Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic

Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy

Marina Montesano

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Marina Montesano
University of Messina
Messina, Italy

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The idea for this book has been on my mind for some time, but it only took form when I participated to the 10th International Conference of the AKIH (Arbeitskreis für Interdisziplinäre Hexenforschung), devoted to *Magic, sorcery, witchcraft. Cultures of Knowledge in Context* (28 September to 1 October 2016, Weingarten, Oberschwaben). I am grateful to Rita Voltmer (together with Iris Gareis, Hans de Waardt and Petra Kurz) for extending to me the invitation and their hospitality. All those who contributed by commenting on my paper on *Classical culture and witchcraft. Ancient mythology, folkloric tradition and witch-trials*, and more generally all of the discussions which filled those days, suggested to me that my ideas might be transformed into something more accomplished. Among the participants, I am particularly obliged to Willem de Blécourt, whom I met again later, in London, to discuss the possibility of publishing in the Series he edits together with Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies. Also, my gratitude goes to the Archivio Comunale of Todi, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Paris) and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, for granting me the use of images they own.

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Introduction

Don Aquilante Rocchetta left Palermo in 1599 to start his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He was born in Calabria and ordained a priest in Sicily, where he lived, and in Jerusalem, he was received into the Order of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre. Like many well-educated men of his generation, be they secular or religious, he was acquainted with humanistic culture and practised a faith purged of many beliefs deemed 'superstitious', an attitude that shines through in the account he wrote of his travels. Don Aquilante is attentive to the ruins of Antiquity as well as to those connected to the Old and New Testaments. However, he does not show the slightest interest in the *mirabilia*, the marvels that enthralled his medieval predecessors, who would flock in great numbers around the *loca sacra*. There, they would look for relics, such as the stones shown to pilgrims at what was purportedly the place where the Protomartyr Stephen had been lapidated; some would scratch slivers off the surfaces inside the Holy Sepulchre to take home as precious souvenirs. There is no mention of such activities in Don Aquilante's account, which was written at a time when pilgrimage to Jerusalem had become less common than it had been in the Late Middle Ages, and people had grown less enthusiastic about it.

In the fifteenth century, the Franciscan Observant Bernardino of Siena had railed publicly against what he called 'superstitions of the faith'. Knowing many pilgrims scratched off pieces of the white chalk that formed naturally in the Cave of the Nativity beneath the church in

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Bethlehem—believing, as they had been told, that it was the milk of the Virgin Mary, appearing miraculously—he once openly preached, in his lively style:

> Oh oh, about the milk of the Virgin Mary: women, where are you, and strong men too, have you seen any of it? You know, relics of it are shown around, but they are fake, because there are really too many of them, you must know they can't be genuine. Was she maybe a cow, the Virgin Mary, to give all of that milk, like animals do when they are milked?[1]

Bernardino was already among those who advocated a faith and a Church expurgated of all superstition, and, following the Lutheran Reformation and the Catholic Revival, a cultivated priest like Don Aquilante would certainly not indulge in any such practices either.

When he was visiting the church of the Holy Sepulchre, Don Aquilante reports watching in horror the Holy Fire miracle, in which candles around the tomb appear to light without human intervention. This, he asserts, is a trick developed by the schismatics (meaning the Orthodox Greeks). Perhaps it is true, he adds—probably in an attempt to justify the many Catholic accounts of the miracle—that in the past it was, indeed, the intervention of God that made this happen; but this is certainly no longer the case. However, recalling his visit to Alexandretta (modern-day İskenderun), he writes of mountains that can be seen in the distance, covered with trees: he was told that there lived in those woods some sort of wolves called '*zaccali*' (jackals) that, during the day, listen attentively when they hear people talking, in order to catch their names ('Nicolao, Pietro, Giovanni'). At night, these *zaccali* go down to the village and, using their voices, which are similar to those of humans, call out the names which they have learned in the day. When someone answers these calls by coming out of their house, the *zaccali* eat him. Some of the residents warned Don Aquilante not to go out at night on any account, and, indeed, he himself reports hearing the sound made by those animals, which was very similar to human voices. He adds that these must be the

[1] «O, o, del latte de la Vergine Maria; o donne, dove sete voi? E anco voi, valenti uomini, vedestene mai? Sapete che si va mostrando per reliquie: non v'aviate fede, ch, elli non è vero; elli se ne truova in tanti luoghi! Tenete che elli non è vero. Forse che ella fu una vacca la Vergine Maria, che ella avesse lassato il latte suo, come si lassa de le bestie, che si lassano mugnare!» Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche volgari sul Campo di Siena 1427*, ed. Carlo Delcorno (Milano, 1989), vol. 2, p. 809.

beasts described by Aristotle, who asserts that they are quick to dig up newly interred bodies from their graves, or by Pliny, in whose account they cheat not only people with their voices, but also dogs.[2]

The commentary to the critical edition of the *Peregrinatio* seems inclined to read this unlikely story as a 'residue' of beliefs of the past. On the contrary, I think this is a particular inclination of Don Aquilante's culture and times. 'Superstition' is a word that can, and has, been used in many different ways. Those practices of pilgrimage that Don Aquilante finds reproachable seemed perfectly acceptable a couple of centuries before—and, indeed, could still be considered thus in other social contexts. 'Superstition' is generally used derogatively when commenting on other people's beliefs and practices. According an extraordinary value to the sources of classical Antiquity was typical of cultivated men in the cultural milieu of the Renaissance, so Don Aquilante, this pilgrim from Sicily, did not find the story he heard of the *zaccali* to be strange, because he had already read of such things in reliable books: How, he may have asked, could it be possible that both the local inhabitants and the ancient sources report the same thing? Plus, he reasoned, he had himself heard something to corroborate these tales, so surely they must be true. Don Aquilante could not have known that Pliny himself, like many ancient authors, gleaned some of his information from folkloric beliefs that he had collected, or that appeared in the works of other authors (more than 400 sources are known for his *Natural History*) and that this could provide an alternative explanation for the resemblance.[3]

The hypothesis that originated this book is related to these considerations. Fifty-one years has passed since Hugh Trevor-Roper's seminal work about the European witch-craze, in which he observes that while

> ever since the eighteenth century we have tended to see European history, from the Renaissance onwards, as the history of progress, and

[2] Plin. *Nat. Hist.*, 8.30 is writing about hyenas, not jackals. The account of the pilgrimage is in Don Aquilante Rocchetta Cavaliero del Santissimo Sepolcro, *Peregrinatione di Terra Santa e d'altre Province*, ed. Giuseppe Roma (Pisa, 1996), pp. 38–39.

[3] Roger French, Frank Greenaway (eds.), *Science in the Early Roman Empire: Pliny the Elder, His Sources and Influence* (London, 1986). Only by the mid-sixteenth century, Pliny's fortune started to fade: see Brian W. Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing Natural History in Renaissance Europe* (Chicago, 2006).

> that progress has seemed to be constant, nonetheless, those progressive times had seen the upsurge of witch-hunting: The years 1550–1600 were worse than the years 1500–1550, and the years 1600–1650 were worse still. Nor was the craze entirely separable from the intellectual and spiritual life of those years. It was forwarded by the cultivated popes of the Renaissance, by the great Protestant reformers, by the saints of the Counter-Reformation, by the scholars, lawyers and churchmen of the age of Scaliger and Lipsius, Bacon and Grotius, Bérulle and Pascal.[4]

Trevor-Roper asked, with an evident tone of disbelief:

> Why did Innocent VIII, that worldly humanist, the patron of Mantegna and Pinturicchio, Perugino and Filippino Lippi, yield to these fanatical Dominican friars? [the two authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, which today is reckoned to be the work of one man] The answer, obviously, is not to be sought in his personality. It is to be sought rather in circumstances: in the historical situation out of which the witch-beliefs had arisen and in the war which the Dominican inquisitors had long been waging against them.[5]

What if, on the contrary, Innocent VIII' s personality or, better, precisely his humanistic culture must be called into question? But, of course, no approach should be limited to only one question; if there is one thing that recent scholarship about witch-hunting has assured us of, it is that all mono-causality theories must be ruled-out, as so many factors have been discovered and investigated: the climate change which occurred around the year 1600 and its socio-economic fallout[6]; the scientific debates that framed many of the phenomena related to witchcraft[7]; the social conditions in village communities and how often bottom-up

[4] Hugh Trevor-Roper, The European Witch-craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, in *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century: Religion, the Reformation and Social Change* (Indianapolis, 2001), p. 84.

[5] Ibidem, p. 94.

[6] Wolfgang Behringer, *Witchcraft Persecutions in Bavaria: Popular Magic, Religious Zealotry and Reason of State in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997); Idem, *A Cultural History of Climate* (London, 2009).

[7] Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997).

pressures gave way to trials against alleged witches[8]; the reading of folk-beliefs in the light of heretical prosecutions and demonology.[9] All of these, and many other approaches, have proven very useful for understanding the witch-hunts, but only as pieces of a puzzle. Still, the possible role of humanistic culture in the developing of the witch-hunts has not yet been fully researched. Many scholars have, of course, noted that stories of witchcraft circulated in Greek and Latin classical texts and also that there were references to those texts in treatises dealing with witch-beliefs in the age of the witch-hunts. However, the relationship between these two elements has only been partially detailed.

As early as 1977, Sydney Anglo observed that:

> Pagan literature was full of the deeds of witches, magicians, and aerial spirits; and the works of demonologists abound in references to Homer, Virgil, and Ovid, despite the fact that much of this material had been rejected as fantastic rubbish by many of those very Fathers whose views were otherwise considered definitive. This abuse of poetry was one of many feeblenesses discerned by Reginald Scot in Bodin's *Demonomanie*; but his withering contempt did not prevent others from continuing to regard the poets as solid evidence. Even in the seventeenth century such sources were still employed as though they had historical validity. William Perkins, for example, in his *Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (1608), rejects any suggestion that the witches of his own age were unknown in the days of Moses or Christ.[10]

In 1979, Franco Cardini, too, underlined the importance of the classical literature in the study of witchcraft, and, more recently, Margaret Sullivan has written about it as an active element in the great witch-hunts by the middle of the fifteenth century.[11] Those, like Wolfgang Behringer,

[8] Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (Oxford, 2002).

[9] Richard Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300–1500* (London, 1976).

[10] Sydney Anglo, Evident Authority and Authoritative Evidence: The Malleus Maleficarum, in *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*, ed. Sidney Anglo (London and New York, 1977), pp. 1–31 (esp. p. 10).

[11] Franco Cardini, *Magia, Stregoneria, Superstizioni nell'Occidente medievale* (Firenze, 1979); Margaret A. Sullivan, The Witches of Dürer and Hans Baldung Grien, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 53, 2 (2000), pp. 333–401.

who have tried to see witchcraft in a wider context, not confined only to the Western Europe of the *Ancien Régime*, and have rather pursued a comparative perspective, have spoken of the links between ancient and modern witchcraft.[12] More scholars could be named, but a comprehensive study of the topic is still missing, so the primary aim of *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* is to fill this gap and to demonstrate how ancient beliefs and descriptions of magic and witchcraft in Greek and Roman literature had an impact on ideas of witchcraft in modern times and on the witch-hunts.

I must emphasise that the term 'Italy' is used in the title in a very generic sense and is inadequate for defining the geographical scope of this research—primarily because political, cultural and linguistic factors fractured Italy into too many segments. The meaning I give to it in the present context is more linked to the role played by Italy, and especially by its central area, in preserving some of the notions of magic and witchcraft that we find in classical culture, both at cultivated and folkloric level. The first two chapters 'Prototypes: Magic and Witchcraft in Greece' and 'The Witch as a Woman: Tales of Magic in Rome' deal, respectively, with Greek and Latin literature. The role of Rome and Italy in this framework requires little explanation. With Circe and Medea, Greek literature provided the history of magic—and, indeed, Western literature and figurative art more generally—with two everlasting characters; but it also conjured the *lamiae* and other scary creatures given to hunting humans. The Greek world did not invent these entirely, of course, and similar stories connected many cultures at the crossroads of Africa, Asia and Europe in Hellenistic times. Nonetheless, without Rome and Latin, most of those accounts would have remained detached from what we now call 'Western culture'. Fascinated by those whom they had conquered, the Romans translated and/or rewrote Greek traditions, assimilating them as their own and passing them on to subsequent generations. At the same time, Rome constructed a juridical system where the threat posed by harmful magic was taken seriously into account. 'Geographic Italy' is important in the Early Middle Ages, because a part of it stood for a long period inside the realm of the Roman empire that had established its new Rome in Constantinople: a large portion of the South; the majority of the Adriatic coast; and 'old' Rome itself, even

[12]Wolfgang Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts* (Cambridge, 2004).

if just formally. But there was also an 'Italy' outside of the geographical border, in the sense of a Greek and Latin culture that the cultivated elites, mostly clerical, kept in their libraries. In the chapter 'Maleficia: From Late Antiquity to the High Middle Ages', I have tried to understand which parts of Latin culture and Roman legislation survived through the Early Middle Ages, and what the role of these was, in particular noting the many ways in which they influenced the juridical codes of the 'Barbarians'. The greatest evident influence is seen in the language employed: using Latin to translate ideas and beliefs originally born in another context was never an easy task. At a higher level, Saint Jerome had done precisely this with his translation of the Bible into Latin; but the anonymous writers who composed the Visigoth, Salic and Lombard laws dealt with the same problem. The Latin word *strix* (or the less classical *striga* and *stria*) did not always define the same character traits, even in classical Latin literature; the problem is exacerbated when we encounter it in sources which aim to single out living creatures (or sometime spirits) who were perceived as a menace to the community, or who were cannibals, or who could shapeshift. In this way, not only specific words, but also some particular features of ancient *striges* were carried into the Late Middle Ages, as I show in the chapter 'A Company that Go the Course'.

There is a wide array of sources for those centuries that present motifs related to magic and witchcraft. As in the previous chapter, I have mainly followed the words related to the classical *strix*: it could be translated by the French *estrie*, or in the more common *sorcière*. *Estries* and *sorcières* populate French medieval literature, which most resented the diffusion of classical authors like Ovid and Apuleius.[13] Again, here I am well outside of Italian borders, following the traces of those classical images of witchcraft through their transmission and interpretation; in a certain sense, they never went away. Of course, 'geographical Italy' also played its role, here. Classical culture had an early impact on Italian humanists. A first-hand knowledge started to be widespread among the elites at the very beginning of the fourteenth century: Dominican preachers such as Domenico Cavalca and Jacopo Passavanti wrote about the '*streghe*'; in their texts, it is possible to see how cultivated ideas entangled with popular beliefs about witchcraft. Secular culture, too, embraced those motifs: this knowledge and use of classical *striges* and folkloric beliefs

[13]Many considerations on witchcraft in medieval times are in Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials* and Jeffrey B. Russel, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London, 1972).

about witchcraft make an interesting companion to the clerical sources. The works of authors as different as Albertino Mussato and Giovanni Boccaccio are equally rich with classical quotations and provide hints of popular beliefs having been folded into their narratives. For example, there is the Italian expression '*andare in corso*', which Giovanni Boccaccio ironically took as the main subject for one of the tales in his *Decameron*: its connection to the *cursus* of the women described in the *Canon Episcopi* has barely been explored by contemporary studies, nor understood, but it provides a good case study for investigating the diffusion of the belief. This is the subject of the chapter 'A Company that Go the Course'.

Next, the book turns to the fifteenth century, when the first episodes of proper witch-hunt are recorded. In 2006, Richard Kieckhefer published his essay *Mythologies of Witchcraft in the Fifteenth Century*, in which he wrote of three different kinds of mythologies, as he called them, which, while remarkably different and geographically separated at the beginning of the century, would eventually converge to shape the image of witchcraft in European witch-trials. They all present the witch as a *strix* or *striga*, recalling a myth common in ancient Latin (but also Greek) literature. Two are related to Italy: the first belongs especially to its central regions, where few trials are recorded at the middle of the century, and even fewer earlier than that; the other is found in a range of trials in Northern Italy where the so called *ludus* plays a central role.[14] I have explored Kieckhefer's suggestion in the chapters 'Let's Send Up Some Incense to the Lord!' and 'The Italian Quattrocento', starting with the contribution of the first generation of Franciscan Observant preachers to the revival of the classical image of *striges*. The role of preachers in modifying collective perceptions of the nature of witchcraft was more effective because some popular memories of ancient *striges* still lingered on in Italy, as is shown in the preceding chapters. However, the preacher (and inquisitor) was not just some kind of anthropologist who discovered ancient beliefs, but also an inventor—or, at the very least, someone who was capable of reading another preacher's sermons describing a tradition rooted in France or Germany and of retelling it in Italy, making it his own. In this way, the circulation of classical themes of magic and witchcraft became more effective in shaping what was by then perceived

[14] Richard Kieckhefer, Mythologies of Witchcraft in the Fifteenth Century, *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 1, 1 (2006), pp. 79–108.

as a collective phenomenon. If, as Kieckhefer observed, the myth common in ancient Latin sources is initially found only in these few trials in central Italy, under the influence of the Franciscan Observants it soon spread far and wide. And centuries of those ancient stories being told and retold helped prepare the ground for this spread.

The final chapter, 'Twelve Thousand Circes', also serves as a conclusion, to show how in the Renaissance, in Italy and beyond, classical accounts of witchcraft ceased to be just stories, as they had formerly been, and were now used to attest to the reality of witches' powers. It was not only that witchcraft was presented and perceived by many as a conspiracy based on the covenant between the witches and the devil; it was also argued that this 'new sect' of witches had always existed, and that the revered voices of many ancient authors showed it. Contemporary witchcraft gave a new meaning to past history, and past history became a proof of the reality of contemporary witchcraft.

A closing comment is necessary to clarify the use in this book of the words 'witch' and 'witchcraft'. In my Italian mother tongue, the first hint of the link existing between the *strix* of the classical Latin (or the *striga* of Late-Antiquity Latin) and the current *strega* is given by the term itself—though other forms, like *masca* or *iana*, are given in the vernacular in early sources, as I will detail further on. As long as the non-Italian sources kept using Latin in their official documents and to compose their literature, the word *strix/striga* lingered, even influencing local vernacular uses: such is the case with French medieval texts where we find *estrie* instead of *sorcière*. There has been, and, indeed, there remains, a debate as to the correct etymology of 'witch' and its Old English form, *wicca*. Two main explanations are privileged today: one is the supposed proto-form *wit-ja*, related to *wise*, meaning a soothsayer or a healer, and having a generally positive meaning. We could relate this to the Latin *saga* rather than to *strix*. The other explanation connects it with the eleventh-century *wiccecræft*, used with the meaning 'necromancer', and asserts that *wicca* reflects the Proto-Germanic *wikyoon* (alleged, not attested). Here, it would refer to something akin to the Norse Valkyries and is more closely related to the otherworld and to obscure powers.[15] In the light of these considerations, it is obvious that the use of *striga* in a Middle Latin

[15]A long and good elucidation of the different etymologies that have been given for 'witch' is in Anatoly Liberman, *An Analytic Dictionary of English Etymology: An Introduction* (Minneapolis and London, 2008), pp. 215–224.

source cannot be translated as ‘witch’—both because, at the time, they did not have the same meaning and because the word ‘witch’ is now rife with associations (such as demonic pacts, harmful magic and poisoning) that were not fully formed in pre-modern times. My choice has been to use the word ‘witch’ with extreme caution, avoiding it for centuries when those discrepancies are tangible and starting to apply it more liberally only when, with the beginning of the witch-hunts, there was a general consensus (even with the pre-existing regional peculiarities that the history of witchcraft throws up) about who and what a ‘witch’ was.

Prototypes: Magic and Witchcraft in Greece

Circe: A Dread Goddess of Human Speech

Of all the characters who emerge from classical Greek literature, Circe has been the most infamous and enduring.[1] She is also the most ancient. The *Odyssey* gives her a personality and a story; while Hesiod's *Theogony* provides her with relatives, siblings and explains that she is the daughter of the divinity Helios and the Oceanid Perseis. In the *Odyssey*, she is famously a powerful sorcerer: 'a dread goddess of human speech' who lives on the island of Aeaea, in a forest surrounded by feral animals, who are, in fact, men whom she has bewitched (subdued with spells: καταθέλγω) with a powerful drug (*pharmakon*).[2] These animals get close to Odysseus and his fellows in a way which clearly suggests that they are actually men who have been enchanted.

While Odysseus is on his ship, Circe lures his companions with her sweet voice and beautiful appearance; the men enter her house and are served with

[1] Judith Yarnall, *Transformations of Circe: The History of an Enchantress* (Urbana, IL, 1994); Maurizio Bettini, Cristiana Franco, *Il Mito Di Circe. Immagini E Racconti Dalla Grecia Ad Oggi* (Torino, 2010); and Cristiana Franco (ed.), *Circe. Variazioni sul mito* (Venezia, 2012).

[2] Homer, *The Odyssey*, 10, 133, trans. A. T. Murray (Cambridge, 1945), pp. 354–355. Full references are given when quoting a translation; otherwise, I will only give the passages.

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> a potion of cheese and barley meal and yellow honey with Pramnian wine; but in the food she mixed baneful drugs, that they might utterly forget their native land. Now when she had given them the potion, and they had drunk it off, then she presently smote them with her wand, and penned them in the sties. And they had the heads, and voice, and bristles, and shape of swine, but their minds remained unchanged even as before.[3]

The wand can be both an instrument to guide the swine and a magic wand that helps her control their will.

One of the men escapes the trap and returns to Odysseus. On hearing what has befallen his companions, Odysseus begins running towards the house to save them, but is stopped on his way by Hermes. The god warns Odysseus that he will be subjugated by Circe, as all the others have been, and that he will need a powerful potion to counteract Circe's magic:

> So saying, Argeiphontes [Hermes] gave me the herb, drawing it from the ground, and showed me its nature. At the root it was black, but its flower was like milk. *Moly* the gods call it, and it is hard for mortal men to dig; but with the gods all things are possible.[4]

The *moly* is a form of counter-magic; it is a *pharmakon*, just like the one employed by Circe, but the text qualifies it as 'good' (ἐσθλός) to distinguish it from her enchantments. Hermes also tells Odysseus that Circe will seduce him, and that he must make her swear not to use her powers against him, lest the encounter should deprive Odysseus of his virility.

Circe and Odysseus spend time together, and she finally returns his men to their human shapes, making them even younger and better looking; after spending a further year on the island with the goddess, the men urge Odysseus to resume their travelling. Circe agrees to let them go, but she reveals to Odysseus that, before they can return home, they must visit Tiresias, the blind seer of Apollo in Thebes. Through performing the rite of *nekya* before Tiresias, Odysseus will be able to call up the spirits of the dead. The *nekya*, as taught by Circe, is a powerful scene of holocaust:

> Thither, prince, do thou draw nigh, as I bid thee, and dig a pit of a cubit's length this way and that, and around it pour a libation to all the dead, first

[3] Ibidem, 10, 235–240, pp. 360–363.

[4] Ibidem, 10, 304–305, pp. 366–367.

> with milk and honey, thereafter with sweet wine, and in the third place with water, and sprinkle thereon white barley meal. And do thou earnestly entreat the powerless heads of the dead, vowing that when thou comest to Ithaca thou wilt sacrifice in thy halls a barren heifer, the best thou hast, and wilt fill the altar with rich gifts; and that to Teiresias alone thou wilt sacrifice separately a ram, wholly black, the goodliest of thy flock. But when with prayers thou hast made supplication to the glorious tribes of the dead, then sacrifice a ram and a black ewe, turning their heads toward Erebus but thyself turning backward, and setting thy face towards the streams of the river. Then many ghosts of men that are dead will come forth. But do thou thereafter call to thy comrades, and bid them flay and burn the sheep that lie there, slain by the pitiless bronze, and make prayer to the gods, to mighty Hades and to dread Persephone. And do thou thyself draw thy sharp sword from beside thy thigh, and sit there, not suffering the powerless heads of the dead to draw near to the blood, till thou hast enquired of Teiresias. Then the seer will presently come to thee, leader of men, and he will tell thee thy way and the measures of thy path.[5]

Odysseus and his companions will perform it exactly thus, as is recounted in the subsequent Book of the epic.

The powers displayed by Circe in the *Odyssey* are of many kinds: she turns people into animals with her *pharmaka*; she is capable of depriving a man of his virility, hence she wields power in the domain of fertility; she is a necromancer, who can teach Odysseus how to summon the spirits of the Underworld. At the same time, the year for which Odysseus and his companions live on the island is represented as a magnificent court, where the men can enjoy life and let time pass—an enchantment broken only by the recollection that they are supposed to be going home. This enchantment is also a motive, in that through it the otherworldly paradise, led by Circe, its queen, continues to endure. The complexity of Circe's personality, which these various powers indicate, is probably due to her godly, pre-Olympian nature and to the archaic character of the *Odyssey*: she does not have to be simply good or evil, a nuance that was largely lost for centuries to come.[6]

[5] Ibidem, 10, 520–535, pp. 382–383.

[6] On later reworkings of the story, see Charles Segal, Circean Temptations: Homer, Virgil, Ovid, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 99 (1968), pp. 419–442; Emmanuel Hatzantonis, I geniali rimaneggiamenti dell'episodio omerico di Circe in Apollonio Rodio e Plutarco, *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 54, 1 (1976), pp. 5–24.

Circe's character became famous, and in addition to Homer's *Odyssey*, she was written about by many authors in the Greek and Latin canon. Some of the Greek sources simply recounted the existing story, with the addition of attributing offspring to Circe and Odysseus. In Hellenistic times, though, Apollonius Rhodius gave Circe a darker side. He mentions her in the Fourth Book of his *Argonautica* (III c. BC), in the episode where Jason and Medea are fleeing, following their brutal killing and dismemberment of Absyrtus, Medea's innocent brother. After the crime, they visit Circe in search of purification. The kingdom Circe inhabits in the *Argonautica* is quite different from the island of Homer's telling. The beasts that surround her are neither animals nor men; they are described as shapeless monsters, assemblages of various limbs. Furthermore, her magic no longer solely consists of poisons; she also performs a blood sacrifice to purify Jason and Medea. In the very first scene, Circe is washing her hair and garments with sea water, because she has been left suffering from a terrible, nightly vision:

> With blood her chambers and all the walls of her palace seemed to be running, and flame was devouring all the magic herbs with which she used to bewitch strangers whoever came; and she herself with murderous blood quenched the glowing flame, drawing it up in her hands; and she ceased from deadly fear.[7]

She goes on to perform the cleansing ritual for Jason and Medea,

> to atone for the murder still unexpiated, she held above their heads the young of a sow whose dugs yet swelled from the fruit of the womb, and, severing its neck, sprinkled their hands with the blood; and again, she made propitiation with other drink offerings, calling on Zeus the Cleanser, the protector of murder-stained suppliants.[8]

[7] Apollonius Rhodius, *The Argonautica*, 4, 665–669, trans. R. C. Seaton (London and New York, 1912), pp. 338–339.

[8] Ibidem, 4, 704–710, pp. 342–343. In his *Gryllus*, Plutarch (I–II c. BC) turns the story upside down, imagining a dialogue between Odysseus and the men changed into animals by Circe, who refuse to go back to their former human status. Here, the episode is exploited for different ends and Circe's magic is of no importance: Plutarch, *Gryllus*, in *Moralia*, trans. William Helmbold, Harold Cherniss (Cambridge, 1957), pp. 487–533.

In the Latin literature, Virgil (I c. BC) and Ovid (I c.) provide the most detailed descriptions of Circe and her realm. Both authors will be very widely read and of paramount importance in the medieval period. In the *Aeneid*, some elements of the description clearly recall the *Odyssey*, such as Circe's singing and weaving, or the pleasant perfume of burning cedar. But something sinister looms: along with hearing the singing, as his ship approaches the island Aeneas can hear the lament and roaring of the men transfigured into wild animals—the lions, boars, bears and monster-wolves that Circe keeps in her thrall. The sound is so frightful that Neptune fills the sails with wind and saves Aeneas from approaching the dangerous land.[9] There is no space, in Virgil's description, for the brighter side of Circe that we find in the *Odyssey*. The seductress-goddess gives way to a more one-sided character, where only dread remains.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* focuses, of course, on Circe's power to transform people's shape; three episodes of the Fourteenth Book are devoted to her arts. Like Virgil in the *Aeneid*, Ovid only considers the dark side of Circe. The story of Glaucus and Scylla is told in the first episode: the sea god seeks a love potion to win Scylla's love, but Circe will not supply Glaucus with it, as she has fallen in love with him herself. This unrequited love pushes Circe to pursue revenge on her rival, and she turns Scylla into a monster, her thighs, legs, feet and belly changed into wild, shapeless beasts. To reach this result, the sorceress prepares a poison with ground herbs while reciting Hecate's spells, muttering obscure enchantments and sprinkling the herbs in a pool of water where Scylla likes to bathe.

Circe's encounter with Odysseus is told in the fourth episode, and the fifth episode deals with the story of the Latin King Picus with whom Circe also falls in love. When Picus prefers to remain faithful to his wife, Circe turns him into a woodpecker. The type of magic she practises in this story is different from all the others. No herbs or poisons are used, yet her spells are so powerful and obscure as to make the sun and moon disappear; the transmutation of Picus is achieved by performing some movements—turning towards the direction of sunset and then towards the dawn—and with a touch of her magic wand:

[9] Virgil, *Aeneis*, 7, 5–24.

> She utters prayers and fell to muttering incantations, worshipping her weird gods with a weird charm with which it was her wont to obscure the white moon's features, and hide her father's face behind misty clouds […] Then twice she turned her to the west and twice to the east; thrice she touched the youth with her wand and thrice she sang her charms. He turned in flight, but was amazed to find himself running more swiftly than his wont, and saw wings spring out upon his body. Enraged at his sudden change to a strange bird in his Latian woods, he pecked at the rough oak-trees with his hard beak and wrathfully inflicted wounds on their long branches. His wings took the colour of his bright red mantle, and what had been a brooch of gold stuck through his robe was changed to feathers, and his neck was circled with a golden-yellow band; and naught of his former self remained to Picus except his name.[10]

Another feature of the 'Latin Circe' is her location and her attachment to Italian traditions. The *gens Mamilia*, one of the most distinguished families of Latium, claimed descent from a Mamilia, granddaughter of Odysseus and Circe. Though the geography of the *Odyssey* is uncertain, Hesiod, who was active around the same time as Homer (VIII–VII c. BC), wrote that one of the sons of Odysseus and Circe was named 'Latinus'; Euripides (V c. BC) had called Circe 'Ligustis', a term which other classical authors, including Aeschylus and Sophocles, also used to define people from the far west.[11] Apollonius Rhodius pinpoints the island of Aeaea in the Tyrrhenian Sea, and it will finally be identified with Mount Circeus, south of Rome, at which point the westernisation of Circe and the myths around her will be complete.[12]

[10] «Concipit illa preces et verba venefica dicit ignotosque deos ignoto carmine adorat, quo solet et niveae vultum confundere Lunae et patrio capiti bibulas subtexere nubes (…) Tum bis ad occasus, bis se convertit ad ortus, ter iuvenem baculo tetigit, tria carmina dixit. ille fugit, sed se solito velocius ipse currere miratur: pennas in corpore vidit, seque novam subito Latiis accedere silvis indignatus avem duro fera robora rostro figit et iratus longis dat vulnera ramis; purpureum chlamydis pennae traxere colorem; fibula quod fuerat vestemque momorderat aurum, pluma fit, et fulvo cervix praecingitur auro, nec quicquam antiquum Pico nisi nomina restat»: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 14, 365–368, 386–396, trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, MA and London, 1971), pp. 326–329.

[11] Michele Armanini, *Ligures apuani. Lunigiana storica, Garfagnana e Versilia prima dei romani* (Padova, 2014), p. 163.

[12] Apollonius Rhodius, *The Argonautica*, 3, 309–313, pp. 214–215.

Medea, the Barbarian Sorcerer

Circe's fame remained alive in later, Christian times, when her stories would be interpreted in a variety of ways, as we will see in the following chapters. Alongside the emergence of the Circe myth in Antiquity came the myth of Medea, a character whose story frequently crossed that of Circe. The pair are bound by blood, as Medea is granddaughter of the sun god Helios, daughter of King Aeëtes of Colchis, and hence the niece of Circe. We have crossed her path already when talking about the role of Circe in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, where we encounter the story of Jason and Medea in its longest form. But Medea is also an ancient character of Greek myth, already mentioned by Hesiod, and even before the *Argonautica*, Euripides' play about her was already destined to become extremely influential.

Performed for the first time in 431 BC, Euripides' *Medea* presents the couple in the aftermath of Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece, as narrated in the later *Argonautica*. The play opens with Medea fighting with Jason, her husband, who has announced his intention to abandon her and marry Glauce, daughter of Creon, the powerful king of Corinth. Although the couple already have two children together, Jason explains that Medea is a barbarian from Colchis, and Glauce a royal princess. He is willing to keep Medea as a mistress, but Creon decides to exile her to Athens instead. Once there, Medea meets the king of Athens, Aegeus, who is married but cannot have offspring; in exchange for Aegeus' hospitality, Medea provides him with drugs that will cure his infertility. As with Circe, Medea is evidently in control of the domain of fertility.

Medea then returns to Corinth to plot the murder of Glauce. She poisons some precious, golden robes, and sends her children to deliver the gift as a sign of peace and acceptance of the new marriage. Pleasantly surprised, Glauce puts the robes on immediately and soon falls and dies. In his despair, her father holds her tightly and is also poisoned. But Medea is not yet satisfied with her vengeance; she wants Jason to suffer yet further and decides to kill their own children in front of him, while he is confronting her over the death of his future bride. The final scene sees Medea with the two little corpses.

Apparently, Euripides had pushed things too far and the public despised his drama. It is probable that the story used to have a different ending: the Corinthians should have killed the children in revenge for

their king's death.[13] A mother who kills her kin and gets away with it was too much to bear. But Euripides' version of the story, if uncomfortable for its contemporary public, nonetheless proved successful in the Latin world.

Medea is a mighty sorcerer, who totally lacks the fairy features of Circe. She is driven only by passions. In the *Argonautica*, her love for Jason is decisive in the successful conclusion of his quest—she helps him to overcome all obstacles with her powers and her knowledge of spells and herbs, but she also has her brother Absyrtus killed and dismembered. The only condition that she imposes on Jason is that he marry her, which helps us to understand how her love turns into blind hate when he abandons her.

There was plenty in this story to excite the imagination, and this is exactly what happened in the Latin world, with many versions of the tragedy appearing—though, unfortunately, not all of them have survived. Ovid's take on the story is lost, but Medea does also appear in his *Metamorphoses*. Her magical powers are underlined by a long invocation she addresses to Hecate, the goddess of the Underworld; her aim is to rejuvenate Jason's father, Aeson. These invocations to Hecate and the gods of the Night illustrate how Medea can control nature and its elements, bringing the dead back from their graves and drawing down the moon:

> O Night, faithful preserver of mysteries, and ye bright stars, whose golden beams with the moon succeed the fires of day; thou three-formed Hecate, who knowest our undertakings and comest to the aid of the spells and arts of magicians; and thou, O Earth, who dost provide the magicians with thy potent herbs; ye breezes and winds, ye mountains and streams and pools; all ye gods of the groves, all ye gods of the night: be with me now. With your help when I have willed it, the streams have run back to their fountain-heads, while the banks wondered; I lay the swollen, and stir up the calm seas by my spell; I drive the clouds and bring on the clouds; the winds I dispel and summon; I break the jaws of serpents with my incantations; living rocks and oaks I root up from their own soil; I move the forests, I bid the mountains shake, the earth to rumble and the ghosts to come forth from their tombs. Thee also, Luna, do I draw from the sky, though

[13] Michael Ewans, *Opera from the Greek: Studies in the Poetics of Appropriation* (London, 2007), p. 55 notes a scholium to the text gives indeed the different ending.

> the clanging bronze of Temesa strive to aid thy throes; even the chariot of the Sun, my grandsire, pales at my song; Aurora pales at my poisons.[14]

To accomplish her task, Medea flies on a chariot through the sky, reaching Thessalian land, a place commonly associated with magic. Once there, she sends out a dragon to collect many kinds of herbs for her potion—when the dragon returns, the rite can begin. Medea is described as a Bacchante, with streaming hair, and she must perform a blood sacrifice before she can concoct her potion:

> As she came Medea stopped this side of the threshold and the door; covered by the sky alone, she avoided her husband's embrace, and built two turf altars, one on the right to Hecate and one on the left to Youth. She wreathed these with boughs from the wild wood, then hard by she dug two ditches in the earth and performed her rites; plunging her knife into the throat of a black sheep, she drenched the open ditches with his blood. Next she poured upon it bowls of liquid wine, and again bowls of milk still warm, while at the same time she uttered her incantations, called up the deities of the earth, and prayed the king of the shades with his stolen bride not to be in haste to rob the old man's body of the breath of life.[15]

This is not the only blood sacrifice that Medea performs: in another scene, she attempts to kill Theseus—long-lost son of Aegeus, with whom she has had a child—using 'a poison which she had brought long ago

[14] «'Nox' ait 'arcanis fidissima, quaeque diurnis aurea cum luna succeditis ignibus astra, tuque triceps Hecate, quae coeptis conscia nostris adiutrixque venis cantusque artisque magorum, quaeque magos, Tellus, pollentibus instruis herbis, auraeque et venti montesque amnesque lacusque dique omnes nemorum, dique omnes noctis adeste. Quorum ope, cum volui, ripis mirantibus amnes in fontes rediere suos, concussaque sisto, stantia concutio cantu freta, nubila pello nubilaque induco, ventos abigoque vocoque, vipereas rumpo verbis et carmine fauces, vivaque saxa sua convulsaque robora terra et silvas moveo, iubeoque tremescere montes et mugire solum manesque exire sepulcris. Te quoque, Luna, traho, quamvis Temesaea labores aera tuos minuant; currus quoque carmine nostro pallet avi, pallet nostris Aurora venenis'»: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 7, 192–209, pp. 356–357.

[15] «Constitit adveniens citra limenque foresque et tantum caelo tegitur refugitque viriles contactus statuitque aras de caespite binas, dexteriore Hecates, ast laeva parte Iuventae. Has ubi verbenis silvaque incinxit agresti. haud procul egesta scrobibus tellure duabus sacra facit cultrosque in guttura velleris atri conicit et patulas perfundit sanguine fossas. Tum super invergens liquidi carchesia vini alteraque invergens tepidi carchesia lactis verba simul fudit terrenaque numina civit umbrarumque rogat rapta cum coniuge regem, ne properent artus anima fraudare senili»: Ibidem, 7, 239–250, pp. 358–361.

from the Scythian shores. This poison, they say, came from the mouth of the Echidnean dog'.[16] This darkest sorcery makes Ovid's image of Medea very biased, but also extremely commanding, and it is this description of Medea that will be best known in the medieval period, along with Seneca's *Medea*, the only existing Latin transposition of Euripides.

Seneca's rewriting is faithful enough, but for one aspect: while the evil deeds of the Greek Medea happen offstage, so that the audience would only hear reports of them, Seneca chooses to show everything, including the slaughter of the children. As in Ovid, there is no trace of pity for a woman who has been betrayed and despised; Seneca's Medea is pure evil from the very beginning, and she is portrayed as being driven by the vilest instincts. While Euripides was still writing about a woman who reacts violently against the injustices visited upon her by Jason and Creon, Ovid and Seneca show a creature without human features, totally devoured by hatred and desire, devoted to the darkest deities and most dreadful rituals.

Words of Magic

It is common to find Circe and Medea's activities translated as 'witchcraft'. This is understandable, given the fact that evil magic is at the core of their stories, but it risks causing bias, as 'witchcraft' is a word heavily charged with modern associations in the minds of contemporary readers and audiences. As such, it is useful to understand which words were used in the Greek and Latin sources to describe these acts and other magical practices. These women's most powerful instruments are the potions they concoct, a practice which involves knowledge of herbs and of the rituals to make them effective. 'Poisons have been strongly associated with witchcraft and sorcery throughout the world since Antiquity, because they manifest a desire to cause harm; involve secret, often ritual, preparations; and work through a hidden, or occult, process'.[17]

[16] «Huius in exitium miscet Medea quod olim attulerat secum Scythicis aconiton ab oris. Illud Echidneae memorant e dentibus ortum esse canis»: Ibidem, 7, 405–409, pp. 370–371.

[17] Marguerite Johnson, Potions, in *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*, ed. Richard M. Golden (Santa Barbara, CA, 2006), vol. 3, pp. 925–927; Michael A. Rinella, *Pharmakon: Plato, Drug Culture, and Identity in Ancient Athens* (Lanham, MD, 2011).

The use of poisons will also be a common feature in many witch-trials in modern times, revealing a long trail that has its roots in Antiquity. As we have said, drugs are called *pharmaka*, a word that can suggest both helpful and harmful potions. The ambiguity of the matter is hidden in the language, as *pharmakon* means variously a medicine (therefore a cure), a spell with herbs and a poison. But there is more to it: in ancient Athens, *pharmakoi* were the ritual scapegoats nurtured and paraded around town before being lapidated or exiled outside the city walls. In his *Plato's Pharmacy*, Jacques Derrida wrote that 'remedy' and 'poison' are intertwined in a way that is impossible to untie:

> Socrates compares the written texts Phaedrus has brought along to a drug (*pharmakon*). This *pharmakon*, this 'medicine', this philtre, which acts as both remedy and poison, already introduces itself into the body of the discourse with all its ambivalence. This charm, this spellbinding virtue, this power of fascination, can be – alternately or simultaneously – beneficent or maleficent.[18]

The same Socrates, in the *Dialogues*, is referred to as both *pharmakeus*, because of his magic gift with words, and *pharmakos*, as he will be Athens' scapegoat, forced to commit suicide.

The Latin transposition of Medea's story by Ovid mentions the 'ars' of the 'magi', a category that deserves attention. According to both Greek and Latin sources, *magoi* and *magi* belong to a specific type, namely practitioners who come from outer lands, generally from the East. The word derives from the Old Persian and is related to the Avestan '*moγu*' and '*magâunô*', the religious caste of the ancient Iranian Medes. The latter meaning is attested to by Herodotus, one of the earlier Greek sources to mention the Magi as one of the Median tribes. But elsewhere he also mentions them as priests who perform blood sacrifices among the Persians:

> As to the usages of the Persians, I know them to be these. It is not their custom to make and set up statues and temples and altars, but those who make such they deem foolish, as I suppose, because they never believed the gods, as the Greeks do, to be in the likeness of men […] They have learnt later to sacrifice to the 'heavenly' Aphrodite, from the Assyrians and

[18] Jacques Derrida, Plato's Pharmacy, in *Dissemination* (Chicago, 1983), pp. 70, 67–185.

> Arabians. She is called by the Assyrians Mylitta, by the Arabians Alilat, by the Persians Mitra […] To whomsoever of the gods a man will sacrifice, he leads a beast to an open space and then, calls on the god, himself wearing a wreath on his tiara, of myrtle for choice. To pray for blessings for himself alone is not lawful for the sacrificer; rather, he prays that it may be well for the king and all the Persians; for he reckons himself among them. He then cuts the victim limb from limb into portions, and having boiled the flesh spreads the softest grass, trefoil by choice, and places all of it on this. When he has so disposed it, a Magian comes near and chants over it the song of the birth of the gods, as the Persian tradition relates it; for no sacrifice can be offered without a Magician.[19]

Later Greek authors, and the Latins who also adopted the same stance, referred to the Magi as performers who came from foreign lands. Sometimes, they might be presented as charlatans, but their art could also be effective. They were the priests of the Iranian Zoroastrian tradition, thought to be the origin of the mystery cult of Mithra; in the first-century AD, Pliny the Elder considered Zoroaster to be the very inventor of magic.[20] This process, beginning in classical Greece, came to a definitive point in Hellenistic times and in Rome; it is what Arnaldo Momigliano defined as 'alien wisdom', an attitude of exoticism adopted by the Greeks and Latins who identified distant lands as sources of wisdom.[21]

The myths of Circe and Medea were perfectly suited to this cultural attitude, as both women hailed from stranger, barbaric lands. They came from Colchis, a region that can be identified with the Eastern side of the Black Sea, but which was given fabulous features by the Greeks; it is now a part of Georgia. It was an independent land associated with Cimmerians and Scythians, and was later subjugated by the Persian kings. It was in Colchis that Jason went in search of the Golden Fleece, and there that he became associated with Medea; and in the sequel to the story, as told by Euripides, he tried to leave her because

[19] Herodotus, *Books I–II* (*The Persian Wars*), 1, 131–132, trans. A. D. Godley (Cambridge, MA and London, 1920, repr. 1975), pp. 170–173; for the former reference to the Magi as a Median tribe: Ibidem, 1, 101, pp. 132–133.

[20] Pliny, *The Natural History*, 30, 2–3.

[21] Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge, 1971, repr. 1990); see also Joseph Bidez, Frantz Cumont, *Les Mages hellénisés*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1938, repr. 1973); and Albert de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature* (Leiden, 1997).

of her barbaric origins. This double status, of being foreigners, therefore marginals, but being also priestesses of occult wisdom, make these two women prototypes for a whole tradition of magicians.

There were other forms of dark magic known to the Greek world, and words to define them. Of these, the ones which are most pertinent to our discussion are those whose use has persisted. *Mánteis* and *góetes* were essentially soothsayers, whose activities were held in secret and who were associated with commerce with the Underworld and the dead. It is thought that in ancient, pre-classical times, *goeteía* combined states of ecstasy, the ritual lament (called *góos*), healing and divination, making the *góes* a shamanic figure, though this thesis is not widely accepted.[22] In Aeschylus' *The Persians*, the ghost of Darius rises from his tomb, awakened by wailing (*góois*): the ritual lament can be a valediction to the dead at their entombment, but it also has the power to bring them back. Indeed, it has been argued that magicians came to be called *goetes* because of the cries they uttered while performing their incantations.[23] This meaning was passed down to the Byzantine Greeks, as evidenced by the tenth-century AD lexicon called *Suda*, in which *goeteía* is defined as the art of summoning up corpses. In a very different context, Plato's *Laws* designates *goeteía* as trickery, performed by those 'claiming that they charm the souls of the dead, and promising to persuade the gods by bewitching them, as it were, with sacrifices, prayers and incantations'.[24]

By denying the *góes* a proper social status, Plato put him in the same category as charlatans (*alazones*) and vagabond-priests (*agurtai* or *agyrtai*), often denounced by Greek sources for their crookery. Both of these terms, however, are nuanced. *Alazones* is linked to an obscure tribe that lived on the northern shores of the Black Sea—the 'Halizones' mentioned by Homer in the *Iliad* (Hom. Il. 2.819) and by Herodotus (Hdt. 4.52)—a place close to the Scythians, and therefore associated with shamanism. Similarly, the name *agurtai*, even if commonly used in a derogatory way, also meant the acolytes of the Mother goddess Cybele, called *metragyrtai* or *menagyrtai*, who were known to perform ecstatic

[22] E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, 1951, repr. 1973), pp. 135–176.

[23] Aeschylus, *Pers.*, 681–693; Sarah Iles Johnston, *Restless Dead: Encounters Between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, 1999), p. 103.

[24] Plato, *Laws*, 10, 909b, trans. L. G. Bury (Cambridge, MA and London, 1926), vol. X, pp. 382–383.

dances during their rites. Their origin was also non-Greek, probably from Phrygia, the north-western part of Anatolia.[25]

Mánteis, on the other hand, were sometimes widely revered, for example, when they were associated with temples or an army. The Pythia, the famous seer at Delphi, who passed the prophecies of Apollo to the visitors of his temple, is the most famous case; so much so that her name, Pythia, will have extraordinary renown in Christian times, mainly due to Jerome's attribution of that name to the Biblical necromancer of Endor. But there were also other, well-known seers attested to in the literature, such as Pausanias' account of the Oropians, the inhabitants of a region between Attica and the land of Tanagra, which in his times was ruled by Athens:

> The Oropians have near the temple a spring, which they call the Spring of Amphiaraus; they neither sacrifice into it nor are wont to use it for purifications or for lustral water. But when a man has been cured of a disease through a response the custom is to throw silver and coined gold into the spring, for by this way they say that Amphiaraus rose up after he had become a god. Iophon the Cnossian, a guide, produced responses in hexameter verse, saying that Amphiaraus gave them to the Argives who were sent against Thebes. These verses unrestrainedly appealed to popular taste. Except those whom they say Apollo inspired of old none of the seers uttered oracles, but they were good at explaining dreams and interpreting the flights of birds and the entrails of victims.[26]

Amphiaraus, a demi-god hero in whose name a cult formed, had been a prophet himself. In his treatise *On Divination*, Cicero compares him to another prototype for this kind of magic, the famous Tiresias:

> Homer writes that he alone has knowledge, the rest wander around like shadows. The reputation Amphiaraus has acquired in Greece means that he is honoured as a god and that oracles are sought from the place in which he was buried.[27]

[25] Many examples in Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London and New York, 2001).

[26] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 34, trans. W. H. S. Jones (London and New York, 1918), pp. 184–187.

[27] Cicero, *On Divination. De Divinatione*, 1, 88, trans. David Wardle (Oxford, 2006), p. 74.

Seers were especially sought after by the military. Spartans enjoyed the service of Tisamenos, and after he was dead, his relatives inherited his precious role, as certain powers could sometimes be attributed not only to a single person, but also to a whole family. Another famous seer, Hegesistratos, was held captive by the Spartans, and was killed when they discovered that he had used his abilities to help their enemies. Tisamenos and Hegesistratos were both Eleans; they spoke a north-western Doric, and were thus considered barbarians by the Athenians.[28]

Most acts of *mantéia* were performed, as Pausanias implies, through rituals: reading the flight and the cry of birds, or the entrails of sacrificed animals, or interpreting dreams. Real oracles were rare. With the exception of those who belonged to the established political and religious systems, seers, like any other magicians, could easily fall under suspicion. In most cases, it would be wrong to think of these people as entirely specialised: a seer could also perform as a *goes*, and they could all be accused of being vagabonds and mountebanks.

Fritz Graf has proposed that, around the fifth-fourth-century BC, two factors in particular contributed to a sea change in how the elites in Greece conceived of magic, a transformation from accepted beliefs to despised practices. Firstly, according to Graf, philosophical reflection on the nature of the sacred and the divine led to a new version of religion, where there was no space for rituals concerned with constraining and forcing the gods. Secondly, he argues, medicine started being thought of as a natural science, rather than a matter of divine interference; this turn to the study of solely physical causes is illustrated by the celebrated work *On the Sacred Disease*, the Hippocratic treatise that determines natural causes of epilepsy (albeit, incorrectly), and which condemns practitioners who continue to treat the condition as a supernatural possession.[29]

Goeteía and *Magheia* were now consigned to the sphere of superstition and trickery. We can see this clearly in Plato's attitude towards magic, and it will remain a common position in the Christian world, at least, again, among its elites. Similarly, the classical world and the Christian era will both tend to associate magic with people coming from the outskirts of civilisation: from Persia, Anatolia and the Black Sea, but not from Greece.

[28] On those, and many more cases, see Esther Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses and Risk Among the Ancient Greeks* (Oxford, 2007); also, Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination* (Oxford, 2008).

[29] Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), pp. 30–35.

Women on Trial

As the beliefs outlined above were mostly held by the intellectual elites, this new attitude towards magic does not indicate that these practices were in decline, nor that there was any wider public condemnation of magic. There is a debate among the historians of classical Greek society about to what extent the condemnation of sorcery was normalised. The absence of legislation is quite evident and is easily explained: magical aid was sought in a great number of situations (and was provided) as there was a common, shared belief in the efficacy of magic. Even when some voices did express their criticism, this did not deter a society that relied on an 'unbroken tradition' of magical practices.[30] Further, there was as yet nothing like Christian theology, which would later intervene to ban magic, and would hold all mythological accounts within its purview.

As many have argued, the legislation against sorcery that Plato proposes in his *Laws* reflects only his personal point of view, or at most that of some intellectual circles, and not the more general public position in Athens. Of course, there were cases that could be prosecuted, generally those in which magic had been performed to cause harm, and was considered to have succeeded in its purpose; and this is something which we will also observe in Roman legislation. Aristotle attests to how, in Athens, trials for deliberate murder and wounding were held in the Areopagus, including causing death by poison.[31] Here, causing harm or death by poison does probably include the category of magic, but this understanding of magic necessarily involves a similar kind of ambiguity to that attributed to *pharmaka*, as discussed above. As is also made clear by Aristotle in the *Magna Moralia*, harming or killing had to be proven to be intentional if the act was to be condemned:

> For instance, they say that once a woman gave a love-potion to somebody; then the man died from the effects of the love-potion, and the woman was put on trial before the Areopagus; on her appearance she was acquitted, just for the reason that she did not do it with design. For she gave it in

[30] As called by Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago and London, 1986), vol. 1, p. xlviii.

[31] Aristotle, *Const. Ath.* 57.3.

> love, but missed her mark; hence it was not held to be voluntary, because in giving the love-potion she did not give it with the thought of killing.[32]

It is important to underline that this kind of legislation has nothing to do with scepticism towards the efficacy of magic; on the contrary, to be harmful, sorcery needed to be effective. However, there is also evidence of trials of cases in which magic was surely involved which ended with convictions for impiety (*asebeia*). From the canon of fictional works, Aesop's *Gunē mágos*, the 'female magician', provides an interesting case. In this short fable, a woman is accused of impiety, for she has tried to introduce new divinities to Athenian society. She has gained money and success, demonstrating that she is capable of influencing the will of the gods. When she is arrested, someone mocks her, asking 'You claimed to be able to turn aside the anger of the gods, so why weren't you able to ward off the plans of mere mortals?'[33] This argument would become a *topos* in many polemics against magic.

The accusation of *asebeia* has been thoroughly discussed by scholars, both as a theoretical concept and in relation to a number of trials that ended with the executions of women who practised magic.[34] The most famous of all—both because it is well attested and because a number of scholars have discussed it—is the prosecution of a certain Theoris, a woman originally from Lemnos, who lived in Athens.[35] The oldest source to mention the case is also the only one contemporary to the events. In his speech *Against Aristogeiton*, Demosthenes (the attribution is controversial, it could be the work of another prosecutor) charges Aristogeiton with many crimes, and in the proceedings slanders Aristogeiton's twin brother Eunomos, whom he accuses of having

[32] Aristotle, Magna Moralia, I, 16, 31–37, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ, 1995), vol. 2, p. 1880.

[33] Laura Gibbs (ed.), *Aesop's Fables* (Oxford, 2002), p. 188; for a commentary see Robert Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens* (Oxford, 2005), p. 135.

[34] Sara Marmai, *Con empia mano e lingua scellerata. Asebeia e crimini contro il sacro nell'Atene del V secolo a.C* (retrieved online, https://www.academia.edu/7003692/).

[35] A perfect starting point is given by Derek Collins, The Trial of Theoris of Lemnos: A 4th Century Witch or Folk Healer? *Western Folklore*, 59, 3/4 (2000), pp. 251–278. On accusations involving magic, see also Christopher A. Faraone, An Accusation of Magic in Classical Athens, *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 119 (1989), pp. 149–160; and Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*, pp. 46–59.

trafficked in poisons and magical trickery. During the accusation of Eumonos, Demosthenes makes reference to the case against Theoris: Eumonos, he asserts,

> got possession of the drugs and charms from the servant of Theoris of Lemnos, the filthy sorceress (*pharmakis*) whom you put to death on that account with all her family. She gave information against her mistress, and this rascal has had children by her, and with her help he plays juggling tricks and professes to cure fits, being himself subject to fits of wickedness of every kind.[36]

Theoris was condemned sometime after 330 BC, though it is not clear for what charges. Demosthenes' account does not mention any poisoning. Two later sources add further details: according to Philochorus—a historian of Athens who wrote a few decades after the fact, but who also served as an oracle himself—Theoris was a *mantis* condemned for impiety; and many centuries later, Plutarchus (I–II AD) wrote that she was a *hiereia*, a priestess, accused of many misdemeanours, and particularly of teaching the slaves to practise deceit.[37]

Speculations abound about Theoris and the nature of her crimes. Being from Lemnos, she might have been a metic, that is, a non-citizen resident foreigner.[38] Her case is discussed in a recent book by Esther Eidinow, in which her plight is compared to stories of other women, such as Ninos and Phyrne, who were subject to similar accusations and who were also brought to trial. Eidinow argues that the fictional way that these stories are told makes it difficult to tell reality from literary constructions. In the case of Phyrne, the only one of the three to be acquitted, the accused was a *hetaira* (a higher class of prostitute)

[36] Demosthenes, *Against Meidias. Against Androtion. Against Aristocrates. Against Timocrates. Against Aristogeiton 1 and 2*, 1, 79–80, trans. J. H. Vince (London and Cambridge, MA, 1935), pp. 562–565.

[37] Plut. *Dem*. 14.4.

[38] For a discussion of their role in the field of religious and magical practices, see Parker, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, pp. 67, 132–134; Derek Collins, *Magic, in the Ancient Greek World* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 491–492; Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*, pp. 50–54. For a gender studies perspective, see Rebecca Futo Kennedy, *Immigrant Women in Athens: Gender, Ethnicity and Citizenship in the Classical City* (London, 2014); and Esther Eidinow, *Envy, Poison and Death: Women on Trial in Ancient Athens* (Oxford and New York, 2016).

who allegedly brought a new god to what were considered shameless *thiasoi* (the ecstatic retinues of Dionysus) which she organised for both men and women. As a result, she was accused of impiety. For Eidinow, the story, and the way the woman is characterised by it, becomes 'gradually muffled in further layers of fiction'.[39]

If it is true that her conviction resulted in not only Theoris's execution, but also that of her children, the charges must have been serious ones, probably considerably more than the preparation of some nefarious potions; and it is also possible that her status as a non-citizen might have been an aggravating factor. In the light of what we know about the trials of Ninos, Theoris and Phryne, it makes sense to suppose, as Parker and others do, that these women were responsible for inaugurating unauthorised, ecstatic cults in Athens. The use of magic was frequently related to those cults, and again, their status as non-citizens may have aggravated the allegations. *Asebeia*, impiety, could then be a generic formulation that implied all of those supposed crimes. If the lack of proper legislation about magic sometimes made it difficult to prosecute people for sorcery, it is also true that the broad sweep of *asebeia* could give way to judgements motivated by broader political motives. In a certain sense, it works both ways: a crime that is hard to demonstrate may equally prove difficult to be exonerated of.

These unfortunate cases show that, if magic was not a crime per se, it could nonetheless be a dangerous field to venture into. Furthermore, it is clear that certain stereotypes surrounded the *pharmakides*: not only were they frequently foreigners, attached to strange, barbaric cults, but they also bordered the world of prostitution, administering potions to their clients to provoke desires towards themselves or others. As Eidinow convincingly argues, because of their social status, these women were particularly vulnerable to gossip. And they were not only singled out by their gender and ethnicity: their age, too, could play a role, as testaments abound of old women who sang enchantments and fabricated amulets.

Women could also join forces and perform their ceremonies together, as is testified to by Theocritus in the second *Idyll*: a Coan girl named Simaetha lays a spell on her reluctant lover, aided by her servant Thestylis. They meet at a crossroads encircled by tombs, not far from a shrine devoted to Hecate. Here, Simaetha starts her rite, burning

[39] Ibidem, p. 30.

barley-meal, bay-leaves, a waxen puppet and some bran; then she pours libations and burns the herb hippomanes along with a piece of her lover's cloak. Throughout the rite, Simaetha spins a four-spoke wheel and recites a soliloquy that serves as an enchantment.[40] At the end of the rite, she vows that if the spell fails to charm her lover, drugs will do.[41]

All of these vivid stereotypes, fictional and non-fictional, will have an influence on, or will be shared by, Latin tradition: Theocritus' *Idyll*, for instance, is the model for Virgil's *Eclogues*.

Scary Monsters

Some of the female figures of Greek mythology remained alive in the imagination for centuries to come: Circe and Medea are the most prominent among them. Others lingered on, not as individual characters, but as generic scary creatures. One example of the latter is Lamia, who in the myth (which we know through several, sometimes conflicting versions) is a beautiful mistress of Zeus, causing the god's wife, Hera, to become jealous and kill (or steal) Lamia's children. The suffering turns Lamia into a monster who steals and cannibalises other women's children. The richest account is given by the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (I BC), in a chapter recounting stories about Lybia, a land which he tells of being peopled by monsters and strange creatures like the Amazons and the Gorgons.[42] While the Macedonian warrior chief Ophellas is marching with his troops to conquer Cyrene, he and his men discover a cave,

> in which according to myth had been born Lamia, a queen of surpassing beauty. But on account of the savagery of her heart they say that the time that has elapsed since has transformed her face to a bestial aspect.

[40] Charles Segal, Space, Time and Imagination in Theocritus' Second 'Idyll', *Classical Antiquity*, 4, 1 (1985), pp. 103–119; Hugh Parry, Magic and the Songstress: Theocritus Idyll 2, *Illinois Classical Studies*, 13, 1 (1988), pp. 43–55; and Manuel García Teijeiro, Il secondo 'Idillio' di Teocrito, *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica*, 61, 1 (1999), pp. 71–86.

[41] On love magic: Christopher A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge, 1999).

[42] Diodorus Siculus, 3, 49–61. More sources are collected by Alejandro González Terriza, La destrucción o el amor. Cuentos de lamia en el mundo antiguo, in *Actas del IX Congreso Español de Esudios Clásicos*, ed. Francisco Rodríguez Adrados (Madrid, 1998), pp. 191–196.

> For when all the children born to her had died, weighed down in her misfortune and envying the happiness of all other women in their children, she ordered that the newborn babes be snatched from their mothers' arms and straightaway slain. Wherefore among us even down to the present generation, the story of this woman remains among the children and her name is most terrifying to them. But whenever she drank freely, she gave to all the opportunity to do what they pleased unobserved. Therefore, since she did not trouble herself about what was taking place at such times, the people of the land assumed that she could not see. And for that reason some tell in the myth that she threw her eyes into a flask, metaphorically turning the carelessness that is most complete amid wine into the aforesaid measure, since it was a measure of wine that took away her sight. One might also present Euripides as a witness that she was born in Libya, for he says: 'Who does not know the name of Lamia, Libyan in race, a name of greatest reproach among mortals?'[43]

Lamia is thought to be related to otherworldly creatures known to the ancient world, such as the Jewish Lilith, who is herself probably derived from the Assyrian demons Lilitu and Lamashtu. These figures all share a problematic relationship with pregnancy: in Jewish folklore, Lilith is a demon who steals and murders children; she is feared, and must be kept at a distance with the help of charms and amulets. According to the cabbalistic tradition, she is also the first wife of Adam, chased away and banished to the depths of the sea. Lilitu is described as a lustful woman who solicits lovers and then abandons them, while Lamashtu is an enemy of pregnant women and a thief of suckling babies.[44] Walter Burkert noted how the representation of Lamashtu is similar to the Gorgo of Greek mythology: both have a leonine head, and stand between two lions with snakes at their belts.[45] This similarity not only demonstrates a circulation of motifs between the ancient Semitic and Greek worlds, but also attests to the persistence of certain demonic creatures and their names;

[43] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, 20.41.1, trans. Russel M. Geer (Cambridge, 1954), pp. 253–255. On Diodorus Siculus' sources for this passage see Franca Landucci Gattinoni, Agatocle, Ofella e il mito di Lamia (Diod. 20.41.2-6), *Aristonothos*, 2 (2008), pp. 161–176.

[44] A. A. Barb, Antaura. The Mermaid and the Devil's Grandmother: A Lecture, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 29 (1966), pp. 1–23.

[45] Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), pp. 82–87.

indeed, many will survive to Late Antiquity. They are mentioned in the *Testamentum Salomonis*, in the catalogue of demons which can be conjured, and are known to folkloric traditions as distant from each other as the Basque and the Latvian/Lithuanian—the first with its fairy Lamina (pl. Lamiak), the latter with its Laume (pl. Laumes), all of them half-human, half-animal. Similar to Lamia, and equally long-lasting, is the Gello. This demon is mentioned by Sappho, and was said to carry off young children; it has also been related to a Sumerian-Akkadian name for an evil spirit. As with Lamia, the Gello will also know an extensive diffusion: we find it in Byzantine and Arabic traditions, but we can also trace it to the English 'ghoul'.

In the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, written between the second and the third-century AD by the Greek author Philostratus, some of Lamia's features change, and she is presented as a beautiful foreign woman loved by a youth named Menippus. The boy is planning to marry her, until the sage Apollonius reveals what she really is:

> One of those *empousai*, that is to say of those beings whom the many regard as *lamiae* and *mormolykeiai*. These beings fall in love, and they are devoted to the delights of Aphrodite, but especially to the flesh of human beings, and they decoy with such delights those whom they mean to devour in their feasts.[46]

Constrained by Apollonius' superior powers, the woman confesses her intentions to fatten up poor Menippus after the marriage, and to eat his body, as 'it was her habit to feed upon young and beautiful bodies, because their blood is pure and strong'.[47] The *Life of Apollonius* provides us with a helpful summary of many demonic creatures known to the Greek world: whilst their traits vary, they all belong to the *topos* of the child-stealing monster, a theme which also recurs in the later folklore of various European countries.[48] These creatures go by many names and

[46]The names are given in the plural form, the singular being *empousa*, *lamia*, *mormolyke*. The English translation leaves *lamia*, and gives 'vampire' and 'hobgoblin' for the other monsters: Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, 4, 25, trans. F. C. Conybeare (London, 1912), pp. 406–407.

