

seventeenth centuries demonstrates that Luther was in fact venerated as a saint in a multitude of ways.<sup>76</sup>

Alongside the deep-seated desire for the miraculous working of God and the saints, the wish for personal knowledge about one's own fate was also an essential aspect of early modern religiosity, and this is where astrology came in. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many women and men of all social strata and every confession had recourse to what it had to offer. It was only in the later seventeenth century that the upper and educated classes gradually began to distance themselves from prognosticating astrology, leaving this field increasingly to the lower social strata in the cities and to the rural peasant population.

The association of religiosity and belief in astrology may seem surprising. Magical ideas, however, established a bridge, so to speak, between the more orthodox forms of religiosity and astrology. This bridge rested essentially on the magical notion of "sympathy," the idea—which goes back to antiquity—that an invisible exchange of forces takes place between the planetary macrocosm and the human microcosm. Analogously, people also imagined a magical-spiritual exchange of powers between objects or between persons. In early modern society, fortune-telling on an astrological basis was the province especially of wise women and sorcerers, who, incidentally, could also help with everyday problems, such as finding lost objects.<sup>77</sup>

Not all forms of early modern religiosity show collective aspects. Astrology, for example, could be put to use for highly personal and private purposes. The same is true of magical practices. Still, early modern popular religiosity as a whole is marked, not least, by its references to the collective. Here, too, the "community" proves to be a fundamental and important dimension of religiosity within the period under discussion. That applies especially to the practice of pilgrimages and saint worship. It is equally true, on the Protestant side, of the belief in omens, for the divine punishments announced by omens were usually directed at the community, even when it was the sins of individuals that led to the threat of divine sanction.

## 4

### Outcasts

#### Marginalized: The Jews

When it comes to dividing Jewish history of the early modern era (1500–1800) into periods, the only thing scholars agree on is that there were two currents that developed in different ways: Sephardic Judaism (Spanish-Portuguese in origin), and Ashkenazi Judaism of the German-speaking lands and central Europe. While Friedrich Battenberg distinguishes between a medieval phase that lasted to the end of the Thirty Years' War and a subsequent early modern phase with its processes of change and assimilation,<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Israel locates a turning point in the history of European Jewry as early as between about 1570 and 1600, which signaled in western and central Europe a gradual end to the expulsion of the Jews.<sup>2</sup> This transition period led to a phase of consolidation between 1600 and 1620, which was followed in turn by a flowering of Jewish culture in the years from 1650 to 1713. Israel's scheme is undoubtedly oriented much more strongly than Battenberg's toward political history. Battenberg, in contrast, is guided primarily by the internal development of European Jewry.

Throughout nearly all of central and western Europe, the history of the Jews in the late Middle Ages and throughout most of the sixteenth century is marked by processes of marginalization and even outright expulsion—from England, the south of France, Spain, and Portugal, as well as from most of the larger cities in the Netherlands,

Germany, and Switzerland. Where Jews continued to be tolerated in urban areas, for example, in the imperial cities of Frankfurt and Worms and in some cities of northern Italy, their growing marginalization was manifested in the process of ghettoization that began in the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, in Central Europe the fallback on money-lending as the primary source of income, a process that had been going on since the late Middle Ages, reinforced the supportive internal structure of Jewry and simultaneously, from the inside out, the isolation imposed by the outside world.

In England, following a series of harassments and accusations of the ritual murder of Christian children, King Edward I expelled the Jews from the realm in 1290. A gradual resettlement did not occur until the 1650s, initially under Oliver Cromwell, who was motivated chiefly by economic and political considerations.<sup>4</sup> While Cromwell had taken this step over the opposition of many critics, the almost sensationally early plan by the Pelham government in 1753 to emancipate the Jews legally was thwarted by the pressure of public opinion, which included anti-Jewish riots in the streets and public squares of English cities.<sup>5</sup>

France saw orders of expulsion by the crown at the beginning and the end of the fourteenth century; the first order of 1306 had been temporarily rescinded. Against the backdrop of the pressure of an anti-Jewish sentiment, a Jewish exodus from almost all of France took place in the course of the fifteenth century. Exceptions were the southwest, where many forcefully converted Portuguese Jews, known as *conversos*, settled in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Papal lordships of Comtat Venaisin and Avignon, as well as the Alsace (at that time not yet under French control) and scattered cities and towns in Lorraine (which did not come under French suzerainty until the eighteenth century). In Lorraine, an important Jewish community—endowed with a royal privilege—arose in the former imperial city of Metz, which had fallen to France in 1552.<sup>6</sup>

The development of Spanish and Portuguese Jewry had an incomparably greater impact in shaping the respective national histories of these countries. In the Middle Ages, the Iberian peninsula was home to members of three religions living together and side by side—although this *convivencia* was rarely a community free of conflict.<sup>7</sup> In the fifteenth century, the Jews felt a strong pressure toward integration especially from two sides: first, from the crown, which, in the wake of the *reconquista* (the conquest of territories previously controlled by the Moors), also pursued the stronger integration of the Jews into the new, strongly Catholic polity; and second, from preachers of the mendicant orders, like Vincent Ferrer, who from the late fourteenth century made increasingly vigorous efforts to convert the Jews. "In a holy war against Islam," as John H. Elliott has rightly noted, "the priests automatically acquired a privileged posi-

tion."<sup>8</sup> Following on the heels of a large pogrom in Castile (1391), in which the clergy was by no means free of blame, most conversions took place under duress; we should not overlook, however, that on occasion there were relatively voluntary conversions, either out of inner conviction or because the individuals in question were also hoping to derive social advantages from this step.<sup>9</sup> This gave rise to the new class of conversos or New Christians. "Relapsed" conversos, who secretly remained faithful to the religion of their ancestors, were called *marraños*. The Moors, too, were subjected to a massive campaign of conversion, which culminated in 1502 in a decree by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella ordering the expulsion of all non-converted Muslims.<sup>10</sup> Already ten years earlier, the history of the Sephardic (Iberian) Jewry had entered a new phase.

During the fifteenth century, no small number of conversos had risen into important positions as financiers, tax farmers, and ecclesiastical dignitaries, thereby contesting the existing elite's monopoly on power. One clear expression of the widespread resentment are the *limpieza de sangre* statutes of the sixteenth century, purity-of-blood decrees by which cathedral chapters, monasteries, and state institutions tried to protect themselves against the unregulated admission of so-called New Christians. After the middle of the sixteenth century, they were used throughout the country. The *limpieza de sangre* contained proof of untainted (which meant non-Jewish) descent. It was indeed "ominous" that Philip II, in 1556, authorized his royal privilege for such a statute by the cathedral chapter in Toledo with the comment that "all heresies in Germany, France, and Spain have been sown by the offspring of Jews."<sup>11</sup> Do the roots of modern, racial anti-Semitism reach back into the Spain of Philip II? Should we be speaking here of anti-Semitism rather than hostility toward the Jews or anti-Judaism? Scholars of Jewish history are divided on how to answer these questions. To be sure, to an expert like Hermann Greive, "the question of this use of different words does not hold the kind of importance that it is sometimes accorded."<sup>12</sup> As I see it, the overwhelming consensus of historical scholarship still holds that the term "anti-Semitism" should be used only for the situation of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

