

Witchcraft, Arson and Murder – The Turek Trial of 1652

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The historiography of early modern witchcraft in Europe

Estimates of the death toll resulting from executions for witchcraft in Europe during the early modern period have ranged from nine million women alone, to more recent estimates of approximately 50,000 men and women.[1] In most areas of Western Europe, the peak of this persecution is thought to have occurred between 1580-1650.[2] Over the last fifty years the study of early modern witchcraft has developed and burgeoned more than almost any other field in history. Its revival was, to a large extent, due to the new life extended to it by the application of anthropological methodology in the 1960s and 1970s by the still axiomatic work of Keith Thomas and Alan Macfarlane.[3] Their observations have been described as the so-called ‘charity-refused paradigm’, in which tense neighbourly relations found release in accusations of witchcraft. This was illustrated by the refusal of charity by one neighbour to another, which provided a grudge or motive for ill will. The unsuccessful supplicant was then blamed for subsequent misfortune suffered by the household that had refused the request for help. Similar motives were revealed, more clearly, in accusations of the use of love magic. In essence witchcraft was interpreted in a functional way, as a weapon of revenge and this paradigm has become a virtual mantra among succeeding historians. Based on close reading of trial records, this theory has challenged previous notions of witch-hunts as the persecution of the peasantry by social elites and the Churches. It reversed the dynamics of witch-hunts, locating an alternative impetus within neighbourly relations rather than within elite methods of exerting power. The historiography of witchcraft studies has seen a multitude of suggestions why particular people were accused of witchcraft, which have included belief in real covens, the use of hallucinogenic drugs, and misogyny.[4] As more work is being conducted in the archives of Europe and North America, witchcraft trials are being consciously located within their cultural, social and legal contexts, instead of merely being viewed as a cruel and superstitious hangover from the Middle Ages.

The historiography of witchcraft in Poland

Whilst new works on witchcraft persecution in Europe and North America are appearing with increasing frequency, the same cannot be said of Poland. Interest in witchcraft trials has never matched that displayed by a variety of ethnographers, historians, and legal historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth century often writing within the context of local historical monographs.[5] These authors published partial transcriptions of individual trials with commentaries, or examined a particular aspect of the trials. It was clear that Polish authors had relied heavily on the work of Wilhelm Soldan and Joseph Hansen,[6] and that no attempt had been made at producing a comprehensive history of witchcraft. In 1952, Bogdan Baranowski's *Procesy czarownic w Polsce w XVII i XVIII w.* (The Trials of Witches in Poland in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries) was published. This has become, for all its faults, the definitive authority on witchcraft persecution in Poland, predominantly thanks to a three-page résumé in French at the end of the work.[7] Most authors have expressed caution about Baranowski's statistics, but some have wholeheartedly embraced his methodology and his explanations of the causes of witchcraft persecution in Poland. Although some authors have dismissed the Polish witch-hunts as a mere extension of the German persecution, because of their supposed ferocity, paradoxically they have not accorded the Polish phenomenon the importance that other areas of the German lands have received.[8]

In essence, Baranowski's work has been widely quoted by readers and non-readers of Polish alike as the sole source of statistics for the Polish witch-hunt, despite the fact that the author issued a caveat that the figures were in no way conclusive, and despite the lack of a verifiable archival basis. A later peak in the number of trials (1675-1725) commensurate with the peak in Hungary[9] was established, but, more important, Baranowski's estimate of total deaths by execution for witchcraft was between 10,000 and 15,000 women. This figure pertained to the territory of the *Korona* (Crown) that fell within the area that was Poland in 1952. This excluded the eastern territories (taken over by the Soviet Union after the Second World War), Royal Prussia and Silesia. He calculated that there had been 1,250 towns in Poland and that each town had tried four cases and put to death two witches from each case. Baranowski arbitrarily added to that total of 10,000 another 5,000 deaths reflecting illegal lynchings.[10] If this were correct then Poland's witchcraft persecution would

have been on a numerical par with that of Switzerland,[11] and possibly have accounted for 30 per cent of the total victims in Europe. If Baranowski's inflated statistics (which included Silesia) were taken into account, Poland would have seen between 30,000 and 40,000 executions, more than the rest of Europe put together. The consistent trend has been to revise figures down, and Baranowski himself, in a commentary to the 1971 Polish translation of Baschwitz's work, wrote that he now considered the total number of deaths in Poland to have been only a few thousand.[12] These statistics were published in Polish and therefore have attracted little attention from most historians of witchcraft, who prefer to cite Baranowski's more sensational statistics.

Because of the extensive destruction of archives in the Second World War, and the loss of some court record books of the period through decay or removal, it is impossible to establish the total number of deaths. Since definitive statistics are beyond our reach, let us at least examine the causal aspect of the persecution. Does Poland subscribe to the charity-refused paradigm, or is there evidence that the persecution was organized by the elites? Baranowski, writing in post-war Poland, subscribed to the latter paradigm, conveniently allowing the oppressors of the early modern period to concur with the traditional oppressor of the people in keeping with Communist ideology. The historically familiar perpetrators of crimes against proletariat 'witches' were Western cultural influence (predominantly German), the Roman Catholic Church, and the nobility. It is clear that in a number of trials, the virtually feudal conditions in which the peasantry lived and the legal possession of villages and towns by the nobility were conducive to witchcraft accusations being used as a tool by local noblemen. The noble *posiadał pełnie władzy prawodawczej w swoich dobrach*, (was vested with complete legal power in his possessions).[13] Conversely, it is also true that many trials revealed quarrels as a motive for bringing charges. Curiously, it would appear that Polish trials for witchcraft display traits of both the Macfarlane-Thomas paradigm and of the instrumental use of witchcraft accusations by the elites.