[47]Ibidem.

[48]Moses Gaster, Two Thousand Years of a Charm Against the Child-Stealing Witch, *Folklore*, 11, 2 (1900), pp. 129–162.

are attached to diverse myths; some of them will enjoy a wider diffusion in Western traditions (such as *lamiae*), others in the Eastern ones (such as *Mormo/Mormolukê/Mormolukeion*).

Philostratus already uses the names *lamia* and *empusa* interchangeably, because in his times they were already seen this way. For instance, in the tale of Cupid and Psyche that he inserts in the *Metamorphoses*, Apuleius calls *lamiae* Psyche's evil sisters (albeit that, technically speaking, here they are not children killers or cannibals).[49] The first name that Philostratus employs is *empousa*, who in Greek mythology is the offspring of the goddess Hecate and the spirit Mormo, and whom we mainly know through Aristophanes' plays. In *The Frogs*, the mention of the *empousa* has been read as an allusion to participants in esoteric cults, and as an indicator of Athenian superstition.[50] In the play, she is a bogey sent by Hecate to scare the humans; she is able to metamorphose between a beautiful woman, a she-mule and a she-dog, but is given away by her perpetually bestial leg.[51]

This hybrid and shape-shifting nature is one of the main features of all these creatures. Sometimes, as with mermaids or the harpies, the monstrous is prevalent: a female face on a bird or a fish body. In other cases, there are revealing signals, like the eyes of the *lamia* (that according to Diodorus Siculus she is able to remove and put back in again) or the *empousa*'s leg. In an essay mostly devoted to Gorgo, and significantly called *La mort dans les yeaux*, Jean-Pierre Vernant remarks on the capacity of the eyes to instil fear when they are motionless (*stantes*), as they are, for example, in the face of the dead. Once again, these eyes are perceived by the Greeks as non-Greek: they represent the image of

[49] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 5, 11–13.

[50] Edward Kerr Borthwick, Seeing Weasels: The Superstitious Background of the Empusa Scene in the Frogs, *Classical Quarterly*, 18, 2 (1968), pp. 200–206; Christopher G. Brown, *Empousa, Dionysus and the Mysteries: Aristophanes, Frogs 258ff.*: Ibidem, 41, 1 (1991), pp. 41–50.

[51] Angela M. Andrisano, Empusa, nome parlante di un mostro infernale (Aristoph. Ran. 288ss.), *Annali Online di Ferrara - Lettere Speciale I* (2007), pp. 21–44; Olimpia Imperio, La donna diavolo nella Grecia antica: Lamia, Circe, Empusa e le stagioni, della vita umana, *Synthesis*, 22 (2015) online; and Alejandro González Terriza, Brujas, ogresas y otras mujeres de mal vivir, in *Adivinos, magos, brujas, astrólogos. Aspectos populares de las religiones del Mundo Antiguo*, eds. Óscar Martínez García, Mercedes Montero Montero (Madrid, 2015), pp. 127–147.

the 'Other'.[52] The Latin notion of *fascinatio* and the folkloric 'evil eye', which is the power to enchant or harm through sight alone, are linked to this 'Otherness'.

The *empousa*'s deformed leg also signifies the other-worldliness of these creatures,[53] and it can be put in the same category as the mutilations of godlike heroes of the Indo-European tradition,[54] and the limping devil in Christian traditions.[55] The ass-leg or ass-shank is mentioned in an episode of the famous *True Stories*, written by the Syrian-Greek Lucian of Samosata (120–180 AD):

> That evening we touched at an island of no great size. It was occupied by what we took for women, talking Greek. They came and greeted us with kisses, were attired like courtesans, all young and fair, and with long robes sweeping the ground. Cabalusa was the name of the island, and Hydramardia the city's. These women paired off with us and led the way to their separate homes. I myself tarried a little, under the influence of some presentiment, and looking more closely observed quantities of human bones and skulls lying about. I did not care to raise an alarm, gather my men, and resort to arms; instead, I drew out my mallow, and prayed earnestly to it for escape from our perilous position. Shortly after, as my hostess was serving me, I saw that in place of human feet she had ass's hoofs; whereupon I drew my sword, seized, bound, and closely questioned her. Reluctantly enough she had to confess; they were sea-women called Ass-shanks (*Onoskeleai*), and their food was travellers. 'When we have made them drunk,' she said, 'and gone to rest with them, we overpower them in their sleep.'[56]

[52] Jean-Pierre Vernant, *La mort dans les yeaux. L'image de l'Autre en Grece ancienne* (Paris, 2011).

[53] Maurizio Bettini, Alberto Borghini, *Edipo lo zoppo*, in *Edipo. Il teatro greco e la cultura europea*, eds. Bruno Gentili, Roberto Pretagostini (Rome, 1986), pp. 215–233; Jean-Pierre Vernant, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Oedipe et ses mythes* (Bruxelles, 1988).

[54] Georges Dumézil, 'Le Borgne' and 'Le Manchot': The State of the Problem, in *Myth in Indo-European Antiquity*, eds. Gerald James Larson, C. Scott Littleton, Jaan Puhvel (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1974), pp. 17–28.

[55] Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath* (London, 1990), pp. 231–232; Gian Luigi Beccaria, *I nomi del mondo. Santi, demoni, folletti e le parole perdute* (Torino, 1995), p. 142s.

[56] *Translations from Lucian*, II, 46, trans. Augusta M. Campbell Davidson (London, 1902), p. 170.

In addition to its animal leg, the *empousa* of the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* is also a shape-shifter. She is able to turn into a dog—an animal linked to Hecate, as demonstrated during Aeneas's descent into the Underworld, where dogs howl when the goddess approaches—and also a mule, the symbol of all hybrids in nature, as Aelian (ca. 175–ca. 235 AD) writes in his treatise *On the Nature of Animals*.[57] The Greek *empousa* is also the creature which most closely resembles the Latin *strix*, at least in Late Antiquity: both are cannibals and bloodsuckers, and screech in the same way. In another episode of the *Life*, Apollonius encounters an *empousa* while travelling to Eastern lands, having passed the Caucasus and on towards the Indus river. He is met by an 'apparition' (*phásma*), which shifts from one form to another, before flying away with a screech, 'as ghosts (*eidola*) do'.[58] The otherworldly nature of this creature is underlined by both words, *phásma* and *eidolon*, which can be used in almost synonymous ways. The first, *phásma*, is a generic term for an apparition or a bogey, while *eidolon* is related to the dead, and can also be the term for the soul departing the body of the deceased, as in: 'The *eidolon* of Patroclos is brought up from his tumulus to show delight in Hector's body being dragged around Troy'.[59]

Sarah Johnston has commented that all of these scary female monsters are connected to the social status of women. In Greek society, women were defined in relation to maternity, and a woman without children bordered on the realm of the demonic. In a certain sense, the *lamia*, the *empousa* and all of the others are gender-defining, in that they reveal a dread of a female universe without motherhood, without fertility; a universe which would, thus, be dead.[60] The gender discourse is strong throughout the whole history of witchcraft, and Johnston's hypothesis is an important one; this said, one can also relate the female monsters (or the powerful female magicians) of Greek culture to other prominent and recurrent themes, not least that of the relationship with the barbarian lands and cults.

[57] See Virgil, *Aeneid*, 4, 257; Aelian, *De Nat. Animal*, 12, 16.

[58] Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, 2, 4, pp. 122–125.

[59] Moshe Barasch, The Departing Soul: The Long Life of a Medieval Creation, *Artibus et Historiae*, 26, 52 (2005), pp. 13–28, esp. 14.

[60] Sarah Iles Johnston, Defining the Dreadful: Remarks on the Greek Child-Killing Demon, in *Ancient magic and ritual Power*, eds. Marvin Meyer, Paul Mirecki (Leiden, New York and Köln, 1995), pp. 361–387; Johnston, *Restless Dead*, pp. 169–183.

The Witch as a Woman: Tales of Magic in Rome

Canidia, Erichtho, Meroe and the Others

Just as Greece did, Rome had its stereotypes about the characters of magicians. But there is one fundamental difference between the Eastern and the Western tradition: while Circe and Medea emerge from myth and the oral tradition, Latin sorceresses were a product of literary creativity. Further, the Greek witches appear to be of divine descent, which is a feature completely lacking from their Roman counterparts.

The most impressive of these Latin magicians are found in the work of Horace and Lucan, and they will enjoy wide success during the Middle Ages and early modern times. In Horace, we find portraits of many horrific women involved in evil magic: Canidia, Sagana, Folia and Veia. Canidia is the most recurrent character; she is mentioned at length in two Epodes (5 and 17) as well as in Satire I, 8, 24 and 48 and receives short mentions in Epode 3, 8, and Satires, II, 1, 48, and II, 2, 95. Scholars have debated the origin of Canidia, asking whether she must be considered to be only a product of the author's fantasy, or if she was, in fact, someone real.[1] Some early commentators on Horace's works imply that she was not a fictional character, but a woman whom Horace had himself known or had heard talk of. In his commentary on Epode 17,

[1] See C. E. Manning, Canidia in the Epodes of Horace, *Mnemosyne*, Fourth Series, 23, 4 (1970), pp. 393–401.

M. Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92078-8_3

Pomponius Porphyrion (second AD or later) wrote that Canidia's character was based on a certain Gratidia, a perfume seller from Naples and former lover of Horace who had jilted the poet.[2] Some details also surface about the other women: Sagana, who appears in Epode 5 and Satire I, 8, is older than Canidia and serves as her assistant, while Folia and Veia are mentioned only in Epode 5. Folia is also said to be from Rimini, and it is reported that she had 'masculine lusts', meaning that she loved women like men do.[3] Nowadays, it is most common to consider all of these women to be fictional characters, but it nonetheless remains uncertain what level of realism there is in the depictions of the acts of Canidia and the other women, or, indeed, as to whether the details could have been taken from some real persons and merged into fictional ones.

A recent study about Canidia proposes that we consider her a functional character in Horace's poetry, and that we abandon all hopes of relating her to an actual person:

> Thus, all of the historical details we possess about Canidia either come directly from Horace's poetry or from the scholiasts who were extrapolating from that same poetry. There is no external evidence to corroborate even the existence of a Neapolitan Gratidia, let alone to verify her as the basis for Horace's Canidia. In fact, the biographer Suetonius (active roughly a century after Horace's death, and at least a century prior to any of the Horatian scholiasts) wrote a brief tract on the poet's life (*Suet. Poet.* 40) in which, although he included such salacious pseudo-biographical details as Horace's preference for hanging mirrors in his bedroom for the express purpose of watching himself and his partner having sex, Suetonius makes no mention whatsoever of Canidia or Gratidia. His silence in this regard, while by no means to be taken as firm evidence, casts further doubt on the existence of a historical Canidia, especially given Suetonius' propensity to record tabloid-quality gossip.[4]

[2] *Pomponii Porhyrionis commentarii in Q. Horatium Flaccum*, ed. Gulielmus Meyer (Leipzig, 1874), pp. 148–149, 151–155.

[3] «Non defuisse masculae libidinis»: Horace, *Epodes*, 5, 41, in *Odes and Epodes*, trans. Niall Rudd (Cambridge, MA and London, 2004), pp. 282–283.

[4] Maxwell Teitel Paule, *Canidia, Rome's First Witch* (London and New York, 2017), p. 4. About the gender stereotypes in classical literature, see Kimberly B. Stratton, *Naming the Witch: Magic, Ideology, & Stereotype in the Ancient World* (New York, 2007).

Nonetheless, considering Canidia to be completely fictional rather limits the possibility of using her portrait to reconstruct magical practices in Horace's times, which is the main interest of the present work. Canidia's rituals are various, changing with the tone of Horace's writing. The woman who gathers assistants to sacrifice a young boy in order to gain the attention of a lover, as depicted in Epode 5, is quite different from the woman of Satire I, 8, driven away by a fart emitted by the statue of Priapus which guards Maecena's garden from intruders. According to the different episodes, Canidia can be scary or laughable, but some basic features remain throughout the Horatian narrative.

Canidia is an old woman, and Sagana, as already mentioned, is yet older. Canidia has artificial teeth and Sagana wears a wig; both will lose these prosthetics fleeing from Priapus' fart. The women wander around the Esquiline; here, the slaves once brought their dead, explains Priapus, also the narrator of the tale, but it has now been restored. There, the two women

> began to dig up the earth with their nails, and to tear a black lamb to pieces with their teeth; the blood was all poured into a trench, that therefrom they might draw the spirits, souls that would give them answers. One image there was of wool, and one of wax, the woollen one the larger, to curb and punish the smaller; the waxen stood in suppliant guise, as if awaiting death in slavish fashion.[5]

The abominable nature of their spells is made clearer in Epode 5, when Canidia and her acolytes are about to sacrifice a young boy:

> The boy stood there, stripped of everything that showed his age and class, a childish figure that could have softened even the unholy heart of a Thracian. But Canidia, her untidy hair entwined with little snakes, orders wild fig trees to be brought, uprooted from tombs; orders funereal cypresses and eggs smeared with the feathers of a nocturnal screech owl, and herbs imported from Iolcos and Hiberia where poisons grow in abundance, and bones snatched from the jaws of a starving bitch—all to

[5] «Scalpere terram unguibus et pullam divellere mordicus agnara coeperunt; cruor in fossam confusus, ut inde manis elicerent, animas responsa daturas, lanea et effigies erat, altera cerea: maior lanea, quae poenis compesceret inferiorem; cerea suppliciter stabat, servilibus ut quae iam peritura modis»: Horace, *Satires*, I, 8, 26–33, in *Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (London and Cambridge, MA, 1942), pp. 98–99.

> be burned in the flames of Colchis. But Sagana, with her dress hitched up, ready for action, sprinkled water from Lake Avernus all through the house, her spiky hair on end like a sea urchin or a charging boar. Veia, inhibited by no sense of guilt, dug a hole in the ground with an iron mattock, grunting with exertion, so that the boy might be buried up to his face (as a swimmer's body floats with its chin just clear of the water), and suffer a slow death gazing at food that was changed two or three times in the course of the long day. Their intention was that, when his eyeballs had finally rotted away from staring at the forbidden food, his dried-up marrow and liver should be cut out and used as a love charm.[6]

Knowing his cries for pity are in vain, the boy resolves to curse his persecutors: he vows to return as a night *furor* to torture them, promising to cause people to gather to lynch them and to leave their bodies to birds of prey and wolves.

So, is the magic of Canidia and the others effective? This question has been asked before.[7] Apart from the infamous banishment from the garden, in Epode 5 (60–65) Canidia confesses that it is because she is unable to recreate the magic of Medea, who took her revenge through poison, that she must fall back on human sacrifice. Horace underlines continuously the despicable nature of these women, and they are seen to have nothing in common with Circe and Medea: while the magic of the latter women may be horrific, it nonetheless retains a preternatural fascination, which in Canidia and Sagana is completely lacking.[8]

[6] «Ut haec trementi questus ore constitit, insignibus raptis puer, impube corpus, quale posset impia mollire Thracum pectora, Canidia, brevibus implicata viperis crinis et incomptum caput, iubet sepulcris caprificos erutas, iubet cupressos funebris et uncta turpis ova ranae sanguine plumamque nocturnae strigis herbasque, quas Iolcos atque Hiberia mittit venenorum ferax, et ossa ab ore rapta ieiunae canis flammis aduri Colchicis. At expedita Sagana per totam domum spargens Avernalis aquas horret capillis ut marinus asperis echinus aut currens aper. Abacta nulla Veia conscientia ligonibus duris humum exhauriebat ingemens laboribus, quo posset infossus puer longo die bis terque mutatae dapis inemori spectaculo, cum promineret ore, quantum exstant aqua suspensa mento corpora, exsecta uti medulla et aridum iecur amoris esset poculum, interminato cum semel fixae cibo intabuissent pupulae»: Horace, *Epodes*, 5, 10–40, pp. 282–283.

[7] William Fitzgerald, Power and Impotence in Horace's Epodes, *Ramus*, 17 (1988), pp. 176–191.

[8] Rita Pierini, Medea e Canidia, Canidia e Medea: percorsi intertestuali tra Orazio giambico e Seneca tragico, *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica*, 11, 2 (2013), pp. 257–266.

Lucan's Erichtho belongs, at least partially, to another realm. She is a Thessalian; not only is she from this land associated with magic, she is, moreover, the fiercest of her kind. Like Canidia, she is repugnant: 'her awful countenance, overcast with a hellish pallor and weighed down by uncombed locks, is never seen by the clear sky', and her breath pollutes the air.[9] There is little doubt that her magic is effective: she does not pray to the gods, rather 'At the first sound of her petition the gods grant every honor, dreading to hear a second spell'.[10] She induces abortions to dispose of the foetuses, or she can sacrifice living creatures to summon spirits to command:

> In the same way she pierces the pregnant womb and delivers the child by an unnatural birth, in order to place it on the fiery altar; and whenever she requires the service of a bold, bad spirit, she takes life with her own hand.[11]

She seeks out the remains of the dead and takes them to perform her necromancy, as when she summons up a corpse to respond to Sextus Pompey's questions.[12] The results are ominous: she predicts the death of Scipio (788–89), the murder of Caesar (791–92), and the suicide of Cato (789–9), and everything in her is related to death; there is no place for love or rage, nor for the passions shown by Circe or Medea.

Sometimes characters are created by gathering together several recurrent elements from literary contexts, resulting in magicians whose powers have more of a farcical than dreadful side to them. Such is the case with Apuleius' Meroe, who appears at the beginning of the *Metamorphoses*, in Aristomenes' tale. The narrator hears a couple of guys talking about

[9] «Tenet ora profanae Foeda situ macies, caeloque ignota sereno Terribilis Stygio facies pallore gravatur Inpexis onerata comis: si nimbus et atrae Sidera subducunt nubes»: Lucan, *The Civil War (Pharsalia)*, VI, 519–520, trans. J. D. Duff (London and Cambridge, MA, 1962), pp. 342–343.

[10] Omne nefas superi prima iam voce precantis concedunt carmenque timent audire secundum: Ibidem, pp. 527–528.

[11] Volnere sic ventris, non qua natura vocabat, Extrahitur partus calidis ponendus in aris; et quotiens saevis opus est ac fortibus umbris. Ipsa facit manes, Hominum mors omnis in usu est: Ibidem, 557–560, pp. 344–345.

[12] On prophecy in *Pharsalia*, see John F. Makowski, Oracula Mortis in the Pharsalia, *Classical Philology*, 72, 3 (1977), pp. 193–202.

unbelievable magical acts; he joins in and tells the story of his old friend Socrates, who has been bewitched and reduced to a miserable state by a woman, Meroe. The setting for the story is, again, Thessaly, where the merchant Aristomenes had gone to trade in cheeses. Here, he hears from Socrates of how he had recently been robbed by bandits and had found his way to an inn managed by an attractive woman named Meroe, who showed him a great deal of kindness and care. Socrates and Meroe promptly became lovers, but Meroe took advantage of the relationship, stealing from Socrates the few things the bandits had left him. Aristomenes curses her, but is instantly stopped by Socrates, who says that Meroe is so powerful that it is better not to call her names. She is, he explains, a *saga*, 'with supernatural powers; she can bring down the sky, raise up the earth, solidify springs, dissolve mountains, raise the dead, send the gods down below, blot out the stars, and illuminate Hell itself'.[13] Aristomenes seems sceptical, so Socrates adds further details:

> When one of her lovers was unfaithful to her, with a single word she turned him into a beaver, because when they're afraid of being caught beavers escape their pursuers by biting off their balls—the idea being that something like that would happen to him. An innkeeper, who was a neighbour and therefore a trade rival, she changed into a frog; and now the poor old chap swims around in a barrel of his own wine and greets his old customers with a polite croak as he squats there in the lees. Another time she changed a lawyer who appeared against her in court into a ram, and it's as a ram that he now pleads his cases. Again, the wife of another of her lovers she condemned to perpetual pregnancy for being witty at her expense; she shut up the woman's womb and halted the growth of the foetus, so that it's now eight years (we've all done the sum) that this unfortunate creature has been swollen with her burden, as if it was an elephant that she was going to produce.[14]

[13] «"Saga" inquit "Et divina, potens caelum deponere, terram suspendere, fontes durare, montes diluere, manes sublimare, deos infimare, aidera extinguere, Tartarum ipsum illuminare"»: Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, in *The Golden Ass*, trans. E. J. Kenny (London, 2004), I, 8, p. 4. For a commentary on witchcraft in the *Metamorphoses*, see Stavros Frangoulidis, *Witches, Isis and Narrative: Approaches to Magic in Apuleius' Metamorphoses* (Berlin, 2008).

[14] «Amatorem suum, quod in aliam temerasset, unico verbo mutavit in feram castorem, quod ea bestia captivitatis metuens ab insequentibus se praecisione genitalium liberat, ut illi quoque simile [quod venerem habuit in aliam] proveniret. Cauponem quoque vicinum atque ob id aemulum deformavit in ranam, et nunc senex ille dolium innatans vini

One day, the people of her village grew tired of Meroe's deeds and decided to stone her to death. She was granted one day's stay of execution, enough time for her to organise a counteroffensive: using necromantic rites, she locked up the villagers inside their houses until they all begged for pity and forgiveness. At the end of this story, Aristomenes seems scared, but, after moving his bed to block the door, he nonetheless falls sound asleep. During the night, despite the lengths Aristomenes has taken to secure the chamber, two women burst open the door and get inside. They are Meroe and her sister Panthia, described as old women, who turn Aristomenes into a tortoise (albeit briefly) and stab Socrates in the neck. Socrates will wake up the morning after, walk around a little, and even eat some bread and cheese, before trying to drink some water, which exposes the deep cut: he is dead already, but has been turned by the two women into some kind of zombie. The tale is clearly a clever patchwork of many literary accounts assembled by the author: Medea is explicitly recalled, as are the bacchantes.

All things considered, it is probably difficult, as Maxwell Teitel Paule argues (mostly in reference to Canidia), to infer from these sources the reality of magical practices in Rome and the Latin world.[15] Fritz Graf asserts that Erichtho's necromancy does adhere to real (which does not, of course, mean effective) practices; but he recognises the polemic intent of Lucan against those who, like Sextus Pompey, preferred Thessalian—that is barbaric—rituals, to pious oracles.[16] In any case, the correlation between magic in literature and actual practices remains an under-researched question, and it cannot be properly addressed here. One thing is certain, however: that these powerful portraits would last for centuries to come.

sui adventores pristinos in faece submissus officiosis roncis raucus appellat. Alium de foro, quod adversus eam locutus esset, in arietem deformavit, et nunc aries ille causas agit. Eadem amatoris sui uxorem, quod in eam dicacule probrum dixerat iam in sarcina praegnationis obsaepto utero et repigrato fetu perpetua praegnatione damnavit, et ut cuncti numerant, iam octo annorum onere misella illa velut elephantum paritura distenditur»: Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, I, 8, p. 5.

[15] Maxwell Teitel Paule, *Canidia, Rome's First Witch*, passim.

[16] Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), pp. 175–204.

Poisons or Medicines?

In the previous chapter, I discussed the meaning and nuances of the word *pharmaka* (and its cognates) in Greek culture. In Rome, *veneficia* are similarly culturally relevant, and the word is equally resistant to being defined in an exclusive, monosemic way. Deadly potions are a main feature of the stories of Erichtho, Canidia and the others: Canidia and Sagana are described roaming around the Esquiline in search of the bones of the dead which, along with *herbae nocentes*, are necessary ingredients for spells and poisons that trouble people's minds[17]; Erichtho says her poisons are strong enough to kill anybody.[18] But these *venena* are not found in literature alone:

> A terrible year succeeded, whether owing to the unseasonable weather or to man's depravity. […] I should be glad to believe had been falsely handed down—and indeed not all the authorities avouch it—namely, that those whose deaths made the year notorious for pestilence were in reality destroyed by poison; still, I must set forth the story as it comes to us, that I may not deprive any writer of his credit. When the leading citizens were falling ill with the same kind of malady, which had, in almost every case the same fatal termination, a certain serving woman came to Quintus Fabius Maximus, the curule aedile, and declared that she would reveal the cause of the general calamity, if he would give her a pledge that she should not suffer for her testimony. Fabius at once referred the matter to the consuls, and the consuls to the senate, and a pledge was given to the witness with the unanimous approval of that body. She then disclosed the fact that the City was afflicted by the criminal practices of the women; that they who prepared these poisons were matrons, whom, if they would instantly attend her, they might take in the very act. They followed the informer and found certain women brewing poisons, and other poisons stored away. These concoctions were brought into the Forum, and some twenty matrons, in whose houses they had been discovered, were summoned thither by an apparitor. Two of their number, Cornelia and Sergia, of patrician houses both, asserted that these drugs were salutary. On the informer giving them the lie, and bidding them drink and prove her charges false in the sight of all, they took time to confer, and after the crowd had been dismissed they referred the question to the rest, and finding that they, like themselves,

[17] Horace, *Satires*, I, 8.

[18] Lucan, *The Civil War* (*Pharsalia*), VI, 605–610.

> would not refuse the draught, they all drank off the poison and perished by their own wicked practices. Their attendants being instantly arrested informed against a large number of matrons, of whom one hundred and seventy were found guilty; yet until that day there had never been a trial for poisoning in Rome. Their act was regarded as a prodigy, and suggested madness rather than felonious intent. Accordingly when a tradition was revived from the annals how formerly in secessions of the plebs, a nail had been driven by the dictator, and how men's minds, which had been distracted by dissension, had by virtue of that expiation regained their self-control, they resolved on the appointment of a dictator to drive the nail. The appointment went to Gnaeus Quinctilius, who named Lucius Valerius master of the horse. The nail was driven and they resigned their posts.[19]

We do not know if this story, told by Livy (64 or 59 BC–17 AD) in his *Books from the Foundation of the City*, is true or not: it is very ancient, dating to 331 BC, and the author himself harbours doubts about it.

[19] «Foedus insequens annus seu intemperie caeli seu humana fraude fuit, M. Claudio Marcello C. Valerio consulibus. – Flaccum Potitumque varie in annalibus cognomen consulis invenio; ceterum in eo parui refert quid veri sit –. Illud peruelim – nec omnes auctores sunt – proditum falso esse venenis absumptos quorum mors infamem annum pestilentia fecerit; sicut proditur tamen res, ne cui auctorum fidem abrogaverim, exponenda est. Cum primores civitatis similibus morbis eodemque ferme omnes eventu morerentur, ancilla quaedam ad Q. Fabium Maximum aedilem curulem indicaturam se causam publicae pestis professa est, si ab eo fides sibi data esset haud futurum noxae indicium. Fabius confestim rem ad consules, consules ad senatum referunt consensuque ordinis fides indici data. Tum patefactum muliebri fraude civitatem premi matronasque ea venena coquere et, si sequi extemplo velint, manifesto deprehendi posse. Secuti indicem et coquentes quasdam medicamenta et recondita alia invenerunt; quibus in forum delatis et ad viginti matronis, apud quas deprehensa erant, per viatorem accitis duae ex eis, Cornelia ac Sergia, patriciae utraque gentis, cum ea medicamenta salubria esse contenderent, ab confutante indice bibere iussae ut se falsum commentam arguerent, spatio ad conloquendum sumpto, cum submoto populo [in conspectu omnium] rem ad ceteras rettulissent, haud abnuentibus et illis bibere, epoto [in conspectu omnium] medicamento suamet ipsae fraude omnes interierunt. Comprehensae extemplo earum comites magnum numerum matronarum indicaverunt; ex quibus ad centum septuaginta damnatae; neque de veneficiis ante eam diem Romae quaesitum est. Prodigii ea res loco habita captisque magis mentibus quam consceleratis similis visa; itaque memoria ex annalibus repetita in secessionibus quondam plebis clauum ab dictatore fixum alienatas[que] discordia mentes hominum eo piaculo compotes sui fecisse, dictatorem clavi figendi causa creari placuit. Creatus Cn. Qvinctilius magistrum equitum L. Valerium dixit, qui fixo clauo magistratu se abdicaverunt»: Livy, *History of Rome*, 8, 18, trans. B. O. Foster (London and New York, 1926), vol. IV, pp. 70–73.

It may show a contemporary concern about the use of poisons, or it may reflect a more ancient fear about them. If true, it would be a case of mass prosecution for the crime of poisoning, which is indeed central in Roman culture. Livy closes the account with details of the ritual of the nail-driving that was performed to mark the anniversary of the dedication of some temples, including those of Jupiter Optimus Maximus and Minerva, and later that of Mars Ultor. The ritual was meant to seal the year, so the fact that it is linked to the explosion of the poisoning 'insanity' is clearly, as Livy says, a way to restore society to a sane state of mind.

The origin of the practice of the nail-driving is mysterious, and its meaning can only be understood at a symbolic level. It is instructive to connect it to another ritual, widespread both in the Greek and the Roman world, that of the *defixiones.* The *tabellae defixionum* were cursing or binding spells scratched onto lead tablets (lead was considered a potent material) which would be secured to temple walls or graves, or thrown into pools, with the aim of fulfilling wishes ranging from charms to killing someone. Although they were not always nailed, the name '*defixiones*' refers to the act of nailing, possibly with the meaning of sealing the fate wished for on the tablet.

A few years after this case, a similar one occurred: there were mysterious deaths, including of some high-profile citizens, and rumours spread that they had been poisoned. The inquiry led to the accusation of the wife of a consul, Hostilia, who it was alleged had acted to help her son's career. She was condemned along with many others. In later centuries, these kinds of accusations became common; they involved both genders, though poisoning was commonly perceived as a female's weapon, to the point of becoming a literary *topos.*[20]

Depending on the situation, the nail-driving that concludes Livy's account could be given a positive or a negative interpretation, just as we found in Greek magic. However, Roman culture seems to have made more forceful attempts to put borders around a subject that apparently refused to be determined once and for all. The topic of poisons and drugs demonstrates this attitude well, especially if we compare it to

[20]David B. Kaufman, Poisons and Poisoning Among the Romans, *Classical Philology*, 27, 2 (1932), pp. 156–167.

the Greek context. While the Greek *pharmaka* appear to be equivocal in their deepest nature, Roman definitions are clearer, even if some words are a perfect match: the Greek *philtron* and the Latin *philtrum* both indicate a love potion, for example. *Venena* are usually poisonous, but their significance in Roman law must be discussed deeply to parse the ramifications and implications.[21]

The word that shares the same ambiguity of the *pharmakon* more than any other is the Latin *medicamentum*, which can be both helpful and harmful, natural or obtained through magic rituals. The second-century AD jurist Gaius makes this clear in his comment to the XII Tables: 'When someone says "*venenum*" he has to add if it is good or bad, because "*medicamenta*" are poisons [*venena*] too'.[22]

The main components of a *medicamentum* are the herbs and the natural substances praised by Pliny throughout the 25th book of his *Natural History*. On the other hand, Pliny despises their magical use and celebrates the *moly* of Homer as a natural remedy.[23] Literature, though, shows that *herbae* and *venena* went together well, and that spells were employed to make them effective. In Virgil's Eighth *Eclogue*, the enchantment performed by Amaryllis to draw Daphnis home involves baneful herbs procured from Ponthus, the region of King Mithridates, who was said to have developed perfect control over poisons and their antidotes.[24] However, Daphnis uses the herbs, along with many other elements, in a ritual that is clearly magic, or, better, where the ceremonial and the natural aspects are so deeply interwoven that they are impossible to distinguish. It is this interweaving that makes *medicamenta* and *venena*, as Gaius stated, potentially good and bad at the same time. In Apuleius' tale of Thelyphron, found in the Second Book of the *Metamorphoses*, herbs are requested to summon up a corpse and make him speak; but as well as the herbs, it is the status of the summoner, who is a seer, and also the ritual he performs that make this act of necromancy not only complete, but also successful:

[21] The literature can be more nuanced, as claimed by Gualtiero Calboli, L'eros nelle declamazioni latine (una pozione di contro-amore), *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 28, 2 (2010), pp. 138–159.

[22] «Qui "venenum" dicit, adicere debet, utrum malum an bonum: nam et medicamenta venena sunt»: *Dig.* 50, 16, 236 (my translation).

[23] Plin, *Nat. Hist.*, XXV, 8.

[24] Ibidem, XXV, 3.

> The prophet, propitiated, laid some sort of herb on the corpse's mouth and another on his breast. Then turning eastwards he silently invoked the majesty of the rising sun, arousing among the witnesses of this impressive performance excited expectations of a great miracle.[25]

Laws and Trials

The tales of poisoning found throughout Latin literature reflect Roman society's preoccupation with the issue. If we turn to the evidence of laws and trials, this widespread fear takes a more defined shape and reveals the antiquity of *veneficium* as a major crime.

The first corpus of Roman laws, the XII Tables, originates in the middle of the fifth century BC. The notoriously difficult work of reconstructing a lost text from later citations, comments and allusions has been recently helped by a number of editions and studies.[26] Among other legislation, section VIII includes two laws that, in our current way of thinking, would be seen as being anti-magic; thus, as James B. Rives remarked, there is nothing in the text to justify the existence of a discourse about 'magic', and the laws are better understood 'if we do not in fact think of them as laws against magic', because they were neither perceived nor named thus.[27] According to Pliny the Elder, the first law regards those 'who took away the crops' ('qui fruges excantassit') or 'who enchanted through some bad spells' ('qui malum Carmen incantassit').[28] Other sources confirm the text, but vary on the interpretation. The verb *excantare* is archaic and can be translated as 'to

[25] «Propheta sic propitiatus herbulam quampiam ob os corporis et aliam pectori eius imponit. Tunc orientem obversus incrementa solis augusti tacitus imprecatus venerabilis scaenae facie studia praesentium ad miraculum tantum certatim arrexit»: Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, II, 28, p. 28.

[26] M. H. Crawford, *Roman Statutes* (London, 1996), vol. II, pp. 555–721.

[27] «In this paper I hope to provide a fresh examination of the evidence and to suggest some new interpretations of these laws. To this end I will avoid, as far as possible, the whole notion of 'magic', except where that terminology is introduced by the sources, and will instead limit my analysis to the more specific terms that were evidently used in the actual laws. After some brief remarks on the XII Tables in general, I will examine in detail the two laws usually associated with magic; I hope to demonstrate that their significance becomes much clearer if we do not in fact think of them as laws against magic»: James B. Rives, Magic in the XII Tables Revisited, *The Classical Quarterly*, 52, 1 (2002), pp. 270–290.

[28] Ibidem.

chant out', meaning 'to remove through the use of chants'. Because of its nature, this kind of theft is given specific attention by the author of the legislation, in a chapter devoted to illicit acts: a chant can be either good or bad, which is why the jurists underline it as *malum*. As we have seen, this is commented on by Gaius, who also mentions the use of *venena*. This latter is not mentioned in the fragments of the Tables which remain, but was probably in the original version. In Virgil's Eighth *Eclogue*, the herbs and *venena* of Ponthus that should draw Daphnis home are said to transport the standing corn to new fields, which is exactly the meaning of the *excantatio*.

Most indicatively of all, there is a famous trial held according to the law of the XII Tables that can illustrate better the word's meaning. The case was brought around 191 BC against a freed slave named Gaius Furius Cresimus, who was accused by his neighbours of having become rich at their expense. He was, like them, a farmer. Cresimus' fields were, apparently, experiencing good harvests that made his neighbours envious. He was summoned by one of the two curule aediles to appear in front of an assembly, to be judged for using occult means to steal crops and enrich his own land. The story is narrated by Pliny the Elder, who clearly accords credibility to the man's defence: he went to the assembly bringing his well-fed animals and healthy slaves, showing how his sound management, and not *venena*, accounted for his success. He was unanimously acquitted.

There are at least a couple of points to be stressed, here: first, in early times, the laws accorded importance to these kinds of acts; they were treated alongside other accusations that involved aggression towards people or their property. Importantly, it was the purpose which was legislated against, not the act itself: spells that were not aimed towards anything illicit, and those that proved ineffective, were not prosecuted.[29] Second, *venena* had a wider meaning and effect than simply 'poisoning', and this helps to explain why in later times (as we will see) *veneficium* became, in Western tradition, synonymous with *maleficium*, an occult way of doing harm.

But Roman law will not remain the same. Around the late Republican era, attitudes started to change, probably because of the growing impact of Hellenic culture. As new cults and new rituals invaded the empire,

[29] Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, pp. 175–204.

laws reacted and became more specific. This shift is evidenced in the texts of many authors who expressed distaste for the changes, Cicero being the most open and direct about it. The *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficiis* is key to understanding the changing Roman conception of what we now call 'magic'. The law was passed in 81 BC under Lucius Cornelius Silla, in an effort to reform and rationalise the regulations of the past.[30]

The fifth section of the law deals with those who have killed someone on purpose by preparing, selling, buying or administering a *venenum malum*. The inclusion of this chapter in a law that probably combined and/or reworked previous, similar laws is significant, not least because of the general meaning of the *Lex Cornelia*, which persecuted *sicarii*—those who killed on purpose, with premeditation, and who perhaps concealed themselves. A *sicarius* is, literally, someone who murders with a little dagger (*sica*), but *sicarii* were more specifically the members of a Jewish sect of zealots that attacked Romans and their supporters—an incident recounted by Flavius in the *War of the Hebrews* (2:254–7)—similar to the Assassins of the thirteenth century. If the word 'assassin' has gained widespread use in modern parlance as a term for a first-degree murderer, *sicarius* has become (in Italian, in French and some other languages) the name for a contract killer. The putting together of *sicariis et veneficiis* is thus explained by the occult nature of both crimes.

As Rives notes, an 'occult' action does not necessarily involve 'magic':

> Was the law on *veneficium* a law against magic? Yes and no. A number of scholars have stressed the ambiguity of the word *venenum*, which they rightly point out can be translated as either 'poison' or 'magic potion,' and have accordingly argued that the *Lex Cornelia* embraced both magic and poisoning. This distinction, however, depends on the conceptual categories of modern western science rather than those of contemporary Romans.[31]

Further, as I have already noted of the XII Tables, it seems that the ambiguity of *medicamenta* and *venena* could accord these terms a wider meaning than the most literal one and thus grant them a higher power.

[30] As for the XII Tables, the original text is lost, but we are able to recreate it, at least partially, on the basis of later commentaries.

[31] James B. Rives, Magic in Roman Law: The Reconstruction of a Crime, *Classical Antiquity*, 22, 2 (2003), pp. 313–339, esp., p. 319.

In any case, the 'modern' concept of magic, or at least its basic root, if still lacking from the *Lex Cornelia*, was about to be born.

In the first century AD, we find increasingly frequent references to the word 'magic', and many sources imply that accusations of 'magic activities' could lead to prosecutions and trials. According to Tacitus, Agrippina Maior (14 BC–33 AD), of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, was charged 'with unchastity, with having Furnius for her paramour, and with attempts on the emperor by poison (*veneficia*) and offerings (*devotiones*)'.[32] This was just one among many prosecutions against women which involved *veneficium* along with other accusations; Tacitus also writes about another woman who 'had made attempts on the emperor's consort by magical incantations, and was disturbing the peace of Italy by an imperfect control of her troops of slaves in Calabria'.[33] Political motivations, if not always explicit, seem to be common to all, or at least many, of these cases. In Agrippina's trial, *devotiones* are cited as a charge along with *veneficium*, an interesting signal of the fact that, at this time, accusations could involve a wider range of activities.

The uncertainty is evident in a passage from Quintilianus' *Institutiones* (95 AD):

> There is a different type of question where the dispute is concerned with the term to be applied, which depends on the letter of the law: it is a form of question which can only arise in the courts from the actual words on which the dispute turns. Take as examples the questions, whether suicide is a form of homicide, or whether the man who forces a tyrant to kill himself can be considered a tyrannicide, or whether magical incantations are equivalent to the crime of poisoning [*an carmina magorum veneficium*]. In all these cases, there is no doubt about the facts, for it is well known that there is a difference between killing oneself and killing another, between slaying a tyrant and forcing him to suicide, between employing incantations and administering a deadly draught, but we enquire whether we are justified in calling them by the same name.[34]

[32] Elizabeth Ann Pollard, Magic Accusations Against Women in Tacitus' Annals, in *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World*, eds. Kimberly B. Stratton, Dayna S. Kalleres (Oxford, 2014), pp. 183–210.

[33] Ibidem.

[34] «Diversum est genus cum controversia consistis in nomine quod pendet ex scripto, nec versatur in iudiciis nisi propter verba quae litem faciunt: an qui se interficit homicida sit, an qui tyrannum in mortem compulit tyrannicida, an carmina magorum veneficium. Res enim manifesta est sciturque non idem esse occidere se quod alium, non idem occidere tyrannum

His conclusion is clearly negative: spells do not equate with poisoning. But the very fact of his having considered the question is evidence that there was ongoing debate on the subject.

In the year 8 BC, the Emperor Augustus had the *Lex Iulia maiestatis* approved. It affirmed that the *crimen maiestatis* was to be considered not only when there was a menace to the State, as had been the case in the past, but also when the emperor himself was threatened. This law, which was commented on by many jurists in Late Antiquity, including the influential Ulpianus (third AD),[35] will be of the utmost importance during the Late Midldle Ages and the Early modern era.[36] We can infer that the *crimen maiestatis* could be performed through *venena* and other enchantments, which made these acts even scarier. Again, Tacitus writes that after the untimely death of prince Germanicus, some *tabellae defixionum* and other signs of deadly spells were found behind the walls and under the floor of the rooms where he slept.

Prior to meetings, Domitian made Apollonius of Tyana set down all books and charms he might have brought with him; Caracal banned all amulets, even those that might have been apotropaic or worn as a cure against diseases. Here, it is thought that practices that had been considered perfectly legitimate, such as divination and astrology, might become dangerous if used to inquire about the emperor, his relatives or his politics. As Fritz Graf and other scholars have written, the legitimacy of certain practices had to be validated by power, with the consequence that rituals which our modern point of view would place in the same category were judged differently according to their use. Augustus ordered more than 2000 books of divination to be burned, claiming that they were spurious, but his criteria for determining which books were ineffective are unknown. Tiberius, who in his later years lived surrounded by diviners and seers, also ordered a ban on foreigners who practised this profession.

quod compellere ad mortem, non idem carmina ac mortiferam potionem, quaeritur tamen an eodem nomine appellanda sint»: Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, VII, 3, trans. H. E. Butler (Cambridge, MA and London, 1922), vol. III, pp. 86–87.

[35] Ulpianus, *Dig.*, 48, 4 s1; see Paul Frédéric Girard, Félix Senn, *Textes de droit romain* (Paris, 1967), vol. I, pp. 452–455.

[36] Mario Sbriccoli, *Crimen lesae maiestatis. Il problema del reato politico alle soglie della. scienza penalistica moderna* (Milano, 1974).

The trial that involved Apuleius around 158/9 AD is an outcome of this growing fear; it is also a sign that the idea of 'magic' as a defined field was now in use. The only source we have is Apuleius' own *Apology*: entitled *Pro se de magia liber*, and his text, naturally, presents the author's point of view. The nature of the accusation and the law under which it was debated are not clear, but it is commonly held that he was judged under the *Lex Cornelia*. Apuleius had married a rich widow, Pudentilla, who had two sons from a previous marriage; some of her relatives thought Apuleius was after her money and accused him of having charmed the woman with his magic arts. Apuleius rebuked any accusations of *veneficium*—a word which no longer referred merely to 'poisoning' but would now, rather, have to be translated as 'black magic'—and asserted that he only used positive magic. Another important new element we find in the *Apology* is the word '*maleficium*', a neologism of the times used to indicate wicked acts, mostly accomplished through magic. It is a definition that, as I will show in the next chapter, will become pervasive.

The third-century *Pauli Sententiae*—which is, in fact, a compilation from the nineteenth century that collects many Roman laws subsequent to the *Lex Cornelia*—give a clear statement about the change in attitude towards magic, which is by now viewed with deep suspicion. Even if the laws take into account a person's status and the nature of the act, there has clearly been a huge step away from the tenor of earlier legislation:

> Those who give abortifacients or love potions [*abortionis aut amatorium poculum*], even if they don't act with malicious intent [*dolo*], nevertheless, because it sets a bad example [*mali exemplires est*]: *humiliores* are relegated to the mines, *honestiores* to an island, with partial forfeiture of their property; but if as a result a woman or a man has died, they suffer the supreme punishment. Those who perform, or arrange for the performance of impious or nocturnal rites [*sacra impia nocturnave*], in order to enchant [*obcantarent*], transfix [*defigerent*], or bind [*obligarent*] someone, shall either be crucified or thrown to the beasts. Those who sacrifice a man or obtain omens from his blood [*hominem immolaverint exve eius sanguine litaverint*], or pollute a shrine or a temple, shall be thrown to the beasts or, if *honestiores*, be punished capitally. It is agreed that those guilty of the magic art [*magicae artis conscios*] be inflicted with the supreme punishment, i.e. be thrown to the beasts or crucified. Actual magicians [*magi*], however, shall be burned alive. No one is permitted to have in their

> possession books of the magic art [*libri artis magicae*]; anyone in whose possession they are found shall have their property confiscated and the books publicly burnt, and they themselves shall be deported to an island; *humiliores* shall be punished capitally. Not only is the profession of this art but also the knowledge [*scientia*] prohibited. If a person has died from a medicine [*medicamen*] given for human health or recovery, the one who gave it, if *honestior*, is relegated to an island; a *humilior*, however, is punished capitally.[37]

The Wise Women

When we read modern translations of Latin texts, many names are used quite freely to define women like Canidia, Erichtho and the others: 'witches', 'hags', 'sorceresses', words which all come with a heavy burden of associations that is not commensurate with terms from Antiquity. In the case of Canidia and Sagana, it is their age that defines them: as is found in many other cases, too, they are simply called 'quaedam anus' ('an old woman'). The more powerful Erichtho is called 'Thessala vates' ('prophetess from Thessalia'). This is not to say that Latin is lacking a vocabulary for magic; on the contrary, there are many words that are used, in other contexts. Some of them will enjoy a greater success than others in the later definition of witchcraft, such as *venefica* and *saga* (the name Sagana might come from it). Literally, *veneficus/a* stands for 'poisoner', but as we have already seen, this crime is not always what is signified. *Saga* comes from *sagire*, and *presagire*, as explained by Cicero in his treatise *Divination*:

> *Sagire* means to have a sharp perception, from which old women are called *sagae*, because they want to know much, and dogs are called *sagaces*. So the person who has knowledge (*sagit*) of something before it happens is said to 'presage' (*praesagire*), that is to perceive the future in advance.[38]

[37] Rives, *Magic in Roman Law*, p. 329; See also Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, pp. 175–204. On capital punishments in Rome, see Eva Cantarella, *I supplizi capitali in Grecia e a Roma* (Milano, 1991), pp. 213–222.

[38] Cicero, *On Divination. De Divinatione*, 1, 64, trans. David Wardle (Oxford, 2006), pp. 66–67.

According to Cicero, then, *saga* has a double meaning: one is natural (to know a great deal) and the other one is preternatural (to see the future).[39]

In many languages, for example Italian, the main word for a witch, 'strega' (but also Romanian: *strigă*; Polish: *strzyga*; Albanian: *shtriga*), derives from, or is related to, the Latin *strix/striges*. The first mention of *striges* in Latin literature is short but important. In 191 BC, Plautus wrote his *Pseudolus*, named after the main character, a smart slave who helps his master Calidorus to solve his love problems. The scene where the *striges* are mentioned takes place inside a kitchen, where a cook is scolding his subordinates: 'These guys, when they cook dinners, when they do season them, they season them not with seasonings, but with *striges* which eat out the bowels of the guests while still alive'.[40] The joke falls flat if it is not immediately understood, suggesting that the public already had a clear knowledge of what *striges* do: they eat the internal organs of the living, just as bad cooking irritates people's bowels.

It is another 150 years before we find an account of what these predators are. Ovid provides us with a description full of details:

> There are greedy birds, not those that cheated Phineus' maw of its repast, though descended from that race. Big is their head, goggle their eyes, their beaks are formed for rapine, their wings are blotched with grey, their claws fitted with hooks. They fly by night and attack nurseless children, and defile their bodies, snatched from their cradles. They are said to rend the flesh of sucklings with their beaks, and their throats are full of the blood which they have drunk. *Striges* is their name, but the reason of the name is that they are wont to screech horribly by night. Whether, therefore, they are born birds, or are made such by enchantment and are nothing but women transformed into fowls by a Marsian spell.[41]

[39] Before Cicero, with the same meaning, see Columella, *De re rustica*, 1, 8.

[40] «Ei homines cenas ubi coquont, cum condiunt, non condimentis condiunt, sed strigibus, vivis convivis intestina quae exedint»: Plautus, *Pseudolus*, 3, 2, 819–821, in *The Little Carthaginian. Pseudolus. The Rope*, trans. Paul Nixon (Cambridge, MA and London, 1980), pp. 232–233; the translation gives 'screech-owl' for striges.

[41] «Sunt avidae volucres, non quae Phineia mensis guttura fraudabant, sed genus inde trahunt: grande caput, stantes oculi, rostra apta rapinis, canities pennis, unguibus hamus inest. Nocte volant puerosque petunt nutricis egentes et vitiant cunis corpora rapta suis. carpere dicuntur lactentia viscera rostris et plenum poto sanguine guttur habent. Est illis strigibus nomen; sed nominis huius causa, quod horrendum stridere nocte solent. Sive igitur nascuntur aves, seu carmine fiunt neniaque in volucres Marsa figurat anus»: Ovid, *Fasti*, VI, 131–142, trans. James George Frazer (Cambridge, MA and London, 1931, repr. 1989),

The mention of Phineus refers us to a passage from Virgil's (70 BC–19 AD) *Aeneid* (3, 214–18), in which the poet borrows from Apollonius Rhodius. In the latter, Greek text, these beings are harpies, a characterisation Virgil retains, calling them simply 'awful monsters' and describing them as a horrendous mix between human and bird (3, 210–218). Ovid, though, is saying that *striges* are not harpies, but monsters of a different kind, even if both share the human-bird features. The *striges* attack defenceless children and drink their blood. The name comes from the screech they make at night: *striges* would then be in the same field as *stridere*, a fact that has been discussed by modern scholars, but which is not a central concern for this discussion; trying to define what *striges* really were, as has been done in the past by scholars wanting to find a night bird that could be identified with them, is pointless. The last detail in Ovid's description concerns the nature of these monsters: Are they humans, changed into birds by magic performed by old women from Marsia—a region of central Italy commonly associated with obscure practices, an inner barbaric land, we could say—or are they born like that? Ovid declines to answer, but the open question will linger, and other authors will choose to classify *striges* in one field or the other.

According to Ovid, the nymph Carna is evoked to protect children and their houses from the incursions of the *striges*. He tells the tale of an old nurse who sacrifices an animal to save an infant, Proca. The child is lying in his cradle when he is suddenly attacked by the creatures. The wound inflicted is a mortal one, but Proca's nurse promises to heal the infant by making a blood sacrifice with a baby sow. It is a pertinent account, as it narrates a form of counter-magic that will be known for centuries to come:

> And [the nurse] said: 'Ye birds of night, spare the child's innards: a small victim falls for a small child. Take, I pray ye, a heart for a heart, entrails for entrails. This life we give you for a better life.' When she had thus sacrificed, she set the severed innards in the open air, and forbade those present at the sacrifice to look back at them.[42]

pp. 328–329. I have amended the translation, giving *striges* for 'screech-owl', and 'women' instead of 'beldames'.

[42] «Atque ita 'noctis aves, extis puerilibus' inquit 'parcite: pro parvo victima parva cadit. Cor pro corde, precor, pro fibris sumite fibras:hanc animam vobis pro meliore damus'»: Ibidem, 159–165, pp. 328–331. On this episode, see Christopher Michael McDonough,

Sometimes, when we read English versions of those texts, it is common to find the name *strix* translated as 'screech owl' or some other nocturnal birds of prey of the *strigidae* taxonomic family. It is, perhaps, useful to remember that these classifications belong to approaches developed in the nineteenth century. The ancients did not call any natural bird by that name. Certainly, they wondered about the *striges*' nature, as Ovid does, but without grouping them with other birds in the realm of the natural. Pliny is quite clear about this, as he does not include his comments on *striges* in the Book about the '*naturalis historia*' of birds (the Tenth), but, rather, places the creatures in the following Book, which covers insects and comparative zoology. He writes:

> Man is the only male among animals that has nipples, all the rest having mere marks only in place of them. Among female animals even, the only ones that have *mammae* on the breast are those which can nurture their young. No oviparous animal has *mammae*, and those only have milk that are viviparous; the bat being the only winged animal that has it. As for the stories that they tell, about the *striges* ejecting milk from its teats upon the lips of infants, I look upon it as utterly fabulous: from ancient times the name '*strix*', I am aware, has been employed in maledictions, but I do not think it is well ascertained what bird is really meant by that name.[43]

Informed by Pliny, and perhaps also by popular beliefs, Serenus Sammonicus' treatise of medicine (late second to early third century), well known in the Middle Ages and later, names the *striges* in a remedy against infant toothache, where it is suggested that garlic will keep them away.[44]

Carna, Proca and the Strix on the Kalends of June, *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 127 (1997), pp. 315–344.

[43] «Mammas homo solus e maribus habet, cetera animalia mammarum notas tantum. sed ne feminae quidem in pectore nisi quae possunt partus suos attollere. ova gignentium nulli; nec lact nisi animal parienti. volucrum vespertilioni tantum: fabulosum enim arbitror de strigibus, ubera eas infantium labris inmulgere. esse in maledictis iam antiquis strigem convenit, sed quae sit avium, constare non arbitror»: Pliny, *The Natural History*, XI, 95, 232, trans. John Bostock, H. T. Riley (London, 1855), vol. III, pp. 82–83.

[44] Q. Serenus Sammonicus, *Liber medicinalis*, c. 58, in *Poetae Latini minores*, ed. Emilius Baehrens (Leipzeig, 1881), p. 155.

As such, when in his *Epode* Horace (65–8) has Canidia and the others concoct one of their mischievous potions, the plumage they use from the *strix* is not from a night bird. Yet more clearly, when Seneca (4–65) writes of the ominous, infamous *striges* in the Tartarus, he is also referring to a monster, not to an animal (*Hercules furens*, v. 688). Silius Italicus (25–101), in his *Punica*, locates the *striges* in the Underworld, along with the harpies, the owl and the vulture, all perched on the branches of a nefarious (and poisonous) *Taxus Baccata* or yew tree, the 'tree of death' in Antiquity, associated in later times with graveyards.[45]

Petronius' *Satyricon* (written around the middle of the first century AD) adds many details to the representation of the *strix*. The tale is told by Trimalchio during his infamous dinner, along with a story of a werewolf. This may suggest that Petronius considered the *striges* to also be shape-shifters; indeed, he also calls them *mulieres* (women), which would suggest, in answer to Ovid's question, that they are women changed into monsters. The passage may also be seen to suggest that both werewolves and *striges* were considered to be folkish beliefs, because Trimalchio is portrayed as a rich, but utterly ignorant man. He is telling his public what happened right after a young boy's death:

> So while his poor mother was bewailing him, and several of us were sharing her sorrow, suddenly the *strigae* began to screech; you would have thought there was a dog pursuing a hare. We had a Cappadocian in the house at the time, a tall fellow, mighty brave and a man of muscle; he could lift an angry bull off the ground. He rushed boldly out of doors with a naked sword, having carefully wrapped up his left hand, and ran the woman through the middle, just about here—may the spot my finger is on be safe! We heard a groan, but to tell the honest truth we did not see the *strigae* themselves. But our big fellow came back and threw himself on a bed: and his whole body was blue as if he had been flogged, of course because the witch's hand had touched him. We shut the door and returned to our observances, but when the mother put her arms round the body of her son, she felt it and saw that it was a little bundle of straw. It had no heart, no inside or anything: of course the witches had carried off the boy and put a straw changeling in his place. Ah! yes, I would beg you to believe there are wise women, and night-riders [*sunt mulieres plussciae, sunt Nocturnae*], who can turn the whole world upside down. Well, the

[45] Punica, XIII, vv. 598–600; on the yew tree, see Thomas W. Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton, NJ, 2015), pp. 133–137.

> tall slave never came back to his proper colour after this affair, and died raving mad in a few days.[46]

There are several noteworthy things in this passage. The first one is the word *striga*, which shows that the form it will assume in many vulgar languages of the Middle Ages was already used in popular contexts, such as those illustrated by the Banquet of Trimalchio. Then, there are also the synonyms that Petronius uses: they are creatures of the night and they are wise; '*plussciae*' is a hapax, which makes it difficult to determine whether it was Petronius' own invention, a vulgar way to say '*sagae*', or a taboo substitute where '*plus*' ('more') is employed to avoid saying '*sagae*'. These *striges* not only steal bodies and substitute them with puppets, they can also harm with their evil hand: the *mala manus* that condemns the Cappadocian to death. Even if the meaning is 'evil touch', the mention of the 'hand' also tells us that the *strigae* have a mostly human anatomy. Their touch pollutes the body, condemning it to rot: the man loses his natural *color*, and turns to *livor*, which in the Roman spectrum of complexions is the sign of something putrefying.

Another reference to these creatures occurs in Chapter 134, towards the end of the *Satyricon*, where the text is mostly fragmentary. It is a very short episode, but worth mentioning for various reasons. The main character, Encolpius, has been made impotent by Priapus, so he asks an old woman, a *saga*, to cure him. She asks him ironically: 'Which *striges*

[46] «Cum adhuc capillatus essem, nam a puero vitam Chiam gessi, ipsimi nostri delicatus decessit, mehercules margaritum, <sacritus> et omnium numerum. Cum ergo illum mater misella plangeret et nos tum plures in tristimonio essemus, subito <stridere> strigae coeperunt; putares canem leporem persequi. Habebamus tunc hominem Cappadocem, longum, valde audaculum et qui valebat: poterat bovem iratum tollere. Hic audacter stricto gladio extra ostium procucurrit, involuta sinistra manu curiose, et mulierem tanquam hoc loco - salvum sit, quod tango! - mediam traiecit. Audimus gemitum, et - plane non mentiar - ipsas non vidimus. Baro autem noster introversus se proiecit in lectum, et corpus totum lividum habebat quasi flagellis caesus, quia scilicet illum tetigerat mala manus. Nos cluso ostio redimus iterum ad officium, sed dum mater amplexaret corpus filii sui, tangit et videt manuciolum de stramentis factum. Non cor habebat, non intestina, non quicquam: scilicet iam puerum strigae involaverant et supposuerant stramenticium vavatonem. Rogo vos, oportet credatis, sunt mulieres plussciae, sunt Nocturnae, et quod sursum est, deorsum faciunt. Ceterum baro ille longus post hoc factum nunquam coloris sui fuit, immo post paucos dies freneticus periit»: Petronius, *Satyricon*, 9, 63, in Petronius, Seneca. Apocolocyntosis, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, M. A. Litt (Cambridge, MA and London, 1925), pp. 116–119.

has eaten your nerve away?'[47] In this context, away from Trimalchio's vulgarity, Petronius uses *striges* instead of *strigae*, but they are creatures of the same kind, capable of taking away one's virility. The verb *comedere* (to eat) is very physical, and it implies that the author means something closer to castration than simple impotence.

As much as Petronius' novel has become famous in modern times, it was not so widely circulated in the Middle Ages. The Banquet of Trimalchio, the most interesting episode for a discourse about witchcraft, was discovered, so far as we know, only in the fifteenth century, by Italian humanist Poggio Bracciolini, who had a copy made, and was reputed hard to understand.[48] Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, the only other remaining novel of the Roman world, shares with the *Satyricon* many details about the Latin idea of witchcraft, but received a great deal of attention in Late Antiquity and medieval times.[49]

The Wicked Shapeshifters

The humanisation of the *strix*, already very tangible in Petronius' novel, is completed in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. Though it is just a hypothesis, this could be the reason why the words *strix* and *striges* are never mentioned, even if Apuleius is clearly writing about them. This is especially evident in the first episode that I am going to recount, which is set in Thessaly. It is narrated to the main character, Lucius, at the dinner table (where trading horror stories was evidently a recurring pastime, at least according to our novelists) by a man called Thelyphron. The story is a compendium of all kinds of magical acts—witchcraft, poisoning, necromancy—doused in horror and laughter, just like a modern splatter movie.

Because his money is running low, Thelyphron is looking around for a job, when he spots a man standing in the public square announcing a reward for anybody willing to watch a corpse. At first, Thelyphron mocks the man, asking if corpses there have the habit to run, but he is warned by a passer-by that, because of his youth and his being a foreigner, he cannot know what is a fact for everyone in Thessaly, which is that there

[47] «Quae striges comederunt nervos tuos?»: Ibidem, 134LO, pp. 298–299.

[48] Anthony Grafton, *Bring Out Your Dead: The Past as Revelation* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), pp. 208–226.

[49] Julia Haig Gaisser, *The Fortunes of Apuleius and the Golden Ass* (Princeton, NJ, 2008).

are some wise women that nibble pieces off the faces of the dead in order to get supplies for their magic art.[50] Thelyphron is scared, but for a few gold coins he accepts. He is advised of several protocols which must be strictly adhered to: he has to stay wide awake for the entire night and not even close his eyes for a moment, nor look away from the corpse, because the dreadful creatures are 'wicked shapeshifters' ('*deterrimae versipelles*') who can change themselves into anything, from birds and dogs to mice and even flies. Further, through their enchantments, they can lull watchmen to sleep. Finally, there is a terrible provision, probably due to the fact that the deceased is the son of an important citizen: if, in the morning, the body is not intact, what has been removed or mutilated has to be made good from the watchman.

Thelyphron is then brought to a house with its front door locked and is ushered inside through a small back passage. There he finds the widow in mourning; together they enter the room where the body is laid out, guarded by seven witnesses. After some more ritual weeping, the woman calls off every feature of the body, while one of the witnesses writes them down in an inventory: nose, eyes, ears, lips, chin—all are checked and written down. When they have finished and are ready to go, Thelyphron is silly enough to ask not only for a lamp, which he receives, but also for wine and leftovers from dinner; for this he is mocked as, after a death, the fire would be left unlit for days. So, Thelyphron is left alone, with just one lamp and the corpse as company.

When night has fallen, Thelyphron suddenly spots a weasel standing in front of him, fixing him with a piercing stare. As the door is locked, he is clearly suspicious and shouts menacingly at the animal, who turns and vanishes.[51] At this point, Thelyphron falls into a deep sleep, against his will, clearly the victim of an enchantment, and remains asleep until cockcrow. When he wakes, he is afraid to check the state of the corpse, but is relieved to find it perfectly whole. When the widow and the other mourners come back, they are also relieved to find that nothing has occurred during the perilous night; they pay Thelyphron, who can't believe his luck, and thank him with many words of gratitude. Revealing his naivety again, however, he thanks the wife, telling her that he would

[50] «Sagae mulieres» that «ora mortuorum passim demorsicant»: Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, II, 20–21, pp. 81–82.

[51] Maurizio Bettini, *Women and Weasels: Mythologies of Birth in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Chicago, 2013), pp. 185–186.

be glad to serve her again; of course, these words are taken as a bad omen, and he is beaten and thrown out of the house.

In the streets, the public funeral is about to begin, with all the honours due to the deceased's high status. While the procession is passing through the city square, with its followers ritually weeping, an old man all dressed in black, the dead man's uncle, starts crying out loud and accuses the wife of faking her sorrow to hide her guilt; in fact, he alleges, she has poisoned her husband to be free to live with her lover. The crowd is undecided as to whose side to take; some would stone the woman there and then, others believe her protestations of innocence. But the uncle already has a solution arranged: he has brought along with him a prophet of the first rank ('*propheta primario*') from Egypt, a man capable of bringing souls back from the Underworld. He is presented as a prophet and a priest (*sacerdos*), a qualified and socially acceptable figure who is going to perform a ritual that is, formally, no different from those of lowlifes like Canidia and the others we have discussed above. Unlike those condemned rituals, however, this one is approved of because it is performed in public and for the laudable reason of establishing the truth. The fact that this prophet is also a man, while all the dark characters are women, signals a social assignment of roles according to gender; his appearance—young, dressed in a linen tunic and palm-leaf sandals with his head shaved—could not be further from the old hags. The Egyptian puts herbs on the corpse's mouth and breast and then turns eastwards invoking the sun, until the dead man begins to breathe.[52] The man is not happy to have been brought back, but he finally tells of how he was, indeed, murdered by his wife, who starts to argue loudly with the (not so) dead husband.

To cut the arguing off, the dead man decides to give incontrovertible proof that he is speaking the truth, by telling of something that he alone could know: he points his finger towards Thelyphron and tells the crowd of how the young man had guarded his body with the utmost alertness, so that the old enchantresses (*cantatrices anus*), despite trying all manner of shapeshifting to achieve their purpose, nonetheless failed to beat his vigilance. But, he continues, they turned against Thelyphron, plunging him into a sleep so deep that he could not resist them; they called his name over and over and compelled him to sleepwalk to the door.

