

WITCHCRAFT AND INFANTICIDE (16TH – 18TH CENTURIES)*Oscar DI SIMPLICIO*

Università degli Studi di Firenze, Dipartimento di Storia, IT-50100 Firenze, Via San Gallo 10

e.mail: disimplicio@unisi.it

ABSTRACT

As it is shown by the two graphics within the text, in the period under consideration (1580-1721) a decline of magic did not take place, but in the mean time the sources register a dying away of trials or prosecution for maleficium.

The disappearing of maleficium cases does not come new to historians, but its curve though defining a wide European phenomenon still awaits a global explanation. It is my opinion that the Stenese trials, together with the evidence we have of local religious, political, and social changes allow us to put forward an interpretation that at the very least can complement today's acknowledged version of the reduction of witchcraft accusations. The aim of this paper is therefore to offer a better understanding of the social reality hiding behind the disappearing of trials indictments and accusations.

Key words: witchcraft, magic, infanticide, Europe, 16th – 18th centuries

STREGONERIA E INFANTICIDIO (SECC. XVI – XVIII)

SINTESI

Come dimostrano i due grafici contenuti nel testo, durante il periodo in esame (1580-1721) non si assistette ad un declino della magia, nonostante allo stesso tempo le fonti indichino una diminuzione dei processi o delle cause per maleficium.

La scomparsa dei casi di maleficium non costituisce una novità per gli storici, ma l'andamento del fenomeno, sebbene indichi una situazione molto diffusa in Europa, non è ancora stato pienamente spiegato. A mio avviso i processi senesi, uniti all'evidenza che riscontriamo di cambiamenti locali religiosi, politici e sociali, ci permettono di avanzare un'interpretazione che quanto meno integra la versione attuale e riconosciuta della riduzione delle accuse di stregoneria. L'obiettivo di questo articolo è quindi di fornire una maggiore comprensione della realtà sociale nascosta dietro la scomparsa dei processi, delle citazioni e delle accuse.

Parole chiave: stregoneria, magia, infanticidio, Europa, secc. XVI-XVIII

In a recent outline of witchcraft and magic in Europe, a paragraph dealing with general reasons for the decline in prosecution laments that:

"In the final analysis it remains impossible to determine to what extent the social and economic improvements and the changes in culture that did take place after 1660 helped to reduce the number of formal accusations made by member of the lower classes [...] When communities did *not* bring charges of witchcraft against their neighbors, at least not as frequently as they had in the past, they rarely left written evidence regarding the reasons for their inactions. We can only speculate, therefore, whether the decline in formal accusation reflects a real reduction in the number and gravity of personal conflicts at the village level or the more pragmatic calculation that judicial authorities would not be receptive to complaints brought before them [...] We still do not have any hard evidence showing that members of the lower classes became reluctant to accuse and prosecute witches" (Levack, 1999, 45-46).

One need not surrender to such pessimism. It is my opinion that the evidence from the Sienese trials, together with information about local religious, political, and social changes, allow us to put forward an interpretation that confirms an authentic agency of illiterate people in reducing witchcraft accusations in 17th century Siena, an unlikely place at the antipodes of "modernization".¹

I

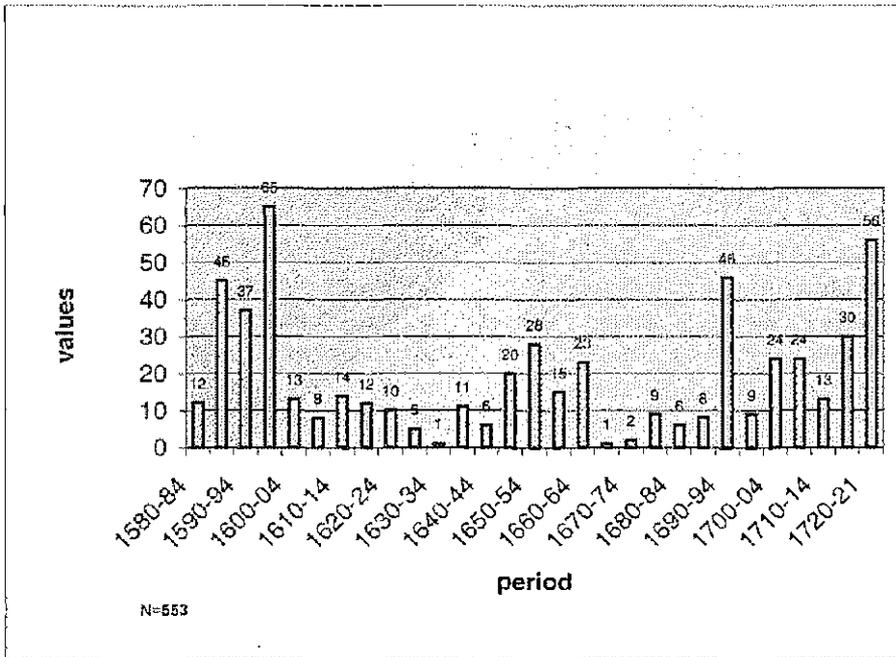
1. The two graphics below clarify the core of my article.² *Graphic 1* demonstrates