It was not only the rapid social rise of many conversos that aroused suspicion within the traditional upper class: the crown, too, under the influence of its clergy, was increasingly concerned about the lack of orthodox beliefs in many New Christians. The coercive character of baptisms by no means ensured that the New Christians were in fact committed Christians, even though the clergy and no doubt a considerable segment of the Old Christians expected just that of them. The widespread belief in the miraculous powers of Church sacraments reinforced this expectation. All the more reason why the fact that

more than a few conversos secretly continued to practice the Jewish faith of their ancestors and its rituals met with growing consternation. It was primarily the related anxieties (alongside more political motives) that eventually gave rise to the Inquisition as a special ecclesiastical tribunal concerned with the orthodoxy of the subjects. The Inquisition began its activities in Castile in 1478, and nine years later in Aragon and Catalonia.<sup>13</sup>

Until the turn of the fifteenth century, the Inquisition was devoted almost exclusively to the problem of the heterodoxy of the conversos. It has been estimated that within this period, about 2,000 victims were burned during the well-known autos-da-fé for heresy and apostasy alone, and that an even greater number were "reconciled" with the Church as a result of an inquisitorial investigation against them. These *reconciliados*, as they were called, had to engage in acts of public humiliation and penance. In serious cases, the reconciliados—like those condemned to the stake—had to expect the confiscation of their property. One cannot dismiss the possibility that this also provided an incentive to prosecute the New Christians; many of whom were well-off.

The exodus of the Spanish conversos began after the royal conversion decree of March 30, 1492. In it, Isabel of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon ordered all Jews not yet baptized to convert to Christianity; those who refused would be banished from Spain. Somewhere between half and two-thirds of Spanish Jews left the realm—followed by many conversos. A few emigrated to North Africa, others to Northern Italy and thence to the Ottoman Empire; the majority, however—Jonathan Israel estimates their number at 70,000, at the most<sup>14</sup>—migrated into neighboring Portugal.

At this time Portugal did not yet have an Inquisition. On the contrary, King Manuel (1495–1521) was initially willing to protect the Jews against the widespread anti-Judaism of the population. Eventually, however, he was forced to yield to Spanish pressure on this issue. In 1497 he decreed the compulsory baptism of all Jewish children, and later that year the baptism of all adult Jews.<sup>15</sup> Portuguese Jewry, among them the refugees from neighboring Spain, had to submit to a mass conversion on a vast scale.

Over the next decades, the Spanish development repeated itself in Portugal. The social rise of no small number of New Christians was followed by growing anxieties and resentment within the old Christian population regarding the orthodoxy and the social influence of the conversos. This increasingly explosive mood erupted in a larger massacre of conversos in 1506—here, too, preachers from the mendicant orders played an ignominious role as instigators. Then, under King John (1521–48), who was evidently impressed by the harsh religious policy of Charles V in Spain, the Portuguese Inquisition was established in 1531 along the lines of the Castilian model. At first, influential

conversos were able to impede its functioning by intervening with the Roman curia, but it swung into full operation beginning in 1539–40. Here, too, the thrust of the penal actions was initially targeted at the Judaizing New Christians, whereby this suspicion was surely not justified in every case. At the first autos-da-fé in Lisbon (1540) and Evora (1542), a number of allegedly Judaizing conversos were executed for their apostasy.

Against this backdrop, a strong exodus of conversos from Portugal commenced in the 1530s, and, despite various measures by the crown, which sought to stop it, continued over several decades. As a result, already existing communities of Iberian conversos in the rest of Europe and the Levant saw a considerable influx of refugees.<sup>16</sup>

A hundred years before Castile, southern Italy witnessed the first pogrom—like excesses against Jews and forced baptisms against the background of accusations of ritual murder in Trani in 1290.<sup>17</sup> As a result the Jewry of northern Italy grew in numbers, with money-lending and pawnbroking, in particular, as possible ways of earning a living. The massive deterioration of living conditions for many Jews in western and central Europe in the fifteenth century is also evident in (northern) Italy. For one thing, the mendicant orders (especially the Franciscans) sought to incite the population against the Jews in Italy as well; for another, the Jews faced competition from the charitable institutions of the *Monti di pietà*. Hostility toward the Jews reached a high point in 1475 in the accusations of ritual murder against the Jews of Trent.<sup>18</sup> Shortly after these events, the boy Simon, the alleged victim of the ritual murder, was beatified as a martyr.

Still, no real expulsion from Italy took place. Instead, in 1492 and thereafter, Iberian and Sicilian Jews found refuge in Italian cities, quite apart from the many conversos, whom I will discuss in more detail presently. Especially in the sphere of influence of the Papal States, living conditions for Jews were comparatively tolerable under the Renaissance popes in the first half of the sixteenth century.<sup>19</sup> That changed in the 1550s, when a new spirit began to pervade the Roman curia. Even before the religious zealot and Jew-hater Cardinal Caraffa assumed the papal throne as Pope Paul IV (1555–59), burnings of Jewish books took place in Rome, and they quickly spread to other cities in northern Italy.<sup>20</sup> With his discriminatory bull *Cum nimis absurdum* (1555), Paul IV promoted, among other things, the creation of Jewish ghettos in Italian cities. Meanwhile, the Roman Inquisition ensured orthodoxy among the Portuguese conversos of Ancona: 24 men and women were burned at the stake, others were condemned to the galleys.<sup>21</sup>

The new papal policy of repression continued under Pius V (1566–72) and had negative repercussions for the conditions of Jewish life nearly

everywhere in Italy: expulsions took place not only in the Papal States. Still, a change of course began to take shape also in Italy in the last third of the sixteenth century, driven primarily by economic motives, especially because of the importance of trade with the Levant, which led to a more tolerant attitude among the princes of the land.<sup>22</sup>

The 1475 ritual murder trial in Trent created a stir not only in northern Italy, but also in the old empire. Despite the concerns of the papal commissioner about the trial proceedings, the accused were sentenced and executed. Indeed, the incident shows unmistakably "that the popularized articles of faith, because of the constant agitation especially by mendicant monks, had become so entrenched that even the authority of the Pope was now powerless against them."<sup>23</sup> At the same time, however, we should not overlook the fact that in the cities of the empire, as in Italy, money-lending constituted the chief source of income for Jews, and in the face of growing Christian competition, the economically less significant pawnbroking became increasingly important. The Jews were economically less interesting than they had been. And that is probably the chief motivation behind the early expulsions from Strasbourg 1389, Basel 1397, Vienna 1421, Cologne 1423/24, Freiburg im Breisgau 1424/25, and Augsburg 1440.<sup>24</sup> The second half of the fifteenth century saw successive expulsions from Breslau, Mainz, Bamberg, and Ulm. The last larger urban expulsion took place in Regensburg in 1519, where a Marian pilgrimage chapel was erected on the site of the demolished synagogue. In all of these cities, the incendiary preaching by the Franciscans and Dominicans was undoubtedly an additional motivation behind the expulsions.<sup>25</sup>

