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## **The Lecherous Witch: Evil, Witchcraft and Female Sexuality in Early Modern Sweden.**

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In the summer of 1675, the small village of Lövånger in northern Sweden was shaken by horrific events.<sup>1</sup> Several children accused women in the area of being witches and having brought them to Blockula, where a feast with the Devil himself took place. Sissla Andersdotter, a 70-year-old peasant woman, was identified by several children, including farmer Olof Andersson's nine-year-old daughter Anna. Anna told the most hair-raising stories. In Blockula, there was a large black dog under the table. On the bed, a big dark man copulated with the witches, and after a month, the witches gave birth to children who were boiled down to ointment. This she and the other children had seen with their own eyes.

After interrogation, the accused confessed that she had been in Blockula and had slept with the old man on the bed. Intercourse with the Evil One! The court members trembled with fear. But how did it feel? Did the intercourse with him give her any pleasure? No, it had been neither painful nor pleasant, Sissla assured them. Moreover, she had not been there alone. She had also seen Filpus' Malin, riding on Father Salinus himself.

The second to confess was the poor old Filpus' Malin; she said that she had brought the priest's little girl Karin to Blockula. Malin had also slept with the Devil, but unlike Sissla she

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<sup>1</sup> The introduction is based on transcriptions of trial protocols, Sture Norberg's archives, Umeå University's research archives.

thought it had "been good"<sup>2</sup>. Both Malin and Sissla told the court that they had been trained by a third woman, Knabb-Rådgerd, who unlike them was a woman with a good reputation. At first Knabb-Rådgerd denied the allegations, but later admitted that she twice had dreamed that she was married to "a large disgusting man". The court warned her: if she did not confess before God, her soul would be in danger. Rådgerd was filled with anguish. Perhaps things had happened the way Malin said, she cried, but "I have done no evil".

The question now was whether the women's confessions were enough to condemn them to death. The chief district judge Wijnbladh was not convinced. Some reputable and learned men down south were in fact skeptical of witchcraft existing to such extent as people claimed. However, the skeptics still numbered few, and at the highest levels it was not only considered reasonable but also necessary to impose the death penalty based on the testimonies from children and other accused. The local pressure was severe; sorcery and witchcraft had to be eliminated. The women had admitted to having intercourse with the Evil One, and even if there could be some doubts, these confessions had to be taken seriously. Sissel Andersdotter, Filpus' Malin and Knabb-Rådgerd were sentenced to death.

The sources from the age of the Witch Craze are fascinating. Naked bodies in orgiastic ceremonies, hairy devils wildly copulating with women, and faces distorted by pain in flaming fire. Detailed descriptions of what the witches devoted themselves to, as well as of the torture and humiliation that took place in the dungeons, often including sexual elements. Nudity, orgy, sadism - it seems obvious that sexuality was central. In this paper, I focus on this particular aspect of the concept of witchcraft.

## **Malleus Maleficarum**

*Malleus Maleficarum*, popularly known as *The Hammer of Witches*, is usually said to be written by Heinrich Insistoris Kramer (Insistoris) and Jacob Sprenger, two Dominican monks, who were inquisitors in Germany. However, the authorship is highly disputed. Insistoris was the archbishop of Salzburg's right hand but his reputation in theological circles was questionable. Sprenger, on the other hand, was a highly reputed theologian, dean of the

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<sup>2</sup> I have translated all quotes from the Swedish judicial sources into modernized English.

Faculty of Theology at Cologne University and the Inquisitor Generalis in Germany. Some researchers believe that Insistoris is the sole author, and that he, in order to increase the legitimacy of the text and strengthen his own position, added Sprenger's name later – with or without his consent. In fact, Sprenger was not named as author until 1519, 24 years after his death.<sup>3</sup>

Insistoris was greatly disturbed by the public's lack of understanding for their work and skepticism about the accusations and methods of the Church and the Inquisition.<sup>4</sup> Local church authorities were often also not convinced of the necessity of the witch-hunt. However, the inquisition was directly subject to Rome, which meant that inquisitors could perform their work without answering to anyone but the Pope.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the troublesome lack of support from the public and Church caused him to turn to the newly appointed Pope Innocent VIII to secure his support. The visit was successful. In the papal bull *Summis Desiderantes Affectibus*, popularly known as “The Witch-Bull”, the Pope sanctions witch persecutions and urges inquisitors to be very firm in the fight against heresy and witchcraft. Moreover, the bishop of Strasbourg would support their work.<sup>6</sup>

*Summis* was far from alone in its kind, and the view of diabolism expressed was relatively conventional for its time. The special thing about this bull is that it gave the two inquisitors exceptional political power and unrestricted control over the witch-hunt and its judicial processes.<sup>7</sup> Insistoris returned to Germany and continued the work he had started. He acted severely indeed. In the district of Constance alone, he was directly responsible for the execution of nearly fifty witches during a five-year period. In support of his and others' hard

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Hans Peter Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft: Theology and Popular Belief* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 19; Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (New York; Cornell University Press, 1972), 230; Wolfgang Behringer & Günter Jerouschek, Introduction, in Heinrich Kramer (Insistoris), *Der Hexenhammer: Malleus Maleficarum. Kommentierte Neuübersetzung*, Edited Wolfgang Behringer et.al. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 2000). In this article I refer only to Heinrich Insistoris Kramer (Insistoris) as author.

<sup>4</sup> Bente Gullveig Alver, *Heksetro og trolddom: En studie i norsk heksevaesen* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1971), 24-25.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Klaits, *Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 44.

<sup>6</sup> Innocentius VIII, *Summis Desiderantes Affectibus*, English translation published in Montague Summers' edition of Heinrich Kramer & Jacob Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum* (London: Arrow Books, 1971), 29-32. The reproduction of the papal bull that is included in copies of *Malleus*, is addressed to both Insistoris and Jacob Sprenger.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Wilson, “Insistoris at Innsbruck: Heinrich Insistoris, the Summis Desiderantes and the Brixen Witch-Trial of 1485”, in *Popular Religion in Germany and Central Europe, 1400–1800*, eds. Bob Schribner & Trevor Johnson (New York, 1996), 87-91.

work, he wrote a witch-hunting handbook, *Malleus Maleficarum*. *Malleus* was not the first manual of its kind. It was preceded by a series of publications about similar themes, and even more followed.<sup>8</sup> However, the direct influence of these early treatises on witchcraft was limited, although they probably were important sources of inspiration for Insistoris. What does make *Malleus* exceptional, however, is its obsession with sexuality.