[52] I have already mentioned this ritual when writing about *veneficium*: see *supra*, Poisons or Medicines?

Although the door was carefully locked, there was a hole in the wood; through that hole, the enchantresses had reached for Thelyphron's face, cutting his nose and ears off and replacing them with wax fakes, perfectly fitting his features. Horrified, Thelyphron raises his hands to his nose and ears, which come off, to the publics' great amusement. At this point, back at the dinner table, Thelyphron reveals to his listeners how his hair and a mask cover the mutilations.

Who are these wicked shapeshifters who maim Thelyphron? Even if the man who explains the reason for watching the corpse calls them harpies, they are clearly women. The name seems to me to be used in a derogatory way, to underline their shapeshifting qualities, as harpies appeared as half human, half bird.

Another episode in the novel confirms this impression. Lucius has a relationship with a servant girl, Photis, whose mistress, Pamphile, not only is the wife of a very rich man, but also happens to be a powerful magician. The description of her 'witch's kitchen' is impressive, a secret place open to the winds in every direction, particularly towards the east, where her profane prayers are directed. Inside this hideout, she has stored all kinds of ingredients: aromata, metal plaques inscribed with characters, the remains of birds of ill omen, noses, fingernails with flesh still attached, fingers, blood and skulls stolen from dead bodies. She douses all these with honey, wine, cow's milk and other fluids. She throws hairs of the dead in the fire and with her powers—so potent that she can force deities to obey her—the bodies whose hairs are crackling in the flames take on human life and walk to her.

Apparently, this mighty display of power is nonetheless unable to bring her loved one to her, which, as Photis reveals, pushes Pamphile to extremes. To reach her lover, she decides to change herself into a bird and fly to him; Lucius is willing to watch and is brought to the place where the shapeshifting is going to happen:

> This is what I saw. First Pamphile completely stripped herself; then she opened a chest and took out a number of small boxes. From one of these she removed the lid and scooped out some ointment, which she rubbed between her hands for a long time before smearing herself with it all over from head to foot. Then there was a long-muttered address to the lamp during which she shook her arms with a fluttering motion. As they gently flapped up and down there appeared on them a soft fluff, then a growth of strong feathers; her nose hardened into a hooked beak, her feet contracted

> into talons—and Pamphile was an owl. Hooting mournfully, she took off and landed once or twice to try her wings; then she launched herself in full flight out of the house and away high into the sky.[53]

Lucius is very excited by all this and asks Photis to provide him with some of the same ointment. The girl warns him of the perils of metamorphosing, because 'if such night-birds do get into a house, people rush to catch them and nail them to the door to make them expiate by torments the destruction which their ill-omened flight brings to the family'.[54] Lucius is eager to try anyway, but unfortunately Photis steals the wrong ointment, which changes Lucius into an ass. The remainder of the story will be a long struggle to return to human form.

As discussed above, *striges* are never explicitly mentioned, here; in fact, Pamphile turns into an owl (*bubo*). Nonetheless, the shapeshifters that feature in Apuleius' novel fit into the same group of night riders and corpse hunters that we have already seen in other stories. Here, they are presented as humans who change their appearance through powerful magic and, perhaps, through their membership of mysterious, foreign religious cults: along with shapeshifting, the cult of Isis is the core of the novel.

We may wonder to what extent the account in the *Metamorphoses* correlates with the *striges* mentioned by Plautus to make his public laugh, or with the popular idea of child-killing demons common to Greek and Latin cultures. Perhaps there is no answer to this question, but for the many readers of centuries to come, Apuleius' version of the wise and shapeshifting women will linger on.

[53] «Iamque circa primam noctis vigiliam ad illud superius cubiculum suspenso et insono vestigio me perducit ipsa perque rimam ostiorum quampiam iubet arbitrari, quae sic gesta sunt. Iam primum omnibus laciniis se devestit Pamphile et arcula quadam reclusa pyxides plusculas inde depromit, de quis unius operculo remoto atque indidem egesta unguedine diuque palmulis suis adfricta ab imis unguibus sese totam adusque summos capillos perlinit multumque cum lucerna secreto conlocuta membra tremulo succussu quatit. Quis leniter fluctuantibus promicant molles plumulae, crescunt et fortes pinnulae, duratur nasus incurvus, coguntur ungues adunci. Fit bubo Pamphile. Sic edito stridore querulo iam sui periclitabunda paulatim terra resultat, mox in altum sublimata forinsecus totis alis evolat»: Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, III, 21, p. 40.

[54] «Quid quod istas nocturnas aves, cum penetraverint larem quempiam, solliciter prehensas foribus videmus adfigi, ut, quod infaustis volatibus familiae minantur exitium, suis luant cruciatibus?»: Ibidem, III, 23, p. 41.

Much has been said about the origin of the Latin *strix*.[55] In the second century AD, the grammarian Festus—whose *De verborum significatum* (*About the meaning of words*) is considered useful for the reconstruction of the past and the meaning of ancient myths and words—wrote that *striges* are night birds called *strinx* by the Greeks, and that the name was appropriated by evil-doing women (*maleficae*), also called riders (*volaticae*). Although he does not say so, the Greek word *strinx* comes from '*stringendo*' ('to hold'), probably because these creatures throttle children.[56]

The most ancient account of what *striges* are could come from the *Ornithologia* of the Greek author Boios, but we have no details about who he was, and we only know his text thanks to a synopsis of Antoninus Liberalis, himself a Greek living in the first centuries of the new era (maybe in the second), whose only surviving work is the Collection of Transformations, *Metamorphoseon Synagoge*, a compendium of forty-one briefly summarised tales about mythical metamorphoses taken from Boios and others, including Nicander. The text survives in very few manuscripts. A good part of the metamorphoses it describes concerns birds, and, among many others, it tells the story of Polyphonte, who provoked the anger of Aphrodite by going to the mountains with Artemis. To punish her, the goddess made Polyphonte fall in love with a bear, with whom she conceived two monstrous sons, Agrius and Oreius. When the sons grew up, they began to kill every stranger they encountered and would feast on their flesh. Zeus sent Hermes to dismember their hands and feet, but he instead decided to turn them into birds: Polyphonte became a *strix*, who cries at night, without food or drink, with head below and feet above, forerunner of war and sedition for mankind; Agrius was changed into a vulture who craves for human flesh and blood; Oreius became an owl, bird of bad omen; and their servant, who was forced by them to execute their orders, was changed into a woodpecker, a bird of good omen.[57]

[55] Read an account of the debate in Laura Cherubini, *Strix. La Strega nella cultura romana* (Torino, 2010), pp. 7–16.

[56] Or *syrnia*, a word otherwise unknown: Festus' text is patchy in many places; Festus, *De verborum significtu cum Pauli epitome*, ed. Wallace M. Lindsay (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1913), p. 414.

[57] Antoninus Liberalis, *The Metamorphoses of Antoninus Liberalis: A Translation with Commentary*, trans. Francis Celoria (London and New York, 1992), pp. 77–78; the Greek text with Latin translation is Antoninus Liberalis, *Transformationum congeries*, ed. G. Xylander, reviewed by H. Verheyk (Leiden, 1774), pp. 136–143.

Given the impossibility of our checking Antoninus' sources, and the fact that, where fragments exist (for example, Nicander), they give quite different versions, nothing assures us that Antoninus Liberalis assiduously followed the ancient Greek authors without making any changes of his own—whether according to his own fancy or by following later, unknown sources. Hence, it is difficult to accept his account of the 'origin' of the myth of the *striges* with any certainty. But, as in many cases where 'origins' are involved, we will probably never arrive at a firm conclusion. Greek or Latin, the important thing to note is the evolution of the Latin *strix* from a child-killing demon, similar to her Greek relatives (harpies, *gelloudes*, *lamiai*, *empousai*), to a woman who changes her shape, as is reported by Apuleius and Festus.

Propertius (I BC) already, in one of his elegies, told the story of a woman whose powers

> could put spells on the moon. She could change her shape and prowl the night like a wolf. Savage, selfish, mean, with her nails she tore out the eyes of innocent ravens to use in charms to blind the watchful husbands whose wives were the working girls in her stable. Pet screech owls (*striges*) she consulted at night to ask how she could make me her slave. It was my blood she was after, but what she used was the flow of mares in heat to make her powerful potions to drive men mad.[58]

This woman is not really one of the *striges*, rather she has an arrangement with them and, through her powerful and wicked magic, does similar things, including shifting her shape, craving human blood and controlling the rules of nature.

It is the same kind of process we observed, at the beginning of this chapter, with the magicians of the Latin world, who do not share their Greek counterparts' divine (if wicked) nature; Canidia, Erichtho and the others are women, like these child-killing and flesh-hunting night creatures whom we have encountered in the later Latin tradition.

[58] «(…) audax cantatae leges imponere lunae et sua nocturno fallere terga lupo, posset ut intentos astu caecare maritos, cornicum immeritas eruit ungue genas; consuluitque striges nostro de sanguine, et in me hippomanes fetae semina legit equae»: Propertius, *Elegies*, IV, 5, in *Propertius in Love: The Elegies*, trans. David Slavit (London and Berkeley, 2002), pp. 215–216. A *saga* of Thessaly is in *Elegy* III, 24.

Maleficia: From Late Antiquity to the High Middle Ages

Christian Laws

As we have seen, the Roman Imperial legislation concerning *maleficia* (evil acts) was severe. In the third century, people found guilty of provoking someone's death through spells were condemned to being burned alive. The first Christian councils, held in Late Antiquity, merged the Roman with the Biblical traditions and treated sorcery with the same seriousness. For instance, Canon 6 of the Council of Elvira (306) refused the *Viaticum* to those who had killed a man *per maleficium* (through a deadly magical act), adding that such a crime could not be perpetrated 'without idolatry': the worship of pagan idols was already equated with worship of the devil, a position which would become general in centuries to come. Similarly, Canon 24 of the Council of Ancyra (314) imposed five years of penance for the lesser crime of seeking advice from magicians. This ruling seems to attest to the survival of pagan practices and beliefs, especially in rural settings. We have many comparable indications of this: throughout the Early Middle Ages, councils held across Europe provide evidence that peasants, even those who were baptised, still worshipped trees, rocks and springs once linked to some deity. Many 'rustics' also required help from figures whom our sources, following the Romans, called *sortilegi* (sorcerers), *auguri* (augurs), *arioli* (diviners) and *incantatores* (spellbinders). But the attitude of the Church councils

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towards these beliefs was generally 'disenchanted': they were considered 'superstitions' rather than real menaces.

The historian Ammianus Marcellinus describes the atmosphere of terror induced by the Roman Emperor Constantius II (317–361), and his attempts to prosecute those suspected of dealing with dangerous magic.

> If anyone wore on his neck an amulet against the quartan ague or any other complaint, or was accused by the testimony of the evil-disposed of passing by a grave in the evening, on the ground that he was a dealer in poisons (*veneficus*), or a gatherer of the horrors of tombs and the vain illusions of the ghosts that walk there, he was condemned to capital punishment and so perished.[1]

The *veneficus* mentioned in the text might be a dealer in poisons or, more generically, an evil practitioner of magic; as we have seen the word already had a wider meaning than 'poisoner'; while the 'gatherer' of *sepulchrum horrores* reminds us of the women who, like Canidia and Sagana, used human body parts for their rituals.

In the previous chapter, I have underlined that this kind of attitude was not unknown in the late Empire, but, at least according to the account of Ammianus, the fourth century was replete with crazes against magic. Under Valentinian I (321–375), many were tortured to extract confessions of their deeds—which usually involved poisoning or writing books of magic formulas—and were finally put to death. Book 28 of Ammianus' *Roman Antiquities* details the facts with many names and cases, and it is usually taken as a thoughtful, not partial account of the scare concerning magic. This kind of *ante litteram* witch-craze finds its explanation in the fight and controversies that were shaking the empire: the wars against the barbaric tribes and the Sassanids of Persia; the revolts inside the borders; and the disputes between the followers of traditional cults and the Christians, but also among the Christians who adhered to different interpretations of dogma.

[1] «Nam siqui remedia quartanae vel doloris alterius collo gestaret, sive per monumentum transisse vesperum malivolorum argueretur indiciis, ut veneficus sepulchrorumque horrores et errantium ibidem animarum ludibria colligens vana pronuntiatus reus pitis interibat»: Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, XIX, 12, 14, trans. John C. Rolfe (London and Cambridge, MA, 1930), vol. 1, pp. 540–541.

The Theodosian Code evidences a desire to resolve religious issues and bring together a common grounding for the empire, assembling and rationalising laws laid down during the fourth century. But in doing so, the Code condemns alternative modes of Christianity as heresies and outlaws traditional cults. Of course, in this rush to counter all possible menaces, magic practices were the first to be outlawed: they are condemned in Book XI, which deals with criminal acts. Where, in previous centuries, there had been attempts to distinguish between positive magic and evil practices—as we have seen when discussing *pharmaka* as both poisons and medicine—here there was no longer any attempt to make such a distinction.

Theodosius II (401–450) was only making explicit a tendency already building under many of the Christian emperors of the century: under Constantius II, for example, shrines had been closed and people executed for political reasons. This was the case in the events that took place at the shrine of Besa:

> There is a town called Abydum, situated in the remotest part of the Thebaïs; here the oracle of a god called in that place Besa in days of old revealed the future and was wont to be honoured in the ancient ceremonials of the adjacent regions. And since some in person, a part through others, by sending a written list of their desires, inquired the will of the deities after definitely stating their requests, the papers or parchments containing their petitions sometimes remained in the shrine even after the replies had been given. Some of these were with malicious intent sent to the emperor who (being very narrow-minded), although deaf to other serious matters, on this point was softer than an earlobe, as the proverb has it; and being suspicious and petty, he grew furiously angry. At once he admonished Paulus to proceed quickly to the Orient, conferring on him, as a leader renowned for his experience, the power of conducting trials according to his good pleasure.[2]

[2] «Oppidum est Abydum in Thebaidis parte situm extrema. Hic Besae dei localiter adpellati oraculum quondam futura pandebat, priscis circumiacentium regionum caerimoniis solitum coli. Et quoniam quidam praesentes, pars per alios desideriorum indice missa scriptura supplicationibus expresse conceptis consulta numinum scitabantur, chartulae seu membranae, continentes quae petebantur, post data quoque responsa interdum remanebant in fano. Ex his aliqua ad imperatorem maligne sunt missa, qui, ut erat angusti pectoris, obsurdescens in aliis etiam nimium seriis in hoc titulo ima, quod aiunt, auricula mollior et suspicax et minutus acri felle concaluit: statimque ad orientem ocius ire monuit Paulum potestate delata, ut instar ducis rerum experientia clari ad arbitrium suum audiri efficeret causas»: Ibidem, XIX, 12, 3, pp. 534–535.

With this authority invested in him, Paulus proceeded to issue indictments, make arrests and to torture and kill those accused. The oracle's words concerning the emperor were seen as an attempt on his life, and so these allegations of witchcraft were to be judged under the severe *Lex maiestatis*.

Accusations of having employed magic were also used strategically against political adversaries. Many cases of this kind occurred under Valentinian, such as that involving Alypius, former vice-governor of Britain:

> He was accused with his son Hierocles, a young man of good character, as guilty of magic, on the sole evidence of a certain Diogenes, a man of low origin, who was tortured with every degree of butchery, to lead him to give testimony agreeable to the emperor, or rather to the instigator of the charge. Diogenes, when not enough of his body was left for torture, was burned alive.[3]

Alypius and his son had their properties confiscated and were exiled.

The Theodosian Code covers a wide array of accusations that could result in capital punishment. Article 16 concerns magicians of different kinds (soothsayers, diviners, astrologers, Chaldeans and many others); the word '*malefici*' is widely used alongside an explanation of the severity of the evil deeds, thus inducing people to define them not by their proper names, like Magi, but to rather use a word that implies their absolute wickedness.[4]

Magic is treated as pollution to society, and it must thus be eradicated with the harshest punishments: death, sometimes by fire, is usually required. Special attention is given to threats to the Emperor himself: a sign, again, that magic deeds were considered effective.

[3] «Ecce autem Alypius quoque ex vicario Brittanniarum, placiditatis homo iucundae post otiosam et repositam vitam quoniam huc usque iniustitia tetenderat manus in squalore maximo volutatus, ut veneficii reus citatus est cum Hierocle filio, adulescente indolis bonae, urgente Diogene quodam et vili et solo, omnique laniena excruciato, ut verba placentia principi vel potius accersitori loqueretur: quo, cum poenis non sufficerent membra, vivo exusto, ipse quoque Alypius post multationem bonorum exulare praeceptus, filium miserabiliter ductum ad mortem casu quodam prospero revocatum excepit»: Ibidem, XIX, 1, 44, pp. 212–215.

[4] «Chaldaei ac magi et ceteri, quos maleficos ob facinorum magnitudinem vulgus appellat»: *Codex theodosianus*, XVI, 4; and also «si quis magus vel magicis contaminibus adsuetus, qui maleficus vulgi consuetudine nuncupatur»: Ibidem, XVI, 6.

Anyone sacrificing to demons by night, or calling them with prayers, was to receive capital punishment, as were those found to have violated cemeteries or tombs—these latter were the subject of the following Article 17. Mostly, those violators of tombs are not magicians, but people who steal columns and other monumental parts for economic reasons or to decorate their own houses. The legislator underlines how the ancestors held these places in the highest respect and considered it sacrilege to interact with those places in any way. Further to these old traditions, there were also the new cults around the holy bodies of saints and their relics, and the Code also prohibits moving bodies or body parts, mentioning explicitly those of the martyrs. The same article condemns those persons who disturb buried bodies or the remains of the dead, which might be an allusion to the use of those body parts in magical practices. In any case, the interaction between the living and the dead had been taboo in Latin society for such a long time that Christianity was yet to invert the status quo, as is made clear by the inclusion of the violation of tombs among the very few reasons acceptable for divorce, along with murder and poisoning. A woman can repudiate her husband if he is convicted as a murderer, caught violating a sepulchre, or if he is found to be a *medicamentarium*, that is a 'poisoner'.[5] The crime concerning the sepulchres will gain attention in later, barbaric legislation, as we shall see in due course.

The Bible and Its Latin Translations

Christianity did not only affect Roman laws. The translation of the Bible into Latin was of paramount importance in the transmission of the new religion. By the end of the fourth century, Christianity had spread across the Western part of the empire, albeit that in those centuries the *pars occidentis* was no longer the most prominent. When the Emperor Constantine had the new capital city built in the old coastal village of Byzantium, it was already clear that the Eastern side was the

[5] Imp. Constantinus a. ad ablavium pf. p. placet, mulieri non licere propter suas pravas cupiditates marito repudium mittere exquisita causa, velut ebrioso aut aleatori aut mulierculario, nec vero maritis per quascumque occasiones uxores suas dimittere, sed in repudio mittendo a femina haec sola crimina inquiri, si homicidam vel medicamentarium vel sepulcrorum dissolutorem maritum suum esse probaverit, ut ita demum laudata omnem suam dotem recipiat: Ibidem, III, 16, 1.

richer and better positioned. Nonetheless, Greek as the official language of the Empire was imposed only during the late sixth century, after Constantinople had lost a good part of Italy to the Lombard occupation and pestilence had ravaged the Eastern and Western societies alike. By then, it was probably clear that the outline of the Empire had completely changed, but, up until this point, the old Empire kept its usual, if troubled, course, which means that the old cultural institutions of teaching and learning were alive and functioning.

Many translations of the Bible circulated. The Septuagint, the Greek translation, was dominant for a long time, but there were also the Latin translations which now go under the name of *Vetus Latina*: not just one text, in fact, but many, sometimes known to us only in fragments. Saint Jerome's version, later called the *Vulgata* and destined to become the accepted Latin version, was conceived with what we might call *ante litteram* philological intentions, in the sense that the Roman intellectual tried to go as deeply as he could into the roots of the different texts which composed the Bible, studying not only Greek and other Latin versions, but also Hebrew ones. His approach did not gain him favour in many circles, not least with other Fathers of the Church, but the fruits of Jerome's labours were a text which would endure for centuries.

Of course, translation did involve many difficult choices, not least because Jerome took on the task of explaining certain passages to the Latin world of his day, a world steeped in classical culture. We must remember that, although Christianity had disrupted the relationships between ancient cults and institutions, it had not affected the knowledge of past literature and culture. Even the Fathers of the Church, the most prominent minds of the new faith, could not escape this reality: they lived in the world of Apuleius to a much greater degree than they might have liked. The task which Jerome took upon himself, then, was to explain the Bible in terms that would be readily comprehensible to his peers. More than translating literary terms, then, Jerome undertook the translation of cultural terms.

The Old Testament (specifically Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Exodus) contains passages in which magic is condemned. Some of these passages will remain relevant in Western societies for centuries, acting as reminders of the absolute division between Christianity and the realm of 'magic'.

In Exodus, we find the most well-known condemnation of *maleficia* and, later, modern witchcraft: '*Malefici* do not deserve to live'.[6] Leviticus speaks of the *pythones*, saying that a man or woman who is possessed by the 'pythonic' spirit must be stoned to death (Lv. 20, 27).[7] Another passage tells of the magicians and *arioli*'s (diviners') art as polluting,[8] while Deuteronomy deals with those among the Jews who had reverted to rites practised by the polytheists surrounding them in the (uncertain) times when it was written: in Jerome's translation, the invective is aimed at those who passed through fire to purify their sons, and those who consult various degrees of seers (or act like those interpreting dreams)—*augures*, *arioli*, *incantatores*, *malefici*, *pythones*—especially to question the dead (Dt 18, 10–12).[9]

Pythonica divinatio should be understood as the art of the Delphic Pythia, and thus relates to the power of receiving revelations from Apollon; this was easily translated by Christian theologists as demonic revelations, following the tendency, already clear in Tertullian, to consider all of the ancient gods demonic. Originally, the Jewish Bible used the word *Owb* for both a skin container and a necromancer, something which, of course, proved very difficult to translate or to explain. Given the context, the Septuagint had translated it as *engastromythoi*, 'ventriloquists', meaning someone who prophesises while possessed by a spirit, hence Jerome's choice of words. But he had also defined the woman of *Acta Apostolorum* 16, 16 (where Paul meets a slave who divined for her masters in exchange for money) as having 'spiritum pythonem'; he uses a similar translation (again: 'mulier habens pythonem') in relation to the necromancer of Endor, who in *1Reges* 28 (today *1Sam* 28) evokes the spirit of Samuel. This last posed a problem: the Fathers, from Origen to Eustathius to Gregory of Nyssa, had discussed the episode and the nature of commerce with the otherworld in general.

[6] «Maleficos non patieris vivere»: Ex. 22, 18.

[7] «Vir sive mulier in quibus pythonicus vel divinationis fuerit spiritus morte moriantur lapidibus obruent eos sanguis eorum sit super illos»: Lv. 20, 27.

[8] «Ne declinetis ad magos nec ab ariolis aliquid sciscitemini ut polluamini per eos ego Dominus Deus vester»: Lv. 19, 31.

[9] «Nec inveniatur in te qui lustret filium suum aut filiam ducens per ignem aut qui ariolos sciscitetur et observet somnia atque auguria ne sit maleficus 11 ne incantator ne pythones consulat ne divinos et quaerat a mortuis veritatem 12 omnia enim haec abominatur Dominus et propter istiusmodi scelera delebit eos in introitu tuo»: Dt. 18, 10–12.

For them, divination through contact with the dead was understood as being, in fact, demons acting as the souls of the dead[10]; as has been proposed elsewhere, the practice was seen as one of 'false resurrection'.[11]

It was a common opinion that (as made clear by Luke, 1–3) after the last prophet, John the Baptist, all the ancient revelations had found their accomplishment in Jesus Christ; the age of revelation was closed, giving way to that of exegesis. An interesting part of the discussion was about the etymology of 'prophet': did it come from *phainō*, 'to bring into the light', with the significance of revealing something that still must happen? Or from *phēmi*, 'declaring', as in speaking for somebody else? The prophecies of pagans responded to the second meaning, as the demons disguised as gods were speaking through their false prophets.[12]

In Jerome's world, the word *pythonissa* had an immediate resonance: every cultivated reader could immediately connect the possessed soothsayer to the Delphic Pythia. Over time, in different, later contexts, this relationship became severed; use of the word persisted, but without the same association. Isidore of Seville explains the concept, writing that 'Pythonesses (*Pythonissae*) are named from Pythian Apollo, because he was the inventor of divination'.[13] As in the *Vulgata*, Pythoness is also the name given to the necromancer of Endor. All those definitions will be included in the *Concordantia discordantium canonum* (*Concord of Discordant Canons*, better known as the *Decretum*), the first collection of ecclesiastical canons, written around the middle of the twelfth century by the monk Gratian.[14] At this point in history, it is unclear what would have been retained of the original meaning, as the passage from classical Latin to Middle Latin was completed, and things had to be made understandable for people who were mostly talking vernacular in their everyday lives.

[10]Manlio Simonetti (ed.), *La maga di Endor* (Florence, 1989); Jean-Claude Schmitt, Le spectre de Samuel et la sorciére d'En-Dor. Avatars historiques d'un récit biblique: I Rois 28, *Études Rurales*, 105–106 (1987), pp. 44–46.

[11]Anna Laura Trombetti Budriesi, *Un gallo ad Asclepio. Morte, morti e società tra antichità e prima età moderna* (Bologna, 2013), p. 568.

[12]See André Vauchez, *Saints, prophètes et visionnaires* (Paris, 1999).

[13]Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, VIII, 9, 7, eds. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, Oliver Berghof (Cambridge, 2006), p. 182.

[14]Gratian, Concordantiam Discordantium Canonum seu Decretum Gratiani, in *Patrologia Latina*, pp. 187, 1024.

We can still find these 'pythons' incongruously popping up in modern age trials. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, in the small village of Tortora, in Calabria, an old widow called Dianora Laino and her daughter Rosa Catarina were detained in the local jail on charges of an unspecified magic nature. The story is known only thanks to a number of letters held at the local parochial archive: it seems that a dispute had arisen between local and central authorities, maybe between local religious and laic powers about who was to be in charge of the judgement of the women. While the argument unfolded, Dianora died from the harsh treatment she was subjected to in jail, and her daughter was freed. Dianora was known by the nickname of 'pitona' and, even more interestingly, she had married, in 1656, a certain 'Pietr'Antonio di Cunto alias Pitone'. In several of the letters, including the one from 1709 which announces her death, she is called 'Dianora Laino alias di Pitone', according to the custom of calling the bride by the name (and in this case even the nickname) of her husband. It seems, then, that the entire family was dedicated to magical activities—to the extent of being named after them—until, for reasons we could only speculate on, they attracted the attention of the authorities. We cannot ascertain how many were able to link this nickname to the *pythonissae* of Saint Jerome, but evidently the definition had stuck throughout the centuries.[15]

To return to Jerome's *Vulgata*, it is worth examining another passage which demonstrates his way of thinking and his approach to translating the Bible. A chapter of Isaiah tells of demons of the desert in the shape of wild animals; one, a *sa`iyr* in Hebrew, is a hairy buck, the other a *tsiyiy*, or a desert dweller. The first is translated in the Septuagint as '*onocentaure*' (literally, like the *empousai* of Greek tradition, 'having asinine legs'), the second as 'hairy beast'. Along with these, there is a *liyliyth* or Lilith, the female-demon that, again, the Septuagint translates with *onocentaure*, while Jerome uses *lamia*, with the clear meaning of a child-killing female-demon: it is the best translation he could give to his readers, the closest to the original text.

Another word used by Jerome in his translation is *maleficus*. The corresponding word in the Jewish Bible is *mekhashefah*, correctly rendered by the Septuagint as *pharmakous*. Jerome evidently had to make a choice, here, preferring *maleficus* to the more philologically correct *veneficus*.

[15] Rocco Liberti, Un processo per stregoneria a Tortora nel 1709, *Historica*, XVIII, 5–6 (1965), pp. 213–216.

Evidently, in his times the word had a wider meaning for his audience, who were more accustomed to it than to the classically resonant category of poisoners. Following his translation and the Theodosian Code, *maleficus/a* became the most comprehensive, and therefore most used, word for practitioners of magic. The famous phrase 'maleficos non patieris vivere' (Ex. 22, 18), though, underwent some important changes during modern times. In Jerome's Latin, as in the Bible, '*malefici*' is not gendered: the plural is always used for both men and women; in our times, however, the phrase from Exodus commonly uses a gendered noun that seems to refer to females only. In Latin, the quote remained the same through the centuries, as we can read in the Clementina revision of 1592.

On the other hand, all of the vulgar translations change the passage. It is already so in John Wycliffe's translation of 1395: 'Thou schalt not suffre witchis to lyue'; Martin Luther's version of 1534 gives 'Die Zauberinnen sollst du nicht Leben lassen', as does that of Zwingli (1531–1540): 'Eine Zauberin sollst du nicht am Leben lassen'.[16] Although a *Zauberin* is not a *Hexe*—that is, a more generic 'enchantress'—it nonetheless refers only to females. The English translations—from the Miles Coverdale (1535), to the Bishop's Bible (1568), to the Geneva Bible (1557–1560) and to the King James (1611)—invariably give 'witches'.[17]

Augustine and *The Golden Ass*

The fame of Apuleius in the Middle Ages can be attributed to many factors, but Saint Augustine of Hippo's polemic against his works, given the theologist's status, certainly drew a larger audience to him[18]; that Augustine was very well informed about Apuleius—not least because both were from the same area—has been widely discussed. A few decades

[16]Meaning 'You should not permit the enchantresses to live' and 'You should not permit an enchantress to live'.

[17]The same did Ulphila translating the Bible for the Goths: his demons have feminine names meant, in his case, to approach them to female goddesses of the German tradition (Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* (London, 1883), vol. 3, p. 990).

[18]Julia Haig Gaisser, How Apuleius Survived, the African Connection, in *Apuleius and Africa*, eds. Benjamin Todd Lee, Ellen Finkelpearl, Luca Graverini (Routledge, 2014), pp. 52–65.

after Augustine's death, the Christian poet Blossius Aemilius Dracontius (ca. 455–ca. 505) of Carthage also wrote of the *strix nocturna* and demonstrated a deep knowledge of classical literature.[19] Even if Books VIII–X of the Bishop's *De Civitate Dei* were mainly concerned with dismantling the discourse about demonic powers in Apuleius' *De Deo Socratis*, for his part, Dracontius evidently admired his neighbour's writings, to a certain degree.[20]

In another book of *De Civitate Dei*, the Eighteenth, Apuleius' *Metamorphosis* is discussed under the alternative name of *The Golden Ass*—a title originally coined by Saint Augustine, which survives to today. The main theme of the commentary is the relationship between the ancient poets and their gods, seen by the Bishop as heroes mistakenly worshipped as divinities. Among these is Diomedes, who after the destruction of Troy was placed among the gods; his companions were turned into birds who now dwell in Diomedes' temple on the island of Diomedæa, not far from Mount Garganus in Apulia, where they receive all Greeks with happiness, while attacking all foreigners with their large, hard beaks.

According to Augustine, Varro corroborates this story, writing of other famous metamorphoses, including those performed by the sorceress (*maga*) Circe when she turned the companions of Ulysses into beasts, and that of the Arcadians. These latter had been changed into wolves when they swam across a certain pool and were left in a desert region with other wild beasts. If they abstained from eating human flesh for nine years and returned to the same pool, they could be changed back to their original form. Something similar also befell one Demænetus, who committed the sin of tasting the flesh of a boy offered as a sacrifice to the gods, and was changed into a wolf; after ten years of abstinence, he was restored to his proper form.

[19] Blossius Aemilius Dracontius, Carmina, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica (MGH). Auctorum Antiquissimorum*, ed. Friedrich Vollmer (Berlin, 1905), XIII, p. 188.

[20] Harald Hagendahl, *Augustin and the Classics* (Göteborg, 1967); Claudio Moreschini, La polemica di Agostino contro la demonologia di Apuleio, *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Classe di Lettere e Filosofia Serie* 3, 2, 2 (1972), pp. 583–596; Paolo Siniscalco, Dai mediatori al mediatore: la demonologia di Apuleio e la critica di Agostino, in *L'autunno del diavolo*, "*Diabolos, Dialogos, Daimon*", ed. Eugenio Corsini (Milano, 1988), vol. 1, pp. 279–294; and Mariateresa Horsfall-Scotti, Apuleio tra magia e filosofia, la riscoperta di Agostino, in *Dicti studiosus. Scritti di filologia offerti a S. Mariotti dai suoi allievi* (Urbino, 1990), pp. 295–320.

Augustine attributes all of these phenomena to delusions wrought by demons, even if he himself admits that these beliefs are widespread, and that it is common to meet people who have heard them on the best authority or have experienced them themselves. He adds that,

> Indeed we ourselves, when in Italy, heard such things about a certain region there, where landladies of inns, imbued with these wicked arts, were said to be in the habit of giving to such travellers as they chose, or could manage, something in a piece of cheese by which they were changed on the spot into beasts of burden, and carried whatever was necessary, and were restored to their own form when the work was done. Yet their mind did not become bestial, but remained rational and human, just as Apuleius, in the books he wrote with the title of *The Golden Ass*, has told, or feigned, that it happened to his own self that, on taking poison, he became an ass, while retaining his human mind.[21]

The story may resemble Luciu's or Aristomene's tales, as told by Apuleius, but Saint Augustine says that he has heard it in Italy, along with other similar stories he recounts in the following paragraph. A man called Præstantius used to tell of how it had happened to his father in his own house, that he took poison in a piece of cheese and lay in his bed, as if sleeping, but could not be roused by anything. After a few days, he finally woke and told of the things he had suffered as if they had been dreams, namely that he had been turned into a horse and, along with other beasts of burden, had carried provisions for the soldiers in Rhœtia. These details happened to be true: beasts of burden had, indeed, served in the region while Præstantius was confined to his bed. Similarly, another man declared that, in his own house at night, before he slept, he saw a certain philosopher, whom he knew very well, come to him and explain to him some points of Platonic philosophy which he had previously declined to discuss. The morning after, the man questioned the philosopher, and they found that the latter had himself dreamed what the other saw done by a phantasm ('per imaginem phantasticam').

[21] «Nam et nos cum essemus in Italia audiebamus talia de quadam regione illarum partium, ubi stabularias mulieres imbutas his malis artibus in caseo dare solere dicebant quibus vellent seu possent viatoribus, unde in iumenta illico verterentur et necessaria quaeque portarent postque perfuncta opera iterum ad se redirent; nec tamen in eis mentem fieri bestialem, sed rationalem humanamque servari, sicut Apuleius in libris, quos Asini aurei titulo inscripsit, sibi ipsi accidisse, ut accepto veneno humano animo permanente asinus fieret, aut indicavit aut finxit»: Sanctus Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei contra paganos libri XXII*, 18, 18, 1, in *City of God*, trans. Marcus Dodds (New York, 2000), pp. 689–690.

It seems, then, that in addition to Apuleius' account, Saint Augustine knew of other stories of metamorphosis in Latin culture and understood that *The Golden Ass* was simply a mirror of those widespread beliefs. Further, according to Augustine, Apuleius' story of the metamorphosis of Lucius was something which the author had himself lived in reality or had faked. In either case, Augustine is attesting to the fact that these were not merely tales born of poets' minds, but something that existed in (what we would now call) folklore.

As Augustine explains elsewhere, the demons cannot accomplish anything against God's will, such that demons 'do not create real substances, but only change the appearance of things created by the true God so as to make them seem to be what they are not'.[22] In reality, he continues, neither the physical shape nor the mind can be changed into bestial forms,

> but the phantasm of a man, which even in thought or dreams goes through innumerable changes, may, when the man's senses are laid asleep or overpowered, be presented to the senses of others in a corporeal form, in some indescribable way unknown to me, so that men's bodies themselves may lie somewhere, alive, indeed, yet with their senses locked up much more heavily and firmly than by sleep, while that phantasm, as it were embodied in the shape of some animal, may appear to the senses of others, and may even seem to the man himself to be changed, just as he may seem to himself in sleep to be so changed, and to bear burdens; and these burdens, if they are real substances, are borne by the demons, that men may be deceived by beholding at the same time the real substance of the burdens and the simulated bodies of the beasts of burden.[23]

[22] «Nec sane daemones naturas creant, si aliquid tale faciunt, de qualibus factis ista vertitur quaestio; sed specie tenus, quae a vero Deo sunt creata, commutant, ut videantur esse quod non sunt»: Ibidem, XVIII, 18, 2, p. 689–690.

[23] «Non itaque solum animum, sed nec corpus quidem ulla ratione crediderim daemonum arte vel potestate in membra et lineamenta bestialia veraciter posse converti, sed phantasticum hominis, quod etiam cogitando sive somniando per rerum innumerabilia genera variatur et, cum corpus non sit, corporum tamen similes mira celeritate formas capit, sopitis aut oppressis corporeis hominis sensibus ad aliorum sensum nescio quo ineffabili modo figura corporea posse perduci; ita ut corpora ipsa hominum alicubi iaceant, viventia quidem, sed multo gravius atque vehementius quam somno suis sensibus obseratis; phantasticum autem illud veluti corporatum in alicuius animalis effigie appareat sensibus alienis talisque etiam sibi esse homo videatur, sicut talis sibi videri posset in somnis, et portare onera; quae onera si vera sunt corpora, portantur a daemonibus, ut illudatur hominibus, partim vera onerum corpora, partim iumentorum falsa cernentibus»: Ibidem.

Augustine then returns to the myths he has previously discussed, including those of Circe and Diomedes, to explain how these demons deceived people into believing their claims of metamorphic powers by, in fact, causing men to disappear and commanding feral beasts and birds to obey their orders. It is to be noted that if the Bishop could not believe in stories of shapeshifting, nor does he scorn these accounts as mere fantasies. Rather, he grants the ancient authors certain credence: they were not telling lies, but could not know the entire truth, as truth is reserved only for the believers in the one true God. Here, then, is a defined and definitive assertion about metamorphosis and how it can seem real to an observer and even be experienced as real by a supposed victim. At a high and accultured level, this position will remain undisputed until the Renaissance, when differing opinions will be expressed, albeit by a minority, as we will see in this book's final chapter.

Isidore, the *Strix* and the *Striga*

As the Goths had lived for a long time on the shores of the Black Sea, along the borders of the eastern part of the empire, their culture was thoroughly acquainted with that of the Romans; the reigns of both the Ostrogoths in Italy and the Visigoths in Spain illustrate this familiarity. In Visigoth Spain lived Isidore, Bishop of Seville (ca. 560–636), of Hispano-Roman descent, whose *Etymologiae* is one of the most important sources in the transmission of classical culture to the Middle Ages. There were also manuscripts, of course, which provided a direct knowledge of the sources, but their circulation was rarefied, while encyclopaedias like Isidore's were handy and provided an outline of heathen culture passed through a Christian lens.

It was Isidore who transmitted the definition of *maleficus/a* as specifically referring to someone who practises magic. In the ordinary juridical lexicon, *maleficium* could also simply mean 'crime', but the fact that the term was increasingly employed only for crimes related to the use of magic, implies a desire to condemn the latter as the most grave of crimes: magic, regardless of whether it was intended to kill or to do less menacing things, was being positioned as evil in itself because it was equated to the *crimen maiestatis*. The magus infringes the First Commandment, and this makes him a *maleficus*. Already Lactanctius and Augustine (as well as the Theodosian Code, as we have seen) had affirmed that *maleficus*

had become the common term used for a *magus*.[24] In the *Etymologiae*, Isidore proposes a very similar definition, one which will remain famous: 'Magi are commonly called "evildoers" (*malefici*) by the crowd because of the magnitude of their crimes'.[25]

The magic they perform is the most powerful, as 'they agitate the elements, disturb the minds of people, and slay without any drinking of poison, using the violence of spells alone', explains Isidore, and he quotes Lucan to corroborate his argument.[26] By this time, *magi* had become a problematic word to use for practitioners of magic, especially because of its link with the *Magi* of the Gospels: How could both of these be referred to with the same name? Isidore is aware of the difficulty, explaining:

> The first interpreters of the stars were called Magi (*magus*), as we read of those who made known the birth of Christ in the Gospels; afterwards they only had the name *mathematicus* [*sic*]. Knowledge of this skill was permitted only up until the time of the Gospel, so that once Christ was born no one thereafter would interpret the birth of anyone from the Heavens.[27]

His assessment of the many disciplines that were part of ancient practices can be considered an endpoint of the classical culture of magic, but in a certain way, Isidore was still a part of it or, perhaps better, was poised between the old world and the new. For instance, he is probably the last to correctly understand the significance of the word *Nekromanteia*, which was to be lost in the Latin world of the Middle Ages, as *nekros* gradually became equivalent to *nigrum*. Rather, Isidore correctly explains the Greek etymology of the word and the meaning

[24] «…Sed eos Magi, et ii quos vere Maleficos vulgus appellat, cum artes suas execrabiles exercent, veris suis nominibus cient, illis coelestibus, quae in litteris sanctis leguntur»: Lucius Caecilius Firminianus Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutiones* II, 17, in *Opera omnia* Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latina*, col. 337; «Qui quasi conantur ista discernere et inlicitis artibus deditos alios damnabiles, quos et Maleficos vulgus appellat»: Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei*, X, 9.

[25] «Magi sunt qui vulgo malefici ob facinorum magnitudinem noncupantur»: Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies*, VIII, 9, p. 182.

[26] «Hi et elementa concutiunt, turbant mentes hominum, ac sine ullo veneni haustu violentia tantum carminis interimunt»: Ibidem; His reference is to Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 6, 457: «Vnde et Lucanus (6457): "Mens hausti nulla sanie polluta veneni incantata perit"».

[27] «Primum autem idem stellarum interpretes magi nuncupabantur, sicut de his legitur qui in Evangelio natum Christum adnuntiaverunt; postea hoc nomine soli Mathematici»: Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies*, VIII, 9, p. 183.

of necromancy. He also explains that a *pythonissa* is named in reference to the Pythian Apollon, and that this name was also given to the necromancer of Endor, as discussed above. And, further, he debates what *aruspicina*, *auguria*, *geomantia*, *hydromantia*, *eromantia* and *pyromantia* are, and what *arioli*, *genethliaci*, *haruspices*, *incantatores* and *sortilegi* do.[28] His explanations of those disciplines will prove useful for legislators and preachers in later times, even when a firsthand knowledge of the classical sources that had inspired him became more widespread.

Isidore writes about *striges* in two different passages of the *Etymologiae*. The first presents information that is mostly derived from Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* and Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. Here, Isidore presents the origins of the names of some birds of prey. The *ulula* (screech owl) is a bird named from a Greek word (which he gives: *ololuzein*) which means 'wailing', as the bird's call sounds like a lamentation. The augurs used to interpret the future according to its silence, which implies prosperity, or its gloomy hoots. The *bubo* (horned owl) is known to dwell day and night among tombs, so it is considered a dire omen. The *noctua* (little owl) flees the day because it cannot stand the sunlight and only flies at night, hence its name.

The *strix* (which Isidore suggests is another word for the *ulula*) is also a nocturnal bird, taking its name from the sound of its call, in that it screeches (*stridere*), and Isidore quotes Lucan on the *strix*'s lament. As we have seen, nothing in the ancient authors shows that they considered the *striges* to be proper birds; Isidore may have lacked the wealth of sources we have now, or he could have been misled by the association of the *strix* with birds of prey. He quotes Pliny's account of the old legend of the *strix* feeding milk to its hatchlings, but uses *amma* for *mammae*, saying: 'This bird is commonly called the *amma*, from loving (*amare*) its young'.[29] Unlike Pliny, he groups his entry defining the *strix* with those on birds of prey in the Twelfth Book, which concerns animals.

Interestingly, the other passage in which Isidore mentions the *strix* is in the Eleventh Book, where he discusses human beings and portents. Here, a short paragraph worth noting discusses metamorphosis:

[28] Ibidem, VIII, 9.

[29] Ibidem, XII, 7, p. 266.

> There are accounts of certain monstrous metamorphoses and changes of humans into beasts, as in the case of that most notorious sorceress (*maga*) Circe, who is said to have transformed the companions of Ulysses into beasts, and the case of the Arcadians who, when their lot was drawn, would swim across a certain pond and would there be converted into wolves. That the companions of Diomedes were transformed into birds is not a lie from story-telling, but people assert this with historical confirmation. Some people claim that witches (*striga*: [*sic*]) were transformed from humans. With regard to many types of crimes, the appearance of the miscreants is changed and they wholly metamorphose into wild animals, by means of either magic charms or poisonous herbs. Indeed, many creatures naturally undergo mutation and, when they decay, are transformed into different species—for instance bees, out of the rotted flesh of calves, or beetles from horses, locusts from mules, scorpions from crabs.[30]

As curious as it might seem to us, Isidore does not associate the *strix* to the *striga*—perhaps because the latter is, as previously noted, the vulgar name that recurs in later authors, such as Petronius, where it is clearer they are monstrous creatures, not animals. Further, as I will demonstrate, *striga* had become a common word in Middle Latin to denote women or demonic creatures, but certainly not birds of any kind.

Concerning the metamorphoses themselves, Isidore is anything but sceptical. Indeed, he reports that some transformations can occur naturally, without the help of magic; he adds, in some episodes, such as that involving Diomedes, there is historical confirmation of the assertion, so the metamorphosis must be taken seriously.

The chapter in which Isidore recounts the origin and the names of the pagan gods and goddesses concludes with a brief note about divinities and demons of the Underworld, such as *larvae*, which according to Latin authors are fearful spirits of the dead roaming at night, or sometimes

[30] «De Transformatis. Scribuntur autem et quaedam monstruosae hominum transformationes et commutationes in bestiis, sicut de illa maga famosissima Circe, quae socios quoque Vlixis mutasse fertur in bestias: et de Arcadibus, qui sorte ducti transnatabant quoddam stagnum atque ibi convertebantur in lupos. Nam et Diomedis socios in volucres fuisse conversos non fabuloso mendacio, sed historica adfirmatione confirmant. Sed et quidam adserunt Strigas ex hominibus fieri. Ad multa enim latrocinia figurae sceleratorum mutantur, et sive magicis cantibus, sive herbarum veneficio totis corporibus in feras transeunt. Siquidem et per naturam pleraque mutationem recipiunt, et corrupta in diversas species transformantur; sicut de vitulorum carnibus putridis apes, sicut de equis scarabei, de mulis locustae, de cancris scorpiones»: Ibidem, XI, 4, p. 246.

demons not dissimilar from the Greek ones.[31] Isidore is probably using Pliny as a source, here, because (other than Seneca) he is the only one who accords this meaning to the *larvae*.[32] Along with the *larvae*, Isidore introduces the *lamiae*, 'whom stories report would snatch children and tear them apart, [and who] are particularly named from "tearing apart" (*laniare*)'.[33] Again, no connection to the *striges* and their habits is made; again, Isidore's description will persist.

Barbaric Laws

During the Early Middle Ages, laws concerning evil acts of magic cannot be easily separated from those condemning magical practices of other kinds, pertaining to other beliefs, or surviving pagan habits: as we have seen, in the light of the First Commandment, all of these could be equated. Laws constitute one of the better sources for studying magic and witchcraft in those times; more for the ideas they reveal than for the actual practices, given we have scarcely ways to check if they were ever applied and to what extent. Nearly, all of them fall into two categories: secular Germanic codes and ecclesiastical legislation. To the former group belong all the codes produced in different European regions, formed with the contribution of Germanic and Latin elements. Among the latter, there are numerous regulations (canons, synods, decrees, penitentials) decreed by the Church during its first centuries as an official State religion. Not all of these have the same purpose: some were meant to impose or forbid a habit; others simply instituted penalties. Some of these codes punished practices of magic and witchcraft, but one also finds laws among them that only censure those who believe the practices to have real effects or those who accuse someone of being a witch or a wizard.

It is not easy to discern exactly what 'witchcraft' was in these early sources, because most of them express, in Latin, notions emerging from Germanic (and sometimes Celtic or even Asiatic) culture. The long-term result of interchanges among these many traditions ultimately led to the formation of the early modern notion of witchcraft, involving the idea

[31] George Thaniel, Lemures and Larvae, *The American Journal of Philology*, 94, 2 (1973), pp. 182–187.

[32] Ibidem, p. 186.

[33] Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies*, VIII, 11, p. 190.

of a diabolical pact or some other intervention by the devil. But early legislation dealt with a complex of traditions concerning deadly spells, weather magic, residues of pagan cults and men and women thought to have certain powers over things or people. Many of the laws are not easy to decipher and relate to cultural contexts that we cannot discern fully, if at all. All of them, though, bear the influence of the Latin Bible and the Theodosian Code which, as we have seen, were to a certain degree still steeped in Classical culture. Apart from those texts, it was the language itself, Middle Latin, that carried the traits inherited from Roman culture, because the legislators had to express with Latin forms notions derived from different and diverse traditions. This was more than mere translation; it was already a cultural crossover.

In the early medieval world, many Germanic kingdoms set out written codes, usually collected from their common traditions; these were more or less influenced by the Roman legislation and were written in Latin. For example, in the Salic Law, issued by the Franks in the first half of the sixth century, there is a chapter titled *De maleficiis*, where various deeds are taken into account: (1) Those who give a herbal potion to someone with the intent to kill and who succeed. (2) Those who give a herbal potion to someone with the intent to kill, but do not succeed. (3) Those who commit a *maleficium*, of a generic kind or with 'ligatures'. (4) Those who administer a potion to a woman, always made with herbs, to provoke an abortion. According to the Germanic *Wergeld* (or, in Latin terms, *guidrigildus*, literally 'man price'), financial damages are the only punishment for crimes; those found guilty of these *maleficia* have to pay 62 and a half golden *solidi*.[34] The attitude of the legislator and his audience concerning the reality and efficacy of these practices is clear: they are considered to be actually effective, and the equation of *veneficus* and *maleficus* is similar to that found in the Roman tradition.

Another chapter, *De herburgium*, is yet more relevant to our discussion. A particular passage, concerning poisoners who act with the help of herbs and spells, seems difficult to explain:

[34] Karl August Eckhardt (ed.), Lex Salica, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Leges Nationum Germanicarum* (Hannover, 1969), IV/2, p. 66. *Solidi*: all Germanic codes refer to this measure, issued from the Roman world, though golden coins were no longer produced, and silver coins had replaced them everywhere in Europe.

> Anyone who calls someone *herbugium* (sometimes *cherviobugum*), that is *strioporcio*, who is the bearer of the caldron (*eneo*, prob. for *aeneus*, meaning 'of bronze') where the *striae* cook, but is not able to prove his accusation is to be judged guilty and will pay 62 *solidi*.[35]

It continues, saying that if someone calls a woman *stria* and cannot prove she really is one, he will pay 187 and a half *solidi*; if a *stria* eats a man and it is proved, she will pay 200 *solidi*.[36] As in the previous chapter, the legislator does not doubt, here, that a woman may be a *stria* (which, of course, is a new vernacular form of the Latin *strix/striga*). But the legislation does leave open the question of who a *stria* is: she resembles the Greek *lamiae* or Petronius' anthropophagic *strigae*, but she is a real person, not a monstrous creature—after all, it would be meaningless to fine a monster for its deeds. Evidently, the false accusation of a woman being a *stria* is considered very serious, so much so that the fine for such accusations is almost as high as that for eating a man; one can suppose it involved a real risk of persecution, even lynching, of an innocent person, so that such gossip must be discouraged with harsh measures.

The most surprising article of the chapter, though, is that involving the *herbugium*: it seems to suggest that, in a gathering of *striae* to cook something, the *strioporcium* is one who assists by bringing the kettle. This is striking because it could be the first representation of a congregation of witches. The cooking reminds us of the now infamous theme of the witches' kitchen, one of the most famed scenes of Goethe's *Faust*, and a frequent image in early modern paintings. As Jacob Grimm suggested, the whole scene could be read as a prohibition of ancient heathen practices involving the cult of goddess Freyja and her priestesses, the *vǫlur*.[37] This might also explain the anthropophagy as part—or as a damning representation—of pagan human sacrifices. I would suggest that the legislator might have in mind, here, the flesh-eating *striges* of Latin tradition, and that these have been used as a justification for the harsher condemnation of ancient traditions. The Salic Law of the sixth century was formed in a time when the Franks had embraced Christianity

[35] «Si quis alterum hereburgium clamaverit, hoc est Strioportium, aut qui æneum portare dicitur, ubi striæ concinunt et convincere non potuerit denarios qui faciunt solidus LXII et dimidium culpabilis judicetur»: *Lex Salica*, eds. Johannes Merkel, Jacob Grimm (Berlin, 1850), p. 34. Unless otherwise stated, English translations are my own.

[36] Ibidem.

[37] Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, vol. III, p. 1045.

only as a consequence of Clovis baptism of late fifth to early sixth centuries, and even if some missions coming from Ireland or from Catholic bishops were attempting to convert the Franks, theirs was far from a totally Christian society. The measures adopted by the Salic Law, then, should be understood as part of an evangelical effort, but they equally attest to the fact that the society's pagan beliefs were far from being extinguished.

The Visigoth Code, also dating from the sixth century, was harsher than the Salic Law: it did not always permit *Wergeld*, so those who had committed serious *maleficia* could lose their freedom and become slaves. The legislation was written under King Chindasvindus, and it bears a strong resemblance to some articles of the Theodosian Code. For example, if a free man or a slave concocts a venomous potion and kills someone, they will be put to death, but if the designated victim remains alive, the court will ask them to decide the fate of the offender.[38] *Malefici* and storm invokers are to be submitted to flagellation and *decalvatio*.[39]

Burgundian Law from the same century bears yet more strongly the influence of Roman Laws. For example, the chapter concerning divorce is taken almost verbatim from the Theodosian Code: a divorce will be granted if one spouse is able to demonstrate that the other is a murderer, a sepulchre violator or a *maleficus/veneficus* (the surviving manuscripts alternate between the two, which is significant in itself).[40] Like the Salic Law, the *Lex Ripuaria* is also of Frank origin, but dates from the seventh century. It states that a man or woman who attempts to render someone mad by using poison or some other *maleficium* must make amends through the *Wergeld*.[41]

If these codes bear the influence of the Roman laws of Late Antiquity, we might contrast these to the early Lombard Laws, which were set out by King Rotharius in 643, when his kingdom was only superficially Christianised. An article of the code forbids the killing of another's slave or *aldia* (a category of half-free) if motivated by

[38] Karl Zeumer (ed.), Lex Visigothorum, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Leges Nationum Germanicarum* (Hannover, 1902), I, p. 259.

[39] Ibidem.

[40] Ludwig Rudolf von Salis (ed.), Leges Burgundionum, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Leges Nationum Germanicarum* (Hannover, 1892), II/1, p. 144.

[41] Franz Beyerle, Rudolf Buchner (eds.), Lex Ribuaria, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Leges Nationum Germanicarum* (Hannover, 1954), III/2, p. 131.

accusations that they are a *striga*, also called *masca*.[42] The main concern of the legislator, here, seems to be the preservation of free men's property, rather than the condemnation of the belief itself, and this makes it difficult for us to decipher the law properly. Here, *masca* is the first recorded use of a definition of 'witch' that will later become widespread. It is generally thought that the word may derive from the masks that were put on dead faces, and thus *masca* could be an undead revenant, rather than a human being—something similar to a *larva*, which in the Augustan age designated a ghostly theatre mask.[43] Alternatively, Jacob Grimm has suggested that the term could be a reference to 'mâcher, mascher, or masticare, and the witch is called mask because she consumes children'.[44] It is very difficult to give a definitive determination, not least because the passage is completely decontextualised, and we do not even know if the Lombard Laws applied only to the Germanic people or also to the Latins. Nonetheless, as we shall see, *masca* will persist in the north-western Italian tradition, and beyond, including across Piedmont, Liguria and Provence.

The *Lex Alamannorum*, of the early eighth century, seems more concerned with preserving women from the defamation and violence which could result from certain accusations and even from gossiping: 'If a woman calls another woman *stria* or *erbaria* during a fight or when she is not there, she must pay twelve *solidi*'; but 'if someone accuses a free woman of being a *stria* or *erbaria*, and because of that keeps her and tortures her […], he will pay 800 solidi'; and only 15 are due if the woman is a slave.[45] *Stria* or *erbaria* could easily be translated, in this case, as *malefica* or *venefica*.

[42] Friedrich Bluhme (ed.), Edictus Langobardorum, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Leges Nationum Germanicarum* (Hannover, 1868), p. 48. About the *masca* cfr. Rita Caprini, La strega mascherata, in *Masca, maschera, masque, mask. Testi e iconografia nelle culture medievali*, in *L'immagine riflessa. Testi società culture*, IX, eds. Rosanna Brusegan, Margherita Lecco, Alessandro Zironi (Alessandria, 2000), pp. 59–73. An *aldia* is a half-free woman.

[43] Thaniel, *Lemures and Larvae*, p. 187.

[44] Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, vol. III, p. 1082.

[45] «Si femina aliam stria aut erbaria clamaverit sive rixam, sive absente hoc dixit, solvat sol. 12»; «Si quis alterius ingenuam de crimina seu stria aut herbaria sisit, et eam priserit et ipsam in clita miserit (…) LXXX sol. componat»: Karl Lehmann (ed.), Leges Alamannorum, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Leges Nationum Germanicarum* (Hannover, 1966), p. 26.

In the light of these laws, with their different meanings and contexts, it is worth noting that the word '*stria/striga*', from its roots in the Latin of Late Antiquity, had become widely used, across many regions of Europe, to name a range of deeds and beliefs pertaining to heathen practices and, later, to evil magic (and, in one case, perhaps also to otherworldly creatures). And these barbaric *strigae* are not only consistent with the semantics of Late Antiquity Latin; the use of the term also follows the tendency we have noted in late authors like Petronius and Apuleius to associate them not with the realm of scary monsters, but with that of womanhood.

The Pagan Course

In the Church's prolonged fight against surviving pagan habits, diminishing ancient cults could sometimes be dismissed as no more than useless superstitions. medieval penitentials shed light on the various ways in which Christianity sought to overwhelm paganism. An early Irish synod, probably dated to the late sixth century,[46] condemns Christians 'who believe there is a *lamia* in the mirror, also called *striga*'. The reference to a mirror suggests that the synod is condemning necromancy, as it was a common instrument for divination, and in this case the *lamia* or *striga* should be interpreted as spectres of the dead.[47]

The Penitentials of Finnian (written in mid-sixth-century Ireland) and of Saint Columba (written slightly later in mainland Europe by an Irish author) show a certain moderation: forty days of fasting are prescribed for those who have joined pagan or diabolical rites; those who repeat the same sin will observe penitence for three Lents; and a period of three years is suggested for those who persist in their crime. As was usual in such sources, penalties for Christian clerics were harsher: doubled for deacons and tripled for priests. One year of penitence is the price for fabricating a love potion, while an abortion induced by magical means can require up to six Lents of fasting, or a penance of half a year with just bread and water, plus two years without wine and meat.[48]

[46] D. A. Binchy, St. Patrick's 'First Synod', *Studia Hibernica*, 8 (1968), pp. 49–59.

[47] Synodus Episcoporum Patricii Auxilii Issernini, in *Patrologia Latina*, 53, col. 825.

[48] Cyrille Vogel (ed.), *Les "libri poenitentiales"* (Turnhout, 1978), pp. 64–65 *et passim*.

In late seventh-century England, the Penitential of Theodore, a monk of Canterbury, threatens three years of penance to those who sacrifice to demons (presumably referring to pagan deities), but, in the most serious cases, the penance rises to ten years. If a woman performs diabolical incantations or divinations, she is condemned to a penance of one year. Another English penitential, named after the Venerable Bede but probably belonging to the eighth century, prescribes five years of penance for clerics and three to five for laymen who perform different forms of magic, such as fabricating amulets or consulting diviners. A group of texts known as the *Old English Penitentials*, held in more than one manuscript, have an interesting taxonomy.[49] Some articles preach abstinence from *lýblacas* and *attorcræftas*, both related to *veneficium* in its larger sense, while *wiccige* and *wiccecræfte* refer to the act of preparing philtres to arouse passion or for darker purposes. The English kings will include these articles in their code of laws of the tenth century: for example, if it is established beyond any possible doubt that *lyblacs* and *morthdaeds* have caused someone's death then, according to the Code of King Athelstan (924–939), they must be put to death, or under the laws of Kings Edmund I, Alfred, Guthrum and Edward the Old, banished from the country.[50]

The early ninth-century French penitential called 'of Halitgar' contains several interesting details, as many of its instructions concern surviving pagan traditions: for example, a wizard found guilty of taking away the mind of a man by invoking demons is condemned to a penance of five years; a conjurer of storms receives an even harsher penance of seven years—three of them on bread and water—exactly the same as for those who cause the death of someone by performing magic arts. The contemporaneous Spanish Penitential of Silos is more severe: those who make images of demons, or who consult with them, are condemned to eight years of penance, while a woman who burns grain where a man has died, seeking relief for the health of the living, must do penance for one year.

The famous *Canon Episcopi*, so widely discussed among both believers and sceptics of modern witches' powers, appears for the first time in a penitential known as *De ecclesiasticis disciplinis* (*About ecclesiastical*

[49] Available online: http://www.anglo-saxon.net/penance/.

[50] Oliver J. Thatcher (ed.), *The Library of Original Sources. Vol. IV: The Early Medieval World* (Milwaukee, 1901), pp. 211–239.

discipline), accredited to Regino of Prüm and dated to the first decade of the tenth century. Among the usual prescriptions against magical practices, the author inserts a text (only later known as *Canon Episcopi*), which dismisses the belief that women, seduced by the illusions of demons, could follow Satan and ride at night upon beasts along with the Latin goddess Diana.[51] A little more than a century later, another penitential, the *Decretum* of Burchard, Bishop of Worms (about 1020), returns to this subject in its nineteenth book, often known separately as the *Corrector*. Burchard attends to many forms of magic—including magical potions concocted to induce impotence or abortion, ceremonies for inducing fertility and love charms—and is constantly preoccupied with the eradication of paganism. Consequently, and unlike the scholastics of later centuries, Burchard refuses to give credence to the reality of such phenomena as nocturnal rides through the air; the ability to control thunder, rain or sunshine; the transformation of men into animals; or the intercourse of *incubi* and *succubi* with human beings.[52]

The beliefs denounced by Regino and Burchard are mentioned by Ratherius, Bishop of Verona (originally from Liège), who wrote his *Praeloquiorum libri* around the mid-ninth century. Ratherius names Herodias as the queen of certain night-time meetings, involving both women and men.[53] In another passage, he shows some knowledge of Italic traditions, mentioning, for example, the Marsians as the epitome of superstition and enchanters of snakes, a reference found in Latin sources including Pliny, but also surviving, in a Christianised form, up until today.[54]

[51] Regino Prumiensis, De ecclesiasticis disciplinis et religione christiana libri duo, in *Patrologia Latina*, 132, col. 352.

[52] Burchardus Wormatensis, *Corrector et medicus (Decretorum liber XIX)*, Ibidem, 140, coll. 963–964. Cfr. Cyrille Vogel, *Pratiques superstitieuses au début du XI^e siècle d'après le "Corrector sive medicus" de Burchardus, évêque de Worms (965-1025)* in *Etudes de civilisation médiévale (IX-XII siècles): Melanges offerts à Édmond - René Labande* (Poitiers, 1974), pp. 751–761.

[53] Ratherius Episcopus Veronensis, *Praeloquia*, I, 4, 26, in *Patrologia Latina*, 136, col. 157–158.

[54] Ibidem, I, 4, 7, col. 152.

The Carolingian Law, which is not codified in a unique corpus, but is rather spread through many *Capitularia*, better represents the position of the Church against magic. It differs from the barbaric laws that we have previously discussed because of the roles of the Carolingian Kings Charlemagne and Louis the Pious in Christianisation. Charlemagne is frequently defined (for instance, in Alcuine of York's letters) as a 'new Moses', 'new David' and 'new Constantine', in reference to his desire to be the head of Christianity, successor to not only the Kings of the Bible, but also heir to the Roman tradition. The Carolingian kings were anointed as *reges et sacerdotes*—first, after 754, as sovereigns of the Franks, and later, after 800, as Emperors of the new Western Roman empire—according to the role models of Melchisedech and Christ himself. From this point of view, their fight against reputedly non-Christian practices was held in higher esteem than that of the Church itself, and the synods and capitulars mirrored each other.

One of the earliest Carolingian texts against magic and particularly heathen practices is the *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum* (*Little Index of Superstitions and Paganism*). It probably dates from the second half of the eighth century and is likely derived from a contemporary synod.[55] The articles in the Index condemn the *dadsisas* (ceremonies or dirges) for the dead, the practice of making circles around the villages, probably done with an apotropaic meaning, and the making of simulacra from cloth sprinkled with flour. Most interestingly, the Index mentions the *paganus cursus* (the pagan course) called *yrias*, which is performed by people after having torn off their clothes and shoes. It has been suggested that *yrias* could be a mistake by the amanuensis in transcribing the name for the German goddess Friya or Freyja. This 'pagan course' could be the first recorded instance of the most famous *cursus* described more than two centuries later by Regino of Prüm and Burchard of Worms.