The Dominicans of Cologne also played a role in the quarrel between the baptized Jew Johannes Pfefferkorn and the humanist and Hebraist Johannes Reuchlin. It broke out in 1509 over Pfefferkorn's writings, in which he called for the destruction of Talmudic text, since the conversion of the Jews would be possible only if one took away their writings. For Reuchlin, however, the study of the Hebrew language on the basis of traditional Jewish texts was an indispensable prerequisite for a study of the Bible in the humanist sense. The affair grew into a major quarrel between Pfefferkorn, the Dominicans of Cologne, and the humanists and reformers who supported Reuchlin.<sup>26</sup> Now, it would be wrong to conclude from this incident that all humanists assumed an attitude of interest and tolerance toward the Jews. The example of Erasmus of Rotterdam, with his deep-seated hatred of the Jews, teaches us otherwise.<sup>27</sup>

Nor did the Reformation in Germany bring any relief for the Jews. Martin Luther, because of a faith in the approaching end times that formed a constant undercurrent in his thinking, expected the conversion of the Jews (or at least some of them) that was prophesied in the apocalyptic passages of the

Bible. Three years before his death he felt so deceived that he wished for terrible punishment upon the Jews in his—from a modern perspective highly disturbing—tractate *Of the Jews and Their Lies* (1543).<sup>28</sup>

In view of the expulsions and persecution in western and central Europe, the time between the late fifteenth and the late sixteenth century was marked by the eastern migration of the Jews, either (in the Mediterranean region) to the Levant, where the Ottoman Empire offered greater tolerance than the Christian lands, or into the Polish-Lithuanian region and the Ukraine. After around 1570, then, within a generation the tide turned in favor of a return to the toleration of Jews in Bohemia, Italy, Germany, France, and the Netherlands. This turnaround was, presumably, an indirect result chiefly of the crisis of the faith of the sixteenth century, which led to a more pragmatic attitude toward the Jews within the educated and leading social strata, and especially among the territorial princes of the Empire and Italy.<sup>29</sup>

Although the Jews of central Europe certainly did not escape the losses inflicted by the Thirty Years' War, we can observe that the Jewish population in cities like Prague, Vienna, Speyer, Hamburg, and the neighboring settlements of Altona and Wandsbek did not decline, and even increased in outright fortress towns like Breisach, Philippsburg, and others, even though the latter were not spared by the war.<sup>30</sup> In demographic terms, however, it was above all the strong growth of eastern European Jewry that was of the greatest consequence. In the second half of the seventeenth century, Jews made up about 7% of the total population of Poland and Lithuania, while in Bohemia and Moravia they accounted for only 1%, and even less in the rest of the Empire. And the 10,000 Hungarian, 8,000 Dutch, and 12,000 French Jews made up an even more modest share of the overall population in their respective countries, although these figures do not include the hard-to-gauge number of secretly Judaizing conversos in the Netherlands and in France.<sup>31</sup>

More drastic and far-reaching than the experiences of the Thirty Years' War were, without any doubt, the massacres that were committed in 1648 and the following years among the Jews of Poland and Ukraine by the rebellious Cossacks under the leadership of Bogdan Khmel'nitski. Between 100,000 and 150,000 Jews fell victim to this unimaginable slaughter. Although the Jewish population recovered fairly rapidly demographically, the negative economic, social, and cultural consequences persisted and motivated many to seek greater existential security: "To some extent, the migration of Jews from West to East began to reverse itself."<sup>32</sup>

An anonymous letter from Frankfurt an der Oder, which dates presumably from the 1560s, relates that the Prince Elector of Brandenburg was holding captive a man from Augsburg who was claiming that both his parents

and two spirits had prophesied to him that "he is to lead an expedition to the East," namely as the leader of a large Jewish army, "for the Jews throughout the world wish to come together so that they might recover their kingdom, and that this was true, and that the Jews were arming themselves."<sup>33</sup> Although we know nothing about the subsequent fate of the prisoner, this strange letter does reflect indirectly the great hope and longing for salvation that pervaded sixteenth-century Jewry. Against the backdrop of the experience of the Khmel'nitski massacre and the rediscovery and new discovery of the ancient mystical teachings of the Kabala within Mediterranean and Polish Jewry, this attitude of messianic expectation crystallized once again in the 1650s and 1660s. It was inspired especially by the appearance of Sabbatai Zevi of Smyrna, who was proclaimed the messiah by his prophet Nathan of Gaza in 1664.<sup>34</sup> The memoirs of Glikl Bas Judah Leib (Glückel of Hameln) illustrate the widespread enthusiasm that seized European Jewry in 1665/66, and it would appear that this enthusiasm resonated especially—and not only in Hamburg, to which Glikl refers—among the Sephardic descendants (whom Glikl calls the "Portuguese") of the forcefully converted Jews:

Our joy, when the letters arrived [from Smyrna] is not to be told. Most of them were addressed to the Sephardim who, as fast as they came, took them to their synagogue and read them aloud: young and old, the Germans too hastened to the Sephardic synagogue. The Sephardic youth came dressed in their best finery and decked in broad green silk ribbons, the gear of Sabbatai Zevi.<sup>35</sup>

But when Sabbatai Zevi a short while later converted to Islam in the prison of the Ottoman sultan, his credibility vanished.

Incidentally, the special significance of 1666 as the year of salvation in kabbalistic prophesies prompted Duke Christian August von Pfalz-Sulzbach to settle Jewish families in Frankish Sulzbach. Under the patronage of this prince, Christian Knorr von Rosenroth published his *Kabbala Denudata* between 1677 and 1684.<sup>36</sup> Other princes of the old empire also drew closer to Judaism in the second half of the seventeenth and the early part of the eighteenth centuries, though their motives, needless to say, were more economic than intellectual, spiritual or phillsemitic. This was the time of the so-called court Jews, who, during the expensive wars of the age of Louis XIV of France and the heightened need for money this created among the princes, exerted considerable influence at the courts of Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands as financiers and general entrepreneurs. For the very same reason, however, their vulnerability equaled their power, as can be seen from the example of

Joseph Süss Oppenheimer, who was executed in 1738 for allegedly treasonous activities after the death of his princely patron.<sup>37</sup>

If some court Jews were already highly assimilated into their Christian courtly environment, the Christian-Jewish rapprochement intensified further during the Enlightenment of the second half of the eighteenth century. Of course, this was a phenomenon exclusively of the upper social strata. The previously mentioned example of the virulent opposition that forced the English government in 1753 to withdraw its proposal for the civic emancipation of the Jews is sufficient testimony to that fact. In Germany, the lead in the struggle for the emancipation of the Jews was taken especially by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, with his drama *Nathan the Wise* (1779), and Christian Wilhelm von Dohm, with his programmatic tract *On the Civic Improvement of the Jews* (1781/1783).<sup>38</sup> Needless to say, we must not overlook the fact that these commendable pioneers of emancipation were essentially thinking chiefly of the relatively small Jewish upper class, and surely not of the impoverished Jews that were becoming a growing social problem in Germany in the eighteenth century.