* An early draft of this article has been read by William Monter. I am grateful for all his suggestions.

1 It is a line of research somewhat foreshadowed by William Monter a quarter of a century ago: "Another type of explanation seeks reasons for the disappearance of witch trials at the bottom of society as well as at the top, attributing it to the growth of decent religious instruction among the peasantry as much as to skepticism among the ruling classes"; see Monter, (1976, 62-63). Even Carlo Ginzburg, (1977, 133), concluding his essay remarked that two were the sides of coin concerning the problem of the end of witchcraft prosecution; and researchers in the future should have dealt not only with trials promoted from above but also with accusations from below.

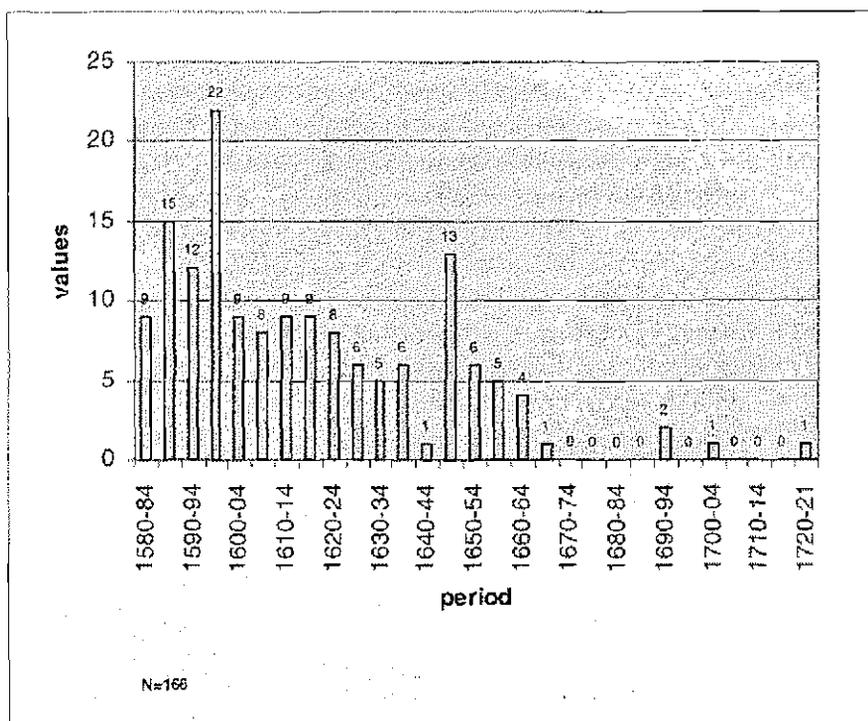
2 Sources: Processi, nn. 2-85. The Sienese inquisitorial archive was moved in 1782 from its initial location, the church of San Francesco, to the archbishop palace where remained till 1912 to be moved to Rome. "Discovered" in 1986 and opened to the public two years later, it is made up of 4 principal sections: the trials (1580c-1782c); the letters: a) from the Roman Congregation of cardinals to the Sienese inquisitor (1606-1712), b) from the Sienese inquisitor to his vicars (1590c-1690c); the censorship; the internal administration of the agency. The trials, which concern us here, have been divided in two main sections: (proper) *Trials* (Processi) and *Causes* (Cause1 e Cause2). The *Trials* are collected in 85 leather bounded foliated huge volumes that cover the years from 1580c to 1721c. The volume one is missing but a fine large register datable in 1720's indexes all defendants of the 85 *faldoni* (bundles), including those of the first missing one. This index book indicates that a reorganization of the archive must have taken place in that decade for reasons not yet clear. Strangely enough, the reorganization did not include 5 huge leather bounded non-foliated volumes of *Denunce* (Denunciations). These 5 *faldoni*, covering the years 1655-1688, mostly consist of short indictments; but even in the *Trials* volumes, besides bulky trials with examinations of witnesses and defendants, we run into one/two pages indictments.