Witchcraft persecution in Poland

In order to create the context for the trial that follows, I will sketch a brief background to Polish witchcraft persecution. The earliest trials were heard before ecclesiastical courts from the fifteenth century,[14] until jurisdiction unofficially passed to the

secular municipal courts around the middle of the sixteenth century.[15] These cases usually involved accusations of using herbs, incantations, causing impotence, or sprinkling cattle with holy water, and almost never mentioned the devil or diabolic practices. Polish witchcraft trials share most of the features common to their counterparts in other areas of Europe in that the criminal charge of witchcraft usually included one or more of the following; attendance at the sabbat, the use of the devil's power to effect supernatural changes, cause illnesses, changes in the weather, to inspire love, to induce an abortion, kill cattle and so forth. A close reading of the trials reveals details about the devil and other anomalies that are specific to Poland.[16] Once charges had been brought, the accused was brought before the court and both parties usually swore an oath. The accuser swore that he was not acting out of malice, spite or revenge and to the truth of his accusation. Elsewhere in Europe witnesses were called (although in Polish cases this is rarer) and then the accused was given the chance to admit or deny the charges. Should the accused plead not guilty then she would be shown the full horror of the torture chamber, or the executioner's tools and if still not compliant, the torture would begin. On the basis of the principle, *confessio est regina probatione*, torture was freely inflicted. In Polish cases it was rare for the accused to be represented by a defence lawyer or indeed anyone. The most important personnel in the trial procedure were the judge, the executioner and the local nobleman, if the case fell within the jurisdiction of a private town or village. For example, in my sample from Wielkopolska, rarely was leave to appeal given in cases of witchcraft; consequently the execution rate was approximately 90 per cent.[17] The Magdeburg Law, widely in use in the Crown, advocated the death penalty for witchcraft and received its moral authority from Exodus 22. 18 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live', often quoted in trial sentencing.[18] In 1776, under King Stanisław August Poniatowski, an end to torture and the trial of witches was declared in a legal statute.[19] Despite this there were accounts after this date of lynchings, and the throwing of women into ponds or rivers (a practice known as swimming witches) to discover if they were witches.[20]

Primary and secondary narratives in trial confessions

Although trial records cannot be read merely as chronological textual accounts of empirical events, they provide one of the richest sources for reconstructing the detail of everyday life in early modern society. These sources must be read and interpreted

in the light of the legal and cultural contexts that brought them into being. First, the trial itself was created, conducted, and recorded by the judiciary. The location, usually in the Town Hall, and the atmosphere, where often the accused appeared shaven and naked before the judges, were calculated to intimidate.[21] In addition, women who had been accused of witchcraft denounced others. These accusers subsequently had to repeat their claims face-to-face with the people they had denounced, who were often members of their own families.

It is clear that within the trial a dialogue arose between the accused and the judges, in which a particular range of scenarios was established, and which was often used as a template for the judges' questions in subsequent trials. It appears from close reading of trial records that there was an accepted language and sequence of events of which both parties were aware. The application of torture predisposed most of the accused to admit to the questions posed, but other levels of discourse also emerge from the confessions. These secondary narratives often revealed histories of abuse, misfortune, or quarrels and provide a sub-narrative within the primary issue of witchcraft. The reader cannot adopt an empirical attitude towards the testimonies, but neither can he dismiss all the details as fantasy. As we shall see, the framework of confession was often the catalyst for releasing private matters into the public domain.[22] In the trial for witchcraft examined below, accounts of murder, arson, family quarrels and poisoning emerge.

The publication of this trial sees one of the first, if not the first discussion of a specific Polish witchcraft trial in English, and therefore places new material into the broader academic arena. The aim is to enable comparison with trials in the rest of Europe and also to present an example of the texture of the documentation, of its content and of judicial procedures evident in Polish trials for witchcraft. This trial is taken from a sample of over 250. This work represents not only one of the few new analyses of archival sources since the work of Baranowski, but is part of a larger work, that also encompasses a comparison with literary representations of the witch in early modern Polish printed sources. The trial examined here took place in the small city of Turek, Wielkopolska. As we have seen, in Wielkopolska, the execution rate was approximately 90 per cent, and there was little evidence of the use of an appeals system. This case is atypical because it involves six women, whereas the average for each case in the sample was two. It is typical though in that all the accused were female, and although a male was sentenced in the trial, that was almost a peripheral

event and he was not accused of witchcraft. According to the court record book examined, between 1648 and 1667, there appear to have been twelve trials for witchcraft involving around thirty-eight women and no men. In a few cases the witches were subjected to trial by water, which was not widely practised in Poland. Some of the cases are in clusters, occurring in 1648 (three trials), 1652 (two trials), 1653 (two trials), 1654, 1660, 1663, 1664, and 1667. There are no chains of cases such as those found in Grodzisk, Kleczew, and Wągrowiec, for example, that involved dozens of accused.

