cosmic struggle between God and Satan (Klaits 1985, 60–61). Regulations and cultural norms regarding personal and interpersonal (including marital) behavior exploded in the period, aimed not just at "keeping the peace" but defending the polity from Satan, who infiltrated and undermined the divine order of civil society through personal bodies. As Muchembled explains, "The offense of witches was not simply to have upheld a heretical doctrine, but to have accepted this permanent invasion, which inverted God's plan within their earthly bodies" (Muchembled 2003, 96). In Lutheran Scandinavia (and elsewhere), priests became

agents of the state as well as the church, charged with regulating and punishing their parishioners' private transgressions; sin had become internal but its policing was a matter of national security.

As Joseph Klaits notes, "In general, Satan was not nearly as horrifying in folk imagery as he was in the minds of most theologians," and it is safe to say that the majority of accusers were not reacting primarily to a belief that the accused witch had joined the Devil's forces (Klaits 1985, 62). However, as Robert Muchembled and Jeffrey Burton Russell have shown, the Devil underwent a dramatic transfiguration in the late medieval and early modern periods, emerging from unimportance in the early Christian period to an enormous, monstrous, existential threat, capable of undermining divine order on earth—and even, in the more apocalyptic strains of Reformation-era doctrines, in heaven (Muchembled 2003, chapter 1; Russell 1984, esp. chapter 8). Although this image of a terrifying, powerful Devil never fully supplanted the rather inept, even risible Devil common to folk legends throughout Europe (Muchembled 2003, 7), the various communicative machinery available to Devil-fearing elites of the late Middle Ages and Reformation era—including artwork, especially woodcuts after the advent of printing, as well as verbal and printed material—certainly popularized some aspects of elite demonology, and inculcated a more pronounced fear of the Devil than he had ever enjoyed before. Satan had begun to grow physically larger and more bestial in depictions already in the twelfth century (Muchembled 2003, 27), but the Reformation spread these ideas deeply throughout the populace: "Leading Protestant and Catholic reformers, continuing the tradition of late medieval Latin Christianity, laid great stress on satanic imagery" (Klaits 1985, 60). As Muchembled notes, the witch trials themselves offer some proof of the efficacy of elite attempts to instill fear of Satan (Muchembled 2003, 53).

### *The Age of Print and Empire: Scandinavia as Part of Europe*

Much of the above cultural, legal, political, and religious history fomented primarily on Continental Europe, and it is not incorrect to consider outlying regions such as the British Isles and Scandinavia somewhat separately. However, it is a mistake to consider them wholly disconnected. Some of the same reforming tendencies culminating in the Protestant Reformation were visible in parts of Scandinavia prior to Martin Luther's rise to fame; according to Martin Schwarz Lausten, for instance, Danes were translating the New Testament into the vernacular "long before" evangelical preachers arrived (Lausten 2016, 20). Trade routes, especially those controlled by the Hanseatic League (established first by German merchants in Visby, Gotland), linked especially the coastal regions of Scandinavia closely to northern German cities, the Netherlands, parts of costal England, Scotland, and France, and through these ports to the rest of Continental Europe. Indeed in the major port cities of late medieval and early modern Scandinavia a kind of Middle Low German became a *lingua franca*, so that large portions of the urban population would have spoken German as their second, or even first and sometimes only, language (Undorf 2014, 3). The Hanseatic League played an enormous role in exporting cultural artifacts, including demonological concepts, from the Continent in general and northern German urban centers in particular to Scandinavia, aided by the development of printing technology and the popularization of art forms like woodcuts, including those that featured witches.

The Lutheran Reformation itself is an example of the enormous cultural influence exerted by Germany, and its promotion of translating the Bible into vernacular languages propelled the spread of literacy, increasing further diffusion of ideas (including, again, about witchcraft); according to Ole Peter Grell's study of the Reformation in Denmark, "the resident German merchant population" in major trading cities like Malmö and Copenhagen "played played an important part in spreading the

new religious ideas, often making sure that these places were visited by itinerant evangelical preachers and that the relevant evangelical literature was made available by their trading partners in Germany" (Grell 2016, 46). E. I. Kouri notes a similar role played by Stockholm in Sweden (Kouri 2016, 61), and Visby's ready adoption of Lutheranism on Gotland will be discussed in chapter 4 below.[12] Gotland generally, with its historic ties to the Hanseatic League, was perhaps more directly tied to the German cultural world than Finnmark, but even here the ambitions of Hanse merchants based in Bergen—Norway's major merchant city, which was "strongly dominated by Lübeck," a primary player in the Hanseatic League (Larsson 2016, 33)—had sweeping effects on the local economy and social order, as will be discussed in chapter 1. Norway generally proved more resistant to Lutheran challenges to the Catholic faith (Grell 2016, 56), but Finnmark, perhaps owing to large numbers of immigrants from farther south, seems to have moved faster than the rest of the country in this regard. Many of the local authorities in Finnmark, for instance, came to the far north from much farther south, even Denmark itself, which naturally had close cultural links to the Hanseatic heartland. Indeed Liv Helene Willumsen understands personal connections to places elsewhere in Europe, including Denmark, as fundamental to the establishment of diabolism in the witch trials of seventeenth-century Finnmark, a feature largely responsible (in Willumsen's estimation) for the severity of the trials (Willumsen 2013, 253, 279–283). I will return to the topic of Finnmark's unusual demographics in chapter 1.

Beyond trade routes, the education of Lutheran clergy after the adoption of Lutheranism often took place in German and other Continental cities, including Wittenberg itself (Kolb 2018, 199; Kouri

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[12] E. I. Kouri and Jens E. Olesen note that the same phenomenon in fact occurred throughout the Baltic: "the close connections between the German colonies in Stockholm and Turku and the Baltic cities, where the Reformation had taken hold in the mid 1520s, helped the new faith to spread in Scandinavia" (Kouri and Olesen 2016b, 6).

2016, 87; Kouri and Olesen 2016b, 6). The technology of print allowed the words of important reformers to travel far beyond their native cities, disseminated not just through trade but also personal networks of evangelizing preachers; despite its distance from Copenhagen, for instance, "religious literature written by leading Danish theologians was in use in the churches" in Finnmark (Willumsen 2013, 237). Military campaigns took Scandinavian armies throughout the Baltic and even deep into the Continent; during the Thirty Years' War of the mid-seventeenth century, Swedish troops penetrated as far south as Augsburg. It is possible, as Brian Levack suggests, that "soldiers returning from Germany from the Thirty Years' War may have introduced more extreme diabolical ideas" to Sweden (Levack 2006, 227). Whatever the reports of ordinary soldiers, however, the experience of witchcraft trials the Swedish authorities encountered in the Holy Roman Empire apparently dampened any enthusiasm they might have felt to prosecute witches in their own country, although not enough to prevent the major "Blåkulla" trials of 1668–1676 (Anklarloo 2002, 87). It's difficult to know how readily Lutheranism was adopted in the countryside,[13] but cultural artifacts (including witchcraft motifs) could and did travel between language areas. Blåkulla itself, as a mountainous site of the witches' sabbath,[14] is a motif shared with German witchcraft lore, which features a mountain called "Brocken" or "Blocksberg" and appears in more than one woodcut produced in the period.[15] Unlike the textual portions of treatises and books, literacy was not a

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[13] The adoption of Lutheranism in the various Nordic counties proceeded differently, but generally speaking towns—especially, as discussed above, those with large German populations—converted first. See Grell (2016) and Kouri (2016).

[14] The use of the word "sabbath" to describe gatherings of witches dates to the early modern period, and is indicative of the extent to which anti-Semitism influenced perceptions of alterity.

Blåkulla has been identified with the isle of Jungfrun, near Öland, since at least 1555, when Olaus Magnus described, with some skepticism, beliefs that "at certain seasons of the year a coven of northern witches assembles on this mountain to try out their spells" (*Description* 2.23 (Olaus Magnus 1996, 122)). See also S. Mitchell (2011, 126–127).

[15] Perhaps the most famous of this is the frontispiece to the second edition of Johann Praetorius's *Blockes-berges Verrichtung* (Leipzig, 1669). Historian Lyndal Roper dismisses this as "a pastiche of demonic cliches, designed to

requirement to consider such woodcuts; images could thus function as universal communicators of ideas about (among other things) witches and witchcraft. I have thus argued that images of the milk-stealing witch in Scandinavian churches can be understood as a kind of dialect of what art historian Charles Zika has termed "the visual language of witchcraft," which developed especially, in Zika's estimation, in the productive, mercantile cities of Germany (Zika 2007; Rose 2015). In short, between military excursions, educational trips, trade routes, and the spread of more-or-less common iconography, Hanseatic Scandinavia became ever more deeply linked to the Continent during the early modern period, with important repercussions for its treatment of witchcraft and those accused of it.

### Gender at Stake: Witchcraft and Women

It should be made clear that I do not subscribe to the notion, now largely abandoned in scholarship, that the witch trials represent a war conducted by men upon women.[16] The existence of and indeed prevalence in some areas of male witches puts the lie to that too-neat dichotomy.[17] In addition, as Robin Briggs, among others, has observed, witchcraft accusations and suspicions largely flowed in

titillate as well as shock" but notes that its motifs of worshippers kissing the Devil's rear—the *osculum infame* of demonological dismay—and of a demon defecating into a pot "almost certainly drew on an older image, most likely one not designed to amuse" (Roper 2008, 131).

[16] See, e.g., discussions in R. Briggs (1996, chapter 7, 257–286); Hagen (2007, 24–28); Levack (2006, 141–149). See also chapter 1, "A Holocaust of one's own: The myth of the Burning Times," in *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (Purkiss 1996, 7–29) and Raisa Maria Toivo's history of feminist scholarship on witchcraft (up until the time the article was written, in 2006).

[17] Taken as a whole, Europe prosecuted and executed far more women than men for the crime of witchcraft, but sex ratios vary widely from country to country and even region to region. In a few places, notably Normandy and Iceland, the number of accused and executed men far outstripped the number of accused and executed women, revealing the extent to which stereotypes and responses to perceived witchcraft were informed by local conditions (for discussion, see Levack 2006, 141–149; see also the volume edited by Alison Rowlands, *Witchcraft and Masculinities in Early Modern Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). The case of Finnmark, studied in depth in chapters 1 through 3 below, is particularly curious in this regard, since a strong stereotype of male Sámi witches coexisted beside the more common European stereotype of a female witch who belonged to the majority ethnic group.

the first instance along female lines within a particular village; most witch trials were not precipitated by elite male judges reacting to poor village women (R. Briggs 1996, 267). Yet it is undeniably true that most (though not all) witches in both trial situations and narrative were female, and this basic fact reveals the extent to which witchcraft legends and beliefs reflected gender concerns. In Scandinavia as elsewhere, these concerns are paramount to understanding the figure of the witch. Indeed anxieties about the properly gendered order of early modern Scandinavian society are palpable in my sources, and as Deborah Willis says of contemporary England, "patriarchy helped to shape the terms" of these anxieties and the discourse of witchcraft generally (Willis 1995, 39).

Late Catholicism and especially the Protestant Reformation tended to restrict the position of women: marriage to a husband and motherhood in emulation of Mary became the overwhelming foci of female identity. "[Protestant] Reformers," Lyndal Roper says, "advocated a sanctified patriarchalism, marked by the attempt to discipline human behaviour so that appropriate male and female behaviour would be clearly defined" (Roper 1994, 97). In many ways, however, reformers who struggled to organize gender into clearly contained categories were simply continuing efforts begun in the medieval past. During the late medieval period,[18] thanks to factors like Christian kingdoms in the Middle East and the resulting cultural exchange between the Latin West, the Byzantine East, and particularly the Muslim Arab world, many ancient Greek writings were introduced to Western Christendom for the first time. Chief among these, probably, were those of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, whose arguments were accepted even though they often

[18] Historians have begun to chafe against many traditional terms for past periods, and this may be particularly true in a Nordic context, which does not always easily align with the terms and dates developed for Continental Europe. I draw no hard-and-fast-line between "medieval" and "early modern" Scandinavia, but it is fair to say that the former lasted later in Northern Europe than in more temperate climes. In this dissertation, I generally extend the Middle Ages in Scandinavia and the Baltic up to the early Protestant Reformation, but do not mean to imply a one-to-one correspondence between the Reformation and the secular designation of the "early modern period," which in my usage refers roughly to the years 1500–1800.

seemed divergent with current understandings of the Bible. The clash spurred the rise of a new and highly influential movement in Catholic theology, Scholasticism (Morris 2001, 215–216). Albertus Magnus (d. 1280) and especially his pupil Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), who spearheaded the attempt to reconcile Aristotelian philosophy with received Catholic wisdom, are still recognized as among the foremost thinkers of their age; their influence among intellectual circles in the late medieval period is not easy to overstate (McGrath 2011, 29).

Susan Mosher Stuard, following Ian Maclean, has argued that the new intellectual climate that valued Aristotle resulted in, among other things, a newly polarized conception of gender. Thomas Aquinas in particular, she suggests, advocated for an Aristotelian understanding of man "as active, formative, and tending toward perfection, unlike woman, whom [Aristotle] defined as opposite, or passive, material, and deprived of the tendency toward perfection" (Stuard 1998, 142–3; Maclean 1980, 6–10; see also Clark 1997, 120–123). This last deficiency agreed with a pre-existing notion among the Christian intelligentsia that women were more susceptible to the charms of the devil. We find it already, for instance, in the *Canon Episcopi*, a ninth-century text included in the extremely influential twelfth-century *Decretum*; in speaking about belief in witchcraft as a "delusion" of "the faithless mind" the (almost certainly male) author repeatedly identifies women as the progenitors of the error, implying that they are easily deceived: "some wicked women," he writes, "have…been seduced by the illusions and phantasms of demons," while Satan can "capture[] the mind of a miserable little woman" (Kors and Peters 2001, 62). The argument was brought to its fullest conclusion, perhaps, in the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the famous witch-hunting manual first published in 1486. Part I, Question 6, asks "why a larger number of sorcerers is found among the delicate female sex than among men" (Mackay 2009, 160) and highlights among its answers that women more credulous than men, "more easily impressed upon" by both good and evil spirits, and intellectually weak (Mackay 2009, 160–

165). Even so, it should be noted that the influence of the *Malleus Maleficarum* on the witch trials has probably been overstated, and that nearly a third of the *Malleus*'s references to witches uses the masculine form of the Latin noun (Nenonen 2006, 166).

Importantly, this construction of a polarized, binary gender system, with women as decidedly the inferior party, did not remain confined to elite, learned circles. According to Susan Stuard, an increasingly rigid hierarchy of professionalization limited exposure among priests, physicians, and lawyers (all exclusively male professions) to Scholastic notions; however, members of these professions in turn introduced elite opinions to the lower classes. By the end of the Middle Ages, "gender expectations now figured as critical categories of thought and organizing principles of society. 'Womanly' conduct appeared to be ordained by God and sanctioned by earthly institutions" (Stuart 1998, 143; 146). Thus, during the early modern period the Aristotelian, hierarchical notion of gender polarity was adopted widely in Europe across all social classes.

As Raisa Maria Toivo remarks, "Why women were witches and witches women is still the question that is raised in every public conference one attends" (Toivo 2006, 188), and with good reason, as Rune Blix Hagen seems to respond: "When felonies are investigated as a topic in the academic world, and nearly 80% of these are conducted by female antagonists, it is obvious that a gender variable will be very much in focus" (Hagen 2006, 123). Clearly, some relationship exists between such a gender statistic and the prevailing intellectual trends outlined above, sparked first from the pens of Catholic Scholastics and fanned to fever pitch by later reformers. It is not my purpose here, however, to enter fully into this well worn debate; instead, contra Toivo, my question in this dissertation is not *why* women were witches, but *how* women were witches, particularly in a Scandinavian context. That is, how was the discourse of witchcraft in (even more particularly) Finnmark and Gotland employed in the diffuse cultural program to construct femininity, a

construction that had to be ratified and related to religion, secular authority, and—not least—local belief structures? Again, this discourse occurred in different modalities and was mediated by institutional structures, but folk groups in both places were also partners in this enterprise and discourse and employed the figure of the witch. I will show in this dissertation that the two locations of Finnmark and Gotland, which shared Nordic motifs, narratives, and beliefs about witchcraft, constructed this discourse differently, but to the same general purpose of generating, codifying, and maintaining proper codes of behavior for both men and, especially, women.

Before turning to these broader arguments, however, some groundwork is necessary, beginning with the difficulties of even discussing such diffuse topics as witchcraft. That is, I must clarify what I mean by such terms as "witch" and "magic."

## Semantics: The Problem of Terminology

> *"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less." "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things." "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."*
> *(Lewis Carroll,* Through the Looking-Glass*)*

Despite its commonality, the word "witch" is difficult to define. In part this is a cultural-linguistic problem; in colloquial parlance, the English word witch betokens, among other things, a ***woman*** who uses magic, usually for malicious, selfish, or evil ends. (In other words she uses "black" as opposed to "white" magic, clichéd and perhaps racist color terms that nevertheless are useful for their assumptions about "bad" or malicious magic, aimed to harm, and "good" or helpful magic, aimed largely to protect or heal; Thompson 1956, G220.0.1.) In other culture areas, however, words typically translated into English as "witch" do not carry such a gender marker, or do so less intently, or in fact have a male connotation instead. Some languages modify terms as appropriate; for example Swedish *trollkvinna* or *trollman*, "witch" and, more awkwardly, "wizard," depending on the

gender of its subject. But setting any native preconceptions about gendered witchcraft aside does not help much. According to Robin Briggs, a witch is "destructive and malicious," the "incarnation of the 'other', a human being who has betrayed his or her natural allegiances to become an agent of evil" (R. Briggs 1994, 3). This definition may do very well for European witchcraft in the period of Briggs's study (1450 to 1750) and may indeed be extended both backwards and forwards in time, if not in geography; certainly its vaguer language accords it more flexibility than that of Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters, who in the introduction to their sourcebook, *Witchcraft in Europe 400–1700: A Documentary History*, explain that "The terms 'diabolical sorcery' and 'witchcraft' used in this book designate the behavior of someone, man or woman, who has acquired extraordinary powers to harm others through a pact, or agreement, with the Devil" (Kors and Peters 2001, 12). This of course is the definition of diabolical witchcraft, the stereotype developed in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries by Europe's demonologists.

Both Robin Briggs and Kors and Peters go on to acknowledge some of the difficulties. Briggs acknowledges that "witchcraft" is "rendered slippery by its status as a logical and linguistic construct whose boundaries are both arbitrary and insecure. This difficulty already presented itself in relation to the various Biblical references; what did the Hebrew and Greek terms translated as 'witch' really mean?" (R. Briggs 1994, 7). (Indeed, the English language, Reformation-era King James Bible, named after one of the monarchs most personally involved in witch prosecutions of the entire period, famously proclaims that "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exod. 22:18), which translation was challenged as early as 1584 by Reginald Scot in his skeptical treatise, *The Discovery of*

*Witchcraft* (*Discovery* 6.1 (Scot 1989, 64)).[19]) Kors and Peters, meanwhile, acknowledge the contemporary linguistic and legal difficulties:

> Those humans who acquired knowledge or power without committing apostasy and idolatry . . . were technically not guilty of either offense. . . . From the late fourteenth century on, however, the line between the two kinds of magic became harder and harder to draw. As European vernacular languages came more and more into general use, they usually distinguished between magic and witchcraft. (Kors and Peters 2001, 12)

Defining "witch" therefore inevitably leads to even murkier semantic questions: what, for instance, is "magic"? Yet we must start somewhere; we must, as Humpty Dumpty does, assume some mastery of the words we have to use.

### *Magic*

Historically, scholars have included magic in a triumvirate of epistemologies, the others being religion and science. Early scholars like Sir James Frazer, applying a racialized evolutionary view, concluded that magic was "primitive," religion rather more advanced, and science the natural result of civilization. While approaches to understanding magic have happily moved away from social evolutionary theory since then, it is still true that magic, science, and religion are related; as Michael D. Bailey puts it (in the first article in the first volume of the journal *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*), "magic might be said to comprise, or least describe, a system for comprehending the entire world," a statement that might equally well apply to religion and science (Bailey 2006, 1).[20] In the same article, Bailey outlines some of the attempts made by Frazer and others to distinguish magic from science

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[19] Scot objected that the Hebrew word for *poisoner* was mistranslated as *witch*, but—as we shall see again in chapter 2, the link between witchcraft and poisoners is old and deep. Johannes Weyer objected along similar lines to Luther's German edition; see Midelfort (1990, 16–17) for discussion.

[20] The point is forcibly made by Douglas J. Falen in the title of his 2018 book, *African Science: Witchcraft, Vodun, and Healing in Southern Benin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press).

and religion but explains that scholarship has generally moved away from universal theories and towards emic perspectives. Scholars now "focus on historically and culturally specific understanding of magic, seeking to clarify not how we might distinguish between magic and religion, or between magic and science, but rather how a given society drew these or other distinctions at some particular moment" (Bailey 2006, 5). As we shall see, however, societies did not always agree on these distinctions. Thus folk healers might be brought up on charges of witchcraft, their store of traditional charms invoking Christian religious figures representing nothing but licit, practical application of the majority religion to them but illicit "magic" to authorities. As Bailey himself notes (summarizing the conclusions of David Fentilcore), "people at all levels of early modern European society were, in practice, little confined by any set notions of magic or religion. Concerned less with methods than with the particular results they wanted to achieve, they moved easily from 'magical' rites to 'religious' ones and back again" (Bailey 2006, 13).

This description is telling, as it indicates a common feature of magical systems of thought, that is, that not only are there unseen beings or forces that can exert influence on the physical or social world, but that these can be brought to bear for specific purposes. Magic shares with many religious systems a basic conception that non-human power exists in the world and can be harnessed by knowledgeable people; Rosalie and Murray Wax coined the capitalized term Power to distinguish this "intrinstic feature of the natural order," a fundamental part of what they call the magical worldview (Wax and Wax 1962, esp. 182–183). Simultaneously (as Frazer noted long ago), magic shares with science a structure of manipulation; that is, humans with the correct knowledge or ability can perform the same actions to achieve the same effect over and over again (Frazer 1922, 56; cf. Wax and Wax 1962, 192, 183). The "magical worldview" often attributes agency to what the scientific worldview attributes to concepts like luck or circumstance, as famously observed by E. E.

Evans-Pritchard in chapter 2, "The Notion of Witchcraft explains Unfortunate Events," in his seminal 1937 study, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (Evans-Pritchard 1976; see also Wax and Wax 1962, 183–184). Certainly the ways in which maleficia manifested in Scandinavia, and Europe generally, conform to this pattern; the types of misfortunes routinely attributed to an ill-intentioned witch (cows drying up, children falling ill, miscarriages) would, post-Enlightenment, more regularly be attributed to medical or circumstantial—in other words un-agented and impersonal—causes.

Employing terms like "magic" and "witchcraft" is further complicated in this context, that is, of writing in English about foreign-language terms that have their own complex histories and nuances, which are not always captured by their rough English equivalents. The English terms "magic," "science," and "religion," all derive from Latin, and are therefore literally rooted in elite discourse. The Scandinavian languages, in contrast, use vernacular terms, for example Swedish *tro*, 'belief,' 'faith,' and *vetenskap*, 'science, knowledge,' which are more catholic in origin and democratic in usage. Translation is always bound to be imperfect and imprecise; for instance, one of the Swedish and Norwegian terms translated as witchcraft is *trolldom*, which literally means "troll-shaped," the condition of being a troll or like a troll—with "troll" itself referring to a slippery complex of nonhuman creatures with supernatural or magical qualities (see Lindow 2014). Performing witchcraft in the Swedish context, then, linguistically and culturally can suggest more or less forcibly behaving *in*humanly, in a much stronger sense than the English word witchcraft—with its own attendant suggestion of artisanship or labor—can.

In this dissertation, while recognizing the tautology, I employ the term "magic" to refer to those powers of nature that were recognized by early modern Europeans as magical—whether those of the maleficia-performing neighbor of the less-educated folk or the Devil-worshipping witch of the

more-educated authorities. One primary difficulty in this elision is that experienced also in the time period; *where* the witch got her abilities was of significantly less concern to the folk than that she had them and used them for ill, whereas to the elites the "fact" that her powers were gifted from the Devil was of primary importance. Further complicating matters is the recognition that the "enchanted Europe" of the early modern period was populated not just by people, but also by—to employ a term coined by Derek Collins—an "invisible community" of supernatural creatures (Collins 2008, 63), whose abilities are sometimes indistinguishable from those of witches and who indeed take the place of witches as supernatural culprits in several culture areas (thus fairies, for example, are more likely to be blamed for dairy malfunctions in Irish legends than witches, though these too appear). And of course we should remember that in Scandinavia, as previously mentioned, "witches" can be termed "troll-men" or "troll-women," thereby implying an elision between the human community and the inhuman one. I must clarify, then, that I understand "magic" to be an umbrella term, upsetting in its vagueness, and "witchcraft" as a subset of magic, that is, magic performed by witches.

### *The Witch*

Who witches are, what witches do, and why witches do the things they do can nevertheless not be simply enunciated. In some places and at some times, the witch is a person who foretells the future; in others, the witch is a woman who swears her fealty to the Christian Devil; in many, the witch is a person who harnesses arcane powers to bring harm to their enemies. Recently, Quinton Deeley has landed on a cross-cultural definition of witchcraft: "What all these beliefs and practices share in common is the notion that affliction or misfortune can be intentionally caused by the special actions of a person, the witch" (Deeley 2019, 86). Even this approach, broad as it is, leaves out those culture groups in which a witch may be a person who inadvertently, through envy or other negative

emotion, magically causes their rival pain or misfortune.[21] A universal definition is impossible. The English word "witch" derives most likely from Old English *wicce* (feminine) or *wicca* (masculine), "both of which are apparently derivatives of *wiccian*," a verb meaning to practice witchcraft or bewitch someone or something (OED s.v. *witch*, n. 2). We may let this somewhat tautological etymology guide us; as Stephen A. Mitchell writes, "The definition of witchcraft is, in the end, a dynamic human perception rather than a bounded entity; that is, its meaning derives most importantly from behaviors that were regarded as acts of witchcraft rather than from the appearance or other attributes of individuals believed to be witches" (S. Mitchell 2011, 14). As Mitchell does, I conceive of witchcraft and witches as emically recognizable and "composed of verbs rather than adjectives and nouns" (S. Mitchell 2011, 14). A witch is a witch, that is to say, because of what she does.

Yet here again we immediately run into stumbling blocks; what do witches do that make them witches? This study is in some ways organized by (some of) the verbs that answer this question; the witch *poisons*, the witch *shapeshifts*, the witch *steals*, and so forth. But not all poisoners are witches, nor are all shapeshifters or thieves. Glibly we might add that the witch does all of these things with magic—that even trickier term—but while, to take the most difficult example, all shapeshifters by (modern) definition use magic to shapeshift, still not all magical shapeshifters are witches. Nor, we must point out, do all witches poison *and* shapeshift *and* steal.

In my study, I try to follow the definitions of witch that underlie my sources. Since these almost never provide such definitions, however, and since some of my sources are visual rather than verbal,

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[21] Many traditions of the evil eye, for instance, do not ascribe consciously ill intent to the "giver" of the evil eye, though others do. See the essays contained in Alan Dundes, ed., *The Evil Eye: A Folklore Casebook* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1981) for lengthy discussion of this widespread phenomenon.

my usage will necessarily be somewhat imprecise. The situation is complicated by the fact that my interest lies primarily in vernacular culture, which often (though not always) operated with differing definitions from the elite culture whose members produced the sources the study depends on. As Kors and Peters, Robin Briggs, and other scholars of the period of witch trials indicate, elites of the age understood witchcraft *and nearly all magic* as inherently diabolical, manipulating the entire broad spectrum of "magic" into dualistic Christian theology. Vernacular European cultures, however, very often distinguished between malefic magic—what we might call witchcraft—which was always ill-intentioned but may not have been diabolical, and beneficial or neutral magic. Folk healers and other practitioners of this "white" magic, who are often called "cunning folk" in English (*klok gubbe* or *gumma*, "wise" -man or -woman in Swedish and Norwegian), were common in medieval and early modern Europe, and indeed in many places still are. Occasionally these people were swept up in accusations of witchcraft, largely because the authorities deliberately did *not* distinguish black and white magic; this occurred for instance on Gotland, as Jan Wall has demonstrated (Wall 1989). That they did not entirely succeed is evident in folk legends collected in the eighteenth through twentieth centuries, after the age of the witch trials, since such legends very frequently recommend using precisely the kind of counter-magic against witchcraft that itself might been labeled witchcraft by witch-hunting authorities. Admittedly, cunning folk were often held somewhat askance in their communities, suspected of being able to harm as well as heal, so that the line between cunning man or woman and witch, even in the vernacular, was always somewhat porous. Additionally, however elite didacticism may have failed prior to the eighteenth century (when elites by and large reoriented their opinions of witchcraft away from diabolism and towards chicanery, fraud, and superstition[22]), it

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[22] The last two decades have seen a notable uptick in scholarly attention to attitudes towards witchcraft and magic after the period of the witch trials. Owen Davies and Willem de Blécourt in particular have pioneered this research (see Davies 1999, Davies and de Blécourt 2004, and de Blécourt and Davies 2004). See also the contributions to *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, edited by Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark

did have partial success in linking malefic magic with the Devil, such that even in modern legends witches will often invoke the Devil in one way or another in the maintenance of their spells (as in, for instance, the legend I opened with). However, features of true diabolical witchcraft—notably the Devil's pact and the witches' sabbath—did not became stable features of European legendry, and by and large the legend tellers seem wholly unconcerned with just how or why the witch acquired their powers. Again, I land on the language used in these stories; we know the subject is a witch not because of what they look like or what kind of relationship they might have had with Satan, but because of what they *do*. Importantly, very few people in the period identified themselves as witches; in the age of the trials, someone was held to be a witch because of what they were *assumed* to do. To that extent it is an ascribed moniker, not an assumed one.

This is not to imply that questions about a witch's acquisition of her powers or her attendance at sabbaths never arise in folklore, and indeed in investigating the deep meaning of Scandinavian witchcraft we shall see that sometimes they are very relevant (see chapter 2); but in terms of definitions I must end broadly, along the lines proposed by Quinton Deeley: in this study, the witch is a person who uses magic for maleficient ends. The *ways* in which their magic is used (poisoning, shapeshifting, stealing) are revealing, and form the backbone of this study.

### *The Motif*

The witch who poisons, shapeshifts, and steals by magic can be found in the motif indices produced largely in the mid-twentieth century—the first and largest of which, *Motif-Index of Folklore*, by Stith

(Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1999). See also Knutsen (2006) for a discussion of the decline of witchcraft trials in Scandinavia particularly.

Thompson, having been revised, expanded, and reissued several times, remains a foundational text in the field of folkloristics. Robert A. Georges and Michael Owen Jones write:

> Folklorists usually use the word *motif* to refer to phenomena, behaviors, and relationships found in traditional prose and poetic narratives…that stand out because they contrast in obvious ways with one's sense of what is real or normal. Thus, pregnancy presented in a narrative as resulting from sexual intercourse between a male and a female would not have the status of a motif, but pregnancy resulting from a woman's having faced the west wind or having eaten a particular food would. (Georges and Jones 1995, 24n5, italics in original)

As the examples they provide suggest, motifs are found in folktales and myths as well as other genres of oral folklore, and indeed the same motif can be found across a variety of genres—and not just verbal ones. They are also frequently international, adaptable to a wide variety of social and cultural contexts. Nevertheless, they can also exhibit remarkable stability, both temporally and cross-culturally. In fact this durability is part of the definition of a motif: "A *motif* is the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition" (Thompson 1946, 415, italics in original). To some extent their persistence is because their boundaries, as established by folklore researchers including especially Stith Thompson, are somewhat arbitrary; as Dan Ben-Amos observes, in contrast to biological classification systems, "bibliographic classification involves an imposition of order that depends not upon the qualities of the subject, but on external means" (Ben-Amos 1980, 27). Thus among the motifs identified by Thompson in *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, "there are differing degrees of abstraction, ranging from a summary of specific incidents such as F1041.1.13.2. '*Woman dies of shame at seeing naked man (husband)*' to a very general idea, G303.3.3 '*The devil in animal form*'" (Ben-Amos 1980, 26)—this last, coincidentally, among those this dissertation considers (chapter 3). Others include G211.1., 'Witch in form of domestic beast,' G266 and 'Witches steal.' Several of these have relevant submotifs or related motifs, for instance G211.1.7., 'Witch in form of cat,'

D2083 'Evil magic in the dairy,' and D2083.3 'Milk transferred from another's cow by magic' (Thompson 1956).

In some ways it is the durability of several motifs associated with witchcraft that fuels this study, although to be clear I am not seeking to establish some genealogy of motifs or—as was once true of motif-oriented studies—looking for the Ur-form of any particular narrative. Rather, I demonstrate that similar motifs arise in related but distinct cultural contexts and argue that this indicates that similar concerns and social structures are in play where they appear, informing the usage of the same motifs even across different modalities like confessions, visual depictions, and oral tales. I rely for reference on Stith Thompson's motif index and on related motif and legend indices, roughly bounded by national borders: namely, Bengt af Klintberg's *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend* (2010) and Reidar Christiansen's *The Migratory Legends: A Proposed List of Types with a Systematic Catalogue of Norwegian Variants* (1958). As the title of Christiansen's book indicates, the narratives that include the motifs at the heart of the study are similarly migratory, mobile, and adaptable, and I turn now to the genre under consideration here, the legend.

## The Legendary Witch

I concern myself in this study exclusively with *legends*, as distinct from other verbal folklore genres like folktales and myths.[23] Although the witch is certainly an active presence in the Scandinavian folktale, as in the European folktale generally, and while she may speak there to some of the same concerns with gender organization, social power, and humanity vis-à-vis animality that she does in the legend, the folktale witch—like all characters of folktales—are fundamentally fictional, and taken

[23] See Bascom (1965) for a discussion of the legend's formal features, particularly contra folktale and myth.

as such by tale tellers and listeners. The folktale witch is often demonstrably inhuman and lives apart from the human community; her magic is bizarre and unmistakable. In contrast, the legendary witch in Scandinavian tradition is frequently indistinguishable from an ordinary housewife; she lives as all other women do, inside the home with a (sometimes absent, but almost always implied) husband; and her magic is hidden, small, and domestic—and yet precisely because it is hidden, small, and domestic, it is ultimately deeply corrosive, to her own household, her community, and—from the early modern elite perspective—the state and even God's divine order. She is possible, even real, in a way that the folktale witch is not. In fact all characters of legend are possible by definition: "It is not the belief of the narrator, nor any of the beliefs of the participants, but rather *the belief itself*, making its presence felt, that is essential to any kind of legend. Explicitly or implicitly the legend must make it clear that its message is or was believed by someone, sometime, somewhere" (Dégh 2001, 140, italics in the original). Legends are outgrowths of shared beliefs, and as such are subject to the shifting currents that afflict all belief systems—currents of changing social mores, cultural opinions, and historical events.

Indeed legends are famously multiform, protean, and multiplicative, and reflect—in terms of setting, characters, and purported truth—the real world, to the point that, as legend scholar Linda Dégh puts it, "the legend, even if it is not founded on reality, can create reality" (Dégh 2001, 5). There *were* witches during the witch trials, and afterwards, in the sense that most everyone *knew* there were witches; legends became rooted in specific places and attached themselves to specific people, who may indeed have occasionally tried their hands at methods that everyone understood would grant them special abilities. We cannot know how many people (or if anyone ever) actually tried to make a

bjära, or trollcat—that is, acted out legendary content in cases of what folklorists call ostension[24]—but a large part of the power of the legend stems not from its definitive statement of fact but from its plausibility. It is easy to believe that individuals may well have made the attempt, just as it was easy—in fact *because* it was easy—for the legend-tellers and -hearers to believe that other individuals had already, and successfully, made the same attempt. Legends emerge from and shape collective beliefs, and, in Dégh's analysis, thrive in regions of doubt: "Legends appear as products of conflicting opinions, expressed in conversation" (Dégh 2001, 2; see also 8–9). They also, perhaps because they are set in the real world—the world of today or the recent, knowable past, featuring ordinary and often specific people—are agile and reflect changing circumstances and concerns. At the same time, to quote Dégh yet again, legends "deal with the most crucial questions of the world and human life"; they treat social, religious, cultural, and even ontological concerns (Dégh 2001, 2). Indeed, Max Lüthi concluded that legends and folktales both are necessary, the genres emerging simultaneously from fundamental "needs of the mind" (Lüthi 1981, 29).

I follow many folklorists in understanding legends as expressive especially of anxieties, generated from universal biological realities, reflective of particular social, cultural, and religious contexts, and set in an historical time and place. As Timothy Tangherlini summarizes this view: "Legend can be seen as a collective expression of an unconscious projection of communal values, beliefs and anxieties, molded by the collective experiences of the tradition group" (Tangherlini 1994, 18; see also Wyckoff 1993, 2, 4). I would modify this slightly to say that such projection need not always or entirely be unconscious; many legend tellers may be entirely aware of how their narratives reflect their own personal or their communal values, beliefs, and anxieties. I would also emphasize, as

[24] There are, however, known cases of people allegedly trying other means of milk-stealing magic; I mention one such briefly below (see page 88 and Van Gent 2009, 72–73).

Tangherlini does as well, that legends convey positivity as well as negativity, that is desires as well as anxieties, always in a culturally appropriate fashion: "Legend, thus, symbolically represents collective experiences and beliefs, and expresses the fears *and desires* associated with the common environment and social factors affecting the tradition participants" (Tangherlini 1994, 19, emphasis added). Narratives can convey these fears and desires regardless of the strength of belief in the veracity of the specific legend; even in the cases of legends told "for fun," the reinforcement of the narrative content itself can reinforce the system of belief that inspires them.

I use a somewhat broader definition of "legend" than the strict folkloristic one of verbal narrative; that is, my study also includes, as legend "texts," artwork such as woodcuts and paintings, particularly those that decorate late medieval church walls in Scandinavia. Such visual productions can illustrate specific narratives, such as the legend of the "woman who was worse than the devil" (see S. Mitchell 2010, 137–138 and Nyborg 1978, 41–42), and artwork can naturally influence beliefs, perceptions, and legends, even as it is influenced by the same.[25] As Nils-Arvid Bringéus points out, "Många bilder är försök att visualisera föreställningar om t.ex. fabeldjur och har bidragit till att fixera vår uppfattning om hur t.ex. en drake ser ut" (Bringéus 1981, 15) [Many images are an attempt to visualize perceptions about, for example, mythical creatures and have contributed to cementing our beliefs about how, for instance, dragons look]. Narratives about dragons inform how artists depict them, but in turn, images of dragons influence how people imagine them, and ultimately describe them in narration.

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[25] Although the construction of legends is not strictly his concern, art historian Charles Zika amply demonstrates how the broad diffusion of artwork featuring witches (via especially woodcuts) contributed to as well as reflected the development of the witch stereotype in early modern Europe (Zika 2007).

In my examination of a collection of murals painted around the turn of the sixteenth century on Gotland (chapter 5), I proceed from the assumption that they are illustrating a known character, the "milk-stealing witch," common to the legends of Northern Europe (and known far earlier than the murals' date of origin), though possibly not specific local legends. In so doing, as Mitchell has argued, the painters imbued the legend and its motifs with specific visual associations and a didactic message (S. Mitchell 2011, 141); I will argue in chapter 5, however, that viewers of these murals may have received them differently than intended—or, more accurately, that additional messages may have been received as well. This is a good example of reticulation between social castes, in which a folkloric tradition was institutionalized but did not remain static, responding both to its own impulses and to the "official" productions. In any case, visual representations of legends and legendary motifs should certainly be included in discussions of their verbal counterparts, for the simple reason that both image and verbal expression contributed to the community's traditional stock (as has long been recognized in the case of proverbial expressions as well; see e.g. Mieder 2008, chapter 8).

I also approach legend from the functionalist perspective—asking in other words not just what anxieties or desires are suggested by these narratives but also what the narratives *did*: as Mitchell states, with particular reference to legends of the milk-stealing witch, narratives and beliefs about her "do not merely reflect anxieties and beliefs but also help set the terms for behavior" (S. Mitchell 2011, 144). These terms are, or aspire to be, normative. As Dégh states, legends generally "are institutionally and authoritatively imbedded in society and made credible for the opinion-leading majority" (Dégh 2001, 131). Witchcraft, as developed in the European tradition, related often and especially to binary, heteronormative gendered behavior: what was appropriate for "women" and "men," and indeed, more fundamentally, what behaviors even *defined* "women" and "men." As

discussed further below, the witch is essentially transgressive in nature; she leads by counterexample. Lutz Röhrich takes the function of legends about frightening things, including witches, to be therapeutic: "Legends and belief stories are oral communications in which people try to verbalize anxieties and fears and, by explaining these away, to free themselves from the oppressive power of their fears" (Röhrich 1998, 8). However, since legends are, by definition, reflections of possible if not definite reality by the standards of their tellers, legends also reinforce the fears that inspired them in the first place. The codes of behavior that their characters display, or more precisely transgress, are therefore also reinforced. In that sense, legends can be understood as tools of repression, molding beliefs and behaviors to collectively negotiated models and delineating the terms by which a person or their behavior may be recognized as deviant and dangerous. This must have had real effects on what people did and under what circumstances; in Per Sörlin's study of witchcraft cases at the Göta High Court from 1635–1754, for instance, he notes that observing unusual behavior or objects, even in the absence of perceived damages, could be enough to provoke suspicions and even formal accusations of witchcraft (Sörlin 2006, 77).

Fundamentally, as witchcraft scholars have discussed at length for decades, witch legends and beliefs functioned to support the patriarchal structures of early modern Europe, even at the cost of human lives. Elite society developed a vested interest in such patriarchal structures, whether social, legal, or religious, but patriarchal culture was not solely a top-down imposition, despite the aggrieved conclusions of earlier generations of feminist scholars. Witchcraft beliefs reflected the fears (and sometimes hopes) of both elite and folk cultures and, as others have noted, cycles of suspicion and accusation were often rooted in female circles; in other words, the concern about maintaining and defining gendered order—"the patriarchy"—was common to men *and* women, elite *and* folk. We should also avoid a too-neat division between elite culture and folk culture; though the distances

between them could differ based on time and place, as historian Deborah Willis reminds us, "the boundaries between 'elite' and 'village-level' belief were permeable" (Willis 1995, 89). In Finnmark the social and even linguistic status of the (mostly female, Norwegian-speaking) accused witches differed dramatically from that of the (entirely male, Danish-speaking) officials, bailiffs, and judges, while in Gotland very little distinguished "elite" from "folk" classes in the countryside; nevertheless both places exhibit reticulation between the upper and lower strata of their respective societies. Unquestionably, however, the institutional bias of the sources—whether trial records or church murals—must be recognized and acknowledged.

## The Transgressive Witch: Outline of Chapters

The witch, as noted by several scholars in a variety of contexts, is essentially a contrary character, serving to illustrate by way of transgression, inversion, and perversion the mores of society and modes of behavior deemed appropriate, valuable, and proper (see esp. Clark 1997, chapter 5). Most frequently this relates to female behavior. Although the historical witch was not always female, the stereotypical witch in Scandinavian and much of European folklore—then as now—was first and foremost a woman. This is shown across a variety of verbal folklore genres, including legends, and contemporary artwork. It is hardly surprising, then, that the social codes she transgresses have most to do with female codes, although (as I shall show, particularly in chapter 5) the messages witch legends convey could speak also, and importantly, to male codes of behavior as well. As Diane Purkiss says, the witch "mark[s] all appropriate boundaries by transgressing them" (Purkiss 1996, 134). The witch represents the opposite of the good, proper, Christian woman along particular vectors that signify sites of cultural friction or anxiety, and each of my four substantive chapters explores one of these.

After a brief overview of early modern Finnmark and its witch trials in chapter 1, chapter 2 examines how the Finnmark witch, made real in the persons of several women over the course of the seventeenth century, represents the figure of a bad or "anti-" neighbor, expressed primarily through the motifs of eating and drinking: the witch is here a contagious presence, creating a shadow community by treachery through the particularly female method of poisoning. Thus I read the "bad neighbor" trope through the lens of the contemporary, strictly gendered, Lutheran society. Chapter 3 examines the Finnmark witch as transgressor of one of early modern society's most fundamental dividing lines, that between human and animal; here again the fundamentally gendered order of early modern Lutheranism inflects the symbolism of the animal world. The witch, understood as being in some way "anti-human," points to a kind of folk taxonomy whereby some animals could fit into a category of "witches' animals" while others did not—and this taxonomy reflects a gendered structure even of the animal and diabolical worlds. Following another overview chapter, this one of late medieval and early modern Gotland (chapter 4), chapter 5 turns to the ways in which the witch—and one particular type of witch, especially productive and recurrent throughout Nordic folklore, namely the milk-stealing witch—represents a kind of "anti-wife," and investigates how this configuration, especially as produced visually on the church walls of late medieval Gotland, reflected not just feminine anxieties but also masculine anxieties concerning proper behavior in the context of the early Reformation. In chapter 6 I turn to a particularly well-studied construction of the witch as an "anti-mother" figure, again paying particular attention to the milk-stealing witch but venturing beyond Gotland in the most far-reaching section of my study. None of these constructions are unique to the Nordic countries and several scholars have located them in their own studies of witchcraft, both throughout Europe and focused on specific places;[26] again, although legends and

[26] The "witch-as-anti-wife" trope, for instance, is widespread in early modern Europe; see e.g. Sigrid Bruaner's monograph, *Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews* (University of Amherst Press, 1995; esp. chapter 4, "Paul Rebhun: Witches and Bad Wives," 69–92). Similarly, I share the concept of the "witch-as-anti-mother" with other scholars:

motifs need to be understood in specific contexts, it is also true that Scandinavia participated in the social, religious, and intellectual trends common to the whole of Europe. We should not therefore be surprised at discovering echoes and resonances.

My dissertation thus considers the witch as an anti-neighbor, anti-human, anti-wife, and anti-mother, as expressed in Scandinavian legends from, especially, Finnmark and Gotland. In all cases she represents the opposite of the idealized neighbor, woman, wife, and mother as constructed in early modern Scandinavia, and narratives about her underscore the ways in which these idealizations were works-in-progress, social constructions imperfectly, and fractiously, imposed on the messiness of lived reality. In all cases the witch (as fundamentally gendered female) speaks to the difficulties of establishing, maintaining, and policing gender norms. These "anti" roles of the witch are not the only ones she plays in the legendry of early modern Scandinavia, but they are some of the most crucial, and some of the most productive, recurring in narrative after narrative and in century after century. By focusing on two disparate sites, which share some structural similarities but are not temporally or geographically contiguous, I illustrate how similar motifs and themes are put to work across visual, verbal, and even legal modalities, responding to the needs of their communities in seeking to develop codes of gendered behavior. The witch, often a figure of true fear, was also an important conveyor of communal decisions regarding gender organization, power, and relationships,

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Robin Briggs, for instance, points out that "The witch is a bad mother, a being who subverts the basic duties of her sex by direct hostility to fertility and nurture" (R. Briggs 1996, 282). He adopts a neo-Freudian perspective on the linkage between witchcraft and motherhood, as do Lyndal Roper (chapter 9, "Witchcraft and Fantasy in Early Modern Germany," in *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe*, 1994) and Diane Purkiss, who spends a great deal of attention on themes of motherhood in her 1996 book, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (see esp. chapters 4 and 5, pp. 91–144). Finally, Deborah Willis has devoted an entire book to the subject, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Willis 1995). Finally, the main title of Briggs's study, *Witches and Neighbors*, indicates the extent to which witches have been understood generally as antithetical to neighbors.

and legends about her created, codified, and communicated those decisions, even as they navigated the anxieties and desires that such decisions sought to resolve.

## CHAPTER 1. THE DEVIL GOES NORTH:

### History and Contextualization of Finnmark's Witchcraft Trials

The following chapters discuss aspects of witchcraft in Finnmark, Norway, primarily as expressed in the documentation of a series of witch trials that took place in the province in the seventeenth century. The documents, as evidence of the legends and beliefs of the folk of Finnmark as related to witchcraft, are imperfect: they are the products of very particular circumstances which were orchestrated by authorities—and the records themselves were produced by scribes who, it seems, edited their work afterwards (Hagen 2015a, 112; Willumsen 2015, 62). Furthermore, although Liv Helene Willumsen asserts that the scribe (the *sorenskriver*) "strove to catch speech verbatim," she also notes that this person was typically Danish and wrote in that language, not the local Norwegian, and suggests that "he sometimes found it hard to understand the dialect and its local terms" (Willumsen 2015, 50–52). Even when we can discern the voices of the accused, therefore, we must remember that the accused witches' confessions were delivered in—to put it mildly—stressful conditions, and are filtered through the lens of (male) court authorities. We cannot therefore take them as unvarnished or spontaneous expressions of folk narrative or belief (Hagen 2015a, 112–113; Willumsen 2015, 55, 61). Nevertheless, the trial records offer some of the best evidence we have of true "folk" belief and narrative, not least because the records quote, or at least paraphrase, the actual words of non-elite persons (Willumsen 2015, 60). Furthermore, in the pressure to emit believable confessions, accused witches must have relied on shared motifs and narrative structures, some of which must have been, or became, familiar to all parties involved in the court case, elites and folk alike (see Willumsen 2015), and as Hagen points out, many men of the court, aside from the bailiff and scribe, were drawn from the local community (Hagen 2015a, 113–114). Again, before moving on, it is important to stress that, throughout the trials, the word "witch" is an ascribed, accusatory,

and pejorative label; rumor panics that resulted in witch trials applied the tradition to actual people, often with deadly results, in a kind of officially sanctioned case of ostension.

I consider two particular tropes in the chapters following. Chapter 2 focuses on the construction of the witch as a "bad neighbor," and her particular manifestation in Finnmark as a poisoner. Chapter 3 considers the Finnmarkian witch as a shapeshifter, discussing a few of the specific species involved and how they point to understanding the witch as a particular kind of "bad human." These are not the only tropes of witchcraft present in the trial documentation, and my analysis does not touch on all of the trials' legendary motifs—I do not discuss, for instance, the important feature of witch as storm-raiser and ship-sinker, except in passing. However, the witch as "bad neighbor" and "bad human," in the sense of not-fully-human, are two extremely significant ways of understanding the figure of the female witch, not just in the specific case of northern Norwegian legend, but in Scandinavian legend more broadly. Before turning to these analyses, however, it is necessary to lay out in the current chapter a brief overview of Finnmark and the witch trials it experienced in the seventeenth century.

### Marginal and Cosmopolitan: Early Modern Finnmark

Finnmark is Norway's largest, northernmost, and easternmost province, and is also its most sparsely populated, with fewer than 80,000 inhabitants, according to the latest census.[27] During the seventeenth century, according to historian Liv Helene Willumsen, the region hosted a very small population indeed, numbering only some 3,200 people (Willumsen 2013, 223). Of these, Willumsen estimates three-quarters to have been ethnically Norwegian and the rest Sámi (Willumsen 2013, 226);

[27] https://www.ssb.no/befolkning/statistikker/folkemengde/aar-per-1-januar/2016-02-19?fane=tabell&sort=nummer&tabell=256001. Accessed October 26, 2019.