the trend of all cases of magic (therapeutic magic; love magic; treasure hunting magic; divinatory magic; superstition, qualified superstition; necromancy) except for cases of *maleficium* (harmful witchcraft). *Graph 2* registers only *maleficium* cases. It is therefore evident that in the period under consideration a decline of magic did not take place, and that in the mean time the sources register a dying away of trials or prosecution for *maleficium*.



Graph 1: Magic cases (maleficium included) 1580 -1721 (Processi, nn. 2-85, Denunce).

Graf 1: Primeri magije (vključno z maleficiumom) 1580-1721 (Processi, nn. 2-85, Denunce).



Graph 2: Maleficium cases only 1580-1721 (Processi, nn. 2-85, Denunce).

Graf 2: Primeri (izključni) maleficijuma 1580-1721 (Processi, nn. 2-85, Denunce).

Today the trend of *Graphic 1* doesn't come new to historians, the persistence of magic well beyond the Eighteenth century being one of the most solid acquisitions of the researchers. But the curve of *Graphic 2*, underlining the vanishing of *maleficium* cases while magic continues to exist, in my opinion still awaits a global explanation. The aim of this article is therefore to offer a better understanding of the social reality hiding behind the disappearing of trials, indictments and accusations.³

3 The scholarly study of witchcraft in early modern Italy has been substantially non-existent for over ten years now, the last book to appear being Carlo Ginzburg's *Eccstasies* (1988). And we must go still further back to 1966 before finding an Italian monograph based on a large use of witch trials: Ginzburg (1966). The important book of Giovanni Romeo (1990) deals mainly with the politics of Holy Office towards witchcraft. It is also worth mentioning: Giovanna Bosco and Patrizia Castelli (1996), where some small contributions deal with early modern Italy. The Church and the long lasting closing of Inquisitorial archive in the Vatican City can be only partially blamed for this peninsular preference, since at least three Italian state archives have preserved inquisitorial witchcraft trials that still await thorough examination. We should at least select the state archives of Udine, Venice and Modena. See for a general treatment Monter, Tedeschi (1987, 130-157).

II

2. The Roman Inquisition in Siena had jurisdiction over the whole old Siennese Republic that in 1559 was absorbed into the Medicean regional state, the Duchy, then Grand-Duchy, of Tuscany. The population of the *New State*, as the Medicean rulers called it, remained almost stationary between the years 1580-1720 from some 109.048 people in 1596 to 108.750 in 1693, and to 117.106 in 1714, when began recovering from the long 17th century depression (Parenti, 1942, 106-113).⁴ The Siennese Tribunal's inhabitants clustered in some 132 nucleated villages divided in two contrasting zones: 46 in the *Maremma* and 86 outside it. The *Maremma* was an unhappy marshy area, plagued by the malaria, and where mostly migrant laborers practiced pastoral farming and extensive cereal cultivation.⁵ Nevertheless, as far as witchcraft accusations are concerned, no clear division existed between developed and under-developed areas.

From the religious point of view the *New State* included six small bishoprics, suffragan of the Siennese archdiocese. A Franciscan, doctor in theology, exerted a close watch over people's consciousness throughout the region, as the General Inquisitor. Defending catholic orthodoxy through a *familia* of 48 persons living in Siena,⁶ and through a net of vicars, most of them parish priests, the Father Inquisitor wielded enormous power over the Faithful through a potential subordination of confessors.⁷ In theory, confessionals acted as "bugging devices" for all local unorthodox beliefs, because parish priests could not absolve parishioners from sins concerning 'magic', until after channelling such penitents to the Inquisition. From the procedural point of

4 In the second half of seventeenth century, the *Phase B* of the Siennese economy, is missing the link between agrarian crisis, the stagnation of material life and witchcraft accusations. For this correlation in the European scenario, see Behringer (1997, 388-389).