The text of the manuscript is too long to be included in its entirety here, but excerpts have been selected, which it is hoped will provide a good indication of the texture and content of the trial documentation, and, most important, of the pattern of torture and confession. The manuscripts reveal the disjointed nature of the procedures and their documentation, the importance of confirmation through repetition, and the recording practice of the scribe. It is possible to discern clearly the pace at which events were moving. The text has been punctuated for clarity, but differences in spelling have been retained as they appear. Alterations have been made to the text to make it more comprehensible, since the questioning moves swiftly and arbitrarily between the various people who had been accused of witchcraft during the trial. Latin phrases have also been translated and appear in italics, which provides a flavour of the increased use of the vernacular in trials, whilst also displaying the level of education of the judge or scribe. The translated texts are indented, followed by a commentary and an explanation of what occurred before the next excerpt.

The trial of Anna Rydzyńska, Ann Leniwa, Anna Wozna, Jadwiga Szczecinina, and her daughters Anna Szczecinianka and Teresa Szczecinianka, recorded in *Księga Miejska Turku*, I/30 from 1652, fols 14^v–21^v. Poznań Regional Archive.

This trial follows closely on from the trial for witchcraft of Dorota Piwkowa and her daughter, who were first accused of working in the fields on Easter Saturday and then of witchcraft. Therefore the usual official recording of the judiciary has already been noted. The episode that concerns us begins with a denunciation made by Anna Szczecinianka at Turek Town Hall. She told the court that her father had been ordered to guard her mother, Jadwiga. When Anna had asked her mother why she was under guard, if she was innocent, her mother had told her she was scared because she had

also tried to escape through the window on the same Thursday that Piwkowa had been arrested. This implies that she was afraid of being associated with Piwkowa.[23] At this denunciation by her own daughter, Jadwiga was arrested and prior to torture, admitted that the devil had come into her head twice whilst she was asleep. On his second visit she crossed herself so that he would fly away and resisted his attempts at seduction. Cannily, she refused to renounce Satan before the judges, recognizing that this was tantamount to admitting that she had given herself to him. Jadwiga tried not to admit to anything other than an illusory devil, and claimed that she could not have slept with him as her husband was next to her. Unfortunately, torture broke her and she confessed that the devil had seized her from her bed and they had gone together to Janiszewo, from where Piwkowa and her daughter came.

Anna testified again, saying that her mother always disappeared when she was frightened and sat in a particular spot. Whenever Anna had asked where her mother had been, her mother would tell that she had been scared. Since her daughter had testified once more to her guilt, Jadwiga, tortured a second time, admitted that she had escaped through the window because Piwkowa had been arrested – guilt by association. She confessed that after that, the devil had left her and had visited Soczewczyna, who told him to come to the door since he would not fit through the window. At that point Anna Leniwa arrived at the house. The questioning switched back to Jadwiga's daughter, who continued her testimony. She described how her mother had put two jars (presumably of ointment, a material purportedly used in witchcraft and for flying to the sabbat) on the fireplace on a Thursday.[24] Having heard the lowing of a cow, Anna went to check the byre, but on her return, her mother had disappeared with the jars and did not return until daybreak. She asked her mother where she had been, and was sharply rebuked. By the third day of questioning, Jadwiga had confirmed all these points, and added the curious, and somewhat random detail that at dawn the devil had neither a head nor legs. Then Jadwiga was confronted by her own daughter.

(fol.15) Jadwiga Szczecina in *confrontation with* Anna, the daughter of that Jadwiga, whose daughter *firmly* standing said, saying 'O darling mother, don't bear me (fol.15^v) on your soul and don't lament your conscience, that twice I saw you smear yourself [with ointment] and

Teresa knew about this and I saw, dear mother, when you flew out of the window twice and you always took the three jars with you.'

At which confrontation the mother said with regret, 'dear Anka, I trusted you and you handed me over.'

But the daughter standing *firmly* looking her mother in the eyes, *steadily* told all, saying, 'dear mother' it is hard for me to deny what I saw, I must tell the truth about what I saw, so that God will bless me.'

Hedwiga[25] Szczecinina *freely*[26] said, 'Old Czuchrzyna, my neighbour, lent me three jars and I smeared myself [with ointment] and I flew to the devil in the field at Lipka and we turned ourselves into small cats. Leniwa and Czuchrzyna were with us and we tore up green rye and Cuchrzyna carried it onto her son-in-law's field. But the second time, I smeared myself [with ointment], we were in Ptak's brewery, we [...] [27] turned ourselves into pigs. There were three of us Cuchrzyna, Leniwa, and I. They took beer in a jug and wanted to teach me but I did not want to and they pricked me with knives. They used the following words, "Let human harvest go its own way." When I took the wheat home and it withered, Cuchrzyna told me "you did it, the wheat [was] withered by the devil [...] I will burn [it in] the same [way]." Leniwa spoilt Kwapicz's beer with Cuchrzyna, [...] Leniwa had become angry with Kwapicz. Cuchrzyna gave me [ointment] to smear under my armpits and to [fly to] Łysina and because of this I flew to the devil at Lipki. But Leniwa was there already and when they took the wheat they divided it into three parts and tore it into three.'

(Fol.16) On the day of the Ascension of our Lord, at two o'clock at night, freely, Hedwiga Szczecinina recalled 'that which I first confessed and what I swear now and say that Anna Leniwa spoilt Kwapicz's beer and Old Czuczrzyna gave me three jars [of ointment] and I smeared myself [with it] and I flew to Lipki, we turned ourselves

into small cats. We were at Ptak's brewery again, having left through the chimney.'