Many articles of law quote the Bible. For example, the *Admonitio Generalis*, of 789, warns against tolerating any activity of poisoners, *malefici*,

[55]Alfred Boretius (ed.), Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Leges. Capitularia regum Francorum* (Hannover, 1883), I, pp. 222–223. For a general introduction see Pierre Riché, *La* magie à l'époque carolingienne, *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 117, 1 (1973), pp. 127–138.

or enchanters.[56] A few years later (802?), a passage against diviners and other *malefici* is quoted from Deuteronomy.[57] In 812, the persecution and punishment are ordered of cults and those who light fires dedicated to trees, stones and water sources.[58] In an Italian capitular dating from 850, it is written that the *maleficae* who put hate or love in people's minds are to be considered *venenariae*.[59]

A capitular by Louis the Pious declares that *magi*, *arioli*, sorcerers, poisoners, diviners, enchanters and dream interpreters are all heathens[60]; those influenced by demons and the *tempestarii*, or those who ruin the minds of others with love potions, food or phylacteries, are also to be condemned.[61] Another capitular from the same time states that those who make people mad by giving them herbs or poisons, or through some other kind of *maleficia*, are like murderers.[62] Many capitulars condemn to death with words that are found in Exodus: '*Malefici* and poisoners do not deserve to live' ('Maleficos et veneficos non sinere vivere')[63]; or with similar words from a synod held in Metz in 859: 'murderers, adulterers, perjurers, poisoners, the sacriligeous/blasphemous do not deserve to live'.[64] But, overall, the many codes created in the Carolingian era show little uniformity: the Council of Lipsia (743), for example, states a fine of only fifteen *solidi* for those found guilty of *maleficium*.

Another council, held in Paderborn (785), is more detailed, but nonetheless shows an apparently contradictory aspect. Sorcerers are condemned to submit themselves as servants to the Church, but those who, blinded by the devil and infected with pagan errors, believe another man or woman to be a *striga* who eats human flesh, and therefore burn her,

[56] Boretius (ed.), Admonitio Generalis, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Leges. Capitularia regum Francorum*, I, p. 52.

[57] *Capitolare missorum item speciale*, Ibidem, pp. 102–104.

[58] *Ansegisi abbatis capitularium collectio*, Ibidem, p. 402.

[59] Alfred Boretius, Victor Krause (eds.), Additamenta ad Capitularia regum Italiae, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Leges. Capitularia regum Francorum* (Hannover, 1897), II, p. 122.

[60] *Additamenta ad Hludowici Pii Capitularia*, Ibidem, p. 44.

[61] Ibidem, p. 45.

[62] *Additamenta ad Capitularia regum Franciae orientalia*, Ibidem, p. 241.

[63] *Capitularia regum Franciae occidentalis (Karoli II)*, Ibidem, p. 345.

[64] *Additamenta ad Capitularia regum Franciae occidentalis (Karoli II)*, Ibidem, p. 444.

eat her flesh or give it to others to eat, will themselves be punished with death.[65] We should note that these measures were meant for a specific people, recently conquered by Charlemagne, namely the Saxons, who strongly resisted conversion to Christianity. Charlemagne took a particularly hard stance against them, punishing them and even condemning them to death for minor transgressions like avoiding fasting at Lent. In addition to raising Charlemagne to the role of *rex et sacerdos*, one could argue that the Franks understood how depriving the Saxons of their religious and cultural identity could be a more effective way of keeping them in line. The general meaning of the law must be understood in this context. Nonetheless, it remains unclear what the legislator meant when writing about the *striga* and anthropophagy: apparently, a *striga* may be a man as well as a woman, which means it is something different from the Roman version. But, if that is the case, why choose this word at all? It may be that the text refers to shapeshifters or ghosts of both genders, and that it was thus thought that the Latin word would best elucidate the concept. This hypothesis could at least account for the link to cannibalism, but, given the scarcity of documents pertaining to the beliefs of these peoples, it remains difficult, if not impossible, to provide a definitive answer.

In some instances, it seems that the legislation may incorporate elements from the classical tradition. For example, the concluding paragraph of *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum* condemns 'those who believe women can eat the moon and rip men's hearts out',[66] which is a magical rite which resembles those of Circe or Medea. The writers of these texts were clerics whose culture was likely informed by Latin models; further, the role of iteration should be taken into account when dealing with those sources, and realism should not be always taken for granted given that it was not unusual for one author to copy others. Even when a treatise was written as a response to contingent issues, it might include a great deal from past and diverse sources. Such is the case with the *De Divortio Lotharii Regis et Theutbergae Reginae*, written by Hincmar, Archbishop of Reims (d. 882), around the mid-ninth century. It explores the issues arising from an attempt by Lothar II, King of Lotharingia (855–869), to rid himself of his wife, Teutberga, and marry

[65] Boretius (ed.), Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Leges. Capitularia regum Francorum*, I, p. 68.

[66] *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum*, Ibidem, p. 223.

his concubine, Waldrada. Hincmar is not simply concerned with this single case, but with a definition of what marriage is, and how and if it may be ended. Of the questions he poses, some are regarding the powers of *maleficia*,—which he deems effective—and others concern whether it is true that there are some women able to bring love or hate between a man and a woman by magical means. At a certain point in his discussion (which includes many elements taken from Isidore of Seville), Hincmar speaks of women who chant over potions they have concocted from dead bones, hair and pubic hair, herbs, snails and snakes. It has been found, he adds, that men can be fascinated by *striges* ('a strigis fascinati') and made impotent, and that others are debilitated by the *lamiae* (also called *geniciales feminae*). Women, too, can be touched by this curse, but in this case it is brought by *dusii* (a Gaulish name for evil spirits) in the shape of men. If the *dusii* are clearly non-human beings, the *striges* and *lamiae* of Hincmar are women who perform *maleficia*.[67]

Words like *lamia* and *striga* (and their variations) are sometimes used in early medieval sources, but evidently not always with the same meaning, which varies according to the context: sometimes they might be *maleficae*, sometimes evil spirits, sometimes shapeshifters or priestesses of religions that the authorities wish to eradicate. It is an ambiguity that is palpable in the Hungarian code of law ordered by King Coloman, who reigned between 1095 and 1116. He is sceptical about the existence of *striges*, as is evidenced by the article *De striges*, which states that there is nothing true about stories of their existence, and that further inquiry would be pointless. According to the Hungarian tradition, *strigoi* and *boszorkány* are not human beings but blood suckers and night demons, something similar to the most ancient Greek and Roman meaning of *lamiae* and *striges*—the similarity of the word *strigoi* clearly attests to the association. Nonetheless, King Coloman's law is anything but sceptical when it comes to *veneficia* and *maleficia*, which are covered by the laic legislation for harsh punishment, alongside necromancy and divination.

A final consideration must be given to the attitudes behind the early laws against magic. It has been argued by some, in reference to penitentials like that of Burchard of Worms, that the early medieval authorities took a soft stance on magic. But such arguments do not take into

[67] Hinkmar von Reims, De Divortio Lotharii Regis Et Theutbergae Reginae, ed. Letha Böhringer, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Capitularia* (Hannover, 1992), IV/1, pp. 99–262, 206.

consideration the peculiar nature of those texts. These penitentials guide the repentance of sins, not the punishment of crimes. From the Theodosian Code on, the laws written by laic powers are very harsh. When practices and beliefs are considered superstitious, it is because the Christian rulers wanted to eradicate existing heathen cults among their people. All forms of magic are persecuted, even if it is difficult to affirm to what extent: written sources from these times are scarce, and there are no surviving trial records.

Nonetheless, some reports about the punishment and execution of those accused of evil acts of magic are known through other kinds of sources. In the *Vita* of the Emperor Louis the Pious, it is reported that, when he fell suddenly ill, his son, Lotharius, accused a nun, Gerberga, of *veneficium* and *maleficium*, and she was consequently drowned.[68] According to some monastic Annals, the abrupt death of King Arnulf of Carinthia in 899 was attributed to the *maleficia* of a woman and a man; both were first tortured, then condemned to death.[69]

In England, a woman and her son were accused of *maleficium*: they made a puppet of cloth in the image of their accuser, to prick with pins and cause his death. The son fled, but his mother was found guilty and was drowned in the Thames, close to the ancient London Bridge, in 970.[70] There are reports of other cases, too: in the first half of the eleventh century, King Ramiro I of Aragon ordered the execution of many *maleficae*. According to the chronicler Ademar of Chabannes, in the year 1028 a woman, a daughter-in-law of the victim, was tortured and burned at the stake with her co-conspirators for causing the death of William of Angoulême. Exactly one century later, a sickness afflicting Count Dietrich of Flanders was blamed on a woman, a sorceress (*incantatrix*), who was also condemned to burn at the stake.[71]

[68] Georg Heinrich Pertz (ed.), Vita Hludovici imperatoris, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores. Scriptores rerum Sangallensium* (Hannover, 1826), p. 639.

[69] Georg Heinrich Pertz (ed.), Annales Fuldenses, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores. Annales et chronica aevi carolini* (Hannover, 1826), p. 414.

[70] Benjamin Thorpe (ed.), *Diplomatarium Anglicum Aevi Saxonici: A Collection of English Charters, from the Reign of King Aethelberht of Kent, A.D. DC.V. to That of William the Conqueror* (London, 1865), pp. 229–230.

[71] Joseph Hansen (ed.), *Zauberwhan, Inquisition und Hexenprozess im Mittelalter, und die Entstehung der grossen Hexenwerfolgung* (Aalen, 1964, 2nd ed.), pp. 116–119.

By contrast, following the Church's official position of considering these beliefs to be mere 'superstition', rather than real menaces, Pope Gregory VII sent a letter to Harald III, King of Denmark, asking him to spare the life of a group of women accused of raising storms and spreading pestilence. These calamities, he wrote, are to be considered acts of God, punishing human sins, and not the results of human actions.[72] The year was 1080.

[72] Ss. Gregorius VII, Registrum epistolarum, in *Patrologia Latina*, 148, coll. 563–565.

‘A Company That Go the Course’

A Classical Revival: Magic and *Mirabilia* in Rome

Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historiography has fallen in love with the idea of multiple Renaissances enlightening the dark Middle Ages. A Carolingian, an Ottonian and a twelfth-century Renaissance anticipated the last, major one, which finally put an end to an era of decline. As well worn as it may be, this vision of the past at least shows that one of the main features of the last Renaissance—the love for the classical period, literature and arts—was deeply rooted in earlier times. Around the beginning of the second millennium, and in many cases in earlier, Carolingian times, Roman antiquities were sought and appreciated. The reign of Emperor Otto III exemplified this new passion, with the great influence of Gerbert of Aurillac, a scholar and teacher who tutored both Otto II and his son, while simultaneously ascending to the highest levels of the ecclesiastic ladder to become Archbishop of Ravenna in 998. Just one year later, following the death of the Emperor’s cousin Pope Gregory V, the recently appointed Otto III elevated the Archbishop to the papacy, as a means of securing imperial influence over the Church. The new pope took the name Sylvester II, wanting to be for the German Emperor what Sylvester I had been for Constantine. But this was a short hiatus: Otto moved to Rome in order to better revive the significance of his crown, considering himself the heir of the ancient Roman emperors. The situation in the city was difficult, and the people

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https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92078-8_5

rebellious; the Emperor was chased away and moved back to Ravenna, along with Gerbert. He died in 1002, still trying to return to Rome, and his Pope followed him within a year. But Gerbert's death gave birth to a enduring set of legends that figured him not just as a scholar, but as a magician who had learned his art in Spain, a land that, being a border between Christianity and the 'Moors', was perceived as mysterious and exotic, possibly recalling the 'barbaric' features commonly associated, since ancient Greek and Roman times, with magic.

The most significant story—one which underlines his passion for Rome—reports that Gerbert had unearthed a broken bronze statue in Campus Martius. The statue suggested to him that he ventured into the underground of the town, and there, through his magical knowledge, he found a room full of treasures that belonged to the Roman emperors. Ignorant people thought the statue was full of gold, and broke it open; but, in fact, it had an inscription on its head that explained the truth, and a finger pointed in the right direction. Is this magic or knowledge? Or both, combined? The fable seems to lay out a new approach to thinking about the Roman past: it is no longer to be simply a political and ideological landscape used to justify the power of the new German emperors; rather, the culture must be sought out and interpreted in all its original depth and subtlety.

While for past dynasties, like the Carolingians, it was paleochristian Roman times which were of most interest, at the beginning of the second millennium, pagan Rome had also become a subject of deep fascination. Pagan Rome and its artistic expressions were not easy to separate from their magical side, and the latter thus became worthy of investigation. In the twelfth century, John of Salisbury wrote the first treatise on political matters, the *Policraticus* (ca. 1159), which was clearly a reflection on the ongoing fight between the papacy and the empire. A cleric himself, John was nonetheless a moderate and was keen to weigh up the role of monarchs and their prerogatives. He was interested in the new Aristotelian political philosophy that was becoming fashionable and was also steeped in Classical culture, albeit that some of his quotations are taken from medieval *florilegia*, rather than from a direct, personal knowledge of all the original sources.[1] A portion of the *Policraticus* is

[1]For an overview to John of Salisbury political views and writings, see Christophe Grellard, Frédérique Lachaud (eds.), *A Companion to John of Salisbury* (Leiden, 2015); of specific interest to my discourse is Laure Hermand-Schebat, *John of Salisbury and Classical Antiquity*, (Leiden, 2014), pp. 180–214.

devoted to a commentary on magic, demonstrating a position which John shared not only with his Biblical sources, but also with his favourite classical model, Cicero. I will discuss his stance towards magic and folk beliefs shortly. For now, it is worth noting that John of Salisbury is the first to have narrated (or invented?) the enduring legend that attributed the burning of the pagan libraries on the Palatine and Capitoline Hills to Gregory the Great—collections whose disappearance did, indeed, date back to before the sixth–seventh century. The story is provocative because it reads as both praise and condemnation: this Pope had fought against paganism, but had also destroyed a whole treasury of the literature that John held in such high esteem.

The same ambiguity is found in a much more obscure writer from the late twelfth century, a certain Magister Gregorius, possibly an English pilgrim who had travelled to Rome, and who describes the *mirabilia* of the town. He is clearly a cultivated man, who quotes from Latin literature and from John's *Policraticus*. Gregorius greatly admires the ancient palaces and ruins of Rome, but is unable to fathom what they were built for, what their use was. Despite his love for the city and his grasping after real knowledge, he interprets what he sees in the light of magic and the fantastic. Gregorius keeps coming back to a statue of a woman, probably representing Venus. The statue fascinates him with its beauty, to the point that he thinks that he has been enchanted by some 'magic persuasion'.[2] The beauty, the formal accuracy of the sculpting and the verisimilitude to real human forms reveal to his eyes (and to those of his contemporaries) that these statues could not have been made without the help of magic, hence of demons: their nature is dangerous as much as it is fascinating.[3]

Magister Gregorius travelled to Rome in peculiar times for the city, after the end of the schism (1139) that had seen two popes, Anacletus II and Innocent II, both insisting on the legitimacy of their claims to the throne of Peter. Their successors inaugurated a period of interest in the remains of ancient Rome: if, previously, it had been only the Christian city of Constantine that interested the papacy, in the second

[2] Cristina Nardella (ed.), *Il fascino di Roma nel Medioevo. Le 'Meraviglie di Roma' di maestro Gregorio* (Roma, 1997), pp. 38–39.

[3] Very useful to the topic of images and fascination are Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art* (Chicago, 1984); David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago, 1989).

half of the twelfth century the Augustan Age also came to be appreciated. Such a perspective bolstered the pontifical view of its superiority over the emperor; or, indeed, positioned popes as the real emperors of Christianity. All this conformed to a general interest of Italian towns in Roman imperial times and saw a run to appropriate parts of ancient monuments, usually to insert them very visibly into new building works—such as cathedrals and public palaces—that celebrated the power of the recently born *Communes*.[4]

Tales of magic and witchcraft could be domesticated and used in many ways, not least as allegories for something else. Deeply concerned with the fight between the papacy and the empire, the Italian monk (later bishop and cardinal) Pier Damiani was a supporter of the ongoing reformation of the Church. In one of his many letters, he writes that even if the *strix malefica* sucks the blood of a person, she spares their progeny.[5] It is a metaphor about the enemies of the Church, which draws from Ovid and Pliny without further consideration. Nonetheless, it is not without interest that Pier Damiani inserts it in his letter like this, apparently out of the blue, because it clearly indicates that he could reasonably assume his readers would understand what he was talking about—both because of their knowledge of classical literature, of course, and because, as we shall see, in Italy the image was deeply rooted as a folkloric motif.

These times of profound renovation demanded a legislative makeover of the often-anarchic proliferations of laws and opinions that the Early and High Middle Ages had produced. The *Decretum* of the jurist Gratian, a revision that harmonised the entire ecclesiastical legislative tradition, was also a product of the twelfth-century Renaissance, as its compiler used the same method that was in use in Bologna to study Roman law and make it relevant to modern times. Inside this huge collection—sourced from Roman laws, the Bible, the Church Fathers, the papal decretals and the acts of councils and synods—there was a section that prohibited magical activities. This section also included the

[4] Chiara Frugoni, L'antichità: dai Mirabilia alla propaganda politica, in *Storia dell'arte italiana. Memoria dell'antico nell'arte italiana I: L'uso dei classici*, ed. Salvatore Settis (Torino, 1984), pp. 4–71, esp. pp. 8–14.

[5] «Strix malefica etiamsi alienum sanguinem sugit, suis tamen pigneribus parcit»: Petrus Damiani, Die Briefe des Petrus Damiani, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Epistolae*, ed. Kurt Reindel (München, 1988), II, p. 538.

so-called *Canon Episcopi*, in a refined version featuring both Diana and Herodias as fictional queens of the deluded women who have visions of flying along with them in the night (but who are, in fact, misled by the devil).[6] Gratian does not mention the belief that these women can shapeshift, but in another part of his text he does mention classical tales, including those of Ulysses (as the Latins called Odysseus) and Circe, to argue that any idea of metamorphosis must be rejected.[7]

The text found its way into other legislative sources, like the *Panormia* of the Canonist and Bishop Ivo of Chartres (1040–1115), and the English Penitential of Bartholomew Iscanus, Bishop of Exeter, from the second half of the twelfth century. The former, indebted to classical authors, the Bible, Saint Augustine and Isidore of Seville, devotes a large section to magical practices and the penalties proper to them: women who believe themselves able to change their shape and ride with demons upon animals should be exiled from the community; it is a demonic illusion, but one that warrants harsh punishment.[8] Bartholomew Iscanus has a different stance, seeming to acknowledge the reality of some magical powers. For instance, those who, by incantation, take another's supply of milk or honey, or some other thing, are condemned to a penance of three years; conjurors of storms, or those who, by invoking demons, lead someone to insanity, must do five years. But people who believe in the nocturnal rides, or in the transformation of men and women into wolves, get, respectively, a mere one year or ten days of penance.[9]

Written and Oral Lore

Starting in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and with increasing force during the thirteenth, the resurgence of Mediterranean traffic, the reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula, the crusades, the organisation of

[6] Gratianus, Concordantiam Discordantium Canonum seu Decretum Gratiani, in *Patrologia Latina*, 187, coll. 1349–1350

[7] Ibidem, p. 1352.

[8] Ivus Carnotensis Episcopus, *Panormia*, Ibidem, 161, coll. 1317–1318. For an introduction to his writings see Christof Rolker, *Canon Law and the Letters of Ivo of Chartres* (Cambridge, 2010).

[9] John T. McNeill, Helena M. Gamer (eds.), *Medieval Handbooks of Penance. A Translation of the Principal 'libri Poenitentiales' and Selections from Related Documents* (New York, 1990), pp. 349–350.

cathedral schools and above all of universities all contributed in different but incisive ways to the reintroduction in the West of branches of classical or late Antiquity scientific-philosophical culture. All this was accompanied by the rediscovery of many texts unknown in past centuries. Italy played an important role in fostering knowledge of these texts, and between the eleventh and twelfth centuries, numerous centres of translation from Greek and Arabic flourished. In Montecassino and Salerno, scholars had translated many treatises on medicine into Latin; in Sicily, at the court of the Normand Kings, there were translations of Plato, Aristotle, Ptolemy and Diogenes Laertius; at around the same time, in the middle of the twelfth century, Giacomo Veneto carried out the most complete Latin translations of the Aristotelian corpus; and a few years later, Gherardo da Cremona translated about seventy works from Arabic, including many on astrological matters.

It was not only written culture that passed from one language to another. Oral lore, until then mainly recorded in sources that, like the Penitentials, were aimed at the eradication of popular beliefs and practices, began to inform written texts in many ways. Of course, some treatises and books of *exempla* written by clerics, and especially by preachers, maintained the same attitude, but many other sources, both clerical and secular, incorporated stories from folklore. Legends like those of the fairy Melusina, the 'dog-Saint' Guinefort, and of werewolves show the way this circulation of motifs worked between oral and written domains.[10]

John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* is a key text for understanding the encounter between Latin texts and oral culture. In one chapter, concerning dreams and dream interpretations (which are not to be recommended), he writes:

> For example it is said that some Moon [*nocticula*] or Herodias or Mistress of the Night [*noctis domina*] calls together councils and assemblies, that banquets are held, that different kinds of rites are performed, and that some are dragged to punishment for their deeds and others raised to glory. Moreover, babes are exposed to witches [*lamiae*] and at one time their mangled limbs are eagerly devoured, at another are flung back and restored to their cradles if the pity of her who presides is aroused. Cannot

[10] Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Le Saint Lévrier. Guinefort, guérisseur d'enfants depuis le XIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1979); Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge. Morgane et Mélusine: la naissance des fées* (Paris, 1984).

> even the blind see that this is but the wickedness of mocking demons? This is quite apparent from the fact that it is for the weaker sex and for men of little strength or sense that they disport themselves in such a cult. If in fact anyone who suffers from such illusion is firmly censured by someone or by some sign the malign influence is either overcome or yields, and, as the saying is, as soon as one is censured in the light the works of darkness cease. The most effective cure however for this bane is for one to embrace the true faith, refuse to listen to such lies, and never to give thought to follies and inanities of the sort.[11]

John of Salisbury mixes some Latin traditions with different motifs. The night flight following a goddess—Herodias and a generic 'lady of the night', or the *nocticula* that brings together the *noctiluca* ('lux in nocte', hence Diana) with, again, a 'lady of the night'—is similar to the one evoked in the *Canon Episcopi*. But, here, they are travelling to a banquet, something absent from the original version (or, at least, the first one we have). The *lamiae*, too, are a new element in this context, and the threat they pose to young children is clearly a detail derived from the Greek and Latin monsters, not from the '*sceleratae mulieres*' of the Canon.

The blending of oral and written cultures is also particularly evident in the work of Gervase of Tilbury, whose *Otia Imperialia* warrants individual attention, apart from contemporaneous sources, due to the personality of the writer and the richness of his account. Gervase was born around the middle of the twelfth century, in Essex, to an aristocratic family linked to the Counts of Salisbury. He studied in Bologna, where he became a *magister*, then moved to Reims to serve the Archbishop,

[11] «Quale est, quod Nocticulam quandam, vel Herodiadem, vel praesidem noctis dominam concilia, et conventus de nocte asserunt varia celebrari convivia. Ministeriorum species diversis occupationibus exerceri, et nunc istos ad penam trahi pro meritis nun illos ad gloriam sullimari. Praeterea infantes exponi lamiis, et nunc frustratim discerptos, edaci ingluvie in ventrem traiectos congeri, nunc praesidentis miseratione reiectos in cunas reponi. Quis vel caecus hoc ludificantium daemonum non videat esse nequitiam? Quod vel ex eo patet, quod mulierculis et viris simplicioribus et infirmioribus in fide ista proveniunt. Si vero quisquam eorum qui hac illusione laborabat, ab aliquo constanter, et ex signis aliquibus arguatur, daemonium statim aut superatur, aut cedit, et, ut dicitur, ex quo quis in luce arguitur, cessant opera tenebrarum. Huius autem pestis cura efficacissima est, ut fidem quis amplexus, his mendaciis subtrahat mentis auditum, et nequaquam respiciat ad huiusmodi vanitates et insanias falsas»: Joannis Saresberiensis, *Policraticus*, II, 17, in John of Salisbury, *Policraticus. On the Frivolities of Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers*, trans. Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 100–101.

William of the White Hands, a renowned intellectual and an enemy of the Cathars—Gervase, too, was involved in the Archbishop's activities against the heretics. He also spent time at the court of Henry II Plantagenet, but in 1189 left for Italy, where he spent time around Salerno, Nola and Napoli, before moving to Sicily (then under the rule of the Normand King William II, who was married to the daughter of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine), where he also spent a few years. In 1207, he returned to Arles, where he served as a judge for over a decade. At some point in his travels, he had met Otto of Brunswick—King of Germany and Holy Roman Emperor, who fought and lost the battle of Bouvines in 1214 against Frederick Hohenstaufen—and Gervase dedicated his *Otia Imperialia* to Otto. It is a curious book, crossing different literary genres, and is variously a *Speculum principis*, an Encyclopaedia, and a book of *exempla*. The author, who probably spent his last years in a monastery, put all his rich cultural learning into it. There are literary motives and folkloric beliefs; clerical and juridical notions; a love of the ancient Latin texts and of the Fathers of the Church, and there are also the views of a cleric who had travelled around Europe for almost his entire life, and who had made treasures of his own experiences.

The Third Book of the *Otia* is an account of the marvellous things of the world: places, creatures, plants, miracles, legends, all have a role in it. One chapter concerns *lamiae* and dragons. Considering these two together may seem odd, but they are connected to the extent that both undergo transformations. The *lamiae* are women, Gervase says, who enter homes at night, where they open and inspect jugs, pots and caskets (that is, things associated with food and drinking), turn on the lamps, sometimes wake those who are sleeping, and pull little children from their cradles. Similarly, he adds, according to popular lore, dragons can turn themselves into human form, and he proceeds to describe many episodes involving dragons, all linked to popular beliefs about creatures which are half human, half otherworldly.

The fact that the *lamiae* are not properly humans, which up until this point had been unclear, is more fully explained in the subsequent chapter on *lamiae* and the nocturnal *larvae*, which are apparitions in the shape of *lares* (dead ancestors), but which are not real and have no actual body. The *lamiae*, Gervase says, are popularly called *mascae* (a word first encountered in the Lombard laws) and, in the Gallic tongue, *striae*: curiously enough, the author is clearly translating into Latin the French word *estries*. One might infer that he is not familiar with the Latin

original, or it may be that he cannot relate the ancient *strix/striges* to the *estries*; in any case, the word *lamia* seems to have been more relevant in those times.[12]

According to Gervase, physicians maintain that *lamiae* are nocturnal fantasies generated by an excess of temperaments that trouble the sleep, whereas Saint Augustin describes them as demons. They would be better called 'laniae', as they tear apart (*laniare*) children; as we have seen in our previous chapter, this is an argument found in Isidore of Seville's writings, and it will inform some later treatises, including Ulrich Molitor's *De laniis et phitonicis mulieribus.* Evidently, Gervase, too, was inclined to favour this theory. But he adds that, in line with the beliefs of a wider public, he can also speculate that these creatures are men and women who fly through the night sky and enter houses, where they not only scare people in their sleep, but also eat, turn on the lights, break bones and put them back together, suck on human blood and move children from one place to another. The French translation of the *Otia Imperialia*, made by Jean de Vignay in the first half of the fourteenth century, removes the male component of the *lamiae* attested to in the *Otia* and reverts to the original formulation: *lamiae* can only be female.[13] One must wonder whether this revision is due to a more gendered perception of witchcraft, or to the more philological approach of an author well-enough informed to know that, in classical literature, *lamiae* were only female.

Gervase adds the story of Ymbertus, Archbishop of Arles, a man of proven faith and sincerity, who had told him of an episode which happened when he was an infant. One night, his mother heard him crying and stretched her hand towards him, only to find the cradle empty and the baby in a pool of water on the ground. It was, he concludes, a story commonly known and told in places where those creatures ride at night. Also, it has been seen how certain barrels of wine are emptied and then filled again by those creatures. The motif of the baby removed from the cradle resurfaced centuries later in some witchcraft trials in a not-so-distant area, the Val Bormida between Piedmont and Liguria, where the word *mascae* for 'witches' is used (as it is in the South of France).

[12] Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, III, 85–86, in *Otia imperialia. Libro III. Le meraviglie del mondo*, ed. Fortunata Latella (Parma, 2010), pp. 245–257.

[13] Dominique Gerner, Cinzia Pignatelli (eds.), *Les traductions françaises des Otia imperialia de Gervais de Tilbury par Jean d'Antioche e Jean de Vigna. Édition de la troisième partie* (Genève, 2006), p. 320.

There, in 1631, one Simone Siverna and his wife Bianca testified how, one Friday night they had heard a crashing noise, like a big stone being thrown in the house, and had turned on the light to find their baby moved out of the cradle and put under the bed.[14]

What are these reports, then? Gervase quotes Saint Augustine by way of an explanation and compares his view with that of Apuleius' *De Deo Socratis*. But all of the debate is taken from *De Civitate Dei*, without, it would seem, direct knowledge of the other source, and without deciding for or against the reality behind these beliefs. The authority of Saint Augustine is, of course, undeniable, but Gervase also finds the accounts he has recorded very convincing. He concludes with Psalm 36:6: 'Thy judgements are a great deep'.[15]

Other texts offer a name for the Lady of the Night who is mentioned alongside the *lamiae* and the goddess of the *Canon Episcopi*. For example, in his treatise *De Universo*, William of Auvergne (1180/90–1249) calls her *Domina Abundantia*.[16] One of the first Western thinkers to deal profoundly with Aristotelian philosophy and its Islamic translators and commentators (especially Avicenna), William of Auvergne became Bishop of Paris and wrote treatises on many different subjects. A section of *De Universo* is devoted to the Wild Hunt and to the illusions created by the malignant spirits that appear in woods and secluded places in the shape of girls or matrons dressed in white garments.[17]

[14] Gian Maria Panizza, *I tamburi delle masche. Note su alcune testimonianze in un processo per stregoneria ad Acqui nel 1631*, *L'Aldilà. Maschere, segni, itinerari visibili e invisibili*, ed. Sonia Maria Barillari (Alessandria, 2000), pp. 194–210.

[15] «Iudicia Dei abissus multa».

[16] William of Auvergne, *Guilielmi Alverni De universo*, II, 3, XXIV, in *Opera omnia*, ed. Franc Hotot (Paris, 1674), p. 1066.

[17] This is another subject that reflects very well the encounter of literate authors with folkloric themes. Some of the sources which relate stories of the Wild Hunt were assembled in 1935 by Karl Meisen, in an anthology now available as Karl Meisen, *La leggenda del cacciatore furioso e della caccia selvaggia*, ed. Sonia Maria Barillari (Alessandria, 2011); Lecco Margherita (ed.), *Il motivo della Mesnie Hellequin nella letteratura medievale* (Alessandria, 2001); and see also Rodolfo il Glabro, *Cronache dell'anno Mille (Storie)*, eds. Guglielmo Cavallo, Giovanni Orlandi (Milano, 1989), p. 255; *Chronicon saxonicum, seu Annales rerum in Anglia præcipue gestarum*, ed. Edmund Gibson (Oxford, 1692, repr. Whitefish, MT, 2009), p. 232; Ekkehardus Uragiensis, *Chronica*, ed. Georges Waitz, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores* (Hannover, 1869), p. 256; Orderic Vitalis, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. Marjorie Chibnall, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1969–1978), vol. 4, pp. 212–215; and Walter Map, *Svaghi di corte*, ed. Fortunata Latella (Parma, 1991), p. 134.

These women in white also appear in the writings of William of Auvergne's contemporary, Caesarius of Heisterbach, whose *Dialogue on Miracles* is full of tales about the power of such demons. In one anecdote, a woman tries to seduce a wine-seller, and when he refuses her advances, she picks him up and carries him through the air, depositing him in a faraway place. In another tale, a dead woman is described as pale white, and wearing white garments, and is reputed to curse a house.[18]

In William's treatise, the women in white are led by Ladies Abundia and Satia and are known to enter human habitations to receive offerings of food and drink. The name 'Satia' derives from 'Bensoziæ' (i.e. 'Bonæ sociæ'), here twisted from Latin *satiare* (fulfil) to match 'Abundantia'. William of Auvergne reports this as a widespread belief—one especially held by women, and more particularly old women.[19] He explains that people leave their homes unlocked so that these white women might enter, as in return they will provide an abundance of good times; the *bonae sociae* will often turn into the *bonae res*; the 'good things'.

The folk story behind the Bishop's tale has been widely discussed. Are these women fairies linked to ancient fertility rites?[20] Are they undead revenants that are saluted with offerings of food and drink, to fulfil the hunger and thirst of the dead?[21] Are they both of these things combined? As interesting as it would be to trace down the roots of this tradition, what is most relevant to the discussion, here, is the way in which these white women were linked to the classical *lamiae* or *striges*. The Bishop himself, in fact, also speaks of some evil spirits, 'that people call *lamiae*', who at night enter the houses where toddlers are, and try to rip them apart (*laniare*) and roast them on the fire. It is curious that William of Auvergne, Bishop of Paris, affirms that 'people' use a Latin expression: is this simply a verbatim quote? Or is he referring to elsewhere than his diocese or native area? It is difficult for us to say. In any

[18] Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum* (Koln, Bonn, Bruxelles, 1851), 2 vols., I, pp. 123–124, II, 313–314.

[19] Bensozia, in *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis, éd. augm.*, ed. Charles du Cange, et al. (Niort, 1883–1887), t. 1, col. 635a. http://ducange.enc.sorbonne.fr.

[20] Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge*, *passim*.

[21] Cfr. Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* (London, 1888), IV, pp. 1367–1370; Walter Deonna, Croyances funeraires. *La soif des mort. Le mort musiciens*, *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 119 (1939), pp. 53–81; Ottavio Cavalcanti, *Cibo dei vivi, cibo dei morti, cibo di Dio* (Soveria Mannelli, 1995); and Bianca Tragni, *Il cibo dei morti* (Bari, 2006).

case, the coupling of *bonae res* and *striges/lamiae* will persist through the centuries, right through to many late medieval and early modern witch trials. Already in *De Universo*, the Bishop is sure that this belief should be harshly condemned because of its idolatry; indeed, he argues, serving food and drink to demons must be classified as a sin which warrants extermination 'by fire and sword'.[22]

Preaching and Circulating the News

With the growing importance of preachers—initially Dominicans and, later, Franciscans—in the cultural context of the thirteenth century, the circulation of these stories achieved unprecedented heights. The sermons were written to be preached across different areas of the Christian world, and as a result, there were an increasing number of stories that were told as first-hand accounts, but which were often taken from other preachers' books. This was especially the case with the *exempla*.

The connection between the night flights of the *Canon Episcopi* and the figure of Lady Abundance is found in some of the exemplar stories told by the French Dominican Stephen of Bourbon, whose *Tractatus de diversis materiis predicabilibus*, composed in the first half of the thirteenth century, attained immense success. In the stories, the night travelling women are called *bonae res*, 'good things', but are potentially dangerous: a woman told a priest she knew how she had entered his house at night with the *bonae res*; he was sleeping naked, so she had covered him hastily, because, if he were to be caught that way by the others, they would have beaten him to death.

A similar story is recounted by Jacques de Vitry, the French Bishop of Acre, who became Cardinal in 1229; he is mostly known for his *Historia Orientalis*, an account of the Crusades, and for his sermons. In one of the latter, he tells the story of a woman deluded by demons into believing that she rode at night upon beasts and saw much of the world in a short time. One day in church she told her priest that she had saved him when a band of these night riders had entered his room, as no locks could keep them out. Judging the claims to be superstitious, the priest locked her inside the church and beat her on the head with a crucifix

[22]William of Auvergne, *De Universo*, p. 1066; see Thomas B. De Mayo, *The Demonology of William of Auvergne: By Fire and Sword*, Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Arizona, 2006 (Lewiston, NY, 2007).

until she was begging to be released, whereupon he challenged her to fly out of the locked door if she truly had such powers.[23]

Both of these *exempla* underline the *fatuitas*, the idiocy of the women who had been tricked by the demons into believing such foolishness. But Stephen of Bourbon also explains why they are called 'good things'; in another story, that takes place in the diocese of Besançon, some men dress themselves as women to pay a visit to the house of a peasant, who foolishly believes them to be the *bonae res* and tells his wife to close her eyes because they are going to bring them riches.[24] The longest *exemplum* told by the preacher concerns a priest who was taken to a banquet by the people called *bonae res*. The priest is told by a man who used to go with those women to get out of bed, naked, because a 'vehicle' is ready outside his door. This transpires to be a beam that the priest is told to ride like it was a horse, and he soon finds himself in a cellar with some women sitting at a table lit by torches and all set with food. The priest, as he is accustomed to doing, makes the sign of the cross upon the table, and suddenly the demons run away. He is found the next morning, alone, in a cellar in Lombardy, sitting on a wine barrel.[25]

In the *Speculum Historiale*, Vincent of Beauvais includes a chapter about shapeshifting, mostly taken from the *Etymologiae* of Isidore, full of accounts of transformations from human to bestial forms. Among these, one concerns *strigae*: 'Some say *strigae* are men who transform themselves into beasts with the help of magic arts or potions, with the purpose of plundering'.[26] This weird account of men-witches seems to mirror the prank played by the men dressed as women whom Stephan of Bourbon tells of. The same Jean de Vignay I have already mentioned in regard to Gervase of Tilbury, also translated this *Speculum Historiale* of Vincent de Beauvais. In a note on the chapter about shapeshifting,

[23] Jacques de Vitry, *The Exempla*, ed. Thomas Frederick Crane (London, 1890), pp. 112–113.

[24] Etienne de Bourbon, *Anecdotes historiques, légendes et apologues tirés du recueil inédit d'Etienne de Bourbon*, ed. Albert Lecoy de la Marche (Paris, 1877), pp. 314–325.

[25] Ibidem, pp. 88–89.

[26] «Sed et quidam asserunt strigas in hominibus fieri. Ad multa enim latrocinia figure sceleratorum mutantur, sive magicis artibus, sive herbarum veneficio totis corporibus in feras transeunt»: Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum Historiale, Doctrinale Bibliotheca mundi Vincentii Burgundi, ex ordine Praedicatorum venerabilis episcopi Bellovacensis, Speculum quadruplex, naturale, doctrinale, morale, historiale* (Douai, 1624), p. 95.

he adds that the *estries* are men and women (not only men, as Vincent would have it) who change their form, and he renders 'in feras transeunt' ('shift to beasts') as 'transportent les corps en autre fourmes', where the verb *transporter* in Middle French implies the idea of movement from one place to another, probably a reference to both the shapeshifting and the flight.[27]

At the end of the thirteenth century, the *Historiae Memorabiles* of Rudolf von Schlettstadt—probably a Dominican friar of Schlettstadt's convent, and known to us only through this single text—shows a great interest in the demonic and the fantastic, as well as an enthusiasm for classical texts, Apuleius in particular. One episode revolves around the story of a monastery servant who is sent out for some provisions. Because of a storm, he stops in a village where a woman takes him in. Around midnight, she takes out a jar containing an ointment, anoints a vase with it, and, sitting on the vase, starts to fly. The servant, astonished, runs for the balm in order to do the same and finds himself sitting on an ass, chasing after the woman. Having caught up with her, and been instructed on some matters of protocol, they proceed to a green meadow where knights and dames are banqueting and dancing.[28] His account includes the final banquet that awaits travellers, something we have seen before, especially in story about fairies, but the ointment and the flight recall the Apuleian tradition more than stories of the *bonae res*.

The circulation of these stories for more than a century among different preachers' sermons is what made them interesting for the inquisitors. These latter came from the same Orders and shared the same ethos, and they had a yet closer relationship with an oral lore which, as we have seen, was replete with such tales. The circulation between the literary and the oral was by this time fully integrated. The *bonae res* were on the radar of inquisitors like Bernard Gui (1261/2–1331), who mentions

[27] Martina Di Febo, Traduzione e tradizione. Le traduzioni degli Otia Imperialia di Gervasio di Tilbury, in *Lingue testi culture L'eredità di Folena vent'anni dopo. Atti del XL Convegno Interuniversitario*, eds. Ivano Paccagnella, Elisa Gregori (Bressanone, 12–15, luglio 2012) (Padova, 2014), pp. 145–158.

[28] Rudolf von Schlettstadt, *Storie memorabili*, ed. Sonia Maria Barillari (Milano-Trento, 1998), p. 127.

them as night riders[29]; or like Nicolaus von Jauer (1355ca–1435), who denounces those who close their food inside locked places for fear that *Habundia e Satia* could eat it: they are just demons, the theologist asserts, so they can neither eat nor drink.[30]

In Italy, many preachers were well versed in classical studies, especially in the fourteenth century, when humanist culture was blossoming. For example, Domenico Cavalca was a Dominican friar who has left many sermons and treatises; the only date which is certain is of his *Specchio dei Peccati* of 1333, and the *Pungilingua* likely followed slightly later. In the latter, he reworks a famous episode from the *Life* of Germain of Auxerre, known to us via Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, composed a few decades before the *Specchio*, between 1260 and 1298:

> Once when he was a guest in a certain house, after the evening meal he noticed that preparations were made for another meal. Germain wondered about this and asked for whom the preparations were made. He was told that some nice women came at night, and Saint Germain decided to stay awake that night. He did and saw a troop of demons coming to the table in the guise of men and women. Germain ordered them to stay where they were, then awakened the family and asked them whether they recognized the visitors. They answered yes, that they were all neighbors. Then, after again telling the demons not to go away, he sent to the neighbors' houses and they were all found at home and in their beds. Finally, at his command, the visitors admitted that they were demons, and that this was the way they fooled humans.[31]

Jacobus's version is clearly composed as an example to explain how demons can trick people into making them see and trust false things, but also to explain a common belief that we have seen in many other texts. Domenico Cavalca adds some touches to the story: he introduces it by saying,

[29] Bernard Gui, *Manuel de l'Inquisiteur*, ed. G. Mollat, 2 vols. (Paris, 1964), vol. 2, p. 22.

[30] Joseph Hansen (ed.), *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Hexenwahns und der hexenverfolgung im Mittelalter* (Bonn, 1901), p. 69.

[31] In Latin 'legenda' means 'readings', but the Italian and other vernacular traditions rendered the title as 'Leggenda/Legend': Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton and Oxford, 2012), p. 414.

> We can go back to talk about the wrong belief that affirms the existence of witches, that they really exist when they do not, because they are demons that take the shape of certain old women or beasts to go plundering.[32]

The word '*streghe*' is not found in the *Golden Legend*, and where that earlier version refers to 'nice things', Cavalca instead writes of the 'old women', a detail conforming to the ancient stereotype. Furthermore, when in the later version the host is asked who he is waiting for, he replies that 'he was setting the table for those witches who come at night, so that they would not take away his kids'.[33] This image of the old, child stealing witch is central to Cavalca's version of the story, but is completely absent from the *Golden Legend*.

The preacher's interest in the subject is again made clear in another of his treatises: the *Specchio de' Peccati*, in which he writes against 'those who charm, or have faith in the existence of witches'.[34] He goes on: 'In many legends it is written that, come the night, demons turns themselves into men or beasts, to spread sin and disorder',[35] and he hints again at entertaining belief in metamorphosis and demons taking on human or animal forms.

Around 1354, the Florentine Jacopo Passavanti, another Dominican friar steeped in classical culture, wrote his treatise *Specchio di vera Penitenza*, in which we find further references to witchcraft and metamorphosis. It is thought that Passavanti is the first to mention the '*tregenda*'—a word whose etymology remains quite mysterious—which refers

[32] «E così potremo riprendere lo stolto detto ed errore che pone che siano streghe, con ciò sia cosa che per verità non siano, anzi sono demonia che prendono forma di certe vecchie o di certe bestie e fanno certi danni»: Domenico Cavalca, *Esempi*, ed. Marcello Ciccuto, in *Racconti esemplari di predicatori del Due e Trecento*, eds. Giorgio Varanini, Guido Baldassarri (Roma, 1993), III, p. 72. Unless otherwise stated, English translations are my own.

[33] «Che apparecchiava per quelle streghe che vanno di notte, ché non gli togliessono li figliuoli». A critical edition of the *Pungilingua* is contained in a Ph.D. thesis by Mauro Zanchetta, *Il Pungilingua di Domenico Cavalca (edizione)*, Dipartimento di Italianistica - Scuola di dottorato in Scienze linguistiche, filologiche e letterarie Indirizzo di Italianistica XXIII ciclo (Università degli Studi di Padova, 2011), p. 304.

[34] «Chi getta sorti, o crede che sieno streghe»: Domenico Cavalca, *Specchio de' peccati*, ed. Francesco Del Furia (Firenze, 1828), p. 77.

[35] «Che come si trova per molte leggende, le demonia si trasformano le notti in varie spezie d'uomini, o di bestie per seminare questi errori, e mettere guerra»: Ibidem.

to the assembly, at the end of a flight, of men and women in the company of demons. This recalls the *Canon Episcopi*, which Passavanti clearly quotes: 'there are some people, and mostly women, who say they go by night in a brigade with this *tregenda* and are able to name one by one the others that go with them'.[36]

In another passage, he explains more clearly what he means by the word '*tregenda*', stating:

> It is known that demons change themselves into men and women, who are alive, or into horses and asses, and go by night together in certain places where people can see them and are brought to think they really are the men and women they look like. And this, in some places, is called '*tregenda*'.[37]

The 'places' he is talking of are to be located in Central or Northern Italy, where the word '*tregenda*' will be found in decades and centuries to come. For example, in the *Pataffio*, attributed to Franco Sacchetti (1332–1400), another Florentine, there is the line, 'because tonight you hear the *tregenda* [coming]'[38]; and the term is also used by Luigi Pulci in his *Morgante*.[39] For want of a better explanation, '*tregenda*' is supposed to have derived from the Latin *transire* (to pass or trespass), which already in classical times presented the form *transenna* to indicate a narrow passage or even a small trap. It is found in later centuries in the vernacular of many areas, from the South to the North of Italy, maintaining the chief meaning of narrow passage or place, and giving the cognates *transienda*, *transanda* and *transeunda*. The form *tresenda*, very close to *tregenda*, is found in northern dialects as a synonym for 'via', hence maintaining the Latin meaning of 'narrow passage'. This might

[36] «Ben si truovano alcune persone, e spezialmente femmine, che dicono di sé medesime ch'elle vanno di notte in brigata con questa cotale tregenda, e compitano per nome molti e molte di loro compagnia»: Fra Iacopo Passavanti, *Lo Specchio di vera penitenza*, ed. Maria Lenardon (Firenze, 1925), pp. 385–386.

[37] «Così si truova, che' demonj prendendo la similitudine d'uomini e di femmine, che sono vivi, e di cavagli e di somieri, vanno di notte in ischiera per certe contrade, dove veduti dalle genti, et è creduto, che sieno quelle persone, la cui similitudine mostravano. E questa in alcuno paese si chiama tregenda»: Ibidem.

[38] «Benché stanotte senti la tregenda»: Franco Sacchetti, *Pataffio*, 9 in *Vocabolario degli accademici della Crusca* (Firenze, 1729–1738, 4th ed.), vol. 5, p. 151.

[39] Luigi Pulci, *Morgante*, XVIII, 117: Ibidem.

explain the *tregenda* as a confined place where meetings take place.[40] The negative meaning it bears in relation to witchcraft may come from the fact that one of the 'narrow passages' was the open-air latrines found in Italian cities; in official documents of Genoa *trexenda* is given as synonym for latrine.[41]

Passavanti discusses at length the power of demons, above all confirming the traditional views of Saint Augustine,[42] and calling the writings of the Latin authors 'fables':

> In the chronicles of the times of Pope Leo I (440–461), we can read of two women in the lands of Rome who gave charmed cheese to some men, turning them into asses. And in *Lives of the Fathers*, we can read of a young woman turned into a horse, who was brought by her relatives to a holy man. The books of the poets are full of those transformations, like Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, but all those things, as Saint Augustine showed, are not true, just delusions, hallucinations and hoaxes of the devil.[43]

Anyway, it is interesting to note that Passavanti asserts that these stories were not only told by the ancient poets, but were also widespread among the people: 'Some say they can, through their evil acts, change the minds, or turn men and women into beasts and birds, or create new things, like the fables these poets tell'.[44]

[40] Mario Alinei, *Il lat. TRANSENNA alla luce dei continuatori romanzi di *TRANSIENDA*, in Quaderni di semantica, 11 (1990), pp. 159–194.

[41] «Remanente muro qui est retro ipsam domum et qui claudit latrinam remanente muro qui est retro ipsam domum et qui claudit latrinam sive trexendam»: Sabina Dellacasa (ed.), *I Libri Iurium della Repubblica di Genova. Fonti per la storia della Liguria* (Genova, 1998), vol. I/4, p. 374, and again p. 375.

[42] Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei*, XVIII, 17.

[43] «Onde si legge nelle cronache che al tempo di papa Leone, nelle terre di Roma furono due albergatrici, che dando agli uomini certo cacio incantato, gli facevano diventare somieri. E nelle Vite dei Santi Padri si legge che fu menata a un santo padre de' parenti una fanciulla ch'era diventata una cavalla. E' libri de' poeti tutti son pieni di cotali trasformazioni; come mostra il libro *Metamorfoseos* d'Ovidio e quello d'Apulegio Platonico dell'*Asino d'Oro*. E tutte queste cose, come pruova santo Agostino nel libro della Città di Dio, non furono secondo verità, ma così parevano, facendo il diavolo ludificazione e fascinazione, cioè con inganno»: Passavanti, *Lo specchio*, p. 305.

[44] «Sogliono vantare certi di questi malefici di potere mutare le menti, e di trasformare una cosa in un'altra, come sarebbe di fare d'un uomo o d'una femmina, una bestia od un

These fourteenth-century sources show how, across Italy, classical literature was frequently mentioned when witches' powers were involved. In theological discourse, they are treated as fables from the ancient poets, but it is also argued that it is the power of the devil that allows these illusory transformations to seem real, and this creates a link between the ancient stories and the new ones—a link surely strengthened by the widespread beliefs about witchcraft and related practices in oral traditions.

Dames and *Estries*

Way before Jacopo Passavanti mentioned Apuleius explicitly, his *Metamorphoses* were already known to many intellectuals and writers. It was previously thought to have become known again in the late thirteenth century thanks to a Monte Cassino manuscript, but it is probable that there were already copies of the *Metamorphoses* in existence during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which have not survived the passage of time. There is no reason to suppose that these additional copies were confined to Monte Cassino; in fact, they assuredly influenced the twelfth-century French romances.[45]

The domain of fictional literature is stimulating because the genre is naturally less constrained by religious concerns about fabulous accounts and beliefs, and the fact that Latin was not usually the chosen language lends these writings a less official, more fun-oriented air. But there are exceptions to this rule, and the case of the *Dolopathos* is a relevant one, here. It is part of a vast literary tradition called 'of the Seven Sages', presumably arriving from India, and documented in both Eastern and Western texts. In Europe, the Latin *Dolopathos* is the earliest, belonging to the period between 1184 and 1212, but it was hastily translated into many vernacular languages, which saw the introduction of variations. The author is a monk, Jean, of the Cistercian abbey of Haute-Seille, not far from Nancy. The 'Seven Sages' part consists of several tales, which

uccello, e di creare cose nuove, come favolegiando scrivono i Poeti» : Ibidem. The story of the girl changed into a horse is taken from the legend of Saint Macharius.

[45] Julia Haig Gaisser, *The Fortunes of Apuleius and the Golden Ass* (Princeton, 2008); Robert H. F. Carver, *The Protean Ass: The 'Metamorphoses' of Apuleius from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 71–107, with slightly different chronologies.

are the common denominator, but which may vary in number according to the version. It provides the frame story of a young prince falsely accused by his stepmother of unwanted sexual attentions, while in reality it was the other way around. The father condemns his son to death, but the intervention of seven wise men, narrating several stories (which often emphasise a misogynistic tone), delays the event until the truth is revealed.

The backdrop against which the *Dolopathos* takes place is ancient (and fantastic) Rome, another sign of the twelfth-century's fascination with those times and the City. Dolopathos is the name of an imaginary King of Sicily, living in the times of Emperor Augustus. His son, Lucinius, is educated away from the court, in Rome, by no less than the poet Virgil. The young prince has a vision of his father remarrying and recalling him to court, and this eventually comes true. Virgil divines through astrology what is about to happen and instructs Lucinius to remain silent during his stay. As a result, when the stepmother makes her false accusations, Lucinius is sentenced to death. The execution is halted by the tales of the wise men and finally by the same Virgil, who sets the record straight for his protégé and consequently has the queen burned at the stake. Lucinius will later become king and convert to Christianity.[46] Some of the versions of this tale circulating Europe at this time, such as those in Italy, originated from a common source but bear many differences from the Latin *Dolopathos*.[47] Others descend directly from the *Dolopathos*, such as a French translation in verse attributed to a certain

[46] Johannes de Alta Silva, *Dolopathos sive De rege et septem sapientibus*, ed. Hermann von Oesterley (Strasbourg and London, 1873); *Historia septem sapientum. II. Johannis de Alta Silva Dolopathos sive De rege et septem sapientibus*, ed. Alfons von Hilka (Heidelberg, 1913); a French translation with a critical edition is *Dolopathos ou Le roi et les sept sages*, éd. Yasmina Foehr-Janssens, Emmanuelle Métry (Turnhout, 2000); for an English translation see Johannes de Alta Silva, *Dolopathos, or, The King and the Seven Wise Men*, trans. Brady B. Gilleland (Binghamton, 1981); to track the history of the different literary traditions: Hans R. Runte, J. Keith Wikeley, A. J. Farrell (eds.), *The Seven Sages of Rome and the Book of Sinidibad: An Analitical Bibliography* (New York and London, 1984).

[47] *Il libro dei sette savi di Roma*, ed. Alessandro D'Ancona (Pisa, 1864; repr. 1897 and Bologna, 1979); *Storia di Stefano, figliuolo d'un imperatore di Roma*, *versione in ottava rima del Libro dei sette savi*, ed. Pio Rajna (Bologna, 1880); and John Keith Wikeley, *Italian Versions of the 'Seven sages of Rome': A Guide to Editions and Secondary Literature* (Edmonton, 1991).

Herbert, which also adds some variations.[48] Jean of Haute-Seille's style reveals a very good knowledge of Latin and classical sources, but, like Magister Gregorius, he is evidently ignorant of the story of the empire and the *Urbe* itself, and of Italy more generally. For instance, Virgil is correctly said to be from Mantua, but the town is relocated to Sicily. It is only such a perfect admixture of knowledge of the classical tradition and an actual distance from the culture that generated it, that could produce a text like the *Dolopathos*.

Most relevant to our purpose is the tale told by the sixth of the wise men, which is divided into three parts, the last one being named '*Striges*'. It deals with the story of a thief who runs into different adventures. While he is roaming in the wilderness, he sees a woman and her small child in tears. They have been taken by the *striges* while sleeping in their house and brought to that place, because the monstrous creatures, loving human flesh, want to cook the baby as a ragout and eat him. The generous thief wants to save them and, having spotted a scaffold where three men have been hanged, hurries towards it and cuts down one of the bodies, thinking he can trick the *striges* and feed it to them instead of the baby. He hides with the corpse and waits. When the ominous creatures return, they send one of their numbers to the scaffold, to pick a body part from one of the hanged men to taste and compare to their meal. Having overheard them, the thief sneaks back to the scaffold and take the place of the dead man; the *strix* cuts a piece of flesh from his leg, but somehow the man manages to remain silent. Having tasted his flesh, the one who seems to dominate pronounces it better and fresher than any other meal, and sends the others to take down the rest of the body. The poor thief risks being cut to pieces, but while the *striges* are about their task, they mysteriously disappear, and the man, the woman and the child are safe and free.

The source of this quite confusing tale is unknown, so we have nothing to corroborate the account, whose characters and names warrant an analysis. The creatures are called *striges* according to the classical, not medieval form *strigae*; the definition is interchangeable with *lamiae*, which is also frequently used by the author. They are called monsters

[48] *Li romans de Dolopathos, publié pour la première fois en entier d'après les deux manuscrits de la Bibliothèque impériale*, eds. M. Charles Brunet, Anatole de Montaiglon (Paris, 1856); Herbert, *Le roman de Dolopathos. Édition du manuscrit H 436 de la Bibliothèque de l'École de médecine de Montpellier*, ed. Jean-Luc Leclanche (Paris, 1997), 3 vols.

(*monstra*) and are fierce cannibals, but Jean does not describe their appearance. As mentioned, they are led by an individual, a 'princeps lamiarum'; such a hierarchy never appears in the classical Latin sources, and is perhaps taken from other kinds of account, such as those of Domina Abundantia. Herbert, the French translator, provides a few more interesting details. He calls them *estries*, literally translating the original, but avoids rendering *lamiae* with a correspondent word, maybe for the lack of one. The princess of the hoard, though, is explicitly turned into one of the *bonae res*: 'La plus grand d'elles estoit dame / Celle appelait la bone fame' ('The most important among them was a dame, called good fame').[49] Further, he defines one of them as 'vielle pautonière', an 'old prostitute', and names them collectively as 'malvais esperits' ('evil spirits').[50] Jean of Haute-Seille wrote for a public able to appreciate his difficult Latin, so he probably had no need of excessive detail to describe his *striges*—his readers, he could safely assume, would be well versed in classical culture. By comparison, Herbert adopted a cumulative method: they are *estries*, *bonae res*, evil spirits and old prostitutes, all at the same time.

The literature composed in French contains two terms of particular interest, here: one is *estrie*, coming of course from *strix*; the other, destined to endure, is *sorcière*, which comes from Middle Latin *sortiaria*, in turn deriving from classical Latin *sors/sortis*: little wooden tablets used for divination. Originally, the word kept its connection to divination, only starting to take on the modern meaning of *malefica* between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[51] In the literary domain, we find both, but they are not used interchangeably.

A main use for *estrie* is as a derogative for ugly, old, wicked women, as, for example, in the French chivalric romance *Galeran de Bretagne*, attributed with uncertainty to Jean Renart, and composed between the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century. Here, a character named Madame Gente is called *estrie*, because she is an appalling mother who is about to abandon her daughter: 'Dont la doit l'en appeler monstre, / Car elle pert le nom de mere / Quant el porte

[49] Ibidem, vv. 8747–8748. 'Fame' could mean 'well-known', but Herbert might also be playing with ambiguity, translating 'bonae res' with 'bone fame' (for 'bonnes femmes').

[50] Ibidem, vv. 8658–8659.

[51] Robert-Léon Wagner, *Sorcier et Magicien. Contribution à l'histoire du vocabulaire de la magie* (Paris, 1949).

mamelle amere / Et devient marrastre et estrie' ('It is for that we ought to call her monster, because she loses the right to the name of mother, when she bears a bitter breast, and becomes an evil stepmother and a witch').[52] Similarly, in the *Miracles de la Sainte Vierge* of Gautier de Coincy (1177–1233ca), both *estrie* and *fée* are used in a polemic against women, in the case of the former with the hideousness that comes from old age and a mischievous life: 'Tele est hideuse comme estrie / Telle est vielle, noire et restrie' ('She is hideous as a witch / She is old, black and withered').[53]

The use of 'witch' as a metaphor for the old and evil is only one of many. Other authors, like the clerics and preachers whose works we have seen before, link *estries* to the women of the *Canon Episcopi* and to Lady Abundance. Such is the case in Jean de Meung's continuation of the *Romance of the Rose*:

> Many people, in their folly, think themselves sorcerers [*estries*] by night wandering with Lady Abundance. And they say that in the whole world every third child born is of such disposition that three times a week he goes just as destiny leads him; that such people push into all houses; that they fear neither keys nor bars, but enter by cracks, cat-hatches, and crevices; that their souls leave their bodies and go with good ladies into strange places and through houses; and they prove it with such reasoning: the different things seen have not come in their beds, but through their souls, which labor and go running about thus through the world; and they make people believe that, as long as they are on such a journey, their souls could never enter their bodies if anyone had overturned them. But this idea is a horrible folly and something not possible, for the human body is a dead thing as soon as it does not carry its soul; thus, it is certain that those who follow this sort of journey three times a week, die three times and revive three times in the same week. And if it is as we have said, then the disciples of such a convent come back to life very often.[54]

[52] Marion Vuagnoux-Uhlig, *Le Couple en herbe 'Galeran de Bretagne' et 'L'Escoufle' à la lumière du roman idyllique médiéval* (Paris, 2009), p. 218; Renaut, *Galeran de Bretagne. Édition bilingue*, ed. Jean Dufournet (Paris, 2009), vv. 584–587.

[53] Gautier de Coincy, *Miracles de la Sainte Vierge*, ed. M. Poquet (Paris, 1857), p. 471.

[54] Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. E. Langlois (Paris, 1922), pp. 229–230. The translation is taken from *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Charles Dahlberg (Princeton, 1971), pp. 305–306.

Aside from the scorn cast by the author on these beliefs, his description contains some details of a certain interest, not least concerning the third-born—albeit that the passage shows a certain preoccupation with three, especially at the end. The triple repetition has a special meaning in the Bible: three travellers visit Abraham to announce the birth of his son; three witnesses count for attesting the truth in a judgement; the Resurrection happens after three days. Also, 'three' stands for the Passion, the Death and the Resurrection of Christ, and there are three Apostles (Peter, James and John) whom Jesus calls to share particularly significant moments of his life, namely the Transfiguration and the Agony in Gethsemane.

In the centuries in question, the word *estrie* seems more fitted to the domain of female ugliness, wickedness or foolishness. When the French poets want to describe a powerful magician, they prefer to speak of *sorcières*. Here, again, some examples taken from the literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries demonstrate the vast influence of classical Latin magic motifs, and particularly of female figures like Circe and Medea. The *Roman d'Enéas*, composed around 1160, is inspired by Virgil's *Aeneid*. In it, Dido consults a woman capable of powerful magic, who is modelled by the French 'translator' on a variety of literary female magicians. There are hints of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and its portrait of Medea, and of Lucan's Erichto. This *sorcière* can turn back the constellations, eclipse the sun, and bring a dead man back to life.

In Chrétien de Troyes' *Cliges* (1176), there is a nurse called, significantly, Thessala, who compares her own powers to those of Medea. In *Amadas et Ydoine* (ca. 1190–1220), there are 'Trois sorcières' who can resuscitate the dead and dominate the elements, making the waves roll in the wrong direction. Like Circe, they can turn men into animals (including asses, reminding us of Apuleius and his Lucius), or make them fall asleep for as long as they want, and control their dreams.[55]

By the beginning of the fourteenth century, the increasing interest in magic extended well beyond the literary domain, even if such writings could still offer some surprises. The long romance *Perceforest* is a good example. Presumably written around 1340, the romance was heavily reworked more than a century later in Burgundy, under Philip the Good, to the point that some do not believe in the existence of a previous

[55] Francis Gingras, Préhistoire de la sorcière d'après quelques récits français des XIIe et XIIIe siècles, *Florilegium*, 18, 1 (2001), pp. 31–50.

version.[56] The author of *Perceforest* draws on many sources—including Alexander romances, Roman and medieval stories and oral traditions—to present a prehistory of King Arthur's adventures, beginning with the arrival on the Island of Alexander the Great and his follower Perceforest, Arthur's Greek ancestor. Magic has a central role in the plot, and there is one remarkable episode which might contain a direct reflection of the 'Vauderie d'Arras', and is certainly one of the first accounts of a Sabbath. The reworked version we know is from 1459, when the witch-hunt in Arras had already begun, at least according to recent studies, and the idea of the night congregation was well developed.[57] The witches are represented as old women, ugly and bearded, who fly on sticks and little saddles, met by the hero, Estonné, who is riding a devil, Zéphir, turned into a horse. The tone of the scene is comical, and it was probably meant as a parody of the growing beliefs about witchcraft.[58]

Magic in the City

At the turn of the fourteenth century, it is Italian literature which best reflects the growing interest in the classical world. This is especially—but not exclusively—true among the laics and in the urban context provided by both the courtly *Signorie* of the North and North-East, and the few remaining *Communes*, such as Florence and other towns in Tuscany. But neither laics nor clerics were yet engaged in the wholesale rethinking of the ancient Latin sources; that would not happen until the fifteenth century. Rather, the prevailing approach at this time was to mix many motifs, from a variety of places and times, just as we have seen was done in the French literature.

The 'Italian' texts I will examine here mostly come, in reality, from the central part of Italy, where writings of different kinds (novels, sermons, chronicles) were flourishing, written both in Latin and in vernacular languages. It is quite accurate to say that, from early on, Italian humanists were influenced by classical culture: from the very beginning

[56] A detailed discussion of the source and the years of its composition is in *Le roman de Perceforest. Première partie*, ed. Jane H. M. Taylor (Genève, 1979), pp. XXXI–XXXIV.

[57] Franck Mercier et Martine Ostorero, *L'énigme de la Vauderie de Lyon. Enquête sur l'essor de la chasse aux sorcières entre France et Empire (1430–1480)* (Florence, 2015).