In the spring of 1487, Insistoris approached the University of Cologne to obtain the approbation of its Faculty of Theology. The text, however, contained some ideas about witchcraft that had not yet been accepted, and it was perceived to be too extreme. Hence, it was impossible to get more than weak approvals from four professors. Despite this, an appropriation document was included in the first edition, in which eight named professors recommend the work as a witch-hunting manual.<sup>9</sup> There are many indications that this document is at least in part a forgery. In fact, it is doubtful whether the Pope or the Faculty of Theology ever had read the text.<sup>10</sup>

It has been argued that the Catholic Church banned *Malleus* in 1490, as it was introduced in the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (List of Forbidden Books). However, the first *Index* did not come until 1559 and it does not include *Malleus*. Nor is it included among banned writings in later editions of the *Index*.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, Insistoris was condemned by the Inquisition in 1490 for recommending unethical and illegal methods, and for not following the doctrines of the church regarding demonology. Possibly the forgery of the approval from the theologians in Cologne had been disclosed by this time.<sup>12</sup>

In *Malleus*, Insistoris uses the typical techniques of a scholastic disputation. He breaks down the problems into clear questions and theses with objections and answers, presents different positions with seemingly high accuracy, and argues for and against different each of them. Finally, his own position is presented as a reply, and its clear logic takes the sting out of the

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<sup>8</sup> Some examples are Johannes Nider, *Formicarius* (1435-37); Anonymous, *Errores Gazariorum* (1450); Martin le Franc, *Champion des Dames* (1440-42) and Claude Tholosan, *Ut magorum et maleficiorum errores* (1436).

<sup>9</sup> "Official Letter of Approbation of the *Malleus Maleficarum* from the Faculty of Theology of the Honourable University of Cologne", English translation published in Montague Summers' edition of Heinrich Kramer & Jacob Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum* (London, 1971), 275-78.

<sup>10</sup> Karen Jolly, Edward Peters, Catharina Raudvere, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, vol. 3, *The Middle Ages* (London, 2002), 239.

<sup>11</sup> *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. Online at the Bavarian State Library.

<sup>12</sup> Jenny Gibbons "Recent Developments in the Study of The Great European Witch Hunt", *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* 5 (1998): 2-16.

criticism and eliminates all the questions. The credibility of the analysis and the solidity of the conclusions is confirmed by Bible verses and references to authorities, like St Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

*Malleus* consists of three parts. The first contains arguments confirming the reality of witchcraft, definitions of the witches' essence and an investigation of their relation to the Devil. The author seeks to prove that different kinds of witches really exist, explains why mainly women are involved in this horrible activity and debates whether God's approval is necessary for witchcraft. The witches' wicked deeds are presented briefly, and the conclusion is: "*The Witches Deserve the heaviest Punishment above All the Criminals of the World.*"<sup>13</sup> The second part contains further description of the witches' methods and different kinds of witchcraft, and how to protect oneself from this evil. The third part deals with the legal procedure and presents a systematic model for effectively and adequately dealing with suspected witches.

The work is permeated with hostility to women and sexuality. Sexuality is regarded as the very basis of witchcraft; witches use carnal lust to attract and destroy, and women are shown to be suitable witches by nature. In addition, there are clear sexual ingredients in the investigation itself, as described in the text.

#### Sexuality as the basis of witchcraft

In *Malleus*, sexuality is identified as the basis for witchcraft, and it is stated that carnal desires always have caused humanity an immense suffering. It is claimed that an act of the flesh caused the fall of Man, and that God therefore allows the devils<sup>14</sup> to have greater power over this area than others. According to this interpretation, a sinful carnal act debased humanity and subjected it to the influence of the Devil. Insistoris states that the devils certainly rejoice in all sins, but they take special delight in fornication, because this deed defiles both body and soul. He concludes by referring to *Tobit's book*: "The devil has power over those who follow their lusts."<sup>15</sup> This is the essential idea in *Malleus Maleficarum*.

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<sup>13</sup> *Malleus*, 77 (P I, Q 14). In the original, the quote is a subheading and therefore in italics.

<sup>14</sup> There are several devils, subordinated to the Devil (Satan) himself.

<sup>15</sup> *Malleus*, 79 (PI Q15). *Tobit's book* belongs to the seven apocryphal deuterocanonical books, i.e. the texts in the Christian Old Testament that are not part of the Hebrew Bible.

Another key idea is that God uses the devils to punish sinful people. The power of Satan is limited, and he cannot act fully without assistants. Although he certainly can arouse desires and lust in humans, he needs human tools to perform malignant deeds (maleficia) and spread evil on earth. This is crucial for witchcraft. It is through bodily contact, preferably fleshly intercourse, that the devil transfers evil power into a human, which is why witchcraft has such a strong sexual character.<sup>16</sup>

Insistoris attacks those who consider the witch herself to be a victim of Satan, and therefore should not be punished, by referring to Augustine's teaching that man is solely responsible for his own sin: "Not all our evil thoughts are stirred up by the devil, but sometimes they arise from the operation of our own judgment".<sup>17</sup> *Malleus* appeases its readers, by emphasizing that temptation itself is not a sin, only giving in to it is sinful. Even if a person can be tempted into sin, she takes the decision of her own free will. A witch is certainly the Devil's instrument, but she has volunteered herself.<sup>18</sup>

#### Why are witches usually female?

*Malleus* presents many reasons for the fact that mainly women are involved in witchcraft. The female gender is already defective and thus inferior in all respects. Women are physically and mentally feebler than men, and therefore credulous and pliant. They can simply assert themselves as witches. In addition, women spread evil more easily because they have "slippery tongues" and cannot keep anything for themselves.<sup>19</sup> Insistoris claims to be able to prove this by considering the origin of the word "feminum". He then finds that "femina" is comprised of "fe" and "minus", making it clear that women "are weaker in maintaining and preserving faith".<sup>20</sup>

A fundamental idea is that women are more "carnal" than men. All women, good or bad, are victims of carnal lust, which makes them easily affected by evil. They are filled with such

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 12-20 (PI, Q2)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 31 (P1, Q5).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 16 (P1, Q2).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 44 (PI, Q6).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 44 (PI, Q6). In fact, the word "feminum" is formed from an Indo-European stem that means "suck". The end of the word comes from an old participle. Femina thus means etymologically "the one who gives suck".

strong desires that they are even willing to fornicate with the Devil. Referring to Cicero, the author states: "The many lusts of men lead them into one sin, but the one lust of women leads them into all sins [...]." <sup>21</sup>

Insistoris firmly maintains that women have feeble memories, making them undisciplined, impulsive and unreliable. In hatred, a woman is as impatient, intense and dangerous as in love. In her eagerness to snatch men, she uses any wicked methods. The vanity of women is boundless, something which is shown both in posture and their way of moving. Women's voices are compared to the songs of the sirens; women drive men into ruin through seduction. "Woman is beautiful to look upon, contaminating to the touch, and deadly to keep" <sup>22</sup>

Eve is a symbol of the perfidy and destructiveness of the female sex. She is slimy and sneaky, and "more bitter than death". <sup>23</sup> Helena, Jezebel, Atalja and Cleopatra are all examples of women who alone are to blame for the suffering of humanity. There is no limit to the evil found in women, the author states, referring to *The Book of Sirach*: "All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman." <sup>24</sup>

"All witchcraft comes from carnal lusts, which in women are insatiable", Insistoris claims. <sup>25</sup> It is therefore natural that witches mainly are female: "And blessed be the Highest Who has so far preserved the male sex from so a great crime: for since He was willing to be born and suffered for us, therefore He has granted to men this privilege." <sup>26</sup> The deciding factor for the author seems to be that God sent a son to the people, not a daughter. The conclusion is quite clear: "Maleficarum" is in the feminine – it is female evil that needs to be smashed with the hammer.