Rune Blix Hagen gives a higher estimate of Sámi persons, estimating nearly 50 percent or 1,500 in one publication (Hagen 2006, 124) and nearly 45 percent or 1,300 in another (Hagen 2015a, 12)).[28] However, many of the non-Sámi population were first, second-, or third-generation Finnmarkers; thanks to the fishing opportunities in the region many immigrants had arrived in the province during the previous century, so that "By the seventeenth century, the population in Finnmark was increasingly becoming mixed with people from Scotland, Germany, the Netherlands, the Faroese Islands and Sweden" (Willumsen 2013, 226; see also Hagen 2015a, 108). Even local government officials, throughout the century, often had strong ties to elsewhere, hailing not just from the capital city of Copenhagen but also from elsewhere in Denmark, Norway, Skåne (a region of southern Sweden controlled by Denmark for most of the seventeenth century), and, perhaps importantly, Scotland, one of Europe's most intense hot-spots of witch hunting. John Cunningham, district governor from 1619 to 1651, was from Fife, Scotland, and spent fifteen years in Helsingør, Denmark before his tenure in Finnmark; both places, Hagen points out, "er kjent for omfattende forfølgelse av trollfolk" (Hagen 2015a, 25) [are known for extensive persecution of witches]. Although Cunningham himself seems not to have pursued witchcraft in Finnmark with any great energy, his son-in-law Hans Jensen Ørbech, installed as bailiff in 1641, did (Hagen 2015a, 25). Even beyond such high-profile connections, the high number of immigrants to Finnmark in the sixteenth century exposed the region to Continental demonology, and generally lent it a surprisingly worldly sensibility despite its poverty and sparse population: "…bør vi også framheve at vi har å gjøre med utadvendte småsamfunn preget av en kosmopolitisk kulturånd, som vi knapt finner maken til i andre norske bygder på denne tid" (Hagen  2015, 18) [we should also emphasize that we are dealing here

[28] Elsewhere, Willumsen provides slightly different figures, putting the number of Sámi in the region at 660 and the total population at three thousand, so that the Sámi would account for 22 percent of it.

with small, outwards-facing communities characterized by a cosmopolitan cultural outlook, which is hardly the case in other Norwegian communities at the time].

## Northern Storms: Society, Economics, Politics, and Religion

The sixteenth-century immigrants had been attracted to Finnmark owing to the opportunities there to fish for cod, since the late medieval period Norway's major source of economic power—to the point where, by the fifteenth century, peoples' taxes were expressed in weights of cod, rather than butter, as had been the case earlier (Hoffman 2002, 23–24). The majority of Norwegians (by which term I mean native Finnmark Norwegians as well as Norwegian-speaking immigrants or their descendants) therefore lived along the coast, in small villages of perhaps 150 people each, surviving via fishing and subsistence agriculture (Hagen 2015a, 9; Willumsen 2013, 224). Nearly everybody was dependent on the cod trade, which was controlled by Bergen-based Hanseatic merchants, a lopsided business arrangement called the *utreder* [outfitting] system:

> Ordningen gikk i korthet ut på at enhver fisker, kalt utredsmann, skulle forplikte seg til å levere sin fangst til én bestemt handelsmann, kalt utreder, og at handelsmannen skulle forplikte seg til å gi kreditt og sørge for de nødvendige forsyningene av utstyr og levnetsmidler til fiskerne sine. (Niemi 2012, 24)
>
> [In brief, the scheme was that each fisherman, called an *utredsmann*, committed himself to deliver his catch to one particular trader, called the *utreder*, and that trader committed himself to supply credit and necessary supplies of equipment and food that their fishermen.]

The monopoly, in which both supply and demand were set by the Bergen-based merchants, resulted, in Willumsen's words, in "a permanent debt dependency" that weighed heavily on the local economy (Willumsen 2013, 225). This is similar, in broad outlines, to the economic situation on Gotland, which also struggled under Hanseatic hegemony (see chapter 4 for more). Still, the situation worked out fairly well throughout the late medieval period, while catches were favorable and Continental Europe's appetite for imported cod seemed insatiable. But reliance on a single

commodity proved unwise, and for the entire seventeenth century Finnmark was plagued by an economic depression, exacerbated by years of bad catches, shipwrecks, a cooler climate, and an unusually high number of storms (Hagen 2015a, 13; Niemi 2012, 22–23; Willumsen 2013, 226). As a result, the population of the province shrank during the 1600s, following two centuries of expansion (Willumsen 2013, 223).

Despite the constricting population, women as well as men continued to immigrate into Finnmark; indeed Willumsen calculates that nearly 20 percent of accused women in Finnmark had immigrated from farther south (Willumsen 2013, 246). Many of these women, as is apparent from the trial records themselves, were socially as well as geographically mobile; many women speak of serving as maids in others' homes, typically in their youth. As a result, in Rune Blix Hagen's estimation, the coastal villages experienced "more loosely tied patriarchal gender relations and household structures compared with the stability of traditional farmer household in other parts of Norway" (Hagen 2006, 138). He also concludes that:

> the wives of Norwegian fishermen and the young maids in eastern Finnmark were in a somewhat more independent, autonomous and freer position. These are active and relatively resourceful women who were able to speak their minds on the consequences of hard living in an era besieged by economic crises. (Hagen 2006, 138)

In both ways, as will be shown in chapter 4 below, the women of Finnmark differ markedly from the women on Gotland, who were not mobile in any sense but rather confined to a stable—though similarly impoverished—social, agricultural structure. Also distinctive of the female population on Finnmark is its small size: "There was a significant shortage of women in the region and a huge surplus of men," Hagen writes. "Indeed, the female population was tiny compared to the majority of young, single male fishermen and their employers" (Hagen 2006, 138).

As Hagen elsewhere explains, these villages were also unusual in Europe for their reliance on their external business partners, the Hanse Bergen merchants, for grain and equipment—the very stuff of survival in both immediate terms and in order to produce the goods they (and the merchants) relied on, Artic cod (Hagen 2015a, 14). Even at the end of the century, when Bergen had somewhat abandoned the Finnmark fisheries as a losing proposition and Russian and Dutch ships began to replace them and their place in the supply chain, the Finnmarkers were in the rare and unenviable position of being, still, extremely reliant on outsiders (Willumsen 2013, 226). Einar Niemi remarks that social dissolution (*samfunnsoppløsning*) may have been particularly pronounced in Varanger, the county north of Varangerfjord and including many of the coastal villages where witchcraft trials erupted (Niemi 2012, 23). Chronic financial and social distress, punctuated by acute disasters like shipwrecks, created networks of need, dependency, and resentment among the individuals within and between villages: recurring crises forced neighbors and relatives to apply to one another for relief—to, as we see in the witchcraft trial records, borrow a cow, or delay payment for a new garment.[29]

Such networks certainly included mixed male-female relationships, both economic and otherwise, but were predominantly single-sexed. As elsewhere in early modern Europe, as will be discussed further in chapter 2 below, work was divided by sex: women managed livestock, farm, and

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[29] These stressed economic relationships are similar to those at the heart of Alan Macfarlane's groundbreaking study, first published in 1970, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study*. A central thesis in this was that witchcraft accusations sprang out of local economic relationships and social conditions that produced a large number of middle-aged and elderly women who were forced to beg from their neighbors, themselves financially strained; Macfarlane posited that, if a woman were refused and went angrily away, the neighbor would feel guilty and when later misfortune struck the household, those feelings of guilt would be projected onto the refused beggar. These conclusions have been fruitfully criticized by a range of scholars, but, as James Sharpe points out in the introduction to the second edition of Macfarlane's work, "the basic validity of an approach to witchcraft accusations which stressed interpersonal relations between the witch and her accuser, as pioneered by Macfarlane, remains unchallenged" (Sharpe 1999, xviii–xix; see the same for a summary of criticism of Macfarlane's socio-economic model).

household, while men operated fishing ships and trade. Thus, despite the unique qualities of Finnmark's female population, Hagen avers that "the coastal societies of Finnmark were characteristically male-centered and male-dominated in both form and content" (Hagen 2006, 138). Women were therefore dependent on each other for both society and survival. Such networks were crucial but also fractious, as Hagen observes:

> De ekstremt vanskelige og harde livsvilkårene, med stort gjennomtrekk og liten stabilitet påvirket naboforhold, vennskapsrelasjoner og familieetableringer. Løst sammensatte nettverk i små og tette samfunn førte til sosiale motsetninger og labile forhold. (Hagen 2015a, 14)
>
> [The extremely difficult and harsh living conditions, with high mobility and little stability, affected neighborly relationships, friendships, and families. Loosely knit networks in small and dense communities led to social friction and labile relationships.]

Adding to the social strain was the political strain of an ambitious Denmark, which during the reigns of Christian IV (1596–1648) and especially his son Frederik III (1648–1670) showed an increasing interest in developing its political and religious control over its various holdings, including Norway.

Although distant from Copenhagen, Finnmark, like the rest of the country, was affected by Denmark's engagement in a variety of wars throughout the century and, in the 1660s, the adoption of an absolute monarchy, reorganization of government structures, and an increasing reliance on the Lutheran Church for propaganda and control: according to historian Byron J. Nordstrom, local Lutheran clergy "played an important role in the development of the new absolutist state by serving as the ears and the mouthpiece of the crown at the local level" (Nordstrom 2000, 39, 59). Although Norway had adopted Lutheranism in 1537—just one year after Denmark—much of the old clergy remained north of Bergen throughout the sixteenth century. Only gradually were they replaced by

Danish clergymen trained in the south (Nordstrom 2000, 40; Willumsen 2013, 235).[30] Finnmark, however, showed early signs of adopting the new faith, with a letter to Norway's last archbishop in 1530 noting the presence of Lutherans in the village of Makkaur (as Rune Blix Hagen notes, this suggests the region's unlikely cosmopolitan character; Hagen 2015a, 108). The seventeenth century experienced several state-supported efforts to reform popular religion, consolidating the power of the state and church at once. "The new church," as Nordstrom notes, "was Danish," with religious services and literature produced and disseminated in that language (Nordstrom 2000, 40; see also Grell 2016, 56). This applied even to distant Finnmark, which received like the rest of the joint kingdom treatises by leading Danish theologians—including those that treated witchcraft and the Devil. "This means," writes Willumsen, "that through the church the common people in Finnmark learned about personal responsibility as the basis for a godly pact and the same as the basis for a pact with the Devil" (Willumsen 2013, 237–238; 2015, 63). Both Willumsen and Hagen note the significance of Continental demonology in understanding the extent of the trials in Finnmark, showing that demonological notions rooted in Finnmark as they did not elsewhere in Norway (Willumsen 2013, 253–256; Hagen 2015a, 129–130).

The role of the local (Danish and Lutheran) authorities in the witch trials of seventeenth-century Finnmark is impossible to ignore, and Hagen stresses their importance in applying Continental demonological perceptions and even directly encouraging the trials, possibly as a kind of "career strategy": "Each time a new district governor arrived in Vardø," Hagen notes, "a new chain reaction hunt began. . . . [Those in power] wished to show their superiors (i.e., the king) that they took their

[30] The year 1537 marked the end of Norway's nominal independence, although its formal induction into the Danish kingdom has been described as "a confirmation of a process which had been taking place over a long period" (Kouri and Olesen 2016b, 5). It therefore lost its political identity and, nominally at least, its religious affiliation to Rome at the same time.

official duties seriously," and perhaps thereby obtain a better position farther south (Hagen 2006, 129–130; 2015a, 23–27, 174–175). Willumsen adds that due to its geographical distance from Copenhagen, local authorities in Finnmark could act with greater independence than they could elsewhere, a situation in which inflamed passions—in the context of a highly charged witchcraft trial—could result in overly swift and brutal judgement (Willumsen 2013, 230; 2015, 50). Still, it is crucial to recall that witchcraft as a broad concept had not been introduced wholesale to Finnmark by either the state or the church. Folk beliefs and stories about witches were both old and dynamic, and as Hagen notes were employed by the accused witches under pressure from their interrogators to describe their diabolical activities (Hagen 2015a, 18–19). In the following two chapters, I will investigate elements of these folk narratives and the ways in which they combined with elite demonological fears, but first it is necessary to provide an overview of the trials and their judicial context.

## The Witchcraft Trials in Finnmark

Except for Finnmark, Norway largely escaped the kinds of large-scale witch trials that plagued other parts of Europe, most spectacularly the Holy Roman Empire. This is likely due to several factors, among them Norway's diminished status in Europe (allowing it some insulation from, for instance, the fulminations of traveling, popular reformers) and its adherence to an accusatorial rather than an inquisitorial legal system (see the introduction). A similar legal system also largely dampened witch prosecution in Denmark and Sweden, except for a major Swedish witch panic from 1668 to 1676, when over 300 people were executed in the so-called Blåkulla trials (see Ankarloo 2002, 81–83; 85–90). A junior colleague, at best, in the united kingdom of Denmark-Norway, Norway was subject to the laws and regulations of Denmark, which in the sixteenth century were surprisingly favorable to defendants (Kallestrup 2018, 20); in 1547, the Copenhagen Articles (also called the Copenhagen

Recess) declared that no statement (including denunciations) from convicted witches could be used as evidence against another accused person—thus preventing the type of linked witch trials that could result in enormous panics—and outlawed the use of torture until after the final sentence had been passed (Johansen 1990, 340). In 1576 another ordinance was enacted that automatically sent capital convictions from lower district courts up to the higher County Court, which—like similar statues elsewhere in Europe—blunted local efforts to execute offending parties swiftly (Johansen 1990, 341). These laws were not always obeyed, and in fact in seventeenth century Finnmark were regularly *disobeyed* by the local magnates; for instance torture, according to Liv Helene Willumsen, was commonly applied there, even prior to final sentencing (Willumsen 2013, 235, 251, 256–258). Finally, in 1617, a new regulation rather dramatically altered the state's position towards witchcraft, explaining that even white magic required prosecution and assigning the death penalty to those who had made a pact with the Devil, called *rette Troldfolck* (or, in modern orthography, *troldfolk*), 'true witches' (Kallustrup 2015, 50; Rørdam 1889, 59–61).

In theory, cases could be appealed to the Court of Appeal. However, the appeals judge could only appear in Finnmark every third year, due to the remoteness and size of the province (Willumsen 2013, 245). This could, as Willumsen says, create delays in the appeal process (Willumsen 2013, 231). Occasionally it had worse effects. As Hans Eyvind Næss documents: in 1653, the visiting judge[31] examined and exonerated several women arrested on suspicion of witchcraft and chastised the local court and bailiff for their mistreatment of the accused—but as soon as he had left, the authorities,

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[31] The judge in question, Mandrup Pedersen Schønnebøl, seems to have acted as a one-man restraint on witchcraft trials during his tenure, from 1647–1682; Hagen notes that "Dersom han ikke hadde grepet inn slik han faktisk gjorde mot forfølgelsen av trollfolk i Finnmark, ville an av de verste menneskeforfølgelsene i norsk historie sett enda verre ut" (Hagen 2015a, 213) [Had he not intervened as much as he did in the prosecutions of witchcraft in Finnmark, one of the worst episodes of prosecution in Norwegian history would look even worse than it does]. In his 2015 volume, Hagen devotes an entire chapter to Schønnebøl, whom he calls "trollkvinnes advokat i nord" [the witches' advocate in the north] (Hagen 2015a, 211–247).

evidently unchastened, rearrested, convicted, and executed the suspects (Næss 1990, 379). The distance from Copenhagen meant that the governors (*lensøvrighet* 'district governor' or, after 1662, *amtmann* 'regional governor'), bailiffs, and other local officials could act with great impunity, and therefore the extent of the witch trials in Finnmark ebbed and flowed with the opinions of these men over time. At the time of the case noted by Hans Eyvind Næss, 1653, a Dane named Jørgen Friis was governor; he had been trained by Jesper Rasmussen Brochman, a well-known demonologist, and was especially active in witch persecutions (Hagen 2015a, 26; Willumsen 2013, 248).

### *"A Teaching in Holy Scripture": A Lutheran Call to Arms Against the Devil*

The local authorities in seventeenth-century Finnmark, therefore, often acted with abandon and, not infrequently, illegally in their pursuit of witches, but they were not entirely without justification, considering the climate of their day. Attitudes towards witchcraft may have been shifting to a more stringent approach even before the law changed in 1617: if the Danish laws of the preceding century had been relatively lax, the opinions of the Lutheran Danish clergy were rather the opposite, as Louise Nyholm Kallestrup has documented (Kallestrup 2015, 36–39, 41–48; 2018, 21–24). Undoubtedly fulminations from the pulpit and the theological faculty at the University of Copenhagen had their effect on Denmark's upper classes, and indeed they eventually succeeded in strengthening the laws against witchcraft. Major Danish theologians in the sixteenth century, chiefly Peder Palladius and Niels Hemmingsen, argued forcibly that all magic—not just the malicious type, a capital offense in Danish law since the medieval period, but white magic as well—was diabolical, an existential threat to social order, Christendom, and the king's rule, and therefore deserved the full weight of the law. Their educational programs were directed towards the populace generally, which was not particularly receptive to the idea that even healing was diabolical at heart (Kallestrup 2015,

51), but also—importantly—towards Denmark's rulers. Denmark's only native treatise dedicated to witchcraft, Hemmingsen's *En undervisning af den hellige skrift…* [*A teaching in Holy Scripture…*],[32] was translated from Latin into Danish in the 1570s, in a conscious attempt to influence secular authorities (Kallestrup 2015, 43, 47). Their efforts bore fruit in 1617, when a new regulation was passed that defined witchcraft and prescribed punishments, including burning for "true witches" who had made a pact with the Devil, and required that all people and especially all "men in the service of the crown" should seek out and bring suspected witches to trial (Johansen 1990, 341; Kallestrup 2015, 49–50; 2018, 20; see also Hagen 2015a, 132). (Peder Palladius, in his 1538–1540 *Book of Visitations*, had similarly incited all people to be on the lookout for witches (Kallestrup 2015, 37).) In Rune Blix Hagen's opinion, this 1617 law had a direct impact on the beginning of true "panics"—or linked trials—in Finnmark, which he dates to 1621, shortly after the arrival of the new district governor, of Scottish extraction, John Cunningham (Hagen 2015a, 23; see also Willumsen 2015, 62).

### *Ethnic Stereotypes: Othering the Sámi*

Rising concerns about witchcraft, not incidentally, targeted the north. The indigenous Sámi had been associated with magic since the medieval period (see, e.g., S. Mitchell 2011, 106–107), an association that was strengthened and publicized in the early modern period by the publication of *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus*—in English, *A Description of the Northern Peoples*—by the exiled Swedish ecclesiastic, Olaus Magnus (Willumsen 2013, 358). Statements such as "Nor is the very farthest part of the North…free from sacrilegious rites and devotion to evil spirits" and "Among the Bothnian

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[32] The full title is En undervisning af den hellige skrift, hvad man dømme skal om den store og gruelige gudsbespottelse som sker med trolddom, signelse, og manelse og anden sådan Guds hellige navn og ords vanbrug, translated by Kallestrup as A teaching in Holy Scripture. What one is to think about the great and terrible profantity that takes place in witchcraft, making the sign of the cross, conjuring and other forms of abuse of God's holy word and name (Kallestrup 2015, 43).

people of the North wizards and magicians were found everywhere, as if it were their particular home" (*Description* 3.2, 3.17 (Olaus Magnus 1996, 149, 174)) starkly identified the Nordic north, and the indigenous inhabitants thereof, with devilish paganism and magical talent. The shamanic traditions of the Sámi were easily interpreted by Lutheran authorities in the early modern period as akin to or part of the witchcraft inspired by Satan; contemporaneously with the Finnmark trials, the Lutheran Scandinavian kingdoms began full-scale efforts to convert the Sámi and counter the Devil (Hagen 2007, 139–143, esp. 140). King Christian IV himself, a man "not only deeply religious but also superstitious and particularly sensitive to the threat posed by witches" (Kallestrup 2015, 49), had singled out Norway's northern regions as hotbeds of Sámi "sorcery" in a 1609 letter sent to the governors of Finnmark and Nordland (Willumsen 2013, 234). It is unsurprising, then, to find Sámi people among those convicted for witchcraft, and indeed one-quarter of these—twenty-seven of 108—were ethnically Sámi.

Hagen suspects that the count of Sámi involved is conservative, writing "bør vi regne med en viss underregistrering og derfor oppfatte de 27 samene som et minimumsantall" (Hagen 2015a, 10; see also Hagen 2006, 126) [we should assume a certain amount of under-reporting and therefore consider the twenty-seven Sámi as a minimum number]. Hagen also suspects, however, as mentioned on page 47 above, that the number of Sámi in Finnmark overall to be much higher than the 22 to 25 percent calculated by Willumsen, closer to 45 or 50 percent (Hagen 2006, 124; Hagen 2015a, 12). Either way, whether Willumsen's ratio of Sámi to Norwegian population is correct and we take the witchcraft records at their word for the number of convicted Sámi, or if Hagen is correct that the number of Sámi should be inflated in both population and conviction counts, the number of accused and convicted Sámi seems to be roughly proportional to their share of Finnmark's population (see also Willumsen 2015, 55). Given the strong emphasis on Sámi sorcery in the

historical records, like King Christian IV's letter, this is somewhat surprising; one might expect to find the Sámi significantly *over*represented in the numbers of accused and convicted.

In one respect, however, the statistics concerning the Sámi convicted of witchcraft do not surprise, and that is the high number of *male* Sámi accused and convicted. One of the most noticeable differences between the stereotype of the Sámi sorcerer and the stereotype of the witch is gender; perhaps owing to the fact that Sámi shamans in the region tended to be men, the Scandinavian perception of the Sámi sorcerer was of a man. And indeed, of the twenty-seven men accused of witchcraft in Finnmark, nineteen were Sámi and only eight Norwegian. The proportion of these sentenced to death is instructive: thirteen Sámi men (68 percent) but only one male Norwegian (12.5 percent) suffered this penalty (figures from Hagen 2015a, 276, table 4).

It would require a separate study to investigate the depth of prejudice against the Sámi and the extent to which the witchcraft trials in Finnmark were inspired by such bigotry; my analysis instead focuses on the witchcraft trials of (mostly Norwegian) women, rather than on the related but rather separate phenomenon of sorcery trials of Sámi men, which has been covered in depth especially by Rune Blix Hagen (Hagen 2006; 2013; 2015, esp. 73–106; see also Steen 1969). Put another way, I focus on the trials that emerged out of Varangerfjord and its Norwegian-inhabited villages, such as Kiborg, Ekkerøy, and Vadsø, rather than Finnmark writ large—which, according to Hagen, shows a clear east/west division, with trials of (Sámi) men concentrated in the west and the far larger number of trials of (Norwegian) women concentrated in the east (Hagen 2006, 127; Hagen 2015a, 84–86).

Nevertheless, it is important to underscore that, partially due to long-standing pejorative ascriptions of magical ability to the Sámi, associations of sorcery with the far north were well known—

mentioned by no less a figure than the French jurist Jean Bodin[33]—and perhaps primed Danish officials to expect to find witchcraft in Finnmark. That they found more Norwegian witches than Sámi sorcerers speaks to general European conceptions of witchcraft as well as, perhaps, to local concerns among the coastal villagers. Additionally, Scandinavian folk belief in general associated evil with the cardinal north,[34] perhaps further priming not just the governors but migrants from other parts of Scandinavia, of which there were many, to "discover" witches in Finnmark. In 1555, Olaus Magnus declared the North to be "in a literal sense the abode of Satan" and absolutely rife with demons, who "with unspeakable derision and in diverse shapes, express their encouragement to people who live in those parts," and, moreover, seem to perform maleficia, upsetting houses, castles, and watercourses, killing cattle, and destroying crops (*Description* 3.22 (Olaus Magnus 1996, 182)). Finally, the theological construction of witchcraft as a diabolical conspiracy aimed at the divinely sanctioned rule of (Lutheran) monarchs (Kallestrup 2015, 47; Kallestrup 2018, 25) found fertile ground in Denmark, where "several of the most widely known cases were associated with royal and noble circles" (Ankarloo 2002, 82). With accused Danish witches confessing to attempts on kings and nobles in 1543–1544 and, most famously, 1590–1591,[35] it is not surprising to discover that the lonely Danish governors of Finnmark, a province "known" to harbor witches and far away from whatever protection Copenhagen could offer, feared personally the threat posed by Satan's earthly

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[33] Jean Bodin (1530–1596), famous as a humanist political philosopher, was also a strident demonologist, and once—with explicit reference to Olaus Magnus—commented on the large number of witches in the north (Ankarloo 2002, 75).

[34] Rune Blix Hagen attributes this common Scandinavian association of evil with the north to a Biblical passage, Jer. 1:14 (Hagen 2015a, 7).

[35] In 1589, Anne of Denmark—the king's sister—set sail for Scotland to wed her intended husband, James VI of Scotland, but storms forced the Danish ships to veer off course towards Norway. The wedding took place in Denmark instead, and the admiral's accusation that witches had raised the storms resulted not only in trials and convictions in Denmark but one of Scotland's most sensational witch panics as well, the so-called North Berwick trials.

servants. Thus the largest set of trials in Finnmark, in 1662–1663, featured confessions of a conspiracy against Christopher Orning, the district governor.

Importantly, however, as with the other "panics" in Finnmark, the 1662–1663 panic involved entirely female suspects, only one of whom was Sámi. As Willumsen points out, the relative absence of accused Sámi during panic periods and their relative frequency in non-panic periods, when trials were restricted to one or just a few individuals, reflect the contemporary stereotype: "A Sami sorcerer practised individual sorcery and was not seen as a member of a group of witches" (Willumsen 2013, 260). As we shall see in the following chapters, in contrast, much of the underlying fears about (Norwegian) women's witchcraft concerned women's networks and their power to create—and therefore also destroy—communities.

### *Facts on the Ground: Numbers and Records*

The Finnmark witchcraft trials are unevenly spaced, but occur throughout the seventeenth century, with the last in 1692. (This one, of Anders Paulsen "Finn," landed the accused in prison, where he was killed by a fellow inmate. The trial of Anders Paulsen, a Sámi shaman, is particularly interesting for its detailed description of his drum.) According to Rune Hagen and Per Einar Sparboe, 137 people were accused in Finnmark between 1601 and 1692, with eighty-five people burned and a further three otherwise executed, while another four died in prison or of torture.[36] This number accounts for nearly a third of all witchcraft executions in Norway, despite the fact that Finnmark

[36] Of the remainder, six persons' cases were appealed, eight people were fined, one was exiled, one sent to a labor camp, two had to undergo a public confession in church, and twenty-two were released. The sentences of the final five convicted witches are not known (Hagen and Sparboe, in Lilienskiold 1998, 295). These numbers differ slightly in other sources; for instance while Hagen and Sparboe specify that the three executed people who were not burned were hanged, Willumsen instead says two were beheaded and the third is simply unspecified (Willumsen 2013, 246, 252).

contained less than 1 percent of the country's population (figures derived from Willumsen 2013, 240, 246). Elsewhere, Hagen counts 138 (Hagen 2015a, 273). Liv Helen Willumsen, contesting three people included by Hagen, counts a total of 135 accused and ninety-one executed (Willumsen 2013, 246; Willumsen 2015, 52). To use Hagen's figures, the total of 138 accused includes eight Sámi women, nineteen Sámi men, 103 Norwegian women, and eight Norwegian men. Hagen counts ninety-two death sentences in all (Hagen 2015a, 276, table 4; see also appendix 1, which comprises a list of accused women and their fates). There were several "panics" in this period, meaning linked trials in which one accused named others, whereupon the new suspects were questioned and named more, in a pattern familiar to scholars of the major Continental witch panics. The largest of these occurred in 1662–1663: twenty-nine people were accused, of whom eighteen were burned at the stake and two were tortured to death. The remaining seven were acquitted after their cases were sent to the appeals court; these included five children, whose age seems to have tempered the court's otherwise rather draconian application of the law. All of those involved were women, a gendered statistic that Willumsen notes is characteristic of Finnmark's panics (Willumsen 2013, 248–250).

These numbers might not, at first glance, seem particularly dreadful; ninety-two executions over a century is, perhaps, not shocking in the context of the witch trials write large across Europe. However, here recalling the tiny population of the province is necessary. According to Liv Helen Willumsen's statistics, "The total number of persons accused of witchcraft was 4.5% of Finnmark's average population," an extremely high percentage even when compared to other places in Europe and one that had "an enormous impact" on the region's population (Willumsen 2013, 246–247). Rune Blix Hagen concurs, writing, "Tar vi det lave folketallet i Finnmark i betraktning, inngår trolldomsforfølgelsen blant de verste i Europa" (Hagen 2015a, 10) [taking the population of Finnmark into account, the prosecution of witchcraft was among the worst in Europe]. During the

height of the trials, including the three major panic periods of 1620–1621, 1651–1655, and 1662–1663, Hagen concludes that the effect on the province would have been enormous: "I Finnmark var processene så intense at de aller fleste som levde i det spredt beygde området i perioden 1620 til 1665, må, på en eller annen måte, ha kommet i berøring med fenomenet" (Hagen 2015a, 7) [In Finnmark the trials were so intense that nearly everybody who lived in the broad area between 1620 and 1665 must, in one way or another, have come into contact with the phenomenon].

We are fortunate to have, in investigating the Finnmark trials, excellent historical records. There are, in brief, two major sources. The first is a summary of trials from 1610 to 1692 made by Governor Hans H. Lilienskiold, who served in Finnmark from 1684–1701. Though secondary, Lilienskiold's reports are especially crucial for the early cases, which have otherwise largely been lost. The second major source is the court records themselves, which are fairly complete for the years 1620 to 1692, excepting only a lacuna from 1633–1647 and a lost record of a 1626 trial (of Karen Monsdatter, also spelled Mogensdatter)—this case, however, is included in an early edition of many of the records from 1918, by Hulda Rutberg.[37] In these records, illness, injury, shipwrecks, and so forth appear over and over again, while descriptions of what might pass for a witches' sabbath—a major feature of Continental demonology—are rather thin[38] (this is also true general of Denmark-Norway writ large;

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[37] Throughout this dissertation, I refer to these sources in the editions prepared by Rune Blix Hagen and Per Einar Sparboe (of Lilienskiold's summaries) and Liv Helene Willumsen (of the trial documents). Hagen and Sparboe included a transcription of the original and a translation into modern Norwegian; I refer throughout to the latter (Lilienskiold 1998). The trial records are published as facsimiles with a transcription into seventeenth-century Danish (Willumsen 2010a) and with a translation into English (Willumsen 2010b).

[38] It should be noted that this impression is not uniformly shared; Rune Blix Hagen on the contrary describes a lack of maleficia in the Finnmark trials (Hagen 2015a, 17). I do not think though that the presence of maleficia in the confessions contradicts his argument that diabolism was largely responsible for the Finnmark trials' "store omfang og grufulle form" [large extent and harrowing nature] (Hagen 2015a, 20; cf. Willumsen 2013, 253–256). I do disagree, however, that "Demonologenes heksebegrep kommer til uttrykk gjennom paktinngåelse, omskaping, nattflyvende hekser, hemmelige hekseselskaper og anvendelse av djevlekraften til å gjøre stor skade" (Hagen 2015a, 20) [Demonological witch-beliefs are expressed through the Devil's pact, shapeshifting, night-flying witches, secretive witch activities, and the use of the Devil's power to do great harm]. While these certainly were present in

see Kallestrup 2015, 51; Næss 1990, 373, table 14.2). What *does* appear over and over again in these records, however, are recitations of how one becomes a witch in the first place and mentions of the various animal shapes the accused witches took as they went about their diabolical witchcraft. These seem to reflect the interrogators' concerns, as presumably much of the information provided came in response to specific questions, but clearly also reflect local traditions—likely familiar to both authorities and the populace, including the accused—as the confessing women drew on their stores of legends and belief in satisfying the judges' curiosity. It is these two elements, becoming a witch and theriomorphism, that I will focus on in the following two chapters, relying on both the local social and economic circumstances and inferences to the shared Nordic language of alterity to interpret the data gleaned from the witch trial records.

Before moving on to these substantive concerns, I wish to reiterate that the sources here are inherently problematic, produced as they were in very particular circumstances and from a very official, institutionalized point of view. It is also incumbent upon us to recall that the motifs and traditional narrative stock discussed in the following chapters were, in these instances, not at all abstract but rather attached deliberately and often with tortuous and deadly consequences to real people. Nevertheless, we can respectfully and critically examine the trial documentation for evidence of a vibrant exchange of folk and elite traditions of witchcraft, and reach conclusions about the ways in which the motifs in question were employed in the shared discourse of witchcraft to construct and evaluate one of the major driving forces behind that discourse, namely, the social power of women to create—or destroy—communities.

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demonological treatises, several also appear in folk belief, unconnected to the *pactum cum diablo* that lies at the heart of diabolical witchcraft.

# CHAPTER 2. POISONED FINNMARK:

## The Witch as (Bad) Neighbor

In 1624, a woman named Gunnele Olsdatter appeared before the court in Vardø, capital of Finnmark, and testified to acts of witchcraft that she had committed.[39] These included cursing Ole Nilsen's wife, who subsequently suffered some misfortune, illness, or injury (what it was precisely is unspecified); injuring another woman (identified only as Jørgen B.'s wife) after an exchange of insults; making a tailor, Ole Hermansen, sick after the corset he made for her didn't fit; and, finally, knowing what other people said about her and apparently being able to spirit-travel, as she was spotted outside the door of a Vardø man even while she was in prison (Lilienskiold 1998, 102). For these offenses, she was sentenced to death and burned at the stake in 1625.

Gunnele was neither the first nor the last person to die for the crime of witchcraft in Finnmark, which experienced a rash of trials in the seventeenth century. Gunnele is the first, however, to describe a method of learning witchcraft that would become commonplace in Finnmark throughout the rest of the trials, namely by ingesting it.

The motif of acquiring witchcraft by eating or drinking it is not evinced in later Nordic folklore, though the acquisition of special, magical, or occult knowledge by ingesting an unusual substance is, in a broad sense, not wholly foreign either. Examples can be adduced even from the medieval period and continue into modern folklore.[40] My purpose here is not, however, to trace the genealogy of the

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[39] Trials took place in several of Finnmark's coastal villages, but were centered on the castle in Vardø (Vardøhus), called by Olaus Magnus in 1555 "the unconquerable fortress of the king of Norway" (*Description* 2.10 (Olaus Magnus 1996, 104)).

[40] For example, the medieval hero Sigurðr, of the Völsung cycle, acquires sudden fluency in bird-speech after accidentally ingesting dragon blood (*Vǫlsunga saga* ch. 19; the episode also appears in a prose interruption between stanzas 31 and 32 in the eddic poem *Fáfnismál*). Modern legends, meanwhile, speak of boiling white snakes and

motif, but rather to set it in its cultural context, and ask what this particular iteration of it meant. Willumsen, rather dismissively, contends that "during the witchcraft trials…specific notions are restricted to certain decades, in a way a passing fashion"; she is specifically referring here to what we might call a sub-motif of the "eating witchcraft" element, namely the black spots many witches said they saw, too late, in their poisoned food or drink (Willumsen 2013, 288). However, the fact that this motif (and its sub-motif) was repeated so frequently, that it so clearly was part of contemporary oral tradition and so clearly fascinated the confessing witches as well as the trial authorities, demands our attention. Why did the acquisition of witchcraft via food and drink command fascination, from both accused and their judges, for those several decades in seventeenth-century Finnmark? How did the various configurations of this motif reflect beliefs in witchcraft and the desires and anxieties that underlay them?

The perception of witchcraft as an edible contagion is, as far as I can tell, unique to Finnmark,[41] but aligns very well with an extremely old and widespread perception of the witch as being, among other things, a poisoner. In this chapter, I investigate the motif of eating or drinking poison in the Finnmark trials, and reveal how its deployment indicates discomfort with the roles women played in creating and sustaining communities. The social relationships that were—quite literally—at stake were necessary to survival in seventeenth century Finnmark and dependent largely on the friendships, enmities, and ties of blood that both bound and fractured the small, coastal villages from which the alleged witches and their accusers emerged. The motif of sharing food that, rather

thereby acquiring special talents (ML3030, Christiansen 1958, 39–41; M1–M2, af Klintberg 2010, 243). Cf. B162.1, D1310.9, D1821.2 (Thompson 1955; 1956).

[41] I have been unable to locate this particular motif anywhere else; Liv Helene Willumsen, however, asserts that "The motif of a pact with the devil by means of food or drink given by a female mentor…also appears in other parts of Scandinavia, in Germany, and in Scotland" (Willumsen 2015, 72).

than bind the community together, tore it in two, reflects anxieties about a fundamental feature of Finnmark's society, one particularly salient to the women who were often left on their own while the men were fishing, hunting, or otherwise away from home: the neighbor. Negotiating social power in a province whose population was falling, where villages had to coordinate their economic sustainability against merchants from the south, and in which a large percentage of the population was not from Finnmark (or which was recently descended from immigrants) proved—to put it mildly—difficult. And because, as I shall discuss below, early modern society was split along gendered lines, friction developed both between and amongst women as well as between women and men. One way that friction found expression was in legends of witchcraft: in the motif of edible witchcraft, we see a particularly Finnmarkian iteration of a widespread phenomenon, understanding the witch as a bad female neighbor. In this Gunnele also provides an excellent example, in the sense that—the exchange of foodstuffs aside—she certainly seems to have earned a reputation as a bad, quarrelsome neighbor. As Per Sörlin remarks, "It was unwise to appear hot-tempered in a society with an active belief in witchcraft," (Sörlin 2006, 68), and having a sharp tongue is a feature that many accused witches across Europe seem to have shared.

## The Transmission of Witchcraft

According to the summary made by Finnmark Regional Governor Hans H. Lilienskiold, probably in 1695 (Lilienskiold 1998, 9), Gunnele Olsdatter reported the following at her 1624 trial:

> Forannevnte Skrep-Ane ga henne et stykke matfisk å ete. Dertil ga datternen henne et stykke brød. Men med det samme hun åt dette, sa Ane: "Gud give! Der fór Fanden i deg!" Straks fikk Gunnele ondt og det var som om det kom noe levende i henne. (Lilienskiold 1998, 102)
>
> [The forenamed Skrep-Ane gave her a piece of fish to eat. Then Skrep-Ane's daughter gave her a piece of bread. But just as [Gunnele] ate them, Ane said: "By God! There goes the Devil into you!" Immediately Gunnele received evil and it was as if something living had come into her.]

In previous trials, convicted witches confessed to having learned their craft either from other people (especially Sámi individuals, often called "Finns" in the original) or the Devil directly. Gunnele introduces a new motif to this trope, however, specifying that her teacher, Skrep-Ane, effectively tricked her into becoming a witch by feeding her evil along with a neighborly snack. This notion became common in Finnmark confessions; over forty other women and girls followed Gunnele's lead in explaining that another witch inducted them, unwittingly, into this diabolic community by essentially poisoning them; evidently, in Finnmark, the English axiom "you are what you eat" held true, with fatal consequences. We cannot know why the motif first emerged precisely in 1624, or whether this initial recording is not its inception but rather simply the first time it was put into writing, but it quickly became a standard part of witchcraft confessions: we can conclude that it must have been deeply meaningful to the community. The motif became so established that by 1663, when Ellen Gundersdatter confessed that she learned witchcraft from a vagrant woman, hired for the purpose by the farmwife for whom Ellen worked, she added: "och huad hun ellers gaff(ue) hende det ind wdi, wed hun icke" (Willumsen 2010a, 233) ["but what [drink or food] she mixed it with, she did not know" (Willumsen 2010b, 233)]. The implication here is that Ellen could not have simply learned witchcraft; she *must* have ingested it, as well. Importantly, the confessing witches themselves seemed to have understood this edible witchcraft as poison; not only did it frequently make them sick (discussed more below), but, as mentioned previously, it also was often visible as black specks or some other foreign material in the proffered food or drink. Typically this was spotted too late to avoid at least partial ingestion, as in the 1663 case of Ingeborg Iverdatter, one of the children implicated during that panic period:

> Da Bekiender och foregiffuer hun, At hendis Moder Maren Siguoldsdaatter, Som Kort forleden for Throlddombs Konnster och Bedriffter er dømbt och henrettit, Hende haffde Lært; Och gaff hun hende ded ind wdi Meelck aff en schaale Vdit Fæhuus; och der hun Melckit haffde affdrucken, Saae hun noget Suart paa Bunden i

> schaalen, och det slog hun vdaff paa gulffuit och icke wille dricke, der Effter fich hun Ont vdi Magen. (Willumsen 2010a, 210)
>
> She confesses and narrates how her mother, Maren Siguoldsdaatter [Sigvoldsdatter], who was convicted of witchcraft and sorcery and executed the other day, taught her by giving it to her in a bowl of milk in the sheep shed. When she drank the milk she saw some black stuff in the bottom of the bowl, and she poured it out onto the floor, refusing to drink it. Afterwards, she got a tummy ache.[42] (Willumsen 2010b, 210)

Ingeborg Iversdatter was fortunate in that her youth—she was only eight years old—resulted in her case going to the court of appeals, which acquitted her. But Ingeborg did not invent the motif of something unusual appearing in food or drink, nor the suggestion that it made her ill. In this we see her—like Ellen Gundersdatter—relying on what had become established "fact" in the local legends of witchcraft: everyone in Finnmark seems to have accepted that one of the things witches did was poison other women into becoming witches. Ingeborg's accusation of her mother, moreover, points to another familiar element of Nordic witchcraft belief, and may help account for her presence before the court to begin with—namely, the conviction that witchcraft was frequently located along matrilineal lines.

In her close reading of a different Finnmark confession, that of the twelve-year-old Maren Olsdatter in 1663, Willumsen summarizes how Maren, too, learned witchcraft from her mother and paternal aunt from a drink, and connects this familial transmission of knowledge to Continental demonology (Willumsen 2013, 287). Elsewhere, Willumsen associates this belief with a specific person, Anne Friedrichsdatter Rhodius, describing it as one of the "new demonological ideas" that Anne Rhodius, who was a Dane of elite background and imprisoned on unrelated charges, introduced to the

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[42] "Ont vdi Magen" might be better translated as "stomach ache," but more literally means "pain in the stomach." The word *ont*, 'pain,' in Scandinavian languages is etymologically related to *ond*, 'evil,' suggesting that the stomach pains Ingeborg and other accused witches experienced might also have been understood as a kind of demonic possession—the evil one taking up residence in their stomachs.

women who were imprisoned for witchcraft (Willumsen 2015, 77–78); however, a similar mother-daughter conspiracy can be glimpsed already in Gunnele's description of her betrayal, which implicates not just Skrep-Ane but Skrepe-Ane's daughter as well. In later Norwegian folklore, witchcraft is not eaten or imbibed, but can certainly be inherited, especially along the maternal line.[43] Genuine traditions of healing practices, protective charms, and other positive magic were also likely passed between relatives, including from mother to daughter, as they were in Sweden also (Van Gent 2008, 102). It is thus tempting to see the role of Skrep-Ane's daughter here as evidence of an ongoing folk belief in inherited witchcraft rather than necessarily evidence of demonological learning. To be clear, by "inheritance" I do not strictly mean genetic inheritance, although that or a similar notion may sometimes have been involved. Rather, I mean inheritance as specialized knowledge, passed from one member of a family to another; as Diana Purkiss points out, "for villagers and townsfolk, witchcraft runs in families in the same way that shoemaking and brewing do. It is a trade, and trades in early modern society are very often family affairs" (Purkiss 1996, 146). Thus the court, and early modern Finnmark generally, found it perfectly reasonable that Maren's mother and aunt, and Ingeborg's mother, would instruct their daughters in the (witch)craft they knew.

In general, this notion of witchcraft as a talent passed from mother to daughter may speak to a particular fear broadly felt in early modern Europe, namely, the power mothers might have over their children and particularly the possibility that the feminine control of food—starting with mother's milk—might weaken or dilute the patriarchal line (which, of course, was fundamental to

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[43] In their headnote to a selection of Scandinavian legends they title "The Witch's Daughter," Reimund Kvideland and Henning K. Sehmsdorf note that "Folk tradition suggest that the magic abilities of the witch were imparted through initiation and instruction, but they could also be passed on genetically" (Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1988, 187). The belief is included in ML3035 in Reidar Christiansen's index of Norwegian migratory legends (Christiansen 1958, 41–44). See also Thompson (1956, G224.9).

the patriarchal social structures of early modern Europe). We see this fear exhibited, for example, in elite circles worried about the potential consequences of wet-nursing, a phenomenon largely limited to wealthy women who for a variety of reasons might employ a lower-class woman to nurse their infants. Warnings about the dangers of using a wet-nurse began in the Middle Ages; they included fears that if the wet-nurse were sexually active while nursing, her milk would become poisonous and sicken the child (Åström 2015, 579). Fears about infants and even adults taking on assumed attributes as well as nutrition via the food they ate abounded throughout the medieval and early modern periods; thus churchmen warned against eating hares, for instance, on the grounds that the animal displayed improper sexuality and the person who ate such a creature might begin to display the same sexual tendencies (Salisbury 1994, 44; see also chapter 6 below). Similarly, the power of the mother—or worse, a wet-nurse—to feed a child from her own body might subvert the father's influence. As Diane Purkiss says, "The wet nurse symbolises the power of the feminine to obliterate male self-replication, an anxiety which also haunted the processes of conception and pregnancy" (Purkiss 1996, 133). In early modern France, sex during pregnancy was actually encouraged by some professionals, to ensure the father had sufficient influence in "fashioning" the child; Jacques Gélis notes that "the idea that the coating of sticky slime which covers the child's body at birth was simply the diluted sperm of the husband was still very strong in the seventeenth century" (Gélis 1991, 85, 145).

Concerns about mothers' influence (and women's more generally) over impressionable children extended beyond infancy and food-giving. Some early modern authors, "considering women intellectually deficient and given to excessive passions, believed they were dangerous as teachers of all except very young children; sons especially should be handed over to male tutors as soon as possible" (Willis 1995, 18). We may imagine that in places like Finnmark, where men were frequently

at sea and not anywhere near their progeny, or at times of high male death rates—caused by shipwrecks or wars, for instance—such concerns about the effects women might have on children would be particularly acute. Indeed, during the major Swedish witch panic of the 1660s and 1670s, not only had Sweden's wars created a vast imbalance in the number of adult women to men, but "a public school system was suggested as a substitute for the demoralizing influence by women on the children" (Ankarloo 1990, 316). The gendered structure of labor that divided adult men and women would be mirrored at young ages among girls and boys, whose vocations largely followed their parents: girls, of course, were taught virtually from birth that they had one path alone, that of becoming in their adulthood wives and mothers as their mothers had before them. As Purkiss puts it, "Housewifery…with its close connections with witchcraft, was handed down as an economic skill from mother to daughter" (Purkiss 1996, 146). That Skrep-Ane's daughter was implicated in the transmission of witchcraft from her mother to the unfortunate Gunnele thus makes perfect sense, as does the continued agreement in folklore traditions that witchcraft, along with recipes and other housewifely methods, is inherited or learned by daughters from their mothers. Female children, of course, would receive most of their instruction in housewifery from their mothers and other female relatives regardless of whether their fathers were home; thus very conscious concerns about precisely what traditions mothers shared with their daughters can easily manifest in cycles of witchcraft trials. Notably, fathers are almost never mentioned in the Finnmark trials at all, and husbands are always either assumed to be or explicitly described as being absent during ingestible witchcraft situations, but it is not fully correct to say that witchcraft was strictly matrilineal; it is Maren's *paternal* aunt, after all, who allegedly teaches the girl how to milk a neighbor's cow with a horn.

The scenario Maren describes, of learning to milk from an older female relative, is in its broad outline very probable for the transmission of practical agricultural knowledge, but, because she was also explaining her induction into witchcraft, her story of learning to milk a cow includes the motifs of witchcraft: she learns on St. Han's eve and milks not in the normal fashion but rather by placing a horn on a neighbor's cow's stomach, "Sagde at hun wilde Melcke wdi Fandens naffn Da melchit hun mere end en Bøtte, med Melck, Och Paa det Sidste, Kom der Blod ud, Da døde Koen" (Willumsen 2010a, 218) ["saying that she wanted milk in the name of the Devil. Then she got more milk than would fill a pail and after that, blood came out, and now the cow died" (Willumsen 2010b, 218)].[44] The Finnmark court was deeply concerned about the possibility that the mothers' and aunts' diabolical influence on the children was indelible. After a series of confessions from Maren and Ingeborg, the court struggles visibly with what to do with them:

> Dißligeste Efftersom dißе 2de: Børnn Nemblig Jngeborig och Maren tit och offte tilforne paa Slottit waardøehuuß haffuer Bekiendt, att de Trolddombs Konster haffuer Lært, och sig derwdi Øffuit, Saa wel som siden de ere Kommen paa Slottit och der aff Leenß Herren flitteligen tilholden wed Prestens formaaning och dagelige Fliid, dennom at wille haffue omwendt til Gud i Himmelen, fra dend Onde Aand dieffuelen och dog ey nogit dermed haff(ue)r Kundit vdRette Mens de Endnu stedtze Befindis effter deris egen Bekiendelße, wed dend Onde Aand at bliffue och ey fra Hannom Kunde Komme; Saa uel som och nu Befindis dette Lille Pigebarn Karen Som er Jngeborgs Søster Huilcket ochsaa Effter Egen Bekiendelße, haff(uer) Lært Trolddoms Sag, och Det begge toe aff Deris Moder,
>
> Da Efftersom den Onde Aand stedtze hoeß dennom tilforen haffuer werit och de Endnu iche Kand bliffue hannom Quit. J Huor megit Præsterne dennom for sig haff(ue)r och flitteligen wille haffue dennom omwent til wor Herre Christus, Saa will hand dog iche Slippe dennom efftersom de er hannom aff Moederenn Offrit. (Willumsen 2010a, 239–240)
>
> Furthermore, since these two children, Jngeborg [Ingeborg] and Maren, have so often confessed at Waardøeshuus Castle [Vardøhus] that they have learnt and practised witchcraft, and also since they are held at the Castle where the District Governor repeatedly urges them, and the priest daily and assiduously admonishes them to tum away from the Evil One and be converted to the ways of God in

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[44] This is an example of a milk-stealing witch legend, which will be discussed in detail in chapters 5 and 6.