[58] See also Christine Ferlampin, Le sabbat de vieilles barbues dans Perceforest, *Le Moyen Âge*, 99 (1993), pp. 471–504.

of the fourteenth century, a first-hand knowledge of classical sources—including many texts involving stories of witchcraft, which would later become very significant—started to become widespread among the elites. In this early humanist culture, Apuleius' opus was already well-known. For example, when, around 1319, the Paduan poet Albertino Mussato (author of the famous *Ecerinis*, inspired by Seneca) fell ill in Florence, he narrated his experience as if it were a dream imbibed from Apuleius' memories. Mussato is delirious with fever and has people helping him, massaging and rubbing his body with ointments; at a certain point he experiences a metamorphosis (which is probably a fever dream; the text where this episode is inserted is indeed called *Somnium*) that is evidently modelled on the metamorphosis of Pamphile into a *bubo*. In Apuleius' tale, Pamphile anoints herself and plumage appears, along with wing-feathers; her nails curve and harden, and she flies away. Was Mussato relating a dream informed precisely by Apuleius? Or is it rather that the two tales share a common, folkloric element? Apuleius is certainly a source, because the details are far too similar for it to be otherwise: the growth of feathers and claws, but also the ointment, central in Pamphile's transformation, that here can be both healing and the cause of the shapeshifting. But this is not to say that a folkloric inspiration should be entirely ruled out: as I have alluded to previously, the tale is also rooted in common beliefs, as will become clearer when we turn to witnesses from subsequent centuries.[59]

The '*streghe*' that we may encounter in laic texts of the fourteenth century are not women who change into monsters; rather, as in the French counterparts explored above, the word is mainly used figuratively to symbolise a feminine vice. Indeed, this is how Dante uses the term. In Purgatory, he is told by Virgil: '"Vedesti", disse, "quell'antica Strega / che sola sovr'a noi omai si piagne; / vedesti come l'uom da lei si slega"' ('"Have you seen that old witch", he said, "that stands alone and cries over us? Can you see how man got free of her bonds?"').[60] This Canto opens with the siren who enchanted Ulysses appearing to the poet as a monstrous creature: 'femmina balba, ne li occhi guercia, e sovra i piè distorta, con le man monche, e di colore scialba' ('a stuttering woman, with

[59] Albertino Mussato, *Écérinide. Épîtres métriques sur la poésie. Songe*, ed. Jean-Frédéric Chevalier (Paris, 2000), pp. 50–61.

[60] Purg, XIX, 58–60.

eyes aslant, distorted feet, hands maimed, and colour pale').[61] It seems here that these 'streghe' are a metaphor for luxury—wherein beauty is only apparent, and coarseness well-hidden—which men must avoid if they are to ascend to Paradise. Nonetheless, the commentary on the *Commedia* written by Francesco Buti (near Pisa), at the end of the century is clear about the meaning of the word:

> E chiamala strega, imperocchè li volgari dicono, che le streghe sono femmine, che sì trasmutano in forma d'animali, e succiano lo sangue a' fanciulli, e, secondo alquanti, se li mangiano, e poi gli rifanno.
>
> (He called her *strega* because people say *streghe* are women who turn themselves into animals and suck the blood of children; according to some, they eat them and then make them again).[62]

Buti's definition includes the ideas of the shapeshifting witch, of the bloodsucker, and of the cannibal that substitutes the baby with a puppet or, perhaps, another child, as in stories of changelings. These are beliefs that Buti attributes to the general populace, not to the classically-educated elites.

Inspired by Dante, Fazio degli Uberti wrote his *Dittamondo* between 1346 and 1367, though it would remain unfinished. The 'femmina balba' of the *Commedia* informs the 'strega' whom Uberti encounters, described as an old woman with a pale and lifeless face, twisted legs, trembling, who wishes to convince the poet to forswear his good intentions.[63]

The Florentine merchant and writer Franco Sacchetti's first composition, *La battaglia delle belle donne di Firenze con le vecchie* (*The battle between the beautiful women and the old ones*, 1354), is a short poem with comic intent, in which the word *strega* appears five times, always denoting old women and their lewdness. The composition, as simple as it is, is full of references to Roman goddesses and Latin *topoi*. The *streghe* are associated with the verb *stridere*, here, as they are in the ancient

[61] Ibidem, 7–9.

[62] *Commento di Francesco da Buti sopra la Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri*, ed. Crescentino Giannini (Pisa, 1858–1862), vol. 2, pp. 449–450.

[63] Fazio degli Uberti, *Il Dittamondo*, I, 4 in *Il Dittamondo e le rime*, ed. Giuseppe Corsi (Bari, 1952), vol. 1, p. 12.

tradition that was certainly an inspiration for Sacchetti's tirade against the *vetulae*.[64]

The ugliness of the *streghe* is opposed to the beauty of the *lamie* or *lammie*: a word that was sometimes (for example, as we have seen, in the *Dolophatos*) interchangeable with *striges*, but which in the Italian tradition of the fourteenth century came to denote an otherworldly creature of (at least apparent) splendour. Such is the case in Boccacio's *Decameron*, in which the author mentions a young woman more beautiful than a *lammia*.[65]

Boccaccio is, of course, crucial when approaching the Italian culture of humanism. But he is also a unique personality whose knowledge of classical culture and French chivalric romances gave life to some of the most complex work of art of late medieval times. Indeed, it has been noted that 'the *Decameron* not only establishes a clear line of evolution between late classical thought and modern humanism, but also stands as the first coherent expression of moral principles that scholarship has come to associate with the Renaissance'.[66] Already in his juvenile *Filocolo*, Boccaccio's interest in magic spurred him to produce a portrait of a wizard. The creation was informed by various classical sources and demonstrates a knowledge that the author will again draw on more than a decade later in the *Decameron*. In the latter, a 'nigromante' is called upon to produce a winter garden for a lady. Boccacio's description of the figure is quick, with just a few details that associate him with Greek magic, whereas in the *Filocolo* the same magical act is described with many more specifics.[67] In the earlier text, the figure is not called a 'nigromante' but is, in fact, closer to a priest; he comes from Thebes and has passed through Thessaly, hence calling to mind Hecate and Ceres.[68] The ritual he follows to produce the magical garden is, in fact, modelled quite directly on Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, specifically on the rite celebrated by Medea to

[64] Franco Sacchetti, *La battaglia delle belle donne, le sposizioni di vangeli, le lettere*, ed. Alberto Chiari (Bari, 1938).

[65] «Egli è una giovane qua giù, che è più bella che una lammia»: Boccaccio, *Decameron*, IX, 5.

[66] Michaela Paasche Grudin, Robert Grudin, *Boccaccio's Decameron and the Ciceronian Renaissance* (London and New York, 2012).

[67] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Filocolo*, IV, 31, in *Opere minori in volgare*, ed. Mario Marti (Milano, 1969), pp. 474–486, 478–482.

[68] Ibidem, pp. 481–482.

rejuvenate Jason.[69] Here it is meant to rejuvenate nature, with no obscure consequences, and is performed by a man instead of a woman.[70]

In the *Decameron*, alongside the many classical references, Boccaccio also takes plenty of motifs from chivalric literature, and from the religious *exempla*, adapting them for Italian taste. For instance, the *Decameron* story of Father Gianni, ordered by his neighbour Pietro to cast a spell in order to turn his wife into a mare, may be inspired by the tale of a wife changed into a mare found in the *Life* of Saint Macharius. In Boccaccio's version, the smart priest uses a fake and very trivial spell to take advantage of the woman and mock the stupidity of her husband.[71]

The most interesting tale, for us, is VIII, 9:

> Bruno and Buffalmacco prevail upon Master Simone, a physician, to betake him by night to a certain place, there to be enrolled in a company that go the course. Buffalmacco throws him into a foul ditch, and there they leave him.[72]

[69] The knowledge of Ovid and the vulgarisation of his works in the Late Middle Ages are very well studied; in particular, the analysis of the fortune of the *Metamorphoses* was the object of the careful work of Bodo Guthmüller, *Ovidio Metamorphoseos vulgare. Formen und Funktionen der volkssprachlichen Wiedergabe klassischer Dichtung in der italianischen Renaissance* (Boppard am Rhein, 1981) (pp. 27–55 are devoted to the fourteenth century); see also Idem, *Mito, poesia, arte. Saggi sulla tradizione ovidiana nel Rinascimento* (Roma, 1997).

[70] «Hinc procul Aesoniden, procul hinc iubet ire ministros, / et monet arcanis oculos removere profanos. / Diffugiunt iussi: sparsis Medea capillis / Bacchantum ritu flagrantes circuit aras; / Multifidasque faces in fossa sanguinis atra / tinguit, et infectas geminis accendit in aris; / terque senem flamma, ter aqua, ter sulfure, lustrat. / Interea validum posito medicamen aheno / fervet, et exultat, spumisque tumentibus albet. / Illic Haemonia radices valle resectas, / seminaque, floresque, et succos incoquit acres: / adiicit extremo lapides Oriente petitos, / et, quas Oceani refluum mare lavit, arenas: / addit et exceptas luna pernocte pruinas, / et strigis infames ipsis cum carnibus alas, / inque virum soliti vultus mutare ferinos / ambigui prosecta lupi: nec defuit illis / squamea Cinyphii tenuis membrana chelydri, / vivacisque iecur cervi: quibus insuper addit / ora caputque novem cornicis saecula passae. / His et mille aliis postquam sine nomine rebus / propositum instruxit mortali barbara maius, / arenti ramo iampridem mitis olivae / omnia confudit, summisque immiscuit ima. / Ecce vetus calido versatus stipes aheno / fit viridis primo nec longo tempore frondes / induit, et subito gravidis oneratur olivis»: Ovid, *Metamorphoseon,* VII, 255–281.

[71] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, IX, 10.

[72] «Maestro Simone medico, da Bruno e da Buffalmacco, per esser fatto d'una brigata che va in corso, fatto andar di notte in alcun luogo, è da Buffalmacco gittato in una fossa di bruttura e lasciatovi»; ibidem, IX, 8. For the English translations see the *Decameron Web*, a project of the Italian Studies Department's Virtual Humanities Lab at Brown University, RI: http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/.

The plot sees the pair of tricksters involve a very naïve physician in a prank whereby they induce him to think they are part of a brigade that partakes of banquets and parties with imaginary Kings and Queens, and where all manner of richness flows. To the curious Master Simone, they explain that,

> Now this in the vulgar we call going the course, because, as the corsairs prey upon all the world, so do we; albeit with this difference, that, whereas they never restore their spoil, we do so as soon as we have done with it.[73]

Simone hosts Bruno and Buffalmacco for many meals, on the promise of being brought along with them to a gathering. In the end, he is told to wait in Santa Maria Novella:

> So you will wait there, until one, whom we shall send, comes for you: who, that you may know exactly what you have to expect, will be a beast black and horned, of no great size; and he will go snorting and bounding about the piazza in front of you, with intent to terrify you; but, when he perceives that you are not afraid, he will draw nigh you quietly, and when he is close by you, then get you down from the tomb, fearing nothing; and, minding you neither of God nor of the saints, mount him, and when you are well set on his back, then fold your arms upon your breast, as in submission, and touch him no more. Then, going gently, he will bear you to us; but once mind you of God, or the saints, or give way to fear, and I warn you, he might give you a fall.[74]

It is the bigger of the two, Buffalmacco, who dresses up for the hoax and who finally tosses poor Master Simone into a ditch.

The central motif of the story is the 'course'. 'Corso' translates the Latin *cursus*, a term which, in Italian, was more commonly used to refer to pirates ('corsari'), and 'andare in corso' meant to search for prey.

[73] «E questa cosa chiamiam noi vulgarmente l'andare in corso; per ciò che sì come i corsari tolgono la roba d'ogn'uomo, e così facciam noi; se non che di tanto siam differenti da loro, che eglino mai non la rendono, e noi la rendiamo come adoperata l'abbiamo»: Boccaccio, *Decameron*, IX, 8.

[74] «E quivi v'aspettate tanto, che per voi venga colui che noi manderemo. E acciò che voi siate d'ogni cosa informato, egli verrà per voi una bestia nera e cornuta, non molto grande, e andrà faccendo per la piazza dinanzi da voi un gran sufolare e un gran saltare per ispaventarvi; ma poi, quando vedrà che voi non vi spaventiate, ella vi s'accosterà

Boccaccio uses a very layered linguistic trick, here, showing how the *cursus* (as it is used in the *Canon Episcopi* or in reference to the *bonae res*) conflates with piracy not only phonically, but also in terms of the actions: if the pirates prey, Bruno and Buffalmacco restore the goods of the house, just like the *bonae res* of the French tradition. It might be that Boccaccio knew the exemplum of Stephen of Bourbon, in which a man dressed as a *bonae res* enters a house, probably with the same intent of stealing—though there is no way to affirm this with certainty.

The references Boccaccio uses are also evidenced by the flight that Simone is told to undertake upon a black, devilish beast. The idea is well rendered in some manuscripts and incunabula in which the scene is portrayed. One illuminator, Ludovico Ceffini, working in Florence at the beginning of the fifteenth century, prefers to depict Buffalmacco both clearly, with human features, carrying Simone on his back and, in another image, like an animal with horns, but with human hands and feet.[75] Another manuscript, attributed to the French humanist and translator Laurent de Premierfait (died 1418), is dated 1414. Here, Buffalmacco is depicted as a black goat with long horns and no recognisable human traits (Fig. 1).[76] Yet another version, a xylography dated 1492, clearly shows the image of a devil with horns, dressed in a fur.[77] So, if Boccaccio, with his words, downplayed the underlying motif of the demonic flight, his illuminators were generally more explicit, leaving little room for interpretation.

It is germane to return, briefly, to France; not to the courtly literature, but to the urban landscape of Paris. Composed around 1393 by

pianamente; quando accostata vi si sarà, e voi allora senza alcuna paura scendete giù dello avello, e, senza ricordare o Iddio o'santi, vi salite suso, e come suso vi siete acconcio, così, a modo che se steste cortese, vi recate le mani al petto, senza più toccar la bestia. Ella allora soavemente si moverà e recherravverle a noi; ma infino ad ora, se voi ricordaste o Iddio o'santi, o aveste paura, vi dich'io che ella vi potrebbe gittare o percuotere in parte che vi putirebbe»: Ibidem.

[75] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Il Decameron*, par Ludovico Ceffini, Ms. Italien 63, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, 250r, 255v.

[76] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Livre appelé Decameron, aultrement surnommé le Prince Galeot*, par Laurent de Premierfait, Ms. Français 239, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, 236r.

[77] Boccaccio Giovanni, *Decamerone o ver cento novelle*, Incunabolo De Gregori. Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia, 1492).

Cy commence la somme de la leppe nouvelle compte par lanvelet fils de la Vesve Jouvence dont elle est Royne

Medem de florence nomme maistre simo de ville compousa ung ancien pantuel florentino & alez par nuit en leave auengnes enlo en certain lieu et en leur compaignie Leuez mainte noz mengnez a lui fautes / Si fist getter dedens Gnes et ambleres pardonnez et pleniere & ordinere / et fallez fist laisser tout cesse & fez plus riches autonez

Cy apres ensuit au long la conmemoracion de la legende a la leppe nouvelle compuse par lanvelet fils de la vesve Jouvence dont elle est Royne

Pres ce que enfiant Gius carlet les femmes orent parle les deux hommes seriens Spinelotte et ciboule / qui seruoit en enlo leuez femmes comunes La Royne qui seule Seuoit compter la nouvelle et qui ne Gouloit parler tout a Dieux / elle ainsi comenca Mes amonneriez Dames Spinelote Sespoir assez bien la mengnelee a lui faitte par ciboule Et pour tant cellui ne me semble mie effre irreprehensible / ainsi comme pampinee Gouloit monstrer en sa nouvelle Gui pour ce Seuant compter qui Seoit milieu et qui guieit Secretaire en mengnez / Cabon Dieu la treuue / et Spinelotte dautrement qui mua la trompeuse Et pour ce Je entens compter nouvelle de cellui qui la mengnez guise / Confessions enlo qui a lui fiecht la truffe ne font point a blasmer ains sont recommendables et cellui a qui lon fist la truffe fist Gius medem qui de leffende de bouloingne effort Petronne a florence / Lon effion une grebe chaussee Petronna tout conuert de nobles pans Dont ofent les medemes en italie

Cy apres ensuit au long la compte de la leppe nouvelle compuse par lanvelet fils de la vesve Jouvence dont elle est Royne

Chascun jour ainsi comme nous Gyons les enfans de nos citoyens Petronent & leffende de bouloingne les antiques Petronent Sotuent en Secret on en lieu pourquoi Cy Semonnent juues en adueus / & ialmes Petronent maistres en medeme et les autres Petronent notaires habilles a dittez contanlp on autres lettres auliez & commelles enlo come Petronnerent & boulonnoise defens de bouloingne Nobles & Seruiales femmes de nobles femmes et autonez Dantres tres grandes appartenens Et assez nous Cyons chun jour comment lefeut conuenu aux Nobles et autonez Sicenlo Entre nous citoyens Soncanez Petronnans & Boulonnoise Gius appelle maistre simon de ville plus riche & Gieux paternembe que le sieme Petronna nazionez portano Nobles Seruiales Chappon Ho nomable Sotuen en me Sale

◀ **Fig. 1** Mastro Simone rides on Buffalmacco, who is disguised as a black goat with long horns: *Livre appelé Decameron, aultrement surnommé le Prince Galeot*, Ms. Français 239, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, 236r

an anonymous 'bourgeois parisien nouvellement marié' ('newly-married Parisian bourgeoise'), *Le Ménagier de Paris* is half treatise on morals and manners, and half manual on family and kitchen life. Among the many stories, one in particular stands out: the author wants to ascertain who is more obedient, monks or wives, and plans an experiment. The abbot will tell each monk to leave a whip hanging by his bed and the door open every night, so that he can come in and punish him whenever he wants; the wives are to leave a broomstick behind their doors for the same purpose. After eight nights, abbot and husbands will reveal who most faithfully obeyed. While all the monks did what asked, the wives all protested, each with a different reason. One objects that 'qu'elle n'estoit venue ne yssue d'enchanteurs ne de sorciers, et qu'elle ne savoit jouer des basteaulx de nuit, ne des balais' ('she was not the daughter of an enchanter and a sorceress, and that she did not play with cans and broomsticks at night').[78] Both the cans (like the one mentioned in the account from Rudolf von Schlettstadt previously discussed) and the broomsticks seem to be already strictly associated with the idea of witches' night flights—otherwise the episode would not resonate with its readers. Almost fifty years later, *Le Champion des Dames* (1441) of Martin Le Franc depict witches flying upon broomsticks; a further sign of the close relationship between oral lore and writings, and also between very geographically separate areas of Europe.

[78] *Le Ménagier de Paris. Traité de morale et d'économie domestique, composé en 1393 par un bourgeois parisien*, I, 6, 2 vols., ed. Jérôme Pichon (Paris, 1846), vol. 1, p. 147. For a modern French translation and a good critical assessment, see *Le Mesnagier de Paris*, eds. Georgina E. Brereton, Janet M. Ferrier, trans. Karin Ueltschi (Paris, 1994); an English translation: *The Good Wife's Guide: Le Ménagier de Paris: A Medieval Household Book*, eds. Gina L. Greco, Christine M. Rose (Ithaca, NY, 2009).

‘Let’s Send Up Some Incense to the Lord!’

A Renaissance for the Church

The fourteenth century closed having accumulated heavy burdens. Economic and financial crises bit hard in the first half of the century, worsened by wars and dire weather conditions. The Black Death was ravaging almost every corner of Europe and the Mediterranean, accompanied in Italy by a sequence of terrible earthquakes. As well as these deep effects on European society, its institutions, too, were shaken, particularly the Church and the Papacy: the schism that followed the disagreement between Philippe IV of France and Boniface VIII, and the subsequent residency in Avignon, ended only with the Councils of Constance (1414–1418) and Basel (1431–1449). This series of events is unanimously recognised as a turning point for the history of witch-hunting. As Richard Kieckhefer has pointed out:

> If we need to locate a spark [of the witch-hunts], at least one source is clear: the vigourous drive for reform of the Church in head and members, found throughout Western Christendom in the wake of the Council of Constance.[1]

[1] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 199–200.

M. Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92078-8_6

The theologians and preachers of the Council who worked for this reform had to tackle many issues which operated well beyond, and at a deeper level than the schism itself—starting with the divisions inside the Church. In Italy, particular attention was necessarily turned on the Franciscan Order, which had divided into different branches, with each labelling the others heretical; but heterodox movements were everywhere, fuelled by the discontent around the Church and by social problems which were often expressed and manifested in religious, rather than political, terms. The Council adopted a hard stance against heresy, but, as is well known, along with the inquisition against heretics came a renewed preoccupation with ceremonial magic and popular unorthodox beliefs. In the meanwhile, as if to underline the state of the Church at the time, when, on 8 January 1438, Pope Eugene IV ordered the Council to move to Ferrara, the Fathers at Basel declared him a heretic. In November 1439, they elected an Antipope, Felix V. The rivalry between these two stood until the Emperor, Frederick III, commanded the city of Basel to expel the Council.

It moved to Lausanne before disbanding two years later. In this period, however, the meetings had served to gather many clerics from around Europe to discuss the Hussite war, heresy, the conciliarist doctrine and, of course, reunification with the Eastern Church as a necessary step in aiding Constantinople against the Turks—an issue which became yet more relevant when the Council moved to Italy. Even if it was never the main issue, the persecution of witches and wizards, now considered heretics, found a new, international platform where doctrines could be discussed. Michael Bailey aptly observes that:

> The Dominican observant leader Johannes Mulberg, for example, played a key role in instigating the persecutions of beguines in Basel in the early fifteenth century, driven mainly by his commitment to reform and by his conviction that the lay religious mode of life represented a dangerous aberration and needed to be eliminated. At nearly the same time, the fiery Dominican preacher and reformer Vincent Ferrer stirred fears that contributed to rising accusations of sorcery as he passed through Dauphiné, and he delivered a series of sermons in the city of Fribourg, directed initially against Waldensian heretics but later shifting into charges of witchcraft. Only slightly later in Italy the Franciscan popular reformer Bernardino of Siena, another incendiary preacher, helped trigger waves of persecutions and trials for sorcery and witchcraft in Rome and Todi by his impassionated

> attacks on immorality and sin. The evidence seems clear. Wherever such reformers went, bonfires and burned flesh appeared in their wake.[2]

Bernardino of Siena and his branch of the Franciscan order, the Observance, were indeed a leading force of reform. This was particularly needed, not least because the Mendicant orders had been the most affected by the spiritual crisis. During the thirteenth century, most of them had sided with the Papacy against Frederick II, riding the prophetical wave that interpreted Joachimite and pseudo-Joachimite writings. Towards the end of the Duecento, and in the following century, the division between the Conventuals and the Spirituals deepened once again. The latter sided with the Emperor Louis the Bavarian against Pope John XXII, and a papal bull was issued, *Quum inter nonnullos* (1323), which in order to diminish the Order declared as 'erroneous and heretical' the doctrine that Christ and his apostles had held no possessions—a decision that could not be accepted even by the Minister General Michele of Cesena. These Spirituals, called *fraticelli*, had been declared heretics in 1296 by Boniface VIII and were persecuted by Conventuals belonging to their same Order.

The Order continued to split into many separate branches, among these being the Observance, a rigourist movement that wanted to go back to their foundations, merging the practice of poverty with obedience to the papacy. Initiated around 1368 by Paolo Trinci of Foligno, the movement, without declarations and affirmations of principle, proposed to observe the Franciscan rule in all its rigour, especially in regard to poverty, interpreting the various pontifical rules in the strictest way possible and showing a strong propensity for the hermit's life. In 1388, the movement was definitively legitimated. Eight years before, Bernardino was born in Massa Marittima to the affluent family Albizzeschi. Soon orphaned, he lived and studied in Siena, and in 1402 entered the Franciscan Observance, which largely owes to him its flowering and leadership in the reform of the Church.

The fame of Bernardino of Siena's preaching and many writings, and the large following he was able to acquire were decisive for his

[2] Michael D. Bailey, *Battling Demons: Witchcraft, Heresy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park, PA, 2003), p. 121. An introduction to the subject is in *A Companion to Observant Reform in the Late Middle Ages and Beyond*, eds. James D. Mixson, Bert Roest (Leiden, 2015).

canonisation in 1450, only six years after his death—that such a procedure was completely unheard of in these times testifies to just how widely celebrated he and his achievements were. The preaching of the friars of the Observance covered the widest possible range of topics: economy, the civil wars that plagued Italian cities, the crusade, sexual misconduct and, of course, heresy and sorcery. The preachers were innovators in both the content and language of their sermons, the liveliness of which certainly bolstered their success. One thing to underline is the impact they had on the humanistic cultural scene, which was drawn to the strong will of reform and renovation that the Observant incarnated. Their discourse was not perceived as retrograde. It is true that, in Italy and beyond, there was a Renaissance that nursed a love for astrology and alchemy, but since the fourteenth century, humanists like Coluccio Salutati had strongly criticised this tendency, arguing for the centrality of the free will and developing the discourse of Saint Thomas against astrology.[3]

In the minds of many among their contemporaries, Bernardino of Siena and the others were part of the same trend of thought. If we look at the biographies that were written right after the death of the Albizzeschi, to promote (before) or to celebrate (after) his canonisation, it is easy to see that, apart from those written by members of the same Observance, like Giovanni of Capestrano, the authors were most often lay humanists. Barnaba Pannilini of Siena was the first, in 1445. He had been personally acquainted with Bernardino and was a distant relative of Enea Silvio Piccolomini, having married Taddea, the daughter of Andrea di Francesco Petrucci and a Forteguerri, the maternal line of Pius II. Barnaba corresponded with Leonardo Bruni, Francesco Filelfo, Agostino Dati and other humanists of his time. His appreciation of Bernardino is related mostly to the preachers' work towards brokering conciliation between the city factions, but the fight against popular beliefs that were perceived as *vanae observationes* also has a central role in his account. This latter cause could equally find a full justification in classical literature, with Cicero, a model for many, similarly despising the 'superstitions' of his own time. Leonardo Benvoglienti, a politician who held a high role in Siena, supported the canonisation of Bernardino, writing in 1446 a detailed chronicle of Bernardino's early life as a preacher, which

[3] S. Th., *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 95, a. 5.

in turn served as the basis for Giovanni of Capestrano's *Life*. After 1450, the *Lives* poured in from authors outside of Siena: Maffeo Vegio was a cleric and a humanist from Lodi, who worked in Rome and wrote the first known study of Christian archaeology, *De rebus antiquis memorabilibus basilicae S. Petri Romae*; Vespasiano da Bisticci was a librarian in Florence, while Giannozzo Manetti, of a family of wealthy merchants, was a diplomat and an intellectual who studied Latin, Greek and Hebrew. Manetti, too, was passionate about Cicero and an advocate of a new, more philological translation of the Bible.[4]

The biographies of Bernardino show the centrality of his experience to the eyes of many humanists, but also that his rise to fame was not without its troubles.[5] His first attempts at preaching were sometimes met with scorn—the less-than-benevolent testimony of the Augustinian monk Andrea Biglia reports this happening in Padua (1413 and 1416) and Mantua (1416)—but by the end of the decade things had started to improve for Bernardino.[6] By this point, however, a new wave of polemics against the friar was mounting, directed against his preaching of the devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus, symbolised by the monogram HIS (the first three letters of the name of Jesus in Greek), stylised in Gothic characters on a blazing sun. Of course, one can suppose there were other motivations, such as envy and rivalry, fuelling these critics, who were mostly from the Augustinian and Dominican Orders.[7] The accusations hit him in 1424. In January of that year, Bernardino of Siena had preached in Bologna, in San Petronio, advocating the replacement of the Augustinian Christopher. The latter, however, had denounced the Franciscan to the Inquisition, accusing him of heresy for having propagated the worship of the Name of Jesus. Bernardino himself was a polemicist: he had harshly attacked the Dominican Manfredo da Vercelli for the apocalyptic tone of his preaching. Soon, the weight of the

[4] Stefano Ugo Baldassarri (ed.), *Dignitas et excellentia hominis. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi su Giannozzo Manetti* (Firenze, 2008).

[5] Marina Montesano, La memoria dell'esperienza di Bernardino da Siena nell'agiografia del XV secolo, *Hagiographica*, 1 (1994), pp. 271–286.

[6] Baudouin de Gaiffier, Le mémoire d'André Biglia sur la predication de s. Bernardin de Sienne, *Analecta Bollandiana*, 53 (1935), pp. 314–358.

[7] Etienne Longpré, S. Bernardin de Sienne et le Nom de Yesus, *Archivum franciscisca-num historicum*, 28 (1935), pp. 443–476; Ibidem, 29 (1936), pp. 142–168, 443–477; and Ibidem, 30 (1937), pp. 170–192.

polemics combined and resulted in a trial for heresy in front of the Pope, Martin V. The pontiff pronounced a positive verdict on Bernardino's deeds, permitting the latter to keep his monogram, and even consenting to his preaching publicly in Rome, an event which was met with enthusiasm. The preacher made another appearance in Siena the year after, in 1427, giving a detailed account of a trial for witchcraft that was instigated in Rome by his words. At this point, his success was no longer up for debate, and his centrality as a key reformer for a Church and a society in need was firmly established.

Because of his significance in the Franciscan Observance, Bernardino has thus far received the most scholarly attention, both in general and in connection with the persecution of magic and witchcraft. By contrast, other preachers (and sometimes inquisitors) of the same movement and of the same generation (or a few years younger)—such as like Giovanni of Capestrano (1386–1456) and Giacomo della Marca (1393–1476)—produced sermons and writings which have gone largely unexplored in relation to our subject. Similarly, an immensely successful preacher of the second generation of the Observance, Roberto Caracciolo of Lecce (1425–1495), has only been studied partially.[8] While the third generation—that of Bernardino de' Bustis (1450–1513)—has been widely discussed, the impact of the movement, at that point, was more intellectual than popular, lacking preachers who enjoyed the level of success of Bernardino of Siena or Roberto of Lecce.[9] If, by the end of the fifteenth century, the discourse about witchcraft had greatly developed, it is in the earliest generation that we may glimpse a process still in the making, and in which the popularity of the Observants played a key role. For this reason, it is necessary to introduce their writing with a brief technical note.

[8]For instance, in relation to the preaching against Islam and in favour of the crusade, themes commonly found also in Giovanni da Capestrano and Giacomo della Marca: Steven J. McMichael, Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce and his sermons on Muhammad and the Muslims, in *Franciscans and Preaching: Every Miracle from the Beginning of the World Came About Through Words*, ed. Timothy Johnson (Leiden, 2012), pp. 328–352; Fulvia Serpico (ed.), *San Giacomo della Marca e l'altra Europa. Crociata, martirio e predicazione nel Mediterraneo Orientale (secc. XIII–XV)*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di studi (Monteprandone, 24–25 novembre 2006) (Firenze, 2007).

[9]About Bernardino de' Bustis and his entourage, see Fabrizio Conti, *Witchcraft, Superstition, and Observant Franciscan Preachers: Pastoral Approach and Intellectual Debate in Renaissance Milan* (Turnhout, 2015).

There are discrepancies among the writings these friars produced, and this also favours Bernardino of Siena, who presents for us a wider and better-edited range of sources. The fame he acquired means we have the *reportationes* of some of his preachings. The *reportatio* is a technique created in the universities of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, based on a system of abbreviations: while he was preaching, someone took notes of his words, giving a direct impression of his way of talking. Needless to say, the *reportationes* are priceless resources when studying the content and the style of a preacher. The earliest one we have is in Latin, written by a notary, Daniele De Purziliis, who translated the 65 sermons Bernardino preached in Padua in 1423. In the following year, 58 sermons from a cycle held in Santa Croce, Florence, were recorded, adhering to the vernacular used. In 1425, another Florentine *reportatio* of 64 sermons, preached before Lent, was made—as well as two different *reportationes* (one vernacular, one Latin) of the Sienese cycle of 50 sermons. Some traces of his activity in Umbria around the same time also remain, but only through schematic notes taken by Giovanni of Capestrano. Most remarkable is the *reportatio* of the 45 sermons Bernardino preached in his hometown's spectacular Piazza del Campo, the cycle which followed his acquittal in Rome. In these, the preacher is particularly self-assured and eloquent, and the incredible precision of the tachygrapher seems to render every word that was pronounced. Finally, there is a *Seraphim* preached in Padua in 1443, which is important for at least two reasons: it is the latest *reportatio* we have, standing apart from his earlier cycles; and, in relation to our topic, it includes an account, from Bernardino, of the notorious case of the witch whom he himself had indicted in Rome—a subject he had first touched upon when preaching in Siena in 1427. In addition to the *reportationes*, there are many cycles of Latin sermons Bernardino composed and assembled, mostly between 1430 and 1440, all edited, along with some treatises, in the *Opera Omnia*, which has been reprinted many times.

The status of the studies and the editions devoted to Giovanni of Capestrano is markedly different from that of the sources on Bernardino. I have taken into account seven manuscripts that belong to the convent Giovanni founded in his native Capestrano, a little town not far from L'Aquila. The treatises and sermons in these manuscripts are mostly written in his own hand. The most useful is the XVII, which comprises a long treatise, *De poenitentia et confessione*. Some sermons can be dated precisely, such as the 49 he preached in Siena in 1424, found in code

XXXI; for others, a date is more difficult to determine. The entirety of the codes is in a precarious condition and is difficult to read, which might explain, at least partially, the relative lack of interest in them.

Giacomo della Marca's most important cycles of sermons are found in a *Quaresimale* and a *Domenicale*. His *Quaresimale* is still unpublished; the autograph has not been found, and we only have two apograph (i.e. transcript of the original) codes: the Vat.-lat. 7642, considered the most complete and reliable; and the paper code of the Foligno Municipal Library, which contains 103 sermons. The first is probably a complete copy (123 sermons) of the autograph *Quaresimale*, and for this reason, I prefer it over the Folignate code. The *Domenicale* includes 99 sermons (two for every Sunday from the first of Advent to the twenty-fourth after Pentecost) published according to the code preserved in the Franciscan library of Falconara Marittima—the most complete, though not an autograph—and compared with code 38 of the Municipal Archives of Monteprandone—which contains the same sermons with different dispositions—and other incomplete codes. All of these codes are apographies; only codices M42, M46, M46bis and M60 of the Municipal Archives of Monteprandone can be recognised as autographs, and in these, only sketches of Sunday sermons are reported. Neither for the *Domenicale* nor for the *Quaresimale* is it possible to provide a date of composition; we only know that the second is earlier than the first, since the preacher during several of the *Dominicale* sermons refers to what has already been said in the *Quaresimale*. If code 7642 actually dates from 1446—a hypothesis based on the reconstruction of some lines erased from a verso page of the apograph, in which this date appears—then we have an indirect indication as to the date of the original.

Roberto Caracciolo is an unusual character: his theatrical antics brought spectacular success, but also attracted many critics, and he was made famous by no other than Erasmus.[10] In 1452, he quit the Observance to join the Conventuals. Only the *reportatio* of the *Quaresimale* he preached in Padua in 1455 has received a critical edition: it contains 49 sermons, one completely devoted to 'superstitions'. Others, in both vernacular and in Latin, are known thanks to

[10]Zelina Zafarana, Caracciolo Roberto (Roberto da Lecce), in *Da Gregorio VII a Bernardino da Siena. Saggi di storia medievale con scritti in ricordo di Zelina Zafarana*, eds. Claudio Leonardi, Enrico Menestò, Roberto Rusconi (Spoleto, 1991), pp. 403–409.

incunabula. Less influential than Bernardino and the other Observants, Caracciolo nonetheless helps us to appreciate the focus on popular beliefs and magical practices so typical of the movement.[11]

The *Barlotto*

The accounts of witchcraft that appear in these Observants' sermons and treatises offer a glimpse of the somehow different way in which accusations were taking form, compared to the better studied early persecutions such as those happening in the Dauphiné. There, as has been previously noted, heresy played a wider role, and the assimilation of sorcery to heresy, or the idea of witchcraft as a new sect, was evidently a main theme. The central and southern regions of Italy show a partially different scenario, albeit that the fight against heresy was an important part of the Observants' activities, especially in the case of Giovanni of Capestrano and Giacomo della Marca, who persecuted the Franciscan *fraticelli*.

Some incidents occurring in Piedmont at the end of the fourteenth century had a notable impact on the narrative of the Observants. Bernardino of Siena refers to the so-called 'barlotto' or 'barilotto' (keg) for the first time during his preaching in Siena in 1427. He is criticising the customs of heretics, when he begins to tell a story:

> There is a place where a certain thing happens, by night, when men and women mix altogether, turning off the light, and then all of them randomly have sex with whom they happen to grab. […] These people are from Piedmont. Five inquisitors went there trying to eradicate this curse, but they have been killed by these wicked people, so that now it is even difficult to find an inquisitor willing to go there. And do you know their name? They are called 'those of the keg', because at a certain time of the year they take a child, and they toss him around among themselves until he dies. Then, they reduce him to powder, put it in the keg, and they all drink from it. […] And to the women here, I want to say one thing, and keep it in mind: if one of those brawlers teases you with lovely words, even the loveliest, and wants to

[11] On the Observant writings and their use for studying magic and witchcraft in the fifteenth century, see Marina Montesano, '*Supra acqua et supra ad vento*'. *Superstizioni, maleficia e incantamenta nei predicatori francescani osservanti (Italia, sec. XV)* (Roma, 1999).

> see you naked, do you know what you have to do? Scream: 'Fire! Fire! Fire!' And do not hush, until someone comes to the rescue.[12]

From some of the details, it is possible to discern the background to the events Bernardino describes. Between 1332 and 1374, two inquisitors and a parish priest were killed in Piedmont by the Waldensians. The violence began in 1309, when the inquisitor Francesco di Poccapaglia was attacked and beaten in Chieri. In 1332, the Waldensians of Angrogna rose against the inquisition, killing the parish priest and expelling the Franciscan Alberto de Castellario. In 1334, there was a new conspiracy against the same Alberto, and the Franciscan Pietro di Ruffia was murdered in 1365 inside his own convent. Finally, in 1374, the Waldensians killed the inquisitor Antonio Pavonio in Bricherasio.[13] These are probably the facts; identification does not seem problematic, since cases of inquisitors being killed by heretics are far from numerous, and the region where the events actually took place was Piedmont. However, into his narration of these events, Bernardino inserts a literary element, that of the ritual orgy. It could partly derive from an episode witnessed (or so he says) by Stephen of Bourbon in Alvernia, in which a woman fell victim to a *maleficium*. She was brought to a subterranean place, where many men and women, lit by torches and candles, gathered around a canister filled

[12] «Egli è anco in parte, che vi si tiene questo maladetto ordine ch'io vi dirò, che la sera di notte si ragunano tutti uomini e donne in uno luogo, e fanno uno brudetto di loro, e hanno uno lume, e quando lo' pare tempo di spegnarlo, lo spengono, e poi a chi s'abatte s'abatta, sia chi vuole (…) E sonne di queste tali genti qua in Piemonte, e so'vi andati gi… cinque inquisitori per levar via questa maladizione, e quali so' stati morti da questa male genti. E più, che non si truova inquisitore che vi voglia andare per mettarvi mano. E sai come si chiamano questi tali? Chiamansi quelli del barilotto. E questo nome si è percé, eglino pigliaranno uno tempo dell'anno uno fanciullino, e tanto il gittaranno fra loro de mano in mano, che elli si muore. Poi che è morto, ne fanno polvere, e mettono la polvare in uno barilotto, e danno poi bere di questo barilotto a ognuno (…) E però voglio dire a voi donne una cosa, e tenetela a mente: se mai voi sapeste che niuno fusse di quelli ribaldi, che vi dicesse per qualunque cagione si fusse, la più bella cosa che fusse mai o che mai sia, sie l'umanità di Cristo, e per questo vi volesse vedere innude; sapeste che voi fate? Gridate: 'Al fuoco! al fuoco! al fuoco!' e non vi ristate mai, insino che qualche cosa non ne seguiti»: Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche volgari sul Campo di Siena 1427*, ed. Carlo Delcorno (Milano, 1989), vol. 2, pp. 793–794. Unless otherwise stated, English translations are my own.

[13] Giovanni Grado Merlo, *Eretici e inquisitori nella società piemontese del Trecento* (Torino, 1977), pp. 150–151.

with water, a spear fastened in its centre. Their master would conjure Lucifer by his beard and by his power until a black cat came down the spear, sprinkling water on everyone with its tail. The lights would extinguish, and everyone would grab the nearest man or woman and have sex.[14]

To the *exemplum* of the Dominican, with whose account he shares numerous elements, and by whom he is certainly inspired, Bernardino adds a new and fundamental detail: the ritual murder of a child, whose body is pulverised and ingested by the heretics. The Franciscan contextualises the story in past events but, in subsequent decades, it will be transposed into a very current and specific framework, namely the inquisition against the *fraticelli* of the Marche region. Norman Cohn has scrupulously reconstructed the routes and phases of this appropriation, attributing it to Giovanni of Capestrano. Around the middle of the century, the Capestranese was involved, together with Giacomo della Marca, in an action against the *fraticelli* of the area around Fabriano. Biondo Flavio, in his *Italia illustrata*, writes that he has learned about the sect of the 'keg' from Giovanni himself.[15] In addition, almost twenty years later, in 1466, a new, larger trial took place in Rome against the *fraticelli* of the Marche, who were questioned about the 'keg'. Cohn also adds that Giovanni had preached about an orgiastic sect very similar to that of the 'keg' in Nuremberg in 1452, which is chronologically at the crossroads between Fabriano's trial and the one in Rome; this last element should establish a clear link between the diffusion in Central Italy of the 'keg' motif—not to mention its political use—and the efforts of Giovanni of Capestrano.[16]

The origin and meaning of the term 'barlotto' remain to be explained. I would tend to completely dismiss the etymology hypothesised by the first commentators on Bernardino's text, according to which we would be faced with a confusion, attributable to Bernardino, between the 'barbette', the elders of the Waldensians, and a 'barletto', an empty horn or hollowed piece of wood used to hold water. It is, in fact, difficult to imagine how further corruption could be achieved leading to 'barlotto',

[14] Etienne de Bourbon, *Anecdotes historiques, légendes et apologues tirés du recueil inédit d'Etienne de Bourbon, dominicain du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Albert Lecoy de La Marche (Paris, 1877), pp. 322–323.

[15] Blondi Flavii Forliviensis, *Italia illustrata* (Basel, 1531), pp. 337–338.

[16] Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons* (London, revised edition 1998), pp. 49–54.

which in Bernardino's story has a precise meaning and a central function, and nothing in common with the elderly Waldensians. Equally unlikely are the assertions that identify the 'barlotto' with the water reservoir of the Roman aqueduct located near Cupramontana, in the area where the persecuted *fraticelli* were abundant. This hypothesis seems to ignore the fact that Bernardino's sermon included that episode, and that, therefore, Giovanni of Capestrano and Giacomo della Marca have drawn inspiration from their older friend. The fact that the aqueduct was previously referred to as 'barlotto', or the fact that 'those of the barlotto' has become a derogatory expression in the Marche, where the resistance of the *fraticelli* occurred, should be thought of as a result of the location of the campaign against the heretics and of the accusations of orgies and infanticides directed at them. The two Observant inquisitors drew from Bernardino an *exemplum*—one that the Sienese reported as an historical situation which had occurred in another area—and updated it, bending it to their purposes. This path is particularly important for my topic, because it will also be used in the witchcraft trials initiated by the Franciscans.

It is probably not germane to look for a source of the term wildly different from what Bernardino says and the use he makes of it; according to Jean-Claude Schmitt, the 'barlotto' from which the heretics drink recalls the small barrel, an article commonly used by hermits. By choosing this element to complete the narrated scene, the preacher implicitly criticises those forms of heterodox and marginal religiosity which were seeking the restoration of an Apostolic Christianity. The ingestion of the sacrilegious and perverse content of the 'keg' would therefore be an inverted representation, in a parodic key, of the 'communist' ambitions ascribed to the heretics.[17] From a lexical point of view, this hypothesis—I am far from being able to consider it a certainty—is not unlikely, given also the generally negative meaning of the semantic field occupied by this word: another diminutive of 'barile' (barrel), 'barletta', was used to indicate a greedy woman and a prostitute. It is used in this fashion by the Tuscan author Giovanni Sercambi in a tale about bad encounters in Pistoia—according to the author a place full of 'barlette' (prostitutes) and 'astrolagi' (charlatans).[18]

[17] Jean-Claude Schmitt (ed.), *Prêcher d'exemples, récits de prédicateurs du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1985), p. 67.

[18] Giovanni Sercambi, *Il Novelliere*, 2 vols., ed. Luciano Rossi (Roma-Bari, 1974), vol. 1, p. 36.

Another episode can help us to understand how Bernardino processes the previous literary tradition to bend it to his purpose. During a Sienese sermon in which he tells of the witch-hunt that, thanks to his preaching, took place the year before in Rome, Bernardino recounts a story with fantastic overtones. The tale tells of the page of a cardinal who is travelling south of Benevento at night when he sees a group of people dancing on a threshing floor in a field. At first he is scared, but then he joins in and dances until the sound of the matin bell, when suddenly everyone disappears except for him and a girl. He takes her home with him and keeps her for three years, during which she never talks. Somehow, though, he discovers that she comes from 'Schiavonia' and has probably been abducted, because at the end of the tale Bernardino laments her having been taken away from her mother and father. Then, the preacher concludes with a new tirade against witches and extols on the necessity of exterminating them.[19] This episode has been studied by Michael Bailey, who has rightly compared it to the tale of Eadric the Wild, as told by Walter Map: young Eadric enters a house where women are dancing.[20] Driven by lust, he takes hold of one of them and drags her away, in spite of the women's resistance; she remains silent for three days and three nights and then agrees to marry him on condition that he respects certain rules. When those are broken, the woman, who is a fairy, disappears forever. It is a common tale, one that finds many parallels in medieval stories about fairies, such as those related to Melusine.[21]

In Bernardino's account, as Bailey suggests, it is the context that changes, because it is related to a witchcraft narrative; the mention of Schiavonia could resonate with his public, because it means the land where slaves came from (in the most generic way: it could mean slaves from Asia as well as from Africa), and in the Late Middle Ages, the use of slaves in Tuscan households had grown in importance. A slave from outside, from a strange land was an alien—a 'domestic enemy' according to Petrarch—because as much as he (and especially she) was useful, a slave remained, to the eyes of the owner, a savage and a potential threat.

[19] Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche volgari sul Campo di Siena 1427*, vol. 2, pp. 1012–1013.

[20] Michael D. Bailey, Nocturnal Journeys and Ritual Dances in Bernardino of Siena, *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 8 (2013), pp. 4–17.

[21] Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge. Morgane et Mélusine: la naissance des fées* (Paris, 1984).

Of course, prejudice played the main role in this, but criminal records show poisoning and acts of violence were not uncommon in this milieu. 'They are *femmine bestiali*', so Margherita Datini described her own slaves in a letter to her husband; 'you cannot trust the house to them: they might at any moment rise up against you'.[22]

Even with these clarifications, Bernardino's text remains difficult to decipher: is he denouncing a rite of some kind, perhaps related to fertility? Or an ecstatic one, as practised by the Benandanti?[23] These are questions that have been posed before, because many accounts of witchcraft reveal actual, underlying folk practices and beliefs, even if these are translated into the demonological language used by the preachers and inquisitors. In this case, however, it seems to me that Bernardino is just recounting an *exemplum*, which he is picking from among the many tales of encounters between a human and a fairy. Even the placing of the tale, towards the end of his speech, follows the typical structure that informs both his vernacular and his Latin sermons. He starts with the *thema*, the first element, which is the Scriptural passage upon which he is going to comment, and then the *divisio*, which involves the main points of the speech—in this case, it concerns the three capital sins. Then comes the *dilatatio*, to articulate and enrich the *divisio* with branches: it is in this part that Bernardino speaks of witches. In conclusion, there is usually one or more *exempla*, which here is the story set in Benevento.

It is very common in Bernardino's sermons to find these short tales picked from a large, pre-existing repertoire, but he often bends them according to his purpose. The fairy encounter takes on darker tones because Benevento—which is his insertion, not found in any antecedent story—is linked to witchcraft, as we will see. The land of Schiavonia appeals to the public because of the slaves; but, unlike many fairy encounters, here there is no marriage at the end, just a hint that the girl has been abducted by demons and witches who disappear in the early light of the morning. As Michael Bailey observes, it is difficult to understand why, given that Bernardino does not believe that witches are genuinely able to fly, he can nonetheless present the story in such terms:

[22] Iris Origo, The Domestic Enemy: The Eastern Slaves in Tuscany in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, *Speculum*, 30, 3 (1955), pp. 312–366, part. p. 342.

[23] For the Benandanti the reference is, of course, to Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Baltimore, 1983).

> The girl whom the Roman page seized, however, had evidently been transported bodily from her distant homeland. Her physicality is another bizarre aspect of Bernardino's story, because in other accounts of witchcraft he generally stressed how, in all matters of transformation or transportation, witches were deluded by demonic trickery. […] He would thus appear to have undercut his own position by subsequently describing a physically real nocturnal gathering that he also meant to associate in some way with witches.[24]

Indeed, this would be very atypical for Bernardino's written sermons; but in his spoken and reported ones, he often pushes his narrative to a point where his position on such matters ceases to be completely clear, often, seemingly, wilfully so. One could infer that the manipulation of his public—his determination to involve the people in front of him in what he is saying—is more important to Bernardino than the tracing of neat boundaries. There are further examples that go in this direction, as we will see. It has been noted that, with this particular sermon, Bernardino failed to engage the public in the way he had in Rome or elsewhere: no witches were burned after his preaching in Siena. It could be that he was proposing a new vision of witchcraft that was as yet neither known nor appreciated in that town, spinning an account laden with too many new details to provoke a reaction.[25] Or it might be that the authorities were more interested in a different part of Bernardino's message, that calling for peace among the factions. A Sienese chronicler who witnessed the Franciscan's presence in the town gives some details of the earlier performance of 1425, but for the year 1427 he does not even mention the sermons in Piazza del Campo, reporting only that Bernardino arrived on 28 August, a Thursday, celebrated the Mass, and preached about peace in the Palazzo Pubblico in front of 306 citizens. Some of those in attendance were engaged in rivalries, and Bernardino urged them to kiss one another on the mouth and forget their enmities.[26]

[24] Bailey, *Nocturnal Journeys*, pp. 13–14.

[25] Bernadette Paton, To the Fire, To the Fire! Let Us Burn a Little Incense to God: Bernardino, Preaching Friars and Maleficio in Late Medieval Siena, in *No God Except Me: Orthodoxy and Religious Practice in Europe, 1200–1600*, ed. Charles Zika (Melbourne, 1991), pp. 7–36.

[26] Paolo di Tommaso Montauri, Cronaca Senese, in *Rerum Italicarum scriptores*, ed. Ludovico Antonio Muratori et al. (Bologna, 1933) tom. 15. pt. 6. vol. 2, p. 808.

Idolaters

In the writings of the Observants, 'witchcraft' refers to a form of *maleficium* distinct from *incantamenta* or *sortilegia*, even if obviously connected to them. While I am going to pay more attention to the friars' descriptions of witches, a brief reminder of their opinions about these other practices may prove helpful, because it underlines the distinctive approach that Bernardino and the others had towards magic, informed as they were by both literary and practical knowledge.

One Latin sermon by Bernardino, *De idolatriae cultu*, demonstrates well the way he wrote on the popular practices that he denounced to his public. He opens his list by affirming that all the ritual deeds to get rid of various kinds of illnesses are sacrifices to the demons, and he then proceeds to explain these, sometime in generic terms, sometime more precisely. For forehead aches, he says that people have 'incantandi modos et ritus' ('ways and rituals to charm'), while to cure headaches folks should not eat animals' heads ('non comedunt de capite': for sympathetic magic) and do other foolish things ('et alias stultitias operantur').[27] For a bleeding nose, he reports, some stones are put around the nostrils. Corals were broadly used as apotropaics, placed around the necks of children for protection against haemorrhages: Piero della Francesca put one around Baby Jesus' neck in his *Madonna di Senigaglia* (1474); but the long tradition of *Lapidaria* attests to the use of such items in Antiquity (as in Pliny) and the Middle Ages—times when, generally speaking, they were not considered as sinful. It is true, though, that many of the practices advocated by, for instance, Hildegard of Bingen in the twelfth century, in her *Causae et Curae*, would have been deemed idolatrous by Bernardino.[28]

Cures for toothache involving the use of metals are widely attested to, as is the more disquieting habit of using the bones and teeth of hanged men. This is also something widely evidenced from Antiquity (as we have seen in the first two chapters) through to modern times. In twentieth-century Southern Italy, the hand of a dead man rubbed upon skin was used to treat diseases, and bodily fluids (called, rather poetically, 'tears of the dead') put upon an aching head were thought

[27] Bernardino da Siena, Quadragesimale 'De christiana religione', in *Opera Omnia*, ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad fidem codicum edita (Firenze, 1950–1965), vol. 1, pp. 113–117.

[28] Beate Hildegardis, *Cause et cure*, ed. Laurence Moulinier (Berlin, 2003).

to be effective cures.[29] The treatment 'contra malum gramphii'—that is, against spasm—used 'cramp-rings' like those studied by Marc Bloch in relation to the Plantagenet Kings, and feature in a case mentioned by Bernardino, enriched by scripts about the Passion of Christ.[30]

Dislocated bones were cured with a remedy already reported by Cato (234–149 BC), whose works were known in the Late Middle Ages.[31] A formula had to be sung while a stick was held to the leg.[32] Bernardino recalls the remedy in his public preaching of 1425: 'If one has a broken finger, take a branch of a walnut tree [often associated with magic], give it to two children to hold, and with words inspired by demons both the stick and the finger are thought to fix'.[33] The devilish tone of the practice is underlined in the Latin version of the sermon, as Bernardino reckons the magic to be effective because it is the devil himself who fixes the limb—the ritual thus becomes an act of blasphemous worship. The remedy for aching kidneys is similar: the patient lies on the ground 'quasi diabolum adorando' ('as if worshipping the devil') and a woman who has given birth to twins takes two distaffs, one for each hand, and walks three times over the aching kidneys, uttering some words. The ritual is linked to fertility, and, in fact, Bernardino follows it by mentioning a remedy for the drying up of a mother's milk, though he does not give details of the method.

According to Bernardino, the kind of sickness afflicting a baby can be determined through molybdomancy, a technique of divination using molten metal such as lead or tin. The practice is well known in ancient and

[29] Alfonso M. Di Nola, *Lo specchio e l'olio* (Roma-Bari, 1994), p. 124.

[30] Marc Bloch, *Les Rois thaumaturges. Étude sur le caractère surnaturel attribué à la puissance royale particulièrement en France et en Angleterre* (Strasbourg and Paris, 1924).

[31] Ettore Paratore, Dante e il mondo classico, and L'eredità classica in Dante, in Idem, *Tradizione e struttura in Dante* (Firenze, 1968), pp. 25–126.

[32] «Luxum si quod est, hac cautione sanum fiaet, harundinum prende tibi viridem p. III aut quinque longam, mediam diffinde, et duo homines teneant ad coxendices; incipe cantare: "motas vaeta daries dardares astataries dissunapiter", usque dum coeant. Ubi coierint et altera alterum tetigerint, id manu prehende et dextera sinistra praecide; ad luxum aut ad fracturam alliga; sanum fiet. Et tamen cotidie cantato et luxato vel hoc modo: "haut haut haut istasis tarsis ardannabou dannaustra"»: Cato, *Agr.*, 160.

[33] «Uno à sconcio el dito, e mandasi per lo nocciulo, e fassi tenere a due fanciulli; e con tue diavolose parole, e dici che le bachette si serrano»: Bernardino da Siena, *Quadragesimale 'De christiana religione'*, pp. 113–117.

modern literature (Goethe famously describes young ladies using it to gain foreknowledge of their future lovers), but it is also widespread in European folklore.[34] Similarly well known to ethnologists is the ritual Bernardino mentions of passing a child through a hole in the roots of an oak tree to prevent or cure illness. This practice is also attested to by Stephen of Bourbon, whose account gives more details than Bernardino's, including the mother of the child being helped in the procedure by an old woman.[35] Bernardino reports with outrage the magic use of the amniotic membrane that covers some newborns; it was in fact considered a premonition of good luck for the child (and for this reason it had to be preserved), but was also very much in demand for its alleged apotropaic powers.

The use of liturgical elements, including the communion host or even prayers, is recurrent and stigmatised; so, too, are the enchanting formulas that Bernardino briefly records: 'Longinus fuit hebraeus' ('Longino was a Jew') aids the removal of an arrow from a wound (a case of sympathetic magic with Longino's spear), or 'Tres boni fratres' ('three good brothers', as in those who met Jesus along their way) helps treat wounds. The integrity of the formulas has been reconstructed using other written sources and modern folklore, and they are recurred throughout Bernardino's sermons.[36] The same spells are recalled by Giovanni of Capestrano and Roberto of Lecce in their own preaching. Bernardino denounces as superstitious, and possibly murderous, the custom of removing a tile from the roof of a house to end the agonies of a sick person within. This custom is well known through Europe and Asia and has been studied by Mircea Eliade.[37]

[34] 'Molybdomancy' from Greek *molybdos* = lead and *manteia* = divination.

[35] «Ad quem cum venirent, sal et quedam alia offerebant, et panniculos pueri per dumos circumstantes pendebant, et acum in lignis, que super locum creverant, figebant, et puerum nudum per foramen quod erat inter duos truncos duorum lignorum (introducebant), matre existente ex una parte et puerum tenente et proiciente novies vetule que erat ex alia parte, cum invocatione demonum adjurantes faunos, qui erant in silva Rimite, ut puerum, quem eorum dicebant, acciperent morbidum et languidum, et suum, quem secum detulerant, reportarent eis pinguem et grossum, vivum et sanum»: Etienne de Bourbon, *Anecdotes historiques*, pp. 325–328.

[36] Montesano, '*Supra acqua et supra ad vento*', p. 78.

[37] Mircea Eliade, 'Spezzare il tetto della casa'. Simbolismo architettonico e fisiologia sottile, in Idem, *Spezzare il tetto della casa. La creatività e i suoi simboli* (Milano, 1988), pp. 149–157.

The Observants' polemics against superstitions is often related to old women, who are seen as the perpetrators of these types of actions. Speaking of amniotic membranes, Bernardino says that they are given to 'vetulae rincagnatae' ('old, dog-faced women'), a derogative expression which is used quite frequently by the friars. Similarly, the *topos* of the *vetula*, so dear to classical literature, also recurs in their writings. A paragraph of the sermon *De factuchiariis* by Giacomo della Marca is entirely dedicated to the 'vetularum deceptio' ('the trickery of old women') against God, the Church sacraments, the Christian faith, the children they suffocate (meaning both abortion and infanticide), the young women they prostitute and their own souls.[38]

Just as his master Bernardino had, Giacomo della Marca also devotes an entire sermon, *De ydolatria et sortilegiis* (*On idolatry and sorcery*), to the subject of magic.[39] He begins with a list of 23 activities, largely taken from Isidore of Seville.[40] The final entry concerns superstitious folks and refers to many practices that the Observants generally condemned, albeit with less vehemence than those practices involving sacramental elements (which were perceived as an aggravation, as already suggested by Bernard Gui),[41] or in which magic is considered heretical.[42]

Such is the case with the 'mulier malefica' ('wicked woman') who, according to Giacomo, built a church in the countryside to which people flocked from the surrounding areas, neglecting the 'official' churches. Imprisoned and led in front of the friar, the woman is asked on what authority she had the church built: she answers 'ex auctoritate divina' ('with God given authority') and adds that a voice communicated to her that a church had to be built up near the body of a saint, who was

[38] «1- contra Deum; 2- contra sacramenta ecclesie; 3- contra fidem sanctam romanam; 4- contra innocentes suffocando; 5- contra iuvenculas ruffianando; 6- contra animam suam iniquam»: Giacomo della Marca, *Sermones dominicales*, ed. Renato Lioi (Falconara M., 1978–1982), vol. 1, pp. 485–486.

[39] Giacomo della Marca, *Sermones Quadragesimales*, Cod. Vat.-lat. 7642, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, cc. 62v.–65v.

[40] Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, VIII, 9, eds. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, Oliver Berghof (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 180–183.

[41] Bernard Gui, *Manuel de l'inquisiteur*, ed. Guillaume Mollat (Paris, 1964), vol. 2, p. 52.

[42] Giacomo della Marca, *Sermones Quadragesimales*, cc. 64r–64v.; Ibidem, *Sermones dominicales*, I, pp. 427–428.

unknown. Of course, Giacomo deems the voice to be that of the devil. It is an interesting episode: the vision, the foundation of an alternative cult to the institutional one and the affirmation of a 'popular' holiness are all interpreted by Giacomo as diabolical in origin. The criterion to be followed to discern true relics from fake ones evidently relates to the official nature of the cult.[43] The preachers' insistence on this subject appears to be aimed at cleansing society of those alternative models of worship and sanctity which often arose spontaneously or uncontrolledly, which escaped from ecclesiastical jurisdiction and which were perceived as alien to the project of re-evangelisation promoted by the Observance.[44]

The *maleficia* carried out with the consecrated host constantly assume very serious, heretical and sacrilegious overtones. In the writings of the friar, they seem to be almost like demonic rituals, characterised by a sort of inversion of the Christian rite: to attract a man, a nefarious old woman in Norcia makes up a philtre with the consecrated host, bones and charcoal; others in Visso and Cascia perform a ritual on the altar by placing chicken, dog and toad dung on it; some carve into the limbs of the crucified Christ to desecrate him[45]; in Amatrice (Rieti), while the priest celebrates Mass at the altar, some women behind him whisper continuously, 'you lie'.[46]

[43]Very useful on the subject of 'true' and 'false' cases of saintity: Gabriella Zarri (ed.), *Finzione e santità tra medioevo ed età moderna* (Torino, 1991); about the link between female saintity and female heresy-witchcraft see Gábor Klaniczay, Miraculum and Maleficium: Reflections Concerning Late Medieval Female Sainthood, in *Problems in the Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Europe*, eds. R. Po-Chia Hsia, R. W. Scribner (Wiesbaden, 1997), pp. 49–73; Tamar Herzig, *Savonarola's Women: Visions and Reform in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, 2008).

[44]«Mulier malefica (…) fecit edificari ecclesiam in campestribus ad quam in festis concurrebant circum habitantes de castris, dimissis ecclesiis, populus ad mercata et ad coricandum. Et ad me ducta ante pergulum, de cuius auctoritate construxit ecclesiam interrogavi. Que respondit: Quia veniebat vox ad eam dicens: "fac edificare ibi ecclesiem, quia ibi est corpus sancti Florentini". Cui ego: "Que miracula fecit? Quam vitam tenuit? Cuius patrie fuit? Quis cognovit ipsum?" Et nesciens respondere dixit coram populo: "miserere, quia venit diabolus et posuit se super pectus meum; et neque comedere, neque bibere valeo, neque dormire si non dixero que ipse dixit". Ecce deceptio diabolica»: Giacomo della Marca, *Sermones dominicales*, vol. 1, pp. 422–423.

[45]Not far from Rieti; Giacomo confirms the story in another sermon: «Alique negant Deum, alique ostendunt anum sicut inveni; alique dum levatur Corpus Christi dicunt: tu mentiris, in Amatrice inveni; alique incidentes omnia membra crucifisso; alique honores Dei dant dyabolo…»: Ibidem, vol. 2, p. 485.

[46]Ibidem, vol. 1, pp. 434–435.

Potions are widely represented in the sermons, and are attributed to old women, such as an elixir made with the body parts of a hanged man, said to turn a young lady into a prostitute.[47] The preacher quotes different episodes from Central Italy and Dalmatia, many having a *vetula* as their main character. He tells of one of those old women who, while being escorted to be tortured, made some gestures with her hands and arms; the guards who attended her were so scared of being enchanted that they refused to go on with the task, and Giacomo himself intervened to have the torture continue.[48]

But for magic to be represented as diabolical, it was not necessary that the reports include macabre or sacrilegious details. There is a case in Bernardino's narrative which is particularly apt to illustrate his thoughts and use of images. The friar recounts it at length during his Florentine cycle of 1425, presenting it as a real situation that had occurred in Lucca, eight years before. A man has lost a large sum of money and decides to go to a *comare* of his: *comare* is a word that properly means a godmother, but is also used for a close neighbour. As usual, she is an old woman. She is standing by her door when the man approaches to ask for her help, and at first, she denies having any skills fit to help him finding the lost money—divination for lost goods and treasures was very common and might be performed by various different means, including necromancy to conjure spirits. The *comare* says she needs to think about it overnight, but the man is curious to see what will go on and lingers to spy on her. During the night, she exits the house naked, her hair dishevelled, and, standing in the garden, begins to summon devils with signs and conjurations. One devil arrives, acting as if he has been disturbed by the woman's shrieking. He reveals that the money has simply been lost by accident in a pigsty and that some is still there (the rest has been eaten by the pigs); but he also suggests hatching a plot to accuse a priest of having stolen it while engaged in a relationship with the wife of the man who has lost the money. The next morning, the *comare* meets with the man and he accuses her of the evil plotting; she tries to escape judgement by fleeing to Pisa, but is finally caught, brought to justice and burned at the stake.[49]

[47] Ibidem, p. 482.