#### The witch's own sexual activity

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 43 (PI, Q6).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 41–48 (PI, Q6). Quote on 46.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 41–48 (PI, Q6). Quote on 43 and 47.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 41–48 (PI, Q6). Quote on 43. *The Book of Sirach*, also called the *Book of Ecclesiasticus*, is one of the deuterocanonical books.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 41–48 (PI, Q6). Quote on 47. It is a quote from *The Book of Sirach*.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 41–48 (PI, Q6). Quote on 47.

Insistoris investigates in several sections the witches' carnal deeds. There are several kinds of witches but "it is common to all of them to practice carnal copulation with devils".<sup>27</sup> This is a sine qua non if the Devil wants to act through a witch. If her magic is to be effective, she must copulate with Satan and become his carnal slave. The author agrees with Thomas Aquinas' view that "those women are chiefly apt to be witches who are most disposed to such acts".<sup>28</sup> These acts do not give any pleasure; on the contrary, they are both unpleasant and painful. Not even the Devil experiences any pleasure in the act. He only accomplishes the carnal act in order to corrupt humanity and spread evil over the world. It is a matter of duty in the service of evil.

*Malleus* explains in detail how the witch practically engages in sex with the Devil, either at a solemn ceremony where many witches are present or at a private meeting.<sup>29</sup> Insistoris claims to possess solid knowledge about the ceremony, based on information he as inquisitor had received from confessions and testimonies. Special attention is devoted to the ceremony, and aided by common elements and features in the confessions, the author seems confident in his ability to reconstruct the course of events. The witches are magically transported, often at night, to a secret meeting in a secluded location. In a joint ceremony, the witch concludes a pact with the Devil, and by swearing an oath commits herself to being his servant. She promises to belong to him body and soul, to persuade others to do the same, and to make ointment from the body parts of children, preferably baptized ones. If she does this, she will fulfil all her wishes with the help of the Evil One.<sup>30</sup> A nightly transport, a secret meeting with many participants, a pact with the Devil and child sacrifice. We recognize these ingredients from the great witch-hunt during of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Witches' Sabbath.

The concept of the Witches' Sabbath is an amalgam of ideas from at least two different origins. The first source was jurists, demonologists and inquisitors, that is the learned elite, and their idea was that there is a devil-inspired sect to which anyone who denies the true faith and endorses the cross and sacraments has access. We find an imaginative depiction of the Witches' Sabbath, in *Errores Gazariorum* (1450). Here, the anonymous author tells us how

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 99 (PII, Q2, Ch 2).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 99 (PII, Q2, Ch 2).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 100 (PII, Q2, Ch 2).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 99 (PII, Q1, Ch2).



witches of both sexes swear devotion to the Devil and kiss him in the anus, how they eat boiled and roasted children, and how they copulate in all constellations and engage in various carnal perversities.<sup>31</sup> The second origin of the concept is from popular conceptions about people who have characteristics that allow them to visit the Kingdom of Death, often riding on an animal or in the form of an animal. At the middle of the fourteenth century, these two lines of thought converged in a process supported by the devotional activities of inquisitors and the powerful texts of the demonologists. These ideas were spread almost immediately, and two hundred years later, the Witches' Sabbath was an obvious part of witch-trials all over Europe.<sup>32</sup> The similarities with the events described in *Malleus* are significant, but there are also differences. The ceremony described in *Malleus* has more the character of a feudal homage ritual than a sexual orgy. Although there certainly are sexual elements, the pornographic details we find in *Errores Gazariorum* (1450) and later works of demonology, and which were so clear in the witch-trials, are not to be found in *Malleus*' description of the ceremony.

Insistoris also deals with the private carnal act between witches and the Devil, who are believed to appear in many different forms. Sometimes he comes as he is, sometimes he appears in another shape, and on other occasions the Devil just speaks through someone else. The witch can see him, but he is invisible to other people. Witnesses have been able to see the witches "lying on their backs in the fields or the woods, naked up to the very navel, and it has been apparent from the disposition of those limbs and members which pertain to the venereal act and orgasm, as also from the agitation of their legs and thighs, that, all invisibly to the bystanders, they have been copulating with Incubus devils".<sup>33</sup> The idea that the Devil is invisible to innocent spectators enabled the inquisitors to obtain a greater number of accusations and testimonies.

The pact with the Devil also means that the witch "indulge[s] in every kind of carnal lust with Incubi and Succubi and all manner of filthy delights".<sup>34</sup> She is not only be obliged to conduct intercourse with the Devil; a witch should engage in all sexual activities, preferably perverse,

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<sup>31</sup> Anon., *Errores gazariorum* (1450), in P.G. Maxwell-Stewart, *Witchcraft in Europe and the New World, 1400-1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 30.

<sup>32</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, "Sabbatens natur", in *Häxornas Europa 1400–1700: Historiska och antropologiska studier*, eds. Bengt Ankarloo & Gustav Henningsen, *Rättshistoriska studier* 13 (Lund: Nerenius & Santérus, 1987).

<sup>33</sup> *Malleus*, 114 (PII, Q1, Ch5).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 20f (PI, Q2).

as often as possible with as many humans as possible. The author is convinced that fleshly intercourse defiles body and soul, which makes it easier to trespass, also in other areas. This is another reason for finding women with carnal lust and poor morals especially suited to witchcraft. Harlots and adulterers are already corrupted and extorted, and they can therefore easily be deceived to engage in witchcraft.<sup>35</sup> This reasoning consolidates the fear of sexuality in general and female sexuality in particular. Feeling and expressing sexual desire as a woman becomes fatal.