The final legal equality for Jews did not occur in Germany until 1871, in Austria-Hungary in 1867, and in Switzerland as late as 1874. Following the failed attempt by the English government to emancipate the Jews in 1753, Revolutionary France became the first European country to decree the legal equality of the Jews in 1791. We should not forget, though, that the decrees and laws issued in the 1780s by Joseph II in Austria in the spirit of the Enlightenment, even if they contained only individual privileges and did not alter the fundamental status of the Jews, prompted people far beyond Austria to ponder the political-legal status of the Jews and their possible legal emancipation.

The Jewish Enlightenment made no small contribution to the secularization of Jewish identity, and in that sense it can also be seen—especially in regard to the German-speaking lands—as an important step along the path to growing assimilation. To the west, this intellectual and cultural movement radiated as far as Metz and Nancy, as well as to the Alsace. In 1781, the Alsatian military contractor Herz Cerff-Berr financed the publication of the tractate *On the Civic Improvement of the Jews*, which was the work of the Protestant historian Christian Wilhelm von Dohm.<sup>39</sup> The history of the Jewish Enlightenment is intimately linked with the name of Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86); from Mendelssohn and his Berlin circle there "emanated decisive impulses for Jewish Enlightenment as a whole," which over the long-term radiated especially into the Eastern European lands.<sup>40</sup> In Berlin, Aaron Salomon

Gumpertz, a descendant of a family of court Jews, introduced Mendelssohn to the educated and learned circles in which Lessing also moved. For all his "rational" understanding of his own religion, which this son of a Torah scribe from Dessau advocated in his widely read publications beginning in 1767, Mendelssohn himself remained faithful to his Jewish roots. The educated world of enlightened Berlin included, far into the Romantic period, the salons of Rahel Varnhagen von Ense, née Levin, who had converted to Christianity but whose sense of self-identity remained deeply rooted in Judaism, and of Henriette Herz, née Lemos.<sup>41</sup>

### Tensions: The Witch Persecutions

Before the later seventeenth century slowly led educated circles to distance themselves from popular notions of an animate world, the worldview of both the common people and the educated was dominated by animistic ideas. To be sure, nature stood under God's command, but on a small scale it was ruled by good and evil spirits. The openings of the human body represented entry points, so to speak, through which demons, in the form of evil spirits, were able to take possession of human bodies.

Exorcism as a means of expelling evil spirits from the body gained in popularity in the wake of the Counter-Reformation, since it was used systematically, especially by the Jesuits and the Capuchins, as a tool of confessional propaganda. This propagandistic purpose was revealed, for example, by the Viennese Jesuit priest Georg Scherrer in a printed sermon, in which he recounted how he had freed sixteen year-old Anna Schlutterbauer from 12,652 devils. Scherrer noted with concern "that if the clergy and Catholic priests had not driven out these spirits, no doubt our enemies would have cast it in the most disreputable light and our entire holy religion would have received abuse because of it, seeing that a number of them were already starting to rejoice merely because of the delay."<sup>42</sup>

It would be wrong, however, to presume that exorcism was in a sense foisted upon the members of the Church. Rather, this practice was in tune with a long and deeply-held world of the imagination, one that even the Reformation in Protestant areas was evidently not able to completely eradicate: numerous sources not only of the sixteenth, but as late as the eighteenth century, tell of Protestants who sought help from Catholic exorcists. The official *Rituale Romanum* of 1614 created the still valid *Ritus exorcisandi obsessos a daemonio*. The exorcism of demons was thus regulated through official Church channels. Three forms of exorcism were distinguished: exorcism at baptism;

the small exorcism for people who were being threatened by demons but were not possessed, and for foodstuffs like water, salt, and oil to ensure their purity; and the great exorcism, which could be applied only by a priest with permission from a bishop and on persons who were possessed.<sup>43</sup> Jean Delumeau has argued that the unmasking of the Devil was "one of the great enterprises of European educational culture at the beginning of modernity," but his observation is difficult to reconcile readily with the exorcisms that took place between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries.<sup>44</sup>

The animistic worldview, to which one can assign ideas about demoniacal possession, also provided the foundation for the contemporary belief in witches.<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, there were connections between possession and witchcraft; witches could incite the Devil to take complete possession of a person. The *Malicus Maleficarum* of 1486, a handbook of contemporary demonology, that was widely read and consulted for many decades, devoted the entire tenth chapter to this aspect.<sup>46</sup>

With a view to the pre-Enlightenment worlds of imagination and experience, we must distinguish three forms of magic. The first was the art of so-called wise women and male sorcerers, who are found throughout Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Like the medicine man and shamans of premodern societies today, they were believed to possess special magical powers, particularly with respect to the cure of illnesses. The second form of magic was regarded as sorcery, for in the understanding of the time, witches and sorcerers were in contact exclusively with evil spirits (demons) and thus sought to practice their art with the help of the Devil. The product of their magical manipulations was *maleficium*, maleficent magic. The third type of magic and witchcraft involved the witches' Sabbath with all its attendant rituals. I will return to this in a moment.

We should linger for a moment on *maleficium*, for it represented by far the most common and widespread form of witchcraft in the world of imagination at the time, and thus also in the court proceedings. The *Traité des superstitions* (1679 and 1697) from the pen of the French *abbé* Jean-Baptiste Thiers, a comprehensive handbook of everything the author believed could be classified as popular superstition, contains a very extensive list of possible forms of maleficent magic.<sup>47</sup> Prominently featured is *le mouvement de l'aiguille*, the knotting of leather thongs which caused impotence or sterility. In his travel accounts, Thomas Platter the Younger describes how extraordinarily widespread the fear of this maleficium was in southern France in the 1790s.<sup>48</sup> The contemporary French scholar Jean Bodin, who made a name for himself not only as a legal and political philosopher, but also as the author of a well known work on witchcraft, knew of no fewer than 50 different types of this

witchcraft.<sup>49</sup> Next on Thiers' list were plagues of animals and insects—from wolves that were set upon sheep to moles in the garden—that could be attributed to witchcraft, followed by illnesses in humans and animals induced by sorcery. There are also references to weather magic or to dolls, for example, that could represent real-life individuals; maltreating the dolls was supposed to harm the person in question through sympathetic or analogous magic.<sup>50</sup> This is just a small selection from Thiers' compendium. Some of the ideas classified by Thiers were limited to certain regions, as is evident from the example of impotence and infertility caused by witchcraft. In southern Germany, for instance, unlike in southern France, this notion appears to have played no role at all, even though the *Malleus Maleficarum* of 1486 devoted a good deal of attention to it.<sup>51</sup>

Considering their wide distribution, so-called wise women—and women were in the majority, although we occasionally find male magical healers—were rarely accused of witchcraft in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>52</sup> Still, the clergy of the established churches occasionally regarded them as undesirable competition. This was the case, for example, with the “soul mother” (*Seelenmutter*) of Küsnacht on the Rigi. The trial, which ended with her death at the stake on November 19, 1573, was instigated by the clergy of the deanery of Lucerne.<sup>53</sup> According to the contemporary observer Renward Gysat, she was “an old woman in Küsnacht . . . who was more skilled than all others in this witchcraft and sorcery, and experienced especially in the invocation of spirits and souls, which is also why she was simply called the soul mother.” Her counsel, which, Gysat says, she dispensed with the help of the Devil, was much sought after. People came to her from near and far: “And the number of people who came from everywhere was so great that she had to spend several hours of the day listening and giving advice to the people who came to her for help and counsel.”<sup>54</sup> These accounts by Lucerne’s city clerk Renward Gysat reveal that he firmly believed in the pact between witches and the Devil. This is evident not only in his claim that this “soul mother” was in league with the devil; it also comes out in this report: “I saw a witch like this burned here in 1560. She used to lead good, pious, and simple-minded women to deserted locations outside the town, where they engaged in the damnable, wretched union and intercourse with the Devil.”<sup>55</sup>

“Union and intercourse” refers to sexual intercourse with the Devil, which witches practiced as part of their pact with Satan. This fantastic notion was part of the theory of the witches’ Sabbath, which can be classified here as the third form of magic and witchcraft that we encounter in the period between the late Middle Ages and the eighteenth century.