Hedwiga Szczecinina *in confrontation with* Anna Leniwa is put before her and [Hedwiga said] 'she also confessed to Leniwa that we were at Lipki and we turned into three small cats when Czuchrzyna smeared me [with ointment]'

Leniwa was surprised by that, she said 'but did you see me there?'

Szczecinina said, 'I saw [you]'. *At these words she became silent* 'Leniwa and Czuchrzyna took the harvest.' This Jadwiga Szczecinina *freely reiterated* that Anna Leniwa had spoiled Kwapicz's beer.

Confrontation between a witness and the accused was an extremely powerful method of inducing a confession, the more so between mother and daughter. Ostensibly the daughter told her mother that she was not to blame for what she saw and corroborated her evidence through her sister Teresa. Jadwiga's disappointment was palpable as she reproached her daughter, who claimed in her defence a desire to partake in the grace of God. This was, in effect, the final faggot at the stake prepared for Jadwiga, who then made a full confession. She admitted to possessing the jars of ointment, but still attempted to shift the blame by claiming the jars were not actually hers. She confessed to meeting the devil and unusually, in Polish cases, to metamorphosis. The cat would seem a rather traditional choice, but there is also tell of the women turning into pigs. Also somewhat rare in Polish cases (surprisingly considering how dependent the Polish economy was on the production of grain), was the confession to having ruined the harvest. The destruction of the harvest threatened the whole community, and provided an empirical harm or *maleficia* from which all could harbour a grudge against the accused. Jadwiga had harmed the common good of the community and had to be punished. The spoiling of beer was a more common accusation, which conveniently provided a blame mechanism for the brewer's inadequate grasp of hygienic processes.

Jadwiga tried yet another strategy to divert blame by claiming that the other women wanted to teach her. Recognizing that she could not escape the charges, she attempted to mitigate them by portraying herself as an unwilling student, who even

incurred punishment – an attempt to reclaim the status of victim. The trial then reached a crucial point, in establishing that the accused had visited Łysina (another name for Łysa Góra, ‘Bald Mountain’), the common location of the witches’ gathering or sabbat. It did not necessarily pertain to the mountain of that name near Kielce, but could refer to any hill beyond the town or village. Unusually, no further detail of the sabbat was elicited and this particular strand of enquiry was not pursued. Diabolic witchcraft practices had been proved, and that was sufficient to warrant a death sentence.

The trial continued into the night. When the judiciary were satisfied that, after much rehearsal of her confession, Jadwiga would stand firm, she was confronted by Anna Leniwa. In the face of Jadwiga’s testimony, Leniwa in turn showed surprise, challenged her, and then was shocked into silence. This confrontation was repeated once more and then the line of enquiry shifted from witchcraft to arson when Teresa, Jadwiga’s second daughter was questioned. Teresa screamed at Satan to leave her, and admitted that she had been paid to commit arson, but that the money she had received had been stolen by a servant.

(fol.16^v) *On the sixth day after the feast of the Ascension of our Lord.*

Teresa confessed that ‘my mother escaped through the window, when Piwkowa was arrested, and she came immediately to the cowshed and I opened it. Father took things downstairs.’

Asked why she escaped during the town fire, she replied ‘because I was afraid’.

Freely Teresa also said that ‘[on the] third day before I set the fire Daddy escaped with the cows and when he had already sent the cows off to the wood he probably started the fire’, *finally* she said that ‘I started the fire on the hill in a hayrick before midday, not far from the hearth where people ate lunch, nobody knew about that, only that I did it for that wretched money. Bielich accused me and not my sister of setting the fire, I regret [it].’

Decree in the criminal case [on the basis of information] *from certain documents and juridical evidence* (fol.17) [and] *then from reliable inquiries*. The excesses shown [by] Jadwiga Szczecinina, who herself freely, pressed by no torture, confessed that she with others of her company indulged in witchcraft, [through] taking the harvest in the field, drinking beer in the breweries, changing partly into small cats, partly pigs through the instruments of cursed Satan, [through] harming people by the seizure of the wheat harvest and stealing beer, to which excesses she freely herself confessed, it is judged right that she is deserving of death by burning.

But this Teresa, the daughter of this Szczecinina, who unmindful of the love of her nearest and the harshness of common law, not having before her eyes the fear of God, having given herself over to evil, made so bold as to start a fire, as she herself admitted, by means of which fire [she] burnt the house of her parents and a lot of their possessions and caused immeasurable harm to the poor citizens of the small city of Turek. Then the Wojt's Court of Turek complied with the articles of the Magdeburg Law, and other authors complying with the Magdeburg Law, so that other criminals would not also commit such vile acts. Teresa is worthy of being sentenced to be burnt to death, together with her mother and is given over into the hands of the administrator of holy justice[28] by the Deputy Wojt's Court. But Jan Szczecina was also *an accomplice* because he escaped with cattle and wandered around and did not retrieve his goods. His daughter Anna knew about this and about her mother smearing herself with the [ointment from the] jar, [he is] then *banished in perpetuity by the jurisdiction of the city of Turek [...]*

(fol.17^v) From Jadwiga Szczecinina's denunciation, Anna Leniwa, *detained in prison*, [when] freely asked why Szczecinina denounced her, replied 'I will tell you nothing and I will endure the greatest sufferings'.