### Sexuality as means

A large part of *Malleus* focuses on the methods used by the Devil and the witches to infiltrate and corrupt humanity. Insistoris believes that this often happens through the eyes, because the eyes are the mirror of the soul and, in addition, particularly susceptible to influence. The eyes can absorb impurity by just looking at an unclean object, such as a menstruating woman. A quick glance may be sufficient for the eyes to be infected and then to infect the entire human being. A man is thus already exposed to real danger when he looks at a vicious woman. Eyes can attract and fascinate; eyesight can tempt and seduce. The author refers to Isidorus's work *Etymologiae*: "Further, he says that they distract men's minds, drive them into madness, insane hatred, and immense lust."<sup>36</sup>

The author pays special attention to what he calls "Incubus" and "Succubus". By turning a demon into human form, the Devil can have sexual intercourse with human beings. Taking the shape of a man, Incubus, or a woman, Succubus, he can copulate with both women and men. Succubi and Incubi are beautiful and attractive, which makes it difficult for humans to resist temptation. It is ingenious: as a Succubus, the Devil can collect semen from a man, store it and pollute it, turn into an Incubus and transfer the seed to a woman and fertilize her. Since reproduction can only be done the way God has determined, through sexual intercourse between a man and a woman, the Devil cannot create life himself. As Succubus or Incubus, however, he can breed artificially. The contradiction between carnal knowledge as pollutant and sinful, on the one hand, and on the other hand, carnal knowledge as a creation of God, is also to be found in early medieval theology. Sexual intercourse that did not directly serve the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 47 (PI, Q6).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 14 (PI, Q2).

purpose of conception was considered a sin, even when it occurred within the marriage. Insistoris states that the most disgusting acts of carnal lust are performed by devils, not for the sake of pleasure, but to contaminate the souls and bodies of human beings.<sup>37</sup>

### Sexual maleficia

*Malleus* also gives an elaborate account of the witches' evil deeds, namely sorcery and destruction – often of a sexual nature. Witches use several methods to damage coition and conception. Their jinxes can cause an abnormally excessive, vicious and evil lust between man and woman. They can enslave men to irresistible passion. If they want to, they can destroy the relationship between two lovers by planting hatred or jealousy. It is also possible for them to physically remove a man or woman during sexual intercourse, or to otherwise prevent their bodies from meeting. Furthermore, the man can be transformed into an animal; male genitals can be replaced by replicas; or a man can be influenced so that he is no longer attracted to a specific woman. A woman's ability to receive male semen can be eliminated, and miscarriage can be induced. The witch can also destroy the vitality of male sperm, prevent ejaculation or make a man impotent. Their powers indeed seem endless.

There is a contradiction between belief in the power of the Catholic sacraments, and the idea that the Devil can make men impotent. Insistoris states that "although matrimony is a work of God, as being instituted by Him, yet it is sometimes wrecked by the work of the devil: not indeed through main force, since then he might be thought stronger than God, but with the permission of God, by causing some temporary or permanent impediment in the conjugal act".<sup>38</sup> If erectile dysfunction lasts for long time, or if the marriage can never be consummated, it has to be annulled. While it is firmly stated that it is with God's permission that the devil prevents the marital act, it is thus concluded that the effect may be that the sacrament instituted by God loses its validity.

In his service as inquisitor, Insistoris had encountered male witnesses who claimed to have been deprived of their genital organs through witchcraft. Two chapters are devoted to proof that the impossible is actually possible, if not in reality at least in illusion.<sup>39</sup> A witch can

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 28 (PI, Q3).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 48 (PI, Q6).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 48 (PI, Q9 and PII, Q1, Ch7).

influence a man's perceptual ability, so that he experiences his member as completely lacking. The author presents theories that the devil, who "in an assumed body he presents himself as being something which he is not"<sup>40</sup>, can place a concealing substance in front of the genitals. He illustrates this by way of some examples. One example, taken from Pope Gregory I (540-604), is about a nun who ate a piece of lettuce, which turned out to be nothing less than the Devil himself in the form of lettuce. The story, of course, seems ridiculous to modern people, but in fifteenth-century Europe, its reasoning was most likely seriously considered. It was a matter of life and death.

Insistoris, however, assures readers that this, fortunately, cannot happen to all men, but only to those who "are lacking in the gift of divine grace".<sup>41</sup> Directly thereafter he tells some hair-raising stories about witches collecting male genitals and keeping them in a bird's nest, where they eat corn and oats like living creatures. Again the author calms his troubled readers: "Those who are given to lust, the devil has power over them."<sup>42</sup> He scares and soothes, threatens and offers protection. The obedient and pious can rest safely in the arms of the Church.

#### Characters revealing a witch

In *Malleus*, sexuality is repeatedly identified as the very origin of witchcraft, and the witch is depicted as a thoroughly lecherous creature. Carnal desires are considered typical of the women who secretly deal in witchcraft. Thus, women who openly show a sexual appetite run a high risk of being suspected. Sensuality becomes life-threatening, and desire becomes a feeling forbidden to women.

Since the Catholic Church accepted sex and sexual intercourse only with reluctance, erotic life became strictly circumscribed by rules and taboos. Sexual intercourse that did not serve the purpose of procreation was considered lecherous and sinful, even within marriage. Insistoris argues that such acts are performed by the devil and his helpers, not for the sake of pleasure, but to corrupt and defile humanity.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 60 (PI, QIX).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 120 (PII, Q1 Ch7).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 121 (PII, Q1 Ch7).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 28 (PI, Q3).

*Malleus* presents typical signs of bewitchment, like impotence and erotic temptation. Reference is made to the contemporary Cardinal Hostiensis, who states that if a man never can get erection, this is a natural condition. If a man gets an erection, but still cannot perform sexual intercourse, it is a sign of witchcraft. The author warns against spreading this information; he probably does not want the tricks of the inquisition to be revealed to the public.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, when it comes to erotic temptation, it is possible to determine what is natural and what is not. The following cases are deemed witchcraft: the man has a beautiful and honest wife, yet experiences a strong temptation; he cannot resist temptation despite persuasive attempts and shameful feelings; he suddenly and unexpectedly gets carried away, both day and night, also over long distances.<sup>45</sup>

#### Sexual elements in the witch processes

The third part of *Malleus* is devoted to legal procedure. Legal representatives are instructed step by step in how and when to interrogate the accused, what questions to ask and what methods to use. Some elements have clear sexual dimensions.

On the first day, the accused shall be undressed; if it is a woman, this will be done in the cell by "honest women of good reputation".<sup>46</sup> After that, her clothes will be examined for hidden witch tools that can help the witch during the process. Then all the hair on the body are to be removed, because magic aids can be hidden there too, "or even in the most secret parts of their bodies which must not be named."<sup>47</sup> It is not difficult to see the sexual dimension of these examinations.

Insistoris assumes that witches usually lie during the first interrogation, because the Devil does not allow them to confess. He disagrees with methods like the water test, as witches can easily get help from the Devil to pass these tests. However, he asserts that torture must be used. In order for the witch to be released from her ties to Satan, she must expiate her crimes and thereby be purified from sin. Thus, torture is presented as something almost humanitarian.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 56 (PI, Q8).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 52f (PI, Q7).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 225 (PIII, Q14).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 228 (PIII, Q15).

Through the torment of torture, the women can be unchained; through fire, they can be saved. Therefore, the author states, there are witches who even embraced the fire with joy: "For she went most willingly to her death, saying that she would gladly suffer an even more terrible death, if only she could be set free from and escape the power of the devil."<sup>48</sup>

Insistoris harshly attacks the critical voices raised against the inquisitors' activities, and never doubts what is right. His assumption is that a woman who has been accused of witchcraft is a witch. If she does not confess, it is because the devil prevents her: "For if it is asked why some will not confess the truth under even the greatest tortures, while others readily confess their crimes when they are questioned [---] then it is due to the devil whether she preserves silence or confesses her crimes".<sup>49</sup> If the witch does not even cry during torture, it is an obvious sign of guilt.