The learned theory of the witches’ Sabbath arose in the fourteenth century. In the 1480s, it was fully incorporated into the first comprehensive handbook for the battle against witches, the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486; the title means “Hammer of Witches”), written by two Dominicans, Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Institoris. Thereafter, it engaged the energies of a host of demonologists in various European countries. In the sixteenth and even for most of the seventeenth century, the academic discussion of theological, philosophical, and legal aspects of witchcraft was a recognized branch of university studies.<sup>56</sup>

What was the concrete content of the theory of the witches’ Sabbath? Four elements are most prominent. First on the list is the pact with the Devil: a person, in the majority of documented cases a woman, “concludes with the Devil, who appears to her as a man, a pact while renouncing God. Second, this pact is concluded in a very particular form, namely as a marriage consummated through sexual intercourse. This was followed, third, by cases of maleficent magic, of harm and destruction inflicted on persons and animals.” Then came, fourth, participation in the witches’ Sabbath, an orgiastic and ritualized gathering of witches under the leadership of the Devil, to which all witches rode on brooms or goats. This last aspect was undoubtedly of profound importance to the spread of the “witch mania,” because the conventional idea of the witches’ Sabbath implied “that every witch had to know other witches, because she had seen them at these assemblies.”<sup>57</sup>

Whether or not something like a pagan cult of the witches’ Sabbath—a kind of counter-cult—did in fact exist during the period under examination is not a question I will deal with at length here. Suffice it to say that I think it is exceedingly unlikely that it did. The idea goes back to the well known nineteenth-century French historian Jules Michelet, and was later revived by prominent historians like Pierre Chaunu and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. In England it was chiefly Margaret Murray who championed similar ideas in the period between the wars.<sup>58</sup>

The theory of the witches’ Sabbath was a learned theory, which means that it did not spring from the imagination of popular culture. It therefore behooves us to see the persecution of witches in the early modern period as a process of negotiation by which, case by case, so to speak, judges, accusers, and witnesses had to arrive at a cultural understanding. As this understanding became more and more difficult, witch trials grew increasingly rare from about the last third of the seventeenth century—apart from some local divergences.

What made this question of a cultural understanding even more difficult was the fact that by no means all members of the educated class believed in witches, let alone their pact with the Devil. One early critic was Johann Weyer

(ca. 1515–88). From 1550 to 1578 he was active in Düsselndorf as the personal physician to the dukes of Cleves-Jülich and Berg. During this time he also wrote *De praestigis daemonum et incantatoribus ac veneficiis* (Of the deceptions of demons and of enchantments and poisonings), first published in Basel in 1563. The basic idea of the book is that witches were not heretics in the religious sense or evildoers in the legal sense, “but ignorant and melancholy women deceived by the Devil.”<sup>59</sup> Weyer’s book was widely read and stirred up an intense discussion, in which Thomas Erastus and Jean Bodin, among others, made a name for themselves as enemies of Weyer.<sup>60</sup> But nothing more happened, since critics like Weyer represented merely a small minority in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Public criticism of the persecution of witches was not without danger, as we learn from the example of the Catholic theologian Cornelius Loos: persuaded by Weyer’s arguments, he was subsequently forced to recant by the nuncio of Cologne and was banished from the city. Later, as a priest in Brussels, his implacable opposition to witch trials landed him in prison for a while.<sup>61</sup>

The particular danger that critics of witch trials faced was the charge of atheism, which all too readily could have legal consequences. Another early critic of witch persecutions who spoke out against trials in spite of this danger was the Englishman Reginald Scot, in his 1584 work *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. This polemical tract prompted James VI of Scotland (the future James I of England), for example, to arrange for the publication in Edinburgh in 1597 of a treatise on demonology directed against Scot and others like him.<sup>62</sup>

The last phase of the battle over witch persecutions in the publishing arena was marked from the middle of the seventeenth century by, on the one hand, the reception of Descartes’ philosophy, whose physics categorically ruled out the existence of spirits and demons, and, on the other hand, the early Enlightenment in general. In this context we should mention the Cartesian criticism of the belief in witches by Thomas Hobbes in his *Leviathan*, first published in 1653, and by the Dutch theologian Balthasar Bekker in *De betoverde Wereld* (1681), as well as the emphatic rejection of demonological theories by the German Christian Thomasiaus in his writings of 1701 and 1712.<sup>63</sup>

The dates of the published works I have mentioned also trace the chronological framework of the larger witch persecutions in the early modern period. It extends essentially from around 1560 to the last third of the seventeenth century. To be sure, witches had been persecuted before, in the late Middle Ages, but larger, panic-like persecutions did not occur until about 1560. Persecutions declined rapidly in the later seventeenth century, while the eighteenth century saw only a few scattered trials, until the whole process came to a halt for good, with the exception of a few ignominious, late trials.

What geographical area was covered by this chronology? The eastern European region was largely excluded. The real epicenter of the European witch persecutions lay in Germany and France. Persecutions began late—after the turn of the sixteenth century—in Scotland, Ireland, Scandinavia, and North America. In Italy, only the north was affected; the southern Italian *mezzogiorno* witnessed virtually no witch trials. The same is true for Spain—with the exception of the Basque region. England played a special role in this regard, since here—unlike in neighboring Scotland and continental Europe—Roman law with its inquisitorial procedures, which included the application of torture, did not become established, and, moreover, the theory of the witches’ Sabbath was of hardly any consequence.<sup>64</sup>

The persecutions were not everywhere marked by the same fervor and intensity, nor did the chronology and geography of the European witch persecutions that I have briefly sketched out overlap. Let us look, for example, at the witch persecutions in the Basque lands, which the Danish folklorist Gustav Henningsen has studied in detail.<sup>65</sup> This region saw two larger waves of persecution in 1608–10 and 1610–11, which the inquisitorial court in Logroño had to deal with. The second wave of persecutions was painstakingly supervised by the chief official of the Inquisition in Logroño, Alonso de Salazar Frias, and the statements by the accused witches, with their numerous contradictions, prompted him to become increasingly skeptical. Although Salazar Frias did not question the existence of witches, because of his skepticism not one of the women arrested in 1610 was burned as a witch, a marked contrast to the first wave of persecutions. Moreover, as a result of his memoranda that were passed on to the highest officers of the Inquisition, no witch burnings took place in Spain at all after 1614—that is, much earlier than the rest of Europe. In Italy, too, where persecutions occurred only in the northern periphery and exclusively in the sixteenth century, the absence of further witch hunting can be explained chiefly by the extraordinarily cautious restraint on the part of the Inquisition.<sup>66</sup>