> Heaven, but to no avail, for they still, according to their own confessions, have the Evil One at their sides and cannot tear themselves away from him, and since, moreover, this little girl Karen, who is the sister of Jngeborg, who also, according to the latter's own confession, has learnt witchcraft, and they both learnt it from their mother, as the Evil One was always with them in the past, and they cannot be rid of him, no matter how the priests work on them and try to convert them to Our Lord the Christ, he [the Evil One] will never relinquish them, for they have been sacrificed to him by the mother. (Willumsen 2010b, 239–240)

The court then considers whether the children should, like their elders, be sentenced to death, but since "Da Efftersom det ere Nogle Smaa W-myndige Børn, Jche Kommen til Skiels Alder" (Willumsen 2010a, 240) ["they are but small children who have not reached an age to make their own decisions"] the judges eventually sent the case to the appeals court, where they were all acquitted (Willumsen 2010b, 240–241). We see here, however, how the mother's influence outstrips even that of priest and district governor—in other words how matriarchal power threatens the patriarchal structures of both church and state. As in Sweden, "The world of God and men was thus set in opposition to a realm where Satan and women ruled" and the authorities', as well as the general population's, "concern was for the children" (Ankarloo 1990, 316–317). However, it must be allowed that in Finnmark at least, except for these few cases in the major 1662–1663 panic, children were neither accused nor accusers,[45] and the matrilineal inheritance of witchcraft does not often appear. Instead, other female networks come to the fore, namely the networks between female neighbors, networks established, sustained, and expressed in exchanges of food.

## Women, Food, and Drink in Finnmark

*"Poison is a woman's weapon." —Mr. Shaitana (Agatha Christie,* Cards on the Table*)*

In many Western cultures, the act of poisoning overlaps with witchcraft and gendered female behavior. Examples abound, from classical characters like Medea and Circe to modern American

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[45] In contrast to the Swedish Blåkulla panic, which is characterized by a heavy reliance on child accusers.

figures like the Wicked Queen from Disney's 1937 film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Martin Luther, who like King James's translators used the word witch (*Zeuberinnen*, in the plural) in his translation of Exod. 22:18 (see page 26 above), strongly associated witchcraft with the (female) art of poisoning (Brauner 1995, 55, 133n11). One crucial factor in this ongoing association is doubtless a recurring cultural assumption that women prepare food—and thus are more likely to have opportunities to use poison. In the early modern period, women were more responsible for food and therefore more dangerous to food; speaking of eighteenth-century witch trials in Sweden, Jacqueline Van Gent notes that harm caused to the production of milk, butter, beer, and brandy—largely identical with the foodstuffs that appear in the Finnmark trials as well—was more frequently attributed to women than men (Van Gent 2009, 25). It is significant that, in Finnmark, it is only women who employ the narrative stratagem of claiming that they were fed witchcraft unwittingly by cunning neighbors. Of the (far fewer) men who were convicted, most—nineteen out of twenty-seven—were ethnically Sámi, and if they said anything at all about how they learned their "witchcraft" it was typically from a relative; the trial document of Nils Rastesen (described as a "Finn"), for instance, states succinctly, "Lærte alveskudd av sin far," and moves swiftly on [Learned elf-shots from his father] (Lilienskiold 1998, 134).[46] Besides the obviously gendered aspect of Sámi sorcery, opposite to the assumptions made of Norwegian witchcraft—that it was male and patrilineal—the Finnmark authorities apparently accepted and perhaps expected that Sámi people had "inherent magical power" (Willumsen 2013, 260). This, of course, was in keeping with the

[46] Using, again, Hagen's figures (2015a, 273). Occasionally the talent is taught by a female relative, e.g. Sarve Persen learned from his godmother (Lilienskiold 1998, 120).

"Elf-shot" refers to a belief common across Northern Europe and attested from the medieval period that elves or similar creatures, including witches, could inflict disease and injury with supernatural projectiles. See Honko (1959); see also Hall (2005) for the belief's appearance in Scottish witchcraft trials and MacLeod and Mees (2006, 25–26, 36, 126) for some discussion of pre-Christian Scandinavian examples.

assumptions unpinning King Christian IV's 1609 letter and the stereotypes spread in Olaus Magnus's 1555 work.[47] In other words, in learned folklore, witches had to acquire magical power; Sámi simply had it, even if they needed to learn how to use it.

Norwegian women—and most convicted women, 103 out of 111 total, were ethnically Norwegian[48]—acquired witchcraft by ingesting it unawares, whereupon it first made them feel ill. In this sense, it strongly resembles poisoning. This is evident already in Gunnele Olsdatter's choice of words in 1624: "det var som om det kom noe levende i henne" [it was as if something living had come into her].[49] This is precisely the same complaint leveled against accused witches by their victims. For instance, in 1638, Sissel Persdatter was accused of killing an unnamed farmhand: "Sønnen til Gunnel Jetmundsdatter tok Sissel i hånden den dagen hun kom fra tinget. Straks kom noe levende i drengen, som en løpende hund om hjertet" (Lilienskiold 1998, 136) [Gunnel Jetmundsdatter's son took ahold of Sissel one day when she was coming from court. Immediately something living came into the farmhand, like a hound running after a hare]. Again, it seems clear that the confessing women *themselves* understood edible witchcraft as being itself a witch's poison,

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47 Olaus Magnus repeatedly associates the inhabitants of the far North with Devil-worship and links this to their alleged facility with sorcery; for instance, he explains that the Biarmians (located roughly on the Kola peninsula) "are idol-worshippers, live in wagons like Scythians, and are well versed in the enchantment of men" (*Description* 1.1 (Olaus Magnus 1996, 18)). The entire third book of his opus, in fact, is titled "On the Superstitious Worship of Demons by the People of the North," and includes references to (presumed) contemporaneous practices as well as descriptions of beliefs and practices of the pagan Scandinavian past.

48 This presentation of the numbers glosses the crucial detail that two of the major Finnmark panics were precipitated by Sámi women, who named Norwegian women under torture as co-conspirators (Willumsen 2013, 273).

49 The motif of eating something with a black speck in it, and subsequently filling ill and as though "something living" were inside, is in fact not limited to Finnmark; Robin Briggs describes precisely this situation from a case in Lorraine, although here there is no question of the victim being a witch herself. Instead her symptoms are evidence of a witch-caused illness: "Marguitte le Cueffre believe that Marion le Masson had bewitched her with some soup which had grains as black as coal in it. After drinking this she felt great pain throughout her body. . . . She had been unwell ever since, with her stomach full of animals which gave her no rest" (R. Briggs 1996, 265–266).

but these descriptions also almost suggest a kind of possession by a demonic force. Indeed, the process of eating witchcraft and thereby becoming a witch is often also accompanied by accounts of sickness or mental distress, also like many accounts of demonic possession.[50] Though not connected with eating or drinking anything, as early as 1620 Karen Edisdatter (a Sámi woman, according to Willumsen (Willumsen 2015, 66)) recounted the following during her trial:

> …det første hun bleff Jndbunden till Dieffuelen, Vaar den tidt Hun Waar tøis, och gietet fee Vdj marchen, falt hinde en tønge paa Vid ten høye, och Midlerthidt Kom der en stor hoffuitløß mandt till hinde, och till spurde hinde, om hun Soff, hun Suarit, Jegh huerchen Soffuer eller Woger. . . . Och der hun Kom hiem, bleff Hun forbistret, och ydermere bekiende, At Dieffuelen fich Altidt Siden i selschab med hinde, Naar presten Jche Vaar hoß hinde. (Willumsen 2010a, 25)
>
> The first time she was involved with the Devil was when she was but a lass and was tending herds in the fields. A heaviness came over her near a hill, and presently a big headless man came to her asking her whether she was asleep. She said, I am neither asleep nor awake. . . . [W]hen she reached home, she became demented, and since then, she confessed, the Devil has always been with her, unless the minister was present… (Willumsen 2010b, 25)

By 1632 the elements of eating/drinking witchcraft and associated disorientation or illness had become linked. In that year Synnøve, called Anders Nordmøring's wife, confessed that "Att for en Rum tiid forleden, gaff gurrj (som boede i Eckerøe och bleff brent) Hinde en Drich som Waar nogit fætt offuen paa lige som aff Liuße, och siden i 3 eller 4 Dage gick, och Waar saa Vnderlige i sinde" (Willumsen 2010a, 73) ["some time ago, Gurrj [Guri], (who lived in Eckerøe and was burnt), gave her a drink on which there was a film of fat, as from cod liver oil, after which she was in very strange spirits for some three or four days" (Willumsen 2010b, 73)].

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[50] For an overview of the connections between demonic possession and illness, see chapter 3, "Demonic Possession and Illness," in Levack (2013, 113–138).

It is tempting, in situations like the above, to conclude that this sequence of ingesting something, especially something that appeared strange, and afterwards getting sick or feeling odd, is simply a description of food poisoning, of eating or drinking something that, for whatever natural reason, was genuinely bad for the person who ate or drank it. Torbjørn Alm pointed to the forty-two cases of women eating or drinking witchcraft as evidence of ergot poisoning (Alm 2003), a suggestion refuted by Liv Helene Willumsen (Willumsen 2013, 287; see also the lengthy, critical discussion in Hagen 2007, 143–148). Although the link between rye grain (the usual culprit in cases of ergotism) and ergot was not firmly established until the 1670s, ergotism since the Middle Ages had been recognized as "Holy Fire" or "Saint Anthony's Fire" and treated in monasteries and hospitals (Cumo 2015, 330; Ainsworth 1986, 126).[51] It was certainly known, even outside the rarified circles of monks and doctors, that eating bad food could result in sickness; one accused witch told the court that another woman gave her a fish that made her ill, but claimed ignorance as to whether it contained witchcraft (Willumsen 2010a, 222; 2010b, 222). While it is certainly possible that ergot, on occasion, contributed to the sensations reported by the women, or that cases of ergot poisoning resulted in or reinforced oral traditions of such sensations that were then employed by the accused women, I agree with Willumsen that the motif cannot simply be attributed to ignorance of mycology. In its recurrence over many decades of confessions and its variation, it shows classic features of oral folklore; and if there were ergot in the grain eaten by these women, we would expect to see symptoms in a much wider segment of the population than the sources suggest. Finally, the evidence of Karen Edisdatter's confession indicates that a sensation of liminality, of being neither asleep nor awake, of being "demented" or "in very strange spirits," was already a feature of oral traditions

[51] In early modern France, at least, rye ergot was apparently also a fairy regular drug used to hasten labor (Gélis 1991, 113, 137).

involving encounters with unnatural creatures like the Devil, without any connection to ingestion at all.

In employing this sequence of motifs—eating/drinking, illness, and then "getting evil"—the women may have been trying to cast themselves as victims of witchcraft. Gunnel Jetmundsdatter's son was recognized as a victim; perhaps the women under suspicion could be afforded the same sympathy. They could hardly help it, after all, if the food or drink that a friendly neighbor offered from was in fact a secret induction into a society that they neither sought nor had the option to refuse.[52] Indeed, accepting food and drink from neighbors willing to give it must have been a necessary and common part of community building among Norwegian women in seventeenth-century Finnmark. As Willumsen explains, although fisheries along the coast were relatively prosperous in the sixteenth century and drew waves of immigration from farther south and from Scotland, Germany, and elsewhere, in the seventeenth century a combination of factors squeezed Finnmark's economy and created something of a chronic economic crisis (Willumsen 2013, 223–228). The population, never large even after the sixteenth-century expansion, contracted throughout the seventeenth (Hagen 2015a, 10). In periods of stress, one of the few options for relief was to turn to your neighbors; receiving and gifting food must have been an important feature of these subsistence communities. As Van Gent notes, "Magical practices are concerned with the regulation of the body and to early modern Europeans, somatic experiences thus reflected wider moral and social relations"; the sicknesses these women experiences was, literally, a forcible relocation of a woman's physical body—and thus her social membership—from proper Lutheran society to a diabolic community (Van Gent 2009, 7). Van Gent goes on to say that "witchcraft provided an accepted discourse to

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[52] Occasionally, a woman would confess to accepting this "poison" willingly; see page 82 for an example. However, this circumstance was extremely rare; the usual course was to deny all foreknowledge that the doctored food or drink was anything out of the ordinary.

ascribe meaning to these manifestations of sickness and pain. Such perception also altered the self image. . . . [M]agical illness represented not just misfortune in an economic sense but also a profound existential crisis" (Van Gent 2009, 8). Accepting gifts from witches—or, as in Karen Edisdatter's case, directly from the Devil—meant accepting a different self-image, a different community, than the one to which the unwary recipient had previously belonged.

It is notable that these gift exchanges (or poisonings) occurred among women, with no men present. This is surely a reflection of reality. Speaking generally of early modern Europe, Robin Briggs describes the social situation of rural communities as divided by gender:

> …all but pre-adolescent children spent most of their time in company with their own sex. They may have preferred this, and social convention gave them no choice in any case. It is striking that those few occasions when both sexes were present in numbers often included arrangements to separate them; it was the widespread, although not universal, custom for men and women to sit apart in church. . . .[53]
>
> Within the peasant family there was a further gender division in terms of production and commerce. This can be roughly represented as outside/male and inside/female. Men took responsibility for crops and livestock, women for house, dairy, poultry and garden, including the marketing of surplus produce from these areas. (R. Briggs 1996, 268)

The situation in Finnmark, as mentioned in chapter 1 above, differed slightly, according to Rune Blix Hagen; Finnmark's women were fewer in number and, to repeat the quote, "somewhat more independent, autonomous and freer" than their countrywomen in more established agrarian villages farther south (Hagen 2006, 138; see also Hagen 2015a, 162–163). It is also worth repeating Hagen's comment, however, that "Nonetheless,…the coastal societies of Finnmark were characteristically male-centred and male-dominated in both form and content. The workforce, fishermen, merchants

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[53] Segregated seating by gender was indeed the norm in many parts of Scandinavia. Typically, as will be discussed in chapter 5 below with specific reference to Gotland, women occupied the northern half of the nave and men the southern (see, e.g., Svahnström 1961, 60).

and traders, belonged to a predominantly male sphere" (Hagen 2006, 138). We should, in other words, not overstate the "freer" position of Finnmark's women; they were still regulated by fundamentalist Lutheran expectations of chastity and modesty and were certainly not supposed to be active in the outward-facing and obviously outdoors activity of fishing and the associated fishing economy. It is true, however, in Finnmark as in Scandinavia generally, and as evinced in Karen Edisdatter's confession, that is was not men but women who looked after most livestock, including taking them out to pasture.

In Finnmark, men instead spent much of their time fishing. "At the time of the witch trials, most Norwegians lived in fishing villages along the coast, and their income came from combining coastal fishing and small scale subsistence agriculture" (Willumsen 2013, 224). This reliance on fishing proved problematic in the seventeenth century, which "was characterized by periods of less than normal fish reaching the coast and several severe shipwrecks" (Willumsen 2013, 226). It also meant that many charges of maleficia were specifically related to fishing and nautical misadventures, in Finnmark as Norway at large; Hans Eyvind Næss, in his tally of the types of accusations throughout the country, breaks maleficia into several categories, in which "sinking of ships, killing of crew" is the third most common (63 cases), after "human sickness or injuries" (129) and "homicide" (90) (Næss 1990, 373, table 14.2). Economic scarcity, under these circumstances and in close-knit fishing communities, could provoke envy, resentment, and the need to rely on one's neighbors—a combination of feelings and situations that could easily provoke witchcraft accusations. These feelings might well have been especially activated in the religious context of a muscular Lutheranism that dictated housewifely frugality and the countermanding social context that advocated neighborly hospitality. It is, in sum, no surprise that the common case of one neighbor providing another with a bite to eat or something to drink was also fraught.

## The Gendered Order and the Motif

Yet the connection between witchcraft and eating/drinking does not merely reflect economic stress or even the religiously gendered order of society. One simple explanation for the association of women and poisoning is, as mentioned briefly above, the cultural assumption that it is women, and especially housewives, who prepare food for the household. Indeed, the connection between femininity and food preparation contributed to the development of the witch figure in the early modern period in multiple and sometimes concrete ways; for instance, art historian Charles Zika argues that one reason why cauldrons, used since the bronze age to prepare food and alcohol and ubiquitous in (women's) kitchens,[54] became such a stable feature of Continental witch iconography is precisely because "the cauldron primarily served to identify the witch as female" (Zika 2007, 74). In a Scandinavian context, the exiled Swedish ecclesiastic Olaus Magnus included an image of a bare-footed, loose-haired witch pouring out the contents of a cauldron, with a ship sinking in a storm beyond her, at the start of book 3, chapter 15. He writes:

> The picture above…shows that all witches use this kind of utensil, where they can boil down juices, herbs, reptiles, and entrails, and with such poisonous fare entice idle persons to follow their wishes; and, in accordance with the bubbling of the pot, they stimulate the sped of ships or riders or runners. (*Description* 3.15 (Olaus Magnus 1996, 171))

The cauldrons pictured in much of Continental artwork typically belch fumes or storms and are surrounded by bones and naked, contorted witches; it is not hard to see in them, and in Olaus

[54] According to Mary Ellen Snodgrass, cauldrons in the medieval and early modern periods could be used for non-culinary and brewing tasks as well: "In domestic settings, cauldrons had multiple uses—for bathing children, boiling or bleaching cloth, or cooking a pudding in an animal paunch" (Snodgrass 2004, 174). Massimo Montanari outlines the extent to which, outside of exlusively male environments like monasteries, food preparation was dominated by women in medieval Europe (Montanari 2015, 48).

Magnus's description, echoes of Act 4, Scene 1 of *Macbeth*, in which three witches throw "poison'd entrails," toads, snakes, and other unpalatable substances into their bubbling brew.

In contrast, the foodstuffs that turn women into witches in Finnmark are wholly ordinary: fish, bread, beer, butter, milk, and so on. These are not the noxious concoctions of literary witches but the foods and drinks that everyone ate, had to eat, every day—and they are all foodstuffs whose preparation was solely the province of a household's women. The symbolic resonance between this kind of food, which looks normal but is in fact is deviously *other*, and the figure of the witch, who appears a normal, respectable woman but is in fact also deviously *other*, is apparent. In part, this explains the terror inspired by witchcraft in Finnmark (and elsewhere); it is by nature unrecognizable until it is too late.

Not only was Finnmark's witchcraft/poison created by women, served by women, and eaten by women, it was in a few instances created specifically for female situations as well, such as confinement (the period of recovery after childbirth). Thus Karen Olsdatter told the court in 1663 that "haffue Lært Throlddom hoes Boedel Claußdatter…vngefehr 2 Aars tid siden, och at hun gaff(ue) hende ded ind vdi *en Grødt, Kaldis Sengemad heller Barnsengs grødt*, dog at ded war med hendis egen willie och Samtycke" (Willumsen 2010a, 276–277, emphasis added) ["she learnt witchcraft some two years ago from Boedel Clausdatter…who had given it to her in *some porridge of the kind served to women in confinement*,[55] but with her consent and acceptance" (Willumsen 2010b, 276–277, emphasis added)]. It is extremely rare that women confess it was their wish to eat witchcraft; far more commonly, they are fed witchcraft decidedly *without* their knowledge or consent. This is the

[55] The original translates literally to "a porridge, called bed-food or childbed-porridge."

case in the following confession, which also involves confinement porridge, of Karen Andersdatter, earlier in 1663:

> Dorette Lauridtzdatter Da her same stedtz boendis, Som for Throlddombs Sag Allereede er henRettit, Som schal haffue giffuit hende en gang wdi hendis Barßel Seng for thou Aar Siden, Een Meelgrød, Reed med Melch och Smør udi, Och der Hun Ded haffde opæedit, Bekom hun sig heel Ondt Dervdaff, och det wdi 14 Dagers tid, Och Jmidlertiid, waar samme forbe: Dorette hoeß hende Paa en 14 dagis tiid, och Achtit hende paa Barßel sengen, Och siger hun, at ded waar En tynd grødt och Saae hun der wdi nogit Suart, Saae stoer som Jt Biug Korn, Men Huad det waar, wiste hun iche, och trej wgger effter Hendis Barselsengs offuerstandelße, Kom den Slemme Sattan til hende wdi en Kattis Lignelse, och Rant paa hendes Legomme fra Føderne och alt Langs opad ind til Munden, Huor hand samme steds telde hendis tender. (Willumsen 2010a, 237–238)
>
> Dorette Lauridtzdatter, who lived here in this same place [Schatøer] and who has already been executed for witchcraft, gave [the craft] to her two years ago, when she was in confinement after giving birth, in a porridge with milk and butter, and when she finished eating it, she was ill from it, and remained ill for a fortnight. Meanwhile, the said Dorette stayed with her for a fortnight and looked after her in her confinement, and she says the porridge was watery and she saw a speck of black in it, about the size of a grain of barley, but she knew not what it was, and three weeks after the end of her confinement, the wicked Sattan [Satan] came to her in the likeness of a cat and moved around her body from the very feet to her mouth, where he counted her teeth.[56] (Willumsen 2010b, 237–238)

As in Karen Olsdatter's confession, we see here how women relied on each other and how the time surrounding childbirth was socially marked, including by the preparation and consumption of special—and perhaps especially vulnerable—foods.

Childbirth and the period of recovery that followed it were one of the periods at the far end of the spectrum Robin Briggs describes, "times when only one sex would be present though a middle area which was predominantly rather than exclusively gendered" (R. Briggs 1996, 268). Only women would be in attendance during both the birth itself and the period afterwards; the mother would

[56] We will return to this description of the Devil as an oddly behaved cat in chapter 3.

possibly see no men at all until she and her newborn were (re)introduced into Christian society through a ceremony called churching, which was practiced by both Protestants and Catholics (Gélis 1991, 99–103; 107). The time was extremely fraught; newborns were especially vulnerable to inimical forces and new mothers suffered physical pain, emotional extremes, and medical concerns for both themselves and their children, while issues like nipple fissures, treatable today, could be painful, injurious, or even—with infection—deadly to a breastfeeding woman (Gélis 1991, 194–196; Purkiss 1996, 132). Both of the English-language terms, "lying-in" and "confinement," suggest the degree to which women were literally and socially removed from ordinary life, in need of a restrictive kind of protection. The Danish term used here, "Barßel Seng," literally means maternity bed, less obviously reflecting the experience of confinement but still suggestive of it, in its reliance on a piece of furniture where one is, typically, prostrate and more or less helpless.

Throughout Europe, the women who attended the birth and the mother during her lying-in period were carefully chosen, but such close quarters, weighted with social and religious concerns, could result in misunderstandings, severed ties, and, at the extreme, accusations of witchcraft. The lying-in maid, who ran her charge's household in addition to caring for the recuperating woman, was particularly problematic; especially during the first week or so, when the new mother was restricted to her bed, the lying-in maid effectively usurped the mother's place in the household and her authority over the servants and older children. She may also have served as wet-nurse, especially immediately after childbirth, a not uncommon but still difficult usurpation of motherhood itself (Purkiss 1996, 104; Roper 1996, 210–215). Special foods and drinks were typically given to women during labor and confinement; some authorities came to view these foods, gifted by female neighbors, as the cause of puerperal fever (Gélis 1991, 180, 190, 248). In extreme cases, such gifts of confinement food could prove the nexus of later accusations of witchcraft. A case from

Langenburg, Germany, deeply researched by Thomas Robisheaux, is one such example, and is reminiscent of Karen Andersdatter's confession: after accepting and eating a Shrove cake brought to her by a friend—the daughter of a reputed witch—a previously healthy woman in confinement fell unexpectedly and alarmingly ill, swelling and excreting and suffering from immense thirst and pain before dying (Robisheaux 2009, 37–38). Of course the major difference here is that the victim dies *of* witchcraft, rather than of execution *for* witchcraft.

Women's contacts and relationships in both webs of society and witchcraft are crucial: they are the lines of transmission of both collegiality and its opposite, expressed, in the extreme case, in terms of witchcraft. And one of the most concrete realizations of both neighborliness and demonic destruction was food, food prepared by women, eaten by women, and in some cases at least, freighted with particularly feminine circumstances like lying-in. Even without such liminal, trying situations as childbirth and confinement, in Finnmark the exchange of witchcraft was a peculiarly female activity, conducted in female spaces—the home, pastures, or animal sheds—with only women present. Moreover, as still happens today, traditions of how to prepare various recipes—including those for bread, fish, beer, and so forth, so often the vehicles for edible witchcraft, and the recipes themselves, likely passed within women's networks of female friends and relatives as well. Quite possibly, the idea of eating or drinking witchcraft meant that the new witch could learn—had perhaps already learned—the technique for imbuing her food with poisonous witchcraft from her own inductor, thus setting the stage for fears of a true epidemic of contagious witchcraft.

As Robin Briggs has observed, witchcraft accusations (and the rumors about a person's bad reputation that could support such an accusation) very frequently took place in gendered circles in part for the simple reason that early modern society had a bifurcated order: women among women, men among men. While the trials themselves had to be orchestrated by men, given the design of

systems of authority at the time, the extent to which women were involved as accusers, witnesses, and in some cases examiners (for instance, on the Continent midwives or other women were often employed to locate witches' marks[57] on suspects) has been remarked upon by several scholars (see, e.g., Roper 1994, 200–201, R. Briggs 1996, Chapter 7, esp. 264–267; Purkiss 1996, 8). In witch panics, characterized by chain accusations triggered by authorities' fears of a "sleeper cell" of witches, accused women in Finnmark exclusively named other women as co-conspirators, largely because (one imagines) the type of witchcraft they were confessing to was emphatically female in conception, but also because, presumably, these were the neighbors they simply knew the best, the neighbors who came most readily to mind. Liv Helene Willumsen reaches this conclusion with specific reference to Finnmark's largest panic, in 1662–1663; the graph she includes that shows the network of accusations is positively tangled. "This web of denunciation," she says, "indicates that the women involved in the panic knew each other" (Willumsen 2013, 275, 276 (fig. 8)). Indeed, it would be surprising if they did not; the villages where the women came from were largely small, coastal fishing villages of fewer than two hundred people—and while the men were out on fishing trips, the women would be left to their own community. Those communities were networks of sociability and antagonisms, friendships, enmities, and economic interdependencies, and transmitted through these networks were, among other things, folk customs, including traditions that could be interpreted by authorities trained in Continental demonology—or by the people themselves—as witchcraft. As Purkiss says, referring to a 1613 English witchcraft case, "spells and familiars circulate around the village or town almost as commodities, almost like…household items and small sums of money. . . . Witchcraft itself is caught up in the currents which flow between households and

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[57] Also called the Devil's mark or, in Latin, *stigma diabolic*, and in some analyses synonymous with a "witch's teat," the witch's mark was a physical feature (a fleshy protuberance, for instance) that supposedly documented her pact with the Devil.

individuals" (Purkiss 1996, 147). A similar situation obtained also in Finnmark; as Hagen notes, "I flere saker nordfra kan vi dessuten se at trolldommen direkte blir anvendt som en slags handelsvare" (Hagen 2015a, 136) [In several cases in the North we can therefore see that witchcraft is employed directly as a kind of commodity]. It is unsurprising, then, that many of the "currents" linking individuals and neighborhoods were dangerous undertows, forged of the kinds of intimate antagonisms that can erupt in cramped villages.

It is difficult to know from the Finnmark trial documentation whether any instances of accusation in these panics were cases of people settling scores or if any of the newly accused had been suggested to them by interrogators or others, although Willumsen suggests that the latter did indeed happen during the 1662–1663 panic, when the high-ranking female prisoner Anne Rhodius, exiled to Vardøhus from the south, communicated regularly with the women and children involved in the network of accusations and apparently encouraged confessions and even accusations of specific people (Willumsen 2013, 279–283, esp. 281; see also Hagen 2015a, 190–210). One other potential instance of "score-settling" is visible in the 1663 trial of Ellen Gundersdatter, mentioned earlier; although presumably she could simply have blamed the (unnamed) vagrant woman who taught her witchcraft for her knowledge of the art, she specified that the passing woman had been hired by her (named and therefore implicated) mistress for the express purpose of spreading her illicit knowledge. This particular accusation also points to some of the specific tensions surrounding female maid servants, who in Finnmark often came from elsewhere (Willumsen 2013, 246) and whose position, in the words of Jacqueline Van Gent, "was somewhat liminal and tenuous" (Van Gent 2009, 152). Van Gent is here speaking specifically of eighteenth-century Sweden, but her observations hold true for Finnmark in the previous century as well. In both places, "servants on…farms were often regarded as temporary members of the household. They…crossed the boundaries of the household,

coming from the outside, and were therefore the first to be suspected of violating body borders and causing illness" (Van Gent 2009, 115). As mentioned above, nearly 20 percent of accused women in Finnmark had immigrated from farther south (Willumsen 2013, 246). Very possibly, as with Ellen Gundersdatter, many or even most of these migrants had been maids in someone else's home (see Hagen 2015a, 164, 176–177); perhaps suspicions, arising from tensions between maid and mistress, were early roots of rumors that later flowered into full-blown reputations as witches. As Van Gent also points out, maids' reliance on their mistress for employment meant they could be exploited, sometimes in the performance of counter-magic or witchcraft itself. For instance, Van Gent discusses a case from 1760 in which one housewife, Sara, instructed her maid Elin to milk the neighbor's cows, from which milk she made little cakes; Elin was then instructed to feed these cakes to Sara's own cows, with the intention that Sara's cows would get more milk than her neighbor's (Van Gent 2009, 72–73). The whole episode is a case of magical milk-theft, which I will be discussing at length in chapters 5 and 6; here it is significant that the woman of house compelled her maid to actually carry out the illicit milking and the subsequent transference of the neighbor's cows' "life essence," in Van Gent's words. Other women in the home, whether during periods of confinement or employment, were sources of both comfort and concern, for all involved.

It is also quite possible that some activities and knowledge deemed witchcraft by the authorities really were passed among the confessing women, who probably did not see these pieces of wisdom in the same light. Such may be the case, for instance, with Kari, wife of Jetmund Siversen (Siffuersen), who in 1632 confessed to learning how to heal[58] from Guri, a previously convicted witch: "Gurrj som bode i Eckerøe och bleff brent, Lærde Hinde att signe och Maale dennom som

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[58] The verb "att signe" is here translated simply as "to heal"; it is related to the Danish word *signelse* and Swedish *signeri*, which betoken a type of superstition associated by authorities with witchcraft but often brought up in the context of (magical) healing. See Nilden-Wall and Wall (1996, 21–22) and Toivo (2016, 12).

fich et slem mod, saa de schulle faa bedre" (Willumsen 2010a, 72) ["Gurrj [Guri], who had lived in Eckerøe and was burnt, taught her to heal and invoke good spirits for those who fell ill, so that they would recover" (Willumsen 2010b, 72)]. It is not clear if she is referring to Guri Olufsdatter from Greater Ekkerøy (Store Ekkerøy) or Guri Olsdatter from Lesser Ekkerøy (Lille Ekkerøy),[59] both of whom were burnt in 1621; the latter confessed to having learned witchcraft from Kristi, Anders Johansen's wife (Lilienskiold 1998, 88), so that—if Kari is referring to this Guri, from Lesser Ekkerøy—we may see a real, if misunderstood, transmission of folk healing from one woman to another over the course of several decades. Such misunderstanding is a recurrent theme in histories of witch trials. Louise Nyholm Kallestrup argues that sixteenth-century Danish theologians spent significant time condemning white magic because "Danish lay people, like the illiterate population in other parts of Europe, found it hard to understand how the Devil could be behind benevolent magic" (Kallestrup 2015, 45). Two centuries later, according to Van Gent, eighteenth-century local Swedish courts continued to "witness[] battles over the meaning of narratives of a magical event" (Van Gent 2009, 23), that is, whether popular religious, cultural, or healing customs belonged to the same category as maleficia or diabolical witchcraft. In any event, it is significant that the knowledge of white magic was transmitted through female lines—just as witchcraft itself was in the Finnmark confessions, and just as it is in later folklore.

## Conclusion: The Witch as Bad Neighbor

The authorities in Finnmark, the accused witches themselves, or both seem to have been particularly concerned with how the confessing women *became* witches, as much or more than they were with the

[59] There is some confusion in the source material regarding these two names. Hagen and Sparboe transcribe and translate both names as Guri Olsdatter (Ols datter; Lilienskiold 1998, 88–89), but they are distinguished as Gøri Olsdatter and Guri Olufsdatter in Willumsen (2010b, 414) and as Guri (Gøri) Oelsdatter and Guri Oluffdatter in Hagen (2015b).

things the accused did *as* witches. Their descriptions of how they acquired the art are often elaborate. This is a particular feature of the trials of women; few of the (mostly Sámi) men gave any explanation of how they learned their art at all or, if they did, seem contented with a very brief description of who they learned it from, with no elaboration as to how. The concern with means of transmission thus seems largely confined to the community of Norwegian women. In broad terms, this speaks to the need felt by church and state to control and order the problematic fact of female persons in an androcentric system, and indeed may also speak to women's own internalized tensions in controlling and ordering themselves within the same. In Finnmark, one way in which these tensions manifested was as concerns with the ties between women within village communities, including ties between female relatives—particularly mothers and daughters—and between female neighbors.

The witch embodied anxieties about female relationships. Instead of creating and supporting the nurturing links needed for small, stressed villages to survive, she subverted them, forming a dark mirror of the proper Lutheran community. Community networks were built upon food, whose preparation and distribution were largely if not entirely governed by women. It is therefore unsurprising that both the dissolution of community and the creation of a new, diabolical one, should also hinge on the exchange of food. Witchcraft in many places and in many ways is linked with poison; in Finnmark, whose population was dependent on supplies of grain from monopolistic Bergen-based merchants and diminishing supplies of fish, "witchcraft" and "poison" became all but synonymous. Induction into the Devil's band of monstrously uncontrolled females was accomplished by a literal poisoning. The witch became a deeply meaningful antonym of "neighbor" in seventeenth-century Finnmark, and her perceived attempt to dissolve patriarchal order required that she first recreate her female networks in her own twisted fashion. Her means of doing so

encoded fears—conscious or unconscious—about the power women held over the basic stuff of life (food) and women's connections to each other, which could both support and destroy larger communities. These powers existed uneasily in a framework that understood society as properly patriarchal, governed by the twin supports of church and state, and yet was a society that depended, for economic and practical reasons, largely on the efforts of women left on their own for lengthy periods of time. Male priests wielded spiritual nourishment, more powerful but less directly connected to immediate survival than the murky, bodily nourishment vulnerable to women's (supposedly) weaker bodies and intellect. Women's power over their children, their communities, and the concrete way in which this power manifested—food—became realized in the motif of witchcraft as poison. Unlike the top-down, regulated governance of the Lutheran state, witches worked from the inside out, quite literally, thorough the evil foodstuffs they insidiously spread about their communities.

# CHAPTER 3. (UN)FAMILIAR ANIMALS IN FINNMARK:

## The Witch as Anti-Human

Motif G275.12 in Stith Thompson's motif index, "Witch in the form of animal is injured or killed as a result of the injury to the animal" (Thompson 1956), can be found in shapeshifting witch legends all across Northern Europe, including Scandinavia; Bengt af Klintberg lists the motif in Swedish material, for instance, as P32 (af Klintberg 2010, 296).[60] The motif is featured in the Norwegian migratory legends ML 3055 (Christiansen 1958, 48) or MLSIT 3056 (Almqvist 1991, 268–269; on the latter see also Ní Dhuibhne 1993). In the oral legends collected by nineteenth- and twentieth-century folklorists, a typical story involving this motif tells of a man out hunting. The man spies a hare, takes shot and misses, and misses again, and finally lands a special bullet, sometimes made of silver; even then the animal is only wounded, often in the leg, and gets away. But then an old woman is discovered with a corresponding wound, and the witch's true identity is exposed, as in this example, told by Gustav Bang from Bækbølling, Denmark:

> I Plovstrup levede en gang en heks, der blandt andet kunde skabe sig om til en hare. og da kunde ingen kugler bide på hende. Men en gang fik en mand, der nok anede, hvem det var, i sinde at skyde på hende med en sølvknap. Haren blev såret i benet og lob ind i heksens hus og op på loftet. Da manden kom der op, befandt heksen sig ganske rigtig deroppe, og var såret i benet. (Broadwell and Tangherlini 2014, ETKspace DS_07_0_00261)
>
> [One time in Plovstrup there was a witch, who among other things could turn herself into a hare. And then no bullets could touch her. But one time a man, who probably suspected what she was, came up with the idea to shoot her with a silver button. The hare was wounded in the leg and ran to the witch's house and up to the attic. When the man came there, the witch was of course up there, the wound in her leg.]

Witches and animals go together hand-in-hand, as it were, throughout European witchcraft belief and legend. Often, as here, the witch is a shapeshifter who takes the form of one animal or

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[60] Cf. P31 (af Klintberg 2010); G252, G252.0.1. (Thompson 1956).

another—the hare being a particular favorite in Scandinavia—but she frequently instead has animal-shaped demonic companions, called "familiars" in English, or meets an animal-shaped or animalistic Devil. A related element in witch beliefs and legends is the misuse of animals as transvecting units: witches in the Blåkulla trials in Sweden, for instance, often rode to meet the Devil at Blåkulla on—among many other things—cows, which in the normal course of things not only do not carry people on their backs but also cannot fly, which is how the Swedish witches traversed the long distance and crossed bodies of water to the site of the sabbath (af Klintberg 2010, N23; Thompson 1956, G241.1, G241.6).[61] The species available in the shapeshifting menagerie are remarkably stable across Europe, allowing for regional variations; goats, dogs, and cats are perhaps the most frequently recurring, with rabbits, toads, and flies also occasionally appearing. In the witchcraft trials of Finnmark, accused witches confessed frequently to turning into a number of types of creature, including cats, dogs, sea animals, and birds, often specifying the species of these: ducks, crows, swans, and geese, among others (see table 1 below).

This chapter explores the motif of shapeshifting in the Finnmark witch trials, drawing on analogous beliefs and narratives from elsewhere to fully investigate it. In particular, I focus on the animals claimed by confessing witches themselves (table 1) and the forms ascribed to the Devil. Women also often ascribed animal forms to their alleged fellow witches, often naming the same or similar species as appear in table 1. They occasionally also gave animal forms to their familiars, called their personal gods or "apostles" in the trial records. In this chapter, I will draw particular attention to the ways in which not all animals have equal roles to play; generally speaking, real animals appear more frequently than legendary or mythical animals, domestic animals more frequently than wild animals,

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[61] A related motif has it that the witch similarly rides humans, typically men (Klintberg 2010, N19–N22; Thompson 1956, G241.2).

and particular types of domestic animals—among them the cat and dog—more frequently than other domestic animals.[62] I will illustrate that these animals truly are on the one hand familiar, but are on the other—given their essentially non-human nature—unknowable, and that this paradox slots them in a similar conceptual slot as the food offered by a neighbor and the housewife-as-witch. In other words, this chapter investigates how Scandinavian witchcraft beliefs probed the fear of the uncanny, the familiar made threatening.[63] More, I illustrate how the particular species involved in the Finnmark trials suggest the same anxiety witnessed also in chapter 1, that is the ability of women to create, and in the case of witches to pervert, their human communities. Fundamentally, the Finnmark shapeshifting witch revealed the risk that Satan posed to the fragile boundaries between human and animal on the one hand, and animal and demon on the other; she literally embodied a messy, fearsome grey zone of taxonomic anxiety that had developed in the Middle Ages and became inflamed in the early modern period.

## The Shapeshifting Witch

It is a particular power of motifs and legends that they can be mapped onto real situations and applied to real people, sometimes—as happened in Finnmark—with devastating results. A total of thirty-seven women who were accused of being witches in the seventeenth-century trials in Finnmark, Norway, confessed to shapeshifting, sometimes more than once and sometimes into more than one type of animal. Dogs, cats, seals, and even the occasional whale all appear, but the

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[62] For reasons that will be discussed below, applying the term "domestic" to cats in particular is rather inaccurate, but I employ it here for the sake of readability.

[63] Though I largely discard both his literary and psychoanalytical analysis, Sigmund Freud's famous essay on "The Uncanny" informs my usage of the term (Freud 2003, 121–162).

vast majority of Finnmark's witches seem to have preferred bird-shapes. These show a great variety of species, as the following chart indicates.

**Table 1. Animal shapes claimed by accused witches in Finnmark**

| Animal | Subcategory | Count |
|---|---|---|
| Bird (total 34) | crow | 10 |
| | duck | 5 |
| | raven | 5 |
| | swan | 5 |
| | *unspecified* | 2 |
| | "little" or "small" | 2 |
| | falcon | 2 |
| | seagull | 2 |
| | eagle | 1 |
| | goose | 1 |
| | pigeon | 1 |
| | wagtail | 1 |
| | wood grouse | 1 |
| Cat (total 8) | *unspecified* | 8 |
| Seal (total 5) | *unspecified* | 5 |
| Dog (total 3) | *unspecified* | 1 |
| | bitch | 1 |
| | small black | 1 |
| Whale (total 1) | *unspecified* | 1 |

Many women also ascribed animal forms to other witches, with a similar distribution of species. There were also two who referred to being "in the sky" without specifying further; such a

description, however, may indicate that they were in bird form—although given that witches flew also on dogs, cows, and farmyard implements, the identification is far from secure. One accused witch suggests she appeared as an animal/human hybrid, telling the court that during one Christmas sabbath she "Waar schichit som et mennische offuen beltet, Men Neden Wschichelige" (Willumsen 2010a, 43) ["was shaped as a human, above her belt, but was not thus shaped below" (Willumsen 2010b, 43)]. Bårne, wife of Villat the Bell Ringer, was similarly vague in 1652, confessing merely that "Naar hun Wilde faare Nogenn stedt och giøre Noget onnt schulde hun allenne Vd gaa paa en besønnderlig Steedt Stilletiendeß Saa fich hun en hamme paa, och Naar hun saa Kaldet paa hinndeß Gud Kunde hun faare aff Steedt" (Willumsen 2010a, 110) ["when she wanted to go somewhere, all she had to do was to quietly walk to a strange place, and then she was decked in a likeness, and as soon as she called for her god, she was off" (Willumsen 2010b, 110)].[64]

The evidence presented in table 1 begs the question: why were birds so popular, and why was there so much more variety among the birds than any of the other animals mentioned? One significant factor in explaining the latter is likely the simple fact that the nonelite class, to which Finnmark's witches belonged, would have been familiar with a large number of bird species in a way that they were not familiar with the variety of dog breeds then available in Europe, and still less familiar with the much smaller number of cat breeds that had begun to emerge in the fourteenth century, among southern Europe's upper classes (Pascua 2011, 102). Birds, on the other hand, whether wild (as in eagles and swans), or domesticated or semi-wild (as in ducks, pigeons, and geese), were omnipresent in coastal Finnmark, and the differences between species readily apparent.

[64] The translation has missed the phrase "giøre Noget onnt"; the complete translation should read "when she wanted to go somewhere *and do something evil*, all she had to do was to quietly walk to a strange place…".

We should however be careful not to impose our post-Linnean assumptions onto the categorization of species represented in table 1. It is entirely possible that the included birds were not grouped together as "birds" in the folk taxonomy of Finnmark, but rather that each species of bird was as distinct as, say, cats were from dogs. If this is the case, our evaluation should be revised to establish that crows (which appear ten times) were the most popular animal form taken by witches, followed closely by cats (eight times). As Dan Sperber explains, "folk taxonomies are often sophisticated and show a deep knowledge of the local environment"; though they do not follow the biological rigor of modern science, they "cannot be right or wrong," in that folk taxonomies respond to the needs and worldview of their particular cultures in a way that scientific zoology does not (Sperber 1996, 160). The division of animals into categories in folk taxonomies need not resemble at all modern zoology's. For instance, scholars consider it likely that medieval monks helped introduce the domestic rabbit to Europe since unborn and newborn rabbits were considered fish, thus rendering them suitable sustenance during Lent (Pascua 2011, 95; Clutton-Brock 1989, 147). In fact, the medieval category of "fish" included "all animals swimming in water, including ducks, geese, and even beavers" (Resl 2011, 5).[65] In the case of shapeshifting witches in table 1, of course, the broadest category is simply "animal forms taken by witches": we are looking at a kind of genus of animal in Finnmark's folk taxonomy. Setting biology aside, then, what unifies these species? I suggest that the most significant unifying factor with all of the species tabulated above is that nearly all of the animal species included in table 1, even seals, would have been regular, familiar sights nearby human habitation and activity, and many of these animals—including cats, dogs, and some of the bird species—would have been at least semidomesticated.

[65] This can perhaps be defended by Biblical exegesis; the Book of Genesis states that God creates aquatic, aerial, and terrestrial animals in distinct stages (Gen. 1:20–25). Therefore all animals of the water are "fish" in the same way that wolves, elephants, and mice fit the same broad type of land-based animal.

In other words, it is notable what the witches do *not* turn into: there are no fantastic, powerful creatures like dragons, no exotic Biblical creatures like lions or camels, and—most strikingly, perhaps—no powerful wild carnivores like bears or wolves. The witches instead confess to shapeshifting into ordinary, mostly innocuous creatures, who would have been unremarkable sights in and around most farmsteads, homes, and fishing sites. It is difficult to know if these particular shapes were spontaneously generated by the women or suggested by the interrogators, but presumably they were agreed upon by both parties as essentially reasonable shapes for witches to take. I suggest that this is because, just as poison appears to be food and the witch herself appears to be an ordinary neighbor woman (as I discussed in chapter 2), the common animal appears to be just that, a harmless addition to and participant in the human-dominated landscape. And yet, in the same way that poisoned porridge might foment or reveal anxieties about neighborly hospitality, legends of shapeshifting witches might reflect anxieties about these apparently harmless animals in our midst. Although such creatures would have been familiar, they also were designated as "Other," and represented an opportunity for the Devil to infiltrate the human community; as discussed below, Satan had become identified with the animal world in the late Middle Ages. In adopting animal forms, Finnmark's witches were again (as they were with their poisonous food), deconstructing the human community and reconstituting a demonic parody of it, aligning themselves with the animal/demonic community in defiance of the divinely sanctioned, patriarchal human one.

In the motif of the shapeshifting witch, animals—and especially the common animals in table 1—are sites of existential conflict, a conflict long known to ecclesiastics and given new, popular resonance in the post-Reformation world: what does it mean to be a human? In her shapeshifting, the witch challenges a fundamental building block of early modern society, that of the separation between animal and human. The aperture had been opened for her, as indicted by the animalistic

Devil that had emerged in the late medieval period; in fact, for centuries the fundamental assumption that humans were distinct from animals had been weakening, driven by philosophical challenges that began in the medieval period and continued through the Reformation. These challenges first emerged among elite theologians, but by the early modern period they can be witnessed in legislation and court cases, indicating that broad concerns about the boundary between animal and human, and concerns about policing that boundary, had penetrated European society.

## Human and Animal: The (Lack of) a Thin Bright Line

The account of Genesis in the Bible seems to make it clear that humans occupied a special place in God's creation vis-à-vis animals: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:26). And yet humans were also recognized, from the early Christian period on, *as* an animal; indeed the Latin word *animal* expressed both human and nonhuman creatures in most learned texts until the fourteenth century (Resl 2011, 3, 10). The recognition of similarity between human animal and nonhuman animal clearly made some medieval theologians uncomfortable, prompting a fair amount of debate about precisely how and in what degrees humans differed from other animals: "The biblical exegetes and early Church fathers of late antiquity were particularly required to elaborate upon the differences between humans and other animals when commenting on the hierarchy of God's creation" (Resl 2011, 10; see also De Leemans and Klemm 2011). As the Middle Ages wore on, the distance between humans and animals grew smaller—"the paradigm of separation of species was breaking down," in historian Joyce E. Salisbury's words (Salisbury 1994, 2). Simultaneously, the realms of the demonic and the animalistic were moving closer together, resulting in an increasingly bestial Devil in artwork, theological writings, and other productions of the late Middle Ages

(Muchembled 2003, 21–27). As a result, shapeshifting from human to animal became a hot topic among demonologists, as it suggested a demonic contamination of the divine order, an eradication of the dangerously uncertain lines between, firstly, human and animal, and, secondly, between animal and demon.

As Johannes Dillinger has demonstrated, medieval theologians like Burchard of Worms and Thomas Aquinas were dismissive of shapeshifting, describing it as a delusion of demons (Dillinger 2015, 143). But later demonologists were more ambivalent, and some—notably Jean Bodin—took the opposite position; as Dillinger says, Bodin "seemed to be bent on proving the reality of the shape-shifters in which people from all over the world and from different periods of time had clearly believed" (Dillinger 2015, 150). Even Bodin, however, maintained that "the devil was incapable of transforming human nature into the nature of an animal"; in this, he was following other demonologists and theologians in asserting God's complete and unassailable control of a thing's essential nature (Dillinger 2015, 151). Dillinger explains that, for Bodin, "the essential human form was reason. Reason remained unchanged and unchangeable" (Dillinger 2015, 151). Dillinger seems to find this peculiar and attributes Bodin's position to his career as a lawyer; if a shapeshifted witch still maintained their human reason, they could still be held legally responsible for any damages committed while in nonhuman form (Dillinger 2015, 151). The primacy of reason as the chief distinguishing element of humanity, however, was not original to Bodin but in fact in line with mainstream medieval Catholic ontology (De Leemans and Klemm 2011, 158, 168–173). Associated with reason was the ability of humans to make moral (or immoral) decisions, and "it was in the area of morality that philosophers insisted the greatest distinction can be made between humans and animals," which naturally meant that "humans can be held morally accountable for their actions where animals are not" (De Leemans and Klemm 2011, 173). Although they do not comment on

the ontological status of the shapeshifted witches, given their apparent acceptance of tales of shapeshifting as evidence in court, the judges in Finnmark seem broadly to agree with the position of Bodin and others, that is, that witches *could* bodily shift shapes but retained their human reason—and therefore culpability—while in animal form.

On the other hand, highbrow philosophical debates aside, legally animals *could* be held accountable for a variety of misdeeds, and were indeed prosecuted, convicted, and sometimes executed. According to Bruce Boehrer, "Roughly two hundred documented examples of such proceedings survive, both from the British Isles and from the Continent, with the earliest dating from the ninth century and the most recent deriving from the twentieth. Seventy-five percent of these surviving cases occur between 1400 and 1700, marking these three centuries as the heyday of the practice" (Boehrer 2011, 23). Witchcraft scholars will recognize these centuries as identical to those that saw the peak of witchcraft trials. In both cases, the need in those years to categorize the world, to organize it firmly and finally along vectors like human/inhuman and male/female—or, more precisely, the broadly shared and uncomfortable recognition that the world was *not* so cleanly organized, and required the intervention of godly authorities to make it so—helped drive the court cases that resulted in pigs hanged for murder, livestock burned for sodomy, and people killed for compacting with the Devil.[66] Boehrer mentions that many of the animal executions and punishments during the early modern period were "justified on the basis that the offending animal was an instrument of evil spirits" (Boehrer 2011, 23). In these cases, there is very little daylight between a shapeshifting witch and an animal possessed by a demon, and indeed demonologists skeptical of literal shapeshifting did occasionally suggest that animals that seemed to be behaving aggressively or

[66] For a discussion of animal prosecution in the early modern period, see chapter 3, "They Hang Horses, Don't They?" in Darren Oldridge, *Strange Histories: The Trial of the Pig, the Walking Dead, and Other Matters of Fact from the Medieval and Renaissance Worlds* (Routledge, 2004), pg. 40–55.

unnaturally might be possessed, rather than shapeshifted (Dillinger 2015, 145, 146, 153; Oldridge 2004, 46). In any case, that the high-water mark of animal prosecutions occurred in the early modern period suggests that the unease surrounding the distinction between human and animal did not settle with the close of the Middle Ages, but rather moved into a new arena: from the pages of theological deliberation to the courtroom and public discourse.