If a judge decides that the witch is to be tortured, it is important that the judiciary "obey immediately but not with joy, rather, they should appear to be concerned about their duty".<sup>50</sup> Apparently, for Insistoris it was obvious that a sadistic setting could have a free outlet in the torture chamber. The combination of violence, sexuality and religious experience is a well-known historical phenomenon. In the ancient cult of Dionysus, there were bloody rites with sexual elements that aimed to create a union between the cult participants and the god. The medieval mystics showed a strong attraction to suffering as a method of experiencing closeness with holiness; pain became a way of communicating with God. Torture fulfilled a similar function – on the torture bench, the truth could come to light and the soul could be purified. Although torture was forbidden in several countries, including Sweden, violence was a rule rather than an exception in European legal practice. Several of the execution methods practiced were extremely cruel. It was probably a general idea that crimes had to be atoned through suffering.<sup>51</sup>

### The impact of *Malleus Maleficarum*

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 104 (PII, Q1).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 102, (PII, Q1).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 225 (PIII, Q14).

<sup>51</sup> See further, for example Mitchell B. Merback, *The thief, the cross, and the wheel; pain and the spectacle of punishment in medieval and renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). The Swedish context is described in Björn Åstrand, *Tortyr och pinligt förhör: Våld och tvång i äldre svensk rätt* (Umeå, Umeå University, 2000).

*Malleus* initially did not attract any particular interest from the Church and the Inquisition, but it soon gained great influence in the civil courts. It was simply useful. When the big Witch Craze broke out, the courts did not know how to handle the ensuing situation, since many had never been faced with the problem before. It is therefore logical that the courts chose to rely on texts that could offer clear guidance - and had the blessing of the Pope and theologians. As a result, *Malleus* became highly influential over time. Between 1486 and 1521, the book was published in at least fourteen editions. During the initial phase of the Reformation, the interest in demonology and *Malleus*' popularity decreased. After 1560, attention was again drawn to witchcraft and in 1575-1670, the book was printed in sixteen additional editions. Already in its third edition, it was published together with another demonological treatise, namely *Tractatus de Pythonicis* (1489). The author was Ulrich Molitoris, a lawyer employed by the archduke Sigismund of Austria. Together, these texts became extremely influential in witch-hunting Europe.<sup>52</sup>

Another influential example from the demonological literature at the time was *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (1580), popularly known as *Demon-Mania*. Author was the well-reputed lawyer and political philosopher Jean Bodin. The text was in French, not Latin, which prompted its rapid spread.<sup>53</sup> Soon it was published in at least 23 editions, including editions in German, Italian and Latin. It became immensely influential, and is considered to have caused several large-scale witchcraft processes during the first five decades after its publication.<sup>54</sup> *Demon-Mania* is divided into four books, but it essentially consists of three parts.<sup>55</sup> The first part contains a theoretical discussion about magic and demons, its origins, guises and relationship with God. Of special interest is the boundary between permissible and unauthorized occultism, between good and evil. The second part deals with sorcery and witchcraft as an idea, phenomenon and crime. Bodin describes, the Witches' Sabbath and various criminal acts of witches, of which devil worship is the worst. The third part concerns the legal treatment of witches. Bodin claims that the only right thing is to kill them, preferably by burning them alive.

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<sup>52</sup> Bengt Ankarloo, *Satans raseri: En sannfärdig berättelse om det stora häxoväsendet i Sverige och omgivande länder* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2007), 82-83.

<sup>53</sup> Jean Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches* (1580), Eng. translation (Toronto: Centre for reformation and renaissance studies, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> Jonathan L. Pearl, "Introduction", in *ibid.*, 9.

<sup>55</sup> I here use Randy A. Scott's modern English translation from 2001, which also contains references and comments on the original text.

*Demon-Mania* uses the same framework as *Malleus*. The ideas, theories and argumentation are also similar, and Bodin often refers to Kramer and Sprenger. The main difference is that Bodin argues from a legal perspective. He shares the belief of his contemporaries that witches must be severely punished, but maintains that it must be done within the judicial system. Of utmost importance is that the judicial process is carried out correctly, in accordance with German-Roman law. In each region, special judges should be appointed to handle witchcraft, and a series of measures should be taken to increase the number of witches that can be brought to justice. As a lawyer, Bodin describes the inquisition process very clearly, focusing on the inquiring court, testimony, evidence and confession. Confession can be forced in different ways, for example by placing a spy in the witch's cell who claims to be accused of the same crime as she is. If the witch does not confess, she should be undressed and shaved, and if there is strong evidence or half-proof, torture should be used. Should the witch confess during torture, but retract her confession after torture, it can only be regarded as an indication of guilt.

It is difficult to know how much influence *Demon-Mania* had on the witch processes. Bodin's perceptions of witchcraft and the existence of the Devil did, in many respects, not correspond to the official attitude of the Catholic Church as formulated by Catholic demonologists. Most French demonologists believed that the book was both incorrect and dangerous, and along with several of Jean Bodin's other works, it was banned by the pope in the 1590s and was included in the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. Therefore, it seems unlikely that the Catholic Church would contribute to spreading Bodin's text. Nevertheless, it continued to be published in Catholic regions.<sup>56</sup>

Both *Malleus* and *Demon-Mania* were part of a genre of demonological texts with similar content, and one can reasonably assume that they were read by European theologians and lawyers who sought knowledge and guidance in the fight against witchcraft.

### Demonology in Sweden

In Sweden too, theological and legal theses were written about sorcery and superstition. It

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<sup>56</sup> Jonathan L. Pearl, "Introduction", in *Demon-Mania*, 27.



seems unlikely, though, that they would have had a general or direct impact on witchcraft processes, since the spread of these manuscripts was too limited. However, they are interesting for at least two reasons: first, they clearly reflect the ideas expressed in the major European demonological theses, mainly *Malleus* and *Demon-Mania*, and second, these ideas are to be found in Swedish courts during the Witch Craze of 1668–76. In fact, demonological theses formed the basis for the courts' decision on what was possible and true in testimonies and confessions. The two most important demonological treatises from sixteenth-century Sweden is *Ethica Christiana* and *Magia Incantratrix*, both written in a classical scholastic Pro Et Contra-tradition, like *Malleus*. They are built on questions, subsequent comments, examples, objections, arguments and conclusions, as well as quotations from the Bible that reinforce these conclusions – all in combination with imaginative speculations and narratives.<sup>57</sup>

Most extensive was *Ethica Christiana*, a giant piece of 3700 pages, of which three chapters are devoted to witchcraft. The author, Laurentius Paulinus Gothus (1565–1646), was Professor of Logic, Mathematics, Astronomy and Theology, as well as Rector at Uppsala University. Gothus held several episcopates and was appointed Archbishop in 1637, a position he held until his death.<sup>58</sup>

*Magia Incantratrix* was written in 1632, and consists of 39 chapters, each of which begins with a theological question about the power, guises and actions of the devil. It was authored by Ericus Johannis Prytz (1587-1637), vicar in Kuddby, in the county of Östergötland, during the first half of the seventeenth century.<sup>59</sup> Prytz came from a family of clergy. His father was vicar in Söderköping and both his brothers were priests. His younger brother, Andreas Prytz, was bishop of Linköping and Professor of Eloquence. As court chaplain to Duke Johan, his elder brother Claudius Prytz had been involved in several witchcraft trials during the period 1610-20. At one point, Claudius himself had been close to being drawn into the fire by a witch at the stake.<sup>60</sup>

Ericus Prytz was a respected clergyman engaged in the fight against the devil. The records say

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<sup>57</sup> Uppsala University was founded 1477 and is the oldest university in the Nordic countries.