Saturday, during torture before sunrise. Anna Leniwa during torture [asked] why she frequented Lipki, and turned into a small cat – denied [it]. [Asked] why she spoiled Kwapicz's beer and was at Ptak's [...] in the brewery - she denied [all]. [When asked if] 'you took away the harvest', she standing *firmly* stubbornly [said] 'Sirs, I will tell you nothing because I cannot' and when the administrator gave her a seasoned drink, she barely tasted it.

Jadwiga Szczecinina [...] *at the site of execution*, having been placed on the stake without force but freely, having been sentenced already said 'Rydzńska was supposed to come to us, Krzeckowa and Wozna [as well...] to Ptasznikow's brewery [...] and Czuchrzyna came to my home. I know nothing about women from Brudzew and Dobra and other [places] because I do not know them, Old Czuchrzyna taught me. Then asked about Ewa, the daughter of Czuchrzyna, [Jadwiga] said 'what her mother knows so does the daughter, but those others will say more than I [...] and with this I go to God's judgement and bear [it all] on my conscience. Asked and asked [again] whether she renounced her denunciation of Leniwa she was silent.

(fol.18) *Saturday after sunrise*

Anna Leniwa *during a second session of torture*, [is] the one denounced by Jadwiga Szczecinina, who did not want to retract her denunciation at the stake. When prayers were said with her, [she said] 'Lord Jesus Christ be with me and you cursed devil leave me' *and she was trembling*. She said 'I will not do [anything] because you don't have him by me' and she remained stubborn in that she did not want to denounce Satan [...] she did not want to denounce by name the *most evil one*. Released [from torture]. [She continued] 'however, I will tell you, Sirs, more'. When she was *released from torture, freely at that moment*, she said 'we were in the field and plucked green rye for harvest. We were at Ptasznikowicz's at the brewery, we drank beer we [ruined] pots [of beer]. Old Czuchrzyna, Szczecinina and I were

pigs and in the field we were small cats. We also spoilt Kwapicz's beer, we poured yeast into it taken from Ptak. It was done with yeast.'

Then Teresa was tortured and confessed that their father had hidden some objects, which suggested that either something secret was going on in the house, or that he recognized that certain objects had the potential to be incriminating, should they be discovered. One group of women had already been arrested and executed for witchcraft, so it was reasonable to take precautions. Teresa first accused her father of starting the fire on the hill and then admitted to committing the act herself. At this point, in the midst of such chaos, Jadwiga's final confession was made and the concise nature of the notation suggests that she merely agreed to a list of accusations compiled by the scribe from previous torture sessions. Meanwhile, Teresa was reviled by the judiciary for having violated the commandment to love one's parents, for having set fire to their house. Paradoxically she was expected to collude with the judiciary in the process that would ultimately send her and her mother to their deaths and her father into exile. In judging her, justice was seen to have been done on behalf of the whole community. The sentences also fulfilled a didactic function, providing a warning for others, who sought to harm the corporate interests of the community. Although the father's guilt was not conclusively established, he was sentenced to permanent banishment.

Just before Jadwiga was taken to her execution, Leniwa withstood another session of torture and admitted nothing. In contrast Jadwiga continued to denounce more women at the stake, and the implication was all the more powerful since she was preparing to meet her maker. Significantly, she denied knowledge of other witches whose names had obviously been suggested to her by the judges. She failed, when specifically asked, to retract her denunciation of Leniwa. Since Leniwa had not yet made a confession, a retraction by Jadwiga might have saved her. This opportunity to show mercy was missed, and the judges renewed their efforts to trick Leniwa into praying for the devil to leave her, but she refused. When released from the second session of torture, Leniwa finally broke and confirmed the story established by Jadwiga. She provided an empirical agent (yeast) for the ruin of the beer rather than using supernatural power, but this in no way mitigated the charges of witchcraft made against her. Following this episode, Anna Rydzyńska (denounced by Jadwiga), was questioned for the first time about the death of Kawalkowa. This quarrel appeared to

have a prehistory, since Kawałkowa had apparently complained about her up until her death. Despite Rydzyńska's denial of murder, she then immediately incriminated herself by describing a practice (regarded as witchcraft) for extracting more milk from cows, which her sister had taught her. Throughout her torture, and when released, she denied all.

(fol.19) *On the third day before the holy feast of Pentecost. During torture*, [she was asked] 'Why did she escape from the wood with her mother and sister?' She replied 'we didn't trust ourselves but my sister was burnt in Nowe Miasto, the one who told me to gather earth and three small stones, that sister's name was Magdalena. She was burnt because she taught me how to obtain milk [...]'.
'Did she use any words?'

She replied 'The Angelic Salutation'. [...] When she was released she said, *freely* about Wozna that 'when she was having difficulties with her second husband, I, as my father had advised my mother, taught her to get water from three churches. [...] I gave her simple water, and she sent me a jug of beer and her stepdaughter knocked it [over]. I said "such work deserves such payment", and I told her also to place three groschen in that water (fol.19^v) and to sprinkle that water around the house, [with the words] "Lord Jesus Christ let the people of my house stay together as I hold [together] these three groschen." I also told Wozna to remove the lilac to banish problems at home.'

Anna Leniwa, *freely admitted* that 'Old Czuczrzyna plucked a handful of absinthe at the feast day of the Holy Spirit and flew through the chimney to Ptasznikowicz and shook down earth from him [...] and sprinkled that absinthe on the hay'.