## The Bestial Devil

Starting in the Romanesque period of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Devil began to accumulate animal features in church architecture and art (Muchembled 2003, 22), and the various folk traditions of Europe seem to have rapidly accepted an animalistic Devil.[67] Here too we see a kind of folk taxonomy at work, in which some species were apparently more likely to be fulcrums for Satanic influence than others; although Jeffrey Russell counts some sixty animal forms the Devil might take in medieval folklore, "the most frequent were serpent (dragon), goat, and dog"; later on in the Middle Ages, the favorites had become "ape, dragon, or serpent" (Russell 1984, 67, 211). By then, even when humanoid, Russell notes that the Devil often sported animal features, most typically horns, a tail, or wings, these last "divided about equally between the feathery wings appropriate to an angel and the sinister bat wings more fitting to the caverns of hell" (Russell 1984, 211). The second type of wings, akin to a bat's, appear occasionally in Scandinavian depictions of

[67] Satan rarely appears in Christian artwork in the early Middle Ages, and when he does he appeared as a human or as an angel, distinguished only by context; the earliest depiction of him (possibly), a sixth-century mosaic at the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, Italy, shows him as a blue-clothed angel on Jesus Christ's left side, accompanied by goats as his counterpart, while a red-clothed angel on Christ's right-hand side accepts the sheep (Russell 1984, 129). According to Marina Montesano, the tableau depicts the segregation of souls as outlined in the Biblical parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31–46), with the animal species corresponding to the status of human souls—goats signifying the damned and sheep the saved (Montesano 2018). Even here, then, although Satan himself is firmly human, his iconographic association with goats—which is still firmly established in many Western traditions—is visible.

witchcraft in late medieval churches—see for instance the devil accompanying the milk-stealing witch in Silte church on Gotland (fig. 4.10 below).

There are, of course, regional variations in terms of what animal forms Satan is wont to take, and in seventeenth-century Finnmark he most commonly appeared as a man—or rather, more typically, as a hybrid, a topic I will return to in chapter 5. By my count, of the forty-eight times Satan's physical appearance is described by the accused witches, he appears twenty-four times as humanoid with animal features,[68] eleven times as a dog, five times as a cat, thrice as a sparrow, once as a buck, once as a crow, and once, memorably, as a "bud on a bough"[69] (by Karen Andersdatter in 1663, who also sees him as a cat and whose confession is discussed below; Willumsen 2010b, 238). Twice his shape is unspecified but is clearly animalistic, as when Synnøve, Anders Nordmøring's wife, described him simply as "et tingist" (Willumsen 2010a, 73) ["some sort of creature" (Willumsen 2010b, 73)].[70] As with those accused witches who confess to transforming into various shapes, Satan's form is unstable even when interacting with a particular witch; he may appear once, twice, or more times and may take a different form each time. From this list, though, we see clearly that the animal forms taken by Satan differ considerably from the witches', at least in terms of favorites: dogs, for instance, account for only 5.5 percent of shapeshifted witches but Satan appears as a dog 48 percent of the time he is in animal form.

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[68] Accounts vary considerably, but he is typically pictured as a "black" man or man wearing black—again a topic of discussion in chapter 5—with fur, horns, or claws.

[69] The original reads: "wdi it Kommers Korn schickelse Som woxer paa en Quist" (Willumsen 2010a, 238).

[70] The records do not always clearly distinguish between Satan and demonic familiars, called "apostles" in the records, who themselves also regularly appear as animals; of those who likely are distinct from the Devil, three appear as dogs, two as cats, and one, whom the accused witch rides, is suggestively named "Lannge Rumpe" (Willumsen 2010a, 112) ["Long Ass" (Willumsen 2010b, 112)]. An additional five are not described.

The crucial point is, however, that the animal forms he *does* take are, like those of the accused witches, similarly familiar to house and home. Notably, despite contemporaneous werewolf beliefs, werewolf trials, and the known presence of actual wolves in Finnmark, and despite the constant metaphoric descriptions of Christians as sheep and Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd or Agnus Dei, the Lamb of God, Satan, like the accused witches, never takes wolf form in the Finnmark trials, nor the forms of any of the other wild carnivores that stalked the North. Like his female followers, he rather appears in more innocuous guises. However, Satan's behavior as an animal is distressing, disturbing, and sometimes violent; he is not a typical cat or dog, but a threatening or uncanny intrusion. Thus all three sparrows identified as the Devil appear inside the house and dart back and forth along the floor;[71] while sparrows of course can and do fly (and sometimes nest) inside of human-made structures like houses and barns, such birds "belong" outside, and even those that do find themselves indoors rarely remain grounded, absent some injury. If the women are remembering incidents with real birds, their behavior seems to have been uncanny, in the Freudian sense, and—at least in the context of a witchcraft trial—the birds were interpreted via the lens of oral tradition as manifestations of Satan. Importantly, as always, the Devil appears (in animal form and otherwise) immediately after the poisoning discussed in chapter 2; the community into which the women are inducted is not just demonic, but also animalistic.

Sparrows are not the only animals whose behavior renders them suspiciously "hybrid," that is, as demonic infiltrators of the human community. For instance, in 1663 a Finnmark woman named Karen Andersdatter confessed that (after accidentally eating witchcraft during confinement), "three weeks after the end of her confinement, the wicked Sattan [Satan] came to her in the likeness of a

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[71] The sparrows appear in the confessions of Maren Sigvoldsdatter, Marthe Rasmusdatter, both of whom were burned in 1662, and Magdelene Jacobsdatter, who was convicted but later acquitted by the court of appeal (see Willumsen 2010a, 184, 191, 267; 2010b, 184, 191, 267).

cat and moved around her body from the very feet to her mouth, where he counted her teeth" (Willumsen 2010b, 238; also quoted above in chapter 2). This is, of course, distinctly unusual behavior for a cat, and the intimacy of his actions suggests an inappropriate level of familiarity with Karen's body; still, it is certainly believable that early modern cats would occasionally invade a person's space in the same way that modern cats do today. Satan's choice of animal speaks to his duplicity: he is not here the angelic creature of early Christian art or the monstrous figure of late medieval art, nor even the bestial but humanoid demons of Scandinavian church wall art discussed in chapter 5. Rather, he is a simple domesticated (or semidomesticated) housecat, a creature that would have been familiar and common in Finnmark's fishing villages and farms. It is not altogether clear from the description if the animal was already known to Karen and possessed by the Devil, or if she was surprised by a completely unknown cat and interpreted it to literally be Satan in animal form, but, either way, his behavior is clearly alarming and upsets the natural order, the divine hierarchy of human control over the animal world.

Specifically, Satan's counting of Karen's teeth is a means of taking possession of her, a signal of ownership—though not common practice with cats, inspection of animals' teeth, notably horses, is a cliché part of purchasing them, and the inversion of the practice here refers to the *mundus inversus* world common to folk demonology. According to Teresa Grant, spitting into a dog's mouth seems to have been a means in seventeenth-century England to demonstrate affection for the animal or to ensure it knew its master; perhaps in Karen Andersdatter's description we have an echo of a similar practice (Grant 2011, 108). The fact that he visits her while she is vulnerable, apparently lying down, and in the marked place of (presumably) her bed, hints at Satan's propensity to invade marital space and usurp a husband's privilege, a theme I again explore in chapter 5. Regardless, we are to take Satan's bestial appearance as part of Karen's induction into the community of witches that served

the Devil, a community that—crucially—was fundamentally animalistic, in addition to being demonic.

Karen Andersdatter's cat is a relative exception; as mentioned above, usually when Satan takes an animal form in the Finnmark confessions he appears as a dog. Like cats, dogs were common creatures across social strata in early modern Europe, with however different dog breeds associated with different social statuses, values, and even genders (Boehrer 2011, 14–16; Grant 2011, 99; Stewart 2014, 28–30). As with the grounded sparrows and Karen Andersdatter's cat, it is possible that the Devil-as-a-dog motif was employed to interpret personal experiences within the framework of a shared tradition of demonic dogs, that is, that real, possibly dangerous animals were interpreted as the Devil either at the time of the encounter, afterwards in remembering or telling about it, or still later in the context of a courtroom confession. (Barbara Allen Woods, in her book-length study of modern iterations of the same motif, makes the same observation: some accounts "show how people have been predisposed to apperceive an actual phenomenon, either a real dog or some object suggesting a dog's shape, in terms of the traditional belief of the devil's appearance in dog form" (Woods 1959, 11).) For instance, the girl Ingeborg Iversdatter told the court in 1663 that after her mother tried to feed her witchcraft, "ind wdi Meelck aff en schaale Vdit Fæehuus" ["in a bowl of milk in the sheep shed"], Satan appeared:

> Med det samme Kalde Moederen paa dend Slemme och sagde Kom hid du, Saa Kom hand ind vdi en Suart Hunds Lignelse, och fattit barnit med Kiefften omkring armmen, saa det bløde och læde hende vd paa Marchen, ned med Braßens sinde huuße. (Willumsen 2010a, 210–211)
>
> Her mother called at once for the Evil One, saying, Come here, and he came in the likeness of a black dog and grabbed the child by the arm with his fangs, so that she bled, and led her out into the fields down by Bras's [Brass's] house. (Willumsen 2010b, 210–211)

This description suggests a fairly large but perfectly realistic dog, and perhaps reveals some genuine fear of dogs on Ingeborg's part. The account indeed possibly refers to a real, truly frightening experience with a dog bite.[72] Similarly, Ingeborg's sister Karen Iversdatter confessed that after "hendis Moeder gaff hende ded ind wdi Nogit Melch" ["her mother gave it [witchcraft] to her in some milk"], Satan showed up the next day, "først wdi en Suart hunds Ligennelse wdi Døren och bed hende wdi Haanden som med merche bleff frembeviste" (Willumsen 2010a, 229) ["at first in the doorway, in the likeness of a black dog, and bit her hand, and the marks are [*now*] exhibited [*to the court*]" (Willumsen 2010b, 229)]. Like her sister, Karen may well be relying on an actual (and perhaps recent) dog bite; it is tempting to speculate that the girls may have truly been menaced by an actual, aggressive dog, whom they and/or the court reinterpreted as Satan. Indeed a third child, Karen Nilsdatter, also claimed that Satan, in the form of a black dog, "bed hand hende och satte Sit Mercke paa hendis Høyre hand" (Willumsen 2010a, 266) ["bit her and left his mark on her right hand" (Willumsen 2010b, 266)]. Conceivably, "the Devil-as-a-dog that bites" may have become a standard modification of the belief in the oral tradition of the time, at least among the accused children, *in addition* to being potential evidence of an actual, aggressive animal.

The important point here is to note that Satan frequently appeared in Finnmark not as any of the dangerous but familiar wild animals then known to the locals (like wolf, bear, lynx, or wolverine) but arrived instead in the guise of a common animal, one that could easily win access to human farmsteads and even their homes, one that might be threatening in its behavior, but was probably not immediately alarming in appearance. Satan-as-a-dog could exploit the leeway humanity granted

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[72] Some aggressive dogs may have suffered from rabies, a disease transmittable from dogs to humans with dire consequences. The disease appears in written records first in Eshnunna cuneiform tablets from the nineteenth–eighteenth centuries BCE and in all Western records since (Velasco-Villa et al. 2017, 2.3). W. M. S. Russell and Claire Russell suggest that werewolf beliefs may have been informed by experience with rabid wolves (Russell and Russell 1978, 164).

dogs in a way that Satan-as-a-wolverine (for instance) never could. The shadow community organized by Satan was animalistic in form, but animalistic in specific ways, using specific and familiar species in its construction. This suggests some level of discomfort with the animal world, even with—especially with—the familiar elements of it. As the Devil grew closer to the animal world in the later Middle Ages, the animal world grew closer to the Devil, creating an uncomfortable entry point into the quotidian world of the rural village—an entry point exploited also by his followers, the witches.

Broadly speaking, the animality of the later medieval Devil speaks in broad terms to the growing concerns in the later Middle Ages and early modern period that animals and humans might not be as wholly distinctive as might be comfortable, that Satan (as allowed by God) held sway over the physical, the earthly, the passions that were coming to be understood as "animal," and that it was through the porous, susceptible human body that Satan could infiltrate Christendom. The hybrid human-animal body that Satan displays in both artwork and the Finnmark confessions literally embodies these concerns. By the late Middle Ages, mainstream Christianity challenged its followers: "Not every member of the flock could have the strength of mind of the saints,…but they all ought to protect themselves against the bestial element they carried with them. Between the sacred and the diabolic and between the saint and the devil, it was the duty of everyone to eradicate whatever aligned them too closely with the animals" (Muchembled 2003, 34). This, of course, was precisely the duty that witches not only ignored, but actively undermined.

## Shapeshifting in Scandinavia

Shapeshifting witches were not new to Scandinavian traditional narrative. Shapeshifters of various sorts and abilities appear throughout the medieval Icelandic sagas, including *fylgjur*[73] and, more pertinently, cunning female magic-users who seem to maintain their human reason and fit their nonhuman shape to their (generally nefarious) purpose, as for example when the witch Þórveig takes the form of a walrus to attack the hero Kormákur while he is traveling by ship (*Kormáks saga*, ch. 18). Closer to home, the Sámi were traditionally associated with shapeshifting, as with other magical or demonic talents; this may partially reflect indigenous shamanic traditions.[74] The early modern period saw the eruption of werewolf trials, in addition to animal trials and witchcraft trials, and many followed Olaus Magnus and others in associating werewolves with the marginal areas of Europe, particularly the eastern Baltic (Metsvahl 2015, 206–207). Aleksander Pluskowski has argued that the werewolf trials represented something new in Northern European tradition, rather than a continuation of pre-Christian shapeshifting beliefs, but generally speaking we can conclude that beliefs and legends about shapeshifters were "in the air," both among learned circles in early modern Europe and in traditional Scandinavian narratives (Pluskowski 2015).

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[73] *Fylgjur* are spirits who typically represent a person's inner character and social status and often presage their fate in the sagas. *Fylgjur* (sg. *fylgja*) very frequently take the form of animals such as wolves, bears, foxes, and occasionally domestic creatures like goats, and, as Kristina Jennbert points out, tend to be associated with male characteristics and male saga characters (Jennbert 2011, 188). See also, e.g., H. E. Davidson (1968, 127–130) and Friesen (2015).

[74] For instance, the medieval *Historia Norwegiæ* describes how a "wizard" of the "Lapps" sent his *gandus*—according the anonymous and disapproving author, this is an "unclean spirit"—in the form of a whale, which perished on its trip, thereby killing its human host as well (*Historia Norwegiæ* 2011, 6–7). Although the author has a clear religious agenda, the account, in which "the shaman tells of having transformed into various animals during his trance," has been described as "the earliest account of a Sámi religious ritual, one with what appear to be clear shamanic details" (DuBois 2009, 13; see also DuBois 1999, 129–130).

Nevertheless, it is worth wondering whether the Finnmark witches confessed to shapeshifting on their own initiative, perhaps born out of contemporary narratives of witchcraft, or whether these confessions were prompted by the interrogators. I am inclined to suspect the latter. While later oral narratives of witchcraft do include shapeshifting motifs, it is very frequently an element in legends of the type quoted at the opening of this chapter, a narrative of discovery, of uncovering the identity of the witch, rather than part of her misdeeds. When it is, it is often connected to theft, particularly the theft of milk, and in those narratives the overwhelming favorite creature to transform into is the hare—which does not appear at all in the Finnmark confessions (but which I will return to in chapter 6; see also Van Gent 2009, 75). However, the recurrence of particular species suggests some level of engagement with folk narrative, especially since—although cats and dogs do appear in Continental demonology—many of the species in the Finnmark trials reflect local, and therefore probably common, zoology, rather than elite imports from the Continent. Goats and toads, for instance, common in Continental demonology, are all but absent from Finnmark, while animals like seals suggest the local environment.

To some extent, the reason behind the choice of specific species in these confessions must surely be simple path dependence; oral narrative is, as folklorists have demonstrated, endlessly variable but also conservative, with motifs sometimes remaining stable for centuries. It is important to remember here that these confessions did not occur in vacuums but were often conducted *seriatim*, with witchcraft confessions often linked together; we may have an example of this in the three descriptions of Satan as a fierce black dog, discussed above, by children who were imprisoned together in the 1662–1663 panic. Generally speaking, in linked trials, we may presume that the specifics of one confession—including what shapes the perpetrators took—would be brought to bear in the confessions of the others. For instance, in 1652, Gunnel Amundsdatter confessed that

she sank Captain Anders Hess's ship with the help of several other witches, whom she named. These accomplices were brought in in turn. This particular case allows for both individual invention and the role of convention, in that Gunnel did not specify what shapes they wore while performing their maleficium, but said "at de och Sambtelige Wahr paa schippr Annderß Heeß aff Bergenn Sin schib, i høst da den Store Stormmb Vahr, och Siunket den Neder Wedt Dommen" (Willumsen 2010a, 101) ["that they, all of them, were on Captain Annders Heess's [Anders Hess's] ship from Bergenn [Bergen] last autumn when the great storm raged, and they sank it off Dommen mountain" (Willumsen 2010b, 101)]. The word "on" (*paa*) is suggestive, and perhaps indicates why an accomplice witch, questioned later, told that court that one of the other women involved was "i en Suanne lignnelse" (Willumsen 2010a, 119) ["in the likeness of a swan" (Willumsen 2010b, 119)] during the storm. A woman *on* a fishing ship would be remarkable; a bird perhaps less so (although admittedly swans are not typical visitors to ships). Another explanation for why specific animals appear is therefore narrative logic, that is, the shape is suggested by the specific narrative described.

In addition to Captain Hess's ship, Gunnel also confessed to sinking Jon Jonsen's ship, again with specified accomplices. While some of the named women thereafter confessed to bewitching the ships in bird or other forms, one woman, Marthe Andersdatter, told the court "Wahr hun i en Stor Siøe Som Størte schibenn Wnnder at dennd fich schaade" (Willumsen 2010a, 113) ["she had been inside a great wave that forced the ship down so that it was destroyed" (Willumsen 2010b, 113)]. What precisely this means—shapeshifting into a wave, mental direction of it, even a kind of spirit-travel—is open to interpretation, but the motif belongs to widespread Scandinavian folk tradition.[75] Nevertheless, much as Þórveig in *Kormáks saga* took the form of a walrus to accomplish her aim,

[75] This motif exists, for instance, in Swedish legend as well; see motif N54, "Witches turn into sea waves" (af Klintberg 2010).

which was to attack her enemy while he was at sea, nothing makes so much logical sense as taking the form of a wave in order to wreck a ship during a storm. Similarly, in 1663 a woman named Gunnel Olsdatter confessed that she and others "herpaa Søen wdi en Kobbis Lignelße…til at Jage fischen fra Landit med Thaare Legger, och giorde hun ded wdaff deß Aarsage, at hun waar wred paa sin Mad fader Søren Christensen. formedelst hand Satte sitt Goeds saa dyr och høyt i priis" (Willumsen 2010a, 254–255) ["were out at sea in the shapes of seals driving away fish with stalks of seaweed, and she did it because she had been angry with her master Søren Christensen because he had taken a high price for his wares" (Willumsen 2010b, 254–255)]. Seaweed aside, if you want to drive fish away it makes perfect sense to change into a seal-shape; very probably fishermen of the region already perceived seals as competition for the fish on which their economy relied. Shapeshifting occasionally has very practical applications, beyond attempts to bewitch people or exact revenge; Hans H. Lilienskiold records that Maren, wife of Jon Dass, went fishing as a swan: "Ennå kan hun det gjøre, at når hun tar en svaneham over seg, så tar hun fisk opp av sjøen og svømmer i land med den" (Lilienskiold 1998, 132) [Moreover, when she takes a swan *ham*[76] over

[76] The word *ham* (Swedish *hamn*) has an old history in the Scandinavian language family, and appears with some frequency in the Old Icelandic corpus of medieval sagas (as *hamr*). Neil Price writes that, in Old Icelandic, *hamr* should be read as "shape" or "shell": "The *hamr* was what changed in the course of shapeshifting, linked to…lycanthropic beliefs in werewolves, bear-men and other transformations. . . . As such it seems to have represented the body's physical form—not just in terms of superficial appearance but as the shell which held all the other aspects inside it" (Price 2019, 30). It is unclear what "taking a *ham* over oneself" (a literal translation) means precisely, but possibly it retains this older sense of a physical and psychic change, in distinction to another term that is also used in the Finnmark trials, "likeness" (spelled in variety of ways in the records, including *lignnelse*, *lignelse,* and *ligennelse*). Although these terms sometimes seem to be interchangeable, "likeness" seems more typically than *ham* to imply a skin or something that is worn in order to cause a change in shape. In 1663, for instance, the child Maren Olsdatter told that court that "haffde dend Slem(m)e schafft hende wdi en Kattis Lignelse" (Willumsen 2010a, 219) ["the Evil One gave her the likeness of a cat" (Willumsen 2010b, 219)]. Previously Maren had waxed eloquent about the mechanics of shapeshifting: "hun Kunde giøre sig wdi en Katt, Men dog maa Fanden fly hende nogit Katte Blod, at Smøre sig med paa Sit Legom(m)e, och Saa Jt Katt schinnd at legge derpaa, Naar hun Saadandt haffuer giort, er hun en Katt" (Willumsen 2010a, 218) ["She also confesses that she could turn herself into a cat, but only if the Devil brought her some cat's blood to smear over her body and the fur of a cat to coat herself with. When she had done so, she was a cat" (Willumsen 2010b, 218)]. Possibly, then, "likeness" required something physical, like blood or fur, but did not necessarily imply a full animal skin. See also Van Gent (2009, 73–75).

herself, she can take fish out of the sea and swim to land with them]. This note is appended to an episode in which Maren, alongside another swan-shaped witch, sank a ship; we can imagine the addition is Maren's response to the prodding of an interrogator, curious about what else she did in her swan-shape; what else would a swan do but catch fish, and what else would a possibly hungry person wish they could do, if they were allowed such facility?

Yet there are other times in which the choice of shape does not seem primarily motivated by narrative logic or wish-fulfillment. For example, in 1621, Kristi Sørensdatter confessed to attending a witches' sabbath where several animal forms make an appearance:

> Ydermere bekiende hun, Att hun forgangen Jullenat, hente Marrite Oelsßdaatter hinder i bergen, Och Vaar i en hunde Lignelße, och sette hinde Nedt her i Vardøen paa balduolden,[77] och hun Vaar selff i en Tispe lignelße, Da Waar der flere forsamlet, och to Vaar i Warie lignelße, Den ene Waar smaall, langh och Sort Om hoffuedet, det Vaar bertell Hendrichsen, och hand schreff for dennem, Den Anden Vaar thyck och huidt for brøstet det Waar Eluffue Oelßen, och der drach di, dandtzet Och Legte, och Elße Knudtzdaatter schientie for den(nem) Widere bekiende hun Att Elße sin Daatter, Mette, Vaar och medt den(nem), och Vaar i en graa[78] Katte Lignelsße. (Willumsen 2010a, 30–31)
>
> Moreover, she confessed that last Christmas night, Marrite Oelsdaatter, in the likeness of a dog, fetched her from Bergen and put her down here in Vardøen on Balduolden. As for herself, she was in the likeness of a bitch. Several others had been there, two of them in the shapes of wolves, one of which was thin and long and black around the head; that was Bertell Hendrichsen who did the writing for them. The other was fat with a white chest; that was Eluffue Oelsen. And they drank and danced and played, and Else Knudtzdaatter waited on them. She also confessed that

[77] Baldvolden (Balduolden) is not a real place, but does appear in the Finnmark witch trials as a site of the witches' sabbath, along with other real and fictional places, often mountaintops. See Willumsen (2013, 254, 364–365).

[78] It is difficult to know what the significance of the color grey is here (if any). The Devil, as discussed below, seems to have favored black fur whilst in animal form, but black cats—as well as striped cats—in the late Middle Ages were in fact prized, being expensive imports from the Near East (Pascua 2011, 102). Albertus Magnus, in his *De animalibus*, mentions that most cats are gray in color; if this were still the case centuries later in Norway, the color specification could simply indicate that Mette's shape was that specifically of a *common* (and therefore unremarkable) animal (*De animalibus* 22.24 (Albertus Magnus 2018, 1469)).

> Else's daughter Mette was with them, too, in the likeness of a grey cat. (Willlumsen 2010b, 30–31)

There is no particular reason why the attendees of the sabbath should be shapeshifted at all, or appear as wolves, cats, or dogs in particular. On the Continent, the Devil and demons often appear in animal form or with animal attributes at the sabbath, and since the late Middle Ages heretics had been pictured traveling to their meetings on animalesque flying demons (fig. 3.1). But in Finnmark, the witches themselves often are shapeshifted for their gatherings. According to Kristi, Marthe Olsdatter also appeared and traveled in the shape of a dog (Willumsen 2010b, 30); though it is unclear how precisely they traveled the 1,000 miles between Bergen and Vardø in a night, given the association of witches' sabbaths with transvection (S. Mitchell 1997), we can imagine that they flew, perhaps with Kristi perched on Marthe's canine back. Since dogs do not, no more than cows, fly or carry people on their backs, here again we are faced with a conundrum: if not for narrative logic, what inspires the choice of specific animal involved?

*Figure 3.1. Heretics worshipping the Devil in the form of a goat. Note the heretics in transit in the sky, flying on animalistic demons (among other things). Johannes Tinctoris,* Traité du crisme de Vauderie*, c. 1470. Source gallica.bnf.fr / BnF. Départment des manuscrits. Français 961.*

To some extent, an individual's (human) appearance may have played a role in choosing their animal forms, at least in cases where shapes were attributed to others. This is the opinion of Rune Blix Hagen, who, commenting on Kristi's description of Bertel [Bertil]

Hendricksen and Eluff [Eilof] Olsen, declares that:

> I flere tilfeller sier omskapingen noe om personens utseende. Ved å se på hvilken dyreskikkelse den trolldomsdømte har omskapt seg til, får vi vite noe om utseendet til vedkommende. Dermed kan vi med en viss sikkerhet si at Bertel Hendriksen var høy, slank og mørk, mens Eluff Olsen var fyldigere og blond. (Hagen 2015a, 154)
>
> [In several cases shapeshifting says something about the person's appearance. By looking at what animal shape the person sentenced for magic has transformed into, we can get some idea of what the person in question looked like. Therefore we can say with some certainty that Bertel Hendriksen was tall, slender, and dark, while Eluff Olsen was heavier and blond.]

Similarly, Marte (or Marit) Thamisdatter, after torture, described her accomplices as Kirsten, "en høi mid Alderne q(ui)nde, hun Waar i enn gaaße Lignelße" ["tall and middle-aged and in the likeness of a goose"] and Anne, "En Vng, laug tyck q(ui)nde, och hun i en Aandtz lignelße" (Willumsen 2010a, 86) ["young, tall and more or less fat and in the likeness of a duck" (Willumsen 2010b, 86)]. Ducks being stouter than geese, it is possible that the distressed Marte chose forms that rather matched her acquaintances' appearances. However, this explanation can only take us so far. While Hagen may be right that the details provided by Kristi of Bertel Hendriksen and Eluff Olsen's wolf forms suggests something about the appearance of the two men in question, there is nothing to suggest that the two men, in their human forms, were particularly lupine. It is even less likely that two women of Marte Thamisdatter's acquaintance strongly recalled a goose and duck. It seems rather more likely that the women were following traditional knowledge in associating male shapeshifters with wolves, while women might be cats, geese, or ducks instead. So we are faced again with the same question; if not narrative logic or particularly animalesque features, what accounts for the recurrence of the same type of animal, over and over again? What did these animals *mean* in the semiotic system of witchcraft in seventeenth-century Finnmark?

## Domestic Savagery: Witches' Animals in Finnmark

The fact that there *were* favorites suggests that the animals included in table 1 constituted a kind of category—a genus, as I described it above—in themselves, i.e. they belonged to the demonic realm in ways that other familiar and also heavily symbolic creatures, like fish, lambs, cows, wolves, and lions did not. Furthermore, we may deduce that this genus is inflected by gender. We recall here that the Devil appears as a dog with far greater frequency than the female witches, and indeed it is not improbable that dogs were broadly "male" animals in early modern Finnmark, since they were "male" elsewhere in Europe (Boehner 2011, 15).[79] Similarly, it is worth reiterating that wolves are extremely rare in the Finnmark confessions, only appearing in three early confessions, including Kristi Sørensdatter's, quoted above. In the remaining two confessions that mention wolves, the wolf-shapes are not specific to individuals; in 1621, the accused witch Lisbet Nilsdatter confessed to attending a witches' sabbath at which "Mange i Warie Och Andre Atschiellige Lignelßer, som hun Jche Kiende" (Willumsen 2010a, 33) ["many of them were in the shapes of wolves or creatures she did not know" (Willumsen 2010b, 33)], while Karen Monsdatter told the court in 1626 that at one witches' sabbath she saw a variety of creatures, "fugler, dyr, hunder, katter, ulver, bjørner og andre dyr" (Lilienskiold 1998, 104) [birds, (wild) animals, dogs, cats, wolves, bears and other animals]. As the description provided in Kristi Sørensdatter's confession suggests, wolves seem to have been particularly associated with male witches,[80] and their appearance at large gatherings like those described by Lisbet Nilsdatter and Karen Monsdatter might similarly indicate the appearance of

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[79] The semiotic system of animals in the early modern period was further refined by breed, which complicates the simple association of dogs with men. In Europe generally, for instance, lapdogs were women's animals and did not at all carry the associations of martial prowess and masculine nobility that, for instance, greyhounds did (Boehner 2011, 16; Grant 2011, 102).

[80] The two men named by Kristi, Norwegians both, were not charged. See Hagen (2015a, 153–155) for more on the two men named in this case.

male witches. The same association of werewolves with men, but female shapeshifters with other types of creature, also obtains for early modern Sweden (Van Gent 2009, 74). With this in mind, we might qualify the statement above: ducks, crows, cats, and so forth, were *female* witch animals, while other animals—particularly wolves—were *male* witch animals.[81]

The little indication of male witch animals that there is, then, associates men with wild carnivores, while women instead transform into things like crows, ravens, ducks, cats, and seals—more akin to the domestic canine Devil, perhaps, than the rare lupine wizard. It is important to state that none of these animals would have been understood as pets, a new concept in Europe generally and probably mostly unknown in Finnmark (Edwards 2011, 92; on the definition of *pet*, see Thomas 1983, 112–115)—but they would nevertheless have been familiar sites in and nearby the home, farmyard, and coast. I propose that is these creatures' banality, the fact that they *were* familiar, that rendered them problematic, points of potential demonic infiltration. That the corvids are so overrepresented, accounting for nearly half of the total bird shapes identified, may speak to some longstanding associations of crows and especially ravens with supernatural activity and paganism; but, importantly, corvids (and crows in particular) are famously bold and inquisitive birds, and seem willing and able to adapt themselves to habitation near, or even with, humans. Indeed, Marijane Osborn has posited that, as early as the medieval period, Icelandic ravens would sometimes settle as "farm ravens," matched pairs of mature birds that would locate permanently on homesteads and interact regularly with the human inhabitants—perhaps begging for scraps or stealing objects from around the farmyard (Osborn 2015, esp. 106, 109). If ravens behaved similarly in Finnmark, they

[81] In most of European folk belief and narrative, werewolves seem to have been associated especially with men, an association also true of pre-Christian and medieval Nordic culture (Pluskowski 2015, esp. 95). Interestingly, however, in early modern Estonia—a hotspot of werewolfism—the opposite was true (Metsvahl 2015, 216).

would be uncomfortably liminal creatures, neither wholly wild nor actually tame, and perhaps likely to act in overly familiar, and unsettling, ways—not unlike Karen Andersdatter's cat.

Indeed, cats—the second-most popular animal form taken by Finnmark's witches, and still widely associated with witchcraft in many European and North American tradition today—were quite literally liminal animals, employed to clear the home and yard of vermin but probably not particularly well-treated or encouraged to sleep inside (Edwards 2011, 91). The symbolism of the cat, throughout Europe, was not positive. On the Continent, cats had developed the reputation for being poisonous or causing disease; prodigious sexual appetites (and "le plus souvent, c'est à la sexualité feminine et aux défauts féminins que le cat est associé" (Bobis 1993, 78) [most often, it is with female sexuality and feminine faults that the cat is associated]); and linked associations with the Devil, heresy, and Judaism (Bobis 1993, 79; Lipton 1992). In late medieval Scandinavian church art, cats occasionally appear with similar overtones; thus a depiction of a woman being punished by demons in Marie Magdalene church in Ryomgård, Denmark, includes a cat licking its rear underneath her (and, not incidentally, one bird, apparently a swallow, pecking at her head and another—a magpie—just beyond her extended foot[82]) (fig. 3.2). As Stephen A. Mitchell says, "If ever we are presented with an image of what late medieval Scandinavia must have regarded as an 'evil woman' (*ondh quinna*), certainly this one is it" (Mitchell 2011, 184–185); the important point here is the link between women's bad behavior, perhaps especially witchcraft, and cats seems to have been known in Scandinavia as well as the Continent.

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[82] Like the other corvids, magpies are also bold birds who not infrequently build their nests close to human dwellings, and are generally of ill repute in European folklore. In modern Scandinavian legends, witches who transform into birds frequently take the form of magpies (Nilden-Wall and Wall 1993, 72; af Klintberg 2010, N36). Moreover, like sparrows, swallows will also roost indoors. Both species featured in Marie Magdalene church, in other words, transgress the boundaries of inside/outside, human/animal, in ways reminiscent of other bird species identified in the Finnmark trials.

*Figure 3.2. Woman being punished by demons. Marie Magdalene church, Ryomgård, Denmark (1475–1510). Photo by Stephen A. Mitchell.*

The cat, more perhaps than any other species included in table 1, exemplifies an important feature of the "witches' animal," namely that they tend to fall into the gap between "domestic animal" and "domesticated animal." As Jacqueline Milliet notes (drawing on J. F. Downs), domestication of any given species was not a single event in history, but is better understood as an ongoing process—indeed one could describe it as a chronic state of affairs (Milliet 2002, 363). This is particularly true with animals that are domesticated rather than domestic. According to Juliet Clutton-Brock:

> *Domestic animals* are *populations* that through direct selection by man have certain inherent morphological, physiological, or behavioural characteristics by which they differ from their ancestral stocks. *Domesticated animals*, on the other hand, are *individuals* that have been made tractable or tame but whose breeding does not involve intentional selection. (Clutton-Brock 1989, 104, italics in original)

Domestic animals include, for instance, dogs, sheep, cattle, and horses; elephants, camels, and reindeer are examples of domesticated animals. The distinction is not absolute, as she herself acknowledges, and the cat in particular does not fit easily in this paradigm. Clutton-Brock, whose second section covers what she calls "exploited captives" and is comprised of "domesticated animals," explains that she opens this section with the cat because it "does not really fall into either group but is intermediate between domestic and domesticated. Perhaps it should be called 'an exploiting captive'" (Clutton-Brock 1989, 105). More poetically, Katherine M. Briggs alights upon a similar conclusion when she notes "the cat's policy of enlightened self-interest," evinced in a popular British folk rhyme (K. Briggs 1980, 159).

Such a self-interested policy means that cats—along with ravens, crows, and many of the other animals on table 1—are little concerned with human-imposed boundaries on house, yard, and even time; unlike most other domestic and domesticated mammals, cats are more likely to be crepuscular or even nocturnal than diurnal. They are thus most active when humans are not, lending their activities an aura of secrecy that is also, of course, a feature of witches' activities. As small hunters of even smaller rodents, cats have a tendency to haunt crevices and out-of-the-way areas of the home and farm; to borrow a term from Jakob von Uexküll, their *umwelt*—their experience and organization of a space—differs dramatically and in ways that are sometimes surprising and even unsettling to their human co-inhabitants (Maran et al. 2016, esp. 11n2). Speaking of the well-known legend "The King of the Cats," in which a person observes a clowder's surprising behavior and describes it upon coming home, whereupon the family cat leaps up, announces himself the new cat king, and departs, Briggs notes that the tale "perceptively conveys the truth that the most domesticated of cats somehow contrives to lead an outside life of its own" (K. Briggs 1980, 12)—in other words the legend speaks to some of the same discomfort with an animal that recognizes human-made

boundaries only at its own whim. Anecdotally, cats seem distressed by closed doors, especially ones they have been previously allowed to use; anyone who has owned an indoor-outdoor cat may have experienced the frustration of the animal refusing to move one way or the other, seemingly preferring to abide on the threshold. In a symbolically similar way, witches are the boundary-crossers *par excellence* in European legendry, challenging the strictures of gendered behavior in general and often by literally crossing thresholds that proper housewives should not cross. Stephen A. Mitchell points out that one Old Norse term for witch, *tún-riða*, literally means "hedge-rider," suggesting the witch is one who crosses, operates at, or is otherwise associated with the hedge that marked the boundaries of the farmyard; in a footnote, he adds that similar terms exist in Old High German and Old English and that the same concept is enshrined in an Old Swedish law (S. Mitchell 2011, 102, 250n149). The term directly implicates the boundary between inside/outside, home/wilderness, ordered space/disordered space, a boundary crossed regularly by liminal animals and witches both.

It is worth recalling here that Finnmark's population was a relatively mobile one, comprised largely of immigrants and their (recent) descendants; as mentioned above, nearly 20 percent of the accused witches had immigrated from farther south and many of them also spoke of having once served as maids in other women's homes. The experience of both geographic and social mobility may have supported these women's identification with animals like cats, whether self-expressed or imposed by others; I propose that the crow's, raven's, and cat's apparent liminality, their disregard for human boundaries, made them (perhaps still makes them) particularly appealing analogs for the witch. We can imagine some discomfort as the idealized image of the Lutheran *house*wife (obliged by modesty and custom to stay at home) ran into the lived reality of many of these mobile women; perhaps identification of witches with liminal animals like cats and crows expressed some of this discomfort.

During the 1662–1663 panic, a number of women (and a few female children) confessed to and accused each other of taking various forms in a variety of activities, including escaping prison at will and visiting already imprisoned members of their diabolical sect. One child, Ingeborg Iversdatter (Jngeborg Jffuersdatter), told the court that she and another accused witch, Solveig (Solwe) Nielsdatter, escaped the prison at the castle in Vardø "och Krøb wnder portten wdi Katte Lignelse" (Willusmen 2010a, 213) ["and crawled under the gate in the shapes of cats" [Willumsen 2010b, 213)], in order to attend a Christmas Eve sabbath in the cellar of a man named Anders Pedersen, whose beer they stole and drank as they attended the Devil. Another accused woman, Sigri Olsdatter (Sigrj Oelsdatter), told the court that the same Solveig, plus two children from the castle's prison, visited her while she was imprisoned by the deputy baliff:

> Som hun Sad vdi til wnderfougdens, Da Natten for Løff(ue)rdagen, Kom der nogle Katte offuen paa Lyren paa gammen, och Reff paa Schioen, och haffde wildt werit Neder til Hende, De Katte siger hun, at huffue werit Solwe och Begge Børnen Nemblig ded paa Slottit och ded wdi wadtzøe och de wilde Atter haft hende med vdi Kielderen igien. (Willumsen 2010a, 206)
>
> some cats appeared at the smoke vent of the turf hut on Friday night, scratching at the edge and wanting to join her. Those cats, she said, were Solwe and the two children, from the Castle and from Wadtzøe [Vadsø], and they wanted her to come down to the cellar again. (Willumsen 2010b, 206)

In the original, the cats are said not just to want Sigri to come with them—which would presumably involve her taking animal form herself, possibly also of a cat—but also to come down to her ("haffde wildt werit Neder til Hende"). The child Ingeborg confirmed this, telling the court that she, Solveig, and another child, Maren, scratched at the smoke vent and were only prevented from getting Sigri out of prison because of the presence of other people (Willumsen 2010a, 214; Willumsen 2010b, 214). Bodel Clausdatter, whose account was also echoed by others, told the court about a similar episode:

> Bekiender hun och, at haffue faarit med Barbra och dj andre Throldquinder her hid paa Slottit wdi en Kragis schichelse och taldte med Giertrud Siuffuers datter Vdi hendis fengsel. huor hun med di andre haffde wilt hafft hende med sig deris wreck at VdRette, da forwandlit hun sig vdi en Kattis lignelse. Huor for[ne]: Giertrud Siuff(ue)rsdatter som hun beretter, da schall haffue wndschylt sig, at hun iche den gang Kunde faare med…
>
> she confesses that she came here to the Castle with Barbra and the other witches in the likeness of a crow, and they spoke to Giertrud Siuffuersdatter who was in prison, wanting her to join them in carrying out their deeds. She transformed herself into the likeness of a cat, but the said Giertrud Siuffuersdatter, according to her statement, excused herself. (Willumsen 2010b, 272)

Gjertrud Siversdatter (Giertrud Siuffuersdatter) did not join her fellows not because she couldn't but because, according to the confessions, she was expecting a visitor, though she still sent "her god" (that is, her familiar) along with the others. In other words, in this and all of these cases, the witches are able, by assuming small, innocuous, boundary-breaking forms like cats and crows, to thwart the will of the court and flout the law, literally by scrambling under gates and strolling about the town.[83]

In the same panic, several of the accused, again including Solveig Nielsdatter, spoke of attempts to injure or even kill the district governor, Christopher Orning, by magic, who however (according to the accused) was saved on account of his piety. Solveig explained that she had been given a cat's likeness and her co-conspirator Sigri a dog's by the Devil and that "di brugte til deris wreck huer en Knapit naael at sticke med, om Natten som hand Laa i Sengen, baade i haand och Foed" (Willumsen 2010a, 226) ["for their task they each had a pin with which to prick his foot and hand at night while he was sleeping in bed" (Willumsen 2010b, 226)]. The suggestion seems to be that witches in such shapes as cats and dogs can gain access even to the bedroom of the district governor, the highest secular authority in the province. (On a separate occasion, a group of other witches—a "store haab och forsamling" ["great multitude"], according to one trial record—are said to make a similar

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83 There is no discussion in the records about why, given this apparent ability, the women do not try to escape altogether.

attempt on the governor in the form of crows and other birds (Willumsen 2010a, 229ff., 273; 2010b, 229ff., 273).)

Laurence Bobis, speaking of the medieval cat, notes: "Symbole de la sauvagerie domestique, le chat est par excellence l'animal qui évoque duplicité et fourberie" (Bobis 1993, 78) [Symbol of domestic savagery, the cat is the animal *par excellence* that evokes duplicity and treachery]. What better words could be applied to the witch, that duplicitous creature of savage domesticity? Animals like cats, crows, and other not-quite domesticated but not fully dangerous animals resonate with meaning in the confessions of accused witches in Finnmark. Some of these layers of meaning draw on shared and inherited—and ultimately theological—concerns about the boundaries of humanity itself, and the degree to which the animal world, which by the early modern period was imbricated with the demonic, could penetrate those boundaries. Domestic farm animals (like cows and sheep) that had specific, economic roles to play and "were regarded as part of the socio-centric self" (Van Gent 2009, 72) were often victims of witchcraft, but do not appear on the list of animal forms taken by witches. Nor do most wild animals—not just carnivores but other wild creatures, like moose and deer, are absent. Witches' animals instead tend to fall somewhere on the slippery border between wild and tame; though not part *of* the household, they were still able to *access* the farmyard, home, and even official buildings, including the castle itself. In the Middle Ages, as Sophie Page writes, "the boundaries between God, animals, and demons were thus relatively firm," but "the border between humans and animals was more fluid and hence a site of anxiety" (Page 2011, 57). This existential crisis outlasted the medieval period and indeed seems to have worsened, as one of Page's "firm" boundaries, that between demon and animal, also started to slip in the late medieval period. Indeed, the crisis is visible in very specific ways in the confessions of accused witches in Finnmark.

*Figure 3.3. Albrecht Dürer,* The Fall of Man*, aka* Adam and Eve*. Engraving, 1504. Metropolitan Museum of Art.*

We might take a moment to consider an image by an influential German artist, Albrecht Dürer, *The Fall of Man* (1504). The engraving treats the very popular Biblical subject of Eve's corruption and immediate treachery towards Adam (fig. 3.3). According to Fred S. Kleiner, the four primary animals in this print, cat, elk, rabbit, and ox, represent the four humors, choleric, melancholic, sanguine, and phlegmatic, respectively. But the cat plays double duty: "The tension between the cat and the mouse in the foreground symbolizes the relation between Adam and Eve at the crucial moment before they commit original sin" (Kleiner 2017, 274). In fact, the cat's pose is ambiguous, a naturalistic depiction of a posture that could either spring into a deadly pounce or fade into sleep. The composition of the piece very clearly links Eve with the cat, whose tail wraps around her leg, and Adam with the mouse; indeed it seems that he is almost stepping on the rodent's tail.[84]

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[84] One of the images from Olaus Magnus's 1555 *Description of the Northern Peoples*, illustrating book 2, chapter 17, shows an interior scene of a woman spinning flax, a cat in contented repose behind her. Although disconnected from any association with evil or witchcraft, once again the position of the cat clearly associates it with the

It is also noteworthy that, except for the mouse and a parrot perched in a branch held by Adam, all of the other animals are grouped closely around Eve: the viewer is meant to perceive that the feminine principle is closer to the more disordered, unbalanced bestial world. Her gaze is focused on the Devil-as-serpent, who deposits the fatal fruit in her hand, while Adam's is focused on her: thus Dürer presents Eve as the fulcrum by which man is led astray into the Devil's clutches.

Though a century and a half later, hundreds of miles north, and presented in a much different context, the witch trials in Finnmark share this apparent mental nexus of femininity, demonic influence, and animals (even to the same species, the cat). Like Eve in Dürer's woodcut, the Finnmark housewife represented a weak point, a potential opening for the Devil to corrupt human society and indeed humanity; the shapeshifting witch revealed that "the borders between person and animal were fluid" (Van Gent 2009, 75). Jacqueline Van Gent observes that "By the eighteenth century,…Swedish court cases report only women as being able to change shape" (Van Gent 2009, 74), suggesting that the anxious finger pointing towards women as the potential fulcrum between proper patriarchal order and demonic, animalistic disorder can be found elsewhere in Scandinavia as well.

Like Dürer's crouching cat, a housewife's appearance of contented repose could conceal desires to act, perhaps to cross the accepted bounds of farm and church. In fact most of the animals identified by the Finnmark witches, and with whom they identified, could do what most Finnmark women could not, at least after they married: roam. This is of course also, and pointedly, true in the specific circumstance of imprisonment. It is conceivable, in other words, that turning into a cat—or a crow,

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housewife, suggesting the link between women, cats, and the presence of animals inside the house was known also in Scandinavian iconography.

or a duck, or a small dog—represented not just demonological fears but also some amount of genuine desire on the part of the accused women; the agreement on an animal as a representation of both anxiety and fantasy is thus reflected in the agreement on the narrative of shapeshifting between interrogators and witches.

## Conclusion: The Witch as Anti-Human

Animals appear in witchcraft beliefs and legends as victims, accomplices, iconographic symbols, and diabolic foils. But not all animals are created equal in the semiotic system of Western witchcraft (or indeed the semiotic system of animals itself in the Western world). This chapter has shown that the types of animals that appear in Scandinavian stories of witchcraft are meaningful and specific, and that they are almost universally those same creatures that were truly familiar to the inhabitants of a largely rural Europe—the animals of the farmyard and field rather than the horrifying hybrids envisioned by earlier churchmen or the apex predators of the Bible (or, for that matter, the nearby wilderness). As with all animals in early modern culture, the animals who play roles in legends and beliefs about witchcraft inflect along social and gendered vectors: the Devil is a dog, but never, for instance, a horse; the witch is a cat, but never a sheep. Because animals carried so much symbolic weight in the period, we can read these legends against the grain to investigate the messages these animals helped carry.

The very commonality of the specific animals involved in these legends—cats, birds, dogs, and so on—is not simply a failure of imagination on the part of the legend-tellers, confessing witches, or learned judges, but rather reflects a fundamental truth about both the animals involved and witchcraft as a concept: the fear of witchcraft was *not* found in the wholly bizarre or completely unknown, but rather in the uncanny, the familiar made unfamiliar, the ordinary turned strange. It is found in the possibility that the witch might infiltrate and corrupt the divinely sanctioned but

perilously bordered human community, using the mostly banal shapes of common but liminal creatures. Speaking of medieval penances recommended to worshippers who ate forbidden animals, Joyce Salisbury notes how the degree of penalty increased successively as the eaten animal moved closer to human companionship; thus the penance for eating a dog was greater than that for eating a cat, which itself was greater than that for eating a mouse. "The most likely explanation," Salisbury ruminates, "is that the greatest penance was assigned to the animal that lived closest to humans, and was thus most threatening to the boundaries that separated the two" (Salisbury 1994, 68). In the same way, despite the very real dangers posed by wolves and bears in rural northern Norway, devils and witches almost never take their forms, but rather infiltrate human habitation with essentially innocuous disguises. This indicates as well some of the same existential concern Salisbury detects: the closer an animal was to human life, the closer it might be to *being* human, and vice versa.

One of the fundamental risks posed by witches was boundary-breaking, threatening the laws of God and men that upheld divinely sanctioned social order. These boundaries included, of course, regulations concerning gender, relationships between parents (and especially mothers) and children, and—in a way most essential—distinctions between human and animal. The ideal binary outdoor/nature/chaotic/demonic versus indoor/social/ordered/divine is frayed in the course of lived reality; for instance, vermin (outdoor) are found indoors, and require animals like cats to control them, but the compromise of the cat represents a small aperture through which the greater threat of the outdoors can find its way in. Though apparently clearly defined by Scripture, the realities of social life conspired to strip away the certainty that people were not animals. The animalistic Devil naturally exploited this grey zone, and took his followers, the witches, into the breach with him.

The strained boundary between indoor/outdoor, represented by animals too close to both wilderness and humanity, become symbolic of the nefariousness of the Devil and his witch servants: they are *both* inside and outside, seemingly friend but actually foe. Once again, as I discussed also in chapter 1, the danger the witch poses is not just to her own soul but to her community, which she disrupts and corrupts by creating a different, demonic and animalistic, community. In the legend that opens this chapter—which was, not incidentally, told by a male informant—a man shoots the witch while in her hare form; she then runs back into her house, where she is later found—as a human—with a corresponding wound in her leg. Not only has the man rid his community of the witch, for by widespread European tradition drawing her blood also draws her power (Thompson 1956, G273.6), but the man has also reestablished male control over the woman and confined her to her proper area, the home. He has also reasserted the primacy of humanity, symbolically slaying the animality of the witch that allowed her to endanger the community—and that endangered the boundary between human and animal. In Finnmark, narratives of shapeshifting had an even bloodier end, but served the same purpose, to reestablish and reinforce the wobbly line that separated human from animal. And again, in both cases, men were the party responsible for establishing and maintaining that boundary.