<sup>58</sup> Laurentius Paulinus Gothus, *Ethica Christiana* I (Strängnäs, 1633), chapters 16–19, 188–252. Manuscript in Västerås city library, Sweden.

<sup>59</sup> Ericus Johannis Prytz, *Magia Incantratrix* (1632). Manuscript in Linköping's city library..

<sup>60</sup> Idem. This was one of the few cases in Sweden where the condemned witch was burned alive.

that he kept a “watchful eye in his office against false teachings” and that he, “because he punished sin, was in danger of the wizards’ and witches’ attacks, much like a soldier standing against the enemy on the battlefield, particularly because he knew that people such as his honorable and learned predecessor, Herr Anders, provost and priest in this same place, and many other pastors in the parish, had also been defeated. Yet he did not fear, but executed his duty, and left the matter in the hands of God.”<sup>61</sup>

The central problem in the three witchcraft chapters of *Ethica Christiana*, as well as in *Magia Incantatrix*, is the line between magia naturalis and magia incantatrix, thus between, on the one hand, learned men's quest for knowledge and utilization of the forces of nature and, on the other hand, dangerous sorcery. This distinction was of the utmost importance, as *magia naturalis* could be taught at universities without problems, while *magia incantatrix* had to be punished severely. Prytz stated that the main problem is not that *magia incantatrix* could be used for destruction, but merely that a person using this magic, no doubt, has entered into a pact with the devil; he has been given diabolical power in exchange for his soul. Gothus eagerly advocated the death penalty for not only *magia incantatrix*, but also for idolatry and devil-worship.

Women run the greatest risk of being seduced by the devil, Prytz claimed, and there are several explanations for this. Already the apostle Peter called woman “the weaker vessel”. Therefore, Satan can easily entice the woman into sorcery, sin and other iniquities. This is evident from the example of Adam and Eve. Referring to *The Book of Sirach*, Prytz finds woman also cunning, “so that no cunning triumphed hers”. This allows her to worship Satan without anyone noticing it, and as his servant she can harm cattle, crops and humans. In addition, sorcery is associated with “much superstition and a lot of nonsense that men do not know and do not want to use”. Men often do not know when their wives are engaged in witchcraft, and beyond the control of men, women are even more likely to commit themselves to evil actions. Thus, it is not surprising that Satan finds his servants mainly among women, “who are so inclined”.<sup>62</sup>

A woman who is unclean during her menstrual period is particularly sensitive, and if the

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<sup>61</sup> Johan Alfred Westerlund and Johan Axel Setterdahl, *Linköpings stifts herdaminne*, 3 (Linköping 1917-1919), 442f.

<sup>62</sup> Ericus Prytz, *Magia Incantatrix*, folio 89–93.

Devil makes use of her weakness, she can easily harm her environment. Among other things, she can crush mirrors with her glance: “Thus womenfolk could, when in pain from their monthly blood, look nosily into mirrors, and damage them, so that the glass is shattered”. The question is then whether the woman's monthly blood is poisoned. Prytz refers to the learned Férnelius<sup>63</sup>, who believed that women's menstrual blood is in fact poisoned, because the appearance of menstruating women can spoil, for example, baking, brewing and casting. On the other hand, Prytz emphasizes that the blood itself cannot be poisoned, since it provides food and drink to the fetus in the mother's womb. Additionally, “milk results from the same blood and flows to the breasts through certain arteries, as appointed by God”. However, since the woman's menstrual blood is kept in the womb, it can be polluted by both the forces of evil and the coldness of the female body. Menstrual blood is a sign of a woman's weakness, but is probably not toxic in itself.<sup>64</sup>

Both Gothus and Prytz raise the question of whether a human can copulate with the devil and evil spirits. Both agree that this is possible. Gothus does not investigate the matter further, but notes with reference to St. Augustine, among others, that the Devil certainly can exploit lewdness and hideous fornication with humans.<sup>65</sup> Prytz discusses the issue in a particular chapter. Satan rejoices that people feel “illicit lust and fornicate with each other”, he states. It is no doubt women who entice men to do this. It is said that Oden copulated with human females and that men would copulate with “the skogsrå”, a mythical forest spirit, and “the mermaid”. Some of the “the elders”, such as Tertullian<sup>66</sup>, say angels can fornicate with women. Others argue that this is merely a matter of imagination and the Devil's illusion; humans cannot copulate with spirits that lack bodies. However, it is possible for the Devil to copulate with humans by inhabiting human form, Prytz claims, either as a male incubus or a female succubus. As a succubus, he first receives semen from men, then quickly transforms into an incubus and plants the seed in the woman. Women who get pregnant this way will give birth to anomalies, with abnormally large heads and narrow arms and legs. These

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<sup>63</sup> Jean Fernel (1497-1558) was one of the leading medical practitioners of the sixteenth century. In his *Abditis rerum causis* (1548) he investigates what he calls "hidden diseases", which result from occult powers. Here he also discusses the unclean and vicious character of the menstrual blood.

<sup>64</sup> Ericus Prytz, *Magia Incantatrix*, 205, 587, 589 and 651.

<sup>65</sup> Laurentius Paulius Gothus, *Ethica Christiana* I, 250.

<sup>66</sup> Tertullian (ca. 160–220) is regarded as one of the fathers of the Catholic Church.

creatures will usually not learn to walk or talk, and they will die unblessed. What is described is probably hydrocephalus, which is considered the result of the Devil's influence.<sup>67</sup>

The similarities with the messages conveyed by Kramer and Sprenger in *Malleus Maleficarum* 150 years earlier are apparent, and it seems likely that both Prytz and Gothus had read this treatise. The weakness, uncleanliness and wiles of woman make her an easy target for the Devil; women entice men to evil; the sexual act is central to witchcraft and devil-worship; as incubus and succubus, the devil can copulate with humans; women who get pregnant with the Devil give birth to anomalies. These ideas are also expressed in Swedish trials during the Witch Craze of the seventeenth century.