Anna Rydzyńska *among other things, freely admitted* that 'she [Wozna] told me to take the water in the well [...] and I said these words "My God, Our Lady Mary with [your] help [...] in the name

of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”. For three Fridays before sunrise, I sprinkled the cows with that water so that milk would come, I took the water from my well.’

It emerged that Rydzyńska’s family was not native to the village, and had already escaped from another town where her sister, Magdalena, had been burnt for witchcraft. It was Magdalena who had taught Anna the practices to increase milk yields regarded as witchcraft. The use of the Angelic Salutation as an incantation was a practice common in trials of the sixteenth century,[29] but rarer in this period. Wozna’s apparent visit to Rydzyńska revealed the family’s reputation for healing and curing problems. Wozna sought their advice to restore harmony within her own household. When released from torture, Rydzyńska, recalled another hostile occasion involving Krzeczkowa.

(fol.19^v) *On the fourth day before the holy feast of Pentecost*

Anna Rydzyńska *freely* told why she had poisoned Kowalkowa [and said] ‘she had not stolen my apron and she was also shrewish and I cooked three snakeskins for her and I took them to her house and I gave her them (fol.20) to eat and she died from that.’

Anna Wozna, [was] asked about the water that Rydzyńska gave her and the three groschen she put in the water. She said with a lament ‘It didn’t happen in my house. Let God kill me with a thunderbolt with God’s permission in front of your eyes.’ she lamented, but she *shed the very smallest amount of tears from her eyes*. Asked why Urczocha, Kicina, and Pieczyłacina had denounced her *in the year 1637*, she said ‘they have wrongly denounced me [...]’. [Asked] why Kolasina denounced her in Janiszewicz, she replied ‘I didn’t know her’. [Asked] why Łakoma denounced her in Grzymiszew, calling her Anna of Wielopole, she admitted nothing.

Anna Rydzyńska finally admitted that she had poisoned Kowalkowa because she was shrewish, ill will providing a motive for the crime. Anna Wozna frantically denied

Rydzyńska's account of events and called upon God to give her justice – a recurring motif in criminal trials, where the accused was or believed him/herself to be innocent. This display of anxiety played into the hands of the judges. Although Wozna lamented she was virtually unable to weep, which confirmed the belief that a witch was incapable of tears. In addition to this evidence, Wozna had previously been denounced, in several villages and several times. She had been extraordinarily fortunate to have survived those multiple denunciations, but her luck finally ran out. After torture she admitted that Christ had abandoned her, saying to her torturers, “say what you want, I will say nothing”.

After torture, freely Anna Wozna [...] *denied [all] and admitted nothing* and whatever Rydzyńska had given her she admitted nothing.

Anna Rydzyńska confessed *freely* that ‘before the plague, Anna Wozna came to me (fol.20^v) to the house wanting to get some advice from my mother. I told her that a certain priest advised [people] to get water from three churches. She asked the deceased Matusz my husband to go for the water to the three churches. Anuszką, Anna Wozna's stepdaughter brought a jug of beer and clumsily smashed it against the post and cried and I said these words “as is the work, so is the payment” and I gave the stepdaughter simple water, unconsecrated in her own little jug, which she took to that Wozna.’ Asked about the lilac, she replied ‘I also advised Wozna to pluck lilac at the cemetery and [said] ‘lilac has the power to prevent problems at home. It is necessary to say the following words; “With the help of My God, with the help of Our Lady Mary, I ask you lilac [...] to get rid of the problem.” He killed his mother and father, let that problem also disappear. [...] Anna Wozna said this in front of me two years ago and she thanked me saying that the water had helped her.’ Anna Rydzyńska *was confronted*. When Anna Wozna was brought to the Town Hall [Rydzyńska] said that she [Wozna] took the water from her and

[continued] ‘I told her to put three groschen in it’, Wozna was stubborn and *denied that*. And again, Rydzyńska denounced her, saying ‘she thanked me for that water, Anna, it was barely two years ago’. (fol.21) Wozna did not [...] but Rydzyńska already sitting on the cart on which she was to travel to the execution, concluded with these words ‘I say what I say, that it is thus and no different’.

Sentence for the crime

At the denunciation of Jadwiga Szczecinina, Anna Leniwa and Anna Rydzyńska are in prison. These women previously freely asked, confessed also *in questioning [...] and after torture, immutably and firmly* and they revealed their excesses. [...] These women unmindful of the harshness of common law and having turned aside from natural life, this Anna Leniwa changed into small cats with others of her company, they took the harvest of hardworking people in the fields *by means of malignant instruments*. They ruined people’s beer, drank, stole, turned into the figure of a pig, flew to the brewery through the chimney, smeared [themselves] with unusual ointments, and caused great harm to those nearest. [...] The law considered that Anna Rydzyńska confessed freely that she had removed her neighbour Kawalkowa from the world by poison with little reason and she had indulged in other superstitions banned by the church. Unmindful of her vocation for her Christian piety (fol.21^v), they permitted themselves various excesses. Because of that common law which always requires the just and holy execution of criminals for their actions, the women Anna Leniwa and Anna Rydzyńska were judged deserving of death by fire and are handed over by the Deputy Wojt’s Court into the hands of the one who carries out holy justice.[30]

At the site of the execution Anna Rydzyńska renounced her denunciation of Wozna. Again she confessed ‘she came to me for

water and I told her to sprinkle her household. I told her to put those three [groschen] in the water so that the people of her house would remain together. When she was asked ‘why are you retracting your denunciation of Wozna?’, she said ‘Tomek, Wozna’s son and Mr Stan[isław] Jerzyk asked me to renounce my denunciation of his mother but I don’t want to lament my conscience, by telling lies at the stake’. Lying down at the stake, Rydzyńska said ‘Wozna was at my house for water, which she was to sprinkle in the house. I say what I say, that Wozna herself came to me at home for [the water]. Although I wanted to free her, Tomek her son asked me with Mr Jerzyk, she was at my home for water and she sprinkled it there in the house so that people would gather round her. It is now difficult for me to change my words and lament my conscience.