In the following chapters, many of the same themes already explored will appear again, this time in a different social and cultural context. The modality shifts as well, from legends and motifs employed in the context of witch trials, and therefore attached to real people, to visual and verbal productions that are, for the most part, not actuated but remain more abstract. In all cases, however, across these modalities, legends and motifs utilize and construct the concept of witchcraft. Unlike Finnmark, the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea did not experience much in the way of witch prosecution, but nonetheless has a long history of witchcraft legends, including a set of visual legends, focusing on a

character known as the "milk-stealing witch," produced at the turn of the sixteenth century in a variety of churches throughout the island. As we shall see, late medieval Gotland does resemble Finnmark in terms of social, economic, and religious stress, and once again witchcraft legends marshal and convey anxieties connected to this generalized stress as well as more particular concerns with female behavior, masculinity, and the intimacy of the household.

# CHAPTER 4. CRISIS IN THE BALTIC:

## A Brief History of Late Medieval Gotland and the Milk-Stealing Witch

The milk-stealing witch is a character known widely throughout Northern Europe and indeed beyond, appearing in narratives at least as early as the seventh century (book 2, chapter 16 of the Irish hagiography of Saint Columba by Abbot Adomnán (Adomnán 1991, 117)) and as far afield as North America (see, e.g., Thompson 1956, D 2083.2 and its submotifs). In the early hagiographic reference, the culprit is male, but otherwise, the milk-stealing witch is almost exclusively female, capable of stealing the milk directly from her neighbors' cows or out of their butter churns, with the result that she has *more* and they have *less*. The theft is sometimes accomplished by milking a knife, or similar object, stuck in a post or wall (Thompson 1956, D2083.3.1; af Klintberg 2010, N45), a motif whose popularity was likely enhanced, as Jan Wall points out, by its inclusion in the early modern blockbusters the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) and Geiler von Kaysersberg's *Die Emeis* (1517) (Wall 1977, 5). This method also appears in witch trials, including in one of Gotland's few witch trials, that of Ingeborg Jonsdotter in 1705 (Wall 1989, 72, 85–86). A parallel tradition, found in the British Isles as well as Scandinavia, maintains that the witch conjures, constructs, or shapeshifts into a kind of creature, which goes by a great many regional names like "trollcat," "milkhare," "bjära," "*tilberi*," and more, which suckles from cows directly and runs its ill-gotten gains back to its witch "mother," vomiting the milk it has stolen into the witch's pails or churn.

It is not easy to overstate the significance of dairy products, especially butter, to the survival and economy of pre-industrial Scandinavia, nor can the dairy business—again prior to industrialization—be described as anything less than fraught. From the Viking Age on,

Scandinavians relied heavily on dairy products for sustenance,[85] but, as Jan Wall points out, production levels were probably low and uncertain (Wall 1977, 3). Butter churning was difficult and time consuming, and success was never guaranteed, but, because butter was one of the few products that could be transported and sold for a profit, "much of agricultural production was eventually oriented towards maximizing butter production" in late medieval Scandinavia (Myrdal 2008, 68). Indeed it was so central to the economy that, beginning at least in the thirteenth century, butter became a basis for taxation (Myrdal 2008, 68). From the Viking Age (if not before) and until the twentieth century, all aspects of dairying, including butter-making, were entirely in the hands of women, but Janken Myrdal has shown that the social status of butter making changed over time: once associated with female slaves, by the fifteenth century it had become "the prestigious labour of the housewife" (Myrdal 2008, 75). Much skill was involved, but luck was as well, and in the "limited good" model of early modern Scandinavian society, luck—including "butter luck"—could be stolen as well as protected by magical means.[86] In illustrating some of butter-making's frustration and resulting suspicions in a pre-industrial, Northern European context, we are fortunate to have the account of Mrs. Ellen Cutler of Ballymenone, Ireland, whom folklorist Henry Glassie interviewed in 1972—a time when local communities were still small, rural, and largely dependent on cattle:

> "Then you churn [the milk]. In hot weather [the butter] might come in less than an hour. But in cold weather you might churn for hours and hours.
>
> "I've seen many's the time I'd churn and churn until my arm ached and the tears was streamin down my face.

[85] The reliance on dairy and cattle meat may even predate the Viking Age; archaeologist Kristina Jennbert notes that remains of domestic cattle in Denmark have been dated to 4800 BCE and that "cattle became the most common farm animals in prehistoric times" (Jennbert 2011, 62).

[86] The concept of luck as a "limited good," that is as a commodity in finite supply that can be guarded and stolen, was developed and theorized by George M. Foster (1965).

> "If it didn't come atall, the old people said that the butter was stold. That some old woman that had a spite against you had come into the house and said, under her breath, Come all to me. Come all to me.
>
> "There was nothin to do then, only give it up." (Glassie 1982, 530, transcribed in dialect)

As this account suggests, irritation with the milk-witch lasted well into the twentieth century in some parts of rural Europe; in Denmark, magical milk-theft has been described as "the most troublesome and persistent form of witchcraft" (Rockwell 1978, 92).

The milk-witch is common in the oral traditions of Northern Europe, but she appears also in many late medieval wall paintings inside churches in Scandinavia (and a few in related areas, like northern Germany and Finland). Jan Wall has counted sixty-three churches throughout this wider region that include the milk-stealing witch on their walls, including forty from Sweden (Wall 1977, 22), a minority of painted medieval churches overall but a remarkably large number for such a secular, legendary character, in the context of the strongly religiously inclined, Biblically focused paintings more standard for the age. Her popularity suggests that she was a deeply meaningful figure in the legendry of late medieval Scandinavia, and perhaps particularly on Gotland, where she appears at least ten (and, as I suggest below, probably eleven) times among the island's ninety-five medieval churches. Indeed, according to Janken Myrdal, the milk-stealing witch "is actually one of the most common late medieval motifs with an agrarian connection" in all of Northern Europe (Myrdal 2008, 74).

As a character, the milk-stealing witch was unlikely to have been introduced to Scandinavian peasantry via the wall paintings, as Stephen A. Mitchell has demonstrated (S. Mitchell 2011, 138–140). As Mitchell notes, the influential Swedish ecclesiastic Magister Mathias described this character in his fourteenth-century handbook *Homo conditus*, used as a sourcebook for sermons (S. Mitchell

2011, 138); though Mathias himself seems to have been skeptical of the reality of the milk-stealing witch, it is quite possible that this skepticism was not communicated to the laity by preachers who made use of his handbook. The milk-stealing witch is also cited by no less an authority than Martin Luther himself (Kors and Peters 2001, 263), illustrating her continued popularity across the centuries and across denominational divides. In other words the milk-stealing witch was a vector of communication between both social and religious classes, a point that Mitchell understands as fundamental to her appearance on church walls:

> There are a number of indications that this myth [of the milk-stealing witch] had currency already much earlier and was being influenced by Church doctrine, developing a view of witchcraft that, on the one hand, drew on local traditions, while, on the other, was also informed by elite views imported from the Continent. It is not difficult to imagine how the church might push back against such "local" beliefs,…yet at the same time appropriate them for their own larger purpose as a warning about trafficking with the demons and falling into the power of the devil. (S. Mitchell 2011, 141)

I do not disagree with Mitchell's assessment here, that churchly authorities were effectively using this common legend to literally illustrate its conception of witchcraft—namely that all magic, no matter how mundane, ultimately and indelibly associated perpetrators with Satan. Yet I also feel that the deep meaning milk-stealing witch, her centuries-long recurrence, conveys more than that, and connects to the witch's broader transgressive role in early modern society, just as the witch-as-poisoner and the witch-as-shapeshifter conveyed deeper messages in Finnmark as well. The following two chapters will consider *how* and *why* this figure played such an outsized role in both the iconographic and oral legendry of late medieval and early modern Gotland, and perhaps beyond. I will demonstrate that, on Gotland and elsewhere, she embodies constructions and fears of feminine power, specifically relating to women's roles as wives and mothers. In order to do so, however, some background knowledge of Gotland and its late medieval depictions of the milk-witch is necessary.

## Crisis in the Baltic

Although Gotland is today a part of Sweden—and has been since 1645, with short periods of subsequent Danish and Russian occupation notwithstanding—in many ways its history, society, and culture should be considered separately from the mainland. It distinguished itself as early as the Vendel period (c. 550–800 CE), with art forms similar to, yet distinct from, the rest of Scandinavia (this is true, for instance, of brooch design and the famous Gotlandic picture stones). As Lena Thunmark-Nylén puts it, "Gotland is a region in its own right. . . . As a matter of fact, Gotland lies not only physically but also mentally east of Scandinavia" (Thunmark-Nylén 1991, 166). Indeed, Gotland's favorable geographic position and several natural harbors allowed it maritime prominence through the Viking and Middle Ages, and its Baltic connections during the period were deep and strong (Jes Wienberg, for instance, attributes both the strength and subsequent weakness of Gotland's medieval economy primarily to activities in the eastern Baltic (Wienberg 2004, esp. 293)). Its trading strength in fact extended far into both Eastern and Western Europe, and combined with the natural advantage of being an island it was able to retain a significant measure of autonomy even though several greater powers laid claim to it over the centuries.

Gotland reached its zenith during the Viking Age, accumulating enormous wealth and operating at the center of the Baltic trade. "Two-thirds of all silver coins from Viking Age Sweden," Wienberg notes, "are found on Gotland" (Wienberg 2004, 286; see also Bolin 1963). Indeed these coins suggest Gotland's cosmopolitan character from an early age; as a Viking trading hub, Gotland collected coins and goods from Byzantium, the Arab world, and beyond (Bolin 1963, esp. 40–41). Arguably one of the most impressive expressions of this accumulated wealth, however, is not underground but still visible throughout the countryside, namely, the ninety-five stone churches built between 1100 and 1350 that still stand throughout the island (these in addition to sixteen

churches in and around Visby, the island's only city). The sheer number of these churches—for an area of about 1,230 square miles—testifies to the wealth of the island during the church-building period, which immediately followed the Viking Age (Wienberg 2004, 287). Gotland's population simultaneously peaked at perhaps 40,000 (Svedjemo 2014, 218, after Blomkvist 2010, 98f), a height not seen again until the twentieth century (today, the population numbers about 58,000).

The fourteenth century, however, proved traumatic for Gotland: civil war, the Black Death, and a major Danish invasion in 1361 drastically cut into the island's wealth and importance. Gotland lost as much as 50 percent of the population, reaching its nadir in the mid-fifteenth century (Svedjemo 2014, 219, 230)—immediately prior to the time when the earliest depictions of the milk-stealing witch appeared.

In the late twelfth century German merchants began to settle in Visby, in large enough numbers that "the Society of Germans traveling to Gotland," which developed into the Hanseatic League, was formed there (Spencer 1974, 65). The German city of Lübeck would quickly achieve prominence in this formation, linking Gotland to an enormously successful trading operation throughout the Baltic and Northern Europe (Harreld 2015, 34); however, Visby's "foreign" population and merchants aligned with the south began to distinguish it from the surrounding countryside. The German population of Visby was, according to Arthur Spencer, always somewhat distinct, but "in addition to internal rivalries in the city itself, Visby was increasingly at loggerheads with the rest of the island, whose trade it began to monopolise" (Spencer 1974, 65). This pattern of Hanseatic domination of trade was typical, as we've seen already with the Hanse merchants of Bergen dominating the fish trade out of Finnmark (see also, e.g., Larson 2010, 29), as was the Hansa bifurcation of the city itself. As Ulf Christian Ewert and Stephan Selzer note, spatial distinctions between "Hansards" and others are visible in many Hanseatic cities, even the tiny Pomeranian city of Greifswald, with fewer than

6,000 inhabitants. "Given these relatively small population figures," as Ewert and Selzer write, "communications between the inhabitants of the town should have been possible, which makes the spatial social segregation in such a small town even more astonishing" (Ewert and Selzer 2015, 175–177).

A civil war in 1288, fought between the German-merchant city of Visby and the countryside, marked the start of a long economic decline, catalyzed in the following century by a Europe-wide agrarian crisis, the arrival of the Black Death, and, in 1361, the invasion of Danish king Valdemar Atterdag, who, fresh from reconquering Skåne, launched a swift and bloody take-over of the island. This event likely separated the already aloof town of Visby even more from the Gotlandic countryside, since, as Arthur Spencer puts it:

> Visby was scarcely harmed. . . . Unlike the Gotlanders proper the burghers of Visby had had advance intelligence of Valdemar's expedition, and for reasons that are not clear but were probably as base as is traditionally assumed they neither opened their gates to give shelter to the Gotlandic levies as they neared the town nor sallied forth to help them. Prudence overcame whatever valour these calculating merchants possessed, and from their walls they watched the seasoned Danish mercenaries slaughter the last reserves of the Gotlanders. (Spencer 1974, 67)

Putting aside Spencer's editorializing, there is no denying the three mass graves of fallen Gotlanders outside the city walls, which contain nearly 1,200 remains. In one of these, "37% of the remains were youths under the age of twenty, supporting the popular notion that this battle represented a desperate people making a last stand against a better-prepared invading force" (Krug 2015, 204). Nor did the indignities end there; summarizing a monk's diary entry, Hugo Yrwing notes that "rådet 1361 lyckats rädda det hanseatiska godset i staden med sin egen egendom, d.v.s. visbyborgarna har friköpt sig från plundring" (Yrwing 1961, 8) [the council managed to save Hanseatic trade goods along with their own property, that is, the Visby burghers had paid a ransom to save themselves from plundering]. Not so the countryside, which had already impoverished itself in the years since

1288, according to Wienberg's theory, by pouring its dwindling resources into church-building in an ill-fated competition with the more prosperous, though still declining, city of Visby (Wienberg 2004, 294–295). Thus runs a famous, tragic inscription, helpfully dated 1361, in Fide church: "Edes succe(n)se gens cesa dolens ruit ense," which Spencer freely translates as "The farms are burnt, the sorrowing people fall by the sword" (Spencer 1974, 68).

Gotland, and especially Gotland's countryside, therefore entered the fifteenth century on a downswing. The Danish king had little interest in this new possession of his, apparently; in the 1390s Gotland fell prey to the Vitalian Brotherhood, a pirate community that took over the island; they were thrown out by the Teutonic Knights in 1398, who sold the island in 1408 to King Erik of Pomerania. Not until 1449 did King Christian I of Denmark-Norway resume control, in a deal made with Erik, and send a Danish governor. By then Nordic control of the Baltic was lost almost beyond recall, and Gotland's central place in it had vanished entirely. In the meantime, the loss of trade had crunched Gotlandic society—that is, had impoverished the upper stratum of society so as to create a more even distribution of wealth (or rather of impecunity). Despite the intervention of foreign kings, no landed aristocracy and no feudal system had ever developed on the island; Gustaf Svetjemo convincingly argues that the leading families throughout the countryside had accumulated wealth by dint of trading, rather than control of land, before the thirteenth century (Svetjemo 2014, 193–196). By the mid-fifteenth century, the prosperous Gotlandic merchant-farmer was a thing of the past and, "Since [the rich socioeconomic élite in the countryside] did not possess any large estates of real property, like the aristocracy in other parts of Scandinavia, they had nothing to fall back on and an impoverishment and thus socioeconomic levelling occurred" (Svetjemo 2014, 198). This is not to suggest that all farms on Gotland operated at precisely the same levels of prosperity or poverty, as Svetjemo is careful to explain: "Of course there were rich and poor farmers, and a

stratum of *storbönder* (well-to-do farmers) existed, but the differences were probably much less than before" (Svetjemo 2014, 198). In brief, this rapid history of late medieval Gotland reveals a countryside in a kind of slow-moving crisis, with both wealth and opportunity gone, culture pulled east towards the Baltic states and south toward Germany, identity affronted by its own merchant city, social structures fraying, and religion vulnerable to local pressures.

It was just after Denmark-Norway reasserted its territorial control of Gotland that the countryside churches started commissioning the so-called Passionsmästaren (the Passion master) workshop, active in the mid- to late fifteenth century throughout the island, to decorate the interiors of their prized buildings. As Ann-Catrine Eriksson notes, the quality of Passionsmästaren's works has been disparaged by modern scholars:

> A common interpretation is that the poor quality of the works was due to economic stagnation. However, it is important to remember that even if the compositions are plain on a superficial level, the size of the picture programmes is quite remarkable and must have involved a lot of work and money. Perhaps bad times generate new visual needs in the hope of a more prosperous future. (Eriksson 2015, 21)

This speculation mirrors Wienberg's theory that building the churches in the first place resulted from similar economic stress—and may inform our speculations as to why, in addition to unsurprising Christological themes, churches commissioned also witch paintings for their walls. Perhaps visual legends, like oral legends, emerge out of shared anxieties and communal stress. Alternatively (though these explanations are not mutually exclusive), the milk-witch might have been deliberately chosen by the commissioners precisely because she represents a direct threat to a community's economy: those better-off *storbönder* and local church deans responsible for the

iconographic programs inside churches might have located in the milk-stealing witch a convenient scapegoat for any anger within their communities at perceived economic inequity.

## Gender and Society on Gotland

Certain aspects of Gotlandic society changed in the difficult transition between the wealthy medieval and impoverished early modern periods, including the dissolution of the ancient reliance on kinship as the organizing principle of Gotlandic villages:

> After the extensive trading ceased in the Middle Ages, the social organisation adapted, and a form of organisation with more independent units/farms was established. When kinship no longer was a key ingredient and farms could be sold and bought outside the family, the village in its old form as a centre for the family became passé, and the individual households/farms became more independent in all respects. (Svetjemo 2014, 203)

The social change, from interconnected farms to independent ones, is significant. From the first written records on Gotland, as Nils Blomkvist documents, "I centrum för det gotländska familjesystemet står gården" [At the center of the Gotlandic family system is the farm] (Blomkvist 2010, 108): this, Blomkvist believes, was the basis of Gotlandic society and Gotlandic identity. Gustaf Svedjemo agrees, noting that "Without ownership in a farm, you could not be considered a full member of the Gotlandic community, but were regarded as a stranger. . . . It is clear that the Gotland identity is linked to the possession of land and being part of a farm" (Svedjemo 2014, 201). Blomkvist argues that medieval Gotlandic society should be understood in a Baltic, or Eastern, context, rather than a Nordic, and that society was organized in terms of polynuclear (*flerkärniga*) families, with two or three generations linked by custom and law, if not by cohabitation (Blomkvist 2010 107; 113). The loss of this kind of system, and its replacement by a more modern one of autonomous, private, completely articulated farms, must have strained Gotlandic society: no longer

were your neighbors also your extended family support system but potential economic rivals. In 1412, King Erik of Pomerania established that each Thing (roughly, a jurisdiction, of which there were twenty on Gotland) would pay a specific tax, but farmers within each Thing determined what each farm had to pay to meet the total demanded (Svetjemo 2014, 1320). Such a system must have strained neighborly relationships. By the seventeenth century, according to Svedjemo, groups of farms "must be regarded as villages, but were no longer organised through kinship" (Svetjemo 2014, 203). In this regard, the countryside of Gotland can be contrasted with coastal Finnmark, as described in chapter 1; similar disarticulation of social structures occurred in both places, albeit in different ways.

As mentioned earlier, many witchcraft scholars have remarked on the statistical preponderance of women who make up not just the accused during the witchcraft trials of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, but often the accusers as well. This must partially be because, as Lyndal Roper observes, "it was the powerful ambivalence of feeling which nourished witchery: witchcraft was to be feared not from those indifferent to you, but from those whose relationship was close and whose intimate knowledge of your secrets could be turned to harm" (Roper 1994, 214). On Gotland as in much of Northern Europe, "those whose relationship was close" meant primarily people of the same sex who lived nearby: daily life and agricultural work was gendered, and as trade dried up and wars drained the countryside of able-bodied men (Rebas 2012, esp. 230–232), pressure must have increased on the island's women to turn a profit on their agricultural labor—largely meaning dairy work. No wonder, then, that fears of the neighbor woman—who was no longer in your "family" but who knew your schedule and was familiar with your livestock—increased during the long years of economic decline.

Other features of Gotlandic society, however, remained stable, for instance the patriarchal system that some scholars believe was more pronounced on Gotland than elsewhere in Scandinavia (Lerbom 2003, 82–85, in Svetjemo 2014, 200). In the medieval period, in fact, women's status was markedly inferior, more so than elsewhere in Europe, as Nils Blomkvist explains:

> Hustrun till en gotländsk bonde lämnade sitt eget familjesammanhang för att tas emot i sin mans hus—men hon upptogs inte i hans ätt. Hennes ställning skilde sig föga från en gästs. Hon förväntades ha en egen ekonomi och hade rätt till *hogsl* och *id*, två sorters gåvor från maken. Här bör noteras att husmodern på en gotländsk gård aldrig skulle få del i dess egendom eller införlivas med släkt annat än genom sina eventuella söner. Hennes ställning som outsider är tydligt uttryckt. Situationen belyses klart i det fall då den manliga arvslinjen dör ut. . . . Enligt många västeuropeiska familjesystem vore det här den överlevande änkan kunde inträda som familjens överhuvud och förmås skaffa en ny bonde genom ett nytt äktenskap, eller inkalla en passande manlig släkting från *sin* släkt. Varje sådan lösning är främmande för GL [Gutalagen]. Där specificeras endast hur hon skulle betalas för sina tjänster och berövas varje formellt eller informellt inflytande som hon kunde ha haft. (Blomkvist 2010, 212)

> [The wife of a Gotlandic farmer left her own family group to take a place in her husband's household—but she was not incorporated into his lineage. Her position was little different than a guest's. She was expected to maintain her own finances and had the right to *hogsl* [consolation] and *id* [provision], two kinds of gifts from her husband. Here it should be noted that a Gotlandic housewife would never inherit any part of the farmland or be incorporated into the family, except through any sons she might have. Her position as an outsider is perfectly clear. The situation is clearly highlighted in the case of the male line dying out. . . . In many Western European family systems, a surviving widow could take over as the head of the family and marry a new farmer, or appoint as the farmer a suitable male from her *own* family. No such solution is found in *Gutalagen*. There it is specified only how she would be paid for her work and be stripped of any formal or informal influence she might have had.]

Whereas in the medieval polynuclear system, Blomkvist notes that such a widow who did not wish to live as a dependent on her late husband's farm could return to her own family (Blomkvist 2010, 213), a woman in the same position a few centuries later might have had even fewer options, or at least less socially ratified ones. This can be contrasted with the position of the "independent, autonomous and freer" women of Finnmark, as discussed in chapter 1 above (Hagen 2006, 138)—although as a kind of "inside stranger," Gotlandic wives might have shared some of the distrust experienced by socially mobile maids in Finnmark and elsewhere in Scandinavia. Of course, as a further contrast, it was Finnmark's women who suffered the brunt of the region's witch trials, while Gotland's women escaped relatively unscathed; perhaps stronger, or more strongly ensconced, patriarchal control in the social sphere dampened any perceived need to apply it through force of law. Nevertheless, the discourse of witchcraft operated also on Gotland to define gender roles, although primarily through oral and visual transmission of legends rather than witch trials. The specific contours of that discourse differed also. Rune Blix Hagen writes: "The persecution of female witches in the eastern part of Finnmark should not be interpreted so much in terms of whether they were *bad housewives* and *bad mothers* as in terms of structures of authority and political power" (Hagen 2006, 140, emphasis added); in contrast, as chapters 5 and 6 illustrate, witchcraft discourse on Gotland focused precisely on these two aspects of femininity.

## Reform Comes to Gotland

The power of the church on Gotland was also relatively unaffected by the transition between medieval and early modern periods, or rather the lack of church power: although Gotland's premodern piety is reflected in the proliferation of medieval churches, church infrastructure was weak. Gotland had been a part of the diocese of Linköping since early days, but, as Herman Shück drily puts it, "Den fyrahundraåriga förbindelsen mellan Linköping och Gotland var ingen idyll" [The

four-hundred-year long relationship between Linköping and Gotland was hardly ideal] (Shück 1961, 45). The bishop's rights on Gotland, according to Svedjemo (after Gunnar Fritzell and Philip Pernler), were severely curtailed in comparison to those in the rest of his diocese. Importantly, "It was the Gotlandic priests not the bishop, as usually was the case, who selected the rural deans" (Svedjemo 2014, 191). The deans—part of a church organization that was growing more elaborate in the High Middle Ages—supervised parish priests and oversaw both literal and metaphorical church infrastructure, including church law. "In districts remote from the cathedral the local superior…had a great deal of influence," and nowhere was more remote from the cathedral than Gotland (Sawyer 1993, 121–122). Indeed, as Shück explains:

> Impulserna från det svenska fastlandet blev också mindre betydande än de från Östersjöns södra och östra stränder och från än avlägsnare trakter. Gotland stod vid medeltidens slut märkligt oberört av den mäktiga andliga och organisatoriska utveckling, som de gångna seklen annars inneburit för de landsdelar som lydde under Linköping. (Shück 1961, 45)
>
> [The influences from the Swedish mainland became less significant than those from the southern and eastern edges of the Baltic Sea, and even from farther areas. At the end of the Middle Ages, Gotland stood remarkably untouched by the powerful spiritual and organizational power Linköping had developed in other parts of its diocese.]

This may partially owe itself to the fact that Linköping was Swedish, while Gotland was technically part of Denmark or run independently, by either natives or interlopers. (In contrast, as discussed above, by the time of the witch trials in Finnmark Denmark had essentially seized operational control of the churches there, sending priests from Denmark and issuing printed materials in Danish even in that far-flung province.) Nevertheless there is no doubt that late medieval Gotlanders considered themselves Christian (i.e. Catholic), to the extent that such an identity was relevant at all.

Despite Linköping's relative impotence, we can reasonably wonder at how quickly, or not, Lutheranism affected Gotlandic church organization. This is a subject little studied, as Jörn Staecker has acknowledged, pointing to the "chaotic conditions" afflicting Gotland in the sixteenth century as an important factor in apparent scholarly disinterest (Staecker 2007, 47). Hain Rebas in fact identifies the years from 1390 to 1525 as Gotland's "long fifteenth century," pointing to the way to Staecker's chaos of the sixteenth (Rebas 2012). While noting the dissolution of Gotland's place of prominence in these years, and speculating that shared memories of it might have produced "feelings of great loss, humiliation, frustration, anger," Rebas also notes that the ancient political arrangement, "the countryside's territorial organization around the *Gutnalthing* still functioned meticuously [*sic*]" (Rebas 2012, 238). He points also to other factors, including language, names, and coinage, that "make a strong statement about the fiercely independent state of mind of the islanders . . . . [W]e have no problems at all to find embracing factors expressing and boosting a specific Gotlandic identity of the 15th century" (Rebas 2012, 241–242). There are indicators, in other words, of some cultural conservatism—at least in the country. And indeed, as Staecker documents, there is a significant distinction between Visby and the country in the adaptation of Lutheranism. By examining the material culture of Gotland's countryside churches, Staecker concludes that the countryside adopted Lutheranism more slowly than the city of Visby, due partially to economic necessity—it was expensive to build and install Protestant-style pulpits, for instance—but also due to a kind of natural stylistic and social conservatism (Staecker 2007, esp. 79). Like other Hanseatic cites, Visby—full as it was of German-speaking merchants, still closely linked to northern German cities that were early adopters of Protestantism—welcomed Lutheranism quickly, with documented activity already in 1527; "schon 1530, als der dänische Lehnsmann Henrik Rosenkrantz seinen Dienst antrat, waren die moisten Spuren des alten Glaubens ausgewischt" (Staecker 2007, 48) [as early as 1530, when the Danish governor Henrik Rosenkrantz took office, most of the traces of the

old faith were gone]. Nevertheless, it was not until 1572 that the island received its first Lutheran superintendent (the highest ecclesiastical office) and, even after that, the office stood empty between 1599 and 1631.

During the first hundred years of the Reformation, in contrast, the countryside churches were left largely to their own devices, as far as we can tell:

> Über den genaueren Verlauf der Reformation auf dem Lande liegen keine Informationen vor. Die Einnahmen der Kirchen gingen zurück und man vereinigte mehrere Kirchspiele zu größeren Pastoraten. . . . Zu einer Zwangsverwaltung kam es aber nicht, vielmehr behielten die Kirchen ihre Selbstständigkeit und ihr Eigentum. (Staecker 2007, 49)
>
> [No information is available on the exact course of the Reformation in the countryside. Church revenues were seized and several parishes united into larger parishes. . . . However, there was no forced reorganization; rather, the churches retained their independence and their property.]

This does not, however, mean that the countryside was immune from the broader cultural effects and expectations of the Reformation, including the reforming trends in the Catholic Church itself that would become the Counter-Reformation. Events like Lübeck's invasion of Visby in 1525 contributed to the economic stagnation throughout the island while the early closure of Gotland's monasteries, including the countryside-located monastery at Roma, must have affected the countryside's religious sensibilities. Roma itself, in fact, was transformed in the 1530s into the summer residence of the Danish feudal lords, and therefore must have become a site of foreign cultural influence as well.

Moreover, as Lee Palmer Wandel has illustrated, the history of the Reformation "begins not in 1517, the date that Martin Luther posted ninety-five theses for debate on the door of the ducal church in

the small town of Wittenberg"; instead, she notes, "It begins with late medieval Christianity, the ways in which it inscribed the landscape of Europe" and with the "discovery" of the New World by Christopher Columbus, as well as with the development of printing technology (Wandel 2011, 11). Patrick Collinson, in his suggestively titled chapter "The Late Medieval Church and its Reformation, 1400–1600," suggests that the Reformation can be understood as "the fulfilment rather than simply a negation of pre-Reformation Catholic culture," and that Martin Luther himself "was hardly a typical product of late medieval German Catholicism but he is recognizable as one of its authentic manifestations" (Collinson 2001, 254; 246). All of which is to say that Gotland, sidelined but hardly isolated from European currents, was painting its witches, along with many other church murals, during this period of growing if disarticulated and sporadic efforts at reform.

## The Milk-Witches of Gotland

On Gotland, there were two distinct phases of milk-witch scene painting, the first occurring in the latter half of the fifteenth century and the second roughly contemporaneous with the first hiccups of the Protestant Reformation. The first group is identical in style and likely painted at the same time as the scenes of Christ's Passion, which are attributed to the workshop known eponymously as Passionsmästaren. They include depictions in Bäl, Endre, Ganthem, Norrlanda, and Näs churches, as well as—I believe, based on stylistic similarities I will discuss below—Gerum (figs. 4.1–4.6).[87] The images in Vamlingbo, whose walls were whitewashed in 1895 but were recorded before that with both a photo and a watercolor drawing, also belong to this early group (figs. 4.7, 4.8); the murals in Alskog, whose walls were whitewashed in 1816, might as well: fragments uncovered in 1964–1965 indicate the work of Passionsmästaren elsewhere in the church (Lagerlöf 1968, 200), and while we

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[87] Ann-Sofi Forsmark identified only four of these, while Johannes Daun added Näs to the list, and tentatively identified Gerum as well (Forsmark 2005/2006, 45; Daun 2010, 83, 89). See also footnote 96 below.

have no pictorial evidence, we do have a description of the images from Bishop Jöran Wallin from the mid-eighteenth century. According to the bishop, there were three scenes on the northern wall, the first showing a woman ("Kiärring") milking a cow, with two demons; the second showing the same woman at her churn, with the same demons; and the third showing her naked and on all fours, ridden by one of the demons and being led by a halter around her neck by the other into hell (qtd. in Lagerlöf 1968, 201–202). This same sequence is found at Ganthem church, unmistakably a product of Passionmästaren's workshop (figs. 4.3a–c), but can also be seen in Öja church, which is certainly not (fig. 4.11).

Dating Passionsmästaren's work is difficult, with an early study firmly declaring it occurred before 1450 and a more recent one just as firmly declaring it could not have occurred before 1450 (Söderberg 1942, 49;[88] Lindgren 1996, 373). Art historian Lennart Karlsson assigns Passionsmästaren to between 1450 and 1480 (Karlsson 2013, 10–11), while Torsten Svensson believes the latter part of Karlsson's date range is most likely (priv. comm., 2018). Furthermore, as Bengt G. Söderberg points out, disciples of the school may have continued painting in the style beyond the "master's" heyday, even to the end of the century (Söderberg 1961, 47). For my purposes, precision in this regard is not strictly necessary, though I am inclined to think the later dating is more likely, not only for the reason Mereth Lindgren identifies (namely, the depiction of a saint not canonized until 1450) but also because, generally in Europe, the artistic depiction of witches only became common in the latter half of the fifteenth century.

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[88] In a later work, the same art historian—Bengt G. Söderberg—extends what he considers to be the likely time frame, from 1430 to 1460 (Söderberg 1961, 47).

In addition to these seven fifteenth-century illustrations of the milk-stealing witch, Gotland hosts a further three still extant, in Sanda, Silte, and Öja (figs. 4.9–4.11). Above the image in Silte the date 1495 appears along with a farm sigil, which according to Mats Bergman metonymically refers to the painter (Bergman 1992, 58). This is the only instance of the milk-witch that can be reliably dated. Johannes Daun improbably asserts that the milk-witch scene in Sanda dates to between 1450 and 1500 and suggests it is the work of Passionsmästaren, although he admits—putting it rather mildly—that "om Passionsmästaren uppfört även tjuvmjölkningsmålningen är ej säkert; i sin komposition avviker den från målarens övriga verk" [it is not certain that Passionsmästaren also constructed the painting of the milk-theft; its composition differs from the painter's other work] (Daun 2010, 85). The style and construction in fact differ altogether from Passionsmästaren's own milk-witch scenes as well as from the Passion scenes that decorate Sanda's nave. The dotted coloration of the devils and the placement of the hell mouth inside a tower instead indicate a later date, probably around 1500. The scene at Öja church, described above, is possibly even younger, dating to 1500–1510.

*Table 2. Dates of milk-stealing witch murals in Gotlandic churches*

| Church | Presumed Date |
|---|---|
| Alskog | c. 1475 |
| Bäl | c. 1475 |
| Endre | c. 1475 |
| Ganthem | c. 1475 |
| Gerum | c. 1475 |
| Norrlanda | c. 1475 |
| Näs | c. 1475 |
| Sanda | c. 1500 |
| Silte | 1495 |
| Vamlingbo | c. 1475 |
| Öja | 1500–1510 |

*Figure 4.1. Milk-witch scene in Bäl church, unfortunately partially obscured by a modern wall sconce. To the left two demons hold a cow. The sconce is placed directly over an image of a demon walking towards the right, where a woman stands working at her churn, with another demon holding it. Photo by author.*

*Figure 4.2. Milk-witch scene in Endre church, showing a woman milking a cow while one demon holds the animal's head and another seems to investigate its rear. A third demon clings to the woman's shoulders. Photo by author.*

*Figures 4.3a–c. Milk-witch scenes in Ganthem church. 4a, top, shows how the visual narrative consists of three parts, spanning the northwest corner of the nave (see appendix 2 for placement). Figure 4.3b, middle, shows the first two parts of the narrative, located on the nave's western wall; figure 4.3c, bottom, shows its (badly effaced) conclusion at the hell mouth, on the nave's northern wall. Photos by author.*

*Figures 4.4a–c. Milk-witch scenes in Norrlanda church. The same narrative sequence as pictured in Ganthem is present here, although the narrative runs from east to west, with the milking scene (top) closest to the altar and the hell mouth (bottom right) closest to the tower (see appendix 2). The placement of a modern organ immediately in front of the scene resulted in distorted image angles. Photos by author.*

*Figure 4.5. Milk-witch narrative in Näs church. A milking scene is center, with a ride (presumably to hell) to the left. More images to the right, perhaps of churning butter, are now obscured. Photo by author.*

*Figure 4.6. Scene in Gerum church of a naked woman on all fours being ridden by one demon and prodded by another. Although nothing obviously indicates the woman is a milk-witch, the resemblance of this woman to the one featured in Näs church leads me to conclude such identification is likely; Johannes Daun similarly suspects her to be a milk witch, commenting that "kanske har här tidigare funnits scener med mjölkning eller smörkärning" (Daun 2010, 89) [perhaps there were once scenes of milking or butter-churning here]. See also footnote 96. Photo by author.*

*Figure 4.7 (left). North wall of Vamlingbo church (now whitewashed). A pair of milk-witch scenes can be seen to the left, including a milking scene and a churning scene. Photo by Olof Sörling (before 1895). Swedish National Heritage Board 538-97.*

*Figure 4.8 (below). Watercolor of Vamlingbo church by Carl Johan Forsberg, 1894. In addition to the churning and milking scenes visible in the photograph above, the watercolor suggests a punishment scene once existed as well, with a naked woman's hair being held by two devils, one of whom is riding her. Photo by Lars Kennerstedt, 2014. Swedish National Heritage Board htgo0597.*

*Figure 4.9. Milk-witch scene in Sanda church. The extant mural is entirely comprised of the witch, identified as a milk-witch by the butter churn she carries, being carried by demons into a hell mouth. The faint remains of another devil below the existing scene suggest there once might have been other elements. Photo by author.*

*Figure 4.10. Milk-witch panels in Silte church, showing a woman churning with a winged devil on the left (closest to the altar; see appendix 2) and the woman, now naked, being ridden by a different demon into a hell mouth on the right. Photo by author.*

*Figure 4.11. One of Gotland's largest and most impressive milk-stealing witch scenes, featured in Öja church and placed directly above the northern door into the nave (see appendix 2). The mural consists of three parts, with a bjära suckling a cow, which is held by two demons, to the left, a churning scene in the middle, and a now-naked, loose-haired woman being ridden into a hell mouth by a demon on the right. Photo by author.*

In sum, Gotland's extant milk-witch scenes (as mentioned, there was once at least one more in Alskog, and likely others that have since been covered or destroyed) fall into two rough time periods: one contemporaneous with and probably produced by Passionsmästaren, in the latter part of the fifteenth century, and a second one or two generations later. The later images are larger in size and show stylistic and substantive differences, both with each other and with the earlier Passionsmästaren murals.

It is unclear who commissioned workshops like Passionsmästaren's to decorate the interior of late Catholic-period churches, but assuredly the impetus and choices of design were local. Given the lack of a feudal structure and a social hierarchy based probably on control of trade, rather than land (Svetjemo 2014, 193, 196), it is reasonable to surmise that it was local elites, made up perhaps of *störbonder*, rural deans, and parish priests, who authorized interior church decorations. However, there was a relatively short social distance between poor farmer and elite church dean in the countryside, as mentioned above. Which is to say: the concerns of those responsible for commissioning church decorations and the concerns of the common churchgoer were likely largely shared, as was the common stock of knowledge, including legends, on which they were based.

These concerns must have included, between roughly 1450 and 1550, the economy; local identity, in tension with Visby and foreign powers like Hansa cities, Denmark, and Sweden; religious identity; and social organization, including ways to structure gender. It is my contention that the milk-stealing witches on the walls of Gotland's countryside churches may have reflected each of these, to varying degrees. Two elements in particular that I will focus on are the organization of masculinity—which of course developed alongside the organization of femininity—and motherhood, which became especially during the Protestant Reformation a particularly salient foundation of femininity, and is particularly pertinent to the late depiction at Öja. That the milk-witch spoke eloquently to these concerns is in part suggested by the fact that her extant geographical range (fig. 4.12) is comparatively large, with appearances lacking only in the northernmost part of the island—and given the late nineteenth-century program of whitewashing objectionable figures in church, such as naked witches, we cannot be sure she did not once reside here as well. The concerns the milk-witch paintings addressed, therefore, must have been widely shared as well: whether or not she ever

appeared also in any of the churches of Visby is entirely unknown, but certainly all throughout the countryside she was a popular iconographic figure.

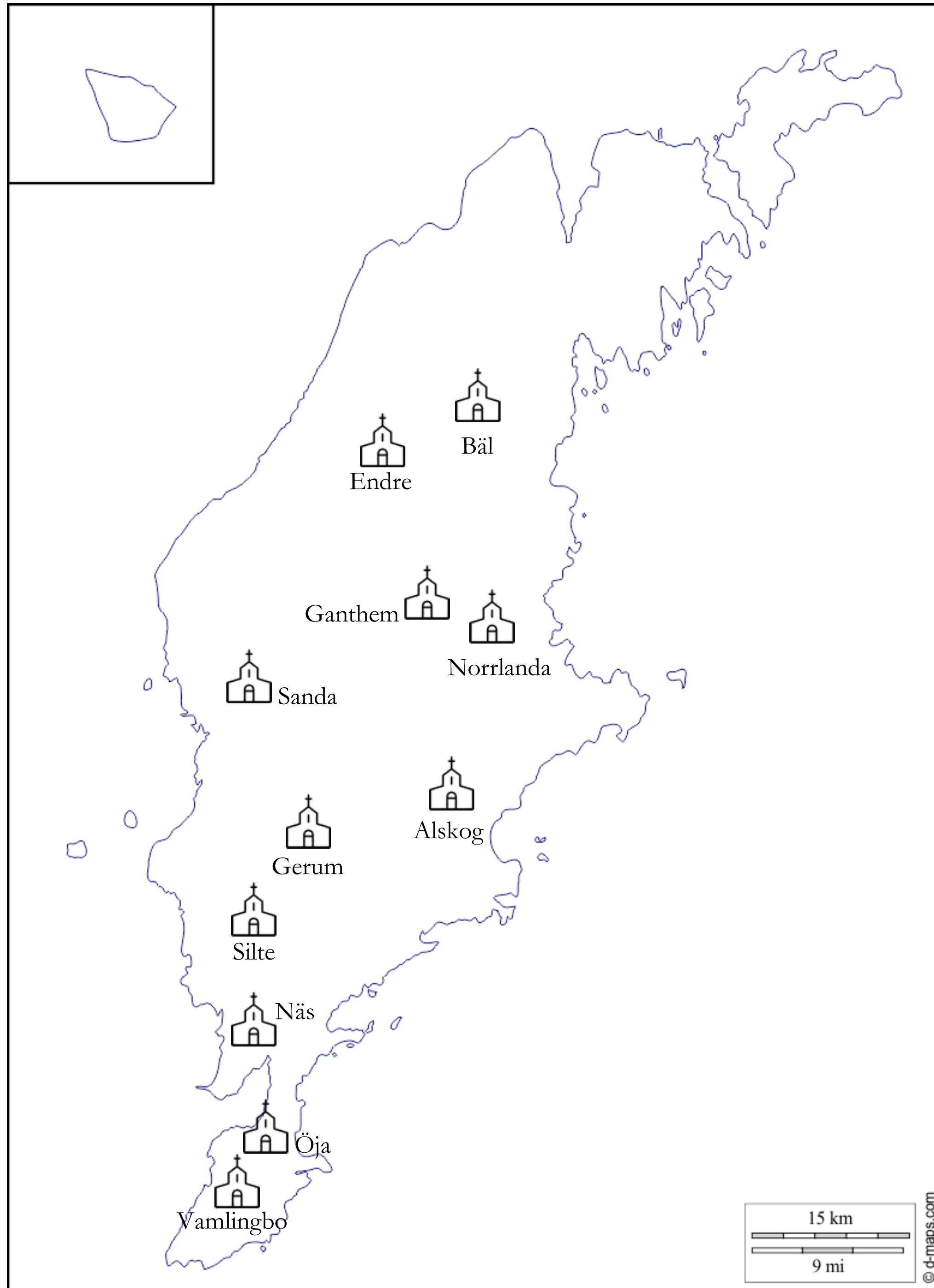


*Figure 4.12. Locations of churches on Gotland that depict the milk-stealing witch. The murals in Alskog and Vamlingbo are no longer visible. Map source: https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=170523&.lang=en. CC.*

# CHAPTER 5. OF MILK AND MEN:

## The Witch as Adulteress Wife

The narratives of the milk-stealing witch that we know from oral traditions recorded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often focus on the exposure of the witch: the moment when a maid or farmhand, disbelieving the witch's instructions, accidentally steals the milk from three provinces instead of one, resulting in a sloppy mess; or when an outraged farmer manages to clip the thieving creature, only to discover that his elderly neighbor is suffering from a gunshot wound in precisely the same spot; sometimes the witch isn't visible at all, but rather a knowledgeable person like a priest demonstrates that a bit of butter was made by a witch by cutting it with a knife and thereby making it bleed.[89] Such milk-witch legends are sites of anxiety, as all legends are; but they also are optimistic. They offer templates for, as Stephen A. Mitchell puts it, "effective countermeasures," that is: "If there are bad things happening in the community—a cow is underproducing, for example—then such things are being caused by someone (a witch), and having identified that person, the community has been informed by tradition about the means by which to fix its troubles" (S. Mitchell 2011, 141; 143).

On the other hand, the depictions of this legend complex (what Mitchell calls myth) on the walls of late medieval Scandinavian churches show the events from, as it were, the witch's perspective. For instance, in Ösmo church in Södermanland, about 25 miles south of Stockholm, four scenes painted in one of the vaults show, in sequence: a demon holding a cow, which is being suckled by a trollcat; a demon helping a woman churn, while a pair of trollcats vomit milk into a nearby pail; another

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[89] ML 3040 (Christiansen 1958); N36, N43, P22 (af Klintberg 2010). For some English-language examples of these legend types, see Kvideland and Semsdorf (1988, 38.3–38.5 (173–175); 39.4 (178–179)).

*Figures 5.1a–d. Milk-stealing witch narrative in Ösmo church, located about 25 miles south of Stockholm. These depictions are arranged in one of the central vaults in the nave. They have been dated to around 1470, roughly contemporaneous with Passionsmästaren's paintings on Gotland. Photos by author.*

demon helping the woman mold the butter, with yet another trollcat vomiting into yet another pail; and (uniquely, so far as I can tell), the woman drinking from a horn,[90] with a devil holding the other end (fig. 5.1a–d). More commonly, as in Ganthem church on Gotland, the sequence ends with the witch being herded, ridden, or carried into the hell mouth (see fig. 4.3c). In other words, there was no worldly recourse suggested in these iterations of the milk-stealing witch legend; the emphasis is on the punishment of the damned woman's soul—a theme perhaps not surprising in the context of a late medieval church, a space preoccupied with questions of Christian salvation (and lack thereof). The women in these depictions contrast to depictions of the Virgin Mary, sometimes in the same churches; while the milk-witches are preoccupied with demons and the instruments of profit, the

[90] This may reference the "witch's ointment," an ungodly mixture that appears as a motif in many European witchcraft traditions. This unguent is, in Swedish tradition, often prepared and distributed by the Devil himself (this is illustrated in a late medieval mural at Yttergran church; see fig. 5.4 below). During the large-scale Blåkulla trials in Sweden, child witnesses related that this was made from the monstrous abortions of witches after short-lived pregnancies by the Devil (Sörlin 2008, 116). Typically, however, such ointment was used as a rub that enabled objects and animals to fly (Sörlin 2008, 118; see also af Klintberg (2010, N17, N27, N28); cf. Christiansen (1958, ML 3045 (C1)); Thompson (1956, G242.1.1)). It is tempting, though perhaps unsupported, to see Ösmo's witch, drinking from the horn, as a visual iteration of the witchcraft-as-poison trope that appears in Finnmark's witch trials and discussed above in chapter 2.

*Figure 5.2. Three panels of Passionsmästaren's work in Hemse church, Gotland (c. 1475). On the left, the Virgin Mary holds the newborn Jesus Christ as one of the Three Magi approaches with a gift; in the center the Virgin presents Jesus at the temple; on the right the Virgin Mary holds Jesus as the family flees to Egypt. Photo by author.*

Virgin is entirely focused—and usually touching—Jesus Christ (fig 5.2). Meanwhile, the visual resonance between the demons surrounding the milk-witches and the Jews tormenting Jesus in the Passionsmästaren's scenes (see fig. 5.3) is notable: in the anti-Semitic iconography of the late medieval period, Jews were typically drawn with large, bulbous noses, and the same feature is visible on the demons as well. They are also, like the devils, frequently shown in profile, which according to Mereth Lindgren was a traditional method of signaling a painted character's evil nature (Lindgren 1996, 406).[91]

The visual display of these legends seems, then, less to provide a blueprint for effective countermeasures and more as a moralizing program. Johannes Daun concludes that "målningarna

[91] Speaking of a depiction of the Old Testament scene of Ham and Noah, painted by Albert Pictor in Härkeberga church, Lindgren says, "Hans onda karaktär är avslöjad redan genom att han är återgiven i profil. . . . På liknande sätt är i en valvkappa Kain, brodermördaren, återgiven i profil med kraftigt överdimensionerad näsa" (Lindgren 1996, 406) [His evil character is revealed by showing him in profile. . . . In the same way, the fratricidal Cain is shown in another vault in profile with an exaggerated, oversized nose].

*Figure 5.3. Jesus Christ being tormented by Jews, Gerum church, Gotland (Passions-mästaren's workshop, c. 1475). Photo by author.*

var troligen ämnade som avskräckande exempel, riktade mot församlingens kvinnor, eftersom de skötte mjölkhanteringen" (Daun 2010, 93) [the paintings were probably intended as a warning, directed at the congregation's women, since they handled dairy work]. The point is made even more forcefully in the article's English summary, which states "The warnings were quite obviously directed to the women in the congregation, since almost all of the paintings have been placed on the north wall of the church—which was the women's side" (Daun 2010, 94). In this, Daun's assessment mirrors Stephen A. Mitchell's assessment of the placement of murals of Sko-Ella in Swedish parish churches, "the woman who was worse than the Devil," a legendary character who receives a pair of shoes on the end of a long pole from the Devil as payment for a wicked deed: "the scene's frequent placement around the door function as a final warning about proper behavior to a parishioner, female parishioners in particular, one imagines, before leaving the church" (S. Mitchell 2011, 137–138).

Daun is right that most of Gotland's milk-stealing witches appear on the north side, the "women's" side of the church (Daun 2010, 90, 91; see also Svahnström 1961, 60). Their specific placements, however (see appendix 2) would have rendered them visible also—and in few places even more visible—to the male half of the congregation. Öja's mural, for instance, would have been obvious first and foremost to men, who would have witnessed their wives, sisters, daughters, and female neighbors walking directly under it into and out of church. It is reasonable to conclude, then, that

the messages conveyed by these images spoke to both men *and* women, though—as Nils-Arvid Bringéus points out—these messages need not have been identical, either to each other or to the message intended by the painter (Bringéus 1981, 188–199). The milk-witch murals spoke to women about their behavior—what was expected and what was feared—but, equally, they spoke to men about their own duties and responsibilities. In this chapter, I argue that the murals of the milk-witch particularly illustrated anxieties about adultery and losing control of wives and womenfolk generally.

The portrayal of these scenes and narratives in late medieval murals depended on the fact that the basic story was widely known: these images were not meant to introduce the notion of a witch who stole her neighbor's milk, but to highlight it with the messages desired by the church authorities. Stephen A. Mitchell, speaking broadly of Scandinavia, contends that the milk-stealing witch paintings in these churches represent an attempt by elites to infuse their concern with demonic activity onto a preexisting folk tradition (S. Mitchell 2011, 138–139, 141; see also Daun 2010, 91). The highly visible demons in these depictions, in other words, are meant to convey the contemporary theological conclusion: magical ability to steal milk was real, and the power to do so was inherently diabolical. This accords with contemporary elite efforts in general to diabolize all manner of magical activity and ability; prevailing intellectual thought increasingly understood all supernatural talent to derive ultimately from Satan (such efforts continued into the Reformation, with Martin Luther himself declaring milk-stealing witches deserved to be burned at the stake, "not for stealing milk, but rather for their blasphemy in strengthening the devil" (qtd. and trans. in Brauner 1995, 55)). Mitchell's reading is certainly correct, so far as it goes; painting the demons as well as the witch on the church walls rendered what was ordinarily invisible (as all spirits, including demons, were) not only visible but impossible to miss. Those desperate or greedy enough to employ magic to increase their dairy supply were damning their own souls.