5 A promiscuous agriculture mostly carried out by sharecroppers characterized the places out of *Maremma*. In 1727, during a mission where 3000 thousands people showed up for confession and communion, a father Lazarist remarked: "From the solitudes [of *Maremma*], let us pass now to cultivated (*domestici*), populated and civilized (*popolati e civili*) places, such as Castelnovo, land six miles far from Siena, that for his climate and air is used as holiday resort by Siennese noblemen" (*Missioni*, p. 172).

6 The Siennese inquisitorial family was made up of 48 people: the father general inquisitor general, a minor conventual Franciscan, the general vicar, 2 *cancellarii*, 1 *procancellarius*, 10 *consultores theologi*, 6 *consultores iusperiti*; 2 *consultores* physicians, 2 surgeons *carceratorum*, 1 *aromatarius*, 1 state procurator (*procuratore fiscale*), 4 lawyers of defendants, 2 public censors of books, 1 procurator for trials to be kept secret (*cause da tener quiete*), 1 *qualificatore* of the Holy Office, 1 visitor of libraries, 3 scribes, 1 guardian, 1 collector, 2 visitors of prisons, 1 attendant, 2 servants, 1 confessor of prisoners, 1 guard. Also, in the whole *New State* there were 10 vicars of the general inquisitor; AAS, 6520 (1689), *Libro dei Ministri o Ufficiali del S. Tribunale dell'Inquisizione della Città e Stato di Siena*.

7 The actual enforcement of this potential manipulation of the sacrament of confession is much disputed among Italian historians. This 'storm over the Confession' has been occasioned by Prosperi's (1996) seminal work. For a sharp criticism of Prosperi's stance see Romeo (1997).

view, as soon as a crime was confessed or reported, any preliminary inquiry was carried out locally and eventually sent to Siena where the General Inquisitor started a new examination of witnesses and culprits. The sentence was given during a Congregation, where a representative of the archbishop and nine ecclesiastics of high rank assisted the Inquisitor. Though all forms of "magic" fell within the competence of the Inquisition, theoretically the secular justice could still claim jurisdiction over harmful sorcery⁸. Two key witchcraft trials held in the secular court were however recovered (both witches and court documents) after some negotiations by the Inquisitors,⁹ and the two women underwent fairer, new proceedings.¹⁰

It is in this physical, human, institutional, and religious setting that villagers denounced several hundred harmful deeds of witches. I would like to summarize their main features bearing in mind that they represent just a series of snapshots, some of them blurred.¹¹

3. In the Sienese countryside trials of individual witches in the period between 1580c. and 1660c. were endemic but rare events. In deeply Catholic Siena as in Protestant England, "it was the popular fear of *maleficium* which provided the normal driving force behind witch prosecution" (Thomas, 1973, 548). No particular "internal" or "external" factors triggering formal indictments should be given preference. Of course, a parish priest reading an inquisitorial edict against magical healers and witches could act as a big "promoter". Nevertheless, most trials for *maleficium* lack this type of connection, and there is also evidence of villagers ignoring an edict and not denouncing the suspicious facts they heard about in the confessional box. Moreover, it must be underlined that demonic witchcraft was utterly marginal. Diabolism rarely worried Sienese villagers. Only six women confessed to have taken part in a Sabbath, five of them under harsh torture, a fifth one spontaneously. They were a very small share of the 198 women who were investigated for *maleficium*, and even of the 31 women who were tortured as suspected witches between 1588 and 1657. One woman was probably burned in 1588. Sienese sources confirm a wide English and Continental feature: witchcraft was a neighbourhood crime fostered by the atmosphere of malevolence and suspicion endemic in early modern communities (Briggs, 1996). Victims were digging in their memory to discover episodes that might have sparked off the evil eye, and they easily discovered the culprit. What is

8 See *Statutum Reipublicae Senensis. Anno Domini MDXLV*, III, 85. *De poena maleficiorum et magicam artem exercentium et faecentium malias vel facturas, et de poena eis opem et receptum dantium*, edited by Mario Ascheri (1993, 320).