The opposite extreme can be found in the Salzburg *Zaubertrachtel* trials between 1675 and 1690.<sup>67</sup> This was one of the last great witch trials in the old empire. Its victims numbered around 200, virtually without exception members of the lower class of beggars and vagrants. Moreover, what is surprising is the large number of children and adolescents among the accused, most of them boys and young men. Of the 133 delinquents who were executed between 1675 and 1681, “about two-thirds were younger than 21, and more than a third had not passed the age of 15.”<sup>68</sup> These rather startling figures do not agree very well with the stereotyped image of the evil old witch, which was confirmed in every way, for example, by the case of the “soul mother” of



Küssnacht. The explanation lies "for one, in the peculiar nature of the investigative practices (the authorities were looking for the *Zauberjäckel*, the chief sorcerer of the inveterate vagrants, but found only his beggar accomplices); and, for another, in the worsening beggar problem in the seventeenth century."<sup>69</sup>

Trials like the Salzburg *Zauberjäckel* of the late seventeenth century were reactions by the state, of the kind we are familiar with from other ecclesiastical principalities of the old empire, for example in the Electorate of Trier. The attempt by the authorities to cast the suspicion of magic upon the begging culture as a whole was "a strategy for the social marginalization of begging, a political strategy that was pursued by the state authorities, and especially by the Counter-Reformation Church," to deepen "the chasm between the population and those undesirable marginal groups" that were beyond the reach of the Church.<sup>70</sup> While this explanation is persuasive for the case in question, it is little suited to a more general interpretation of witch persecutions in the early modern period. For example, in the Spanish Basque region, it was, on the contrary, the assertion of control over the legal proceedings by the centralized authority of state and church that defused the entire problem. Moreover, there were areas in Europe in which the participation of the authorities in the emergence of witch trials was marginal or virtually nonexistent. One example is the Saarland, where "community committees" that were established on a communal basis "had the village mandate to prepare, initiate, and supervise the witch trials that were wanted and approved of by the collective."<sup>71</sup>

Among French historians, Robert Muchembled some time ago advanced the thesis that the witch persecutions in France were primarily an expression of what he called the acculturation of traditional rural culture by the Counter-Reformation Church and the absolutist state, and the uncertainties this entailed on the level of the village. The Scottish persecutions, which occurred chiefly between the 1590s and the 1670s, have been interpreted in a similar vein as well.<sup>72</sup>

In a regional study of the witch persecutions in Cambrésis in northern France, however, Muchembled also pointed emphatically to the economic events that formed the backdrop: the first wave of witch persecutions, he notes, followed directly in the wake of a longer economic crisis in the last third of the sixteenth century.<sup>73</sup> In the light of newer research on the witch problem, the causal link between economic crises, the social destabilization they produced, and individual waves of persecutions strikes me as more plausible than the general causal connection between witch persecutions and the growing assertion of power by the early modern state, and the claims of confessionalization advanced by the post-Reformation and post-Tridentine churches.

The example of the witch persecutions in the Saar region, in particular, refutes such a statist interpretation in the most direct way.

Other scholars have pointed to the link between specific waves of persecution and crop failures in the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. In the process, they have made it clear just how much these evident causal connections point to the need to study the phenomenon of witch persecutions primarily on the level of the village community:

In the village, more so than anywhere else, one can see the elemental link between crop failures, food shortages, the increase in hunger and disease, and the death of both man and animal. The village was therefore the first and primary locus where all this misery had to be explained. And this was, accordingly, also the place where the desire to eliminate the causes was most pronounced. Characteristically enough, then, in rural witch trials specific individuals were generally accused of having threatened, harmed, or destroyed another person, animal, or object through a *maleficium*.<sup>74</sup>

A particular clear case for the causal link between local crises and panic-like forms of witch persecutions is offered by Geneva, where outbreaks of the plague in the city (1545, 1567/68, 1571, and 1615) were regularly attended by rumors that so-called *engraisseurs*, who were in league with the Devil, had exacerbated the impact of the epidemic. According to a contemporary chronicler, seven men and 24 women were executed in Geneva in 1545 for conspiring with the Devil to use lethal ointments (hence the term *engraisseurs*) "to poison those in the city whom the plague had spared."<sup>75</sup> However, it must be noted that this kind of causal link can evidently not be established in the other witch trials in Geneva in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and that those trials were also characterized by a striking restraint when it came to sentencing of the accused. Only about 20% of the accused were executed during these later proceedings, while the corresponding ratio in Zurich was 33% in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and in Lucerne no less than 51% between 1550 and 1675.<sup>76</sup> By contrast, in southern Germany, and not least along the upper Rhine, where a large, almost epidemic-like wave of persecution swept the land between 1627 and 1632 and seized, among other places, Mergentheim, the margravate of Baden, the imperial cities of Offenburg and Gengenbach, and the Ortenau region, the percentage of accused who were found guilty was probably extremely high.<sup>77</sup>

All this still leaves the question to what extent local forms of conflict management through accusations of witchcraft were distorted, so to speak, through the intervention by the state. In England, direct state intervention in this area

was not possible. In Scotland, on the other hand, every single accusation of witchcraft reached either the Royal Council or Parliament, where the witch persecutions of 1649 and around 1660 were employed as an instrument for creating national unity.<sup>78</sup> It would thus surely be false to regard the Salzburg *Zauberjacht* trial as a unique or special case of the state instrumentalizing the events for its own purposes. Still, in my view the interpretative framework that focuses on the local community is, on the whole, a more promising approach, although one must bear in mind, of course, that the phenomenon of witch persecutions can be explained only if it is seen within the context of a permanent dialogue between popular and educated culture.

This observation applies especially to the historical explanation of the decline of witch persecutions from the last third of the seventeenth century, at the latest. Here we should note, first of all, the fact—well documented, particularly for France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—that the spontaneous lynching of alleged witches and sorcerers occurred again and again on a local level. The 1580 tract *La démonomanie des sorciers*, in which Jean Bodin advocated the harsh legal persecution of witches and sorcerers, was, among other things, testimony to the worry that higher officials were paying too little attention to the concerns of the common people, thereby tolerating an utterly irregular popular justice aimed at those believed to be witches.<sup>79</sup> Of course, the measures taken by the Parlement of Paris between 1587 and the decree of 1624, which in witch trials conducted by lower courts allowed for an appeal to the Parlement, were not at all along the lines of Bodin's proposals. Rather, they reflected the conscious moderation on the part of the Parlement, and their result was that within its jurisdiction, by far the largest in France at the time, only sporadic witch trials took place after the 1640s.<sup>80</sup> Still, as late as 1785 the region of Béarn in southwestern France saw sporadic "witchcraft crises" with accusations of harmful magic, especially in cases of illness, but the courts no longer reacted to them.<sup>81</sup>