However, given the synecdoche between "farmer" and "farm" in Gotlandic thought (as described in chapter 4), the witch did not only pose a threat to her own individual soul, but also to her farm—or rather, her husband's farm. Crucially, the milk-witch is invariably shown with the headdress of a married woman, at least while she is milking, churning, or shaping butter (Myrdal 2008, 75). As Roberta Milliken notes, for centuries European women followed a basic rule, that girls and unmarried women could display their locks but married women kept their hair covered: "This was the way of not only signifying her subordination to her husband…, but it also effectively signaled her sexual status as one who was no longer a virgin. In this sense, a woman's hair can be viewed as a communicative element of who she is/was" (Milliken 2012, 55). That the milk-witch appears alongside and frequently touching male demons therefore suggests sexual impropriety as well as maleficia; her involvement with devils conveys "a scene not only of diabolical seduction, but also of adultery," as Charles Zika says of a witch similarly embracing a devil in one of Ulrich Molitor's woodcuts (Zika 2007, 23). She threatened the economy of her neighbors, yes, but she also cuckolded her husband and presented the Devil with an inroad to the entire household. In this sense the witch, shown in the overly familiar clutches of various demons (as for instance at Ganthem and Öja churches on Gotland), spoke not just to women, but also to men: it was a husband's reified role to maintain the sanctity and control of his farm—and not least of his wife.

## Family and Farm: Defining the Gotlandic Household

During the medieval period on Gotland, it is probable that the family unit constituted more than just the individuals involved. "The physical house, with all its land, rights and the personal property, could not be separated from its inhabitants," Gustaf Svetjemo points out. "They were the same and more than just the individuals making up the household" (Svetjemo 2014, 201). This medieval state of affairs, which centered the farm as an intact system of people and property, "probably lived on

stronger and longer on Gotland than other parts of Scandinavia" (Svetjemo 2014, 202). This conception of the farm certainly would have included livestock and their products, perhaps especially dairy products; "Smör var under 1300-talet en av Sveriges absolut viktigaste exportvaror, och Kalmar, Lödöse och Visby var viktiga städer för smörhandeln" (Daun 2010, 76) [During the fourteenth century butter was one of Sweden's most important exports, and Kalmar, Lödöse and Visby were important cities for the butter-trade]. Janken Myrdal also emphasizes the importance of butter to the Swedish economy, noting that it "became an accepted form of payment for trade and taxes" during the Middle Ages and "much of agricultural production was eventually oriented towards maximizing butter production" (Myrdal 2008, 68).

Protection of a household's production of butter was, therefore, vital, and since all aspects of it, from milking to churning to preservation, were vulnerable to a thousand uncontrollable circumstances, it was deemed vulnerable to the inimical hidden powers of the witch. Since the medieval period on Gotland, "to enter a person's farm unlawfully gave severe penalties" (Svetjemo 2014, 201), but this was no barrier to the witch, who after all shucked even God's laws, not to mention man's—as mentioned earlier, fundamentally the witch in European legendary is a boundary-breaker. Penetrating a farm, however—even if "just" to steal butter—had important repercussions for both the victimized household and her own.

To understand this, we may turn to a modern ethnography of French witchcraft beliefs by Jeanne Favret-Saada, called in its English translation *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage* (1980). Although referring to modern France, we may tentatively apply some of Favret-Saada's observations to historical Scandinavia; similar, and perhaps culturally related, concepts concerning the organization and structure of rural society existed in both places—indeed many of Favret-Saada's conclusions are echoed by Jacqueline Van Gent's description of eighteenth-century Sweden. Based on fieldwork

conducted in the 1960s and 1970s, Favret-Saada demonstrates how witchcraft in the Bocage is conceptualized, abstractly, as occurring between "sets" or "units" of people, in which the witch's set penetrates the victim's; the bewitched set comprises not just the immediate victim, but also his family, possessions, and lands (Favret-Saada 1980, 127). Animals belonging to the human victim are vulnerable because "they are included in the same set" (Favret-Saada 1980, 145). Similarly, as Van Gent says of early modern Europe in general and Sweden in particular, "the socio-centric nature of the human self could be extended to include animals and spirits." Farm animals especially, like milk cows, fall into this category: "Because animals were regarded as part of the socio-centric self, it was possible to bewitch them in the same way as a person" (Van Gent 2009, 71–72). This is directly analogous to Svetjemo's description of the Gotlandic farm as comprising people, place, and property, and, with the help of this analogy, the significance of butter-theft becomes clearer.

Understanding the farm as not just a place but a social unit, and as being more than the sum of its parts (meaning what Favret-Saada calls its "bio-economic potential"), helps reveal why the milk-stealing witch on Gotland was dangerous enough to have a place on the church walls. She did not "merely" threaten the production of milk and butter, with its attendant stresses on subsistence and potential profits, but threated the entire victimized social unit with Satanic potential. Indeed her broader community might come into dangerous contact with, ultimately, demonic forces: thus in a trial concerning bjäror from Karby farm (discussed further in chapter 6), complainants testified that "de lider där i socken och runt omkring stort förtryck på sin boskap av slik otyg" (Nilden-Wall and Wall 1996, 49) [they suffered in the parish and the surrounding areas from great difficulties with their cattle from such pests]. The flip side of this was that accusations of witchcraft—throughout early modern Europe—were blows not just at a particular person, but implicated their entire household; thus in Finnmark, for instance, husbands are seen in the court records to step forward to

defend their wives; sometimes they are instructed to control them properly, lest the state do it for them (see, e.g., Willumsen 2010a, 106; 2010b, 106). More than one is told that if his wife does not appear to face charges he will have to stand in for her (Willumsen 2010a, 77, 80, 353; 2010b, 77, 80, 353). In other cases, husbands were occasionally part of the court that sentenced their wives to the stake; Rune Blix Hagen cynically wonders if "enkelte menn brukte denne strategien for å bli kvitt brysomme, utrangerte kvinner" (Hagen 2015a, 141) [some men used this strategy to rid themselves of troublesome, unwanted women]. More generously—perhaps—these men may have been trying to perform their duty to protect the community, even at the cost of their wives.[92] Whether defenders or judges, however, in these cases the burden of patriarchy, discussed more below, must have been keenly felt indeed.

## Masculinity under Threat

Hain Rebas, noting the probable participation of the island's masculine population in the numerous battles for and around Gotland from the 1390s through the 1520s, suggests that "Gotlandic 15th century support for the captains [of Visborg castle] was also founded in nostalgia and by frustration caused by the disparity between lost former greatness and the reduced present, above all among young men" (Rebas 2012, 246). Certainly frustration must have been common, owing partially to the very captains on Gotland Rebas discusses, as he himself documents: for instance, "The erection of Visborg castle (1408–) cost generations of Gotlandic taxpayers funds. The tax was raised by 1000% and remained thus almost until the 1470s" (Rebas 2012, 245). Rebas speculates that memories of

[92] Indeed, Hagen later discusses one such witch-burning husband, Peder Henningsen, who seems to have lost two wives at the stake. Hagen explains that the first wife's conviction cost Peder his honor, standing, and career, which he later regained partially by being involved in sending his second wife to the stake and, thereafter, several other women in the 1640s and 1650s (Hagen 2015a, 152–153). A similar fate—though without such "redemption"—befell Thomas Pedersen. Of course, although Thomas was "sterkt befengt med trolldom" [strongly associated with witchcraft] over a long period of time and "mistet [] sin ære" [lost his honor] because of it, it was his wives who lost their lives (Hagen 2015a, 171–172).

Gotland's earlier prowess would have been retained in oral tradition, and that comparisons between such a glorified past and the less-than-satisfying present of the fifteenth century would have generated frustration and even aggression, particularly among men. Very possibly the ill-fated competition with Visby, the domination of trade by German Hanseatic merchants, and the need to pay such heavy taxes contributed to a pervasive kind of crisis in masculinity in the Gotlandic countryside, one exacerbated by the Reformation, for reasons I will discuss below. Notably, the two phases of milk-witch painting roughly correspond with two periods of the "prolonged armed struggles and bloody fighting on and around the island" identified by Rebas, namely those in the 1480s and at the start of the 1500s (Rebas 2012, 230). Thus one way in which the crisis of masculinity manifested may have been in the depiction of milk-witches on Gotland, perhaps as a conscious attempt to assert control over at least the domestic sphere in an age when society and even survival were threatened by chaotic political and economic conditions.

Johannes Daun correctly asserts, as noted above, that most of Gotland's milk-stealing witches appear on the north side, and towards the west—near or even in the church's tower, the most profane part of the church (Daun 2010, 90, 91; see also appendix 2).[93] The north, associated with the forces of evil (see page 59 above), was also the women's side of the church (Van Gent 2009, 33; Svahnström 1961, 60), and many churches include portals that were used by the female half of the congregation even into the modern period. But I do not believe that these visual messages were meant only for women. Even if they were, as mentioned above, men would assuredly have seen

[93] The orientation of churches towards the east—metaphorically towards Jerusalem—was common throughout medieval and early modern Europe, and the interior space of a church was highly marked and stratified. Only clergy were allowed in the chancel, where the altar was, while, as Lee Palmer Wandel notes, "The primary entrance into churches was usually on the western end; the faithful moved from 'the world outside' into consecrated space, facing towards the eastern end of a church, where the greatest density of meaning was to be found" (Wandel 2011, 24). As the diagrams in appendix 2 show, the churches on Gotland follow this basic pattern, with doors for the laity usually located towards the western end of the nave or even in the tower.

them as well. Moreover, although the state of preservation makes any general pronouncement uncertain, the emphasis in most of the Gotlandic visual narratives is not on damnation or punishment, but rather on the crime *in flagrante delicto*, namely the milking and churning. This points to underlying anxieties about social power and control, especially of women, but also anxiety about the presupposed controllers: men.

Most obviously, the legends of the milk-stealing witch as displayed on Gotland's church walls speaks to the proper, gendered behavior of women, namely by displaying its opposite: the witch, who commits adultery, denies God, and steals from her neighbors. Fear of women seems to run through these portrayals: after all, without the invisible (the demons) made apparent, there would be no distinguishing between the evil, adulterating witch and the demure wife. Dairy work had remained absolutely the province of women from the Viking Age into the twentieth century (Wall 1977, 4; Myrdal 2008, 64), and came to dictate the social-spatial organization of society—in eighteenth-century Sweden, for instance, "men would avoid even entering the barn" (Van Gent 2009, 95). It also affected perceptions of cows as particularly "female" animals, whereas horses (regardless of an animal's particular sex) were "male" animals, in much the same way as, as discussed in chapter 3, dogs were "male" animals, while cats were associated especially with women and often with witches. Speaking of nineteenth century Sweden, Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren write that "Horses were associated with the men cows with the women. Horses belonged to the public sphere, shown off with pride to the neighbors. Cows, however, were a part of the private sphere of home, the women's world" (Frykman and Löfgren 1987, 182).

This state of affairs seems also to have applied to medieval Gotland, where a statute was added to the law code in the early fourteenth century, "connected to the circumstance that the wife had no definite marital rights to the estate" (Myrdal 2008, 67)—underlining the wife's status as subordinate

to and dependent on her husband. In the event of her husband's death, however, the medieval Gotlandic housewife would receive some number of cows—up to fifteen—but only be able to take the same number of horses she had brought with her. "The idea," as Janken Myrdal explains, "is that she managed the cows and thus had a right to part of the herd, but not to the horses, which were managed by men" (Myrdal 2008, 67). In this way women's control over a vital source of the economy, butter, and ultimately cows, is emphasized as a fundamental part of Gotlandic society. The visual resonance between the cows and the demons, who often share the same bovine horns and are occasionally the same color[94] in the Gotlandic (and, generally, Nordic) murals is therefore suggestive: women, familiar with cattle as keepers of the dairy, are equally familiar with demons, these depictions suggest. This is a literal illustration of what was discussed in chapter 3, namely, the shrinking space between the demonic and the animal worlds and between the animal and human worlds, with women as the fulcrum between all three. The placement of several of Gotland's milk-stealing witch scenes—especially in Öja and Näs churches—would have tarred all women with this fear; the resonance between female church goers and the milk-stealing witch as they walked directly under her depiction seems designed to produce such anxiety.

Nevertheless, particularly in the later period—and it is important to recall that these images continued to be viewed for centuries after their production—the same milk-stealing witch scenes that spoke to female behavior may have come to implicate masculinity as well. Speaking of Protestant Germany, which maintained close cultural ties with Scandinavia generally and Gotland specifically, Lyndal Roper explains that "the effect of evangelical advocacy was to propose a vision of masculinity which was as unitary as its ideal of femininity. The real man was a household head, a

[94] Even more frequently, on Gotland, the witch's dress is painted the same color as the cow, thus emphasizing women's affinity with and even resemblance of these milk-producing animals.

little patriarch ruling over wife, children, servants, journeymen and apprentices" (Roper 1994, 46). This model was explicitly adopted in Denmark, which of course officially governed Gotland until 1645; as Nina Javette Koefoed, writing about the Danish reception of Lutheranism, notes, "Luther talked about obedience towards both parents, but only of the authority of the father, indirectly pointing to the wife as equal to her husband in honor, but part of a hierarchical system in which only the husband possessed authority" (Koefoed 2018, 326). The demons pictured in the milk-stealing witch murals are, in contrast, both emasculated (in both a literal sense and as the witch's servants) and sexually threatening, taking the husband's place at his wife's side and, later, literally riding her. In other words the witch on the one hand, by directing the emasculated demons, has assumed an unfeminine amount of control over her male partners; on the other, the demons assert the sexual prerogatives that rightly belong solely to her husband. It is worth reiterating here that many of the demons in Passionsmästaren's share features with the anti-Semitic depictions of Jews in the same churches—and in late medieval anti-Semitism, Jews were assumed to be hypersexual and perverted. Women who left their husbands for the embrace of demons were, of course, witches, to be outcast by the community; but their uncontrolled actions spoke very poorly of their husbands as well. A man who had lost his wife to the Devil had also lost control of his farm, his household, and his honor.

We might take a moment to compare these scenes of implicit adultery, and its ramifications on the construction of masculinity, with another secular legend painted in other medieval Scandinavian churches, that of Sko-Ella. As discussed by Stephen A. Mitchell, this character receives her payment because she successfully destroys a marriage:

> The devil had long hoped to stir up trouble between a married couple and engages Sko-Ella as this helper. . . . She tells the wife in the couple that her husband has been unfaithful and that the wife can prevent future philandering if she cuts off a lock of

> his beard at night. Sko-Ella then tells the husband that his wife is planning to kill him at night with a knife. He is thus prepared when she approaches him at night to clip his beard and kills her. The devil, given that he believes Sko-Ella is actually worse than he, fears giving her the reward [of shoes] and does so only at the end of a long pole. (S. Mitchell 2011, 137)

In addition to the allegation of adultery, the tale underlines sexual anxieties with the purported semi-magical "cure" of slicing the man's beard, an act that clearly symbolizes emasculation. Although Sko-Ella does not use magic, her deceitful murderousness and the tale's reliance on sexuality color her as "witchy" (see also Brauner 1995, 74–77). In this case, too, then, we have a popular legend illustrated on church walls that points to anxiety about male power (and the related characteristic of male sexual virility) as well as female appropriation of male sexuality. Men do not appear in either of these scenes, Sko-Ella or the milk-witch: the realm of the diabolic, like the dairy, seems wholly female. Yet their very absence marks these scenes as sites of male fear: illustrating women's dairy work makes the usually unseen visible, and illustrating the normally invisible demons makes this unseen, regular feature of women's life terrifying.[95] To be proper patriarchs, husbands must somehow convince their wives to avoid the wiles of the Devil. This of course was true throughout Scandinavia, but may have yet particular resonance on Gotland, which, as documented above, seems to have maintained a particularly patriarchal society, "a society more dominated by males than in other parts of Scandinavia" (Svedjemo 2014, 200, after Lerbom 2003, 85). And yet, as in Finnmark, men were frequently not around to supervise: if not fishing or working on trading ships or in Visby, they were—as Rebas suggests—fighting for the endless succession of the island's rulers. Their absence must have produced some anxieties about the state of their farms and households, left by

[95] According to Janken Myrdal, women in preindustrial Sweden might let cream sour for "up to a week" prior to churning it, so that butter churning would probably have been at least a weekly, if not more frequent, occurrence (Myrdal 2008, 69).

necessity to the control of their wives—and this absence was realized in depictions of the milk-stealing witch, left alone with her demons.

## Overly Familiar: The Witch's Familiar and Adultery

The theme of adultery is realized in Gotland's depictions of the milk-witch in the presence and behavior of her attendant demons. These monstrous but male figures are shown in a variety of postures, contrasting with the still, staid images of the saints that line the walls (and which sometimes are placed directly above them, as in Ganthem) and again resembling the sometimes frenzied movement shown by Jesus Christ's Jewish tormentors in the contemporary Passion scenes (see fig. 5.3). In their hectic activities, poking at cows, gossiping with or perhaps indoctrinating the witch, and even riding her into hell, the demons' constant movement seems to countermand the injunction of the Bible to take a day of rest on Sundays, the very day when most people would view these images. The stoicism displayed by the saints—usually pictured with the instrument of their martyrdom—and even that of the suffering Christ presumably is meant to be admirable, as the demons' contrasting, frenetic action is meant to disgust.

These demons became characters in the sexualized, visual language of witchcraft developed most productively in late fifteenth-century southern Germany (Zika 2007, esp. 11–17). I have argued elsewhere that Scandinavian images of the milk-stealing witch should be understood as a kind of Nordic dialect of what Charles Zika termed the "visual language" of witchcraft, which came to its fullest fruition just a few years later in Germany (Rose 2015; Zika 2007, esp. chapter 1). This language not only diabolized but also sexualized the witch, with implements like cooking forks and peels symbolizing phallic appropriation and unbridled female sexuality (Rose 2015, 31; Zika 2007, 120). In the milk-stealing witch murals, the butter-churn lasher plays this role: "As with the Continental distaffs, brooms, and cooking forks, the plungers represent the witch's habit of

inverting a feminine, housewifely activity into something masculine and actively sexual" (Rose 2015, 39). In contemporary demonological theory, many witches were women whose insatiable sex drive drove them into the embrace of the Devil, a notion most famously emphasized in the *Malleus Maleficarum*, and many of the demons who appear in the milk-stealing witch murals can be understood as not just the witch's supernatural power source but also her mate. The many instances of demons riding the witch, or clinging to her shoulders, resemble in reverse the far more explicit examples of witches riding devils on the Continent (Rose 2015, 30, 37–38). It is perhaps for this reason that the women's punishment is so sexualized; not only are they usually naked, but they are frequently the subjects of sexual abuse, for instance in Gerum on Gotland and—farther afield—Marie Magdalene church in Ryomgård, Denmark (fig. 3.2) and Dannemora church in Uppland, Sweden (Rose 2015, 38–39; see also Daun 2010, 88–89, Haastrup 1992, 204–205, and S. Mitchell 2011, 184–185).

One of the ways these demons are meant to show their true character, however—and one of the ways in which they differ from the anti-Semitic depictions of Jews in the Passion scenes—is their animal hybridity. As discussed in chapter 3, in the late Middle Ages the demonic and animal worlds were being drawn closer together, and the hybrid began to appear as the realization of concern about the need to keep animal and human separate; by the early modern period, even being frightened by an animal while pregnant could result in the child having animal features (Gélis 1991, 56; see also chapter 20, "Where Does the Beast End and Man Begin?," 255–269). The demons interacting with the milk-witches on Gotland thus represented not just adultery but another sexual sin, one often treated in the laws of the time as being just as bad if not worse: bestiality. Even metaphorical bestiality—that is improper sexual behavior, such as that indicated at Gerum (discussed below)—could result in monsters (Gélis 1991, 55). In other cases, hybrids were

understood as the literal embodiment of this sin, the union of human and animal; owing probably to the underlying distress about policing the boundaries of divine humanity (as discussed in chapter 3), a conviction of bestiality might result in the executions of both perpetrators, both human and animal. According to one mid-seventeenth-century Artois jurist cited by Robert Muchembled, execution of the animal had a humane element, seeking to relieve the creature's "horror and memory of the act," but according to Bruce Boehrer animal execution for manslaughter or bestiality was "often justified on the basis that the offending animal was an instrument of evil spirits" (Muchembled 2003, 95; Boehrer 2011, 23). The distinction between these contemporaneous views in the early modern period—animal as dumb, suffering victim and animal as demonic seducer—reveals the conflicting approaches to animals in general, and helps illuminate the extent of anxiety surrounding peoples' interactions with animals. Muchembled explains that the crime of bestiality was gendered: "Man corrupted his nature by putting his semen into the belly of beasts, but it was women who committed the most dreadful sin of all by giving themselves to an animal and then carrying within them the hybrid that resulted" (Muchembled 2003, 85; see also Östling 2006, 116). We can therefore witness in the church murals both the genesis and potential product of improper human interaction with animals, the result being purely demonic.

Indeed, adultery in general was a major theme of Nordic beliefs and legends about witchcraft, despite the general lack of sordid descriptions of orgiastic sabbaths that characterized Continental legends during the period of witchcraft trials. It is visible, for instance, in the Finnmark trials, in which the Devil does sometimes take animal form (as discussed in chapter 3) but more frequently appears as a man—or as a hybrid. Black-furred as an animal (unlike the red demons on Gotland), the Finnmark Devil favors black clothes as a man. These can be deceptive; Synnøve Johansdatter in 1678 said that he was "meget Smucht Klæd" ["very handsomely dressed"], though the claws on his

hands and feet—and the fact that he appeared after she tried the craft on livestock—are obvious clues that the stranger's sartorial elegance was merely a disguise (Willumsen 2010a, 338; 2010b, 338). Several women described the Devil as a man wearing black; that this should not have been taken in and of itself as unusual is suggested by Malene Jakobsdatter, who in 1663 noted that Satan "haffde Suartte Kleder paa sig, Saasom en anden Christen Mands Persohn" (Willumsen 2010a, 267) ["was dressed in black, just as any other Christian man would be" (Willumsen 2010b, 267)]. It is not altogether clear what it means when less effusive women simply describe the Devil as a "black man," as for instance when Guri from Ekkerøy says "waar Fanden wdi en Mands Lignelse och waar megit Suart" (Willumsen 2010a, 220) ["the Devil was in the likeness of a man, and he was very black" (Willumsen 2010b, 220)]. Hans H. Lilienskiold's summary uses different language, but it is no clearer: "…kom Fanden som en stor, sort mann" [the Devil came as a big, black man] (Lilienskiold 1998, 192). It is possible that calling the Devil "a black man" means that he has black hair, similar to how contemporary American language might simply use "blonde" or "brunette" as a metonym for person with fair or brown hair, respectively—or how, closer to the mark, "black" (*svartr*) is used in the Icelandic sagas to refer to hair or eye color (Wolf 2006, 65). It is also possible, though I think it unlikely, that the phrase refers to race, that is, that the Finnmark accused were envisioning the Devil as a non-white person. Most likely, in my opinion, the term *does* refer to skin color or general aspect, but means here a bluish-black, a color associated in Scandinavia since the medieval period with corpses, the unquiet dead, and malevolent supernatural beings of all types—including the Christian Devil (Wolf 2006, 67–68, 72). In contemporary Swedish folklore, witches themselves sometimes appeared blue-black; we may even see a depiction of this in Yttergran Church (fig. 5.4), which shows a succession of black-skinned witches flying to meet the Devil at Blåkulla—the traditional Swedish witch sabbath-site whose name, "Blue Hill" in English translation, hints at the same association (Östling 2006, 82–83, 91). The depiction of the Devil at Yttergran, large and seated, recalls another

*Figure 5.4. Witches meeting the Devil and receiving witch's ointment from his horn. Yttergran church, Sweden. Photo by Stephen A. Mitchell.*

Finnmark witch's description of the Devil as a large man who walked into the cow byre and sat himself on the milk stool (that is, the seat used when milking cows) to talk to the confessing witch, Margrett Jonsdatter (Willumsen 2010b, 243). Here, the Devil—though male, as ever—flouts the traditional gendered nature of the cow byre, which was off-limits to men. The intrusion not only signals the threat the Devil poses to gendered order, but also the assumed intimacy he has with the witch, one inappropriate to anyone not her husband.

It is a similar intimacy between the witch and her attendant demons that we witness in Gotland's milk-witch murals, and a similar intrusion of demonic masculinity into the feminine arena of the dairy—despite the different modalities and contexts of the sources. On Gotland's church walls, as frequently in Continental depictions of witches, the milk-witch appears outside, in a wilderness—

that is if any identifying features of her surrounds appear at all. At Endre and Bäl churches, for instance, grass and hillocks can be seen, suggestive of an outdoor area. While reasonable for milking cows (although of course this could also be done indoors), this is not a realistic depiction of churning; this work would presumably have been done in or near the house or dairy buildings. It is however a visual representation of the witch's dismissal of the boundaries that defined and supported social structures on Gotland and elsewhere in the early modern period, a mirror image of the Devil who walks inside of women's homes in Finnmark. Here, rather than dutifully working at home, the witch improperly works outside. The setting may even obliquely reference adultery. According to Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren, nineteenth-century rural Swedes had sex outside, even married couples: "Lutheran morality had permeated people's view of sex within marriage to the extent that it was felt proper to conceal it from the other members of the household" (Frykman and Löfgren 1987, 208). Whether or not such was the intention of the murals' commissioners or painters, as the Reformation wore on and "Lutheran morality" permeated through society, viewers may have come to make the connection between the outdoors and women behaving inappropriately with (demonic) male visitors, while the animality of the demons may have suggested the extent to which the milk-witch, through her implied adultery, threatened the fundamental structures of society.

## Masculinity and the Milk-Witch

In the reformed theology solidified by Martin Luther, spiritual emphasis shifted away from the church as such and towards a more individualistic relationship with the divine. Patrick Collinson explains:

> The sacramental economy of the church together with the hierarchical priesthood, guardians of doctrine and of the souls of the church's members, was radically undermined, since in Luther's perception the mass and all other devotions were

> "works" with a false motivation. . . . This was to condemn and secularize much that had been thought "religious": mysticism, monasticism, virginity; and to endorse and sacralize much that was worldly: daily occupations however insignificant, marriage and parenthood, government, even war. (Collinson 2001, 259–260)

Yet this "vocational" theology was a double-edged sword. Freedom, as Janis Joplin sang, is just another word for nothing left to lose; and without the church as caretaker, your soul was, perhaps, both freer and more at risk. Men were now responsible for the worldly and religious well-being of both themselves and their households, and to lose control of any of it meant a corresponding reduction in manliness. As Lyndal Roper concludes, "Masculinity…, for the archetypal virile entrepreneur of the early modern period, was intrinsically bound up with honour, the name, access to treasure and the control of other people" (Roper 1994, 138). Control of "other people" meant, of course, first and foremost, the wife, whose purported lustfulness, credulity, and natural weakness of faith made her particularly vulnerable to the Devil's seductions; yet whose business was, by custom and economic necessity, largely out of sight.

The emerging Protestant focus on the family unit, led by a patriarch, was nothing new in Gotland, as previously discussed. However, though perhaps subtle, the changing emphases in conceptualizing masculinity in the late medieval and early modern periods generated significant anxieties surrounding gender constructions. The various essays in a collection edited by Scott H. Hendrix and Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *Masculinity in the Reformation Era*, point to the myriad ways these anxieties developed. As the editors note in their introduction to this anthology, one general conclusion the volume reaches "is the near-universality within Europe of normative ideals for the comportment of men and women and the binary tendency of these ideals. . . . Practicality and necessity, on the other hand, produced noticeable departures from dictated norms" (Hendrix and Karant-Nunn 2008, xvi). In other words, the increasingly rigid ideation of "man" and "woman" crashed into the practical realities of daily life, a situation bound to produce tensions both societally and individually. These

were, moreover, not as separate then as they might be today, as Karen E. Spierling details in her contribution. "The challenge…," she writes, "was how to reconcile this vision of 'obedient and humble…mild and communal' masculinity with the more traditional emphasis placed upon the demonstration of virility, participation in violence, and the protection of one's family name and honor" (Spierling 2008, 102). As the state expanded its power over daily life, being a good citizen, a good Christian, and a good husband and father became public as well as private endeavors; Scott H. Hendrix mentions that one prominent Protestant pastor—Johann Bugenhagen, who operated in northern Germany and Denmark for most of his career—"believed that a man's duty to his family also entailed responsibility for the community and its stability" (Hendrix 2008, 80). "In the early modern period," Hendrix goes on, "for men to marry was at the same time to take on the social burden of upholding the structure and values of the community" (Hendrix 2008, 81). In this light, we might consider the images of the milk-stealing witch anew.

In Näs church on Gotland, a rather poorly drawn example nonetheless takes a prominent place on the column dividing the nave from the tower, thus literally protruding into the church's space (fig. 4.5; see appendix 2). Remnants of Passionsmästaren's trademark series suggests that the Passion scenes were level with the milk-witch; for men entering through the southern door, the eye would have perceived this most holy of messages as visually contiguous with the witch's scandalous and Satanic activity: a mythic, masculine ideal and a direct, immediate, and "real" challenge to the developing construction of masculinity are thus starkly presented. Näs's milk-witch tableau consists of two preserved scenes, one, on the right, shows the witch milking a cow while a demon leans over the animal. Whitewashing obscures the remainder of the image to the right, but to the left is a familiar view of her punishment: now naked and loose-haired, the woman is ridden like a horse on all fours by a demon who bears more than a passing resemblance to the demon who stands with the

cow, now wielding a club above her head. A bridle seems to gag the woman, who faces the audience in the only outward-looking part of the image. The posture may be read as a cry for help, but may have been intended as a warning for the women who would have passed directly under this image on their way in and out of church. The same scene, even more poorly preserved, is visible just to right of the (only) church portal for laymen at Gerum church (fig. 4.6). Here again, the woman stares out towards the church parishioners, while a second devil prods at her rear, a scatological gesture suggestive of bestiality and unorthodox sexual activity—precisely the kind of sex that sixteenth-century reformers judged subversive and dangerous.[96] For heterosexual men in the mid-sixteenth century, viewing such scenes might have raised discomforting feelings of arousal (James Mitchell has referred to other images of demonic copulation as "a kind of permitted pornography, morally sanitized by their association with witchcraft" (J. Mitchell 2008, 14))—a dangerous sensation in a time when even clergymen were subjected to lust and had to marry in order to control the impulse to sin (Karant-Nunn 2008, 172; Hendrix 2008, 76). They may equally have reminded these men of their duty to keep their wives in order, no small task when women's work in the dairy was physically removed from men's work, whether in the fields, on the ocean, on the battlefield, or in construction.

During the sixteenth century, both men and women found their means of expressing their gender, their social value, and their identity constricted. Alice Lyttkens notes that "[Reformationen] samtidigt berövades kvinnan sin möjlighet att jämföra sig med Guds moder och de kvinnliga helgonen, hon berövades också möjligheten att höja sig över andra människor genom att själv bli

[96] The "riding" scenes at Näs and Gerum churches may profitably be compared to similar scenes in other Scandinavian churches. At Dannemora church in Österbybruk, Uppland (Sweden), for instance, a naked woman on hands and knees, with loose hair and reins around her head, is being ridden by one devil and herded by another; the pole held by this second demon is suggestively placed at her rear. The woman holds an oversized "smörtopp," or molded butter pat, announcing to the audience that she was guilty of magical milk-theft. Such similarity bolsters the conclusion that the woman pictured at Gerum is also a milk-witch.

helgon eller Kristi brud" [The [Protestant] Reformation denied women the ability to compare themselves to God's mother or female saints, while simultaneously denying them the chance to elevate themselves over others by becoming saints or nuns]. Effectively, she continues, Martin Luther replaced Mary's worship with marital submission, so that in 1548 the (now reformed) church manual for marriage stated specifically that women were made for the sake of men (Lyttkens 1972, 137–138). Nevertheless, Scott H. Hendrix and Susan C. Karant-Nunn conclude flatly that, for men as well in the sixteenth century, "patriarchy was burdensome" (Hendrix and Karant-Nunn 2008, xvii). According to early Protestant preachers:

> (1) men were regarded as vulnerable to sexual provocation; (2) they required sexual expression and restraints on that expression; (3) the responsibility of providing for a family was judged a burden; (4) men needed to be supported emotionally and domestically; and (5) in some cases at least, men were held to higher standards than women and were more readily blamed. (Hendrix 2008, 74)

Women were universally declared the weaker of the sexes in all ways, but because of this, men were burdened with the responsibility for the well-being of the household, even though wives were of necessity given the daily running of it. In this asymmetric ascription of power, in which the wife's "dominion is circumscribed, and even within the home it is delegated to her by her husband, who supervises all that she does" (Karant-Nunn 2008, 173), it is tempting to consider the relationship between God and Satan, who in typical Christian theology is permitted to act on earth only at God's direction. As a result of this ultimate domestic authority, men accrued power at the cost of what Hendrix and Karant-Nunn term their traditional "masculine liberties" (Hendrix and Karant-Nunn 2008, xvii); Karen E. Spierling notes that "the Genevan authorities sought to make masculinity inseparable from disciplined, pious Reformed Christian belief and behavior—both in public and in private" (Spierling 2008, 117). The burdens of patriarchy may have been particularly felt on Gotland; as early as the thirteenth century, Gotlandic law—in distinction from other regional law codes—

"emphasiz[ed] the father's duty of support" for any illegitimate children (underlining the degree to which dairying was understood as women's work, such a father was instructed to provide cows to illegitimate daughters (Myrdal 2008, 67–68)). The Gotlandic male, despite the economic and perhaps social requirement that he farm, trade, fish, and work in Visby or for its captains, thus also had to control and manage his wife, defend his farm, and maintain the honor of not just himself but also his household.

Throughout the Protestant sixteenth century, preachers joined with secular authorities to regulate religious, social, and gender identity. And, since men were deemed more responsible and wiser than women, strictures fell in some cases more forcefully on them. In fact, Hendrix argues, with an assist from Lyndal Roper, "If Protestantism reinforced patriarchy by 'entrusting husbands with functions which had previously been divided among husbands, rulers, and priests,' it not only made life harder on women on the home, but it also increased the burdens placed upon men" (Hendrix 2008, 83). One of these burdens related specifically to being what is today often referred to metonymically as "the breadwinner." Hendrix, referring to another Protestant preacher named Veit Dietrich, elaborates:

> The duty of being what is now glibly called the "provider" was noted by several writers. Dietrich named it the peculiar burden to be shouldered by married men; it was the punishment for his sin just as the woman's punishment was to bear children in pain. Few records report men's reactions to this burden. The stage was set, however, for many conscientious men to feel inadequate as providers or to chafe at jobs they disliked but out of necessity still had to perform. (Hendrix 2008, 79)

In such a setting, the long-standing practice of relying partially on women's work—butter-making—for survival and economic sustainability must have provoked frustration, suspicion, and, of course, anxiety about being a man.

## Legends and Control

Milk-stealing witch legends speak broadly to the need to regulate the female body, which in its ability to become pregnant, swell, and contract, and with its tendency to produce excess and potentially dangerous fluids like menstrual blood and milk, is always potentially polluting. Lutheran theology was explicit about the need to constrain human behavior, particularly sexual behavior and especially female sexual behavior, by confining it within the structure of a marriage. It then became the duty of men to control their wives, the duty of men to regulate women. Milk-stealing witch legends feature men as frequently as they do women, often placing male figures in the role of hero, uncovering the witch's identity, ruining her trollcat, and sometimes punishing the witch. As Robert Muchembled says:

> It was the duty of men to contain women's worst excesses by a combination of moral and practical obligations. A descent into the demonic was always possible. It had to remain exceptional, or else it would have posed more generally the problem of the inability of men to control their mother, their wife or their daughters. Witchcraft was only an extreme case, an example of what happened if the controls on female nature were relaxed, and it graduated from bad to evil. (Muchembled 2003, 95)

It was the duty of all men to patrol the behavior of all women. This could, of course, be personal; many oral legends of milk-theft revolve around the victimized farmer reasserting control over his farm by identifying and nullifying the witch, but several legends also feature male passers-by who, upon spotting a trollcat, chase it back to its owner and take "appropriate" action, whatever that might be. On Gotland, even in legends, execution was rarely the outcome, but exile (as for example in the legend quoted below) and public shaming do appear; in one narrative from 1866, the victim manages to lasso the trollcat and follow it home, whereupon "måste hon ge kons egare en 1/2 tunna rågmjöl, att han skulle tiga med saken; men han talade ändock om det för hela socknen" (Säve 1959, 223) [she (i.e., the witch) had to give the cow's owner a half-barrel of rye flour, so that he would be

quiet about the affair; but he told the whole parish about it anyway]. By exposing her crimes to the parish, the farmer has reasserted control over his farm and also humbled the witch, whose bad behavior might thereafter be monitored by the entire community—and particularly, one imagines, by her husband and the other men of the area.

It was also the duty of men, broadly speaking, to patrol the boundaries of the human/animal worlds, by, among other things, hunting. Indeed Bodil Nildin-Wall and Jan Wall distinguish between the milkhare or trollcat, on the one hand, and, on the other, the trollhare, a supernatural hare found in the woods, "where it annoys and fools men out shooting" without, apparently, stealing anything or belonging to anybody (Nildin-Wall and Wall 1993, 67–68). The crucial factor differentiating the two types of demonic hare, according to Nilden-Wall and Wall, is the function of the story, related to whether the story's climax is concerned with the actual shooting or with the discovery and possible punishment of a witch (Nilden-Wall and Wall 1993, 70). However, while they correctly point out that the shooters in all legends are male, I do not agree with their blanket statement that "observations of the creature while it is sucking cows or seen near them at pasture or in the byre are mostly made by females" (Nilden-Wall and Wall 1993, 68–69); several legends suggest men are just as likely—in fact perhaps more likely in some areas—to spot and attempt to deal with trollcats.

According to Nilden-Wall and Wall, "cats and magpies are animals which are normally never shot," yet these are two of the most common forms witches shape-shift into in order to steal milk from their neighbors' cows; typically, as the man who shoots one of these creatures wounds it and later discovers the identity of a witch because the woman has a wound exactly corresponding to the gunshot—as illustrated in the Danish legend quoted at the start of chapter 3. Nilden-Wall and Wall continue: "it is frequently stated that shooting [cats and magpies] spoils the gun and should never be attempted. So the man who wants to render the witch in shape of cat or magpie harmless, has to

break a well-known and widely spread norm of behavior" (Nilden-Wall and Wall 1993, 72). I suggest that by breaking this taboo, the men of these legends are upholding another, more fundamental role, that of the protector not just of the immediate community (as Nilden-Wall and Wall allow) but also of humanity *per se*, that is humanity as distinct from animality.[97] I have discussed earlier why cats and corvids like ravens and crows may have been particular favorites of witches, as animals that are fundamentally liminal, both in behavior and with regard to their not-quite-domestic and not-quite-wild status; magpies (another corvid), are similarly liminal, being almost entirely wild but famously bold, inquisitive birds, whose penchant for stealing human artifacts is known throughout European folk tradition. In adopting either form, the witch has betrayed not just her community but her species, and the men who restore the shape-shifted women to their human forms (and punish them with a gunshot, thereby symbolically killing the animal form) re-establish godly order on the world, with men asserting control over the animal world and women at the same time.

Legends like these could therefore attract a type of hypermasculine valence, emphasizing the duties of men to protect "the people," in a variety of configurations. The need to conduct literal oversight, and the challenges that can present, is evident in several Gotlandic milk-witch legends, such as the following:

> Det hände sig i en Gård att korna der i hela trakten alldrig mjölkade med skick. Men engång, då karlarna voro i skogen, fingo de se Bjäran sitta och di en ko i hagen. Bjäran tog genast till flykten; men karlarne hastigt efter den lastade bjäran, att hon ej fick dölja sig: för "hade augu kummä af dä, så hade dä försvunnä!" Kommen till ett knuthus i grannlaget, kröp bjäran in mellan stockarne i huset; der karlarne, som skyndade in i stugan, sågo henne redan stå och urlasta sig i en ditställd balja. Karlarne grepo då bjäran, bundo ett strumpeband om hennes hals, och ledde det fram till husets ägarinna, ett gammalt "qvinfolks-menskä", som just då satt bakom en stol och

[97] It is interesting that guns, often a phallic symbol of masculine power, break if normal cats and magpies—"female" animals—are shot at. This widespread belief may also point to anxieties about the power dynamic and relationships between the sexes.

> mjölkade ur fyra strumpebands-ändar, fastbundna i "stol-baken", mjölk i en balja. — Kärringen och hennes man blefvo der för tilltalade och förvista till Småland, deras hembygd. (Säve 1959, 220–221)
>
> [It happened once at a farm that the cows in the whole area were never in a condition to be milked. But one time, when the men were in the forest, they caught a glimpse of the bjära sitting and suckling a cow in the pasture. The bjära at once took to flight; but the men hastened after the laden bjära so that it couldn't hide itself: for "if eyes were taken off of it, so could it disappear!" Arriving at a nearby shed, the bjära crept in between the logs of the house; the men, who ran in to the building, saw it standing and unloading into a bucket. The men grabbed the bjära, tied a stocking around its neck, and led it to the house's owner, an old hag who sat just so on a stool and milked the ends of four stockings that were fastened to the chair back, milk in a pail. — The old woman and her husband were accosted and exiled to Småland, their homeland.]

Here, the men have to literally keep sight of the trollcat—a logical requirement of hunting anything, but also reflecting an early modern understanding of sight as one of the most powerful of senses, coded masculine and divine (Muchembled 2003, 99).[98] It is notable that the heroic Gotlanders exile not just the milk-witch but also her husband, who has evidently failed in his duties of patrolling his wife's behavior, a failure perhaps ascribed to their "otherness": the miscreants are not Gotlanders but Smålanders. These Gotlanders have therefore successfully defended not just their own homes but the broader community from a common threat, and asserted Gotland's distinction from the mainland to boot.

## Conclusions: The Milk-Witch as Bad Wife

The milk-stealing witch, as painted on Gotland's walls and as she appears in later oral legends, is not *just* a milk-stealing witch, but also represents a shameful failure on the part of her husband, whose honor was inextricably linked to the people he managed—including his wife—and the operation of

[98] The ability of trollcats to vanish unless one's eyes are on them speaks also to the occult powers of vision, the flip side of which of course are the widespread beliefs in the evil eye—the possibility that a person's envy or ill-will can be effectual simply through a glance. Indeed, in twentieth-century Bocage witchcraft belief, "Even more than speech or touch, the witch's look has devastating effects" (Favret-Saada 1980, 115).

his farm. A milk-stealing witch threatened all manner of structures that supported society, including the line between human and animal, but one of the most pertinent was her real or implied adultery, with its implications not only for female but also proper male behavior.

As a character, the milk-stealing witch spoke not only to women but also to men. In the early modern marriage of church and state, the Lutheran construction of a family represented in microcosm the construction of the nation-state, which in turn represented on earth the heavenly order: "a wife's obedience to her husband corresponds to her husband's obedience to secular authority and to the obedience of Christians to God" (Brauner 1995, 78; see also Wandel 2011, 128). As God was to the universe so the king was to his kingdom, and so the patriarch was to his household. The witch was inimical to all of it, but as a member of a household she was, even after the period of the witch trials, in the first instance a threat *to* the household. As a symbolic if not actual adulteress—an anti-wife—she was the responsibility firstly of her husband and secondly of the entire community—and particularly the men of the community, who would be forced to step in if her husband failed to keep her in check. As Sigrid Brauner writes, summarizing the views of Martin Luther and other Protestant reformers, "The family hierarchy both mirrors and reproduces the social and religious order; therefore, any disruption of family is a serious threat to society" (Brauner 1995, 78). Painted in an era of broad societal stress, one that, according to Hain Rebas (2012), had severe effects on Gotland's men and their sense of self, the milk-stealing witch murals perhaps came to speak more broadly to anxieties of masculinity, particularly adultery and control over the household and farm. As the Reformation and Lutheran morality was adopted in the countryside, similar anxieties were eventually expressed also in oral legends, recorded centuries after the milk-witch first appeared on the church walls.

# CHAPTER 6. TROLLCATS AND MILKHARES:

## The Witch as Anti-Mother

Of the extant images of the milk-witch on Gotland's churches, only one—Öja—clearly features a bjära (pl. bjäror), the Gotlandic version of a trollcat. This includes the now-covered images at Vamlingbo, which we can glimpse thanks to a watercolor drawn in 1894 and a photograph taken before 1895 (see figs. 4.7 and 4.8), when the church was whitewashed (Stolt 2015, 78, 81). Other potential candidates include the demon beneath the cow at Bäl church (fig. 4.1), tentatively identified by historian Börje Westlund as a bjära despite its large size (pers. comm., 2018) and—even less probably—the demon clinging to the woman's shoulders at Endre church (Daun 2010, 80; fig. 4.2). Across the Nordic region, of the sixty-three churches that Jan Walls finds to feature the milk-stealing witch, only fourteen or fifteen also feature trollcats (Wall 1977, 22, 66 (table 5); the discrepancy concerns a depiction in Lojo church, Finland). It seems that the late medieval churchmen who commissioned the milk-stealing witch murals, including those on Gotland, were not particularly interested in trollcats. This is interesting because in later legends, including those collected on Gotland, trollcats feature prominently in milk-witch legends. The fact that they appear at all in late medieval murals, coupled with their appearance in early literary accounts of magical milk theft, indicates that trollcats could not have been entirely unknown in milk-witch legendry of the time: their relative absence in the Gotlandic depictions (and generally) may thus reveal a disconnect between folk legends of the milk-stealing witch and elite legends of the milk-stealing witch.

It is important to remember, in this context, that on one level, these illustrations of the milk-stealing witch were nothing more than reminders. In the case of Endre church, for instance, the entire legend is suggested with a single image (fig. 4.2), that of a woman milking a cow accompanied by a

pair of devils.[99] This swift production functions as what Lauri Honko, following Henry A. Murray, calls a "mythic imagent"; it does for the milk-stealing witch legend what visual religious symbols (like a crucifix) do for believers. In Honko's words, such imagents comprise "the minimum amount of information that the human mind needs in order to create a recognisable version of a myth," or, in this case, legend (Honko 1984, 50). It is impossible to know positively what these legends were on Gotland at the turn of the sixteenth century, but given the large role played by bjäror in later oral tradition, and the probability that they were known prior to the images painted on the church walls, it is possible that bjäror were similarly common characters in contemporary oral Gotlandic legend. It is also possible that the animalesque demons, meant by the church authorities to literally show how all witchcraft was ultimately the result of compacting with Satan, suggested bjäror to the viewers, if in somewhat attenuated fashion. This may be particularly true of those acting rather like bjäror, such as the demon vomiting into the butter churn at Norrlanda church (fig. 4b).

In this chapter, I turn to Gotland's bjäror and, to further contextualize the bjäror, Nordic trollcats more generally, asking what their popularity particularly in the oral tradition means. I demonstrate that, as witches' familiars elsewhere, they reflect anxieties—conscious or unconscious—about motherhood in particular and reproduction generally. They also reflect anxieties covered previously, namely women's work and the permeable boundary between animal and human. While they can be found occasionally on the walls of Gotland's churches, their relative infrequency may reveal disinterest on the part of late Catholic clergy to some of these questions, but as the Reformation wore on and expectations regarding motherhood shifted, more and more milk-witch legends came to focus on these creatures, literal embodiments of fears about mothers, reproduction, domesticity,

[99] It is of course possible, as Johannes Daun and Ann-Sofi Forsmark also note, that there were once other milk-witch scenes in Endre that have since been painted over (Daun 2010, 81; Forsmark 2006, 291n3).

and animality. Before delving into how legends of trollcats can reflect anxieties about motherhood, women's work, and the ways in which men and the church should control those aspects of women's life, I will examine in more detail what a trollcat is.

## The Forms of a Trollcat

Trollcats vary not only by name by also in appearance throughout the Nordic region and over time. The one depicted in Öja on Gotland resembles a small dog; in one of Gotland's few witch trials, of Brita Biörns in 1737, the accused explained that a bjära was an imp (*sattyg*) that looked like a cat (Nilden-Wall and Wall 1996, 51).[100] In Jan Wall's tabulation, of the fifteen instances of milk-stealing creatures he identifies in Nordic churches, four appear as hares and two as cats; nine—including, according to him, Öja—have *obest. gestalt*, 'undetermined forms' (Wall 1977, 66, table 5). According to Bodil Nilden-Wall and Jan Wall, however, aside from the southwest of the Nordic region, "the supernatural milk-thief is mostly said to look like a grey ball or a spool" (Nilden-Wall and Wall 1993, 69). The Icelandic *tilberi* falls into this broad category and the Gotlandic bjära often does as well, although other forms are also mentioned; for example, Sofia Svensson (b. 1845) told P.A. Säve in 1872 that "Bjäru är såsom en grode till att se, men hennes spar i snön äro lika som efter små barnfötter" (Säve 1959, 222) [a bjära is like a frog to look at, but its tracks in the snow are more like those of small children]. Another informant told him, on the contrary, that the footprints of a bjära look like cat paw prints (Säve 1959, 221).

However, according again to Bodil Nilden-Wall and Jan Wall, the most common term for the trollcat is actually milkhare, and as this name suggests one of the most common forms for a milk-

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[100] P.A. Säve chanced to interview Brita Biörns's great-granddaughter in the late 1860s and early 1870s, who was known as "den yngre Hejnumkärringen," the Younger Hejnum Witch. See Ragnar Bjersby for the details of this family, including a transcription of Brita Biörns's trial (Bjersby 1964, 208–226).

stealing witch or her familiar to take was a hare (Nilden-Wall and Wall 1993, 67). The popularity of this particular creature deserves some scrutiny; like the cat discussed previously, hares clearly *were* a witch's animal in the Nordic folk taxonomy of creatures.

Some of the early modern distrust of the hare likely emerged, ultimately, from its poor reputation in previous centuries. Deriving from classical associations, early in the Christian era the hare became "a symbol of promiscuity and homosexuality," to such an extent that in the Middle Ages "its name served as the common word for a homosexual" (Dines 2004, 74). Indeed, common medieval folklore held that "due to their peculiar sexual inclinations, hares grew a new anus each year" (Salisbury 1994, 82). As a result, some churchmen advised against eating hares, for fear that the human feaster would "take on the same sexual attributes" (Salisbury 1994, 44). In this, of course, such concerned churchmen were also following Scripture; both Leviticus and Deuteronomy forbid eating the hare as an unclean animal (Lev. 11:6; Deut. 14:7). None of these injunctions worked; as the Romans had before them, Europeans continued to hunt and eat hares throughout the medieval and early modern periods. That misgivings about hares persisted, however, is significant, and the association of the hare with immoral sexuality meant it was easily mapped onto the figure of the hypersexualized witch stereotype in the early modern period.