### **The Swedish Empire – Consolidating central power and raging wars**

During the seventeenth century, Sweden became one of the most powerful countries in Europe, and comprehensive national reforms took place to consolidate central power. Courts of Appeal were established, the collegiate system was introduced and state administration was strengthened. The educational system became more structured, with elementary and secondary schools as well as new universities, and literacy teaching was intensified. A libertarian climate prevailed at Uppsala University, where ideas about power and government were discussed in a relatively favorable academic atmosphere. There was active contact with the rest of Europe as an increasing number of Swedish students studied abroad and foreign professors taught at Swedish universities. The intellectual scope widened – but at the same time superstition flourished.<sup>68</sup>

A functioning central administration was vital in controlling and administrating the kingdom. Officers of the new central administration were appointed from the nobility – from both from the old landowning nobility and from the ranks of the newly ennobled – which had increased privileges and great power. Meanwhile, common people was under great pressure: the tax burden was heavy to bear for yeoman farmers and the allotment system meant that every 10

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<sup>67</sup> Ericus Prytz, *Magia Incantatrix*, folie 24-29. About hydrocephalus se for example A. Aschoff et.al, “The scientific history of hydrocephalus and its treatment”, *Neurosurgical Review* 22, 2-3 (1999):67-93.

<sup>68</sup> Günther Barudio, *Absolutismus– Zerstörung der libertären Verfassung. Studien zur “karolinischen Eingewalt” in Schweden zwischen 1680 und 1693* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1976); Rudolf Thunander, *Hovrätt i funktion: Göta hovrätt och brottmålen, 1635-1699. Rättshistoriskt bibliotek*, I:49 (Lund: Institutet för rättshistorisk forskning, 1993), 3.

adult men were sent to European battlefields. Between 1621 and 1632 alone about 50 000 men were killed, a considerable number in a country with only one million inhabitants.<sup>69</sup>

In the mid-1600s, the country's economy was extremely strained after years of war and bad crops. To finance the wars large sums had been levied from the peasant families that were already hard hit by recurrent crop failures and harsh winters. Taxes were considerably increased, both in absolute terms and relative to the crop yield, but this was not enough to finance the wars. The state took large loans from foreign as well as Swedish funders, with the result that national debt rose dramatically and taxes on the population further increased. At this time, the Kingdom of Sweden was gripped by the Witch Craze.

#### Law and judicial system

The church in Sweden was territorially organized in parishes and dioceses. The local parishes were both ecclesiastical and legal entities and enjoyed a certain autonomy. The decision-making body was the parish meeting, led by the vicar and comprising both women and men from the parish. The parish meeting had different functions, among them to be the judicial body in matters concerning breaches of the Ten Commandments, including superstition. Cases of less serious superstition were transferred to the church, while more severe superstition crimes, such as witchcraft, were handled by the secular law.<sup>70</sup>

The judicial system was organized in two levels of courts: The District Court and the Court of Appeal, tasked with "pronouncing the King's judgment". The District Courts had to submit copies of their records every year to the Court of Appeal, which also was to do unannounced inspections regularly. Furthermore, all death sentences were to be considered by the Court of Appeal, which had the right to commute the sentence, while the District Courts were obliged to judge according to the letter of the law. Some particularly serious crimes could immediately be brought before the Court of Appeal, including witchcraft and blasphemy against God.

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<sup>69</sup> Sven A. Nilsson, *De stora krigens tid: Om Sverige som militärstat och bondesamhälle* (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 1990), 21f.

<sup>70</sup> Göran Inger, *Svensk rättshistoria*, 4. ed. (Stockholm: Liber, 1997), 82–83. Superstition included verbal magic, such as spells and curses, and solitaire, magic actions with signage and various accessories, such as herbs, hair and cats.

The dominant principles of the law were deterrence and retribution.<sup>71</sup> The often very cruel punishments were part of the early modern state's disciplinary project, and the executions were made into spectacles where power was manifested and respect for Lady Justice strongly imprinted in the people. During the latter part of the seventeenth century, around 70 crimes were punishable by death, including double adultery, violence against parents, and blasphemy. In practice, however, the Court of Appeal often exercised its right to commute sentences, and imposed a more lenient sentence.

In Sweden, as in Scandinavia and England, an accusatorial lawsuit had been in force since the Middle Ages, while inquisitorial proceedings had dominated on the continent since the thirteenth century. The accusatorial process required that a particular person was accused of a crime by another individual; in other words, the process requires a plaintiff and a defendant. During the accusatorial process, members of the court took a passive role. The duty of the court was to listen to the accusations and the defense, to consider whether the defendant was to be convicted of having committed the alleged crime, and, if so, to decide on punishment in accordance with law. In the inquisitorial process, on the other hand, the court played an active role. Its task was to discover the truth by questioning the accused, and to collect, scrutinize and evaluate evidence. In practice, the presiding judge could act as prosecutor, applying heavy pressure to obtain a confession.

A large number of Swedish lawyers, especially in the Court of Appeal, were educated at foreign universities, where they had been schooled in German-Roman law. These 'new and modern' ideas were brought to Uppsala University, where law was taught, and accordingly affected judicial processes. Legal management became more rational and the state had the opportunity to exercise better control over law enforcement. Increasingly, the trial became a tool for maintaining the power of the Church and the State.

German-Roman law included the theory of legal proof, based on a ranking of the value of testimonies and evidence.<sup>72</sup> Voluntary, unequivocal and clear confessions constituted full proof, probatio plena, as did two unanimous testimonies.<sup>73</sup> Half-proof, probatio semiplena,

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<sup>71</sup> Göran Inger, *Svensk rättshistoria*, 119-122.

<sup>72</sup> The theory of legal proof was gradually incorporated in Swedish courts during the sixteenth century, but was first settled in the Civil Code of 1734. Göran Inger, *Svensk rättshistoria*, 54f.

<sup>73</sup> Testimony did not have the status of material evidence until the seventeenth century.

could consist of many incidents of damage without eyewitnesses. Testimonies and evidence could also be valued additively, so that many cases of weak evidence together constituted half-proof. This additive evaluation came to be used during the witchcraft trials when testimonies were presented by children. Full proof was needed for conviction, and if this was not presented, the court essentially had two options: transferring the matter to the Court of Appeal or trying to get a confession. One way of obtaining confessions was through torture.<sup>74</sup>

A problem for the District Courts was that torture was prohibited by Swedish law, also during most of the seventeenth century. The question of torture was discussed by the judiciary and the church. Some completely opposed permitting the use of physical violence as part of a trial, while others felt that it was both necessary and reasonable to use torture in certain cases. A series of attempts had been made to legalize torture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but without success.<sup>75</sup> However, this did not stop torture from being used in practice, and to obtain support for the use of torture, legal representatives turned to the countries in Europe where German-Roman law had a stronger foothold.<sup>76</sup> On the continent, torture had been allowed for a long time, and when inquisition courts started to incorporate torture this brought about regulation of a procedure that in the past was more or less uncontrolled. In exceptional crimes, *crimen exceptum*, the usual rules did not apply, and witchcraft and blasphemy were both considered exceptional crimes. Torture had two functions: to complement and support evidence, and to purify the malefactor's soul. The use of torture was strictly regulated; these regulations were not, however, followed in practice.<sup>77</sup>