Rydzyńska confessed that Wozna had come to her house for advice from her mother, who apparently also had a reputation for healing. As an alternative remedy, she instructed Wozna to gather lilac from the cemetery, and invoke sacred forces to restore harmony to her household. There was also a reference to Wozna’s husband’s violent past. It seems that possibly he had killed his parents, although if this was common knowledge was there a reason for his not having been executed for this, or was the position of the ‘healer’ such that secrets would not be revealed for the greater community good? This episode had taken place over two years previously, so Rydzyńska’s reputation stretched back at least that far. Finally, probably broken by torture, Rydzyńska was taken on a cart to her execution. The sentencing summarized the main points of the confessions, but did not dwell upon diabolic involvement, indeed this aspect was absent from most of the trial. Even at the stake the drama was not yet over. For many victims it was the last opportunity to reclaim power, by discharging debts by denouncing others, or conversely by retracting denunciations they had previously made, as Rydzyńska had attempted. For some reason, she swiftly retracted her renunciation claiming that she could not lie at the stake, not even at the request of Wozna’s son, who was clearly trying to save his mother.

Conclusions

This trial reveals many similarities to trials in Western Europe, for example, accounts of transvection,[31] *maleficia*, metamorphosis, apparitions of the devil, the inability to weep, and superstitious practices designed to increase dairy yield. It is clear that denunciation was the key mechanism driving the trial, and it is within this mechanism that the Thomas-Macfarlane thesis should be located. The trial clearly reveals motives of revenge, which emerge once accusations have been made either to justify a denunciation or within a confrontation. It is also apparent in the context of both the individual desire for revenge and that of the community, since community interests such as the harvest have been ostensibly harmed. This partially endorses the Thomas-Macfarlane theory. In this trial one of the principal accusers was, unusually, the accused's daughter, according to the extant documentation, and no clear initial motive of cruelty or quarrel was apparent. Jadwiga identified anger as Leniwa's motive for destroying Kwapicz's beer, whilst Rydzyńska confessed that she had poisoned Kowalkowa for being shrewish. As outsiders, Rydzyńska's family was an obvious target, having already been accused of witchcraft in another city, and since they clearly had a reputation as cunning folk (that is healers). It seems that once a reputation had been tarnished, this was a catalyst for apportioning blame for a variety of crimes, as indeed we saw confessions to murder, arson, and poisoning emerge from this trial. The quarrels and denunciations became an integral part of the dynamic of the trial, enhanced by confrontations, but do not seem to have been the driving force.

The trial also dismisses several stereotypical beliefs about witchcraft trials. It reveals that judges were not overeager to blame witchcraft for all misfortune. Where there was a clear empirical explanation, such as for arson, or poisoning, they were willing to accept it. Within the trial procedures, women deployed consciously or unconsciously, strategies of defence to try and mitigate the accusations. Finally, power was placed perversely in the hands of the victim, who could denounce or retract denunciations of others; thus the hunted turned hunter. Whatever the arguments over the function, content and nature of the trial in the European or Polish context, the overwhelming influence was the use of both physical and psychological torture.