Incidentally, something similar can be reported about the development in Brandenburg-Prussia. There, Frederick Wilhelm I (1713–40), through an edict of 1714, reserved any further witchcraft trials for the royal government and the highest judicial panels: "The trials were thus removed from the often zealous irrationalism of local judges. The burning of witches came to an end in Prussia."<sup>82</sup>

In this context, it is interesting to note that a whole series of cases of village lynching-law against witches is documented for England as late as the eighteenth century, that is, at a time, when the courts finally and openly refused to be drawn any longer into witchcraft trials. In other words, witchcraft trials before a court presupposed a certain consensus regarding the belief in

witches among officials (judges and jurors), who in England usually hailed from the educated classes, and the average village population. When the officials overturned this consensus once and for all at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the persecution of witches on the village level, where the belief in witches was alive and well, could continue only in the form of spontaneous popular justice. There is much to suggest, therefore, that in England the increasingly realistic worldview of the educated classes, and the resulting skepticism toward ideas about witchcraft, was crucial in putting an end to the legal persecution of witches. Conversely, however, this also means that it was only the broad criminalization of the witch by the judicial apparatus of the state since the 1560s that helped the witchcraft phenomenon, which had already existed for some time on a local level, to attain new prominence in the first place. This realization prompted Larnier to draw the conclusion, not without good reason, that only the criminalization of witchcraft in Scotland in 1563 and around the same time in the rest of Europe, coupled with the growing interest of authorities and the state in persecuting witches, invested the local witch with its real potential of threat.<sup>83</sup>

This interpretation could be applied even to the Saar region, for while the initiative for the persecutions came primarily from the individual communities, it is also true that demonology's new image activated "ideas—anchored in the magical thinking of the rural population—about harmful magical possibilities, female unpredictability, and fantastic creatures that existed in oral popular culture."<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, the help of the Enlightenment was not required to bring the persecutions to an end in the Saar region, where their end resulted largely from the destruction of the existing village communities by the Thirty Years' War.<sup>85</sup>

Compared to the developments in the Saar region and in the north of the old empire, it took longer for the witch mania to be overcome in southern Germany and in Austria. Here the influence of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment was crucial. To be sure, leaving aside the hereditary Habsburg lands, the eighteenth century saw only scattered trials. Gerhard Schormann has emphasized that "for Germany as a whole, one can assume that the great persecutions came to an end in the last two decades of the seventeenth century."<sup>86</sup> The last isolated witch trial in southern Germany took place in 1775 in the *Reichsstift* of Kempten. In Switzerland, the last alleged witch, Anna Göldi, was executed in Glarus seven years later, after here, too, the trials had already dried up completely in various regions during the eighteenth century.

The delayed subsiding of the witch trials in southern Germany and in the Habsburg lands, where a few larger trials were held as late as the first half of the eighteenth century (especially in Hungary), might be seen, at first glance,

as an indication that the response to witches was much harsher in Catholic territories than it was in the Protestant north. A closer look reveals, however, that in the old empire there is no clear confessional difference between the persecutions in Protestant and in Catholic territories. Incidentally, this is also true of the link between processes of confessionalization inside German territorial states and the witch persecutions, for such a link cannot be documented. In other words, it is not possible to show that in Catholic territories, for example, the followers of the new doctrines were especially hard hit by the persecutions.<sup>87</sup> That the events across Europe can hardly be subsumed under confessional stereotypes is already demonstrated by the difference between the Catholic Basque region, where, as we have seen, no witches were executed after 1612 (the same is also true for the rest of Spain), and the Archbishopric of Salzburg or the Habsburg lands, where larger persecutions still occurred toward the end of the seventeenth and into the first decades of the eighteenth century.

The last victim of a witch trial in Germany, held in Kempten in 1775, "was the daughter of a mercenary and day-laborer, left homeless at an early age and probably also ragged and unkempt." Anna Göldi, executed in Glarus in June of 1782, was a poor maidservant. This case confirms Norbert Schindler's previously mentioned thesis that the victims in the late witch trials of the Alpine region were predominantly women and men from the lower and underprivileged social classes. Of course, that points merely to a regional trend. What, more broadly, was the social background of the victims, here and outside of the Alpine region, from the beginning of the larger persecutions in the 1560s? In the case of England, Keith Thomas has summarized the overall picture he found with regard to the social background of the victims in one sentence: "they were poor, and they were usually women."<sup>88</sup> Alan Macfarlane has further noted that in England the witches were generally poorer than the persons they were accused of having sought to harm with their magic. Thomas and Macfarlane thus place their explanatory approach within the context of the strong growth in the lower peasant classes in England in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the dissolution of the traditional village community this entailed. I will return to the gender-specific aspect of the situation, but first let us linger for a moment over the question of the social status of the accused.

In the Westphalian principality of Büren, the accused were evidently "in the majority from the lower peasant classes," that is, the class of day-laborers, cottagers, and the like.<sup>89</sup> Research on the witch persecutions in Cambriés in northern France has also essentially confirmed Macfarlane's thesis, while at

the same time pointing out that witches should not be understood simply as the target of the campaign by the authorities—which was gaining momentum in the seventeenth century—against poverty, vagrancy, and begging.<sup>90</sup> This latter observation is surely correct, even though the Salzburg *Zauberfackel* trial of the 1690s would suggest a different conclusion. Incidentally, this unusual Salzburg trial was not the only exception; the same holds true for the panic-like conflagrations in southwest Germany. Where the persecutions temporarily assumed epidemic forms, because the torture of the accused rapidly produced a growing list of those who allegedly participated in the witches' Sabbath, members of the well-situated urban bourgeoisie also fell victim to the witch hunts. That was the case especially in Mergentheim (1628–31) and Ellwangen (1611–15).<sup>91</sup> Incidentally, in southern Germany children were also involved in the trials with growing frequency in the course of the seventeenth century. Leaving aside the exceptions I have indicated, however, we can assume that a large percentage of the accused generally came from the lower bourgeois and lower peasant classes.

What was the gender distribution among the total number of victims? In Germany, there were regions

with a relatively high ratio of male victims—for example, in the trials documented for the Duchy of Westphalia, nearly half of the accused were men—but that does not alter the overall picture in any way. A comparison between various regions in Europe for which we have the relevant information shows that, on average, 80% of victims were women, with a high of 95% in certain areas of the Jura region . . . and a low of 38% in the Pays de Vaud and 64% in Freiburg in Switzerland.<sup>92</sup>

In southwestern Germany (Baden-Württemberg),

the ratio of women ranged from 72 to 95%, likewise in the Saar region and in the Walloon areas of Luxembourg; in the Bishopric of Basel, in Denmark, and in the Counties of Namur and Essex it was as high as 92–95%. The ratio of women stood at 80% in the canton of Solothurn, in the Department du Nord, in the canton of Neuchâtel . . . , in Scotland and Norway, while women accounted for up to 70% in the German-speaking regions of Luxembourg, in Franche-Comté, Geneva, the Country of Burgundy, and in Toledo.<sup>93</sup>

Of course, these are averages and do not tell us anything about changes in the gender distribution over the decades. That such shifts did occur is revealed

by the example of the lordship of Neuchâtel: whereas men hardly registered among the accused before 1600, after 1600 their number rose to about 20%.