As with cats, hares' natural behaviors and inclinations may have made it an attractive animal companion for the witch. In important ways, hares differ morphologically and behaviorally from rabbits: hares are larger, more solitary, and do not burrow, though they may take advantage of burrows dug by other animals (Clutton-Brock 1989, 146; Hackländer and Schai-Brun 2018, 189). Moreover, as with the cat, hares tend to be nocturnal or crepuscular, but can occasionally emerge in full daylight, particularly in the summer months. Also like the cat, hares tend to frequent the edges of human habitation, in their case literally: "set-asides or fallow land are preferred consistently,

whereas settlement areas are avoided" (Hackländer and Schei-Braun 2018, 188–189); in other words, hares are likely to be found in meadows, unutilized cropland, and grassy areas. Catching sight of a hare could be unfortunate in the early modern period; "In Lorraine," Jacques Gélis reports, "a pregnant woman who encountered a hare—an unlucky animal—after sunset must not touch her face, or her child would be born with a hare lip" (Gélis 1991, 56). Klaus Hackländer and Stéphanie Schai-Braun note that "European hares feed predominantly on cultivated crops, weeds, and grasses," and that even when hares "venture deeply into forests"—which is rare—they tend to stick "to clearings and forest roads" (Hackländer and Schai-Braun 2018, 188). Hares, then, appear sporadically, haunting the edges of human habitation, and are probably not infrequent visitors to cow pastures in southern Scandinavia, (the northernmost part of the European hare's historic range; the mountain hare, however, which prefers forests, appears throughout the region[101]). In all of these ways—their willingness to "invade" other animals' burrows, their secretive action at night, with occasional (and perhaps ill-fated) glimpses during the day, the liminal arena of their activities, their presumed sexuality, and of course their tendency to "steal" crops—hares, like cats, present a natural companion animal to the witch. In a 1978 article discussing, in particular, witch beliefs in Yorkshire, Kathryn C. Smith also alighted upon the confluence of hares and cats as witches' familiars, remarking, "Perhaps the nature of hares and cats might throw some light on the reason for their role in popular myth making." It is unclear if she reports her own beliefs—largely consistent with the medieval and ancient traditions—as she continues, "Certain features of the hare provoke interest: for instance, unusual gynaecological aspects, double pregnancies, males giving birth; its shriek is

[101] It is worth noting that the mountain hare, like the European hare, "is primarily nocturnal, but shows increased daylight activity in summer." Its sexual habits are—though not as dramatic as medieval folklore would have had it—notable in the context of hares' association with witchcraft: "Females dominate males" and "copulation can involve five or more males and a single female" (Angerbjörn 2018, 215). Such behaviors, if observed, might have reinforced ideas about female witches' presumed hypersexuality, their appropriation of male sexual power, and the orgies that were featured in Continental witchcraft belief during the early modern period.

disturbing in its resemblance to the cry of a child, it displays odd behaviour at certain times" (Smith 1978, 101).

There is another way in which hares and cats resemble each other, namely their physical size and shape. It is notable that the hare (which Fred Kleiner calls a rabbit) and cat pictured in Albrecht Dürer's engraving, *The Fall of Man*, are virtually mirror images of each other and—but for the presence of perspective—touching each other (fig. 3.3). Their postures are nearly identical, and just as the cat's tail identifies it with Eve, the hare's position, with its head pointing the viewer towards Eve and one ear hidden behind her leg, similarly suggests a resonance. It is not a coincidence, in my view, that Dürer's hare here resembles even more closely the cat included by Dürer's pupil, Hans Baldung Grien, in the latter's famous woodcut of witches cavorting in the woods (*The Witches*, fig. 6.1). Baldung Grien, a Strasbourg-based artist who

*Figure 6.1. Hans Baldung Grien,* The Witches. *Woodcut, 1510. Metropolitan Museum of Art.*

seems to have been particularly fascinated by witchcraft and whom art historian Charles Zika credits above all others with fashioning "a visual iconography of witchcraft" (Zika 2007, 13), included cats in several of his influential woodcuts of witches, including *A Group of Witches* (copied by Urs Graf in 1514), in which a cat in the bottom right corner appears to be vomiting. Undoubtedly the cats, like the other animals Baldung Grien includes in his depictions of witchcraft, "define[] the women's activities as bestial," (Zika 2007, 13); moreover, given the cat's association with female sexuality (as mentined earlier), their presence further underscores the already lascivious portrayal of witches in Baldung Grien's images. They also point to the witches' "savage domesticity," to reiterate Bobis's words, that is, their ability to appear tame while being wild. Yet they may also, far more literally, depict witches' familiars. The vomiting cat in *A Group of Witches* is highly suggestive of the behavior ascribed to many trollcats, which vomit their ill-gotten gains into the witch's churn upon returning home. This is clearly depicted in Ösmo church in Nynäshamns municipality, for instance (see fig. 5.1), in Söderby-Karl church in Norrtälje municipality (fig. 6.2), and in Norrlanda church on Gotland, where the "trollcat" is better described as a demon (see fig. 4.4b).

The cats in Baldung Grien's depictions, realistically depicted albeit with a rather menacing mien, coupled with the grotesque remains of a child presumably slain by the witches in the *Group of Witches* woodcut, also point to a reality, that cats (and hares) are roughly the same size and shape as human babies, and when a cat permits itself to be held it seems reasonable that one would attempt to cradle it like an infant. Thus witches replace slain or aborted human infants with (more or less demonic) animals—it is easy to view the bjära pictured in Öja church as precisely the kind of small dog who might play this role. The idea of a "pet" as a named, beloved animal who lives in the home was becoming more common at the time; the word *pet* in English first appears in 1539 in a Scottish account. According to Bruce Boehner:

> To begin with, the word appears to have referred primarily to lambs, specifically 'cade' lambs, cast off by their ewe and therefore raised by hand. Introduced into the household for their own survival, these animals could become an object of particular attention, care, and affection, entering thereby into a special relation to the human begins on whom they depended. (Boehner 2011, 21)

Then as now, such creatures could play the role of infants or small (human) children, and the affective emotional attachment could have been both powerful and—in an era that strove mightily to distinguish "human" and "animal"—powerfully disconcerting. Prior to the improvement and popularization of technology like breast pumps, animals—presumably small animals, as friendly to humans as possible—were sometimes used to suck excess milk out of a mother's breasts (Purkiss

*Figure 6.2. Milk-stealing witch in Söderby-Karl church, Sweden. A trollcat is visible behind the witch, vomiting into a milk pail. Photo by Lennart Karlsson, courtesy of the Swedish History Museum. Medeltidens bildvärld 9551813. CC-BY.*

1996, 133; Radbill 1976, 26);[102] this technique assuredly fed anxieties about the distinctions between pets, human infants, and witches' familiars.

The connection between flatly demonic familiars and more ambiguous, distressing "pets" arises elsewhere in Nordic witchcraft. In fact, the precise situation of a cade lamb as described by Boehner seems to arise in the Finnmark trials. In 1663, an accused woman named Sigri Olsdatter told the court about another suspected witch, Guri, who:

> engang Kommen end [sic] til hende, och Begiert at hun och hendis mand, wilde giffue hende Jt lider Lamb, som gich vdi stuffuen, Huilchit hun tog op vdi sin Arm och strøg det paa Røgen, Da Negted de hende ded, Och der hun ded iche bekom, Da en fire Dage dereffter, døde Lammit, Mens om hun war Aarsage derudi Kunde de det…iche sige. (Willumsen 2010a, 209)
>
> once came to her asking her and her husband to give her a small lamb that was kept inside the house and which she picked up and stroked over the back. They refused her, and when she did not get it, the lamb died some four days later. However, they did not know whether she was the cause. (Willumsen 2010b, 209)

This small, inconclusive episode is parallel to another case that took place in Finnmark a decade earlier; in 1652, Bårne, wife of Villat the Bell-Ringer, told the court that Smeld Ane gave her some porridge and asked her to pet Smeld Ane's black cat, which she did while eating the (witchcraft-infected) porridge (Willumsen 2010a, 110; 2010b, 110). In both cases, the opportunity to literally pet a creature inside the home was apparently memorable and noteworthy and in both cases the interaction is associated—though not definitively—with the diabolical activity surrounding it. It is entirely believable that Smeld Ane had a particularly tractable or beloved cat in her household, willing and desirous of human contact. However, given that pets were unusual, it is also likely that the possibility of interacting with an animal in this fashion—to no purpose beyond tactile and

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[102] According to Radbill, dogs are a cross-cultural favorite species of women who need to "draw" their milk; he mentions also that, in America, piglets and lambs have been used as well (Radbill 1976, 26–28).

emotional pleasure—was a memorable and perhaps slightly unsettling event, easily woven by the accused Bårne into the traditional narrative about eating witchcraft that, by 1652, was well known (see chapter 2). As Bobis puts it, “Le problème fondamental posé par l’animal familier et, en particulier par le chat, est bien la difficulté de distinguer l’amour que l’on peut licitement porter à l’animal, frère de l’homme dans la Création, de celui, impur, de la créature” (Bobis 1993, 77) [The fundamental problem posed by the pet, and particularly the cat, is the difficulty of distinguishing love that one might licitly bring *to* the creature, as a brother of man in God’s Creation, from that that one might illicitly feel *for* the creature (emphasis added)]. Animals that inspired affection, and perhaps encouraged treatment similar to that one would give a human infant, possibly played an important role in the development and continuation of legends of witches’ familiars, perhaps especially in legends of trollcats, which—like real cats—had a traditional affinity for milk.

However, as mentioned above, very frequently the trollcat does not resemble a known creature at all, but is merely a kind of self-automated ball of yarn. Much energy seems to have been spent in envisioning not just what the trollcat does but how it was made; folk legends and beliefs often include instructions on how to create such a creature and descriptions of what it looks like. On Gotland, P.A. Säve collected a number of statements in the nineteenth century about the bjära, including: “‘Bjäru’ ser stundom ut som ett 1/2 alns stort grått nyste” [a bjära sometimes looks like a 1/2 *aln* [1/3 meter]-big gray ball of yarn]; “‘Bjäru’ görs af en ‘sopare’-qvast” [a bjära is made out of a broom]; a bjära is made “af en tom strumpa” [out of an empty stocking]; and “Bjäru göres af ‹strump-fötlingar›, kjortel-fållar, som utgöra kroppen; väfsolfver, som utgöra tarmarna, och afbrutna stickor=fötterna” [a bjäru is made of “sock-feet,” bits of skirt fabric make up the body; yarn, which are the intestines, and broken knitting needles are the feet] (Säve 1959, 219–220). It should be noted that in all cases the materials are ones that women in particular would have worked with,

manipulated, and discarded on a daily basis: the basic (and base) material needed to create offspring, whether licitly for a human baby or illicitly for a demonic familiar, is feminine. A fundamental distrust of women's generative abilities runs through legends of and beliefs about the trollcat: if not controlled properly by men and churchly doctrines, women's bodies and the materials they produce could overflow, contaminate God's ordered world, and provide inroads for the Devil.

Trollcats were made out of not just feminine materials, but especially those that had been improperly discarded; Jacob Petter Enderberg (b. 1849),[103] for instance, told P. A. Säve that "Afklippta särk-fållar och pärk-stumpar brända i båda ändarna, skall man [ej] kasta ut utan på elden; ty de duga att göra Bjärar af" (Säve 1959, 221) [Cut-off shirt fabric and *pärk*-sticks,[104] burned at both ends, should not be thrown out but rather thrown onto the fire; otherwise they might be used to make bjäror]. These basic materials could, in other words, contaminate the province. Similarly, once constructed, the trollcat also contaminated its environment with its own discarded materials, specifically its droppings, one of the most widespread features of milk-witch legends. In 1690, a man named Knut Larsarve in Roma parish on Gotland found pieces of bread, butter, and curdled milk in his meadow, and associated these items—which "smelled very bad" when disturbed—with old rumors of bjäror living on a neighboring farm. The case ended with his neighbor Nils Karby being fined, not for operating bjäror but for illicit, magical healing, but, as Bodil Nildin-Wall and Jan Wall write, "är det inte Nils Karbys verksamhet som botare och blodstämmare som är av det största intresset, utan den starka tro på tjuvmjölkande väsen som kommer till synes i protokollet" (Nilden-Wall and Wall 1996, 49–50) [it is not Nils Karby's work as a healer or blood-stancher that is of greatest interest, but rather the strong belief in milk-stealing creatures that comes through in the trial

103 See Bjersby (1964, 139–146) for more on Jacob Petter Enderberg and his brother, Lars Niclas.

104 These are short sticks used for the Gotlandic game of pärk.

records]. It is notable that both disputants here are men, despite the strong associations of bjäror with dairying and women; here we have an example of Gotlandic men representing—and defending—the whole of their farms, including property and womenfolk—and again, as in the legends discussed in the previous chapter, the "protagonist" is male. Folklorists and some community members as well sometimes equate trollcat-droppings with actual fungi or other natural phenomena, as Reimund Kvideland and Henning K. Sehmsdorf do: "The gelatinous substance of certain fast-growing fungi (fuligo septica), as well as the white foam left by the spittle bug, were often associated with the droppings of the troll cat" (Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1988, 178; cf. Säve 1959, 221), but in folk narrative such evidence—like the trollcat itself—can often be used in counter-magic against the witch, to force her to reveal herself, hurt her, and/or rob her of her powers. These are not mutually exclusive outcomes. One common method of dealing with a milk-witch after the discovery of trollcat leavings is to burn it, which forces the witch to turn up, often in distress. Thus, in Gotlandic folk belief:

> För att få veta bjäranas ägare, skall bjäre-smöret brännas på en kors-väg med nio slags ved. Den första som då kommer under brännandet är Bjärans ägare, hvilken då kommer sanslös och under förvändning efterfrågar något bortkommet t.ex. får, getter, m. m. (Säve 1959, 221)
>
> [To discover the bjära's owner, the bjära-butter should be burned at a crossroads with nine types of wood. The first person who comes by the fire is the bjära's owner, who will show up senseless and as an excuse ask after something that is lost, for example sheep, goats, etc.][105]

Burning is of course a symbolically potent means of eradicating contamination, but in witchcraft legends it carries the added weight of having been used in the past to rid the world of witches themselves, as well as the contamination they represented. The act of forcing the witch to reveal herself and "ask after something that is lost" similarly rights the world, restoring order to people's

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105 See P11–P21 (af Klintberg 2010).

possessions and the organization of the basic materials of household economies—as for instance sheep and goats. In doing so, we see, yet again, the ways in which legends about the milk-witch and the trollcat help describe ways in which control can be maintained or, in this case, regained from the witch, who seeks to overturn the "natural" order, whether in terms of household economics or, perhaps even more sinisterly, motherhood.

## Motherhood and Mating: The Milk-Witch in the Reformation

As Charles Zika has demonstrated, the visual stereotype of the witch as developed in late fifteenth and sixteenth century German merchant cities like Nuremburg and Strasbourg was heavily sexualized (Zika 2007, esp. chapter 3, "Witches' Cauldrons and Women's Bodies," 70–98). While the overt sexual depiction of witches never became a major feature of Scandinavian witch legends, in either elite or folk circles, it was certainly present implicitly—in for example the emphasis on churning in milk-stealing witch images, as mentioned above. This emphasis on the sexuality of the witch was but a slight adjustment to the native perception of witchcraft in the Nordic region; throughout the medieval period, as Stephen A. Mitchell has argued, "the core reality of Nordic witchcraft" was "essentially gendered" in the legal tradition: "women were consistently tried for magical acts that had to do with the manipulation of sexuality," although here the crimes generally have to do with causing infertility and impotence rather than promiscuity (S. Mitchell 1998, 16). This disconnect between precisely how the witch sexually transgressed in Nordic perceptions of witchcraft is similar to the situation Lyndal Roper discovers in southern Germany during the Reformation, where, despite the prevalence of explicit and sexual imagery of witches in woodcuts and elsewhere, witchcraft accusations typically "concern suckling, giving birth, food and feeding; the capacities of parturient women's bodies and the vulnerability of infants" (Roper 1994, 202). In other words, the visual preoccupation with frankly pornographic illustrations of witchcraft overlap but do

not mirror witchcraft beliefs as expressed in oral legend and accusation, in neither Scandinavia nor the German heartland of witch iconography.

As a theme, motherhood appears fairly rarely in the visual art of witchcraft, with one notable exception appearing in an English pamphlet from 1579, *A rehearsall both straung and true, of hainous and horrible actes committed by Elizabeth Stile*. The pamphlet includes a drawing of a witch, "Mother Dutten," feeding her familiar, "a Spirite or Feende in the likenesse of a Toade, and fedeth the same Feende…with blood whiche she causeth to issue from her owne flancke" (*A Rehearsal* 1579, 9–10; Thompson 1956, G225.0.1) (fig. 6.3). One Gotlander ("Soph. Svensson," or Sophia Svensson) told P.A. Säve in 1872 that a trollcat ("bjäru," in this case) left footprints like a small child's, and that it needed to be fed—also like a child—porridge and milk.[106] The English example underlines the demonic nature of the familiar by specifying its unwholesome diet of human blood; in Sophia

*Figure 6.3. Image of "Mother Dutten" feeding her toad-shaped familiars. Detail, "*A rehearsal both straung and true, of hainous and horrible actes committed by Elizabeth Stilt, alias Rockingham, Mother Dutten, Mother Deuell, Mother Margaret, fower [four] notorious witches.*" Pamphlet, 1579, London. British Library.*

[106] Her full name and the date of her interview are according to Bjersby (1964, 356).

Svesson's tale, its demonic nature is instead underlined by the location of its meal "i gödselhopen," that is, on the manure pile (Säve 1959, 222). In Nordic traditions, familiars often appear specifically in the context of the milk-stealing witch. Although some Nordic milk-witches may shapeshift into a hare or other animal to steal milk themselves, they often create a trollcat to do the deed instead, but, importantly, they cannot always create it completely by themselves. Instead, they commit a kind of adultery with the Devil, becoming his "mate" and creating a kind of demonic "child."

Whether the witch creates the trollcat independently or with the Devil's assistance, in both cases the trollcat "mother" transgresses God's ordered method of human procreation. While disagreements about the precise mechanics of pregnancy and birth persisted through the medieval and early modern periods, generally speaking learned opinion followed Aristotelian theory and held that a man's semen was primarily responsible for creating an ensouled baby, while the woman simply provided the basic matter and a space for it to grow (Tuttle 2010, 66–67). Thus a woman who created her own living thing, without a man's help, created a monstrous thing, neither human nor with a human soul. In instances in which she enlists the Devil's help, Satan becomes the thing's father. To Deborah Willis, the intrusion of the Devil on "the mother-child dyad suggested by the pairing of witch with familiar" indicates elite, rather than folk, beliefs: "Elite beliefs about the witch reimagined her as part of a perverse but patriarchal family, in which the mother's powers were clearly inferior" (Willis 1995, 91). If so, this is one instance in which folk legend proved receptive to elite configurations, as several legends and charms are fairly explicit about the relationship. In one Finnish legend (translated by Jan Wall into Swedish) about how to create a trollcat from 1789, the witch is called the Devil's wife:

> Bär smör, bär mjölk.
> Bringa smör, bergets gubbe,
> surmjölk, djävulens hustru.

Rädda surmjölken ur knipan
och mjölken ur det suras våld. (Wall 1997, 104)

[Carry butter, carry milk.
Bring butter, mountain gnome,
sour milk, to the Devil's wife.
Save the sour milk from trouble
and the milk from spoiling.]

Less explicitly but with a similar dynamic, in one Swedish charm recorded in 1908, the witch is supposed to recite the following, "samtidigt som man droppade sitt blod i puken" [while dripping your own blood on the trollcat]:

Jag ger dig blod,
fan ger dig mod.
Du skall för mig på Jorden rinna,
och jag skall för dig i helvetet brinna.
Du skall fara över land och löte
och samla både mjölk och flöte. (af Klintberg 1965, 87)

I give you blood,
Satan gives you power.
You shall run for me on earth,
I shall burn for you in hell.
You shall travel through forests and fields,
gathering both milk and cream. (Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1988, 39.2 (176–177))

In both cases, not only is the woman usurping—disastrously—the generative power given to men, and thereby perverting God's design, but she is also committing adultery with Satan. In the second charm, Aristotelian procreative theory is precisely represented; here as in "nature," the female provides basic matter (blood) and the male provides life, or soul—but of course in this case the process is perverted and sacrilegious, and results in a demonically powered cat- or hare-shaped creature. The witch effectively conceives a child, which brings her milk, by congress with the Devil, a parody of the proper woman who has a child with her husband and provides the infant with milk herself. These more recent and geographically dispersed examples help to demonstrate the

*Figure 6.4. Photo of milk-witch in Färentuna church. Photographer and date unknown. Swedish National Heritage Board 3543-134.*

conservative nature of legends and suggest that social anxieties continued well past the medieval and early modern periods.

Similar themes can be found in the much earlier, visual depictions of milk-witches in late medieval Scandinavian churches. One particularly clear example can be seen in Färentuna church in Uppland, whose *vapenhus* (a type of foyer) includes an image of a milk-witch apparently shaping a trollcat with the aid of a demon, while another demon clings to her back (fig. 6.4). Ann-Sofi Forsmark's description of this image is worth quoting in full:

> Denna bild visar en kvinna, klädd i huvuddok och klänning med förkläde och korta stövlar, som böjer sig över en djurliknande skepnad. Kjorteln når bara till mitten av vaden, och man skymtar hennes lätt särade, bara ben. Hennes båda händer är placerade på djurets rygg. Hon omfamnas bakifrån av en djävulsfigur med åsneliknande öron. En långnäst, röd djävul är placerad mittemot henne och håller fast djurets huvud. Djävlarna ramar in kvinnan och styr skeendet—med den ene djävulens hjälp kan hon skapa väsendet, med den andres kontrollera det. . . . I nästa bild i serien är bjäran nästan utplånad, men de kloförsedda vassa baktassarna syns tydligt och markerar att en förändring skett. (Forsmark 2006, 293)
>
> [The image shows a woman, wearing a headdress and dress with an apron and short boots, bending over an animal-like creature. Her skirt only reaches as far down as the middle of her calf, and one glimpses her slightly parted, bare legs. Both of her hands are placed on the back of the creature. She is embraced from behind by a demonic figure with donkey-like ears. A long-nosed, red devil stands opposite her and holds the animal's head tightly. The devils frame the woman and seem to control the events—with the help of the one devil she can make the creature, and with the other's help she can control it. . . . In the next picture in the series, the bjära has been nearly effaced, but sharp claws on the rear paws are clearly visible and indicate that a transformation has occurred.]

As Forsmark makes clear, the involvement of the devils in this creation of a trollcat is unmistakable, and colored with suggestions of wantonness (as the woman's parted, bare legs indicate) and themes

of animality. Less obviously, but also suggestive of a demonic parody of motherhood, Öja church on Gotland shows us an improper inversion of motherhood: the housewife is embraced by demons while her (or their) demonic child suckles from a cow, to bring milk to its "mother" (fig. 4.11).

As discussed in the previous chapter, adultery continued to be a major theme of milk-witch legends throughout the Nordic region. In these legends, we also sometimes see the witch's trollcat or familiar appearing, interchangeably and sometimes simultaneously, as demonic animal, infant, and lover. For instance, one succinct mid-nineteenth century legend from Iceland reads:

> Einu sinni var bóndi fyrir austan að sækja kýr sínar sem voru úti. Hann sá hvar tilberi var að sjúga bestu kúna. Bóndinn elti hann þar til hann kom þar sem tilberinn átti heima og skaust hann þar upp undir húsfreyjuna. Bóndinn stökk af baki, gekk að konunni og batt öll fötin að henni fyrir neðan tilberann og var hún svo brennd. (Sagnagrunnur 1205[1])
>
> [One time a farmer was traveling east to look for cattle of his that had gone wandering. He saw that a *tilberi* was suckling from his best cow. The farmer chased it as the *tilberi* ran home and scooted up under the housewife's skirts. The farmer jumped around behind the woman and tied her clothing around her beneath the *tilberi* and so she was burned.]

Here, as is typical in such legends, the *tilberi* (Icelandic trollcat) behaves like any domesticated animal would when frightened: it runs home, thus exposing its owner's identity. It moreover behaves like a young child, running not just home but to its mother—a moniker explicitly applied in other Icelandic legends in which the witch is called a "tilberamóðir" [tilberi-mother] (e.g. Gunnell 1999, Sagnagrunnur 3585, 6740). Shy or frightened children will often cling to a parent's garments, but the fact that the tilberi dives *under* the witch's skirts in this and other legends speaks to the perverted relationship the woman has with her familiar. In Iceland, milk-stealing witches often sport a witch's teat on their thigh, to which the tilberi attaches and sucks her blood (like a demonic inversion of an infant), but the Icelandic tilberi is also phallic in appearance: "*Tilberi* eller *snakkur* beskrivs som ett avlångt föremål, något böjt i ändarna, och liknas oftast vid en vävspole. Den uppges vara grå till

färgen och den sägs mestadels ha en mun vardera änden. Väsendet kan också beskrivas som tjockt och uppblåst och liknas då i ett fall vid en bälg" (Wall 1978, 53–54) [The tilberi or snakkur is described as an elongated object, slightly curved at the ends, and is often likened to a distaff. It is said to be gray in color and often has a mouth at either end. The creature can also be described as thick and bloated and in this case is likened to a bellows]. Diane Purkiss describes a cat-shaped familiar in an English trial who seems to have gotten the witch pregnant (Purkiss 1996, 139); clearly, throughout Northern European legend, a witch's relationship with her animal- or childlike familiar could be sexual as well as maternal. That the tilberi disappears under its mother's skirts therefore hints again at the fundamentally sexualized nature of the witch, her insatiable sexual appetite, and her proclivity for adulterous relationships.

## The Familiar as an Infant

The familiar is a demonic mirror of a human child in a host of ways, but can also encode desires and wishes, as indeed legendary beliefs generally can. Simply as a helper, an obedient laborer who provides food, the familiar can easily be read as a hungry or economically struggling woman's wish-fulfillment, who may wish for aid in her daily work and the easing of stress from needing to provide food and other goods for herself and her household. In addition to milk, Nordic trollcats could also collect other goods, particularly ale and, in Iceland, wool. It is also easy to imagine that fantasies of familiars—and the indulgence of animal pets—reflected a biological urge to nurture small creatures, an urge supported and indeed required by post-Reformation culture:

> The sixteenth century also saw changes in ideological constructions of the "ideal" mother. By the latter half of the century, in conduct literature and in Protestant handbooks for Christian households, a new emphasis was placed on the wife's role as nurturer and caretaker of small children, at the expense of her other duties as household manager or producer of domestic goods. . . . Motherhood, for these authors, was no longer simply one of the many important tasks in a domestic

> economy but a woman's "special vocation," drawing upon her "natural" virtues of compassion and pity and her biological capacity to breast-feed. (Willis 1995, 17–18)

For women instructed that their primary function and identity was motherhood, either treating small animals like infants (i.e., turning them into pets) or developing fantasies of infant-sized familiars might be a natural extension of these theologically informed self-perceptions. It is worth reiterating the words of Nils Blomkvist here: "a Gotlandic housewife would never inherit any part of the farmland or be incorporated into the family, except through any sons she might have" (Blomkvist 2010, 212). For Gotlandic housewives, whose positions in their husbands' home was even more precarious than elsewhere and depended almost entirely on their production of children, fantasies and fears of children might have been particularly acute. It is, therefore, not surprising that we would see the occasional bjära on church walls and hear regularly of bjäror in oral legends.

Deborah Willis similarly concludes that many stories of familiars represent women's fantasies of having small children, but ascribes such desires primarily to older women, the kind who were often accused of witchcraft in her study area of England:

> …if we read the "confessions" of women accused of witchcraft as to some degree revealing beliefs they, or others, may have actually held and enacted, it is possible that these women find in their supernatural children—who are fed blood of the witch's body as well as human food, wrapped in wool and tucked into pots to sleep for the night, fussed over and called pet names—substitutes who fill the gaps left by the earthly children they no longer have to care for. (Willis 1995, 34)

In an age when infant mortality was high, however, I find it just as likely that these fantasies would have been more widely shared, by younger women who experienced difficulty getting pregnant or carrying a fetus to term, whose infants had died, and even perhaps by those whose infants had survived; certainly the physical difficulties (sleep deprivation, for instance) might have encouraged either conscious or unconscious ideation of a more tractable, obedient infant, maybe even one who provided rather than required milk. Even among women with healthy infants, the idea of an infant-

like creature to whom they might show boundless affection might have appealed; "in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, moralists, educators and doctors…opined that [mothers'] indulgence was limitless and that their bringing up of the children was quite pernicious" (Gélis 1991, 183; see also Willis 1995, 18). Martin Luther believed that a woman who loved her children too well might be tempted into becoming a witch, desiring, for instance, to heal them by whatever diabolical means necessary if they fell ill (Brauner 1995, 61). Crucially, "for townspeople very conscious of their 'humanity', an overdemonstrative attitude of mothers towards their babies became a mark of 'animal' behavior" (Gélis 1991, 183). The animal familiar might thus embody both desires to unconditionally love a small, dependent creature and fears that such desires were illicit—even demonic. Unending cycles of pregnancy, birth, and nursing during a housewife's fertile years may well have prompted both anxieties about all stages of the process—expressed in terms of demonic infant-like creatures—or desires for a less bodily invasive version of small, animalistic children, ones that obeyed commands, were loyal firstly to their mother rather than a patriarch, and helped the household economy.

And yet, as Willis and, separately, Diana Purkiss point out, the familiars of witch lore are as often *disobedient* as they are otherwise, as liable to steal their mother/owner's food as to provide it (Willis 1995, 55–56, Purkiss 1996, 138–139). In this they are similar to the Devil, whose promises and gifts are false: "Gud bedre mig, for Løffte hand Loffuit, hand haff(ue)r holt ded Som en Hund, Som hand och er" (Willumsen 2010a, 260) ["Bless me, what promises he made, he kept them like a dog, which is what he is" (Willumsen 2010b, 260)], one accused witch in Finnmark despaired—demonstrating the unstable relationship between trollcat and mother and the dangers of trusting the Devil. Purkiss understands tales of disobedient, harmful, and sometimes downright murderous familiars as strategies of psychological transference: "Greedy and neglectful familiars mirror

maternal fears of child misbehavior; there was no place in early modern ideology for mothers to express feeling of hostility to children, but the witches' fantasies about their familiars may be a coded representation of their unspeakable fears and loathings" (Purkiss 1996, 138). It is worth remembering, in this context, that reliable birth control and abortion were far from the norm; repeated pregnancies, births, infant illnesses and deaths, coupled with constant injunctions to nurture children—but not too much, lest the child be spoilt and stunted and the mother turned to witchcraft—could easily produce the kind of emotional strain Purkiss envisions. The common, pan-European association of witches with infanticide and cannibalism may, sometimes at least, represent similar repressed fears and desires. Not coincidentally, female animals who ate their own young were also assumed to be victims of witchcraft or were associated with witches; thus the first witch in *Macbeth* adds "sow's blood, that hath eaten / Her nine farrow" to their gruesome pot (Shakespeare, *Macbeth* 4.1).[107]

During the Swedish Blåkulla trials, witnesses claimed that witches would copulate with the Devil and almost immediately give birth (without pain, in accordance with the *mundus inversus* theme of Blåkulla), whereupon "the resulting monstrosities" would be slain and boiled into the ointment that allowed the witches to fly (Sörlin 2008, 116). Given that much of the Blåkulla testimony was provided by children, we might here be seeing the kinds of transference of Freudian rage towards maternal figures described by Willis (Willis 1995, 43, 57). In this construction, the witch clearly represents an anti-mother, a mother who kills her own children. Although not as clear-cut, Gotlandic (and other Nordic) legends in which the trollcat ends up the downfall of its owner, whether through exposure and exile, magical neutralization, or even death, similarly reflect anxieties

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[107] Deborah Willis quotes this scene in connection with an episode of English witchcraft in which one woman blamed another for witchcraft that made her sow go mad, not letting her piglets suckle and attacking them instead (Willis 1995, 51).

about the degree to which mothers and infants are bound; both bad mothers and bad children are on display in these tales.

## The Familiar at the Breast

Legends of familiars could also allow women space to discuss and express their own fears of childbirth and child-rearing throughout the Nordic region. Breastfeeding, which could be physically painful and potentially, given the possibility of infection, dangerous, emerges as a particular focus of attention, especially in legends about trollcats—a natural association, perhaps, given the essential function of the trollcat to collect extra milk.

Breastfeeding was a heavily freighted activity that was celebrated and often featured in late medieval and early modern depictions of the Virgin Mary and yet was also (except of course in Mary's case) evidence of a woman's sexual activity and linked, in medical treatises, with that most impure of substances, menstrual blood. As a result, breastfeeding was an ambiguous activity. As Berit Åström explains, from the medieval period to the present day, "women have been told that it is not only desirable that they breastfeed their children, but imperative that they do" (Åström 2015, 575). And yet, as Åström documents, the same intellectual tradition that endorsed breastfeeding also routinely expressed misgivings about a system it saw as intrinsically flawed, misgivings that varied over time but that fundamentally express "societal anxieties about the unruly female body and a desire for its control" (Åström 2015, 574). In the medieval and early modern periods, for instance, colostrum was held to be impure and dangerous for the newborn to consume—and according to Diane Purkiss was known as "witch's milk," at least in early modern England (Åström 2015, 577; Purkiss 1996, 131). This and similar anxieties about "the poison bag of the female body" (Purkiss 1996, 132), particularly when it came to infants, were widespread.

It had been widely held since the medieval period that a mother's milk had been transmuted from her menstrual blood and purified, sometimes imperfectly, in her breasts (Åström 2015, 277; Purkiss 1996, 131; Gélis 1991, 169; Milliken 2012, 52). Concerns about the process were widespread, and sometimes resulted in women avoiding breastfeeding altogether. Jenny Jochens notes, for instance, that "at some point during the late Middle Ages,…Icelandic mothers came to consider their own milk inferior and ceased to nurse. Instead they fed their infants cows' milk and even cream and gave them meat and fish, pre-chewed and thinned with melted butter" (Jochens 1996, 212). The early modern witch represents one of the most extreme expressions of these misgivings. As Diane Purkiss has argued, the witch inverts the process of blood-to-milk conversion, feeding her infant-like familiars "impure blood" instead of mother's milk; the witch's body "is all poison" (Purkiss 1996, 134). All women, defective by nature, might fail to properly convert menstrual blood to breast-milk, thereby rendering it "a potentially fatal poison" for the infant (Åström 2015, 577), but the witch happily does the opposite, feeding her familiars not just blood but the especially impure blood that pools in the lower parts of the body, near the genitals and anus (Purkiss 1996, 134).

It is nearly impossible not to see what were very likely real fears about the dangers of breastfeeding in legends in which the trollcat kills its mother, such as the following:

> Kona ein var grunuð um að hafa tilbera. Eitt sinn er hún lagðist á sæng bað hún vinnukonu sína að muna að leysa ekki ofan af tunnu inni í búrinu sem bundið var um. Stúlkan lofar því en var svo forvitin að hún kíkir í tunnuna. Þaut þá grár hnoðri upp úr tunnunni og litlu síðar heyrðist hljóð frá konunni. Var þá tilberinn kominn á brjóst hennar og saug þangað til hún dó. (Gunnell 1999, Sagnagrunnur 2558[108])
>
> [A certain woman was suspected of having a tilberi. One time when she was in her lying-in bed she asked her maid to remember not to untie the strings around the barrel that was in the pantry. The girl promised not to but was so curious that she peeked inside the barrel. Then a grey mass jumped up out of the barrel and in little

[108] http://sagnagrunnur.arnastofnun.is/s/#legend/2558.

> time a cry was heard from the woman. The tilberi was at her breast and had nursed her until she died.]

This Icelandic variant also shows, less explicitly than fears about breastfeeding, concerns about birth (symbolized by the untying of a barrel, which then "births" a homicidal demon), and concerns about integrating another woman into a household. Some of the subversive messages about class that appear in other milk-witch legends as well are also present here: it is a maid, an employee, who uncovers the illicit secrets of her employer—secrets that may have contributed to the witch's presumed social and economic success in the first place. But the climax of the legend undoubtedly hinges on the tilberi nursing its mother to death. On Gotland, where it was crucial that women birth and raise a child, and more preferably a son, the anxieties surrounding breastfeeding, and child-rearing more generally, may have felt all the more acute.

## Contesting the Witch

Many, if not most, milk-stealing witch legends focus not on the milk-witch herself but on her discovery, and as in the example of the burning bjära-butter above, such legends often feature trollcats as both the evidence of her crime and simultaneously her undoing. Burning may echo, symbolically at least, the witch trials of previous centuries, but in in most milk-witch legends the driving force is often not to kill or even punish the witch, but merely to *identify* her—literally to (re)gain oversight of her—and thereby neutralize her power. In this sense, the legends play a didactic and reassuring role, arming community members with the knowledge that however destabilizing the witch might be, in practice she can be located, stopped, and deflated, reshaped into the housewife that she should have been all along. These legends nearly always reveal fractious faults within community power dynamics. The majority of discovery legends involve a man who discovers or reveals the witch's identity. Occasionally the witch's antagonist is female, but in those cases she is typically a maid, of lower social status than the witch herself (the men may be of any social status,

equal to, above—in the cases where he is a minister, infrequent on Gotland—or below, in cases where he is a farmhand). The heroes use a few means of revealing the witch's identity and thereby depriving her of power. Two of the most popular are *piercing* and *binding*. In both cases, I argue, the witch is symbolically and sometimes literally reshaped, her uncontrolled, diabolically maternal body transformed into that of a proper mother and housewife.

### *Piercing: Phallic Penetration and Control*

Jan Wall notes that in modern memorates in which people claim to have seen trollcats with their own eyes, the circumstances of the sighting differ by gender: women see them while milking, men while hunting (Wall 1978, 91; see also Nilden-Wall and Wall 1993, 68–69). An early example of this type of legend, recorded by Belgian-born Baudouin Rosse, comes from the Netherlands and dates to the early seventeenth century: here a soldier, while crossing a bridge into a city, was surprised by a sack rolling by itself across the bridge. Taking his sword, he clove the thing in two, releasing a flood of milk into the street (qtd. in Wall 1977, 91–2). The phallic penetration of a womblike creature halts the witch in her tracks, almost literally, and if in later legends the weapon has been updated to a gun, the motif of penetration remains.

Legends featuring neither witch nor trollcat but the butter they produce often include the same motif. On Gotland, "Det säges äfven…att om någon kärnar smör på mjölk, som Bjäran lemnat från sig, och skär i smöret med en magnètståls-knif, så skall blod komma att rinna derefter" [It is also said…that if someone churns butter with milk that the bjära expelled, and cuts into the butter with a knife made with magnetic steel, blood will start to flow from it] (Säve 1959, 219). This is a very widespread element of Nordic milk-stealing witch belief (af Klintberg 2010, P22), and reflects the close link developed in the early modern period between two female bodily products, blood and milk, products which could be poisonous and spread female contagion, into vulnerable children and

indeed beyond (Åström 2015; Muchembled 2003, 77–78). Not only are both of these products feminine, but both milk and menstruation directly signify women's sexual bodies as well. Menstruation is coterminous with fertility, a fact certainly known in early modern Scandinavia (as recorded matter-of-factly in AM434a, an Icelandic medical text from c. 1500: "No woman who does not menstruate may conceive a child" (Waggoner 2011, 25)). Milk, meanwhile, is produced by women only in the very late stages of pregnancy and while nursing. As mentioned above, the witch's poisonous body refuses the natural and reified process of converting menstrual blood into nourishing milk; her familiars instead feed on her blood.

In Scandinavia, the milk-witch's churn—a metaphor for her womb (Rose 2015, 40)—similarly perverts a process that should result in something nourishing. It should be noted that sometimes the witch need not churn the milk the trollcat brings at all: on Gotland, one of P.A. Säve's informants explained that "under hemspringandet [bjäran] kärnar mjölken till smör i sin sage" [while running home (the bjära) churns the milk to butter with its spit] (Säve 1959, 220). Neither the witch's body, her churn, her trollcat, or the products they produce, can provide anything, ultimately, other than (dangerous) blood, signal and symbol of misplaced and mistreated maternal power. Penetrating the trollcat or the butter—in other words penetrating the false stuff the witch produces—with knife, special steel, or gunshot, imposes masculine control and proper order on a feminine process of generation that has gotten out of hand.

This motif of penetration as restoring order also mirrors the phallic appropriation practiced by the witch in her production of milk and butter to begin with, in other words her refusal to act as passive "mother" and her improper and sacrilegious assumption of masculine generative power. Employing a trollcat was only one means of obtaining extra milk for herself. Another common method was known throughout the Nordic region and depicted in a woodcut illustration from the printed edition

of several of Johann Geiler of Kaysersberg's sermons on witchcraft, *Die Emeis*—a woodcut sometimes attributed to Hans Baldung Grien or his studio (Kors and Peters 2001, 237; fig. 6.5). As pictured, this method requires the witch to stick a knife or axe into a post or beam and milk the handle—in other words to violently penetrate something in service of their greed. Churning itself, as I and others have noted elsewhere, can easily be read as symbolically sexual: thrusting the lasher repeatedly through a small hole into a womblike churn and thereby making something new, butter, is a neat analog of sex and even birth. Notably, the churn displayed in murals of the milk-witch on Gotland's walls—and elsewhere—is often oversized and centrally located (Forsmark 2006, 294), emphasizing both the economic disruption caused by the witch and her symbolic, sexual transgression. By piercing the witch, drawing her blood, or splitting the laden trollcat, the (almost always male) heroes of milk-witch legends recover their masculine powers of generative penetration,

*Figure 6.5. Witch stealing milk via an axe-handle stuck in a post. Johann Geiler of Kayserberg,* Die Emeis*, 1516. Wellcome Collection, CC BY 4.0.*

demoting the witch into her proper, passive position of housewife and returning to men their supposed power to create and take life.

### *Binding: Female Work and Female Fabric*

Imposing (masculine) control over the milk-stealing witch does not always involve penetration. One large group of legends instead uses women's garments—of the same type that witches use to make trollcats—to bind them, sometimes quite literally. On Gotland, biting one's hem effectively allows the person to take control of the bjära, since—as stated in the following legend—they are made of the same material (note that two trollcat terms, *bjäru* and *pjäskå*, are here used interchangeably):

> "Bjär-Smör" brännes vid korsväg med nio slags "lau-vid" (löfved) och piskas med en tynne-käpp, då kommer [den] dit som har "bjäru", f. def., i sin tjenst. Så kom engång en rik bondhustru farande fram till korsvägen; men man låtsade då ingen ting. Men en gång så passade man ut henne, då "a pjäskå" kom och mammade (diade) kon. Den som egde kon bet då i skjortstjertfallden (-fållen), — ty "Bjäru" är gjord af en skjortfåall —, kastade ett band om hennes fot och följde henne hem. Då måste hon ge kons egare en 1/2 tunna rågmjöl, att han skulle tiga med saken; men han talade ändock om det för hela socknen.[109] (Säve 1959, 223)
>
> [Bjära-butter burned at a crossroads with nine types of hardwood and whipped with a switch, then the one who owns the bjäru (fem. def.) will come in its place. One time a rich farmer's wife came thus to the crossroad, but we pretended nothing was wrong. But once we met her and a trollcat [*pjäskå*] came and suckled the cow. The one who owned the cow bit down on the hem of their shirt—since a bjäru is made of shirttail hems—, threw a rope around its foot and followed it home. Then she had to give the cow's owner a half-barrel of rye flour, so that he would be quiet about the affair; but he told the whole parish about it anyway.]

The same technique is used in a different multiform from Gotland in which a female milkmaid is the one who spots a suckling bjära and magically freezes it in place by biting her apron hem; in this instance, however, the milk-witch pulls the apron out of the maid's mouth and both the witch and

[109] It is unclear who "pretended nothing was wrong" ("man låtsade då ingen ting"), and even if it is one or more people who did so; it is also unclear what *passade ut* ("en gang så passade man ut henne") means precisely.

her bjära disappear (Säve 1959, 219).[110] It is significant that the technique seems to work best if employed by a man; it underlines my suggestion that the binding of the witch symbolically restores patriarchal order. As governors of a household's economy, even in such a firmly patriarchal system as existed on Gotland, women had a great deal of power over the products of the household—particularly dairy products and ingredients like rye flour. These legends speak to a felt need to regulate this power, however, to maintain in the final analysis masculine control over the entire economic system, including women.

Women's clothing, of course, is one means of controlling and literally binding them, and a woman's "looseness" can still refer metaphorically to illicit promiscuity and unregulated behavior. In the iconography of witchcraft, witches are stereotypically shown with loose, flying hair, in direct contradiction of the proper housewife's tightly bound, braided hair, hidden beneath her headdress (Zika 2007, 21, 26; Milliken 2012, 55). So deeply was a woman's hair tied to her sexual identity that, according to Roberta Milliken, "once one notices [a woman's] hair being used to torment her, one can reasonably conclude that her sin involves sexual misbehavior" in European artwork (Milliken 2012, 5). It is worth remembering here that on Gotland at Öja, Norrlanda, and apparently Vamlingbo churches the milk-witches' hair is being used as reins as demons ride them into hell (see figs. 4.4, 4.8, and 4.11). Not only does this reference their implicit adultery, with their loose hair symbolizing their loose morals, but the fact that devils are gripping their hair—rebinding it, after a fashion—suggests that their morality is not just loose but inverted. Rather than residing properly under the control of their husbands, the witches have literally placed themselves under control of

[110] This legend is in fact a continuation of the narrative I opened my dissertation with. On the technique of biting one's skirt hem, see also motif P8, "Maid exposes herself to *bjära*" (af Klintberg 2010). Here af Klintberg seems to be suggesting that the exposure of the woman's genitals, in combination with biting her skirt hem, is magically effective. In this connection, see also Gunnell (2014, 143–144). The link between a woman's sex and her garments is thus underscored.

demons, who, riding them like horses, have transformed the transgressors into bestial, sexually exploited supplicants.

It will be profitable here to return briefly to the Finnmark witch trials. In 1689, a fourteen-year-old girl named Malene Olsdatter [Martte Olsdater] told the court the following about a neighbor woman, Brite Eriksdatter [Birgette Erichsdaatter]:

> Saaledes At hun gich i Fieren At hente en Kiøres Sand, da kom en Trold Kat rullende, som Var skabt som en Snelde fuld aff garn, Thych mit paa oc Smal til bege Endene, som Var sort, oc Rullet sig paa Sand Kieristen, en 2 a 3 ganger, oc Rullet Sig af igien naar hun Ville Slaa effter hannem, men dend tredie gang hun Ramte hamb med skuffelen gich hand i Støcher, o cud rand af ham som et grue af Melch oc blod, Men Skindet Lagde hun med Skuffelen paa Kiørsten, oc drog op med Kiøristen, oc da hunk om for Waardøe Michels dør, kom hans quinde Birgette Erichsdaatter udgaaende, oc Spurde huad tøsen giør, Huorpaa hun intet Suarede, dend tredie gang hun Spurte sagde hun, Slaar du mit Folch, det er min Søn du Slaar, du skal faa scham for det du Slaar ham, och i det For Suantes Trold Katten bort, Saa tog tøßen huen af hinde med den høyre haand som hun Ville Hafue til Vidne oc Sette huen under den Wenstre Arm, men Birgette tog huen fra hinde igien och skuede hinde of(ue)r Ende. (Willumsen 2010a, 367)
>
> […while [Malene] was down by the shore to fetch a cart of sand, a troll cat came rolling towards her. It bore the shape of a spindle full of yarn, thick in the middle and tapered at the ends. It was black, and it rolled up onto the sand sieve two or three times, then rolled off again when she tried to hit it. But the third time, when she rammed it with her shovel, it broke, and milk and blood welled out of it, but she picked up the skin with her shovel and laid it on the sieve. Then she went up again, dragging the cart with her. And as she passed Waardøe Michel's [*Michel Thorgersen's*] door, his wife Birgette Erichsdaatter came out and asked what the girl was doing. The girl did not reply. The third time she [Birgette] asked, she added, Are you striking my people, that is my son you are striking, you will come to harm for striking him, and at that the troll cat disappeared. Then the girl tore the cap off her [Birgitte] with her right hand, because she wanted to keep it as evidence, and she tucked it under her left arm, but Birgette took the cap away from her again and pushed her so that she fell to the ground. (Willumsen 2010b, 367)]

In this account, we see a trollcat as roughly phallic in shape but constructed of feminine materials, referred to by the accused witch in possessive, affectionate terms as her "son," vanquished by violent penetration, and full of the twinned female fluids of milk and blood. Malene's action of

ripping Brite's cap off is curious, except in the context of the legends from elsewhere in the Nordic world we have examined, in which women's garments are effective counter-magic against trollcats, given their cognate relationship. Somehow, Brite's cap would have provided "evidence" against her—perhaps Malene had plans to use it to neutralize Brite's trollcat. Uncovering Brite's hair in this fashion may also have signaled Malene's assumptions about Brite's character. In Sweden in the same time period, properly covering one's hair had important implications for one's reputation, and improperly showing hair could contaminate the whole community with sickness (Van Gent 2008, 105). Removing Brite's cap may therefore have been an insult targeted at Brite's assumed wantonness, her apparent willingness to deal with the Devil.

Penetrating and binding are sometimes paired in the same story. Indeed it is possible that they are in Malene's account, if my supposition that Malene had intended to use the cap in some way to "bind" the trollcat is correct; her use of a shovel to at least partially halt the milk-theft is a kind of penetration. (Since Brite managed to recover her cap it is difficult to say, however, what Malene might have intended, and it is worth noting that after this exchange between the woman and girl Malene became "demented," which precipitated Brite's trial to begin with; thus Malene's "penetration" of the troll cat was insufficiently effective. Like the maid in the Gotlandic legend above, a female's attempt to put a stop to the witch's behavior is, at best, only partially effective.) The motifs are certainly paired in a modern Norwegian legend, in which the guilty party is caught by collecting the found "troll cat butter," as the droppings are called here, loading it into a gun barrel, and heating the gun in a forge:

> Before long they could hear noises coming from the barrel, it banged and whimpered and whistled, and the men were quite frightened. All of a sudden Marte Holon came into the smithy, her shirt hanging halfway off her shoulder. I guess she did not have time to put it on all the way. Sweat was dripping off her, and she asked for something to drink. They had collected their own piss into a horn, and they offered

> this to her. Then Hans quickly took off his left shoe and hit her across the mouth so that two teeth fell out and blood flowed. (Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1988, 39.3 (178))

The witch subsequently flees by broomstick, but clearly her milk-stealing is at an end. Drawing blood from a witch is, traditionally, a fool-proof way to break her power (Thompson 1956, D1741.2.1), but the legend suggests that the synecdoche between witch and trollcat butter is also effective (af Klintberg 2010, P11, P13, P14). Because the witch uses contagious magic to create the trollcat, and because the trollcat is connected to its droppings in the same way a human is to shorn fingernails or hair, what affects the trollcat (according to folk belief) also affects the witch. Burning trollcat droppings effectively burns the witch, if in diminished form. Forcing her to come to her victims, looking for lost items or asking for food or drink, reverses the flow she had created, in which milk is taken from one household to another; in re-establishing the boundaries of the household, the men (led in this legend by Hans Tofte, of the victimized Tofte farm) force the witch to come to them, as she had forced their cows' milk to come to her. Their counter-magic involves not just drawing blood and fire but also binding, containing the leavings—and through them the witch's power—inside that symbol of male power, the gun, an echo of legends in which the witch is bound to her proper role with female garments. Both restore the "natural" order of gendered social power. And again, in this instance, the "heroes" of the legend are all male.