9 In 1624 Sinalunga and 1645 Pitigliano.

10 In Siena, between 1457 and 1541, a court bearing various name. *Nove di guardia e reggimento, Otto di custodia e reggimento, Otto di guardia*, dealt with crimes concerning magic and witchcraft. Eight short trials have survived in the Sienese state archive. See Maria Assunta Ceppari Ridolff (1999).

11 I refer to future work for due focus and clarification: see my *Autunno della stregoneria. Maleficio e magia nell'antico stato senese. Un'indagine regionale e comparata (1580-1721)*, forthcoming.

much more difficult for historians to ascertain is why the anger or grudge or mere suspect of victims fell upon a particular person, selected among quite a large number of locally eligible candidates. In 1605 Castelnuovo, a small village in the developed sharecropping area, a woman complained that: "There are fifteen or more people like me that go around here and there healing. But now as soon as an infant dies everybody says that they all have been wasted [*guasti*]. And they can blame me as well as the others. I don't know why. They are hunting me while they could likewise the others" (Processi, 21, c. 388).

Two coincidental realities don't simplify historical understanding. First, by a process of lexical assimilation *strega* became a word defining a healer as well as a harmful witch¹². Secondly, in the Siense state, *all* witches are women. This is a regional feature, yet to be explained. Not all Siense witches were very old, unmarried, widows, very poor, and marginal women.¹³ These *malefiche* (maleficent witches) were also supposed to have the power to heal people they had wasted. A hierarchy of healers (male and female) can be reconstructed, according to their personal power and knowledge. At its top we find only men, the *stregone* (male witch) or *indovino* (soothsayer; cunning man). No maleficent actions made by the *stregoni* were ever reported to the general Inquisitors.¹⁴ From scraps of information we can surmise to the assumption that in the Siense villages some women were surely boasting their supernatural ill will.¹⁵

4. Therefore in the district of the Siense Inquisition witches Sabbaths were virtually unknown but *malefiche* and *streghe* abound in the documentation, at least until ca. 1660. Nevertheless, although infant mortality remained very high, it seems that the nexus between infant deaths and charges of *maleficium*, so common among all social classes, dissolved in the last decades of 17th century.¹⁶ To prove this two different approaches are followed. First, by way of a case study the infanticide is de-

12 "The word 'witch' was and is an interpretive category which may not be useful and could, in fact, obscure historical investigation and understanding [...] The identification of 'witches' by historians might mask real diversity, as well as important commonalities, among those accused [...] The noun *strega* is rarely used in the trials surveyed and never by the prosecutor or defendant: it designates a trade, like 'baker' or 'prostitute', not an identity. It is vocational, occasional and external, not an internal, dominant and determining characteristic. It has become the essence of these women only because they are frozen in a particular kind of historical document: they are isolated in the transcript of a witch trial" (Scully, 1995, 365). I partially agree with this statement. As a matter of fact the challenge to decode meanings is intrinsic to the *métier*.

13 No children have ever been accused of witchcraft.

14 In 1599 Montepulciano, Giandomenico, a cobbler, was on trial for negromancy and maleficium (infanticide). There is strong evidence that it was a set-up as a consequence of a local feud.

15 A spontaneous denunciation made by a *cerusico* (barber) of the Siense main hospital reveals the intriguing existence of a *Congrega di stregoni* (a male witch and two *streghe*), and give details of their foul performances.

16 With some surveys in local demographic sources it won't be hard to prove that for most of infant deaths weren't blamed witches. On this point see Macfarlane (1999, 178-180).

defined as the main topic of witchcraft accusations in the Sienese countryside. Secondly, for the lack of accusations after 1660, the procedure is to be mainly (but not completely) indirect, inferential in order to prove that they might have stopped from below. The aim is to show that different social relationships accelerated the change of the idea of causation in late seventeenth century villages, eventually leading to a stop of infant *maleficium* cases. To be more precise, paraphrasing an incisive Macfarlane's judgment, the Sienese evidence seems to indicate that "a proportion of [infant] deaths in [Sienese] villages ceased to be treated as murders" (Macfarlane, 1999, 203).