[48] Ibidem, p. 434. I discuss '*fascinum*' *infra*.

[49] Bernardino da Siena, *Le prediche volgari inedite (1425)*, ed. Dionisio Pacetti (Siena, 1935), pp. 540–542.

As Franco Mormando rightly noted, the nakedness and the dishevelled hair, in times when women's heads were covered with scarves for decency, are signs of the debauchery of the *comare*; there may also be the implication of her having had intercourse with the devil—albeit that it does not feature explicitly in this episode—a possibility made even more abject by the fact she is an old woman.[50]

All in all, this is a common representation of women who deal with the devil, but at this point, in the second decade of the century, it is an image still in the making, for, as we know, the archetypal representation of the Sabbat is yet to come. Nevertheless, unkempt hair and nakedness are recurrent images in Latin tales of witchcraft: Canidia has dishevelled hair and Pamphile strips herself naked when performing her ritual. These scenes were well known to the humanist friars from their cultivated readings.

The central point of all of these accounts lays in the women's trading with the devil. They are not yet properly witches, one could say, because they lack two elements that appear in other cases: the killing of small children and the ability to fly. But they do all share a common element, namely the 'idolatry' mentioned in the sermons of both Bernardino and Giacomo. These idolaters (mainly old women, but sometimes women of unspecified age and even, sometimes, men) worship the devil through their evil deeds and collude voluntarily with him.

'.... DE' FATTI DE LE STREGHE'

In the writings of the Observants, the lexicon relating to the domain of witchcraft sees little variation: in most cases, we encounter *strix*, *striga* or *stria*, although there are other vernacular expressions indicative of individual friars' cultural backgrounds. In a passage of the *Sermones extraordinarii*, Bernardino of Siena speaks of *mascae*,

> who go charming, enchanting and divining, and say they can talk with the stars, and go with Herodias to the river Jordan in the night of Epiphany, and know how to predict the future, and say they talk to the dead, and can make spells that kill.[51]

[50] Franco Mormando, *Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of Early Renaissance Italy* (Chicago and London, 1999), pp. 77–89.

[51] Bernardino da Siena, Sermones extraordinarii, in *Opera omnia*, ed. Ioannis De La Haye (Paris, 1645), vol. 3, p. 476.

Masca is a synonym for *strix/striga*, as we already know, but the image of the witch which the friar presents closely resembles the omnipotent characters of classical literature, such as Circe and Medea. Giovanni of Capestrano writes of men and women whom people call 'janas sive corsarias aut stregas'.[52] We don't have a reliable etymology for the term *jana*; however, it is possible to compare it by assonance to *ganna/gannes*, a name, possibly of Celtic origin, which in the Eastern Alps refers to figures similar to fairies. Both terms probably derive from Diana, but *jana* is more common in Southern and Central Italy. It is also used by the Dominican Antonino Pierozzi, Bishop of Florence, who uses it as a synonym of *striga*: 'About some other superstitions, the first is of those women who think they ride in the night with Diana or Herodias, or that they can shift to other creatures, and are commonly called *strigae* or *ianuaticae*'.[53]

Antonino erroneously derives *jana* from *Janus*, so he speaks of *ianuaticae* rather than—as would be more correct—of *ianaticae*; also, he might have in mind a famous mysoginistic quote from Tertullian, who defined the woman as 'diaboli ianua' ('door of the devil').[54] Finally, *corsariae* comes from *cursus*, like the 'andare in corso' used by Boccaccio, hence must be intended as 'those who (think they) fly'.

Bernardino adds Iobiana (also Zobiana) alongside Diana and Herodias. It is a name which has been questioned without answer; it also figures in a medical treatise by Antonio Guaineri, who studied and taught medicine in Pavia and belonged to the same generation as Bernardino of Siena, being born around the end of the 1380s or early 1390s, and dying around 1455. In his medical treatise on headaches, he speaks of *incubi* and their illusions, saying there are some old women who think they can shift their form in many ways with their

[52] Giovanni da Capestrano, *Tractatus de confessione*, in cod. XVII, Convento O.F.M. di Capestrano, c. 304v.

[53] «De quibusdam alijs superstitionibus, et primo de mulieribus credentibus secum Diana vel Herodias nocturnis horis equitare, vel se in alias creaturas transformari, ut dicitur de his quae vulgariter dicuntur strigae vel ianuaticae»: B. Antonini archiepiscopi florentini *Summae sacrae theologiae* (Venetiis, 1571), II, 12 (*De infidelitate*), 361r.

[54] Tert. *De Cultu Feminarum*, I, 1. I don't believe in fact that it is an error of transcription, as claimed by Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath* (London, 1990), p. 117, n. 64.

enchantments, who are called by local people *striae* or *zobianae*, and are said to take the shape of cats.[55] They are also accused of killing toddlers, though these may have been natural deaths, caused by suffocation, and only through people's ignorance attributed as a crime perpetrated by *zobianae*. Apart from Guaineri's rationalisation of popular beliefs about witchcraft, his use of *zobiana* in such a context seems to indicate it was a popular word. Its meaning lies, I think, in the fact that Thursday was often said to be the day when witches gathered and took flight (it would also be thought to be the day of their Sabbath, once the term came into use). In the vernaculars of Central and Northern Italy, *joibe* and *zobia* are known forms for 'giovedì' (Thursday); for instance, 'The revolt of the Cruel Thursday of abundance'—the name given to a rebellion that took place in Friuli in 1511—is called, by Tuscans and Venetians, 'Crudel zobia grassa', and by Friulans 'Crudel joibe grasse'.[56] If my hypothesis is correct, *Zobianae* means 'those of the Thursdays' and implies a popular knowledge of that day being crucial for witches' reunions. It is also interesting to stress that the term is plural, as is Giacomo della Marca's 'Herodianiste' (all those who presume to follow Herodias): both words are used to refer to a group rather than to single out individual persons, and this probably indicates that the idea of witches being a sect was gaining traction.[57]

In the Observants' sermons, there are references to the *Canon Episcopi* and to the traditions that we have seen in the literature of the preceding centuries. However, their witches are essentially bloodsuckers who represent a threat against children, derived from both folkloric and cultivated/classical Latin images of witchcraft. In other, clearer, terms, whenever the word 'witch' appears in the Observant lexicon, it can be assigned a specific character rooted in ancient sources, both literary and folkloric. Initially, the reference to the *striges* of classical tradition seems to be used to strengthen the preachers' narrative, but in the space of a few years, between the first and second generations of Observants, it becomes a charge against the alleged witches.

[55] Antonio Guaineri, *De egritudinibus capitis* (Pavia, 1488) fol. 17r; Danielle Jacquart, De la science à la magie: le cas d'Antonio Guainerio, médecin italien du xve siècle, *La possession. Littérature, médecine, société*, 9 (1988), pp. 137–156.

[56] Furio Bianco, *1511: la 'Crudel zobia grassa': rivolte contadine e faide nobiliari in Friuli tra '400 e '500* (Gorizia, 2010).

[57] Giacomo della Marca, *Sermones dominicales*, vol. 1, p. 431.

The Franciscan friars follow the *Canon Episcopi*, making some modifications to the traditional version. In his sermon *De Evangelio aeterno*, Bernardino quotes the *Canon* but adds a few flourishes of his own: the evil women ('*crudelissimae mulieres*') are sometimes joined by men and are believed to follow 'Dyana, seu Iobyiana vel Herodiade', riding on certain animals on particular nights, such as Thursdays and between Sundays and Mondays. These are facts unknown to the original source, as is the fact that the witches are believed to have a power over people—and especially small children—being able to affect them for better or for worse ('maxime parvulos pueros posse in deterius vel in melius permutare'), probably meaning to cure or to kill them. Further, they can seem to transform into other species and otherwise change their appearance ('in aliam speciem et similitudinem transformare'), which, according to the preacher, are diabolical delusions that happen only in dreams and visions.[58]

The vernacular exposition we can read in a *reportatio* is far more vivid:

> Are evil spells real? Yes, they are! But not those attributed to the witches (*'de' fatti de le streghe'*). There are many people who fabricate an ointment and anoint themselves, and they claim and believe themselves to be cats, but it is the devil who deludes them, and they trust him.[59]

Another time he adds:

> And let me tell you about witches, that nobody can change into another species, whether it is a cat or a goat, like the bestiality of some women, and sometimes also of men, allows them to think. It is the demon who makes a woman believe she is a cat that goes witching, while she lies in her bed. These are delusions of the devil used to cheat people! Some talk of the *tregenda*[60] that happens on every Thursday night, and these also are dreams and delusions from the devil. Try not to be a sinner, like I have said before,

[58] «Puossi fare malie? Sì! None però che sieno quello che paiono, cioè de' fatti de le streghe. So' molte persone che faranno uno unguento e ongonsi, e così dicono e credono essere come gatta, però che 'l diavolo lo' dimostra così, e loro il credono»: Bernardino da Siena, *Quadragesimale 'De christiana religione'*, vol. 1, p. 117.

[59] Bernardino da Siena, *Le prediche volgari (Siena 1425)*, ed. Ciro Cannarozzi (Firenze, 1958), vol. 2, pp. 278–279.

[60] The same word used by Jacopo Passavanti, discussed in the previous chapter.

> and do not be afraid for yourselves or your offspring about any witches, *tregenda*, evil spells and enchantments![61]

The expression 'de' fatti de le streghe' seems to refer to a series of pertinent issues for us—issues which, while not well documented in written culture, must have been widespread in the traditional and oral public domain. These are summed up in the two representations of animal metamorphosis (occasionally with the help of ointments) and in the tales involving the killing of children. Of course, Bernardino did not believe in these popular stories; nonetheless, when he presents specific cases—some of which we will discuss below—he draws the concept of *strix* from both classical sources and the folkloric-oral Italic reservoir.

Even if he rules out any real basis to these practices, in the Sienese preacher's opinion the women are, nonetheless, in some way guilty of the crimes; in fact, if they hadn't succumbed to the devil's allures, he would not have power over them. The delusions that the devil can bring might lead someone to believe he is about to have sex with one of those night-riding women, but it is in fact a demon (a *succubus*) who lies with him.[62] Also, when old women believe they go riding (the *cursus*) with Zobiana, it is, in fact, the devil making them dream that they are turning into cats. If the devil turns into a cat and enters a house where a man thinks a witch is about to go after his baby, and so hits the cat, breaking its leg, then the devil will in turn break the woman's leg so that,

[61] «E nota delle streghe, che niuna persona si può mutare in altra spezie si sia, o di gatta, o di capra, o d'altro animale come la bestialità delle donne si dànno a credere. E alcuna volta si dànno a credere degli uomini. El dimonio fa parere a quella mala femmina ch'ella diventi gatta e vada stregonando, ma ella si sta nel letto suo. Lusioni di dimonio per ingannare altrui! E altri dice della tregenda al giovedì notte, che sono tutti sogni e lusioni diaboliche. Fa' di none stare in peccato mortale, come di sopra è detto, e non avere paura per te né pe' tuoi figliuoli di streghe, di tregenda, o di malie, o d'incanto! Tutte le fantasie diaboliche ti metti in testa, o d'incanti di membra, o di malattie, o di tempesta, o gragnuola, o d'altre frasche, in quelle ti fa cascare il dimonio per la promessione di Dio, come t'ò detto»: Bernardino da Siena, *Le prediche volgari (Firenze 1425)*, ed. Ciro Cannarozzi (Firenze, 1940), vol. 2, pp. 168–169.

[62] «Sed quid dices de his, qui faciunt sibi portari foeminas per incantamenta, et habent secum agere, et si quaeris a muliere, dicet tibi quod est verum quod fuit portata, et habuit coitum cum tali, et tamen mentietur. Nota quod diabolus potest transformari in

the day after, when the baby's father meets the *vetula*, he recognises her as a witch.[63] For Bernardino, the night ride of the *Canon Episcopi* is firmly linked to those beliefs which identify witches with bloodsuckers, who are perceived as a menace to children especially. As he states in the sermon *De christiana religione*: 'The devil pours a crazed thirst for the blood of children into *mascarae* and witches, so women believe themselves to be [such creatures], even if it is not true, as the holy council affirms'.[64] Bernardino freely attributes certain depictions of witches to former councils that, in fact, never included them. The association between night rides and the witches is also attested to in the literature of earlier centuries, but the fact that it was denounced with such persistence by preachers of Bernardino's status brought the narratives a renewed prominence.

When *janae*, *corsariae* and *stregae* are mentioned in his treatise *De confessione*, Giovanni of Capestrano names a place where their night flights are directed: towards Apulia 'cum aqua et vento ad nucem de Benevento' ('over water and wind towards the walnut of Benevento'), a formula made famous in the trial against Matteuccia da Todi, which is more or less contemporary with Giovanni's writing. Even if the friar has stated that those men and women who believe themselves able to fly and change into beasts are deluded by Satan ('sathanico impulsu debachati'), his description of their evil deeds is nonetheless very factual:

forma mulieris illius incantatae, et faciet se portari, et fatuus incantator credet quod sit illa foemina, et copulabitur cum diabolo, et exinde faciet quod foemina somniabit se portari et iacere cum illo et reportari, et tamen in vero nihil erit, et hoc ut detrahatur fidei Christi, et est deceptio carnalitatis, licet etiam in veritate aliquando contingat, quod propter peccata quasi insanam et nesciam ad domum suam, et abuti illa, quae tamen nesciet quid agat»: Bernardino da Siena, 'Seraphim' Paduae an. 1423 reportatum a Daniele De Purziliis, in *Opera omnia*, vol. 3, p. 198.

[63] «Sunt enim aliquae vetulae, quae credunt se ire cum Zobiana, vel in cursu, quia diabolus faciet sic sibi apparere in somnis, quod efficiatur una felis, et tamen non erit verum, quia diabolus transformabit se in unam felem, et in apparentia felis intrabit cameram, et pater familias habens puerum credit quod sit una striga, et surgens percutiet felem, et videbitur sibi fregisse tibiam felis et deinde diabolus faciet frangi tibiam illi vetulae, et in crastino tam illa pater familias quam illa vetula credent esse vera, et erunt illusiones diabolicae»: Ibidem.

[64] «Unde in màscaris seu streghis immittit sitibundam rabiem bibendi sanguinem puerorum, quod et se facere credunt, licet minime verum sit, sicut sacrum concilium attestatur' (XXVI, quaest. 5, cap. Episcopi eorum)»: Bernardino da Siena, *Quadragesimale 'De christiana religione'*, vol. 2, p. 43.

> They perpetrate many evil deeds, like fornication and rape, adultery, incest, sacrilege, sodomy and murder of children, and sometimes they change into cats or mice and go to the cradles of toddlers whose blood they drink and in doing so they kill them.[65]

Roberto Caracciolo, too, talks about the false beliefs of the pagans, including a belief in people who could turn into cats and other beasts, and of whom it is said that 'these are witches, who by night access toddlers' cradles to kill them'.[66] He tells the story of a woman who is cheated by the devil: he takes on the appearance of her husband and lies with her until the real husband knocks at the door, at which point the false one disappears. The woman has a fit that lasts for fifteen days, and is finally cured by a witch. The preacher could be tailoring to his needs the episode of the miller and his wife, told by Apuleius and also adapted by Boccaccio.[67] When Lucius is living like a donkey, he witnesses an encounter between a woman and her young lover, Filesìtero. While the two are alone in the house, the miller unexpectedly returns; Filesìtero hides himself and the poor husband confides to his wife all his indignation for the sad case of a friend whose wife has just been caught in blatant betrayal. At this, the donkey decides to intervene and, trampling the fingers of the concealed lover, forces him to reveal himself. The husband decides on a very original retribution: he forces the young man to spend the night with him and then chases the two adulterers out of his home. The vengeance of the wicked wife is quick: she resorts to the arts of a witch, and the miller is found dead the very next day. Apuleius' tale is very different from Caracciolo's *exemplum* in many aspects, but the role of the witch might nonetheless be revealing: in the preacher's account that role is not very meaningful, merely showing that witches are allies of the devil, and that they intervene with him; as Caracciolo states,

[65] «Multa scelera perpetrant, furnicationem vel stupra, adulteria, incestus, sacrilegia et sogdomia necnon homicidia et puerorum et aliorum fatentur, enim se nonnumquam transformari in gactam sive murilem et auferre de cuna infantulum cui sanguinem bibere et sic mactare»: Giovanni da Capestrano, *Tractatus de confessione*, c. 304v.

[66] «Et iste sunt strige, que de nocte accedunt pueros destruendo»: Roberto da Lecce, *Quaresimale padovano 1455*, p. 209.

[67] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, X, 5.

'It took a witch to set her free'.[68] He continues by quoting Augustine who, in his book, says that when someone believes herself to be a *striga*, and duly anoints herself, the devil makes her sleep, so as to let her think she is, indeed, performing evil deeds such as killing children. Of course, Saint Augustine never wrote such things about witches, rather he wrote about the powers of demons and the tricks of transformation, not of killings; but just like Bernardino, Roberto mixes different stories to strengthen his narrative.

The portraits of the women who perpetrate *maleficia* are dark and full of macabre details: they go to cemeteries and dig the bones out of graves; or to gallows, where they steal the rope and the bones of the hanged. Their art is actively sought, which makes it easy for them to cheat people: for example, the 'vetula rechagnata' who says she 'goes the course', so that foolish women call her 'domina Simia' and ask her to reveal who their future husbands will be. She asks in exchange for a big bird to eat and some wine, and because she is smart enough to give the expected answers, women continue to come to her, and to bring her gifts.

If witchcraft in the strict sense is a devilish delusion or a fraud, however, through their evil deeds these old women can genuinely make a pact with the devil, to the point of evoking him. In a sermon of the *Quaresimale de peccatis*, Roberto of Lecce narrates an episode from Albenga (Liguria), witnessed in the first person, of an elderly woman charged with *maleficium*. The accused is subjected to torture to make her confess to having begun a relationship with the devil: she had married young and was badly treated by her husband's brother, a priest. One day, alone and afflicted, pushed by desperation, she asked loudly: 'Oh devil, come to me and bring me your help; oh devil, where are you?' A young man with horns suddenly appeared and said: '"What do you want?" And I answered, "your help"'.[69]

[68] «Quedam vero striga eam liberavit»: Roberto da Lecce, *Quaresimale padovano 1455*, ed. Oriana Visani (Padova, 1983), p. 209.

[69] «"O diabole, veni ad me et fer auxilium tuum: o diabole, ubi es?"» (…) «"Quid vis, aut quid quaeris?" Ego vero: "Ut mihi succurras", respondit»: Ibidem, p. 210. It recalls the dialogue between another woman and the devil as portrayed in a trial of the end of sixteenth century: Franco Cardini (ed.), *Gostanza, la Strega di San Miniato* (Roma-Bari, 2001).

Giacomo della Marca's writings evidence some differences in position compared to the other Observants, which is why I have kept them to the end of this chapter. In his sermons, the preacher provides very few theological-canonistic references; the stories are in most cases based on episodes he claims to have encountered directly during his travels as a preacher and inquisitor in Italy and the Balkans. Consequently, Giacomo merely offers narrated episodes, almost without comment. We never find an explicit position of credulity regarding the reality of witches' powers, and it is important to stress that Giacomo does not, at any point, use the term *strix* or its specific synonyms. Nonetheless, many of his examples of malefaction fall squarely within the stereotypical images of the 'witch' and the 'Sabbath'. The women involved are often called *mulieres* and, most frequently, *vetulae*.

On a couple of occasions, the preacher makes a very concise reference to belief in night flights following Diana and Herodias. On one occasion, his account of the final purpose of the *cursus* hardly seems unsettling—'They go at night with Diana and Herodias and others to dance and eat'—but in every other example, Giacomo's accounts have a deep demonic turn.[70] The magic practices concerning the erotic-affective sphere, in particular, assume very marked ritual and demonic connotations: for example, in Verona, he reports, 'to find men they go at night with hair dishevelled and naked riding on a stick'.[71] He also tells of a *vetula* who dressed as a priest to go riding at night on a stick brought by two other old women; together they visited houses where they made people sexually impotent and unable to procreate.[72]

Another case, which took place in Lombardy, is rendered even more explicitly diabolical by the presence of the devil himself. There was an evocation of demons, in order for the healer to exercise thaumaturgical powers and treat 60 sick people, and it is this which makes this episode atypical, compared with the usual practices of enchantment.

[70] «Quod vadunt in nocte cum Dyana et Herodiana et aliis coreyzandum et comedendum»: Giacomo della Marca, *Sermones Quadragesimales*, Cod. Vat.-lat. 7642, c. 64r.

[71] «Ut capiant virum in nocte vadunt scapigliate et nude, vel eque sunt super lignum»: Giacomo della Marca, *Sermones dominicales*, vol. 1, p. 481.

[72] «Exemplum in Verona: quedam vetula induta vestibus sacerdotalibus equester super unum lignum portatum a duabus vetulis in nocte hinc inde per aliquos vicos ad domos aliquorum ut non possent concipere neque cognoscere uxores»: Ibidem, p. 424.

In this account, a *vetula* stood naked in the night with a sword, and people came to her from far away. Black demons went to her saying: this man comes from a certain land to be healed of his sickness, and she gave remedies to up to 60 people. She later allegedly confessed in front of Matteo of Sicily and many others.[73] The same friar found two old women who stood upon an altar next to the city gate, and from there went naked to a place where three roads met, to talk with the devil. Finally, they killed many children, and were burned, still invoking the devil.[74]

Matteo of Agrigento was the main founder of the Observance in Sicily, mostly preaching between Italy and Spain.[75] He was with Bernardino and Giacomo in Lombardy between 1418 and 1422,[76] so it is likely that the events took place in those years. This dating would place the episodes quite early, and it is difficult to determine the date with certainty, not least because Matteo does not speak of them in his own sermons, and Giacomo's versions date from 15 to 20 years later.[77]

Finicella and Santuccia

In 1426, Bernardino was in Rome, having been called to face allegations of heresy before Pope Martin V. He was found innocent and was thus able to preach triumphantly in the city; in the same days, a woman known as Finicella was tried for *maleficia* and burnt at the stake. The following year, in the course of another sermon in his native city, Bernardino recalled the events:

[73] «Quedam vetula in Lombardia cum spata in nocte et nuda in area, ad quam currebant omnes circum habitantes et demones nigri veniebant ad eam dicentes: talis veniet de tali terra pro tali infirmitate; fac sic, et dabat remedium usque ad 60 personas. Confessa coram fratre Mactheo de Cicilia et coram omni populo»: Ibidem, p. 425.

[74] «Item idem frater Matheus invenit duas vetulas super altare extra portam civitatis, abeuntes insimul pro confusione Christi. Postea in trivio nude loquebantur cum dyabolo, interfectis multis pueris; combuste sunt clamantes dyabolum»: Ibidem.

[75] Antonio Mursia, Matteo d'Agrigento, fondatore dei primi conventi osservanti in Sicilia, *Antonianum*, 90, 1 (2015), pp. 81–100.

[76] Filippo Rotolo, *Il beato Matteo d'Agrigento e la provincia francescana di Sicilia nella prima metà del secolo XV* (Palermo, 2006), p. 85; Paolo Evangelisti, Matteo d'Agrigento, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome, 2008), vol. 72 (online http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/matteo-d-agrigento_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/).

[77] Matteo d'Agrigento, *Sermones varii*, ed. Agostino Amore (Roma, 1960).

> Having preached about these enchantments and about witches and magic, I seemed to them to be speaking as if in a dream. Then it was said to me that everyone who knew that a man or a woman was capable of doing this [magic] and did not accuse them, would be guilty of the same sin. As I preached, many witches and sorcerers were accused […]. And one among the crowd was captured, and she declared and confessed without any torture that she had killed more than thirty boys by sucking their blood; and she said furthermore that she had freed forty boys, and every time she freed one of them, a limb was to be offered to the devil as a sacrifice, and she would offer the limb of a beast […]. And she even confessed to killing her own son and turning him into dust, which she would eat as part of such rituals. And it seemed so incredible that a creature could have done such evil things that it was desired to see whether this was all true. So finally she was questioned about whom she had killed. She reported who they were, and whose sons they were, and how and when she had killed them […]. And she told of how she used to go to Saint Peter's Square and would have some ointments made from herbs which had been picked on the Feast of Saint John or on the Feast of the Assumption. Then I took these [ointments] in my hands, and after putting them under my nose found that they stank so terribly that they seemed indeed to be things of the devil, as they were. And it was told that they [the witches] greased themselves with these ointments, and after they were greased, they seemed to be female cats; their body did not actually transform into another shape, but it seemed to themselves to be thus.[78]

[78] «Avendo io predicato di questi incantamenti e di streghe e di malie, el mio dire era a loro come se io sognasse. Infine elli mi venne detto che qualunque persona sapesse niuno o niuna che sapesse fare tal cosa, che, non acusandola, elli sarebbe nel medesimo peccato. […] E come io ebbi predicato, furono acusate una moltitudine di streghe e di incantatori. […] E fune presa una fra l'altre, la quale disse e confessò senza niuno martorio, che aveva uccisi da XXX fanciulli col succhiare il sangue loro; e anco disse che n'aveva liberati LX; e disse che ogni volta che ella ne liberava niuno, ogni volta si conveniva dare uno membro al diavolo per sagrificio, e davane uno membro di bestia […]. E più anco confessò, che ella aveva morto el suo propio figliulo, e avevane fatto polvare, de la quale dava mangiare per tali faccende. E perché pareva cosa incredibile che una criatura avesse fatti tanti mali, fu voluto provare se era vero. Infine fu domandato chi ella aveva ucciso. Ella diceva chi, e cui figliuoli ellino furono, e in che modo, e a che tempo ella li aveva morti. […] E disse del modo come ella andava innanzi d'in su la piazza di Santo Pietro, e ine aveva certi bossogli d'unguenti fatti d'erbe che erano colte nel dì di santo Giovanni e nel dì de la Asunzione. Infine io li ebbi in mano, e ponendomeli al naso elli putivano per sì fatto modo, che ben parevano cose di diavolo, come erano. E dicevano che con essi s'ognevano, e così come erano onte, lo' pareva essare gatte, e non era vero; però che il corpo loro non si rimutava in altra forma, ma ben lo' pareva a loro»: Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche volgari sul Campo di Siena 1427*, vol. 2, pp. 1007–1009.

His recollection of the events is quite clear: the allegations of witchcraft relate to infanticide and metamorphosis, while the *incantamenta* concern the collecting of herbs and acts of healing. In both cases, however, there does not seem to be a real gap between the two spheres: the gathered herbs are used to prepare witches' ointments, and the healing of children is achieved through collusion with the devil.

Years later, in 1443, during the *Seraphim* preached in Padua, Bernardino added further details about the deeds of the Roman woman, building up an image of the witch that contains all of the elements one would expect to find in the stereotypes of later times. The main theme of the sermon, however, was infanticide. Bernardino recounts how one night, while studying, he heard many voices crying 'vindictam vindictam vindictam' ('revenge, revenge, revenge'). He looked out of his window and saw nothing, so went back to his desk, from where he again heard the voices coming from the city. They were children's voices, each calling out for different reasons. Some had been aborted by their mothers with potions and formulas, and lamented, 'Disgraceful and devilish mother, why did you kill me, what have I done to you, why have you condemned my body and my soul, could you not even wait for me to be baptized?'[79] And there were the voices of children suffocated by careless mothers, who slept with them and accidentally killed them; and there are yet others 'who cry for revenge' and who 'are fascinated and bewitched children'—and it is 'really true', Bernardino adds, 'that children are fascinated by devilish old women'.[80]

Following his account of these voices, Bernardino makes a long reference to the *Canon Episcopi*, in which he explains how women are deluded by the devil in their sleep. It is at the end of this part of Bernardino's discourse that Finicella is named. While preaching in Rome, he encouraged those among his public who knew of male and female witches to denounce them to the inquisitors. Following this admonition, the accusations poured in, and many were arrested. Among the worst cases, three were singled out, including one who confessed immediately

[79] «O ribalda et dyabolica mater, quare me interfecisti, quid feceram tibi, quare dampnasti corpus et animam meam, saltem expectasses quod habuissem baptismum?»: Bernardino da Siena, *Seraphim 1453*, Bergamo, Biblioteca civica "Angelo Mai", Cod. Delta V. 23, cc. 171r–173v.

[80] «Qui cridant vindictam sunt pueruli fassinati seu strigati et est verissimum quod pueri faxinantur a dyabolicis vetulis»: Ibidem.

that she had killed thirty children and cured sixty. Asked how she had done it, she reported a dialogue between herself and a demon. The demon asked,

> 'What do you want?' And she said: 'I want this child to be set free of his sickness or accident', and the devil replied: 'I am ready, but I want you to give me one limb of a man or a woman, and sacrifice it to me'.[81]

The woman also confessed that, in the company of some other women, she had gone to a bridge, where the group decided

> 'to go to kill the young son of someone', and they went and killed him, and said they changed into cats, but it was not true, because they stay in their houses, and the devil makes them sleep deeply, and deludes them into thinking that they take the shape of cats and go about fascinating children, and thinking that they ride different animals and follow Herodias and others. They are also persuaded to drink and eat, commit luxurious sins and other phantasies, while the devil, changed into a cat, approaches the cradles of children and sucks their blood from a vein on their heads.[82]

The *Consilium*, wrongly attributed to the famous jurist Bartolo di Sassoferrato, which probably dates from the sixteenth century, uses the same wording as Bernardino's text, *fassinati* and *strigati*: 'children are fascinated and bewitched' ('Confitetur etiam pueros tactu stricasse et fascinasse').[83] It might be that Bernardino was a model for the forger,

[81] «"Quid vis?"; et ipsa dicebat: "Ego volo quod de infortunium sive disgraciam liberandi istum puerum"; et dyabolus respondebat: "Bene sum paratus, sed volo quod tu mihi des unum membrum unius persone et illud mihi sacrifices"»: Ibidem.

[82] «Tales in domo sua et dyabolus dat sibi soporem profundum et dat sibi illusiones quod videtur quod capiant forma gate et vadant faxinando pueros et videre se equitare varias bestias et ire cum Herodiada et cetera. Videtur eis quod bibant et comedant, luxurientur et multa fantasmata sibi apparent et dyabolus capit formam gate et vadit ad cunabula pueri et sugit puero unam venam post caput et sugit sanguinem pueris illo modo; et videtur illis mulieribus quod ipse sint ille que faxinaverunt illos pueros»: Ibidem.

[83] «"Ad occidendum unum puerum filium talis", et ibant et occidebant ipsum. […] et dicebat quod capiebant formam gatarum, et non est verum quod stant tales in domo sua et dyabolus dat sibi soporem profundum et dat sibi illusiones et cetera»: Ibidem. The *Consilium* is in *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Hexenwahns und der hexenverfolgung im Mittelalter*, ed. Joseph Hansen (Bonn, 1901), pp. 64–65. The opinion

but it might also be that those verbs together had become a formulaic phrase. The pseudo-Bartolus has a direct link to the Latin sources, quoting Virgil's *Ecloga*: 'I do not know who is enchanting my tender lambs with eyes' ('Nescio quis teneros oculus mihi fascinat agnos'), meaning that children are bewitched through the evil eye or an evil touch.[84]

The verb *fascinare* comes from the Roman *Fascinus*—the embodiment of the divine phallus—and is hence a word for the deity and his representations in effigies and amulets, as well as for the spells used to invoke his divine protection. During the Middle Ages, there are traces of persisting rituals (not cults), to honour these objects, that we know about thanks to synods where these acts were condemned.[85] The use of the verb *fascinare* to denote enchanting, though, is more intriguing. It is used in Middle Latin, where it mostly signifies a spell made through special powers and the eyes only, and relates to classical tales of magic. A good example is provided by Gervase of Tilbury, who tells the story of a man who lives near Arles who can kill an animal simply by saying nice words about it. Gervase quotes as evidence of his claims the same passage from Virgil as is mentioned by the pseudo-Bartolus, adapting the original to better support his point concerning the importance of words: 'I do not know who is enchanting my lambs with tender words' ('Nescio quis teneros verbis mihi fascinat agnos').[86] Incidentally, Gervase errs in his translation: it is the lambs that are tender, not the words (or the eyes)—proof that he is modelling his story more on Virgil than on any direct experience of his own.

it is fake was given first by Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, pp. 196–200, later strengthen by Mario Ascheri, Streghe e 'deviantì': alcuni consilia apocrifi di Bartolo da Sassoferrato?, in *Scritti di storia del diritto offerti dagli allievi a Domenico Maffei*, ed. Mario Ascheri (Padova, 1991), pp. 203–234. Girolamo Tartarotti was also suspicious about it: Diego Quaglioni, Tradizione criminalistica e riforme nel Settecento. Il *Congresso notturno delle Lammie* di Girolamo Tartarotti (1749), in *Studi di storia del diritto medioevale e moderno*, ed. Filippo Liotta (Bologna, 1999), pp. 253–275.

[84] Virgil *Eclogae*, III 103.

[85] Richard Payne Knight, Thomas Wright, *Sexual Symbolism: A History of Phallic Worship* (Dover, 2016), p. 138; it presents two old studies, dating to 1786 and 1866.

[86] Gervase of Tilbury, Otia Imperialia, in *Otia imperialia. Libro III. Le meraviglie del mondo*, ed. Fortunata Latella (Parma, 2010), pp. 242–243.

Fascinare gives the French *fesne*. This appears in some literary texts, including the *Roman de la Rose*, but becomes more commonly used in the Late Middle Ages as classical texts become better known. At this time, French adopts the more cultivated (because closer to the Latin form) *fasiner*, and Bernardino's 'fassinare' is similarly classically refined.[87]

But there is more to his account which should be discussed. The way Bernardino depicts the deal between Finicella and the devil bears similarities to the tale of the nurse recalled by Ovid in his *Fasti*. In the latter, the *striges* might be actual birds or women transformed into birds by Marsian magic, who attack an infant, Proca, in his cradle. Their assault on the child threatens to prove fatal, but his nurse, Cranae, promises to heal the baby by making a blood sacrifice with a baby sow. Finicella does the same thing, only in her case the promise is to give the devil a human limb for each cure he provides. I am not arguing that Bernardino was specifically modelling his tale after Ovid's; rather, I am suggesting that the confessions of Finicella remind us of something that saturated Italian folkloric tradition—and that a cultivated preacher like Bernardino of Siena would be encountering these beliefs both when hearing confession and in his studies. Nonetheless, a hint towards Ovid indeed being his source can be found in the dialogue Bernardino inserts in the *Seraphim*: 'Quid vis?' ('What do you want?'), asks the devil of Funicella; and 'Quid faceret?' ('What was she to do?') is the question that opens the Ovid's account. Both pieces then continue with the same pattern of alternating direct dialogue with the respective writer's own words.

Finicella is condemned as a witch because of her crimes, but Bernardino is (again) not so clear about them. In the *Seraphim*, he states that it is the devil who actually sucks the children's blood, but this clashes with his version of Finicella's confession in which she states that she had killed thirty children by sucking their blood ('col succhiare il sangue loro').[88] And in the *Seraphim* he worsens her position by stating that 'It really is true that little children are fascinated by devilish old women' ('est verissimum quod pueri faxinantur a dyabolicis vetulis').[89] Is it true or not? The answer is moot for Bernardino, because the

[87] Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IXe au XVe siècle* (Paris, 1881), p. 769.

[88] Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche volgari sul Campo di Siena 1427*, II, pp. 1007–1009.

[89] Bernardino da Siena, *Seraphim 1453*, cc. 171r–173v.

witches' main crime, idolatry, is the worst, and, he argues, such delusions cannot happen without the women's consent. In the *Quaresimale* preached in Florence in 1424, Bernardino tells the story of a woman who usually led an honest life, but who came to be possessed by the devil. When she suddenly started to curse and commit sacrileges, she threw herself at the foot of an inquisitor, asking to be burned at the stake as a heretic. He asked if she really wanted to be in that state, and when the woman vehemently denied that she did, he sent her away, saying that without consent there is no sin.[90] The difference with the witches lies, therefore, in the different disposition of the women involved.

The nuanced distinction between what is real and what is delusional that we find in Bernardino tends to disappear if we look at other cases which we can relate to his teachings, but which are not told by him. This is especially true for the accusations of ritual infanticide and the exsanguination of little children, which in Bernardino of Siena's sermons remain largely a controversial-literary arguments, modelled on the stereotype offered by the *striges* and *lamiae* of ancient literature. The operational transposition of this *topos* will prove to be fraught with consequences, as I will show in the next chapter.

Giacomo della Marca, an inquisitor, more hardline than his master, also recalled the episode of Finicella in his Sunday sermons and erased completely all references to the activity of healing exercised by the woman. Moreover, in many of the examples that Giacomo compares to the case of Finicella, several dark elements are found in common—including abortion, infanticide and vampirism—but the preacher never makes the distinction his teacher had between the actual work of the witches and the devilish deception of them.

The first such case concerns the accusation and sentencing of a woman, Santecia or Santuccia, which took place in Perugia in 1455, when Giacomo was preaching there. The friar describes her crimes with these words:

> A devilish old woman from Gualdo de Nuceria was burned in Perugia; her name was Santecia, and she committed countless evil acts, among which she confessed to having killed fifty children by sucking their blood though their ears, and also many other evil deeds with the Corpus Christi

[90] Bernardino da Siena, *Le prediche volgari (Firenze 1425)*, vol. 1, pp. 191–192.

> consecrated by a priest she was acquainted with, who later with her devilish art, she took by the genitals and threw on a tree, or by his nose etc. Another one killed twelve and another fourteen, not to speak of the many still in their mothers' womb.[91]

A local chronicler confirms the condemnation of the woman, reporting that she was caught the day before the friar started to preach and, not having enough money to pay a fine (200 fiorini), was paraded around on a donkey—facing backwards, with a mitre on her head held by two men dressed as devils—before being brought to the stake. After Giacomo started his preaching, two other women who had had dealings with Santuccia were arrested, and two priests. The chronicler does not mention the killing of children or the other incredible acts of magic that Giacomo attributes to the woman.

The stereotype of the witch as a bloodsucker recurs throughout Giacomo's sermons. For example, he recounts a story he was told by a man while in Pinzolo, who was once visited in his house by an old woman, whom entered despite the door being closed. Sitting close to the man's wife, the old woman told the stupefied hosts that there were many others like her who craved the blood of children.[92]

Giacomo della Marca was not the only one to take Bernardino of Siena's accounts at face value. As I wrote at the beginning of this chapter, according to Michael Bailey, 'bonfires and burned flesh' followed those preachers wherever they went.[93] From this perspective, Bernardino's rather creepy incitement to 'send up some incense to the Lord here in Siena!' certainly has a Biblical undertone.[94] The God of the Old Testament demands blood sacrifices, as in *Genesis*:

[91] «Item, quedam diabolica vetula de Gualdo de Nuceria, combusta in Perusia, nomine Santecia, que fecit innumerabilia mala, inter que confessa est quod occidit pueros 50 et etiam sucavit sanguinem cuiusdam pueri totum per auriculam et etiam multa maleficia fecerat cum corpore Christi a quodam presbitero suo amico consecrato, quem postea per artem diabolicam cepit per genitalia et proiecit in arborem, vel per nasum etc. Ibidem una alia interfecit 12 et alia 14 et in uteribus matrum multos»: Giacomo della Marca, *Sermones dominicales*, vol. 1, p. 424.

[92] Ibidem, p. 426.

[93] Bailey, *Battling Demons*, p. 121.

[94] «Doh, facciamo un poco d'oncenso a Domenedio qui a Siena!» Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche volgari sul Campo di Siena 1427*, vol. 2, p. 1007.

> And Noe built an altar unto the Lord: and taking of all cattle and fowls that were clean, offered holocausts upon the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savour, and said: I will no more curse the earth for the sake of man.[95]

Unwillingly, these verses bear with them a memory of blood sacrifices performed across the Mediterranean and beyond in ancient times, sacrifices that similarly involved fumigations to please the gods, but also to lure demons, that they might obey those who had performed the acts.[96] It is a contradiction Bernardino could not have been aware of, that while sacrificing victims to his God, he was repeating an ancient and pagan holocaust.

[95] *Genesis*, 8, 20–21: "A sweet savour" is rendered exactly the same way in Hebrew, Greek and Latin: «reyach nichoach»; «καὶ ὠσφράνθη κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὀσμὴν εὐωδίας»; «Odoratusque est Dominus odorem suavitatis». In the Hebrew Bible the expression «reyach nichoach» occurs 42 times: Stephen Finlan, *Problems with atonement* (Minnesota, 2005), p. 12 (but see also pp. 11–38 for a wider look at sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible).

[96] On the subject of smells, perfumes and magic Marina Montesano, *The Smell of Magic* in *Parfums et odeurs au Moyen Âge. Science, usage, symboles*, ed. Agostino Paravicini Bagliani (Firenze, 2015), pp. 205–220.

The Italian Quattrocento

Stregatum in Benevento

The consequences of Bernardino of Siena's preaching become clear in a trial held at Todi in 1428, against a woman called Matteuccia. Where Bernardino, who had a classical education, modelled his image of the witch on the Latin tradition of Petronius and Apuleius, with their vivid descriptions of *striges*, the transposition of the literary *topos* in the trial of Matteuccia led to a different set of assertions: that witches are not just *maleficae* cheated by the devil, but are really able to do what they are accused of. The trial proceedings, in which her crimes as a *strega* were asserted, were clearly indebted to Bernardino's sermons; and an important factor in his being able to so effectively modify collective perceptions of the nature of witchcraft was the folklore of ancient *striges* which still lingered in Italy. But the preacher (and the inquisitor) was not simply some kind of anthropologist unearthing ancient beliefs; he was also an inventor, or was, at least, someone capable of reading the sermons of others—based, perhaps, on traditions rooted elsewhere—and bending the details to fit his own context. Similarly, these preachers were able to glean from the classical sources, representing those ancient myths and beliefs in their own, contemporary context—as, for example, Bernardino and others did when they mixed the classical *strix* with the magical flight of the *Canon Episcopi*, paving the way for modern beliefs on witchcraft.

M. Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic,
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At the beginning of 1426, Bernardino preached in Umbria, visiting the towns of Montefalco, Spoleto and Todi. In this last, he contributed to the reform of the statutes and committed himself to the pursuit of the 'witch' Matteuccia di Francesco, as the proceedings of the trial testify. We do not have any reports of this period of pursuit, but it is very likely that, once he had become aware of Matteuccia's activities, Bernardino's attempts to stop her attracted the attention of the authorities. Not by chance, therefore, the proceedings focus on Matteuccia's activities between 1426 and 1428.

Matteuccia di Francesco was judged and sentenced by Lorenzo de Surdis, *capitaneus* of Todi (assisted by two jurists) in a secular, not ecclesiastical, trial. The accusations against her were manifold: she was branded a woman of bad reputation and an enchantress, an evil-doer, a spellbinder and a witch.[1] The choice of words appears to be anything but random: where the first accusation pertains to rumours surrounding her reputation—and corresponds, in fact, to a general (and, as so often in cases like this, recurrent) judgement of improper conduct on the part of the accused—the others distinguish different 'magical' actions. For example, *incantamenta* refers to the healing activities which Matteuccia carried out. The practice being alleged respects the etymology of the word, because as a healer she resorts to numerous *carmina*—the recitation of spells, some of which are transcribed in the records of the trial—accompanied by gestures. Matteuccia heals several possessed people, either by the practice of 'measuring cloths' ('misurazione dei panni') or by using a 'pagan bone'.[2] The first of these customs offers a means of detecting an illness, while the latter combines the use of the bones of corpses—in particular, those of unbaptised children and bones found in ancient burials, details which are also given in Bernardino's sermons—with the recitation of Christian prayers.

The terms *facturaria* (from *facere*, with the meaning of *malum facere*) and *maliaria* (which derives from *malus*) are almost synonymous and are both related to the sphere of erotic-affective discomforts. Matteuccia had achieved a certain notoriety in this field, and women and men alike were coming to her in large numbers. The remedies she would propose

[1] «Publicam incantatricem, facturiam et maliariam et stregam»: Domenico Mammoli (ed.), *Processo alla strega Matteuccia di Francesco* (*Todi, 20 marzo 1428*) (Spoleto 2013, first print, 1969), pp. 10–11. Unless otherwise stated, English translations are my own.

[2] Ibidem, pp. 14–15.

consist, as always in this domain, of the application of concoctions composed of herbs, hair, doves reduced to powder and dead animals; wax images and consecrated objects are also used. Ointments were prepared from the flesh and fat of the dead, something which Matteuccia does using the corpse of a drowned person to provide a curative ointment for an employee of the famous warlord Braccio da Montone. This is further proof of the fame achieved by Matteuccia, who could boast a clientele from well beyond the narrow urban and suburban locality. Casting spells and counteracting wicked ones—which were considered to be the cause of many physical and mental illnesses—were another of Matteuccia's skills; to heal a paralytic, she washed him with a decoction of herbs which she then threw into the street in order to transfer the spell to the first unfortunate passer-by. The 'professional' connotations of Matteuccia's activities were certainly an aggravating factor of considerable importance, one which the court underlined: she did it for the money.[3]

These practices together would have been enough to reach a verdict against Matteuccia and to declare her a witch in a broad sense. However, in this particular context, being a *striga* implies more specifically the practices of magical flight, shapeshifting and feeding upon children's blood:

> Compelled by the diabolical spirit, again and again she went to the *Stregatum*, devastating children, sucking their blood in many different places; and many times she went, together with other witches, to the Walnut of Benevento or to other walnuts, anointing herself with a certain ointment made with the fat of the vulture, with the blood of the nightjars, with the blood of infants and others ingredients, saying [in vernacular]: 'Ointment Ointment, send me to the walnut of Benevento, over water and over wind, and over any tempest'. ('Unguento, unguento/mandame a la noce de Benivento,/supra aqua et supra ad vento/et supra ad omne maltempo')[4]

[3] «Ex lucro percepto»: Ibidem, pp. 26–27.

[4] «Item (…), diabolico spiritu instigata, quam pluries et pluries ivit stregatum infantes devastando, sanguinem ipsorum lactantium sucando pluribus et diversis locis ac temporibus, ac etiam pluries accessit una cum alijs streghis ad nocem Beniventi et ad alias noces unguendo se cum quodam unghuento facto ex pinguedine ultoris (vulturis), sanguine noctule et sanguine puerorum lactantium et alijs rebus, dicendo: "Unguento, unguento/mandame a la noce de Benivento,/supra aqua et supra ad vento/et supra ad omne maltempo"»: Ibidem, pp. 26–27.

She invoked the devil with another formula, which is also reported: 'Oh Lucibello, demon from hell, because you were banned, you changed your name to Lucifer the most powerful, come to me or send one of your servants'.[5] With this, the devil allegedly appeared in the shape of a goat, and Matteuccia herself turned into a cat and rode the goat to the *stregatum*, the gathering where many witches, various demons and Lucifer come together. There, Lucifer gave commands to those gathered to enter any house where an infant was living, to suck its blood through the throat or nose, and to bring it back to be used in the preparation of the ointment. In five cases, the facts are detailed with the names of the parents and the localities (all Umbrian) in which the alleged murders were committed.

The *stregatum* happened, according to the statement, with a worrying frequency, every Monday, Saturday and Sunday through six months of the year: April, May, August, September, March and December—the so-called Stile dell'Incarnazione was in use, hence the New Year started on March 25, but even in the light of this consideration, the sequence is nonsense, as March should come after December. It has to be noted that some of the common features of later Sabbat representations are absent from this account: there is no dancing, no eating, no sex, and no *osculum* is mentioned as having occurred at these gatherings. The sole purpose seems to be to plan the killing of children and the harvesting of their blood for use in the ointments and magical activities of the witches. Even if here it is called *stregatum*, this is nonetheless one of the earliest and most seminal representations of the Sabbat, predating by a few years the famous cases from the Western Alps.

The fame of Benevento and its walnut trees in recorded accounts begins with the Observants' preaching and with this trial, though it must remain unknown whether an oral tradition existed prior to the friars' writings. Many explanations have been offered to explain its origins. There is a hagiographical text dating from the ninth century which narrates alleged events from the seventh concerning the conversion of the local Lombards. They used to worship a tree (though whether it is a walnut or not the text does not specify) where they would hang the carcass of an animal and ride their horses around trying to hit it with their spears; at the end of the ritual, they would each eat a small piece

[5] «O Lucibello, demonio dello inferno, poiché sbandito fosti, el nome cagnasti, et ay nome Lucifero maiure, vieni ad me o manda un tuo servitore»: Ibidem, pp. 28–29.

of the skin. This practice continued until the local bishop, Barbatus, convinced them to stop by performing a few miracles. Some scholars are convinced that the memory of this sacred tree could have been lingering on, giving birth to the walnut tree of the witches' Sabbat.[6] However, there are problems with this explanation. Unlike other hagiographic legends, full of *topoi* and with little attachment to reality, this ninth-century *Life* of Barbatus is credible—in this episode at least—as the account of the rite includes a misunderstanding by the hagiographer: he reports that the Lombards performed their religious vows in this fashion and for this reason called the place *Votum*. Of course, this explanation makes no sense, as it is inconceivable that the pagan Lombards would assign a Christian and Latin name to a place sacred to their religion. *Votum* is a misunderstanding by an author, writing two centuries after fact, who did not grasp that Wodan was the name of the place or, better, of the divinity to whom the Lombard warriors dedicated their ritual. This is very consistent with what we know of their religion, not least as Paulus Diaconus reports that they were particularly devoted to Wodan. Further, it especially recalls the ritual hangings performed to honour Wodan/Odhinn's self-sacrifice, recorded in the *Havamal*, when he hanged from the sacred tree Yggdrasil for three days and three nights in order to acquire his knowledge. Adam von Bremen discovered that the Swedish also sacrificed to their gods according to this tradition in the sacred forest of Uppsala. To return to our theme, it is hard to credit that this very particular set of beliefs, which all but ceased in the seventh century, and which was only partially understood two centuries later, even by a local, could form the basis of a widespread legend involving witches and walnuts eight centuries later.

Another curious coincidence is that a river called Sabato runs through Benevento, a name which might evoke Shabbath/Sabbat. But the two words are entirely unrelated: Sabato comes from Sabini, a Sanniti tribe who settled in the Sabatus basin (according to Livy), whose eponym was Sabus; furthermore, according to our current knowledge, the name Sabbat for the witches gathering first appeared later than the early fifteenth century. A less captivating explanation would be that it was

[6]For a discussion of the topic see Paolo Portone, Benevento, Walnut Tree of, in *Encyclopaedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*, ed. Richard M. Golden (Santa Barbara, CA, 2006), vol. 1, pp. 109–110.

simply necessary, if the text were to scan, that wind (*ventum*) rhymed with the name of the place—a place, moreover, which we cannot be sure Matteuccia would have been able to precisely locate. In fact, in another trial in the same area, held in 1456 against a certain Mariana, the formula ascribed to the witch changes: 'Unguento, menace a la noce de Menavento sopra l'acqua et sopra al vento'. 'Menavento' provides the same rhyme, but is not a town or a place; its meaning is 'where the wind blows'.[7]

The reference to the walnut tree makes more sense, because there was an established literary and oral tradition that attributed special powers to the tree and its drupes. Pliny states that even sitting under a walnut tree can give you headaches, a notion shared by the anonymous author of the previously mentioned *Mesnagier de Paris*, in which nut trees in general are said to provoke this noxious effect. According to tradition, during the Nativity of St. John the Baptist (the Summer Solstice), walnuts which have not yet ripened must be harvested, as should various herbs thought to be full of unusual powers—Bernardino of Siena says Finicella, discussed at the end of the previous Chapter, collected herbs on that night.[8]

During the trial, Matteuccia was left with a few days to put forward her defence. But she was helpless to do so and consequently was condemned to burn at the stake. She was carried to the appointed place on a donkey, her hands tied behind her back and a mitre upon her head. The date was 20 March 1428. The notary who recorded the sentencing of the trial left a small drawing of a woman's head, clearly Matteuccia, in the left margin at the top of the page. She is shown enchanting a little animal, with her hair uncombed and loose, a typical depiction that, as we have seen in the previous chapter, was widely established (Fig. 1). No indication of her age is given, not even whether she was old or young; and nor are her social standing or family situation known.

Before the trial against Matteuccia, the area had registered no similar cases. In the nearby city of Perugia, Riccola di Puccio, a woman from Pisa, had been executed in 1347 for being a poisoner (*venefica*), a sorceress (*affacturatrice*) and an enchantress (*incantatrix*). Most

[7] Ugolino Nicolini (ed.), La stregoneria a Perugia e in Umbria, *Bollettino della Deputazione di Storia Patria per l'Umbria*, 84 (1987), pp. 58–63.

[8] Mane Perrine, Les fruits dans les traités culinaires français (XIIIe–XVe siècles), *Archéologie du Midi médiéval*, 23–24 (2005), pp. 129–144.

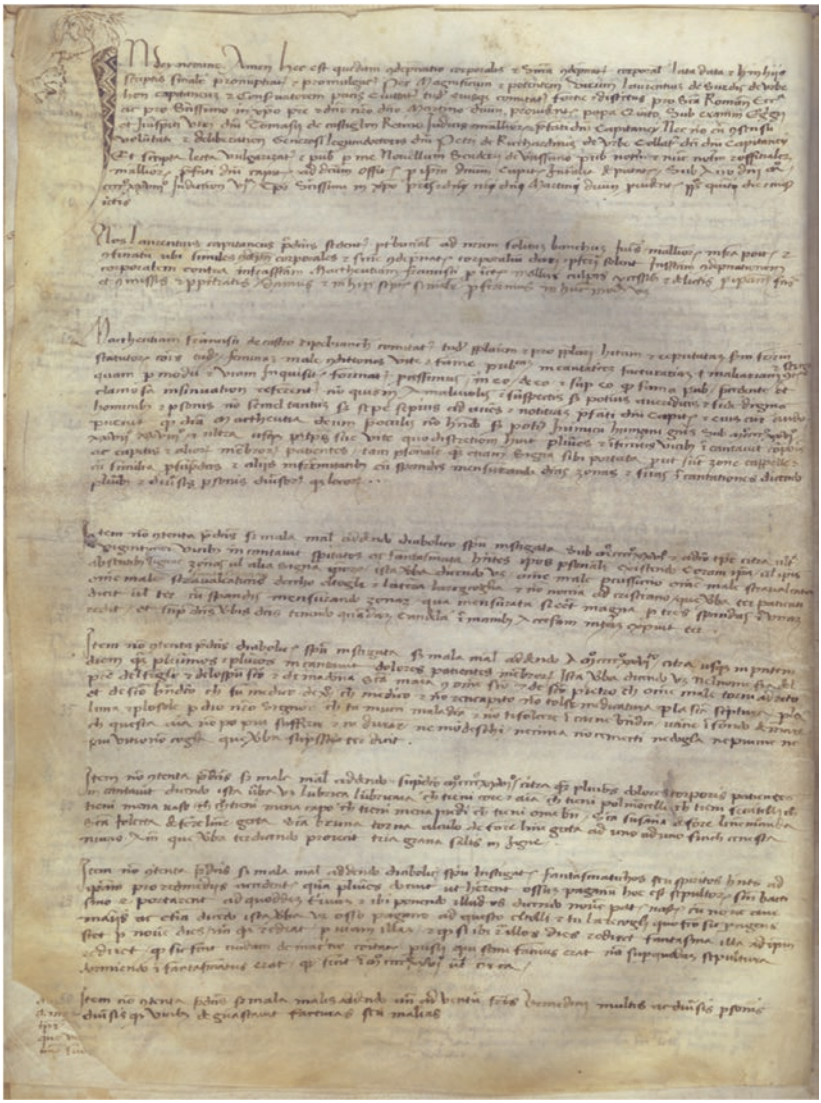

Fig. 1 Matteuccia da Todi enchanting a little animal, with her hair uncombed and loose: Atti del Processo, Archivio Comunale di Todi, photo by Massimiliano Bassetti

importantly, she was condemned as an invoker of demons: those called 'Mosecto, Barbecto and Belsabuct', plus many more, were summoned through her spells.[9] She mainly performed love magic, and her formulas involved spells, herbs, animal parts (in one episode, an egg from a black chicken) and amulets, all detailed by the judge who assisted the *capitaneum* of the city. If it were not for the insistence that she formed pacts with demons—whose intervention in these trifling matters seems quite preposterous—the trial would be like many others of the time. The elements of child killing and night rides are absent from this early account, as are the lurid details of horrid ointments; nor is Riccola described as the stereotypical witch, performing naked with her hair uncombed. In the end, she falls victim to the growing concerns about demonic practices and, unable to pay the huge amount of money demanded by the court, is burned at the stake.

Another early case, also tried in Perugia, involves a certain Caterina di Giorgio from Modrus, Croatia. There are too few cases to truly establish a pattern, but the foreign origins of the accused might imply that they were perceived as marginals or were picked upon because they were alone and vulnerable. Aside from these speculations, the trial against Caterina is peculiar because, as well as the accusations of using magic, she was also accused of an actual homicide. The alleged pact with the devil seems of less interest to the judges, and while she is said to have been 'inspired' by him, there were no evocations or direct relations. Caterina was in the habit of preparing love potions and amulets, which were applied in different times and places, and these are all detailed in the sentencing. She also used sacramental hosts sacrilegiously—these were provided by a priest, who, on the judge's request, is not mentioned by name. Then, one day Caterina became involved in a quarrel between a couple, which she tried to solve with her potions. It seems she may have been in love with the man, but things went wrong and the wife (who also went by the name Caterina) died, probably during a fight, having been pushed by the defendant. Returning to her house, Caterina tried to act as if nothing had happened, but she was eventually discovered, brought to trial and finally condemned.

[9] Nicolini (ed.), *La stregoneria a Perugia e in Umbria*, pp. 5–87 (the trial of Riccola: pp. 30–44).

'Vampires'

In March 1455, Perugia witnessed the trial of one Santuccia, instigated by Giacomo della Marca.[10] Immediately following it, two further cases were brought, both bearing clear resemblances to it: one in April 1455, against Filippa della Pieve; the other in November 1456, against Mariana da S. Sisto. Both of these latter present features very similar to the case of Matteuccia, and it seems very possible that what was unfolding in Perugia was similar to what Bernardino of Siena had started almost thirty years before: preaching about a certain image of the witch in sermons gave way to trials in which the accusations were all similar, and all indebted to the archetypal Latin *strix*.

Clearly, these cases were considered more important than previous ones: the *capitaneum* of the city is named alongside the Bishop of Macerata and Recanati, Nicola (the episcopal see of Perugia was vacant at the time), a jurist and the notary who recorded the sentence. The list of accusations against Filippa Lucrezia of Angelo Alberto from Città della Pieve (near Perugia) is very long. According to the sentence, she was a *facturaria*, a diviner ('auguriola magica'), a poisoner, an enchantress, a summoner of lurid spirits and demons, and a crook who corrupted pure and chaste souls. The list includes a direct quote from the Theodosian Code—citing an article of law from Constantius II—dense with errors, but clearly recognisable: she is a weather sorceress, who never ceases from disrupting the lives of innocents and inviting trouble by raising the shades of the dead to hurt their enemies with their wicked arts.[11]

She is further defined as 'stregam corsariam maligiagiam et potatricem sanguinis puerorum'.[12] 'Maligiagia' is an unknown word, but it surely relates to both *maleficium* and *magia*: Malagigi, in the Italian Renaissance, translates Maugis or Maugris, who is one of the characters of the *Chansons de geste* and romances of chivalry, brought up by a fairy

[10] I have detailed the case of Santuccia in the previous chapter.

[11] «(…) elementorum turbatricem, vitas insontium hominum labefactare non dubitantem, plura et diversa scielerum componimenta minibus acitiis ventillatricem ut suos confecerit inimicos»: Ibidem, pp. 52–63; the passage quotes the Theodosian Code: «Multi magicis artibus ausi elementa turbare vitas insontium labefactare non dubitant et manibus accitis audent ventilare, ut quisque suos conficiat malis artibus inimicos» Cod. Theod. 9, 16, 4.

[12] Nicolini (ed.), *La stregoneria a Perugia e in Umbria*, pp. 52–63.

to become a great enchanter. The figure went on to assume a role of his own in many Italian poems—such as *Morgante* by Luigi Pulci, *Orlando Innamorato* by Matteo Maria Boiardo and *Orlando Furioso* by Ludovico Ariosto—in which he was a magician and a thief. Whatever exactly the notary wished to express with the word 'maligiagia', it is certainly related to this domain. *Strega* and *corsaria* are related to witchcraft and night rides, and finally, she is accused of exsanguinating children.[13]

Filippa had a partner in her crimes, named Clarutia di Angelo, who was also from Città delle Pieve. The pair are said to have met in 1434, or at any rate, it was in that year that she began her dealings with the devil, having heard Clarutia speak of her previous activities. In March of that year, under the guidance of her friend, Filippa met the devil: she stood naked, with her hair all messed up ('extra omne ordine', reports the text), receiving from him an ointment, a thing that was new to her ('adhuc notitiam non habebat'), and with that anointed herself.[14] Here, there is a small contradiction in the sentence, because it says 'and with that she did the usual anointment' ('factaque cum illo solita untione'), which is strange, given that we are also told it was her first time doing such a thing.[15] Evidently, the information is being given as something that is already known: that such ointments are used in this way. After the anointment, Filippa pronounced a formula, which is given in vernacular: 'Devil, I give myself to you, bring me wherever I tell you'.[16] With this, Filippa and Clarutia were immediately brought to the house of a neighbour, where a toddler was lying down to sleep at his mother's side. The pair decide to enter after changing their shape—what animal forms they morph into is not stated—and they suck almost all of the blood out of the baby, who dies the next day from the bites and loss of blood. Unlike reports from other trials, where blood is sucked to prepare ointment, in this instance the two witches also go after the corpse. In fact, when the infant was buried, they allegedly took him out of the grave and totally lacerated his body, tearing it apart limb from limb, bone

[13] Some considerations on the menace to children as one of the roots of witch-craze are in Richard Kieckhefer, Avenging the Blood of Children: Anxiety Over Child Victims and the Origins of the European Witch Trials, in *The Devil, Heresy and Witchcraft in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey B. Russell*, ed. Alberto Ferreiro (Leiden, 1998), pp. 91–109.

[14] Nicolini (ed.), *La stregoneria a Perugia e in Umbria*, pp. 54, 56.

[15] Ibidem, p. 53.

[16] «Diaulo ad te me do in anima et in corpo, portame dove io ti dirrò»: Ibidem.

from bone and boiling the parts down. They then took the rendered fat and a powder made from the pulverised, burnt bones to prepare the ointment. Other allegations include that they got naked in the night by candlelight and entered closed houses to loot them; that they summoned demons; and that they turned chaste women lustful. The account of the sentence is quite confused, piling up elements that are not completely clear: how, for example, was the ointment used? How did the demons intervene in Filippa and Clarutia's crimes?

Around 1440, according to the chronology given by the text, Clarutia died, leaving Filippa to continue her activities alone. Mostly, she collected the bodies of foetuses to extract fat for her ointments. It is not specified whether she helped the mothers to abort these foetuses, as Matteuccia allegedly had, only that she was quick to go after them.[17] The ointment, prepared with the baby fat plus other, unnamed elements, was rubbed over her body, and she would ride on the devil to the homes of small children, whose blood she sucked. It is said that more than one hundred young victims were subjected to this treatment, each subsequently dying or falling seriously ill.

The accusations become less disconnected in the following part of the text, which relates to events occurring after 1440. In that year, Filippa fell in love with a young forester, James; she summoned demons to obtain the recipe for a potion which would win his love. The concoction was made of earthworms, children's hair, rope stolen from hanging scaffolds, a night bird partially burned and other things that are not specified. The preparation had to be put in a place where James regularly passed by. Next, he was given a concoction of sperm, Filippa's menstrual blood and valerian (whose side effects are drowsiness and insomnia), hidden in his drink and food. Finally, on a Thursday, early in the morning before the sun is up, Filippa collects the necessary herbs and, turning towards the East, makes three marriage rings with the valerian, uttering some words that the text states are known, but which, for brevity's sake, are not recorded. Those three rings were also hidden in James' drink and food. Unsurprisingly, the young man fell very sick, to the extent that Filippa was moved to pity and decided to release him from her magic.

Nonetheless, Filippa continued to use her spells against many other men, three of whom are named. In 1448, she quarrelled with a certain

[17] «Solicita fuit habere corpuscula filiorum qui mortui de utero matris exiverunt»: Ibidem, p. 54.