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- [1] Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, London, 1996, p. 8 and Brian Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, London, 1995, p. 25.
- [2] *Ibid.*, p. 185.
- [3] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, London, 1997 [1971] and Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, London, 1970.
- [4] See Margaret Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, Oxford, 1921; Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze*, New York, 1994; Montague Summers, *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology*, London, 1926.
- [5] For early work on Polish witchcraft see Kazimierz Karczmarczyk, 'Proces o czarostwo w 1688 i 1699', *Lud*, 7, 1908, pp. 302-22; Kazimierz Karczmarczyk, 'Ze starych aktów. Proces o czary w Bochni 1679 r.', *Lud*, 16, 1910, pp. 45-53; Karol Koranyi, 'Czary w postępowaniu sądowym', *Lud*, 25, 1926, pp. 7-18; Karol Koranyi, 'Studia nad wierzeniami w historii prawa karnego. Beczka czarownic', *Pamiętnik Historyczno-Prawny*, 5, 1927, 2, pp. 1-43; Józef Łukaszewicz, *Krótki historyczno-statystyczny opis miast i wsi w dzisiejszym powiecie krotoszyńskim*, 2 vols, Poznań, 1869-75; Marian Wawrzeniecki, 'Przyczynek do procesów o czary', *Lud*, 24, 1925, p. 173; Marian Wawrzeniecki, 'Dwa procesy o czary z 1684', *Lud*, 24, 1925, pp. 170-2.
- [6] Joseph Hansen, *Quellen u. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Hexenwahns u. die Hexenverfolgung im Mittelalter*, Bonn, 1901; Wilhelm Soldan, *Geschichte der Hexenprozesse*, 2 vols, Monachium-Lipsk, 1880.
- [7] Bogdan Baranowski, *Procesy czarownic w Polsce w XVII i XVIII wieku*, Łódź, 1952, pp. 178-79.
- [8] *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31; Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze*, pp. 67, 198; Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, p. 216; Janusz Tazbir, 'Procesy o czary', *Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce*, 23, 1978, p. 15.
- [9] Gábor Klaniczay, 'Witch-Trials in Hungary (1520-1777): The Accusations and the Popular Universe of Magic', in Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen (eds), *Early Modern Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, 2nd edn, Oxford, 1998, p. 230.
- [10] Baranowski, *Procesy czarownic w Polsce w XVII i XVIII wieku*, pp. 30-1.
- [11] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, p. 23. Levack suggests a revised figure of at least 10,000 people tried as witches.
- [12] Kurt Baschwitz, *Czarownice*, Warsaw, 1971, p. 430.
- [13] Juliusz Bardach, Bogusław Leśnodorski and Michał Pietrzak, *Historia państwa i prawa polskiego*, Warsaw, 1976, p. 195.
- [14] Karol Koranyi, 'Czary i gusła przed sądami kościelnymi w Polsce w XV i pierwszej połowie XVI w.', *Lud*, 26, 1927, pp. 1-25; Henryk Karbownik, 'Management of Witchcraft Trials in the Light of Synod Resolutions and Bishops' Regulations in Pre-partition Poland', *The Review of Comparative Law*, 2, 1998, pp. 65-78.
- [15] See *Volumina Legum: Przedruk zbioru praw staraniem XX. Pijarów w Warszawie od roku 1732 do roku [1793]*, Jozafat Ohryzko, 1859-60, 10 vols, St Petersburg, 2nd edn, 1980, I, p. 283. According to the Cracow Sejm Walny of 1543, jurisdiction over 'heretics, schismatics, blasphemers against God and apostates... incantations and magic' was passed to the ecclesiastical courts, but the jurisdiction was dependent upon the interpretation of the word *magia*. At this time, conversely, trials began to be heard by the secular courts, i.e. in Poznań from 1544, and in Kalisz from 1580. This change in jurisdiction heralded conflict between the clergy and the secular judiciary. For an outline of attempts made by the Roman Catholic Church to

regain jurisdiction see Karbownik, 'Managemnet of Witchcraft Trials in the Light of Synod Resolutions and Bishops' Regulations in Pre-partition Poland', pp. 65-78.

[16] Wanda Wyporska, 'The Devil in Early Modern Poland', in Gábor Klaniczay and Eva Pócs (eds), *Demons, Spirits, Witches. Christian Demonology and Popular Mythology*, Budapest, 2003, pp. 153-165; Wanda Wyporska, 'Early Modern Exclusion - The Branding of the Witch in Demonological Literature 1511-1775', in Elwira Grossman (ed.), *Examining the Other in Polish Culture: Studies in Language, Literature and Cultural Mythology*, Lampeter, 2002, pp. 143-155.

[17] My sample of trials was selected from twenty-five towns from the area of Wielkopolska ('Great Poland') on the basis of the criminal records of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. This includes the thirty-eight criminal record books of Poznań between 1502-1778, the *księgi czarne* 'black books', and books containing trials mentioned in secondary sources. The remaining books were sampled. This produced 251 cases from 1511-1793 (including three controversial cases supposedly after 1775). The sample revealed 511 accused, of which 90 per cent were executed. 31 per cent of the trials occurred between 1676 and 1700, involving 38 per cent of the total accused. In the quartiles either side of the peak there was a similar percentage of accused, but between 1651-1675 there were thirty-six cases and between 1701 and 1725, forty-seven. This research is to be published as part of forthcoming conference proceedings of the Third York Cultural History Conference, held in April 2002.

[18] Ludwik Trippin, *Tajemnice społeczeństwa wykryte ze spraw kryminalnych krajowych*, 3 vols, Wrocław, 1852, 3, pp. 203, 208.

[19] *Volumina Legum*, VIII, pp. 546-47.

[20] Krystyna Ceynowa was thought to have been drowned as a witch in 1836 in Hel - see Baranowski, *Procesy czarownic w Polsce w XVII i XVIII wieku*, p. 96. The process of 'swimming a witch' entailed tying his/her left arm to the right leg and vice versa before throwing the witch into a large pond or river. If the witch sank s/he was innocent; if they drowned they were thought to be guilty.

[21] Jędrzej Kitowicz, *Opis obyczajów za panowania Augusta III*, Warsaw, 1985 [1840], Poznań, pp. 136-7.

[22] For an excellent discussion on reading archival sources, see Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France*, Cambridge, 1987; Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil : Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe*, London, 1994; Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture : Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England*, London, 1995.

[23] Piwkowa was examined in the previous trial along with her daughter.

[24] The day traditionally connected with the witches' sabbat. The jars presumably contained ointment, which when smeared on the witch enabled her to fly.

[25] Jadwiga and Hedwiga are used interchangeably.

[26] The term 'freely' indicates that the speaker was not undergoing torture at that point in the procedure.

[27] This sign indicates that the text was either unclear or ambiguous.

[28] The executioner.

[29] Poznań, Archiwum Państwowe w Poznaniu, Akta Miasta Kalisz I/158, fol. 202.

[30] The executioner.

[31] A term denoting transportation to the sabbat usually thought to have been by broomstick, animal or other methods.

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