How were the female accused in concrete cases? The persons accused of being *engravisseurs* in Geneva in 1571-72 included 90 women and 9 men. About half of these were day-laborers or the wives of day-laborers; the rest came from the class of small artisans or fishermen. What is surely more striking is the fact that only one in twelve accused was a man.<sup>94</sup> A study of the witch trials in Besançon in the years 1602, 1608, and 1609 has identified a high ratio of widows and of unmarried women from the lower classes among the victims. Since a comparably high ratio of unmarried and widowed women can also be found elsewhere, William Monter has concluded that "witchcraft accusations can best be understood as projections of patriarchal social fears onto atypical women, those who lived apart from the direct male control of husbands or fathers."<sup>95</sup>

The claim that the witch persecutions can be attributed chiefly to social fears and misogyny no longer holds up in this generalized form.<sup>96</sup> In the case of English witch trials, scholars have by now shown that in a whole series of trials it was almost exclusively women who figured among the accused as well as the accusers; in other words, it was not unusual that it was chiefly women who brought cases of witchcraft before the courts in the first place. Of course, there is no need to emphasize that the court was then composed exclusively of men. What is important, however, is the reference to the emergence of accusations within a local framework and to the possible motives that might have played a role in this process. That neighborly and social tensions had a motivating effect is evident; however, in trials that arose within an exclusively female sphere, we can simply rule out patriarchal fears and misogyny as a contributing factor.<sup>97</sup>

Lyndal Roper's research on Augsburg leads to similar conclusions. That city saw no panic-like persecutions and no witch trials of any kind prior to 1625. After this date there were some scattered trials of individuals. All together, 18 persons were executed in Augsburg in the seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries. That is far fewer than the 101 individuals who lost their lives in Merгентheim in 1628/29, and a far cry from the more than 300 persons who fell victim to the witch persecutions in Ellwangen between 1611 and 1615.<sup>98</sup>

The typical accused in Augsburg in the seventeenth century was the *Kindsamme*, who assisted new mothers in childbed, and who were generally older women who could no longer bear children themselves. The accusations usually came from the women they had cared for and concerned either the premature death of the newborn or its physical deformities. Men were strictly

excluded from the environment of women in childbed, until the latter, six weeks after giving birth, were ritually readmitted into the circle of parishioners, or at least that was the practice in Catholicism and Lutheranism. The primary context of witchcraft accusations in Augsburg that emanated from a purely female environment was motherhood. The conflicts that gave rise to these accusations "were not concerned with the social construction of gender but were related much more closely to the physical changes a woman's body undergoes when she bears children."<sup>99</sup> In other words, they had to do chiefly with the *physical* reality of gender identity. Roper seeks to explain the conflicts that led, in seventeenth-century Augsburg, chiefly to accusations of witchcraft psychohistorically as an expression of individual efforts to cope with problems of motherhood. And this does not stand in contradiction to the fact that after the turn of the seventeenth century, it was almost exclusively children and not older women who fell under suspicion of witchcraft in Augsburg, since "the dynamics of much witch-hunting have to be sought in the relationship between mother and child."<sup>100</sup>

Of course, this raises complex questions of historical methodology—especially about the legitimacy of psychohistorical approaches—which cannot be addressed here. It is clear, however, that the picture of the Augsburg trials has once and for all put a large question mark over older, feminist approaches that saw in the witch persecutions primarily a deliberate campaign to eliminate midwives, who were then replaced by the male physician as birth helper in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A direct cause for this explanation was the special suspicion that the two authors of the *Malficarum* of 1486 had cast upon midwives.

To be sure, there is no dispute that this professional displacement—from female to male birth helpers—did in fact take place. And while it can also be shown that "midwives were clearly overrepresented among the victims of the witch trials," on the whole they were only "a small minority."<sup>101</sup> The midwife, like the *Kindsamme* of the lying-in period, cannot be presented as the chief victim of the persecutions, even though she, like the *Kindsamme*, played a difficult role in the problematic area of motherhood, and was all too readily singled out as the guilty party if the child was stillborn or there was some other mishap during birth.

In any case, the more recent works on the role of women in the witch trials in England and Augsburg that I have discussed here show that the theory of a deliberate extermination of midwives is in no way able to explain the European witch persecutions as an alternative to the conventional scholarly debate. At the same time, however, a look at the "midwife theory" also demonstrates the limitations of a psychohistorical explanation of the witch

persecutions. The same is true for the generalized approach mentioned earlier, which argues that the persecutions were an expression of both patriarchal fears and tangible misogyny. The witch persecutions were too complex a phenomenon to fit neatly into this explanatory template, as the presence of men and children among the accused demonstrates.

The generalizing explanatory approaches include, fourth, those that seek to link the witch persecutions with disciplinary measures by the state and the church, as, for example, when the persecutions are seen as a battle by the Church to eradicate popular magic. But in the end this approach, too, falls short as a theory with a sole claim to validity, because it ignores the extent to which witch trials could originate entirely from the village level without having been in any way initiated "from above." The previous discussion has also made it clear that the witch persecutions cannot be explained by way of professional conflicts, which is a fifth global explanation that turns out in the end to be inadequate.

The witch persecutions of the early modern period cannot be squeezed into any monocausal explanatory scheme. In the vast majority of cases—to return to the title of this section—the issues revolved around questions of community and neighborliness.<sup>102</sup> It would be wrong, however, to see early modern witch persecutions from a contemporary perspective as merely an aberration, a mishap, so to speak, in the wake of what has been called the "disenchantment" of the world that supposedly began with the Reformation. There were no unresolvable contradictions between the conventional Protestant ways of thought and a mentality that accepted the working of the Devil in this world.<sup>103</sup> At least in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the belief in magic was an integral phenomenon of early modern history. Seeing it as merely an aberration on the road to the individualism of the Enlightenment and the rationalism of modernity would be a failure to fully appreciate this belief and all its ramifications.

## 5

### Separatism

I will preface my discussion of some representative separatist church movements of the early modern period with two remarks about the concepts of "church" and "sect," taking guidance from the still-important ideas of the theologian Ernst Troeltsch.

First, the presence of the established churches in social life has gradually declined in the postwar societies of central and western Europe. Many people today declare themselves to be indifferent when it comes to religion or the church, or have joined non-church groups and organizations that are concerned with investing life with meaning—from Astro to Tao, so to speak. Still, in spite of this evident pluralism, the term "sect" carries something pejorative and derogatory with it to this day. Yet this implicit value-judgment, which is oriented toward the perspective of the official state churches, is not very helpful, for, as Troeltsch observed of early modern sects, "Very often in the so-called 'sects' it is precisely the essential elements of the Gospel which are fully expressed; they themselves always appeal to the Gospel and to Primitive Christianity, and accuse the Church of having fallen away from its ideal; these impulses are always those which have been either suppressed or undeveloped in the official churches. . . ." <sup>1</sup> Here we should recall, for example, the emergence of the idea of religious tolerance in the early modern period:<sup>2</sup> it took place at best at the margins of the established churches, and in most cases outside of them.