Gerolamo Bartolomei and decided to kill him. She prepared a poison comprising one vesper bat, the feather of a raven, a piece of rope from a hanged man's noose and some hairs from his corpse, plus other ingredients that she consecrated to Venus ('stella magna').[18] Notably, she performed the consecration while standing naked in the night, and the record reports the familiar detail of her having dishevelled hair. She placed the potion in an envelope close to the door of the house where Gerolamo lived; shortly after, passing by the potion, he died. In February 1455, only two months before she was on trial, she practised her magic on another man, a certain Evangelista from Rome. They had previously lived together, but the situation between the pair had become tense. The text reports that Filippa's intention was to make him sick and then cure him, and we might speculate that in doing so she hoped to regain his favour. She made a potion with Evangelista's hair, a carnation, a small dose of mercury and spit, plus other, unspecified ingredients. She consecrated the concoction to Satan, standing naked with her face to the Moon, and added it to Evangelista's food. She had also readied an antidote, a yet more repulsive preparation consisting of the stomach of a capon, emptied of food and filled with noses, ears and the stomach membranes of foetuses. A hole was made in this using hair from a corpse, and it was put away in a hidden place. When Evangelista started feeling sick, Filippa put some lard in a pan over the fire, mixed the potion with it and rubbed it on the chest of Evangelista, who regained his health.

For all these charges, Filippa was condemned to pay four thousand *denarii* and a few days later, having been unable to produce the money, was burned at the stake. As we have seen, there is a very detailed account of the trial. The most confusing parts are those linked to her activity as a proper *Strega*—the baby fat, riding upon the devil, the exsanguination of young children—while her activity as *venefica* is much better explained. Of course, the first thing that comes to mind is that the less coherent accounts were totally invented. The rest of the accusations, though, are more consistent: even if they resemble the kind of revolting magic that the Latin authors had attributed to lowlifes like Canidia and Sagana, they are so full of unique details that one wonders if indeed they mirrored folk magic. Again, here, the cultivated view that built on classical

[18] Ibidem, p. 55.

literature to construct an image of modern witchcraft met some folkloric uses that really resembled those the friars, inquisitors and cultivated men of those times had read in written accounts.

This seems to also be true of the accusations against Mariana da S. Sisto of Perugia, who was judged and condemned in November 1456. Mariana lived in a village near Perugia and was married. She is described only as 'factucchiagia', but the accusations against her do not differ much from the others, even if the account is shorter and less detailed. Like Filippa, Mariana made potions with 'pagan bones' which she collected from a ditch next to the church of Saint John in Pila (on the outskirts of Perugia) where unbaptised children were buried. With the help of a presbyter, whose name is known but not revealed, she summoned spirits and demons to obtain help with the murder of a shoemaker she hated, called Gniagnie (for Giovanni). She then hid a potion at the doorway of the man's house, and he died. Mariana wore a number of *brevia* (amulets) to protect herself, which comprised teeth, the flesh of wolves, powders and herbs, each with names of demons inscribed. Further, she was charged with sexual misconduct, having left her husband and children to live with another man and having also engaged in an affair with the aforementioned presbyter.[19]

However, the main accusations are solely connected with witchcraft. Mariana was trained by another unnamed woman on how to exsanguinate children ('surchiandum pueros'). Together, the pair applied an ointment to their faces and bodies and recited a formula we have seen before: 'Ointment, bring us to the walnut of Menavento over water and over wind' ('Unguento, menace a la noce de Menavento sopra l'acqua et sopra al vento').[20] In this way, they reached a place full of walnuts, and in the dark, they partied ('tripudiabant') and resolved to go exsanguinating babies, whose homes they entered with the help of the ointment. One victim is named as the son of a couple in Pila; they sucked the child's blood through his nose, almost to his death, but the child was eventually saved by the intervention of Mariana's associate, who acted as a healer. Even if the passage is not fully clear, the idea is that they bled small children in order to then gain money as magic healers, a practice which parallels what Bernardino had said about Finicella. Nothing more

[19] Ibidem, pp. 58–63.

[20] Ibidem, p. 60.

is known of Mariana's partner in crime, and the trial ended as usual, with the accused being condemned to burn at the stake.

The list of trials for witchcraft that took place in Perugia ends in 1501 with the condemnation of a man, Gniagne Mei from Cibottola. His activities date back over twenty years, since 1481, when he was associated with two women—their names are known to the judge, but purposely not recorded. Gniagne was accused of being a male witch, a *maleficus*, a sorcerer, a spell binder and an summoner of demons: 'strego, maleficus, facturarius, maliator et immundorum spirituum incantator'.[21] Apart from the occasional mention of a love potion, the crimes Gniagne stood accused of all related to the exsanguination of children. Inspired and counselled by the devil, he and his partners anointed themselves and preyed on various homes (some names, places and dates are given); sometimes they sucked the blood until the baby was sick, and on other occasions, they bled the child completely and would then cook the blood and eat it. Evidently, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, many things had changed: groups of witches (both women and men, such as we find in this case) were more frequent, and the notion of the sect was more widely accepted. Further, different types of devilish witchcraft were known and persecuted around Europe. The trial of Gniagne evidences tight links with earlier trials in Perugia—especially as vampirism is the central accusation—but, by this time, the novelty of the Observants' allegations had been surpassed by many other writings on the matter of witchcraft.

From Sorcery to Witchcraft

The other early Italian trials follow a similar pattern, but present a different set of accusations. Towards the end of the fourteenth century, there are an increasing number of cases involving love magic and necromancy, but which do not contain any traces of 'vampirism', night flights or Sabbats. These latter features will appear only around the middle of the fifteenth century. In a region that geographically and culturally is not far from Umbria, such as Tuscany, the Observants' preaching did not have the same impact, or not for at least a few decades.

[21] Ibidem, p. 66.

Around the time of Dante, as Robert Davidsohn has discussed, there were a few trials for sorcery held, revolving mostly around love magic and potions.[22] One of the earliest recorded cases dates from 1250 and concerns a servant from Pisa, Meldina, who stood accused of having enchanted her master, and was condemned to pay a fine.[23] In 1298, an old widow, Fresca of Fiesole, stood accused of the enchantment of a young woman who had abandoned her husband right after the marriage, and whose father brought the accusations; the result of the trial is unknown. The case of renowned astrologist Cecco d'Ascoli, burned at the stake in 1327, was another matter entirely, as the political implications of his trial, and the type of accusations brought against him, differed greatly from the witchcraft trials.[24] A certain Franceschina, originally of Rome but living in Florence, was arrested and judged in Lucca for a series of frauds involving magic: she masqueraded as a Jew, held books of medicine and claimed to be a healer, but was, more likely, a swindler moving from one place to another in order to avoid being caught.[25]

In a seminal article on the subject, Gene Brucker argues that, contrary to a common assumption linking increased fear of the occult to the search for scapegoats for the Black Death and the subsequent crisis that struck Europe in the middle of the century, Tuscan trials, in fact, ceased in these years and resumed only in 1375—a fact that conforms with the general trend in European trials for sorcery.[26] Of course, one can argue that there are too few cases to determine a conclusive pattern, especially when we consider the gaps left by the loss of manuscripts, but it is also the case that some trials dating from that period are now known. For example, there was the case of a doctor, Francesco di Carmignano, who stood before the inquisitor of Florence in 1350, accused of having

[22] Robert Davidsohn, *Firenze ai tempi di Dante* (Firenze, 1929), vol. 1, pp. 85–90.

[23] Ludovico Zdekauer, La condanna di una strega (1250), *Bullettino storico pistoiese*, 26 (1924), pp. 107–109.

[24] Antonio Rigon (ed.), *Cecco d'Ascoli: cultura, scienza e politica nell'Italia del Trecento*, Atti del convegno di studio (Ascoli Piceno, 2–3 dicembre 2005) (Roma, 2007).

[25] Christine E. Meek, *The Commune of Lucca Under Pisan Rule, 1342–1369* (Cambridge, MA, 1980), pp. 44–46.

[26] Gene A. Brucker, Sorcery in Early Renaissance Florence, *Studies in the Renaissance*, 10 (1963), pp. 7–24; see also Richard Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300–1500* (London, 1976), pp. 15–16.

invoked demons with the help of books of necromancy. He was cleared of the allegations.[27] In Siena, two more cases of male necromancers are known, both judged by the Franciscan inquisitor Antonio da S. Miniato in the year 1361, and both accused of having summoned demons to help in their sorcery. Again, neither was condemned to death.[28]

It is probable, then, that a few cases continued to be prosecuted; and we should resist rushing to any definitive conclusion on the importance of the Black Death. Its side effects, so to speak, are something to observe over the longer term, not in the pandemic's immediate aftermath. In any case, it is certain that there was an increase in the number of trials in the last quarter of the century. As the same Gene Brucker has noted:

> The advent of humanism coincided with a revival of sorcery persecution. In the half century from 1375 to 1430, the authorities passed death sentences on three convicted sorcerers, two of whom paid the supreme penalty outside the Porta alla Giustizia. At precisely the time when humanist ideals and values were replacing traditional medieval beliefs, the city was burning its heretics and its sorcerers.[29]

The themes that recur throughout these eight trials are sexual and love magic, money, the summoning of demons and acts of sacrilege. Three cases ended with a death sentence (one of these three managed to escape), others with severe corporal punishments.

Even if the city of Florence did not have a specific provision for the punishment of sorcery—with the result that, between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the decision was left to the judge—statutes and laws show a growing concern with poisons. As Trevor Dean notes, 'Poisoning and sorcery were linked offences. Medieval legal categories conjoined what historians differentiate. The law did not conceive of poisoning as a separate offence, but confused it with harmful magic'.[30] This is probably less a genuine confusion (nor one particular to the medieval period),

[27] Dinora Corsi, *Diaboliche maledette e disperate. Le donne nei processi per stregoneria (secoli XIV–XVI)* (Firenze, 2013), pp. 42–44.

[28] Paolo Piccolomini, Documenti senesi sull'inquisizione, *Bollettino senese di storia patria*, 1, 15 (1908), pp. 233–246.

[29] Brucker, *Sorcery in Early Renaissance Florence*, p. 166.

[30] Trevor Dean, *Crime and Justice in Late Medieval Italy* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 157–158.

but is rather indicative of an entire history of concepts and laws concerning *veneficium* that show this boundary to be thin or non-existent. As Dean continues,

> An early fourteenth-century enactment by the king of Sicily against poisonings, magical incantations, divination and sorcery punished the practice of all these with death. The statutes of several cities in Piedmont appointed the same penalty for poisons and spells. Poisoning was one of the few crimes where the attempt was criminalised as well as the completed act. In Cesena it was a capital offence to poison someone even if the victim did not die. In Genoa the early fifteenth-century statutes declare that many citizens are killed or made seriously ill by potions given to them by their servants, who are not punished by the death penalty because they say that they did it not with an evil intent, to inflict death, but rather to induce love. Henceforth, the statute declares, any servant or slave who gives such a potion from which someone becomes ill or dies, even if it is done with the intention of inducing love, not of killing, is to suffer the death penalty.[31]

Part of the reason for such laws could be, as Dean notes, the influence of the *Lex Cornelia*. Actually, where the Roman laws did have an early influence, this trend happened way before the statutes quoted in this passage were conceived. Indeed, Frederick II had these norms included in his *Liber Augustalis*. Even if he reputedly thought it 'fabulous that the minds of men should be influenced by food or drink to loves or hates unless the guilty suspicion of the recipient induces these feelings', nonetheless, the will to harm by potions could not remain unchallenged:

> We order that those who dispense love potions or harmful foods of any kind or who make illicit exorcisms should be bound by such a penalty that, if those to whom such things have been given die or lose their minds as a result of them, we desire that those who perpetrated such acts should be subjected to the penalty of death. But if those who received these things were not harmed then we do not desire that the wills of the perpetrators should remain without blame, but we order that, after their goods have been confiscated, they should be jailed for a year.[32]

[31] Ibidem.

[32] *The Liber Augustalis*, trans. James M. Powell (Syracuse, 1971), p. 144.

Frederick and his jurists, and those who later followed on the same path, embraced ideas from Roman law—not only the *Lex Cornelia*, but also the provisions of the fourth century that aimed to persecute all and any use of potions, be they effective or not.[33]

Let us now move on to examine a series of early trials held in Northern Italy. Milan's first case of major interest involved a man called Giovanni Grassi. He had been arrested at Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, across the Rhone River from Avignon, around 1375, and was prosecuted by a Franciscan inquisitor who accused him of having dealt with the devil. Grassi saved his life by confessing his crime, but ten years later he was arrested again in Milan and faced similar accusations from a Dominican inquisitor in Sant'Eustorgio. Convicted as a repeat offender, or *relapsus*, Grassi was condemned to the stake and handed over to the city's *podestà*, who duly burned him.

In these same years, we also find the most famous case among the Milanese trials: the Dominican inquisitors tried two women, Pierina de Bugatis and Sibillia Zanni, for crimes linked to magical beliefs and deeds, and condemned them to light penance. In 1390, they, like Grassi, were arrested again on the same charges. During the new interrogations, they confessed to participating in a *ludus* (game), paying homage to the 'domina ludi' (Lady of the Game), called 'Madona Oriente' (Lady of the East)—or 'Diana' or 'Erodiade', names borrowed from the well-known *Canon Episcopi*. These women's spells seem different from those mentioned in both later Milanese witchcraft trials, and in the Umbrian ones, there are no confessions of killing babies, no blasphemy nor descriptions of Sabbats. At one point, Pierina mentions a spirit called *Lucifello*, who appeared and spoke to her in the shape of a man, but mostly their confessions seem related to folkloric traditions. For example, there are details of the consumption of an ox when the women gathered together. The ox's bones were then wrapped in the skin and buried, and finally, the beast was brought back to life. This rite is based on beliefs for which there are parallels across Northern Europe and Asia, and which has been deeply analysed.[34] Milan's inquisitor seemed inclined to treat the two

[33] As I have showed in the chapter 'The Witch as a Woman: Tales of Magic in Rome'.

[34] Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 1972), pp. 211–214; Maurizio Bertolotti, Le ossa e la pelle dei buoi. Un mito popolare tra agiografia e stregoneria, *Quaderni storici*, 14 (1979), pp. 470–499; Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath* (London, 1990), pp. 91–102; and Gábor Klaniczay, *The Uses of*

women's beliefs as real, beyond their unfortunate status as relapsed heretics. Both were condemned to death and handed over to the *podestà*.

There is little evidence of inquisitorial activity in Milan in the early fifteenth century for either diabolism or *maleficia*. Around the middle of the century, we find many trials against men and women accused of heresy for beliefs and acts connected to magic and devil worshipping, but these all took place in nearby valleys and not in Milan itself. The trials held around 1450 were led by the inquisitor Luca di Lecco, whose sentences were not particularly severe, even though several women were accused of having been seduced by the devil to worship a *domina ludi*, now declared a demon, and of performing many heretical acts, including stealing the Eucharist for their ceremonies. By the late fifteenth century, we find considerable confusion about the way to proceed in such cases, demonstrated by the fact that both prosecutors and prosecuted addressed protests to the Duke of Milan, Francesco Sforza. The inquisitor most active at this time, Paolo dei Filiberti, was often supported by Francesco Sforza himself. The inquisitor had created a team of 300 *bellatores*, as he calls them, instructed to fight against heretics, but also as security against the violent reprisals he feared. When he describes the deeds of the heretics, we see that they are all clearly related to witchcraft: for example, the accusations of killing children in various ways, including roasting them, and wringing their necks as one would with a goose.[35] Note, however, that at this stage there is still no trace of witches acting as 'vampires'.

After the middle of the century, a bloody repression of witches starts to take place in the diocese of Milan and in the nearby diocese of Como. These are surely influenced by the persecutions occurring in the Ticino, Alpin Valleys and Pays de Vaud, where a new definition of witchcraft was developing. Another landmark arrives in 1484, when the papal decree *Summis Desiderantes Affectibus* (*Desiring with great fervour*) was circulated, and trials for witchcraft increased in Milan. Under the rule of Ludovico il Moro and at the very beginning of the sixteenth century, Milan and its surroundings felt the effects of Bernardo Rategno's

Supernatural Power: The Transformation of Popular Religion in Medieval and Early-Modern Europe (Princeton, NJ, 1990), pp. 129–150.

[35] Luigi Fumi, L'inquisizione romana e lo stato di Milano: Saggio di ricerche nell'archivio di Stato, *Archivio storico lombardo*, 25 (1910), pp. 5–124 (esp. pp. 104–105).

activities as inquisitor of Como: a mountainous place called Tonale is named in sources during those years as one of the best-known Italian locations for Sabbats; Between 1483 and 1485, many trials held in Bormio, garnered such fame as to be remembered in Heinrich Kramer's *Malleus Maleficarum*.[36] Kramer refers to a Dominican inquisitor—who has since been identified as Lorenzo Soleri da Sant'Agata—and records that the trials included accusations of both cannibalism and exsanguination of young children.[37]

Some trials show the interweaving of different traditions, such as the case of a woman judged by the inquisitor Girolamo Rusconi, in which not only is the *ludus* mentioned, but also flight to Benevento, and even a devil in the shape of a young man named Macometto. We see clearly, here, how the depositions matched different sets of information that both the inquisitors and the accused had received from a variety of sources: the *ludus*, tales of which recurred around Milan; Benevento, which was first heard of in central Italy; and the anti-Islamic name of 'Macometto' (resembling Mahomet) given to the devil. This last might recall the tradition of prophetic and apocalyptic pamphlets that had agitated Italy during the wars between Ghibellini and Guelfi, or it could match more recent fears kindled by the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans and Constantinople.

The proceedings of the trials held in Modena, studied and published by Matteo Duni, date from the late fourteenth to early fifteenth century. The defendants appear to all be healers, practitioners of love magic or invokers of demons, such as in the case of Orsolina la Rossa, tried in 1539. Here, we see the full imagery of the Sabbat displayed, with the ointment made of human flesh and fat, and bloodsucking of babies:

> Interrogated in what way she harms babies, she answered: 'I suck their blood from under the nails of their hands or of their feet, or else from their

[36] On the relationship between Kramer and Northern Italy, see Tamara Herzig, Heinrich Kramer e la caccia alle streghe in Italia, in '*Non lasciar vivere la malefica*'. *Le streghe nei trattati e nei processi (secoli XI–XVII)*, eds. Dinora Corsi, Matteo Duni (Firenze, 2008), pp. 167–196.

[37] Michael Tavuzzi, *Renaissance Inquisitors. Dominican Inquisitors and Inquisitorial Districts in Northern Italy* (Leiden, 2007), pp. 163–174 and *passim*.

> lips, and I spit that blood into the hearth, after having first put all the ashes to the side, and I make a focaccia with that congealed blood and then I keep it. And if I were to find unguarded babies, woe to them![38]

In the village of Salussola, near Biella, Piedmont, the trial against Giovanna Monduro took place in January and February 1470, led by Giovanni Domenico da Cremona on behalf of Niccolò Constantini da Biella, inquisitor of Vercelli, Ivrea, Novara and Como. The transcript of the proceedings was made by a local priest who acted as notary at the trial. The charges being brought mostly relate to accusations of intercourse with demons and participation at gatherings (called '*ludi*'). At these gatherings, most often held on Thursdays, the *osculum infame* was practised, along with communal drinking from the barlotto. Giovanna allegedly rode a demon called Zen, or else mounted an anointed broom, together with other women, and also admitted to having harmed people, suffocating them with the help of demons who guided her hands.[39] As it has been noted, this trial 'may well be taken as representative of the witch-trials conducted by Dominicans, both conventual and observant, in Northern Italy during the Renaissance and discloses their common dynamics'.[40]

In the area of Saluzzo, some *mascae* (as they are called) were accused of heresy by the inquisition in 1495: they had participated in meetings with the devil, had sex with demons, danced under oak trees and committed sacrileges. The proceedings also tell of how they had killed a toddler, later disinterred the corpse and cooked it to separate the fat (for the ointment) from the flesh, which was eaten. Further baby-killing was confessed to, always perpetrated at night while the children slept with their parents. Adults and animals were also killed, and another preferred activity after the gatherings was to invoke storms.[41] The area borders with Savoy, where in 1430 Amadeus VIII had promulgated new statutes to control the morals, dress and beliefs

[38] Matteo Duni, *Under the Devil's Spell: Witches, Sorcerers, and the Inquisition in Renaissance Italy* (Syracuse–Florence, 2007), p. 119.

[39] Marcello Craveri, *Sante e streghe* (Milano, 1981), pp. 128–143.

[40] Tavuzzi, *Renaissance Inquisitors*, p. 158.

[41] Rinaldo Comba e Angelo Nicolini (eds.), '*Lucea talvolta la luna*'. *I processi alle masche di Rifredo e Gambasca* (Cuneo, 2004); Grado Giovanni Merlo, *Streghe* (Bologna, 2006).

of the Duchy, addressing in particular Jews, sorcerers, heretics and blasphemers. Savoy is, in turn, very close to Vaud, an area which took similar actions to persecute sorcery.[42]

Even a cursory glance at these early Italian trials shows the path leading from sorcery to witchcraft. To quote Michael Bailey, where sorcery is 'the simple performance of harmful magic', witchcraft implies a wider range of allegations:

> Witches were certainly believed to perform magic with the aid of demons, indeed via the supplication and worship of demons. But worse even than that, they were accused of complete apostasy, of rejecting their faith and surrendering their souls to Satan himself in exchange for their dark powers. They were thus thought to be members of an organized cult headed by the Prince of Darkness and standing in opposition to God's church on earth. At regular nocturnal gatherings known as sabbaths, they would assemble in the presence of their demonic master, worship him, and, in exchange for his promise of magical power, for- swear Christ, the church, and the entire Christian faith. They would also murder and devour babies, engage in sexual orgies, and perform other sinful and abominable rites.[43]

Some of these accusations appear very early in central Italy, as we have seen, due to the Observants' preaching. Over time, they gradually reached a wider audience and began to appear in trials held further afield, eventually meeting with other narratives of sorcery and witchcraft.

Poets to Admire or to Believe?

Scholars have shown how witch-trials and witch-hunts increased, especially in Northern Italy, towards the end of the fifteenth century, accompanied by increasingly frequent capital sentences, at a level

[42] Martine Ostorero, '*Folâtrer avec les démons*'. *Sabbat et chasse aux sorciers à Vevey (1448)* (Lausanne, 1996); Georg Modestin, *Le diable chez l'évêque. Chasse aux sorciers dans le diocèse de Lausanne (vers 1460)* (Lausanne, 1999); Sophie Simon, *Si je le veux, il mourra! Maléfices et sorcellerie dans la campagne genevoise (1497–1530)* (Lausanne, 2007); and Martine Ostorero, Kathrin Utz Tremp, Georg Modestin (eds.), *Inquisition et sorcellerie en Suisse romande. Le registre Ac 29 des Archives cantonales vaudoises (1438–1528)* (Lausanne, 2007).

[43] Michael D. Bailey, From Sorcery to Witchcraft: Clerical Conceptions of Magic in the Later Middle Ages, *Speculum*, 76, 4 (2001), pp. 960–990 (esp. p. 962).

perhaps underestimated in the past. According to the data assembled by Michael Tavuzzo, between 1450 and 1527, men and women accused of witchcraft and tried by the Dominican inquisitors were burned by the hundreds:

> Furthermore, if one were to consider as well witch-trials carried out by Franciscan inquisitors, episcopal courts and, especially, secular magistrates, it might well turn out that, whatever might have been the defining traits of the civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, witch-hunting was an integral part of it.[44]

Dominicans, especially those of the Congregation of Lombardy, played a leading role, while the Franciscan Observants, whom I consider to be major actors in early witch-trials, were relegated to a less active role. As Fabrizio Conti's analysis of the writings of many Franciscans at the turn of the century shows, the positions the Observants held were relatively removed from those of the *Malleus* and from the many Dominican inquisitors.

One of the lead characters of the movement, Bernardino de' Bustis, believed in the reality of the diabolic *ludus*—not the *ludus Dianae*, but one driven by the devil. Furthermore, even if he did not explicitly speak of a sect of witches, the alleged participation in communal gatherings clearly infers it. On the other hand, however, he followed Bernardino of Siena in giving no credence to the night flights being real.[45] Here, though, we can see how Bernardino de' Bustis follows a path common to many of his contemporaries, in separating the witches' Sabbat from the beliefs stated by the *Canon*: the diabolic *ludus* is real, and hence the witches who are persecuted in his times must be different from the *sceleratae mulieres* of the ancient *Canon*. Kramer was yet more explicit in the *Malleus Maleficarum*:

> Therefore since the Canon mentions those women and not the sorceresses, it is a false interpretation of the Canon when they wish to ascribe such imaginary transportations of bodies to the entire category of superstition

[44] Tavuzzi, *Renaissance Inquisitors*, pp. 197–198 (emphasis removed).

[45] Fabrizio Conti, *Witchcraft, Superstition, and Observant Franciscan Preachers: Pastoral Approach and Intellectual Debate in Renaissance Milan* (Turnhout, 2015).

> and to all its varieties, so that all sorceresses are transported only in the imagination in the way that those women are.[46]

Before Kramer, the Dominican inquisitor Jean Vineti had, in his *Tractatus contra demonum invocatores*, published ca. 1450, pointed out how the *Canon Episcopi* had not dealt with the 'modern heretics' who invoke demons, worship them and sacrifice their newborn babies and other people's infants to them.[47]

As Michael Tavuzzi has noted, the witch-hunts carried out by Niccolò Constantini da Biella (in Vercelli, Ivrea, Novara and Como, ca. 1460–1483), by Lorenzo Soleri (in Vercelli, Ivrea, Novara and Como in 1483–1505) and by Antonio Pezzotelli (in Brescia in 1479–1498) preceded the publication of both the *Summis Desiderantis* by Innocent VIII (1484) and the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487).[48] Indeed, the reference made to those Dominicans in Kramer's treatise could suggest he took inspiration from them. But this must remain a hypothesis—not only because we do not have any writings by the Dominicans to lend weight to the theory, but also because they could have been influenced, in turn, both by earlier trials in central Italy, in which the idea of the witch as a 'vampire' featured, and by those held in Vaud concerning the question of a new sect.[49]

In order to know more about which kind of witchcraft was persecuted in late fifteenth-century Lombardy, one must approach treatises on the matter, specifically those written by friars and jurists. Around 1460, the Dominican friar Girolamo Visconti wrote two treatises: *Lamiarum sive striarum opusculum* and the shorter *Opusculum de striis*, published together in 1490. The first is dedicated to Francesco Sforza (1401–1466), first Duke of his dynasty to rule Milan, and aims to address the issue of women who are thought to be *lamiae* or *striae* and

[46] Christopher S. Mackay (ed.), *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 98.

[47] Joseph Hansen (ed.), *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Hexenwahns und der hexenverfolgung im Mittelalter* (Bonn, 1901), p. 202.

[48] Tavuzzi, *Renaissance Inquisitors*, p. 167.

[49] New findings may occur, though: it is the case of the *Formularium* by another Dominican inquisitor of the early sixteenth century, studied by Matteo Duni, Un manuale inedito per cacciatori di streghe. Il Formularium pro exequendo Inquisitionis officio di Modesto Scrofeo (c. 1523), *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 171, 2 (2013), pp. 339–358.

who are condemned to burn at the stake. Clearly, it was the first wave of trials that pushed Visconti to lay out his juridical opinion. His first question deals with the reality of the *ludus*, as he calls it: do *lamiae*, who people call *striae*, really gather together in this way? The subject was clearly still new in his times, and Visconti prefers to maintain a moderate stance: if those women are *relapsae* and really gather for the *ludus*, they would deserve to die by fire; but if they only dream of going to a place where they eat, drink and dance—and where they ask the devil for help—their lives must be spared, because there is no actual crime. Nonetheless, Visconti repeatedly asserts that attending the *ludus* is possible in reality, and that demons have the ability to move people from one place to another, as well as being able to make them believe they have transformed into cats. He debates the matter, quoting many sources, especially the Bible, Saint Augustine and Isidore of Seville.

In the later *Opusculum de striis*, Visconti hardens his position, calling a group of witches 'a sect' and stressing the reality of the *ludus* as a gathering of witches and demons. In the *Lamiarum sive striarum opusculum*, he also discusses some of the classical sources that speak of shapeshifting and powerful sorcery: Circe, defined as the 'maga famosissima' who changed Ulysses' friends into beasts, is the first case Visconti mentions; but he also reports the 'many things' Ovid said about Medea. Referencing a line from the *Distichs of Cato* (a Latin collection of proverbial wisdom by an unknown author named Dionysius Cato from the third or fourth century AD), Visconti adds that, because he does 'not want to be told that poets are to be admired, not believed' ('Sed ne michi dicerent; nam miranda canunt, sed non credenda poete'), he must conclude that people do not change into animals in reality ('secundum veritatem'), but only seem to transform ('secundum apparentiam') because of the tricks played by demons.[50] It is noteworthy that Visconti refuses to discredit the stories of the ancient poets, preferring instead to establish a continuity between their times and his own: demons, he asserts, have acted throughout the ages to deceive humans, using witches as their servants.

Another important witness of the ongoing witch-hunts happening around Milan is Ambrogio Vignati, born in Lodi (date unknown), who worked as a jurist and taught in the universities of Turin and Bologna. He died in 1468, having written a treatise on heresy. For a time, Vignati

[50]Magistri Hyeronimi Vicecomitis *Lamiarum siue striarum opusculum ad illustrissimum Mediolani ducem Franciscum Sfortiam Vicecomitem* (Lyon, 1669), p. 11.

was in touch with the humanist Francesco Filelfo, who worked in Milan—first at the court of Visconti, then of the Sforzas—having left Florence following a clash with the Medicis. Filelfo was one of the leading connoisseurs of Latin literature and among the first to introduce the study of Greek to Italy, and to the West more widely.

Vignati wrote a *Quaestio unica de lamiis seu strigibus*, part of his treatise on heresy, which was edited in 1581 by the Spanish theologian and jurist Francisco Peña (ca. 1540–1612). Vignati, too, was compelled to write of actual cases: for example, without detailing the circumstances, he introduces a woman who belonged to the sect of *mascae* and evil-doers ('secta mascorum seu maleficorum'), and who accused many others, both women and men, of riding by night to meet at crossroads and there conspire on crimes to commit. Given his remit, Vignati is more interested than most in strictly juridical issues, such as how much credit to accord to confessions (depending, for example, on the number of witnesses), about the nature of the *cursus* (as people call it, he adds), and whether confessions under torture are to be believed.[51] On the other hand, the jurist is less interested than his contemporaries in the reality of flight and the transmutation of bodies, which he finally decides are impossible. His particular focus is influenced by his knowledge of classical literature, which he quotes and discusses at length: tales of Circe, of course, but also of Demenetum, who changed into a wolf (as recounted by Pliny). Apuleius' work is also mentioned, as he writes about his transformation into a donkey; and Vignati discusses how Isidore accepted the fact that Circe changed Ulysses' friends into beasts with her enchantments.[52] Francisco Peña's commentary, written more than a century later, asserts a continuity between the witches of ancient times and those judged in the contemporary trials. He writes, 'Those wicked women, of which we talk, among the Greeks and the Latins were called by many names', and he lists '*lamiae*, *striges*, *magae*, *veneficae*, *incantatrices*, et *maleficae*'; while in Italy, he goes on, the names *strighae* and *strigoni* are always used.[53]

[51] Ambrosii de Vignate, Quaestio unica de lamiis seu strigibus, in *Malleus maleficarum: maleficas et earum hæresim framea conterens, ex variis auctoribus compilatus, & in quatuor tomos iuste distributus*, ed. Claude Bourgeat (Lyon, 1669), pp. 153–157.

[52] Francisco Peña, *Nota in Ambrosii de Vignate questionem de lamiis*, ibidem, pp. 133–141.

[53] Bernardus Comensis *Tractatus de strigibus*, ibidem, p. 133.

Bernardo Rategno of Como (born ca. 1450 in Como, died ca. 1513, probably also in Como) was a Dominican inquisitor and preacher who also belonged to the Congregation of Lombardy. In 1505, he was named inquisitor of Como, and around the same time, he composed both the *Lucerna Inquisitorum Haereticae Pravitatis*, which focuses on inquisitorial procedures, and a *Tractatus de Strigibus*, a short theological treatise in which he argues for the reality of the *ludus* and dismisses the *Canon* as a thing of the past. Rategno claims that the sect of heretical witchcraft was only born around the middle of the fourteenth century, and he rejects as impossible the existence of shapeshifting witches.[54] His knowledge of classical literature seems poor, for example, the second-hand quotes about Circe that he uses. Again, it is a commentary by Francisco Peña which shows the deeper interest in the subject, discussing the possible Greek origin of the Italian word *striges*, its link with nocturnal birds and the *striges* main feature of exsanguinating children while enchanting them with the help of spells (as reported by Ovid).[55]

The beginning of the sixteenth century saw a debate on the reality of the flight and the *ludus* between, on the one hand, jurists and even friars, and, on the other, the Dominican inquisitors. Individuals on the sceptic side of the argument included the Franciscan Samuele Cassini and the jurists Giovanfrancesco Ponzinibio and Andrea Alciato, while Silvestro Mazzolini da Prierio and his disciple Bartolomeo Spina vehemently criticised their positions. It was part of a wider European dispute about witchcraft that accompanied the acceleration of the witch-hunts.[56]

In other areas of Italy, there are fewer traces of a debate on the matter of witchcraft, and nowhere do we find the same level of concern shown

[54]Tavuzzi, *Renaissance Inquisitors*, pp. 220–221; Vincenzo Lavenia, Rategno, Bernardo, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Roma, 2016), vol. 86 (online http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bernardo-rategno(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

[55]Francisco Peña, Annotationes in Bern. Comensis Tractatus de strigibus, in *Malleus Maleficarum*, ed. Bourgeat, p. 110.

[56]Matteo Duni, Doubting Witchcraft: Theologians, Jurists, Inquisitors During the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, *Studies in Church History*, 52 (2006), pp. 203–231; Idem, *La caccia alle streghe e i dubbi di un giurista: il De lamiis et excellentia utriusque iuris di Giovanfrancesco Ponzinibio (1511)*, Camilla Hermanin, Luisa Simonutti (eds.), *La centralità del dubbio. Un progetto di Antonio Rotondò* (Firenze, 2011), vol. I, pp. 3–26. On Bartolomeo Spina: Maurizio Bertolotti, *La* Quaestio de strigibus *di Bartolomeo Spina ed il*

by the early Franciscan Observants (in times when the witch-craze was unknown) or the obsession of the Dominicans of Lombardy in the late Quattrocento. During the following century, a change of the ecclesiastical hierarchies' attitudes towards witches and their powers led Italy along a different, more moderate path, as many studies have shown. This is partly due to the emergence of other concerns—Lutheranism, above all—but also because the discourse about 'modern' witchcraft spread by the Dominicans, despite initial success, had not become predominant.[57]

Nonetheless, the image of the witch and discussions of witchcraft certainly were actively present elsewhere, outside of trials and specific treatises. If there is a domain in which Italy, and especially the central-northern part of it, was excelling over other areas of Europe in the fifteenth century, it is in literature and the arts, in both its richness and its varieties. In the humanistic approach to the past, there is room enough for both the birth of philology and the dreamy tones of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*—indeed, quite often, this apparent dichotomy is found in the works of a single author.

Such is the case of Mariano Sozzini the Elder (1397–1467), who was a friend of the Franciscan preacher Bernardino of Siena and of Enea Silvio Piccolomini, sharing with both the same origins. The treatise *De sortilegiis*, part of his *Commentaria*, has a juridical, not theological nature and concerns itself with many of the practices and beliefs that Bernardino would also expound on in his preaching, although

dibattito sulla stregoneria in Italia nel primo '500. Tesi di laurea, Università degli Studi di Firenze, relatore Leandro Perini, a.a. 1975–1976; Gabriella Zarri, Spina Bartolomeo, in *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft. The Western Tradition*, vol. 4, pp. 1081–1082; Domizia Weber, *Sanare e maleficiare. Guaritrici, streghe e medicina a Modena nel XVI secolo* (Roma, 2011); and Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 2003), pp. 149–168, 187–205.

[57] On the evolution of Roman Inquisition policy towards witchcraft see Giovanni Romeo, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe nell'Italia della Controriforma* (Firenze, 1990); Adriano Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza. Inquisitori, confessori, missionari* (Torino, 1996), pp. 368–430; Giovanni Romeo, *Inquisizione, Chiesa e stregoneria nell'Italia della Controriforma: nuove ipotesi*, in *Non lasciar vivere la malefica*, pp. 53–64; and Andrea Del Col, *L'Inquisizione in Italia dal XII al XXI secolo* (Milano, 2006), pp. 572–590, 622–625, 640–658.

comparatively, Sozzini shows a certain degree of leniency.[58] The treatise is of less interest for the study of witchcraft in his age, but another of his writings is worthy of our attention. Periodically, Sozzini would retreat from the city's problems and violence to Asciano, some 30 kilometres south-east of Siena. It was there—so he wrote to his friend, Antonio Tridentone, in 1462—that he met a man who told him of an experience he had had many years before, probably around the 1420s.[59] His name was Nanni, nicknamed Cianchadeus ('Nannes, cognomento vero Cianchadeus appellabatur'), as he used to swear on 'God's leg' (*chianca* in local dialect).[60] Nanni told him that in Asciano there was an old woman, a *vetula*, who in Tuscan vernacular was called a 'strega mathematica'—Sozzini probably takes the term from one of the lists of different acts of magic and 'superstitions' (many penned by Bernardino of Siena) in which *mathematicus/a* means an astrologer. This *vetula*, however, does not deal with astrology. Indeed, all Nanni tells is that at sunset, when the Ancients of the Twelve Tables call for the latest time ('Adveniente vero noctis crepuscolo, quod antiqui in duodecim tabulis supremam tempestatem vocabant')—which meant the latest useful time for proceedings in a trial[61]—the old woman strips naked in her room, lets down her hair, opens all of the windows and starts uttering some words ('quedam verba').[62] Then, she takes a jar containing an ointment and rubs herself with it, repeating the phrase: 'Sopra aqua et sopra vento menami a la noce di Benevento', at which she changes into the form of a goat and flies away.[63] Nanni recounts how, having witnessed the scene, he, too, rubbed himself with the same ointment and changed into a donkey, and also flew off to Piazza del Campo in Siena. He describes the Tower of Mangia, the Piazza coming to life in the morning, some adventures he lived and how he came back to the house where, again with

[58] Marianus Socinus, *De sortilegiis*, in Ms.90, Biblioteca Angelica, Manoscritti, Roma, cc. 67r–83v.

[59] Francesco Novati, *Una lettera ed un sonetto di Mariano Sozzini*, 1 (1894), pp. 89–100 (esp. p. 96).

[60] Ibidem, p. 96.

[61] See Ernest Metzger, *A New Outline of the Roman Civil Trial* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 108–109.

[62] Novati, *Una lettera ed un sonetto di Mariano Sozzini*, p. 97.

[63] Ibidem.

the help of some of the *vetula*'s paraphernalia, he turned human again. '"This", Nanni insists at the end of the story, "is not a dream or a tale, but a real story I saw and experienced, and I'm telling you I was transfigured for real"'.[64]

Of course, the model after which the story is tailored is Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, the central moment when Pamphile turns into a night owl (not a goat) and Lucius thinks he is using the same ointment to change into a bird, but ends up as a donkey. So what are we to make of this story? Of course, there are many details which indicate that it was spun by a cultivated man: the references to the Roman Twelve Tables, the *mathematica* (rarely found in a vernacular context), and to Apuleius. Yet, at the same time, we could assume that this is not completely an invention by Mariano Sozzini, but that, rather, he is adding a literary spin to an account that he really did hear from this old guy—a tale which, in turn, could contain some elements of folklore. The fact is that, even at this stage, a clear division between what is literate and what is folkloric does not hold up, as is also true for 'high' magic and its lower forms.

The Humanist and the *Lamia*

The fifteenth century saw the rise in Italy, and especially in Florence, of cenacles of scholars attentive to cultural renewal—first and foremost textual and philological—driven by both the rediscovery of previously ignored ancient Latin works and, even more significantly, the arrival of Hellenic and Hellenistic texts directly from the Byzantine world, then under threat from the Ottoman advance. It was above all the Platonic and Neoplatonic revival, together with the arrival of hermetic texts, that justified a revival of the magic that, starting in Florence, would spread across the entire continent over the next two centuries.

The story of humanistic magic also becomes, at this point, textual history, connected as it is to knowledge of new texts and to the re-reading and reinterpretation of already known ones. For instance, the Greek manuscript of the *Hieroglyphica* of Orapollo, brought to Florence in 1419, aroused an interest in Alexandrian mystery literature and founded the basis for the 'Egyptian myth' that would enjoy extraordinary fortune and a very long life in modern culture, especially in eighteenth-century

[64] «Hanc, inquit senex, non somnium nec fabulam, sed veram hystoriam credite, quam ego qui vidi et sensi, et transfiguratus fui veraciter narr»: Ibidem, p. 98.

esoterism. At the end of the Quattrocento, Renaissance 'Egyptomania' would reach its climax at the court of Alexander VI Borgia, who entrusted to Pinturicchio and his workshop the frescoes of the Apartments. Among the various scenes depicted, the myth of Isis and Osiris stands out: it follows not Ovid and the 'Greek' version of the tale, but that of Diodorus Siculus and, above all, of Plutarch, who with his *De Iside et Osiris* gave to the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance an Isis perhaps better suited to the image of Egypt that some intellectuals were building at that time.[65] Almost contemporary to the work of Pinturicchio is the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* by Francesco Colonna, printed in Venice in 1498, in which the myth of Isis—here, in the version offered by the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius—is strongly present.[66]

Some scholars have focused on the influence of Neoplatonic doctrines over esoteric ones in the birth of a new magical thought.[67] Georgius Gemistus (ca. 1355–1452/1454), later called Pletho, was a Greek scholar of Neoplatonic philosophy. At the time of the Council of Florence, in 1438–1439, he reintroduced Plato's thought to Western Europe. He also met and influenced Cosimo de' Medici, who agreed to establish a new Platonic Academy, where, under Marsilio Ficino, all of Plato's works, and various Neoplatonic texts, were translated into Latin. Gemistus Pletho was not afraid of the pagan associations of his work; rather, he saw it as laying the foundations of a new religion that would encompass Christianity and ancient polytheism both. Under his influence, Emperor Julian's *Oration to the Sovereign Sun* became one of the texts dearest to the *pietas* of the humanistic circle protected by Cosimo and was also prized outside of Florence. Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, at the end of the siege of Mistra in 1456, found the grave of Gemistus Pletho—who had died there, possibly by suicide, in 1452 or 1454—and

[65] Fritz Saxl, *La storia delle immagini* (Roma-Bari, 1990), pp. 135–164; Marina Montesano, Il toro dei Borgia. Analisi di un simbolo fra tradizione araldica e suggestioni pagane, in *Roma di fronte all'Europa al tempo di Alessandro VI*, eds. Miriam Chiabò, Silvia Maddalo, Massimo Miglio, and Anna Maria, Atti del convegno internazionale, Città del Vaticano–Roma, 1–4 dicembre 1999 (Roma, 2001), pp. 759–779.

[66] Francesco Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, eds. Marco Ariani, Mino Gabriele (Milano, 1998).

[67] James E. McGuire, Neoplatonism and Active Principles: Newton and the Corpus Hermeticum, in *Hermeticism and the Scientific Revolution: Papers Read at a Clark Library Seminar*, eds. Robert S. Westman, James E. McGuire (Los Angeles, 1977), pp. 93–142; Charles Bernhard Schmitt, *Reappraisals in Renaissance Thought* (London, 1989).

brought his remains back to Italy. He wished them to be buried on the side of his Tempio Malatestiano, side by side with the finest humanist intellectuals that had served the Malatesta family.[68]

Both Hermeticism and Neoplatonism were fecund soil for magic ideas to grow; but Aristotelianism also came out shaken by its encounter with those doctrines. As has been observed, in reference to the Aristotelian philosopher Agostino Nifo (ca. 1473–1538/1545), the opposition to magical practices and beliefs from this quarter was not grounded in scepticism. As Nifo wrote,

> There is an infinite number of books on magical images and I have seen many of them. All confirm that this art is true in itself even though it is difficult to find instances of it. There is no doubt that magical images make it possible to abduct women and to perform many other marvels. Furthermore, all religions forbid magic, something which would not have happened if it had not been true. Indeed, they testify that from magic there may proceed wonderful effects which are outside the normal course of nature. Also magic is taught in many universities and sometimes terrible phenomena appear which can hardly be explained according to Aristotelian principles.[69]

Despite the somewhat vague definition of magic given by Nifo—which leads him to wrongly claim that it is prohibited in all religions—he evidently does not doubt the power and the menace it carries.

A menace to some, a huge sea of possibilities to others. The Greek refugees from Constantinople brought with them the entirety (or, at least, an organic whole) of the so-called hermetic writings to Cosimo de' Medici's Florence: again, it was Marsilio Ficino who translated them into Latin, contributing to a fundamental chapter in the cultural history of humanism and the Renaissance. In 1463, he had finished translating from the Greek the *Pimander* and thirteen hermetic texts. With these translations, Hermes came to be seen as the oldest civiliser, earlier than Moses himself, and ancient Egypt was the land to look towards to discover the origin of every civilisation, including the Greeks.

[68] Stefano Trovato, Il giorno della morte di Pletone (26 giugno): una imitatio Iuliani? *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 106, 1 (2013), pp. 163–173.

[69] Averroes, *Destructio destructionum cum expositio Augustini Niphi (1497)*, in Paola Zambelli, *Theories on Astrology and Magic (1348–1586) in Recent Interpretations*, in Eadem, *Astrology and Magic from the Medieval Latin and Islamic World to Renaissance* (London, 2012), p. 7.

The rediscovery of hermetic texts constitutes the nodal point of a conception that—by closely linking heaven and earth, cosmos in its entirety and individual elements—made man the centre of the universe. The centrality of man is a fundamental fact in Ficino's meditation on the great magical theme. The magician captures, coordinates and organises the celestial forces, turning them to the interests of man. Importantly, for Marsilio Ficino, doctor and son of a doctor, this especially includes man's health, both spiritual and physical, a position he advances in one of his most famous texts, the *De Vita*.[70] Reaffirming the full dignity of magic as a charitable art and divine science—not without the direct, albeit undeclared, influence of texts such as *Picatrix*—Ficino refers to the evangelical Magi, whose cult predominated in the circle around Cosimo, to remember that *magus* means neither *veneficus* nor *maleficus*, but *sapiens* and *sacerdos*. Nonetheless, the magician Ficino portrays is not only a theorist, but also an expert in physical substances and metals, a moulder of objects, a craftsman and—which made particular sense in a town like Florence—an artist. This passionate defence of lawfulness, or, rather, of the sacredness of magic, can be read not only in *De vita*, but also in *De sacrificio et magia*, a Latin translation of Proclus. By choosing to approach mostly the late Platonists, such as Iamblichus, Proclus and Psellus, Ficino entered a realm of magic that was difficult to reconcile with Christian orthodoxy, and, indeed, from 1490, the *De vita* did attract negative attention from the ecclesiastical authorities.[71]

The treatise includes a chapter devoted to the use of human blood and milk to prolong the lives of the elderly. Around seventy years of age, and sometimes earlier, Ficino argues, the human body, like a tree, starts to dry up and needs youthful fluids to revive itself:

> You should therefore select a clean girl, one who is beautiful, cheerful, and calm, and, being ravishingly hungry yourself, and with the Moon rising, proceed to suck her milk. Immediately thereafter, eat a little powder of

[70] On its fortune see Alessandra Tarabochia Canavero, Il 'De Triplici Vita' di Marsilio Ficino: una strana vicenda ermeneutica, *Vita e Pensiero – Pubblicazioni dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore*, 69, 4 (1977), pp. 697–717.

[71] Michele Ciliberto, *Pensare per contrari: disincanto e utopia nel Rinascimento* (Roma, 2005), pp. 171–172.

> sweet fennel made with sugar. Sugar does not coagulate or putrefy milk in the stomach, and fennel, which is both thin and a friend of milk, will dilate and spread into the limbs.[72]

Blood is even more effective for rejuvenation: 'It is a common and ancient opinion that certain old women who were *sagae* (usually called *striges*) used to suck the blood of infants and become rejuvenated from it'.[73] The kind of practice Ficino is suggesting has everything in common with those we have found in early Umbrian trials. Ficino calls them *sagae*, wise women, saying the other common name, *striges*, is more usual. But his witches are, indeed, wise: he argues that the practice is beneficial and should not be prohibited, though it should, of course, only be performed on willing adolescents. Even if in those times Florence was by no means the epicentre of any hunt (especially compared to, say, Milan), Ficino could not be unaware of the witch-trials and the accusations being levelled in them. The world he lived in was certainly far detached from that of the women who stood accused of witchcraft—not least because of his social status as the son of a physician under the direct patronage of Cosimo de' Medici—nonetheless, the bloodsucking *vetula* whom he described in that brief passage clearly resembles the 'actual' witches being tried. This would explain why, at the same time as declaring the efficacy of the practice, Ficino also felt the need to distance himself from the idea of bleeding young children.

Humanistic culture, however, also included staunch opponents of any magical–astrological beliefs. Leon Battista Alberti, for example, insisted on a model of nature governed by rational laws and principles beyond obscure astral influences. Indeed, the controversy of magic tended to revolve around astrology, and, in turn, great importance fell on the debate between those arguing for the existence of an inevitable fate which can be known but not changed and those arguing that human will can overcome fate. In particular, this was one of the central issues for Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, whose stance against horoscopes recalled those expressed during the fourteenth century by, among others, Nicola Oresme and Coluccio Salutati.

[72] Marsilio Ficino, *The Book of Life*, trans. Charles Boer (Dallas, 1980), p. 56.

[73] The translation originally gives 'fortune-tellers' for *sagae* which is slightly misleading: Ibidem, p. 57; for the Latin text see Marsilii Florentini medici *De Vita libri tres* (Lyon, 1567), p. 104.

While he condemned divination astrology, however, Pico exalted magic and Kabbalah, asserting that there are no better sciences to offer us guarantees of the divinity of Christ. In 1486, he wished to open a public debate in Rome about nine hundred propositions concerning religion and philosophy, many of them drawn from the Kabbalah, the late ancient Platonic tradition and other esoteric sources. His hopes were quashed when Pope Innocent VIII—evidently worried about the propagation of magic and witchcraft, and only two years after he had penned the *Summis desiderantes affectibus*—labelled thirteen of them heretical.[74] After this event, Pico gradually moved towards the position held by the preacher Girolamo Savonarola, with whom he already shared a disdain for astrology. Pico saw in divinatory astrology an anti-scientific and non-philosophical mystification, and Savonarola—who hailed from Ferrara, a city of astrologers—saw in the practice an attack against faith. On the eve of his execution, in 1497, Savonarola wrote a dissertation against astrologers, in which he explicitly referred to Pico's *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*.[75] Here, again, we see the dichotomy of the Italian Quattrocento: as Stuart Clark has noted,

> It has been suggested, for example, that in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Italy, and Savonarolan Florence in particular, eschatological sentiments penetrated every level of society. This presents a nice counterpoint to the literary and more closed tradition of Ciceronian historical thought in Italy, on which historians of history have usually concentrated in their search for modernity.[76]

Pico della Mirandola accentuated the difference between magic understood as a part of the science of nature versus the practising of necromancy

[74] Fabrizio Lelli (ed.), *Giovanni Pico e la cabbalà* (Firenze, 2014).

[75] Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, 2 vol., ed. Eugenio Garin (Firenze, 1946, reprint. Torino, 2004); Girolamo Savonarola, *Contro gli astrologi*, ed. Claudio Gigante (Roma, 2000); Eugenio Garin, *Lo zodiaco della vita: la polemica sull'astrologia dal Trecento al Cinquecento* (Roma–Bari, 2007); Marco Bertozzi (ed.) *Nello specchio del cielo: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola e le Disputationes contro l'astrologia divinatoria* (Firenze, 2008), p. 85; and Simone Felina, *Modelli di episteme neoplatonica nella Firenze del '400: la gnoseologia di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola e di Marsilio Ficino* (Firenze, 2014).

[76] Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 318–319.

and witchcraft; or, again, between the prophet and the soothsayer. However, in practical magic, ambiguity was easier to find than these clear-cut distinctions suggest. The *Picatrix*, which was a common textbook for 'high' magic, and whose formulas echo throughout fourteenth- and fifteenth-century necromantic and theurgic manuals, contains rituals and potions that are very detached from any idea of 'naturality'. One example gives a recipe for appearing as any chosen animal:

> Take the head of the animal you want [to look like] and its soft fat, and dried nut in quantities consistent with the nature of each one. Cover everything in oil inside a jar, put in on low heat and leave it there for one day and one night, until that oil runs everywhere. When it is cold, pour it carefully through a filter. If you light a lamp and smear it with oil, you will appear as that animal to everyone. You can do it with the heads of different animals, and look like them.[77]

Also, to cause someone to lose their mind, instructions are given to take the head of a recently beheaded man, along with his internal organs and the heads of many animals. These are also covered with oil and cooked for a number of days and nights. After mixing the remaining bones of the boiled heads with black henbane, and combining dried nuts with the oil, the potion can be served to the intended victim.[78] We are not far, here, from the filthy remedies attributed to witches in the performance of their magic. As distant as the social status and context might have been, they were all involved in the same cultural realm.

An interesting case is provided by Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494), an acquaintance of Pico della Mirandola, with whom he shared many passions, including a love of Savonarola. The men had very different backgrounds, though: Pico belonged to an aristocratic dynasty, but Angelo came from a troubled family. His father was a jurist in Montepulciano,

[77] «Ad apparendum in forma cuiuslibet animalis [libuerit]. Recipe caput illius animalis quod volueris et eius axungiam, nucem scialtam quantum oportuerit cuiuslibet eorum. Et cooperiantur ex oleo in olla; et ad ignem mansuetum per diem et noctem ponatur quousque eius oleum totum currat. Et dum fuerit infrigidatum, optime coletur. Si ex eo lumen accenderis et eius faciem inunxerit cum predicto, in forma ipsius animalis astantibus apparebit. Et hoc potest fieri de capitibus diversorum animalium, et similiter apparebit diversorum animalium»: David Pingree (ed.), *Picatrix: The Latin version of the 'Ghayat Al-ljakim* (London, 1986), pp. 160–161.

[78] Ibidem.

near Siena, who was killed when his son was just ten years old; his mother was unable to cope, and the child was sent to a poor family of relatives in Florence, where he grew up. Later, he was accepted to the university and became a part of the circle of humanists led by Marsilio Ficino and protected by the Medicis.[79]

Angelo Poliziano was above all a philologist, interested in Latin and Greek culture, but around 1490 he also started teaching Aristotelian philosophy.[80] The initiative was not without controversy: Poliziano had his detractors, and in 1492, he composed the *Lamia* against them. His knowledge of classical sources made the word *lamia* very familiar to him; at the same time, the figures of *lamiae* were also recurrent in medieval literature, where they were monsters as well as beautiful, enchanting women.[81] Several decades before Poliziano's *Lamia*, in 1446, Luca Pulci (brother of the better known Luigi) had written a poem, *Il Driadeo*, which we can be certain Poliziano knew because it was dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici. The plot follows the love between a satyr and a dryad (a nymph) who was devoted to the cult of Diana and who, thus, had to remain a virgin. In the poem, we are told that nymphs ride by night and by day as a retinue to Diana, 'And the vulgar talk of rough people labels them *lamie*, giving to their name unworthy infamy'.[82] I would rather discount the idea of a well-hidden polemic against witch-trials as an interpretation of these lines and rather suggest that, with his depiction of these classical creatures, Pulci is weaving an image as remote as possible from the grimy stories of witchcraft of his own time.

In any case, the *lamia* returns as a protagonist in Angelo Poliziano's treatise. His upbringing, as I have noted, differed from that of other

[79] Paolo Viti (ed.), *Pico, Poliziano e l'Umanesimo di fine Quattrocento* (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, 4 novembre–31 dicembre 1994) Catalogo a cura di Studi pichiani, 2 vols. (Firenze, 1994).

[80] Vincenzo Fera, Mario Martelli (eds.), *Agnolo Poliziano: Poeta scrittore filologo* (Firenze, 1998). Still essential is Cesare Vasoli, *La dialettica e la retorica dell'Umanesimo: 'Invenzione' e 'metodo' nella cultura del XV e XVI secolo* (Milan, 1968), esp. pp. 116–131; David Lines, *Aristotle's 'Ethics' in the Italian Renaissance (ca. 1300–1650): The Universities and the Problem of Moral Education* (Leiden, 2002).

[81] See *supra*, in the chapter 'A Company That Go the Course'.

[82] «Ed il rozzo parlar dei villan vuole/Che queste ninfe sien chiamate lamie/Dando al cognome loro indegne infamie»: Luigi Pulci, *Il Driadeo d'Amore* (Napoli, 1881), pp. 14–15.

humanists, and it allowed him to begin with a story set in a rural environment, albeit one in which he quotes Horace and writes in a style wilfully indebted to Apuleius:

> Haven't you ever heard the name 'Lamia'? Even from the time when I was a little boy, my grandmother used to tell me that there were these Lamias in the wilderness, which devoured crying boys. Back then, the Lamia was the thing I dreaded the most, my greatest fear.

Even nowadays, he adds, *lamiae* still come up in people's chatter:

> Right near my little Fiesolan hideaway is Fonte Lucente [the name of the place],[83] concealed, secret in the shadow, where—as some of the little women tell it when they come to get water—there is now an abode of Lamias.[84]

His direct knowledge of the sources is evident in his description of their eyes, which a *lamia* is able to pull out and put back in again:

> She has eyes that she takes out and replaces when she pleases […]. Now then, every time this Lamia goes out of the house, she attaches her eyes and goes wandering around […]. But when she comes back home, right at the doorway she pops those eyes out of her head and puts them back in a little compartment. And so she is always blind at home, always sighted in public.[85]

Poliziano also mentions women who wear false teeth and wigs, in a likely allusion to Horace's Canidia and Sagana.[86]

The *lamiae* of Poliziano are embodiments of his accusers; he is able to throw at them a whole range of possible incarnations that a *lamia* might take, such as the image, so feared by his grandmother, of a monster who kills little children and who is endowed with fascinating eyes. His writing

[83] It is the villa on the hillside of Fiesole Lorenzo de' Medici gave him.

[84] Angelo Poliziano, *Lamia*, ed. Christopher S. Celenza (Leiden, 2010), p. 195. The edition and translation are perfected by a remarkable section of introductive essays.

[85] Ibidem, p. 197.

[86] See *supra*, in the chapter 'The Witch as a Woman: Tales of Magic in Rome'.

also shows how the fear of *striges* and *lamiae* was equally effective in a folkloric milieu as in the upper social levels. Yet, the *lamia* is also similar to a woman who spends her time gossiping, like an old hag:

> Now you might ask: what does she do when she's at home? She sits around, making wool and singing little songs to while away the time. I ask you, Florentine countrymen, haven't you ever seen Lamias like this, who know nothing about themselves and their own business but are always observing others and their affairs?[87]

After all, Poliziano seems to imply, the monster and the hag might be the same thing: 'Do you deny it?' he asks, 'Yet they are still common in cities and even in yours; but they march around, masked. You might think they are human beings, but they are Lamias'.[88]

Of course, the primary goal for Poliziano was to make fun of his enemies, showing with his prose and insight how foolish they were for attacking him; the *lamia* is just a pretext for his discourse. Nonetheless, it is hard not to think more deeply about these writings—in which Diana is a queen and the *lamiae* her nymphs; in which the *striges* appear in medical treatises about rejuvenation through the ingestion of blood; and in which a jurist narrates strange flights to Benevento and over Siena in the shape of a goat or a donkey—when at the same moment real women were being condemned as witches for comparable accusations. It is another paradox of the Italian Quattrocento, a time so suffused with love for Antiquity and its magical aura, that the same passion could drive both the inquisitors and the humanists.

[87] Ibidem, p. 199.

[88] Ibidem.

‘Twelve Thousand Circes’

The Renaissance Dialogue

If, in the previous chapter, we saw all of the influences which had, by the end of the fifteenth century, contributed to the construction of a discourse about magic and witchcraft, we most clearly see their coming together in the work of Giovanfrancesco Pico della Mirandola. In his writings, we find religious and even apocalyptic fears, an interest in philosophical disciplines, and a love for Greek and Latin arts and literature. Giovanfrancesco was the son of Galeotto I of Mirandola and Bianca Maria d’Este, herself the illegitimate daughter of Niccoló III d’Este, the Duke of Ferrara, Modena and Reggio. Giovanfrancesco was also the nephew of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, but they were very close in age, with Giovanni being born in 1463 and Giovanfrancesco in 1469. The untimely death of Giovanni at only 31 made Giovanfrancesco the primary keeper of his uncle’s memory. During Giovanni Pico’s last years, during which he was a follower of friar Girolamo Savonarola, uncle and nephew had maintained a correspondence. Even after his uncle’s death, Giovanfrancesco would stay faithful to the legacy of the friar his uncle had revered—even despite Girolamo being condemned and burned in 1498—and he wrote a *Life* of Girolamo that shows all his personal affiliation to the Savonarolan moral views.[1]

[1] Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Vita Hieronymi Savonarolae*, ed. Elisabetta Schisto (Firenze, 1999).

M. Montesano, *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92078-8_8

The polemic against astrology that had been common to both Giovanni and Girolamo in Florence was also shared by Giovanfrancesco, but it would take a different turn at the beginning of the new century, not least because the nephew did not share his uncle's interest in the esoteric.[2]

On a practical level, life in Mirandola was not easy for Giovanfrancesco: he had to fight against his brothers at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and ten years later confronted Gian Giacomo Trivulzio, a Milanese commander who had seized Mirandola and chased off Giovanfrancesco and one of his brothers, with whom, at the time, he shared ownership of the land. It was only through the mediation of the imperial vicar, in 1514, that they were able to return. In the first decade of the century, Giovanfrancesco had travelled around Italy and abroad, making contact with various circles of German humanists. In this period, he certainly gained some knowledge of treatises about witchcraft, and particularly of the *Malleus maleficarum*, from which he quotes in his writings. This knowledge would prove useful when, in the early 1520s, some cases of witchcraft emerged in Mirandola.

Girolamo di Gianfrancesco Armellini da Faenza was the Dominican inquisitor of Parma and Reggio, roughly between 1518 and 1526, and hence, Mirandola fell within his purview. Probably following some denouncement, Armellini was informed of suspicious nightly gatherings on the banks of the river Secchia. He launched an investigation which confirmed that there were, indeed, meetings there of male and female witches, which involved devil-worshipping and many other crimes. Some people were arrested, and trials were held by one of Armellini's vicars, the Florentine inquisitor Luca Bettini. The first death sentence of the trials was inflicted on a priest, followed by six more executions in 1523. All in all, more than 70 people were involved in the inquiry and, in addition to those condemned to the stake, others received minor penalties. The novelty of the witch-hunt in a land that had thus far been spared the craze was not without consequences: it is likely that many were sceptical, and the sheer number of those facing accusations sparked criticism

[2] Elisabetta Scapparone, Pico della Mirandola Gianfrancesco, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Roma, 2015), vol. 83 (online http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovan-francesco-pico_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/); Gabriella Zarri, Pico della Mirandola Gianfrancesco, in *Encyclopaedia of Witchcraft*: *The Western Traditio*, ed. Richard M. Golden (Santa Barbara, CA, 2006), vol. 4, pp. 898–900.

about the severity of the inquisitors. These circumstances have been considered the primary reason for the composition of the most famous book by Giovanfrancesco Pico, who had followed the trial closely. It is an apologetic treatise called *The Witch, or the Deceptions of Demons* (*Strix, sive de ludificatione daemonum*), and was evidently rushed by the author, who had it published in Bologna the same year as the trials concluded, in 1523. The next year, it was translated from Latin by the Dominican Leandro Alberti, a friar and an inquisitor himself belonging to the Congregation of Lombardy, who rendered it (albeit not without a few textual issues) in vernacular. His intention, as Alberti states in his introduction, was to make the book available to a larger and less exclusively elite audience.[3]

Strix enjoyed wide circulation, and despite its peculiar tone, which differed greatly from theological and juridical treatises—or, perhaps, for precisely that reason—it became a standard work of demonology. It is presented as a dialogue between four interlocutors: Phronimus (which means 'learned') represents Pico himself; Apistius (the 'unbeliever') represents the sceptic, in times when scepticism towards witchcraft was not rare; Dicastes (the 'judge') might represent Armellini or Bettini; and the *Strix*, who is facing interrogation, stands for all the accused in the trial. It should be noted that, while many of those facing trial were male, Giovanfrancesco Pico chooses a female and names the treatise after her, a choice that is intimately linked to the classical inspiration which drives him.[4] By the end of the dialogue, Apistius is convinced of the reality of diabolic witchcraft and is renamed Pisticus, that is, 'believer'. Both Phronimus and Apistius appear to be well versed in classical literature, which is the main subject of many of their discussions.

Employing the form of the dialogue was typical of the classically educated humanists, and it has a precedent in the 1489 book *Of Witches and Diviner Women* (*De Laniis et Pythonicis Mulieribus*) by Ulrich Molitor, a jurist who studied in Pavia, and who worked at both the episcopal court of Konstanz and, later, the court of Sigismund, Archduke of Austria and

[3] Giovanfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Strega o delle illusioni del demonio nel volgarizzamento di Leandro Alberti*, ed. Albano Biondi (Venezia, 1989), pp. 49–50. The Latin text with Italian translation is now available in a very good version: Lucia Pappalardo (ed.), *La Strega* (*Strix*) (Roma, 2017).