Despite the fact that Swedish law did not allow torture, both the Court of Appeal and the King himself sanctioned torture in *crimen exceptum*. The legal protocols show that the District Courts also practiced torture, despite the fact that they completely lacked the authority for this. Sometimes the courts, in the reports to the Court of Appeal, tried to hide the fact that torture had been used. Furthermore, there were regional differences in the use of torture. In Stockholm the District Court was far more inclined to use torture than in rural courts around

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<sup>74</sup> Göran Inger, *Svensk rättshistoria*, 116-117; Bengt Ankarloo, *Trolldomsprocesserna i Sverige* (Stockholm: Nerenius & Santérus, 1984), 241-246.

<sup>75</sup> Henrik Munktel, "Tortyrn i svensk rättshistoria I", *Lychnos* 1939, 114-117; Björn Åstrand, *Tortyr och pinligt förhör*.

<sup>76</sup> Göran Inger, *Svensk rättshistoria*, 116-117; Bengt Ankarloo, *Trolldomsprocesserna i Sverige*, 65-67.

<sup>77</sup> Bengt Ankarloo, *Trolldomsprocesserna i Sverige*, 60-63, 66; Björn Åstrand, *Tortyr och pinligt förhör*, 42-43.

the country, probably because they were more influenced by the German-Roman law and of the learned doctrines that they had access to.<sup>78</sup>

However, far more common than torture were threats and admonitions from the priest, about eternal torment in hell for to anyone who refused to confess. A special method was that the condemned was brought to the place of execution and there was pressured to confess both her own guilt, and witness to others. Only those who confessed were to be executed, while those who did not were returned to custody. For obvious reasons, the method soon lost its effect.

### The law on witchcraft crimes

The medieval provincial legal codes decreed severe penalties for physically harmful witchcraft (maleficia).<sup>79</sup> In the first law of the realm, *King Magnus Eriksson's Law of the Realm* (1350), a paragraph concerning witchcraft was added, which among other things decreed that the culprit would suffer on the breaking wheel if he is a man and stoned if she is a woman. This type of punishment, a 'qualified death penalty', was only given for the most serious crimes. In *King Kristoffer's Law of the Realm* (1442) the crime of witchcraft was included in "Höghmælis Balker", the law code dealing with particularly serious crimes, such as murder, buggery, treason and 'harmful sorcery'. For witchcraft causing a man's death, men would be punished on the breaking wheel and women would be burned at the stake. Being burned alive was seen as an evil death, associated with eternal damnation.<sup>80</sup> However, there are only a few examples of people convicted of witchcraft in the seventeenth century who were actually burned alive in Sweden. Often the District Court did pronounce such a sentence which the Court of Appeal then commuted so that the convicted would first be beheaded and then burned.<sup>81</sup>

To be tried for witchcraft was far from being tantamount to a death sentence as long as the accusatorial system was applied. When the inquisitorial process had become more or less

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<sup>78</sup> Bengt Ankarloo, *Trolldomsprocesserna i Sverige*, 73, 257–259; Henrik Munktel, "Tortyren i svensk rättshistoria I", 127–131.

<sup>78</sup> Göran Inger, *Svensk rättshistoria*, 116; Bengt Ankarloo, *Trolldomsprocesserna i Sverige*, 258.

<sup>79</sup> *Upplandslagen, Manhælgisbalker (Manhelgdsbalken)*, in *Svenska landskapslagar*, eds. Elias Wessén & Åke Holmbäck, 1.vol. (1933), 19.

<sup>80</sup> Jonas Liliequist, *Brott, synd och straff: Tidlagsbrottet i Sverige under 1600- och 1700-talen* (Umeå: Umeå universitet, 1992), 91-92.

<sup>81</sup> Rudolf Thunander, *Hovrätt i funktion*, 77.



standard practice in cases of witchcraft, the number of witchcraft trials increased. Moreover, torture became permitted in practice, which meant that the court could more easily obtain confessions that constituted the full proof needed for conviction and execution, according to ruling principles. However, in the spring of 1672 the Court of Appeal departed from this principle by sentencing two women in Älvdalen to death solely on the basis of children's testimonies. This then became more and more common.<sup>82</sup>

In Sweden, about 400 people were executed for witchcraft between 1492 and 1704, most of them in the period 1668-76, which was characterized by an intense witch-hunt, the "Big Noise". However, it remains unclear how many actually were accused and put on trial. Until 1668 about 20 percent of the accused were men, but during the Witch Craze this had fallen to 14 percent. Very few of the men were executed; it was the women who were dragged to the scaffold. Central accusations were affiliation with Satan and participation in the Witches' Sabbath.

On the Witches' Sabbath, witches copulated with the Devil, became the brides of trolls, fornicated with the neighbors or even the priests, and kissed the devil or each other in the anus. During secret nightly meetings, they met the Devil - in the shape of a man - and committed all kinds of fornication with him. They induced miscarriage in pregnant women; made men impotent and women infertile. The accused was investigated "in privatum" by the clergy and sheriff, who searched her naked body meticulously for the Devil's mark. The sexual element was present in the accusations, examinations, proofs and explanations.

## Conclusion

So what about Sissla, Malin and Knabb-Rådgerd in Lövvånger? They were indeed lucky. At the time they were supposed to be executed, 1676-77, skepticism had come to influence the Swedish discourse on witchcraft. When the Witch Craze hit the capital, Stockholm, and even women from the nobility were accused of being witches, there were increasingly doubts about the accusations, evidence and witness reliability. In spite of this, one woman was burned alive, the poor old Malin Matsdotter who was executed in the centre of the city in August 1676. She was the only witch who was burned alive during the Big Noise, 1668-1676. One

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<sup>82</sup> Bengt Ankarloo, *Trolldomsprocesserna i Sverige*, 134.

month later, one of the child witnesses conceded that she in fact had made up the stories as a way of obtaining food or money from people in the villages, interrogations of child witnesses took place immediately. The conclusion was that it all was a product of wicked children's imagination – and thus the Big Noise, the Witch Craze, ended. Sissla, Malin and Knabb-Rådgerd were set free.

The last person to be executed for witchcraft in Sweden was Anna Eriksdotter, who was beheaded on 15 June 1704. The last major trial in which someone was sentenced for witchcraft took place in 1724; nine women were accused and tortured and those who confessed were sentenced to flogging, imprisonment and banishment. Sweden's last judicial witch process was held in 1757, when 18 people were declared innocent after being subjected to torture. However, fornication, carnal lust and sexual maleficia were not at stake any more. The days of the lecherous witch was over.

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