## Conclusions: The Milk-Witch as Bad Mother

The early modern witch, in many ways, represented the opposite of a proper housewife and mother, and in Scandinavian folk tradition these negative qualities coalesced around the figure of the milk-stealing witch. Pictured on Gotland's late medieval walls (as well as elsewhere), she remained a popular legendary character there as throughout the Nordic region through the nineteenth century,

when people still reported her activities in oral narratives.[111] Although largely absent from pictorial depictions from the late medieval period, one near constant character accompanying the milk-witch in her nefarious activities was her familiar, the trollcat. A major reason for its enduring presence was its role as the witch's demonic child, creating a dyad that mirrored darkly the romanticized mother-child dyad that emerged as the ideal of womanhood in the sixteenth century and developed over the next several centuries. The witch's appropriation of male generative power, her phallic "misuse" of tools like the lasher (paralleling her phallic misuse of other feminine domestic implements like broomsticks), her sacrilegious and sometimes adulterous creation of a demonic infant, her willingness to cross and even eradicate the boundary between human, animal, and child: in all of these transgressions and inversions, she threatened the gendered order of patriarchal, Lutheran, early modern Scandinavia, and, because this order was presumed to be divinely ordained, thereby rebelled against God himself.

Of course, in the Lutheran theology of individual salvation, all women's bodies were vulnerable to corruption. Pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding were obviously necessary facts of early modern life, and unavoidable in an age prior to birth control and infant formula. But they also demonstrated the fact of a woman's sexual activity, and were therefore highly charged in the Reformation era (and afterwards). Motherhood was both celebrated and subtlety condemned, subject to a succession of regulations, fears, hopes, and both physical and emotional stresses, all of which could be social, individual, conscious, or unconscious—and sometimes all of the above. Once again, the collision of lived reality and idealization frayed symbolic boundaries. The discourse of witchcraft offered one

[111] Indeed legends about her are found even late into the twentieth century, not just in Scandinavia: Jeanne Favret-Saada, for instance, documents milk-stealing legends in France's Bocage in the 1960s (Favret-Saada 1980, 85, 100, 103, 111–112, 142, 157, 161–164), and we have already encountered an Irish example from the 1970s (see pages 132–133).

way to communicate these tangled expectations and emotive realities, and the milk-stealing witch and her familiar became, in Scandinavia, a highly productive set of motifs. Particularly salient in this discourse of witchcraft was the trollcat, the "carrier" (*bjära* derives from the Swedish word *bära*, (Danish and Norwegian *bære*), 'to carry') of not just milk and butter, but also cultural anxieties and desires about motherhood and women's power. As a more-or-less literal embodiment of concerns about reproduction, the human/animal distinction, and the sanctity of familial bonds, the trollcat represents a nexus of fears, whose relevance continued for centuries as the Reformation reshaped and reinvigorated the contours of the patriarchal structure that governed Gotland—and in fact all of the Scandinavia.

## CONCLUSION

Legends offer one means by which communities can negotiate areas of shared stresses. For the researcher, they can therefore indicate what those areas of stress are: how they are shaped, and what their contours are. The shape of communal nightmares delimits communal angst. In early modern Scandinavia, one recurring nightmare figure was the witch. Although witches could be, in both narrative and reality—meaning accusatory episodes, which could sometimes involve the state judiciary—either male or female, in both scenarios witches were far more likely to be female, and in my analysis of early Scandinavian witchcraft I have focused on the constructed stereotype of the early modern witch as a woman. More precisely, the legendary witch is often not just any woman, but rather a housewife: someone who appears to be a respectable, married member of the local community. Indeed, as with all legendary characters, the witch was not, in the early modern period, remote or safely entertaining; she was but one door over, known but frighteningly unrecognizable. As Timothy R. Tangherlini notes, "One can never be entirely sure that a next-door neighbor, a friend or even one's own spouse is not a witch" (Tangherlini 2000, 279)—and of course, during the period of witch trials, it was precisely one's neighbor, friend, and family members who "realized" the legends and often became witches, at least in the eyes of their communities and the law. It is, in part, her disguise as a normal housewife that made the witch so frightening in the early modern period, and examining vernacular sources of precisely how she differed in the end from the housewife she emulated helps us understand the ways in which both men and women negotiated fears related to women's positions and roles in early modern society.

Legends about the witch migrated throughout small communities, regions, nations, and even the continent of Europe; to that extent they were traditional, conservative even, relying on motifs that, in their most superficial form, might remain stable for centuries and familiar over thousands of

miles. And yet, as folklore scholars have observed for decades, legends display an astonishing plasticity, an ability to mutate with remarkable agility to suit the specific community at hand.

By examining how a single, shared legendary character—the witch—revealed herself in two different locations, Finnmark and Gotland, and in various modalities (witchcraft trial, verbal narration, and visual depiction) we can investigate how the different emphases on this character reflect differences in the mentalities of these locations. We can also discover places of overlap. Both Finnmark and Gotland were parts of an expanding Denmark and were simultaneously cosmopolitan (trading hubs that experienced frequent interaction with non-locals) and marginal, Finnmark on account of its extreme northern location and Gotland because of political and economic machinations. They were both at the mercy of the Hanseatic League, and both—largely due to the League's significance—less insulated from Continental developments than might at first be imagined. As a result, it is hardly surprising that many of the themes explored in this dissertation, including the production and meaning of food, motherhood and family structures, and the relationship between the human and animal worlds, are not unique to either location, nor indeed to Scandinavia; as many other scholars have elucidated, the same themes can be found running through witchcraft beliefs and narratives across Europe. This should not suggest they are not worth studying; to find the same themes even in these "marginal" locations is itself instructive, and the particular ways in which they manifested offer important insights into their particular mentalities.

The precise forms the witch takes in Finnmark and Gotland differ, but intersect: she is, in both places, associated with food gone bad—poisoned porridge, for instance, or curdled milk; in both places she appears as a bad mother, inducting her children into Satan's service in Finnmark or eschewing human children altogether in favor of demonic sprites on Gotland. Certainly in both places she displays an unwholesome familiarity with the animal world, and in both places she is a

bad wife, bringing Satan into her home and symbolically, if not literally, cuckolding her husband. These characteristics of the witch concur with the Scandinavian witch more broadly; as Tangherlini observes of the Danish legendary witch, she "appears as a terrifying and at times vindictive menace, intent on wreaking economic and physical havoc on otherwise seemingly safe rural communities" (Tangherlini 2000, 279). Yet we might reasonably ask what the specific forms taken by the witch meant to her respective communities. Linda Dégh observes that "the legend can be characterized as the conveyer of information that concerns subjective human experience and answers an implicit or openly uttered question" (Dégh 2001, 98). In early modern Finnmark and Gotland we can begin to identify what the question that witch narratives answered, or sought to answer, and also begin to understand what the witch *meant*, more broadly, in early modern Scandinavia.

In this dissertation, I have shown that one of the questions answered by the witch figure, whether in witchcraft trials, on church walls, or in oral legends, had to do fundamentally with the organization of gender. The defining characteristics of "women" and "men" in the increasingly rigid two-gender system of early modern Europe did not emerge in a social or historical vacuum—that is to say, lived realities, long-standing customs, and social circumstances did not permit idealized constructions of womanhood and manhood to be implemented without friction. Concerns about women's power in a newly powerful, and perhaps newly brittle, androcentric system could not be easily settled. Linda Dégh explains that she started collecting legends for her 2001 book, *Legend and Belief: Dialectics of a Folklore Genre*, when she "realized that this genre is the most reliable barometer of human concerns in an age when fundamental changes in social relationships have been speedily, aggressively imposed by the electrification of communication technology" (Dégh 2001, 21). Obviously, the same situation does not perfectly apply to early modern Europe; however, massive social, cultural, economic, and political changes were taking place, spurred by the analog (and analogous) technology of print. Early

modern legends, then, may be as reliable a barometer of past human concerns as contemporary legends are of our current age. Although we cannot collect early modern legends using current best practices in ethnographic methodologies, as Linda Dégh did and other contemporary researchers can do today, we can examine the available sources for evidence of vernacular expressions, including legends, and thereby take the measurements of the concerns they were responding to.

The early modern Scandinavian witch spoke to anxieties concerning various aspects of women's power that early modern society found troubling. These included power over food, its production and its distribution, and its associated ability to create communities; power over sexuality, reproduction, and children; and power connected to perceived closeness to the animal world—power with which she could again threaten to infect and undermine her human community and corrupt her roles as wife and mother. The witch presents herself as an anti-neighbor, an anti-human, an anti-wife, and an anti-mother. The homosocial organization of much of early modern life meant that men and women spent the majority of time among their own sex; this may have been particularly true in places like Finnmark, where the fishing industry demanded men spend a great deal of time not just away from home but even away from land, but was true also of more settled, agrarian places like Gotland, where (as was true throughout Scandinavia) farm labor was divided along gendered lines. This presented a conundrum: women among women, operating often without direct male oversight, threatened patriarchal control, even as such communities were encouraged and necessitated by the design of patriarchal society. The witch of seventeenth-century Finnmark legend, who creates a shadow community of women that corrupts the visible, devout one, speaks to this conundrum. The *gammal kärring*, 'old witch,' described in the Gotlandic legend included at the very beginning of this dissertation, is a different reflection of the same problem: women's knowledge

is women's knowledge, which hides it from direct male oversight and makes it potentially subversive. In Finnmark, it was not just subversive, but poisonous.

That the Finnmark witch used poison, literally edible witchcraft hidden inside the innocuous foodstuffs of daily sustenance, and that the "milk-stealing witch" of Gotland (and elsewhere) focused also on the dairy and its products, all important to both literal and economic survival, is not a coincidence. In both Finnmark and Gotland, as throughout Scandinavia, women were largely responsible for the management of livestock (except for horses) and the production of food, and had particular control over the dairy and the production of butter, a dietary staple and—owing to its marketability—economic necessity. These were crucial tasks, and entrusting them to the sex that was widely deemed physically, intellectually, and spiritually weaker resulted in deeply felt, widely shared anxieties, among both men and women. In Finnmark, less immediately reliant on dairy products, the milk-stealing witch does not play a large role in the narratives we discover through the witchcraft trial documentation. Instead, as I illustrate in chapter 2, anxieties surrounding women's community, women's power over food, and the ways in which the ability to offer and share food manifested that power, are manifested in the witch-as-poisoner trope. In both places, concerns about women and their involvement in the production of food emerge, though these concerns focus on different stages of that production: at the very beginning when it comes to the milk-stealing witch, and at the very end, when it is actually prepared and eaten, when it comes to Finnmark.

On Gotland, the power of women over foodstuffs is linked inextricably to their control of the dairy. In the magical worldview of early modern Scandinavia, "butter luck" and "cattle luck" were not abstract characteristics of a particular person or household but were limited goods, following the foundational theory of George M. Foster. In other words, they "*exist in finite quantity* and *are always in short supply*"; crucially, "it follows that *an individual or a family can improve a position only at the expense of*

*others*" (Foster 1964, 296–297, original emphasis). The milk-stealing witch improves her position—that is, increases the quantity of milk she has at her disposal, or the quantity of butter she can produce—by stealing the milk from her neighbors' cows and their butter-luck from their churns. As Stephen A. Mitchell says of this figure, "the milk-stealing witch is explained, or perhaps even explained away, by noting how such a tale addresses such basic human emotions as envy and jealousy: Why does that person have more than I do? And do they have more because they have taken something away from me?" (Mitchell 2011, 141). In legend, envy is typically attributed to—or perhaps projected on—the witch, as in my dissertation's opening legend, which starts: "En Bond-hustru, som gerna ville ha mycket smör och mjölk och mer än hennes egna kor naturligen kunde gifva" (Säve 1959, 218) [A housewife, who would like to have more butter and milk and such than her own cows could provide naturally]. This is one way in which legends operate within communities to think through troubled relationships, in this case between women, their control of a crucial industry, and the (religiously condemned) feeling of envy.

The milk-witch, however, discussed in chapters 5 and 6, spoke also to anxieties surrounding the organization of Reformation-era families, specifically the construction of "husband" and "wife" and the development of motherhood. Motherhood, of course, is another arena of female power, one that is biologically ordained and became reified in the early modern period, but that nonetheless sat uneasily within the idealized Lutheran household with a patriarch at its head. And because mothers were, in the usual course of events, literally food for their own children, motherhood became symbolically bound with anxieties surrounding food production—and particularly dairy products, as it is an unavoidable truth that both post-parturient women and cows produce milk. The primary roles of a woman in this period, in both Finnmark and Gotland as well as in Europe generally, were

those of housewife and mother, but these acknowledged female sexuality and ceded certain arenas to female power. The witch provided a means to encapsulate concerns about both.

Importantly, narratives about witchcraft do not represent the efforts of men to control women—it is better stated that they represent the efforts of a developing patriarchal system to negotiate the existence and power of women. Charges of witchcraft were brought by women against other women, just as they were brought by men; narratives about witches were, similarly, told by both genders, and both men and women would have witnessed and, occasionally at least, pondered, images of witchcraft. Legends of witchcraft, in short, spoke also to men, and even as they most obviously reflect efforts to limit women's power and authority they also reflect efforts to construct masculinity, as I discuss especially in chapter 5. In the Reformation, "manhood" became largely synonymous with running a household—or rather ruling a household, while the housewife managed it on a daily basis. As the volume edited by Scott H. Hendrix and Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *Masculinity in the Reformation Era*, underlines, the duties and roles of men were circumscribed as well as those of women, in ways that have important repercussions for how relationships between the sexes were lived and felt. As the editors comment, "near-binary visualization of the proper roles of men and women prevailed throughout the sixteenth century and beyond" (Hendrix and Karant-Nunn 2008, xvii), and one of the primary duties of men was to rule his household: maintain its chastity, order, and virtue. The witch, who cuckolded her husband (either symbolically or literally), created her own demonic "children" in his absence, disordered the household with ungodly interventions, and disrupted the local economy, was an affront not just to the idealized housewife but also to the idealized husband. Honor (also a limited good in early modern society) had to be defended, and the honor of a household was the honor of its master. A man could not fully retain his masculine honor

if he lost control of his wife—and a witch represented the most extreme version of a woman outside of masculine control.

In ways both large and small, it was the duty of men to define and patrol order, an order that—according to the prevailing theory of the day—was divine in origin, secular in implementation, and necessitated the active participation of all members of a society. As God's kingdom, so earthly nations; as the king to his people, so the patriarch to his household. Masculinity became bound up in defending symbolic boundaries. One of these truly foundational boundaries was that between the categories of "human" and "animal," and yet despite its significance it proved to be particularly susceptible to fraying. Already in the medieval period, the distinction between "human" and "animal" was starting to waver, and the growing relevance of Satan attracted all inhuman animals to him. Biblical precedent and theological preference tended to associate him with powerful wild or mystical creatures like wolves, snakes, and dragons, but the folk taxonomies of Europe associated Satan and his human followers instead with those animals that were most responsible for disrupting the human-animal boundary. In Finnmark, such creatures included dogs, cats, crows, and even seals; on Gotland—and throughout the milk-stealing witch's ambit—cats and hares are particular species of interest. In chapters 3 and 6 I demonstrated that such specificity of species is meaningful, and showed how these animals reflect, again, concerns with gender organization and motherhood. Cats in particular, through their habits, associations inherited from the medieval period, and role on the farm, became natural companions of the witch figure; they shared, for instance, associations with female sexuality, liminal habits, and had reputations for being both at and yet not entirely of the home. They also, owing to their size, shape, and habituation to people, might have acted more as modern "pets" than early modern people were used to, in other words might have resembled, at least in emotional attachment, human infants, and thereby further disturbed the troubled boundary

between human and animal. Here again, the power of women to create human communities, and even create humans, is a source of anxiety, since that power, ungoverned by proper patriarchal control, can instead be used to undermine and corrupt the human community. It seems that cats were broadly associated with women in the medieval and early modern periods, in fact as they often still are, and in that we have one example of a species whose symbolic role was inflected along gendered lines, among others.

Witchcraft legends, like all folklore, cannot be fully understood absent their social, cultural, and historical context. When working in the past, however, such context must largely be reconstructed. Chapters 1 and 4 laid out the specific situations in Finnmark and Gotland, respectively, and permitted the legends that emerge from Finnmark's witchcraft trials on the one hand, and Gotland's church murals and later legend collections on the other, to be presented with their appropriate contexts. A folkloristic perspective enables us to witness patterns that span narrow regional studies, however, and this dissertation has shown that similar concerns underwrite some legends of witchcraft in both places. Despite historical and linguistic differences, and despite differences in expressive context—witchcraft trial, church mural, or folklorist's collection—witchcraft legends in both places answer, or rather seek to answer, similar questions about gender organization, women's power, and the relationship between humans and animals. Of course, these are not the only questions addressed by these narratives, but they seem to have been particularly salient in early modern Scandinavia; they constitute at least some of the major "human concerns" measured by the barometer of witchcraft legends. These concerns, in their broad form, lasted a long time; to take just the example of Gotland, the late medieval church paintings indicate some level of consternation with women's work and their control of the dairy, and I have argued that these murals might have come to reflect concerns regarding male behavior and duties as well; both issues are still on display

in more modern legends as well, as in the following example, collected by P.A. Säve in the mid-1860s from Catharina Bodilla Östman:[112]

> Den ena bondhustrun i en gård fick alltid snart smör, då hon kärnade, men hennes grann-qvinna fick det blott med största svårighet. Denna frågade den förras lille son hur hans mor bar sig åt med kärningen och gossen berättade, att hon satte ett litet knyte under kärnan, läste:
>
> "Smör i byttor, smör i spann,
> Smör i bunkar alla!"
>
> och kärnade så några tag, hvarmed hon hade så mycket smör hon ville. Hon fick af barnet också låna det lilla knytet, begagnade det på samma sätt och fick grufligt med smör! Men, sedan hon i tysthet gifvit gossen knytet igen, talade hon om allt för sin man: och så satte de allt smöret ut i nystugan.
>
> Om natten bultade det på dörren och bonden gick upp och öppnade: der ute stod en karl ("den Håle"), som lofvade dem samma smör-lycka. Men Bonden gick först in i stugan och talade med sin hustru, som låg i sängen och blef grufligt förskräckt. Och genast kastade de allt smöret ut för dörren, då bonden sade: "Ta' det, som hörer dig till, men jag vill inte ha' annat än det, som Gud ger mig." — Men ändock fingo de ej sämre Smör-lycka än tillförne. (Säve 1959, 222–223)
>
> [One housewife on a farm always got butter quickly when she churned, while her (female) neighbors got almost nothing, and that with the greatest difficulty. One of them asked the former's small son how his mother conducted herself at the churn and the little fellow explains that she set a little bundle under the churn, reciting:
>
> "Butter in the bucket, butter in the pail,
> Butter in every bowl!"
>
> and then churned for a while, whereupon she had as much butter as she wanted. The one housewife got the child to loan the little bundle to her, used it in the same way and became flush with butter! But after she secretly returned the bundle to the boy, she told her husband everything: and so they set all the butter out in the storehouse.
>
> During the night someone pounded at the door and the farmer got up and opened it: outside stood a man ("the Devil"), who promised them the same butter-luck. But the farmer went into the house and spoke with his wife, who lay in bed overcome with terror. And then they threw all the butter out the door, the farmer saying, "Take that

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112 Ragnar Bjersby includes a lengthy account of Säve's interactions with Catharina Östman, who was born in 1805 in Burs, Gotland (Bjersby 1964, 247–253).

> which belongs to you, I don't want anything other than what God gives me." — But they still didn't get worse butter-luck than before.]

In this legend, the housewife is, technically, a milk-witch; but because she trusted to her husband, we can view her with some sympathy. The legend illustrates not just correct female behavior (by showing its opposite) but also correct male behavior: the farmer is the master of his household, master of his wife, and defends the borders of his home—with the piety of a good Lutheran. He exerts his own power and sends the Devil away; the construction of masculinity supports an ordered, patriarchal system. The "real" milk-witch, the woman who owns the "little bundle," perhaps akin to the rags that bjäror are made out of, goes unpunished. She is, in fact, completely out of focus in this legend, but she also clearly presents as simply one of many neighborhood housewives, complete with small son. Her husband, in contrast to the pious farmer, has failed in his duties to order his household, and as a result his wife's witchcraft has infected their child and disrupted the local economy. It is worth underlining that this legend was told by a woman; the governance of gendered behavior was not strictly a male concern. Rather, as mentioned above, witchcraft legends allowed participants of all genders to negotiate the rules of their patriarchal social structure, to construct both femininity and masculinity, and to identify the dangers of female power. It is also worth reiterating that this legend was collected some four hundred years after the church murals were painted, and though they are not identical in content they do concern the same figure, the milk-stealing witch, and reflect some similar concerns. Like all folklore, legends continue to be told as long as they remain relevant to the community: they are both conservative and adaptive.

Linda Dégh avers that "the legend is a far more important parameter of human mentality than any other folklore genre" (Dégh 2001, 87). Despite the difficulties of parsing historical records, then, of disentangling (to the extent that it is relevant) "elite" and "folk" lore, of situating particular iterations of legends within particular historical contexts, it is incumbent upon witchcraft scholars to attend to

the legend of the witch. The forms she takes, the things she does, the words she says, all inform us about the mentalities of those who believed in her, or half-believed in her, or identified and prosecuted her, or used the idea of her as a tool to build their culture. In Nordic folk belief, the witch appears at the stress fractures of social construction; to more fully comprehend that construction, we must attend to the shapes she takes, the boundaries she breaks, and the roles she plays.

## APPENDIX 1:

### Women Accused of Witchcraft in Finnmark, 1600–1690

The following table is after Hagen (2015b), with additional reference to Lilienskiold (1998) and Willumsen (2010a; 2010b). Spelling has been standardized to modern Norwegian, after Lilienskiold (1998), with major variants noted. Note that this table is not a comprehensive list of all accused persons, but is limited only to females. Ethnicity is not marked, except when an ethnic term like "Sámi" (or "Finn") is used as part of an accused person's name.

To the right are marked, by x's, the presence of the three major motifs focused on in this dissertation, that is, edible witchcraft, shapeshifting, and milk-theft. (The lack of data, owing for example to missing or incomplete records, is marked "n.d.," for "no data.") The "shapeshifting" motif column indicates not just descriptions, confessions, or accusations of shapeshifting witches, but also descriptions of the Devil in animal or hybrid form and animal-shaped familiars. Similarly, the "milk-theft" includes a variety of motifs associated with milk-theft, including for instance accusations of owning trollcats, confessions of stealing milk, and purported hopes to secure "milk" or "butter luck." It is crucial to note here that the presence of an "x" in any given field does *not* necessarily mean the woman in question confessed to the associated crime; in several cases these are accusations made by others in the court records, namely alleged victims, fellow accused witches, or other witnesses. It is also crucial to note that the presence or absence of these motifs—which by no means comprise the entirety of potential witchcraft crimes that appear in the records—do not necessarily have direct bearing on the person's ultimate fate.

| | Name | Date | Sentence or fate | *Motifs* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | *Edible witchcraft* | *Shape-shifting* | *Milk-theft* |
| 1 | Kristen Skredder | 1601 | Burned at the stake | n.d. | n.d. | n.d. |
| 2 | Old Zare | 1610 | Burned at the stake | n.d. | n.d. | n.d. |
| 3 | Anne, wife of Lars Persen | 1610 | Burned at the stake | | | |
| 4 | Lisbet, Per Torfindsen's wife | 1612 | Burned at the stake | | | |
| 5 | Karen ("Finn-Kari") Edisdatter | 1620 | Burned at the stake | | | |
| 6 | Kristi Sørensdatter | 1621 | Burned at the stake | | x | |
| 7 | Guri Olsdatter | 1621 | Burned at the stake | | x[113] | |
| 8 | Guri Olufsdatter | 1621 | Burned at the stake | | | |
| 9 | Kari Olsdatter (Olufsdatter) | 1621 | Burned at the stake | | x | |
| 10 | Mari Jørgensdatter | 1621 | Burned at the stake | | x | |
| 11 | Ragnhild Olufsdatter | 1621 | Burned at the stake | n.d. | n.d. | n.d. |
| 12 | Siri Knudsdatter | 1621 | Burned at the stake | | | |
| 13 | Marthe (Marit, Marrite) Olsdatter | 1621 | Burned at the stake | | x[114] | |
| 14 | Lisbet Nilsdatter | 1621 | Burned at the stake | | x | x |
| 15 | Inger (Ingri), Torkild Andersen's wife | 1621 | Burned at the stake | | | |
| 16 | Elsebe Knudsdatter | 1621 | Burned at the stake | | x | |
| 17 | Ane Larsdatter (Anne Lauritsdatter) | 1621 | Burned at the stake | | x | |
| 18 | Mette Thorgiersdatter | 1621 | Acquitted | | | |
| 19 | Ane (Anne) Edisdatter | 1624 | Burned at the stake | | | |
| 20 | Elli (Elin) Thorstensdatter | 1624 | Burned at the stake[115] | | | |
| 21 | Doritte Jensdatter | 1624 | Fined | | | |
| 22 | Gunnele (Gunnhild, Gundell) Olsdatter | 1625 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |

[113] According to Hans H. Lilienskiold's summary, Guri does not confess to being in any particular shape, but says she was with others "over sjøen, høye klipper og berg" (Lilienskiold 1998, 88) [over the sea, high peaks and mountains], which perhaps suggests a bird shape (although witches flew also on other creatures, and agricultural and domestic tools).

[114] Hans H. Lilienskiold's summary records that Marthe Olsdatter, much like Guri Olsdatter, "var…i luften over høye klipper og fjell" (Lilienskiold 1998, 86) [was…in the sky above high peaks and mountains].

[115] Elli was sentenced to death, but apparently fled (see Willumsen 2010a, 41; 2010b, 41). Her ultimate fate is unclear.

| | Name | Date | Sentence or fate | ***Motifs*** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | *Edible witchcraft* | *Shape-shifting* | *Milk-theft* |
| 23 | Karen Monsdatter (Mogensdatter) | 1626 | Burned at the stake | x | x | x |
| 24 | Marit (Marrite) Edisdater | 1626 | Burned at the stake | | | |
| 25 | Maren Christensdatter | 1626 | Accused[116] | | | |
| 26 | Kaa Anne | 1628 | Fined | | | |
| 27 | Kari, Jetmund Siversen's wife | 1632 | Burned at the stake | x[117] | | |
| 28 | Synnøve, Anders Nordmøring's wife | 1632 | Fined | x | x | |
| 29 | Birgitte, Christopher's wife (Birgete, Old Christopher's wife) | 1632 | Accused[118] | | | |
| 30 | Ingeborg Jørgensdatter, Ole Monsen's wife | 1634 | Burned at the stake | | x | x |
| 31 | Kirsten, Rasmus Siversen's wife | 1634 | Burned at the stake | x | x[119] | x |
| 32 | Anne Mathisdatter (Mattisdatter) | 1634 | Burned at the stake | | | x |
| 33 | Marthe, Oluf Møring's wife | 1634 | Burned at the stake | | | |
| 34 | Marte (Marrite, Marit) Thamisdatter | 1634 | Burned at the stake | | x | |

[116] The accusation of Maren Christensdatter was postponed pending further testimony; the case may have been subsequently dismissed (Willumsen 2010a, 47; 2010b, 47).

[117] This is a curious inversion of the motif; Kari confessed "Att Hun Haffde en schieck tunge, och Hindiß moder Wolte Hinde dett, fordj Hun lagde Hinde fra sitt bryst, den tiid Hun war spee i 3 Netter, och siden laa Hinde der till igien" (Willumsen 2010a, 71) ["that she had a sharp tongue, for which her mother was the cause because she removed her from her breast when she was no more than a wee babe three nights old, and then put her back again" (Willumsen 2010b, 71)]. The implication seems to be that the *lack* of mother's milk proved poisonous to such an extent that Kari grew up with a witch's powers (on the anxieties surrounding breastfeeding and the perceptions of risks of breast milk to children, see esp. Åström 2015).

[118] Birgitte had been denounced apparently in 1626, but her answer that the denunciation was the result of a quarrel seems to have satisfied the court, as "bleff det opsat till en Anden tiid" (Willumsen 2010a, 77" ["The matter was put off until some other time" (Willumsen 2010b, 77)].

[119] Again, the record is open to interpretation; Kirsten told the court that two other accused witches, Synnøve, Anders Nordmøring's wife, and Kari, Jetmund Siversen's wife, "Kom til hinde i lufften" (Willumsen 2010a, 80) ["came to her through the air" (Willumsen 2010b, 80)]; whether they were shapeshifted or not during this flight is not specified.

| | Name | Date | Sentence or fate | ***Motifs*** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | *Edible witchcraft* | *Shape-shifting* | *Milk-theft* |
| 35 | Lisbet, Ole (Oluf) Nilsen's wife | 1638 | Burned at the stake | | | |
| 36 | Mari, Østen's wife | 1638 | Burned at the stake | | x | |
| 37 | Solveig (Solve) Andersdatter | 1638 | Burned at the stake | | | |
| 38 | Sissel (Sitzele) Persdatter | 1638 | Burned at the stake | | | |
| 39 | Maren, Jon Dass's wife | 1638 | Burned at the stake | | x | |
| 40 | Smeld Anne | 164? | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 41 | Kirsten tøs (the maidservant) | 164? | Burned at the stake | x | | |
| 42 | Marthe (Marette), Torstein's wife | 1645 | Burned at the stake | x | | |
| 43 | Oluf Rasmussen's wife (Marthe?) | 1645 | Burned at the stake | n.d. | n.d. | n.d. |
| 44 | Maren Jacobsdatter (Søren Nilsen's wife) | 1647 | Acquitted | n.d. | n.d. | n.d. |
| 45 | Mari, Oluf Jonsen's wife | 1649? | Burned at the stake | x | | |
| 46 | Gunnel Amundsdatter (Gunhild Amondsdatter, Gundelle Omundsdatter) | 1652 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 47 | Mette Danielsdatter | 1652 | Unknown | | x | |
| 48 | Bodil, Axel Andersen's wife[120] | 1652 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 49 | Bårne, Villat the Bell-ringer's wife | 1652 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 50 | Eli Sigvartsdatter | 1653 | Burned at the stake | x | | |
| 51 | Brite (Bergitte, Berigette) Edisdatter | 1653 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 52 | Marthe (Marette, Marit) Andersdatter | 1653 | Burned at the stake | x | x[121] | |
| 53 | Synnøve Olsdatter | 1653 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |

[120] Called Bodelle Danielsdatter in Willumsen (2010b, 414). Hagen seems to refer to the same person, however, as Bodil Guttormsdatter (Hagen 2015b).

[121] Marthe confessed to having two familiars ("apostles"), one of whom, called "Long Ass," she rode on, suggesting it had an animal shape (see Willumsen 2010a, 112–113; 2010b, 112–113).

| | Name | Date | Sentence or fate | ***Motifs*** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | *Edible witchcraft* | *Shape-shifting* | *Milk-theft* |
| 54 | Brite (Bergitte, Berigette) Christophersdatter | 1653 | Burned at the stake | x | | |
| 55 | Brite (Berit, Berigette) Johansdatter | 1653 | Burned at the stake | x | | |
| 56 | Bårne Olsdatter | 1653 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 57 | Lisbet Paulsdatter (Poulsdatter, Povelsdatter) | 1653 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 58 | Ane Pedersdatter | 1653 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 59 | Gjertrud Tronsdatter | 1653 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 60 | Guri Edisdatter | 1653 | Unknown[122] | | x | |
| 61 | Kirsten Mikkelsdatter (Michelsdatter) | 1653 | Acquitted | n.d. | n.d. | n.d. |
| 62 | Anne Bjørnsdatter | 1653 | Acquitted | n.d. | n.d. | n.d. |
| 63 | "Sami" Berette | 1653 | Acquitted | n.d. | n.d. | n.d. |
| 64 | Bergitte Simensdatter | 1653 | Acquitted | n.d. | n.d. | n.d. |
| 65 | Siri (Sigri) Tørresdatter | 1653 | Acquitted | n.d. | n.d. | n.d. |
| 66 | Ingeborg Jonsdatter | 1653 | Acquitted | n.d. | n.d. | n.d. |
| 67 | Aagot, Aslak Lauritsen's wife (Aagaatte Jacobsdatter) | 1653 | Acquitted | n.d. | n.d. | n.d. |
| 68 | Inger, Oluf Olufsen's wife (or Thieralsdatter) | 1654 | Fined, public confession | x | | |
| 69 | Karen Jonsdatter | 1654 | Burned at the stake | x | x | x[123] |
| 70 | Marthe (Marit, Marette) Rasmusdatter | 1654 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 71 | Kirsten Olsdatter | 1655 | Burned at the stake | | x | |
| 72 | Siri Christophersdatter | 1656 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 73 | Mari Thomasdatter (Tamisdatter, Thamisdatter) | 1656 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |

[122] Rune Blix Hagen suspects that Guri Edisdatter was tortured to death or burned at the stake (Hagen 2015a, 169–170, 171).

[123] Karen confessed that she and another accused witch had two garters that produced mead and beer. Though not milk, the "milking" of garters is a common motif in milk-stealing witch legends, and stealing alcohol is a closely related motif.

| | Name | Date | Sentence or fate | ***Motifs*** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | *Edible witchcraft* | *Shape-shifting* | *Milk-theft* |
| 74 | Mette Nielsdatter (Hennrich Pedersen's wife) | 1656 | Acquitted | x | x | |
| 75 | Doreth Larsdatter (Dorte Laurtitsdatter, Dorette Lauritsdatter) | 1662 | Burned at the stake | | x | |
| 76 | Maren Sigvoldsdatter | 1662 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 77 | Ragnhild Klemmetsdatter (Klemetsdatter, Clemidsdatter) | 1662 | Burned at the stake | | x | |
| 78 | Maren Mogensdatter | 1662 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 79 | Marthe (Marit, Maritte) Rasmusdatter | 1662 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 80 | Maren Hemmingsdatter | 1662 | Burned at the stake | | | |
| 81 | Sigri Olsdatter | 1663 | Burned at the stake | x | x | x |
| 82 | Ingeborg, Peder Krog's wife | 1663 | Tortured to death | x | | |
| 83 | Guri, Lauritz's wife | 1663 | Burned at the stake | x | | x |
| 84 | Solveig (Solve) Nilsdatter | 1663 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 85 | Ellen Gunnersdatter | 1663 | Burned at the stake | x | x | x |
| 86 | Karen Andersdatter, Villad the Bell-ringer's wife[124] | 1663 | Burned at the stake | x | x | x |
| 87 | Margrethe (Margrete, Margrette) Jonsdatter | 1663 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 88 | Sigri (Sigrid) Jonsdatter | 1663 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 89 | Gunnhild (Gundele, Gundelle) Olsdatter | 1663 | Burned at the stake | x | x | x |
| 90 | Doreth (Dorte, Dorette) Poulsdatter (Povelsdatter) | 1663 | Tortured to death | x | | |
| 91 | Barbra Olsdatter, Nils Bastiansen's wife | 1663 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 92 | Bodel Clausdatter (Bol Klausdatter, Bodil Klausdatter) | 1663 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |

124 Called "Karen, klokker Villads kone fra Skatøre" [Karen, Bell-ringer Villad's wife from Skatøre] in Lilienskiold (1998, 212).

| | Name | Date | Sentence or fate | ***Motifs*** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | *Edible witchcraft* | *Shape-shifting* | *Milk-theft* |
| 93 | Brite (Birgitte) Olufsdatter | 1663 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 94 | Karen Olsdatter, Henrik (Hendrich) Knudsen's wife | 1663 | Burned at the stake | x | x | |
| 95 | Karen Iversdatter (8 years old) | 1663 | Acquitted | x | x | |
| 96 | Ingeborg Iversdatter (child) | 1663 | Acquitted | x | x | |
| 97 | Maren Olsdatter (Olufsdatter) (12 years old) | 1663 | Acquitted[125] | x | x | x |
| 98 | Karen Nilsdatter (adult) | 1663 | Acquitted | | | |
| 99 | Ragnhild Endresdatter | 1663 | Acquitted | x | x | x |
| 100 | Gjertrud Siversdatter (Giertrud Sivertsdatter) and child | 1663 | Acquitted | | | |
| 101 | Kirsten Sørensdatter[126] | 1663 | Acquitted | | | |
| 102 | Karen Nilsdatter (child) | 1663 | Acquitted | x | x | |
| 103 | Sigri (Siri) Pedersdatter[127] | 1663 | Acquitted | | | |
| 104 | "Sámi" or "Finde" [Finn] Elli | 1670 | Died in custody | | | |
| 105 | Magdalene Jacobsdatter | 1671 | Acquitted | | | |
| 106 | Maritte Gundersdatter | 1672 | Acquitted | | | |
| 107 | Synnøve Johansdotter | 1678 | Burned at the stake | x | x | x |
| 108 | Kirsten Knudsdatter | 1680 | Acquitted | | | |
| 109 | Karen Klemmitsdatter (Clemmitsdatter) | 1680 | Acquitted | n.d. | n.d. | n.d. |

[125] According to Willumsen (2013, 282); Hagen (2015b), however, lists her sentence as a labor camp. See also Hagen (2015a, 215).

[126] Kirsten is described in the records as "Sørenn Christensen's oldest daughter" (Willumsen 2010b, 264); her age is unclear, but it is certainly possible that she was a child or young teenager; Hagen thus lists her as a potential *barn*, 'child,' in his tabulation (Hagen 2015b).

[127] Also possibly a child, though the records are not definite.

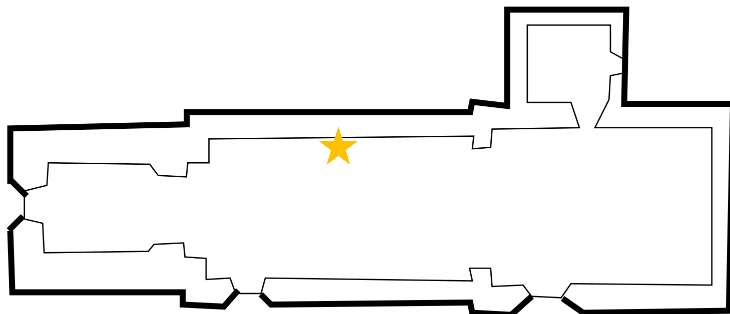
| | Name | Date | Sentence or fate | ***Motifs*** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | *Edible witchcraft* | *Shape-shifting* | *Milk-theft* |
| 110 | Karen Nilsdatter | 1688 | Accused[128] | | | |
| 111 | Birgitte Eriksdatter (Erichsdatter) | 1689 | Acquitted | | | x |
| 112 | Karen Simensdatter | 1690 | Public confession | | | |
| 113 | Marit Nilsdatter | 1690 | Public confession | | | |

[128] Karen Nilsdatter was instructed by the court to prove herself by the "compurgation oath," that is, to find twelve worthy people to testify to her good character (Willumsen 2010a, 363; 2010b, 363; see also 'compurgation oath,' Willumsen 2010b, 412). She does not appear again in the records.

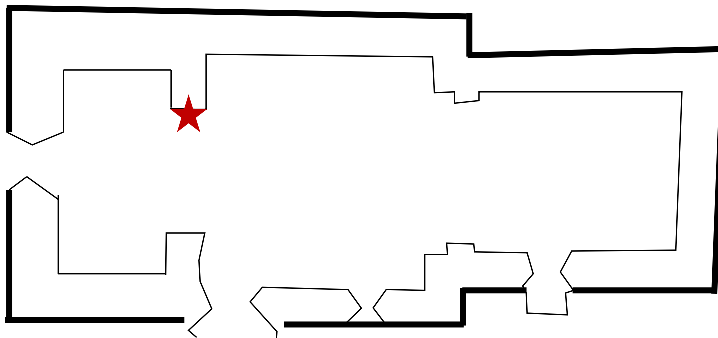
## APPENDIX 2:

## Locations of Milk-Witch Murals in Gotland's Churches

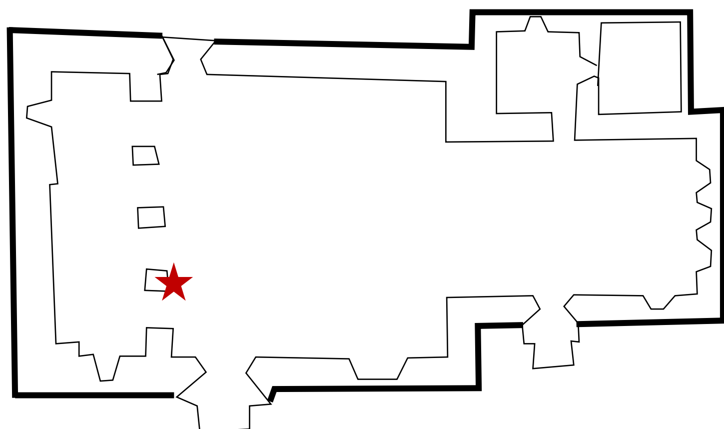
The following illustrations show where the milk-witch scene or scenes are to be found in the interior of each church. All churches are drawn in the same orientation, with north towards the top of the page (on Gotland, all medieval churches are oriented with the altars in the east). Note that the plans drawn illustrate the current configuration, without specifying those sections (often the sacristries) that are newer than the period under discussion. Architectural features such as alcoves, columns, and staircases have not always been included, unless necessary to demonstrate placement of the witch-stealing witch murals.



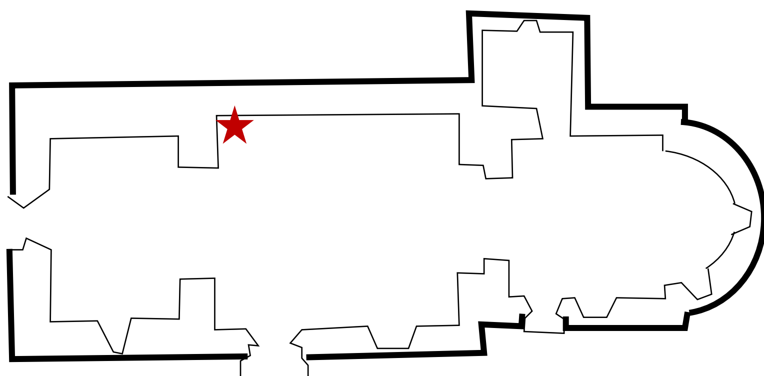
Alskog church. After figure 264 in Lagerlöf (1968, 240). The milk-stealing witch mural is no longer visible, but from an eighteenth century description we know three panels of it once decorated the northern wall. Its precise placement is unknown.



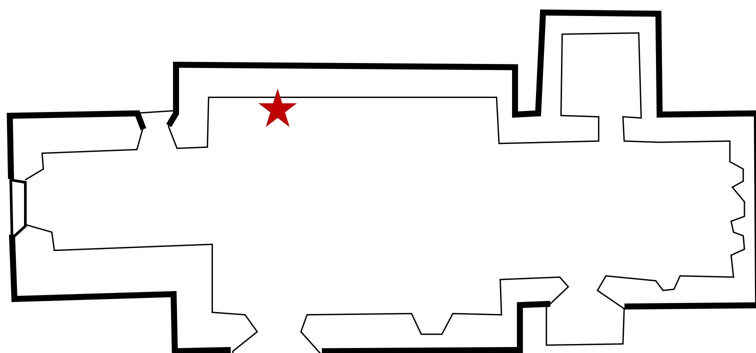
Bäl church. After figure 256 in Hedlund (1935, 179). The milk-stealing witch scene is on the northern pillar, facing the southern door.



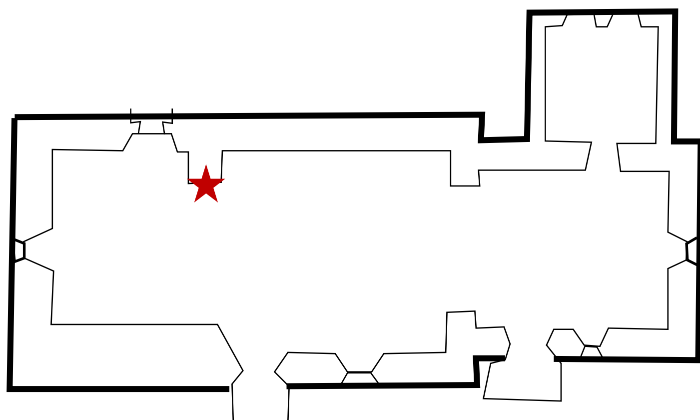
Endre church. After figure 448, Lundmark (1931, 385). The milk-stealing witch appears on the southernmost pillar, facing the nave.



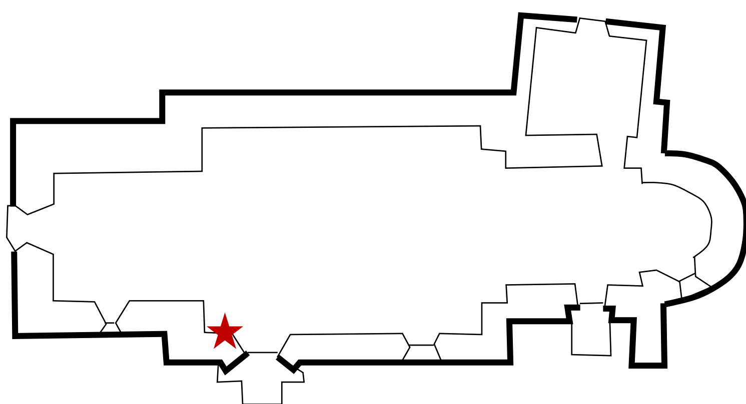
Ganthem chuch. After figure 237 in Roosval (1952, 220). The sequence of milk-stealing witch scenes runs around the northwestern corner of the nave.



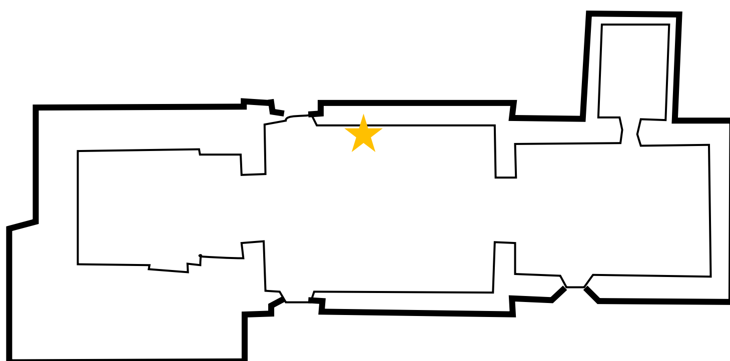
Norrlanda church. After figure 127 in Roosval and Alm (1947, 114). A sequence of milk-stealing witch scenes stands on the northern wall of the nave, directly opposite the door. At present it is obscured by the placement of an organ.



Näs church. After figure 5 in Bergman (1998, 13). The milk-witch mural can be found on the pillar separating the tower from the nave, facing south.

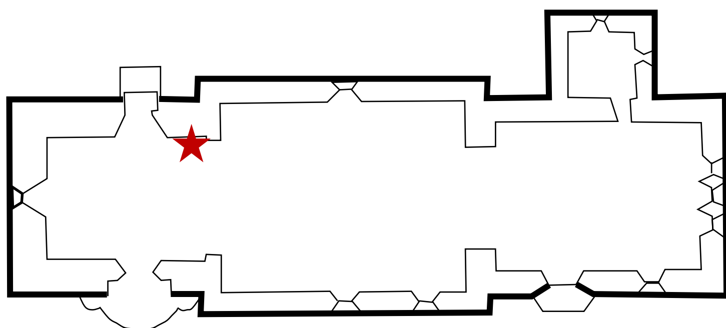


Gerum church. After figure 11 in Stolt (1982, 15). A badly preserved image of a demon and a naked woman on all fours, whom I argue should be interpreted as a milk-stealing witch, is located on the southern wall, immediately beside the southern door in the nave.

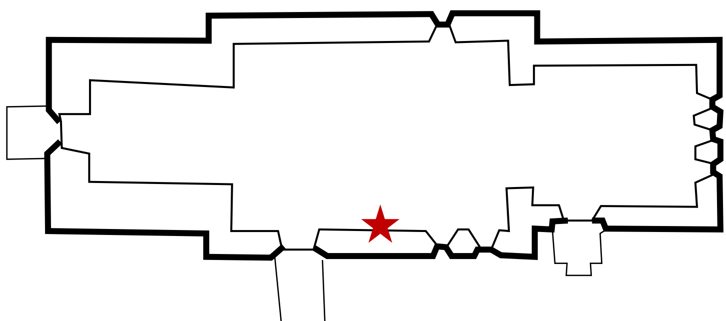


Vamlingbo church. After drawing in Bebyggelseregistret.[129] Images of the milk-stealing witch, no longer visible due to whitewashing, seem on the basis of a photograph prior to whitewashing (see fig. 4.7) to have been located next to the door on the northern wall in the nave.

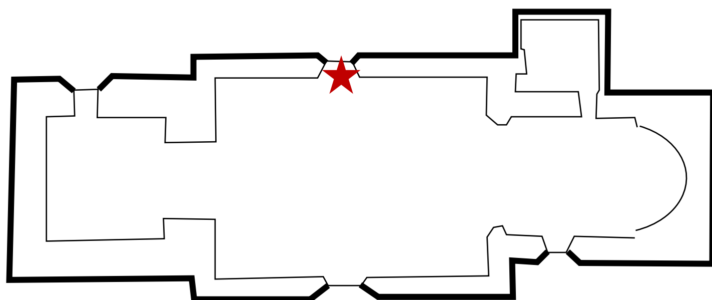
129 http://www.bebyggelseregistret.raa.se/bbr2/byggnad/visaRitningar.raa?byggnadId=21400000444093&page=ritningar.



Sanda church. After figure 142 in Roosval and Sällström (1942, 130). A large, monoepisodic milk-stealing witch mural occupies the wall between the northern tower door and the nave.



Silte church. After figure 14 in Bergman (1992, 20). Two panels comprising a witch-stealing milk narrative are (uniquely) positioned along the southern wall of the nave.



Öja church. After drawing from Bebyggelseregistret.[130] A large panel showing a tripartite milk-stealing narrative is located immediately above the northern door in the nave.

130 http://www.bebyggelseregistret.raa.se/bbr2/byggnad/visaRitningar.raa?byggnadId=21400000444008&page=ritningar.

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*Description* = Olaus Magnus 1996.

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