[4] Peter Burke, The Renaissance dialogue, *Renaissance Studies*, 3, 1 (1989), pp. 1–12.

Count of Tyrol.[5] In line with his chosen style, classical literature plays an important part in Molitor's treatise, and he refers to Socrates, Apuleius, Aristotle and Plautus as authorities on the matter. His dialogue has three protagonists: himself, Sigismund and Konrad Schatz, the *Bürgermeister* of Konstanz.[6] Unlike Giovanfrancesco Pico, however, Molitor can, for the most part at least, be safely grouped with the sceptics: he is convinced that the witches' powers are just delusions from the devil, so that they cannot actually affect the weather, divine, cause illness, have sexual intercourse with demons, nor fly to their gatherings. The devil, he argues, has limited powers and can only work according to the order of nature imposed by God. On the other hand, those who consent to deal with the devil and make a covenant with him are idolaters and apostates, and for these crimes, they deserve the death sentence.

Even if, coming right after the publication of Kramer's *Malleus Maleficarum*, Ulrich Molitor's *Of Witches and Diviner Women* was meant to mitigate the accusations against alleged witches, it has been noted that it was also the first book about witchcraft that contained graphic woodcuts of witches and the devil's activities, giving the impression they were real, more than Molitor himself ever wrote.[7]

In a famous essay on the relationship between text and image in Ms 2810 of the Bibliothèque National de France—which contains Marco Polo's *Travels*—Rudolf Wittkower argues that illuminations and illustrations often show the most conservative and/or popular approach to a subject. Wittkower observes how the illuminator of the manuscript was uncomfortable with respect to a story that did not marry in full, and which, indeed, sometimes rejected common ideas on the wonders of the East. He preferred, instead, to not be bound by the text, rather giving the readers exactly what they would expect, even if this meant

[5] On *Lamia/ lania* see *supra*, in the chapter '*Maleficia*: From Late Antiquity to the High Middle Ages'. For the Latin terminology (especially *lania* and *pythonissa*), see Julia Gold, *›Von den vnholden oder hexen‹: Studien zu Text und Kontext eines Traktats des Ulrich Molitoris* (Hildesheim, 2016), pp. 79–84.

[6] Ibidem, pp. 165–171.

[7] Jane P. Davidson, *The Witch in Northern European Art, 1470–1750* (Freren, 1987) *passim*; Charles Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft: Print and Visual Culture in Sixteenth-century Europe* (London and New York, 2007), pp. 18–20; and Natalie Kwan, Woodcuts and Witches: Ulrich Molitor's De lamiis et pythonicis mulieribus, 1489–1669, *German History*, 30, 4 (2012), pp. 493–527.

betraying the writing.[8] In Molitor's case, it might be that the form of the dialogue—which is less often used in this domain, in comparison with its being widely employed in Scholastic treatises—may have proven misleading, because by its nature it leaves many questions unsolved until the proper ending, when the author affirms clearly his point of view. For instance, when debating whether the shape of a man can be transformed into that of a beast, Sigismund starts by saying he does not believe it to be true and quotes the *Canon*; to which Konrad answers that, while he does not want to disrespect the *Canon*, many authors like Virgil tell the story of Circe and her powers.[9] When Sigismund remarks that these men are poets, Konrad replies that they are reliable, even if, as Boetius said, they tell the truth through allegories. He then introduces Apuleius and a slew of stories which overwhelms Sigismund's resistance.[10] When Ulrich himself intervenes, he seems to concur with Konrad's opinion, offering yet more stories, and Sigismund gives up. At the close of the chapter, Ulrich defers offering his conclusion until the summing up of the whole dialogue: only there is the reader told that such transformations are impossible, which overall has involved a very confusing approach.

Giovanfrancesco Pico goes yet further than Molitor in the conceit of presenting his treatise as a humanistic dialogue, starting with giving Greek names to his characters. Apistius and Phronimus are the two main voices, and a large part of the debate happens between them, with Dicastes contributing some evidence, and the *strix* speaking only to answer questions about her deeds. The first of the three parts of the treatise is mostly filled by a dialogue between Apistius and Phronimus: they do not talk about contemporary cases of witchcraft, some generic hints notwithstanding, but share their common knowledge of ancient accounts of witches, with each advancing different interpretations. Phronimus tells Apistius of how, in ancient times, people were afraid of witches, those night birds of awful appearance, and used to protect their houses by hanging hawthorn at their doors. Apistius replies that these stories differ too much, and that each seems to be a folk superstition. Nonetheless,

[8] Rudolf Wittkower, Marco Polo and the Pictorial Tradition of the Marvels of the East, in *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols*, ed. Rudolf Wittkower (London, 1977), pp. 75–92.

[9] Gold, *Von den vnholden oder hexen*, pp. 193–194.

[10] Ulrich Molitor, *De Laniis et Pythonicis Mulieribus* in *Des sorcières et des devineresses. Reproduit en facsimile d'apres l'édition latine de Cologne 1489 et traduit pour la première fois en français* (Paris, 1926), pp. 19–27.

Phronimus insists that under all the accounts from the poets of witches as night birds—which may, indeed, appear as fables—there is always the devil cheating people into seeing what he wants them to see. In our times, he adds, witches speak of being brought to the game of Diana, and they exsanguinate toddlers in their cradles in order to be called upon to heal them (which is a ruse to make money, it will be claimed later in the book). Those women are called witches (*striges*) by people in the present, just as they were in the past. Both interlocutors are steadfast in their positions, even if Giovanfrancesco Pico goes on at length to display all the richness of his classical knowledge, by quoting episodes and authors. At the end of the section, the witch and the judge appear, exchanging a few words about the confessions she has already made, her need to remain quiet for a while and the assurances of Dicastes that she won't be forced in any way.

The second part sees all four characters together. The witch admits that she used to attend the game of Diana or Herodias, but that she lacks an explanation about the nature of the game and why it bears this name. The others start a discussion about the reality of the game and whether it, in fact, corresponds to the descriptions given in the *Decretum* of Gratian (which also means the *Canon Episcopi*, as we have seen), the councils of the Church and the dispositions of the popes. Dicastes says that some things are similar, while others differ. The three men ask the witch how she would travel to the game, and she answers that it seemed to her that she went both physically and with her soul at the same time; that, having anointed her genitals, she rode on a linen mallet; and that once arrived she met a demon named Ludovicus, who looked like a man, but had goose feet—Dicastes observes that it is typical of demons to show their nature through their feet. The witch adds that the meetings happened only on certain nights (Saturdays and Thursdays), and that at them she would have sexual intercourse with the devil, a thing that horrifies her witnesses because, they say, she is old and ugly. Throughout this section, classical references abound: they are used to lend an air of erudition to the discourse, but also to add elements that might be linked to the confessions, even if those latter might generally seem quite preposterous: for example, Phronimus also picks up on the demon's goose feet by opening a long digression about geese in the Latin world and even among the Egyptians.

Here, the witch's confessions begin. She admits to being capable, with the demons' help, of provoking tempests by drawing a circle, and

she describes having perpetrated horrible sacrileges with the Eucharist. There are also elements of her confessions that recall central and northern Italian traditions: she is a bloodsucker who, with others, visits houses where infants live, induces in them a state of deep sleep and exsanguinates them, almost to the point of death, through little holes pricked under their nails. The witches then return the infants to their cradles, knowing that the parents will call them as healers. Yet further, according to Dicastes, witches put the bones of cattle they have eaten during the game back in the skins and, hitting the stuffed hides with wands given to them by the Lady of the Game, bring the animals back to life—we have already seen this same folkloric belief related during the trial held in Milan at the end of the fourteenth century.[11]

The judge argues against the veracity of the witch's confessions, saying that these are, in fact, tricks played by the devil. In turn, Phronimus objects to the judge's rebuttal and recounts the story of Ulysses' companions who, stranded on the island of Thrinacia, disregard Helios' ban against eating his herds and instead killed and cooked them, provoking the ire of the sun god. As a sign of Helios' displeasure, 'the flesh, both roast and raw, bellowed upon the spits'.[12]

With all the allegations and arguments, Apistius begins to review his position. Together with Phronimus, he comments on the huge number of male and female witches, pointing out that the ancient sources speak of only a few—such as Circe, Medea, Canidia and Erichtho—but that nowadays there seem to be many more:

> *Apistius*: It seems to me that these days many Medeas, quite a few Canidias, and more than one Erichtho are found.
> *Phronimus*: you marvel in front of six hundred Medeas, but you should know that in one town there have been found twelve thousand Circes […] and you do not wonder before them?[13]

Contemporary witches, then, are seen as just as powerful as their forebears, but growing in number. Some of their deeds—such as their night rides to the game, their intercourse with demons (acting as both *succubi*

[11] See supra, 'The Italian Quattrocento'.

[12] Hom. Od. 12.365. Pappalardo (ed.), *La Strega*, pp. 368–369.

[13] Ibidem, pp. 378–379. Unless otherwise stated, English translations are my own.

and *incubi*) and their exsanguination of little children—are considered real; other deeds, like the reanimation of cattle, are of debatable veracity, but should probably be considered delusions from the devil.

Phronimus/Giovanfrancesco even attempts to compare the ancient writers' opinions about witches. If Pliny admits to some perplexities about them—for example, about their being thought to put the lips on babies' mouths, or about which kind of night bird they resemble—Phronimus can correct Pliny by quoting Ovid, and other poets, who testify that the witches do not suck babies' nipples, but their blood. Apistius makes a point of the diversity of representations of witches in Antiquity, but Phronimus replies that if there is one common element among all the stories, it is that the devil takes different shapes and adapts to different situations—for example, in current times, witches are brought to the game of Diana and deplete babies' health to gain money by later curing them.[14] Apistius then argues that the witches of the poets are fables, but Phronimus insists that some of those stories are not merely fabulations. Apistius says that he can hardly believe that such things are actually happening, even if their contemporary times are delivering great discoveries, such as travel between Spain and India (by which he means the New World). Phronimus is quick to turn this topic to his advantage, claiming that the discovery of new lands is hard to believe because they were unknown even to the great geographers of the past, like Strabo and Ptolemy. But this imperfect knowledge does not make those lands unreal, and so, Phronimus argues, if witches were already known by ancient authors, what could be the justification for refusing to believe that they really exist?[15]

The discovery of the New World returns as a theme in the third book, in an argument concerning the existence of cannibal witches: it is proposed that, because maneaters have been found in those foreign lands, the existence of cannibal witches is, at the very least, possible. It is in this third and last book that Apistius—faced with the wealth of evidence coming from the combined confessions of the witch, the accounts of the judge and the reasoning of Phronimus—finally comes to change his mind. The sources quoted or referred to by Phronimus are too many to recount, but three writers are of particular import: Homer, for his

[14] Ibidem, pp. 266–271.

[15] Ibidem, pp. 396–399.

account of Circe's directions to Odysseus for the sacrifices to be made to the dead prior to his descent into the Underworld; and Ovid and Apuleius, whose writings remain central, even if neither the witch nor any of the other interlocutors mention any metamorphosis.

It is with a certain disdain that modern scholars have considered Phronimus'/Giovanfrancesco Pico's avowed adherence to humanistic culture. The editor of the vernacular version of the *Strix* argues that the author's fight against witchcraft was in line with his fears that humanistic culture would promote the cult of ancient gods.[16] Commenting on the dialogue, Peter Burke has observed that:

> Phronimus may be well read in the classics, but he does not approve of classical antiquity. Like some medieval writers, he believes that the ancient gods and goddesses really existed, but that they were all 'demons', by which he means 'devils'. In antiquity, the argument goes, the devil induced men to worship him 'under the veil of a false religion'. In the famous beauty contest, 'the devil deceived Paris in the form of three goddesses'. Proteus, so renowned for changes of shape, was a demon, and so was the goddess Diana, who was, he adds, not as chaste as she has been painted.[17]

However, I think a more refined distinction needs to be made, here, because humanistic culture cannot simply be grasped as a single block without nuances—and as important as they were, people who believed in the Renaissance of ancient gods, such as Gemistus Pletho, remained a minority. There were those who praised Bernardino of Siena's fight against idolatry and 'superstition', and those—like Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Angelo Poliziano—who had a deep knowledge of classical culture, but who were also influenced by Savonarola.[18] A reverence for Greek and Latin works of art is the common denominator for all of these men, Giovanfrancesco Pico included. His main preoccupation in the *Strix* is not to do with worries about beliefs in ancient gods, but with the power of demons. For him, the ancient poets were witnesses to humankind's ongoing fight against the devil, and, as witnesses, they should be

[16] Giovanfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Strega o delle illusioni*, p. 34.

[17] Peter Burke, Witchcraft and Magic in Renaissance Italy: Gianfrancesco Pico and His Strix, in *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*, ed. Sydney Anglo (London, 1977), pp. 32–52 (esp. p. 38).

[18] See supra, 'The Italian Quattrocento'.

thought trustworthy—indeed, he goes so far as to assert that the poets offer reliable evidence that is valid for modern trials. The only difference he sees is that, having not being touched by the light of Christianity, the ancients could not be aware of the devil's plans as such. Nowhere in Giovanfrancesco Pico's treatise is there a denigration of ancient literature, only of ancient religion: two things that had been perceived as separated for many centuries.

Certainly, as a treatise, *Strix* was better suited to the interpretations and interests of Italian humanistic culture than the usual, heavy demonological writings dealing with witchcraft. As Tamar Herzig writes:

> In *Strix*, Pico clearly identifies himself with those who supported the *Malleus*. He praises the German tract explicitly, even though lauding a book written north of the Alps, in what was considered an old-fashioned Latin style, was not an easy task. A close friend of some of the leading figures of Italian humanist culture, Pico knew that the prestige of literary works was based not only on their content but first and foremost on their aesthetic quality as works of art. He was aware that the scholastic style in which Kramer wrote the Malleus made it unattractive to many learned Italians. *Strix* was directed to precisely these educated readers, who doubted the real existence of witches; Pico—who argued that the Malleus is very important for understanding Italian witchcraft—used his classical erudition and adopted the literary form of a dialogue to make its content more palatable to contemporary readership.[19]

This said, Pico's opinions did not remain constrained to the Italian setting, but in a few years also gained favour further afield.

'Old Women Who Had Not Read Plutarch or Herodotus'

It was not only Italy, of course, that nursed an interest in classical literature. Other European treatises also considered the relationship between ancient and modern witchcraft, although with less intensity and fewer details. It is not by chance that, of the five authors considered to be the founders of Sabbat beliefs in the Vaud area, only one shows an interest

[19]Tamar Herzig, The Demons' Reaction to Sodomy: Witchcraft and Homosexuality in Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's Strix, *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 34, 1 (2003), p. 59.

in classical literature. The five core texts are: Hans Fründ's report on the trials that took place in Valais in 1428, written shortly after the events and titled 'Rapport sur la chasse aux sorciers et aux sorcières menée dès 1428 dans le diocèse de Sion'; Johann Nider's *Formicarius*, thought to date from 1436 to 1438; the anonymous *Errores Gazariorum*, of approximately the same date; the treatise *Ut magorum et maleficiorum errores* by Claude Tholosan, ca. 1436; and, finally, *Le Champion des Dames*, by Martin Le Franc, who began writing in 1440 and completed the work in January 1442 at the latest.[20] These writings cover the same period that Bernardino of Siena and the early Franciscan preachers of the Observance were active—years which, as we have seen in the last two chapters, were seminal in developing a certain idea of witchcraft. Among these five treatises, the only one to refer to the classical world is the one most closely linked to Italian humanist culture, *Le Champion des Dames*, whose author was an apostolic protonotary, close to the future Pope Pius II. In this text, which is also presented in the form of a dialogue, Le Franc talks of the transmutation of bodies and recalls Apuleius, the tale of Circe and the incident of Aphrodite transforming Diomedes' companions into birds. Notably, these are the same examples we find in Saint Augustine, who Le Franc cites, 'without repeating of course', so we read in the commentary to the text, 'the conclusions of the latter, opposed to his subject'.[21]

Bernard Basin (ca. 1445–1510), a cleric of Zaragoza, who authored a *Tractatus de magicis artibus ac magorum malificiis* (Treatise of magical arts and evil deeds of the magicians)—published in 1483 and reissued in 1506—writes that women, especially old ones, are more superstitious than men, which explains why they are prone to foretelling and visions, why they can kill little children, and why they might believe themselves to be taken from one place to another, in large groups ('cum societate magna'), as the *Canon* records.[22] The attitudes of these women, the

[20] Martine Ostorero, Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, Kathrin Utz Tremp, Catherine Chène (eds.), *L'imaginaire du sabbat. Edition critique des textes les plus anciens (1430c.–1440c.)* (Lausanne, 1999). On Johann Nider see also Michael D. Bailey, *Battling Demons: Witchcraft, Heresy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Press, PA, 2003).

[21] «Sans reprendre bien sûr le conclusions de çe dernier, opposée à son propos»: Agnès Blanc, Virginie Dang, Martine Ostorero, *L'imaginaire du sabbat*, p. 491.

[22] Bernard Basin, *De artibus magicis ac magorum malificiis opus clarissimum eximii* (Paris, 1506), pp. 14–16.

reader is told, have various causes, including demons tempting them more often, and the fact that they are easily impressed and cannot hold their tongue. It is a list of gendered ideas that Basin shared with many authors of his times, and which are similarly found in Kramer's *Malleus Maleficarum*. In the first part of his short treatise, Basin quotes Apuleius, Virgil, Ovid, Seneca and Cicero as authorities on magic, along with Saint Augustine.[23]

The *Malleus Maleficarum* also contains many quotes from ancient sources, mainly Cicero, Terence, Cato, Valerius Maximus and Seneca, but there is no doubt that 'Kramer's sharpest weapon […] was his reference to personal experience. Besides theological authorities, first-hand examples provided Kramer's foremost evidence for the reality of witchcraft'.[24] Certainly, the Bible and the Fathers are his primary authorities; but, nonetheless, Cicero and Seneca are used to underline certain things—things that were important to Kramer, and which were easier to find in classical texts, such as the underlying misogyny. For example, there are passions that he believes to be mainly aroused in women, and he has polemics about love, hate and greed; the 'raging Medea', Kramer argues, is a good case in point.[25] These sources also help him to bypass the *Canon Episcopi* and its claim that these 'wicked women' suffer from delusions. Rather, the *Malleus* argues, the legislator was simply talking about a different phenomenon:

> First, women who believe that they ride on horseback with Diana or Herodias during the night-time hours are censured, and adherents of the error think that because it is stated that such things happen only fantastically in the imagination, this is the case with all other effects. Second, it is stated in the *Canon* that whoever believes or claims that some creature can be made or changed for the better or worse or turned into a different form or appearance in any way other than by God, the Creator of all things, is an infidel and worse than a pagan, and on the basis of the phrase 'changed for the worse', they say that this effect is not real in terms of the person affected by sorcery and is only imaginary.[26]

[23] Ibidem, p. 6.

[24] Wolfgang Behringher, Malleus Maleficarum, in *Encyclopaedia of Witchcraft*, vol. 3, pp. 717–723 (esp. p. 720).

[25] Christopher S. Mackay (ed.), *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 162–163, 67–168.

[26] Ibidem, p. 93.

In contrast to what we have seen with Giovanfrancesco Pico, for whom the Greek and Latin authors are the backbone of his reasoning and his proofs, in Kramer these sources are mere accessories; but they do allow him to weave myriad narratives about the infinite variations of the demons' powers. In fact, as Wolfgang Behringer observes with great subtlety, in the *Malleus*,

> like postmodern theorists, Kramer concluded that human beings could never be certain about reality; any phenomenon could be different from what it appeared to be and could be a demonic delusion. In contrast to modern philosophers, who denied the reality of demons, Kramer denied the reality of reality.[27]

Lacking definitive conclusions, the Dominican inquisitor instead accumulates cases, authors and examples (including from classical literature) that lend credibility to the menace caused by demons and witches.

The first decades of the sixteenth century saw a growing interest in classical sources in relation to magic and witchcraft. I am not suggesting that Giovanfrancesco's *Strix* changed the outlook of his contemporaries, even if it certainly did have repercussions; rather, it is more that the times were ripe for a change in perspective, ready to take classical sources as a foundation of knowledge that was not only valid in retrospect, but was also applicable in modern times. The earliest Latin dictionaries appeared at the beginning of the century, providing references to sources and enlarging the knowledge of theologists and jurists alike on ancient witchcraft. The Italian lexicographer Ambrogio Calepino published his *Dictionarium Latinum* in 1502, which was later followed by expanded editions. He lists entries for *lamia* and *strix*, both referencing only classical sources: of course, the work is intended to be a dictionary of classical Latin, without more contemporary inclusions, but it is nonetheless an instructive source.[28] The same is true of Robert Estienne's *Dictionarium seu latinae linguae Thesaurus*, printed in 1531: his references are the likes of Horace, Ovid and Apuleius, among many others.[29]

[27] Behringher, *Malleus Maleficarum*, p. 720.

[28] See entries *lamia* and *strix*: Ambrogio Calepino, *Dictionarium Latinum* (Reggio, 1502) (no page numbers).

[29] Robert Estienne, *Dictionarium seu latinae linguae Thesaurus* (Lyon, 1531), p. 848.

In 1574, the Calvinist preacher Lambert Daneau, inspired by some trials held in Paris, published a treatise in French which was subsequently translated into Latin and, later, English.[30] It is a dialogue, like those we have looked at by Ulrich Molitor and Giovanfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, albeit much simpler and less accomplished in its style. It features only two characters: Antoine and Theophile. Antoine opens the dialogue, recounting many cases of witchcraft he came across in Paris; he is not a sceptic, but takes the role of posing questions, which are answered by Theophile. Of the many crimes attributed to witches, Daneau seems most interested in poisoning, although the reality of flights to the gatherings called 'Sabbats' is also discussed at length, with the eventual conclusion that the phenomenon is not to be doubted.[31]

As was typical of the cultivated men of his times, Daneau was familiar with Greek and Latin authors, and he often quotes them to argue his points. For example, Varro is the authority whom Daneau turns to in order to distinguish the four known kinds of divination.[32] Similarly, when discussing women who administer poisons, Daneau uses the Latin terms in his original French version—'Sagae, Thessalae, Magae, Lamiae, Striges, Veneficae'—and references descriptions from a number of ancient poets: Circe in Homer, Medea in Ovid and Canidia in Horace.[33] Even if the authors of these sources are poets, he argues, they are reliable and their tales are corroborated by serious historians like Tacitus,[34] and by Roman laws, from the Twelve Tables to the Lex Cornelia.[35] As these women are poisoners, they use herbs, and Daneau also quotes Virgil's account of the plants of Pontus, which he translates into French.[36]

Towards the end of the treatise, the doubtful Antoine is still unconvinced about the reality of the night flight, and Theophile, after quoting Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas, says: 'To put an end to

[30] Lambert Daneau, *Les sorciers, dialogue très utile et très nécessaire pour ce temps* (Genève, 1574); Idem, *De veneficiis quos olim sortilegos, nunc autem vulgo sortiarios vocant, dialogus* (Genève, 1574); and Idem, *A Dialogue of Witches, in Foretime Named Lot-tellers, and Novv Commonly Called Sorcerers* (London, 1575).

[31] Idem, *Les sorciers*, p. 78.

[32] Ibidem, p. 18.

[33] Ibidem, pp. 28–29.

[34] Ibidem, p. 29.

[35] Ibidem, p. 35.

[36] Ibidem, p. 56.

your doubts, I am going to show you some cases of what I am saying, that were sustained even by pagans'.[37] He is referring to the legend of the sudden disappearance of Romulus, founder of Rome, who was taken away by the devil in front of all his people. Theophile attributes the story to Plutarch, whom he calls 'the most credible and cultivated among all the Greek and Latin authors'.[38] This incident, part of the tale of the death of Romulus, is also told by Livy: while the king assembled his army for inspection on the plain bordering the marsh of Caprae, a huge crash of thunder was heard, and a storm arose, covering Romulus with such a thick cloud that it hid him from the sight of the army. When the cloud dispersed, he was nowhere to be seen, and his throne sat empty. The whole assembly hailed him as a god, a king and father of the city of Rome.[39] Daneau interprets the incident as a deed of the devil, on account of the many sins committed by Romulus, and it is again clear that not only are contemporary beliefs (like belief in the powers of demons) used to interpret ancient history—an approach which had been common since early Christian times—but that, equally, ancient stories can be useful for understanding the present, including contemporary witchcraft.

It is Jean Bodin who best explains this way of connecting ancient and modern witchcraft, as is made clear in the Preface to his *Demon-Mania of Witches*, of 1580, where he writes:

> We read Greek and Latin histories, ancient and modern histories, and reports of every country and people, who have left written accounts of the things which witches do, including the ecstasy in spirit and the transport of witches in body and soul to distant countries.[40]

These stories, he argues, are told across many nations—including Germany, France and Italy—but also by many classical authors: Plutarch, Herodotus, Pliny and Philostratus all write of magical flights, which should confirm that witches do actually fly to the Sabbat in both body and soul. Confessions and witness accounts from trials held in different

[37] Ibidem, p. 94.

[38] Ibidem, pp. 94–95.

[39] Liv., I, 16.

[40] Jean Bodin, *Demon-Mania of Witches*, ed. and trans. Jonathan L. Pearl, Randy A. Scott (Toronto, 2001), p. 40.

countries, alongside these ancient sources, are, for Bodin, the main proof of the reality of witchcraft, because this diverse evidence encompasses disparate ages and lands:

> In short, we note the trials conducted against witches in Germany, France, Italy, and Spain, through written accounts; and every day we encounter the innumerable testimonies, reconstructed stories, confrontations, convictions, and confessions which those who were executed persisted in until death. For the most part they were completely ignorant people or old women who had not read Plutarch or Herodotus, or Philostratus, or the laws of other peoples, nor spoken to witches from Germany and Italy in order to agree so completely on everything and on every point as they do.[41]

There can be little doubt about the irreproachability of Bodin's logic, even if his pamphlet is a gallimaufry of quotes, examples and names from a wide span of places and times: a method that is carefully chosen by the author, as I will show later.

Bodin is among the few writers who did not shy from believing that physical transformation could be real—the idea belonged to folklore and was taken as read in trials, but it was rarely accepted as true in cultivated discussion. As a jurist, Bodin was much freer from theological constraints than many of his contemporary writers, and he relies more on recent evidence and stories from the past. He discusses this approach at the beginning of Book 2.6, where he debates lycanthropy and a spirit who changed people into beasts—a thing he declares 'the most wonderful', but which he also considers to have been proven beyond doubt.[42] Some of the authors he quotes in support of his view are, in fact, blatantly opposed to them, such as Ulrich Molitor, who, according to Bodin, concluded his dialogue arguing 'that such a transformation was real'. Whether he was confused by the treatise or was lying about it is difficult to say. In any case, he mostly glosses over such sources, preferring the ground of natural philosophy and arguing, for example, that 'Pomponazzi and Paracelsus, among the foremost philosophers of their time, believe that the transmutations of men into beasts

[41] Ibidem, p. 41.

[42] Ibidem, p. 122.

is a certainty'.[43] Indeed, as Stuart Clark has shown, demonic flight and even metamorphosis would have been topics of discussion in many universities during the seventeenth century, when interest in natural curiosities and wonders was high.[44] In addition to the philosophers, for Bodin, various Greek and Latin authors—from Herodotus, Homer, Pomponius Mela and Strabo, to Varro, Virgil and Ovid—also agree on the matter.[45]

Johann Weyer was a physician who, perhaps more than anyone else, opposed the witch-hunts. While he was convinced of the powers demons had over nature, he was equally certain that witches were poor and weak, sometimes melancholic women whom the devil had persuaded could do things which were, in fact, impossible and against the laws of nature. He argued this position in his *De praestigiis daemonum* (On the Tricks of the Demons, 1563), which was harshly attacked by Jean Bodin.[46] By 1583, there were six more editions of the work with expansions and changes; the fifth, published in 1577, contains an appendix under the title *Pseudomonarchia dæmonum*, a catalogue of 69 demons followed by a short modus operandi.[47] Weyer insists, on more than one occasion, that the ancient tales of witchcraft and shapeshifting are to be considered mythical, not real; he especially devotes his third book, called *De Lamiis*, to the topic. It opens with a long dissertation on magic and witchcraft in ancient poetry, studded with quotes from Apuleius, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Tibullus and many more. As he admits, there are relatively few sources on the subject of *lamiae* outside of classical literature, although it is clear, in the light of his positions, he relegates those witnesses to the realm of poetry, not history. Weyer also advocates scepticism towards witchcraft by citing Horace, who opposed beliefs about the *sagae* of Thessaly.[48] This is just one element of a richer discourse in which the

[43] Ibidem, p. 123.

[44] Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 274–276.

[45] Bodin, *Demon-Mania of Witches*, p. 126.

[46] Ioannis Wieri, *De praestigiis daemonum* in Idem, *Opera omnia* (Amsterdam, 1609); see: Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, pp. 198–202; and Michaela Valente, *Johann Wier: Agli albori della critica razionale dell'occulto e del demoniaco* (Firenze, 2003).

[47] Jean-Patrice Boudet, Les who's who démonologiques de la Renaissance et leurs ancêtres médiévaux, *Médiévales*, 44 (2003), pp. 117–140.

[48] Weyer Johann, De praestigiis daemonum, et incantationibus, ac veneficiis, in *Witches, Devils and Doctors in the Renaissance: Johann Weyers 'De praestigiis daemonum'*, ed. Mora George, Benjamin Kohl, trans. J. Shea (Binghamton, NY, 1991), p. 583.

physician mixes classical influences, theological sources, medieval *exempla* and a deep knowledge of actual witch-trials. Nonetheless, being an intellectual of the Renaissance, Weyer still uses classical accounts of witches to construct a sizeable part of his narrative, albeit with results totally opposed to those of others, like Jean Bodin.

The turn of the century, 1599–1600, saw the publication of one of the most influential treatises, the *Disquisitiones magicae* (*Investigations on magic*) of the Jesuit Martín Del Rio, which was reprinted many times. It is organised into six books, each devoted to different kinds of magic (like love, weather and harmful magic), with a particular interest in divination. The Sabbat and witchcraft as a sect of a diabolical nature are discussed in different parts of the *Disquisitiones*, most prominently in the First and Second Books. The Fifth and Sixth Books offer guidance to judges and confessors, although Del Rio himself had no first-hand experience of actual trials.[49]

Del Rio was born in Antwerp, then part of the Spanish Netherlands, in 1551, to a Castilian father and an Aragonese mother. His family was rich, so he studied at universities which were among the best of his times, namely Paris, Louvain and Salamanca. Classical culture was not just a part of his curriculum, as it was for many cultivated men of the Renaissance; exceeding the norm, Del Rio mastered Greek, Latin and Hebrew, and his first writings were devoted to Solinus, Claudian and, above all, Seneca—indeed, it has been suggested that his study of Seneca (and his *Medea*) might have induced Del Rio's interest in witchcraft.[50]

As a consequence of Del Rio's great learning, the *Disquisitiones magicae* are filled with classical quotes and references handled with better precision than is common in comparable works. A long discussion of what *striges* and *lamiae* (rightly compared to Lilith) are opens the Third Book: a large number of Greek and Latin authors are cited, starting with Homer, though it is to Ovid and Virgil that the most

[49]Wolfgang Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts: A Global History* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 101 thinks Del Rio developed his interest towards witchcraft after the wave of trials that occurred in the Spanish Netherlands during the reign of Philippe II (1556–98). Anyway, he might have been interested because of those events, but, as Jan Machielsen rightly argues, Del Rio's knowledge of the phenomenon was mostly theoretical: *Martin Delrio: Demonology and Scholarship in the Counter-Reformation* (Oxford, 2015).

[50]Ibidem, pp. 233–234 and *passim*.

space is given.[51] When Del Rio talks of the old women who in ancient literature fake being good nurses in order to gain access to infants, he also compares them to women of his own times who, acting like wild beasts, enter rooms and exsanguinate babies. The worst acts of magic, like the kidnapping of infants and illicit sexual practices, Del Rio argues, are sometimes done with the helping of potions and wicked enchantments, which he describes through reference to Seneca's *Medea*.[52] He also cites Apuleius' account of Thelyphron, recounting the tale at length; and to exemplify the use of love potions, he turns to Theocritus and Virgil.[53] Lacking the juridical experience of some of the laics who wrote about witchcraft, Del Rio rarely uses contemporary case studies, and the classical accounts seem to be his main source for descriptions of magic. Of course, his being a Jesuit already aligns him with those authors we have discussed who believe the night flights, the Sabbat and the *maleficia* to be real, but the transformations to be delusions from the devil.

Like Giovanfrancesco Pico before him, Del Rio is attentive to news coming from the New World. He quotes from the chronicles of Pedro De Cieza, who had witnessed the conquering of Peru, to attest to the presence of witches in those faraway lands. Del Rio writes of the many witches found in Peru who suck the blood of infants,[54] perhaps blending Pedro De Cieza's accounts with those of another Spanish chronicler, Cristobal De Molina. The latter wrote of the local myth, well known to anthropologists, of the figure of the *nakaq* (also called *kharisiri* and *pishtacos*), which may be originally linked with sacrificial customs involving human blood and fat, but which became intertwined with growing apocalyptic fears catalysed by the arrival of the conquistadors.[55] Molina asserts that locals were convinced the Spaniards were there to kill them and take

[51] Martin Del Rio, *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex* (Mannheim, 1617), pp. 353–355.

[52] Ibidem, p. 356.

[53] Ibidem, pp. 357–358, 362–366.

[54] Ibidem, p. 355.

[55] On Peruvian 'vampires' see Anita G. Cook, Huari D-Shaped Structures, Sacrificial Offerings, and Divine Rulership, in *Ritual Sacrifice in Ancient Peru*, eds. Elizabeth P. Benson, Anita G. Cook (Austin, 2001), pp. 137–164, esp. pp. 158–160; Fernando Santos-Granero, The Land Within: Indigenous Territory and the Perception of the Environment, *American Ethnologist*, 25, 2 (1998), pp. 128–148, esp. pp. 136–138; and Nathan Wachtel, *Gods and Vampires. Return to Chipaya* (Chicago and London, 1994).

away their fat, and they dared not enter any of the white men's houses.[56] The idea that Del Rio endeavours to pass on to his readers is that of a universal conspiracy on the devil's part, effected through witchcraft. This conspiracy, he argues, was already alive in Antiquity, as the sources he cites attest, and it continues to rage in his own times; indeed, it is even found in new lands that are still being discovered. Of course, he could not know that the very arrival of the Europeans allowed this belief to spread.

Sometimes, classical literature is called upon to prop-up ideas that would be hard to prove. Such is the case with the judge Henri Boguet, who tried a number of witches at the end of the sixteenth century in Franche-Comté, including the famous case of Françoise Secrétain, and recounted his experiences in his *Discourse on Witches* (1602). In the region, the belief in werewolves was widespread, so it is natural that a part of Boguet's narrative deals with them.[57] He asks if shapeshifting can be considered a true phenomenon or an illusion: in favour of its reality, he lists local traditions, his direct experience and accounts from classical literature, which are otherwise mostly absent from his treatise. In particular, Boguet cites Plautus' *Asinaria*—in which Demenetus changes his shape into that of a wolf at the festival of Lycaea—as well as Virgil, Apuleius and tales of Circe and others.[58]

Werewolves are an interest held in common by Boguet and his colleague Pierre de Lancre, a lawyer and a magistrate who was appointed to investigate alleged witch activities in the south-west of France, along the border with Navarre. Today it is believed he greatly overstated the number of witches whom he persecuted and condemned to the stake during the hunt in this Basque region; but despite the incredulity of many other

[56] Cristóbal de Molina, *Relación de las fábulas y ritos de los incas*, ed. Paloma Jiménez del Campo (Berlin and Madrid, 2010), pp. 94–95.

[57] On witchcraft in those border areas amid France, Switzerland and Germany, see William Monter, *Witchcraft in France and Switzerland: The Borderlands During the Reformation* (Ithaca, NY, 1976); Caroline Oates, Metamorphosis and Lycanthropy in Franche-Comte, 1521–1643, in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, eds. Michael Feher, Ramona Naddaff, Nadia Tazi (New York, 1989), vol. 1, pp. 305–363; and Brigitte Rochelandet, *Sorcières, diables et bûchers en Franche-Comté aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles* (Besançon, 1997). On *Lycanthropy* see Willem de Blécourt (ed.), *Werewolf Histories* (London, 2015).

[58] Henri Boguet, *Discours exécrable des sorciers* (Paris, 1603), pp. 110–124; in English: Henri Boguet, *An Examen of Witches*, trans. Montague Summers (London, 1929).

French jurists, there is no doubt he provoked a witch-craze that ranks among the worst seen in France.[59] As was the case for Boguet, Pierre de Lancre's witch-hunt involved many children—both facing accusations and called as witnesses—but beyond these commonalities, Pierre de Lancre's account of the facts in his *On the Inconstancy of Witches* (*Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et demons*, 1612) is much more complex and interesting than Boguet's *Discourse*.

The preface to de Lancre's book deals with the Basque people, and the characteristics that he believes make them prone to the allure of the devil. At the beginning of the First book, we find a misogynistic tone not dissimilar from that of the *Malleus Maleficarum*: the judge, wishing to explain why there are more female witches than male, turns to classical literature, saying, 'This is readily seen in the works of Greek, Latin, Italian, and French poets, each of whom celebrated some woman as an excellent female magician or witch'.[60] The list of cases he cites is long but predictable, though de Lancre does demonstrate a very good knowledge of the literature: Circe, Medea, Canidia, Sagana, Folia and Veia are all mentioned, and many quotations in Latin are included to give an account of female involvement with devilish practices through the ages.

De Lancre also shows an interest in Renaissance literature, referencing female magicians who appear in works by Ariosto and Torquato Tasso.[61] Curiously, he suggests that Torquato Tasso describes the Sabbat in his epic poem *Jerusalem Delivered*.[62] This is not entirely untrue, as Tasso does, indeed, mention a gathering of witches and spirits—perhaps with the intention of gesturing towards contemporaneous beliefs in witchcraft—but de Lancre is rather quick to incorporate this piece of literature as another brick in his wall of proof. This aside, the greater part of his evidence for the reality of the Sabbat and of witches' powers comes from de Lancre's direct involvement with the trials.

Among the treatises written by jurists, Nicolas Rémy's *Demonolatry* is certainly the most renowned. As William Monter and Edward Peters write:

[59] Jonathan L. Pearl, *The Crime of Crimes: Demonology and Politics in France, 1560–1620* (Waterloo and Ontario, 1999).

[60] Pierre de Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, eds. Gerhild Scholz Williams, Harriet Stone, Michaela Glesenkirchen, John Morris (Tempe, AZ–Turnhout, 2006), p. 67.

[61] Ibidem, pp. 67–80.

[62] Ibidem, pp. 145–146: Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata*, XIII, 4.

> With other Catholic works on demonology and witchcraft written around the same time, including those by Henri Boguet, Pierre de Lancre, and Martín Del Rio, most of them the products of specific regional prosecutions, confessions, and executions, Rémy's book helped displace the *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer of Witches, 1486) as a guide to judges in witchcraft trials at the height of the prosecutions around the turn of the seventeenth century.[63]

Rémy's *Demonolatry* was published in 1595, when the Duchy of Lorraine, a region which separated the kingdom of France from the Holy Roman Empire, saw some of the highest rates of convictions for witchcraft. Hunts peaked in the decades around Nicolas Rémy's being active, between 1570 and 1630; and he himself claimed to have prosecuted between 800 and 900 witches in a decade—surely an exaggeration, but neither the first nor the last of its kind.[64] His examination of the phenomenon crosses ages and countries, and he finds cases in all kinds of sources, including medieval ones. Significantly, Rémy shows that these diverse sources—be they literary, theological or accounts from actual trials—were now all part of the same narrative. But while classical sources may be discussed, they are not to be preferred over all other sources of knowledge. On the question of shapeshifting, for example, Rémy quotes the accounts by Homer, Apuleius and Ovid, to argue that whilst the ancients believed it was real, as some contemporaries do, the metamorphosis is only apparent.[65] Anyway, he makes very clear that there is a relationship between old and new witchcraft. When he tells the story, from Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, about keeping watch during the night over the bodies of the dead, he adds that the witches of his own time also use such practices, especially when they get the corpse of a man who has been put to death and exposed, and use it in their magical practices along with the rope, the pole, the spikes.[66] Another similarity is found in Pliny, who wrote that midwives and harlots dismember aborted foetuses

[63]William Monter, Edward Peters, Nicolas Rémy, *Encyclopaedia of Witchcraft*, vol. 4, p. 955.

[64]Robin Briggs, *Witchcraft and Popular Mentality in Lorraine, 1580–1630* in Idem, *Communities of Belief: Cultural and Social Tensions in Early Modern France* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 66–82; Idem, *The Witches of Lorraine* (Oxford, 2007).

[65]Nicolas Rémy, *La Démonolâtrie. Texte latin de 1595 et traduction par Jean Boës* (Nancy and Paris, 2017), vol. 2, pp. 37–45.

[66]Ibidem, p. 26.

to concoct poisons, a practice Rémy says is common in contemporary Lorraine.[67] Above and beyond classical sources, it was experience that most interested Rémy; if shapeshifting is impossible, he argues, metaphorically witches are endowed with the traits of beasts. As Stuart Clark points out: 'Although it was usual to argue that the transformations were illusory, the concept of metamorphosis itself suggested that instinct might replace reason, and brutishness, virtue'.[68]

If all those demonologists adopted examples from ancient literature to prove or at least to discuss their points, their stance towards it is not univocal. The sixteenth century brought a new sensibility towards history and a method of studying and narrating it, which also influenced the way in which Greek and Latin authors were considered. Some studies point out that late Renaissance saw a shift in the perception of classical knowledge as authoritative; for instance, the topic of which form of classic text was to be considered more reliable—poetry, history, comedy, tragedy—was frequently asked, and even within the demonological debate, there were different answers. Jan Machielsen, who has discussed the topic, writes that 'Henry Boguet cites the dress Medea gave to Jason's wife Creusa as proof that the presents of witches could be harmful'[69]; Lambert Daneau relies on poets, the Spanish Jesuit Benito Pereira (1535–1610) on historians; Del Rio thought Seneca's tragedies were based on historical truth, but this truth was to be confirmed in the light of philosophical orthodoxy, primarily the Christian Fathers.[70] It is quite obvious that ancient historians were considered better sources for ascertaining the truth, though this does not mean others were disdained.

A suitable example comes from Jean Bodin, who notoriously wrote a treatise about the method in history: his *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* (method for the easy comprehension of history) preceded the *Demon-mania* by many years; its first edition was published in 1566 and the second, revised, in 1572.[71] The *Demon-mania* used to be

[67] Ibidem, pp. 26–27.

[68] Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, p. 90.

[69] Machielsen, *Martin Delrio*, p. 194.

[70] Ibidem, pp. 186–203.

[71] Jean Bodin, *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem*, ed. Sara Miglietti (Pisa, 2012); for an English translation see Idem, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, trans. Beatrice Reynolds (New York, 1945). For the differences between the two, see the comment by Sara Miglietti, pp. 22–31.

considered an exception in Bodin's body of work, but in recent decades, historiography has placed it in strict connection with the Platonism of his time and with his other treatises, including the *Method*.[72] Writing about history, Bodin is not hostile to poets, but simply focuses on historians, whom he organises according to their degree of consistency and reliability: famously he denigrates Herodotus and favours Thucydides; he also makes erroneous judgements, for example when he quotes from misleading works by Berosus Caldaeus and by Metasthenes, who were only fabrications by Annius of Viterbo.[73] Clearly, Bodin pays particular attention to the Latin historians, whom he knows quite well, both from classical and later times.[74] The same carefulness is evident in the choice of his sources for the *Demon-mania*: not just poets, but also historians; not from one tradition only, but from many.[75] Battista Platina, a Roman historian of the fifteenth century, is quoted on the tricks played by Satan through witches[76]; only historians are cited concerning the story of Romulus being lifted into the air by spirits[77]; philosophers of different schools and Arab thinkers agree with the Bible about the powers of angels and demons[78]; Plato, Lucretius, Virgil and Marsilio Ficino share the same opinion on the soul of a murdered person coming back to hunt the murderer[79]; Homer, Pomponius Mela, Solon, Strabo and countless others tell the same stories of lycanthropy.[80] It is the intersection of so

[72] Cesare Vasoli, *Riflessioni su De la Démonomanie des sorciers di Jean Bodin*, in Idem, *Armonia e giustizia. Studi sulle idee filosofiche di Jean Bodin* (Firenze, 2008), pp. 131–167; many essays in Gabriel A. Pérouse, Nicole Dockès-Lallement, Jean-Marie Servet (eds.), *L'Oeuvre de Jean Bodin: actes du colloque tenu á Lyon à l'occasion du quatriéme centenaire de sa mort, 11–13 janvier 1996* (Paris, 2004): especially Marc Venard, *Jean Bodin et les sorciers La Démonomanie est-elle une aberration dans l'oeuvre de Bodin*, pp. 419–429.

[73] Federicomaria Muccioli, Il canone degli storici greci nella Methodus di Jean Bodin, in *Storici antichi e storici moderni nella Methodus di Jean Bodin*, eds. Alessandro Galimberti, Giuseppe Zecchini (Milano, 2012), pp. 27–48.

[74] Maria Teresa Schettino, *Il canone degli storici romani nella Methodus di Jean Bodin* and Giuseppe Zecchini, *Il canone degli storici tardoantichi nella Methodus di Jean Bodin*, ibidem, pp. 49–74, 75–84.

[75] Michaela Valente, *Storia e politica. Bodin e gli storici coevi nella Methodus*, p. 129.

[76] Bodin, *Demon-Mania of Witches*, p. 38.

[77] Ibidem, pp. 40–41.

[78] Ibidem, p. 46.

[79] Ibidem, p. 106.

[80] Ibidem, p. 126.

many different sources that Bodin finds convincing as evidence, especially because he can match them with a reality that is under his eyes: the confessions of the witches. The premises are all in his *Method*, a dissertation that was aimed at establishing a basis for his juridical interests that encompassed the Roman laws, but aimed at including also those of other peoples (the Egyptians, the Persians, the Greeks and more).[81] As such, the *Method* brings together the history and the geography of so many different times and lands as a preliminary and necessary analysis for Bodin's further studies, including the *Demon-mania*, which shares the same principles. In his writings, as in those of other demonologists (albeit with less conscious intent), the interest in witchcraft in the New World has exactly the same purpose of accumulating evidence: history confirms the present, and other worlds assure our perception of what is going on around us, because there is a net that the historical method can help to find.

Painters and Poets

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, at the peak of European witch-hunting, there was probably no need for more treatises on witchcraft; as Wolfgang Behringer writes: 'the new publications added hardly any new ideas or concepts—the subject was exhausted'.[82] All the questions about the powers of the devil, the reality of the Sabbat and of witchcraft, had been posed and answered in myriad ways and with many nuances. The stereotype of the witch had already been formed, and the use of ancient literature was probably less necessary, even if it was still heavily evident in some texts. Such is the case of a text written by the Milanese Barnabite friar Francesco Maria Guaccio, the *Compendium Maleficarum* (*A Summary of Witches*, 1608; expanded edition in 1626). It is more of a compilation of a variety of sources—including many cases taken from Nicolas Rémy, Martín Del Rio and other antecedents—in which classical references appear throughout the text, but are cited more as examples than as proofs. The *Compendium* gained moderate notoriety, and the woodcuts showing Satan and the evil deeds of the witches, originally disseminated in the editions, overshadowed the written sections

[81] Bodin, *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem*, p. 7.

[82] Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts*, p. 105.

and found a success of their own, being reprinted and reproduced many times.[83] As we have seen, the same had happened with Ulrich Molitor's *De Lamiis*.

Leonardo da Vinci advocated the superiority of painting over poetry, and this re-evaluation was dear to Renaissance authors, who drew on Aristotle and Horace to elaborate a theory of images different from that of the Middle Ages.[84] Of course, painting and poetry were both revered as valuable sources. As Johann Weyer observed in the sixth book of his *De praestigiis daemonum*, quoting one of the most renowned passages from Horace's *Ars poetica*, 'Painters and poets have always had equal chances to dare whatever they please'.[85] By this, Weyer probably meant that they dare to venture beyond what is real and true, and are willing to devalue their credibility as witnesses; but he clearly departs from Horace's intended context, which was the question of the autonomy of the arts. If, as we have seen, texts do not always reveal their authors' intentions with absolute clarity, the same is yet more true of images, whose very nature is ambiguous. Renaissance poetry, in turn, is not exempt from this rule of uncertainty, which may be due to discourse in general being often unclear, or it may be that ambiguity is endemic to the matter at hand. Images of witchcraft in the work of poets and painters alike were mostly inspired by Antiquity; but it could be argued that they were also mirroring contemporary events—if so, though, we must also ask to what purpose?

Many poems of the sixteenth century have characters modelled on ancient witches. Such is the case in Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1532), whose female sorceresses—the evil Alcina and the good Melissa—gain their names from the Medieval Matter of France and their characteristics from the magicians of classical literature. Similarly, Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* (1590)—a work which, as

[83] Francesco Maria Guaccio, *Compendium maleficarum* (Torino, 1992).

[84] For Leonardo's quote, see Jean Paul Richter, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci* (London, 1939, 2nd ed.), vol. 1, pp. 52–68; on Renaissance theories of painting: Lee W. Rensselaer, Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting, *The Art Bulletin*, 22, 4 (1940), pp. 197–269.

[85] «Pictoribus atque poetis quidlibet audendi semper fuit aequa potestas» Horat, *Ars Poetica*, 10; Ioannis Wieri, *De praestigiis daemonum*, p. 531; a commentary on Horace's phrase in Medieval and Renaissance times: André Chastel, Le dictum Horatii: quidlibet audendi potestas et les artistes (XIIIe–XVIe siècle), *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettre*, 121, 1 (1977), pp. 30–45.

discussed, contains an allusion to the witches' place of gathering that so struck Pierre de Lancre—involves the character Armida, a female witch who is astonishingly beautiful and wicked, who turns the crusaders into fish using a magic wand and a book of enchantments, and who clearly resembles Circe and the powerful magicians of Antiquity. Even in a context so different from the epics as Rabelais' *Pantagruel* (1542), we find mention of a Sybil who, according to Pantagruel, might possibly be 'some Canidia, Sagana, or Pythonissa, either whereof with us is vulgarly called a witch'. He goes on, 'the place of her abode is vilely stained with the abominable repute of abounding more with sorcerers and witches than ever did the plains of Thessaly'.[86] A few decades later, the 'damn'd witch Sycorax' of William Shakespeare's *Tempest* (1611) is fashioned after Medea above all, while the Wayward Sisters who hail Macbeth (1603–1607) owe as much to the Three Fates of Greek mythology as to local folklore.[87] *The Witch* by Thomas Middleton (1613–1616), while inspired by Reginald Scot's treatise *Discovery of Witchcraft* (1584)—in which the refutation of witchcraft and magic beliefs depends mostly on Cicero—certainly does not share Scot's sceptical views, rather relying on classical images of witches.[88] The chief witch in Middleton's play, for example, an old woman of 120 years, is called Hecate.[89] Other plays took their inspiration from real cases of witchcraft that took place in England, with works like *The Witch of Edmonton* by William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford (1621) and *The Late Lancashire Witches* by Thomas

[86] Rabelais, *The Works of Françis Rabelais* (London, 1807), vol. 2, p. 134.

[87] *The Tempest* Act 1, s. 2.

[88] «Scot was certainly familiar with both Apuleius and Cicero: indeed he seems especially indebted to the latter's *De diivinatione*, although, somewhat disingenuously, he specifically refers to that text at only one of several points where its influence is manifest»: Sidney Anglo, Reginald Scot's Discoverie of Witchcraft: Scepticism and Sadduceeism, in *The Damned Art*, pp. 106–139 (esp. p. 129). See also Cora Fox, Authorising the Metamorphic Witch: Ovid in Reginald Scot's Discoverie of Witchcraft, in *Metamorphosis: The Changing Face of Ovid in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Alison Keith, Stephen Rupp (Toronto, 2007), pp. 165–178.

[89] Simon F. Davies, The Reception of Reginald Scot's Discovery of Witchcraft: Witchcraft, Magic, and Radical Religion, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 74, 3 (2013), pp. 381–401.

Heywood and Richard Brome (1634), which eschewed classical themes and fantasies to deal instead with social issues.[90]

A list of literary works which contain references to witchcraft-related themes risks being anecdotal at best, not least because comprehensive or comparative studies of how the matter has been dealt with in fiction are sorely missing: so I leave it at that.[91] The same can be said for fine arts. Art historians have been intrigued by the representation of witches and witchcraft in painting, and a few among them have also shown an awareness of the influence of classical literary descriptions on Renaissance figurative art. As Charles Zika has observed:

> The discourses of sorcery and witchcraft which developed throughout much of western and central Europe from the middle of the fifteenth century involved the production and circulation not only of literary and archival documents, but also of pictorial artifacts. As woodcut illustrations for theological or philosophical treatises, for historical chronicles or contemporary news-sheets, as single-leaf woodcuts or stand alone drawings, engravings, or even paintings, visual images of witchcraft must have played a significant role in developing this new discourse about witchcraft and the direction of the debates which it spawned. But precisely how pictorial images contributed to this process, to what extent they were implicated in it, and what impact they made on its direction, are questions which historians have barely begun to address.[92]

Margaret Sullivan has even suggested that the gap in prosecutions that the records of many areas show, which occurred between the first fires of the fifteenth centuries and the increasing number of hunts after the middle of the sixteenth century, was a lull filled by the diffusion of paintings and drawings such as those by Albrecht Dürer and Hans Baldung Grien—images that, even against the will of their makers, helped stoke

[90] Peter Corbin, Douglas Sedge, *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays* (Manchester, 1986); James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550–1750* (London, 1996).

[91] Some useful indications are in Gareth Roberts, The Descendants of Circe: Witches and Renaissance Fiction, in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief*, eds. Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, Gareth Roberts (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 183–206.

[92] Charles Zika, Images of Circe and Discourses of Witchcraft, 1480–1580, *Zeitenblicke*, 1 (2002). online http://www.zeitenblicke.de/2002/01/zika/zika.html.

new witch-crazes.[93] According to Sullivan, those works responded to the contemporary revival of ancient literature, of which witchcraft and magic were a great part. Classical literature furnished artists as well as inquisitors and jurists with powerful examples of female characters who practised magic. Sullivan's suggestions do invite further research, not least in the area of Northern European art, where a connection with contemporary events seems more relevant, and which could exclude the monocausal explanation that emerges from her article.[94] Concerning Dürer, it has also been noted that his inspiration was more linked to invention than to historical images: a thing that distinguished him from his Italian contemporaries.[95]

Among the many inspiring characters, some named and some anonymous, it was Circe who was most often turned to: as we have seen, there is almost no one who did not refer to her magical acts, and her role as an archetype in the figurative arts was also singular. In the case of Circe, as well as in many other depictions of magic themes, two fields of analysis should be separated: 'high art', on the one hand, and on the other hand, the engravings and woodcuts, etc., which were included in printed texts, such as those I have discussed above.

At the beginning of fifteenth century, the painter Dosso Dossi made two representations of Circe. Dosso was born Giovanni Luteri, in the Duchy of Mirandola around 1486, and was mostly employed at the court of the Estense family in Ferrara, which placed him in a good position to participate in both the revival of Antiquity and the growing interest in magic and witchcraft, as many of his paintings demonstrate.[96]

[93]Margaret A. Sullivan, The Witches of Dürer and Hans Baldung Grien, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 53, 2 (2000), pp. 333–401; on Baldung see also Dale Hoak, Art, Culture, and Mentality in Renaissance Society: The Meaning of Hans Baldung Grien's Bewitched Groom (1544), *Renaissance Quarterly*, 38, 3 (1985), pp. 488–510.

[94]See the beautiful catalogue, richly commented and illustrated by Renilde Vervoort, *Bruegel's Witches: Witchcraft Images in the Low Countries Between 1450 and 1700* (Bruges, 2015).

[95]Linda C. Hults, Dürer's Four Witches Reconsidered, in *Saints, Sinners, and Sisters: Gender and Northern Art in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Jane L. Carroll, Alison G. Stewart (London, 2003), pp. 94–125, esp. pp. 94–99.

[96]The standard studies by Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* (New York, 1953) and Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (London, 1958) can be revised in the light of Monica Centanni, *Fantasmi dell'Antico. La tradizione classica nel Rinascimento* (Rimini, 2017).

Fig. 1 Dosso Dossi, *Circe and her Lovers in a Landscape*: National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

His *Circe and her Lovers in a Landscape* (1511–12) (Fig. 1) presents a naked, beautiful woman surrounded by animals—reminiscent of Ulysses' transformed companions—against the backdrop of an idyllic landscape; there is nothing but quiet beauty in the painting, which could not be more remote from the image of the old, lewd woman often associated with witchcraft. However, in the Greek tradition, Circe is the daughter of a god—thus a half goddess herself—and it is this image that Dossi is painting: Circe lures with her attractiveness, and the mystery of magic and human transformation is bound up with mythological narrative.

Another painting by Dosso Dossi, also associated with Circe (a detail of which is reproduced on the cover of this book), sees a fully clad, richly dressed woman staring upward at some enchanted little human forms hanging from a tree (1522–1524, now at Galleria Borghese, Rome). She has a dog by her side and holds a decorated sceptre (or a magic wand) in one hand, with which she is lighting a fire. In more recent times, the painting's traditional association with Circe has been brought into

question, with the suggestion that the figure could, rather, be Alcina or Melissa. Radiography has revealed a knight standing in the background, later painted over by Dossi, which might indicate that the painting was originally composed to depict the chivalric epic of Ariosto; but it could also be that Dosso did not want the subject to be too decisively clear.[97] Indeed, such an incertitude marries well with the suspended atmosphere of the painting, and as Circe is the archetype for all other powerful female magicians, it is not important whether Dosso had any figure in particular in mind, or rather just the type.

We must remember that the episode of Circe transforming Ulysses' companions was also treated as a moral tale, which at times overshadowed the theme of magic. Around 1517, Niccolò Machiavelli wrote a poem, left unfinished, that was intended as a reworking of Apuleius's *Golden Ass*, and, indeed, bore that same title. Among other stories, it recounts a meeting between the author and a herdswoman surrounded by beasts, who clearly is Circe. After making love to him, she explains the moral characteristics of each of the animals.[98] This moral turn in her character is found in many other examples, and can be both independent of, or entangled with, the image of Circe the magician.[99] In sixteenth-century Italy, Giovan Battista Gelli, with his *La Circe* (1549), and Giordano Bruno, with the *Cantus Circaeus* (1582), also turned to her for inspiration; and outside of Italy, Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590) has an episode based on her character.[100] Circe as the *meretrix*, already represented in Giovanfrancesco Pico's *Strix*, is a common theme in the arts.[101]

[97] Peter Humfrey, Mario Lucco (eds.), *Dosso Dossi: Court Painter in Renaissance Ferrara* (New York, 1998), pp. 89–92, 114–118; Stefania Macioce (ed.), *L'incantesimo di Circe. Temi di magia nella pittura da Dosso Dossi a Salvator Rosa* (Roma, 2004), esp. pp. 11–40; and Mina Gregori (ed.), *In the Light of Apollo: Italian Renaissance and Greece*, 2 vols. (Athens, 2003–2004).

[98] Nicolò Machiavelli, *L'Asino d'Oro, con tutte l'altre sue operette*, vol. IV (s.l. 1679), pp. 35–48.

[99] Brigitte Urbani, Vaut-il «mieux mille fois être ânes qu'être hommes»? *Chroniques Italiennes*, 59–60 (2002), pp. 163–180; Eadem, Ulysse dans la culture italienne. Voyage multiforme à travers le temps, *Cahiers d'études romanes*, 27 (2013), pp. 19–46.

[100] Roberts, *The Descendants of Circe*, pp. 183–206.

[101] Patricia Simons, The Crone, The Witch, and the Library: The Intersection of Classical Fantasy with Christian Vice During the Italian Renaissance, in *Receptions of Antiquity, Constructions of Gender in European Art, 1300–1600*, eds. Marice Rose, Alison C. Poe (Leiden, 2015), pp. 264–304.

Less valuable but more common images of Circe circulated in printed books. Charles Zika writes that the model for many of these images was probably set by Boccaccio's work *On Famous Women*, which began to include images of Circe in its fifteenth-century editions, and whose iconography was maintained into the sixteenth century: 'In line with Boccaccio's text', Zika argues, 'the woodcut is primarily concerned to emphasise Circe's role as a sorceress who exploits her powers of metamorphosis. The iconography of the print continued for more than fifty years'.[102] At the end of the century, more ideas began to arrive from Germany, and while these are best related to the spread of Nordic images of witchcraft, with different roots from the classical ones, the influence of Virgil and Ovid also played a role.

Apart from Circe, other motifs issuing from classical Antiquity passed through figurative art, garnering wider success and audiences. The theme of transformation, for example, featured widely in sixteenth-century narratives of witchcraft, mostly as a trick played by the devil. Circe is the powerful magician able to change the shape of men: a theme used by demonologists to discuss the powers of demons, to the point that Gareth Roberts affirms she 'is the archetype in demonological discussions of transformation'.[103] In written treatises, Circe overshadowed other characters, like Pamphile and Lucius, who in the *Golden Ass* shapeshift themselves, but whom never received the same level of attention, even if Apuleius is widely quoted, as we have seen. Circe and sometimes Medea are the prototypes for the magician—having been so in ancient literature, they continued to be perceived this way through Medieval times, and in the Renaissance.

This does not mean other characters did not play a role. The graphic descriptions of Lucius shapeshifting into an ass, or Pamphile into an owl—all set, as was customary at the time, against contemporary surroundings and landscapes, and with people in modern dress—helped to complete the impression that the witching powers of the past could be traced with an unbroken continuity into contemporary phenomena, the same argument that many treatises had laid out in words. As Pope Gregory I Magnus had written a full millennium earlier, 'What writing does for the literate, a picture does for the illiterate looking at it'.[104]

[102] Zika, *Images of Circe*, p. 4.

[103] Roberts, *The Descendants of Circe*, p. 194.

[104] Gregorii Magni, *Registrum epistularum libri I–XIV*, ed. Dag Norberg (Turnhout, 1982), p. 768.

In the Renaissance, many things changed, and the distribution of literacy differed greatly from the late sixth century, when Gregory had been writing. But, still, not everyone was willing and able to read a treatise, and for the ignorant and well-read alike, the power of images was strong. Engravings and woodcuts that illustrated their story showed in detail the metamorphosis of Lucius and Pamphile's bodies, and for many, this might prove more effective than written words.[105]

Often, those ancient poets portrayed women endowed with special powers: they could be demi-goddesses, like Circe and Medea—terrifying like Erichto, or lewd like Canidia. They could be beautiful *lamiae*, like the *Four Witches* of Dürer, or their opposite, like in his *The Witch*, where the painter draws a dreadful *vetula* with uncombed hair, riding backwards on a devilish goat; and maybe also the ugly old hags, cooking filthy potions and ointments in a cauldron, like those of the *Witches' Scene* by David Teniers II. Certainly, we cannot trace a direct continuity from classical Antiquity to modern times for all of them, but the highly gendered visual description common for most is not without links to the ancient literary witches. 'Behind their gorgeous facades, Early Modern Circes disguised a grotesque reality that looked like Horace's Canidia and warned against the emasculating consequences of succumbing to sensuality. Indeed, we might read such a double-sidedness into the contrast between Dürer's *Four Witches* and *The Witch*'.[106]

Ovid, Apuleius and many others told stories of metamorphosis that were significant for the Renaissance, and which were also admired and loved for the style and the language of their authors. Even the legal precedents from which judges and inquisitors worked owed much to Roman laws on the matter of witchcraft. And, yet further, many of the confessions of alleged witches recalled deeds described in ancient poems. As Jean Bodin asked, how could this correspondence be without a causal basis? He preferred to think that the root cause was an ongoing plot by

[105] Many examples in Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft*, pp. 125–155. See also Robert H. F. Carver, *The Protean Ass: The Metamorphoses of Apuleius from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Oxford, 2007). For the image/writing relationships, and the prevailing force of the former towards vs. latter, see David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago, 1989).

[106] Hults, *Dürer's Four Witches Reconsidered*, pp. 96–97.

the devil and his servants—and, considering the sources he had available to him, Bodin's was a perfectly sound proposition. We attribute it, now, to the circulation of knowledge between folklore and written culture, evident in Ancient and Medieval times, which influenced both the witches and the judges alike, way before the two groups ever met. When Ovid wrote of child Proca and his nurse fighting against witches, he was transposing into poetic language stories that were currently circulating in his time. Poliziano was doing precisely the same when he described the scary *lamia* with removable eyes that Tuscan grandmothers evoked to scare children—little imagining the tale might end up in a philosophical pamphlet.

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