III

5. In order to sketch a typical *maleficium* trial by the Sienese Inquisition, let us set the stage featuring the case of Angelica, a late sixteenth century healer, specialized on infant diseases, based in Radicondoli, a small village of some 700 hundred souls, perched in a high hill south of Siena. Angelica, wife of Giusto, was "75 or 76 years old" (Processi, 17, p. 697v.) when in 1589 she was first put under trial by the general inquisitor of Siena. According to a powerful local exorcist, the Sienese nobleman friar Andromaco d'Elci, the woman must have been very ugly: "no witnesses are needed to realize she is a witch; it is enough to look at her" (Processi, 17, p. 679v). Angelica was endowed with a bold, aggressive personality. When rumors were already spreading that she had been accused of malefic witchcraft, apparently during an exorcism,¹⁷ she broke into the room where some women were looming and shouted: "Who is that cuckold or that bitch that want to say I am a witch? [I want] to strangulate [such a person]" (Processi, 17, p. 618).

Even friar Andromaco was not safe from Angelica's anger. In a letter to the General Inquisitor, the exorcist urged her capture and imprisonment, painting an alarming local situation: "This land is full of bewitched (*ammaliati*) and rotten (*guasti*) children [...] Everybody is blaming *Angelicona* (big Angelica) [...] She threatens to stab whoever is willing to testify [...], even me; and she keeps repeating that I am more *stregone* than her" (Processi, 17, p. 679v).¹⁸

Angelica's tough behaviour, even if strongly overstated, was in some way the expected reaction of a woman blamed for witchcraft in a close-knit community. On the other hand, Angelica had a rough character. Emanuele of Girolamo, a weaver, complained that once "she had come over threatening [him] because he had not worked

17 The text is not conclusive on this point. In any case it seems to be the only case of an accusation made by demoniacs to be found in the Sienese trials. This is a striking contrast, for instance, with the Jura's situation as described by Monter (1976, 59-60, 71-72).

18 I have decided to translate the verb *guastare* (vernacular past participle, *guasto*) with "to cause to rot" or "to waste away", and the adjective *guasto* with "rotten".

one of her cloths" (Processi, 17, p. 619v). Alessandro Berlinghieri, a petty Sieneze nobleman with his goods in Radicondoli, blamed her insolence: "They [Angelica and her daughter Antea] are by nature scolds (*rompicolti*)" (Processi, 17, p. 721v).

Much more than a scold. "She is healing (*raggiustare*/mending) people to earn, and has married off four daughters, and lends more than a hundred *scudi* on usury" (Processi, 17, p. 674v), wrote friar Andromaco. Even if his insinuation about usury was exaggerated, Angelica was a for-profit healer, as she herself admitted when refusing a payment from Aldola, widow of Gioacchino: "From you I don't want anything because you are poor" (Processi, 17, p. 645v). Angelica's concern for gain must have made her very unpopular.¹⁹ In the mind of some fellow countrymen her personality is blurring, undergoing a sinister mutation that transforms her *from a healer into a witch*. But she is a specialist and the village needs her services.

Angelica, daughter of madonna Betta, herself "reputed a *strega* or a *maliarda* (witch) boasting to be able to spell anybody with a spit" (Processi, 17, p. 661v), very likely inherited from her mother some power of healing, but it is unclear when and why the decisive change of her reputation took place.²⁰ For sure, events came to a head with the arrival in Radicondoli of friar Andromaco. His exorcistic performances were contextual, maybe *post hoc atque propter hoc*, to the new anti-magic strategy of the Catholic Church after the defeat of Protestant heresy in the Peninsula. The sermon of Simone Nerini, *pievano* (parish priest) of Radicondoli in 1588, must have been a further awakening of moods and mentalities: "*Dilectissimi in Christo* [...] I recommend and pray you not to fail to favor the Holy Inquisition [...] Those who will fail, will not receive the Holy Sacraments; because it is a case reserved to the Holy Office [to know and apprehend] whoever makes spells, causes children to rot, heals rotten children [...] Because only ministers of the Holy Office can absolve from such sins" (Processi, 11, p. 125v).²¹

Angelica developed by herself some personal qualities, and a possible skill inherited by her mother, but the handicap of Betta's ill fame would not have necessarily affected the reputation of the daughter.²² In any case to counteract a negative imprint Angelica should have been a "spiritual" woman. In fact, there is evidence in the Sieneze *New State* of powerful females, called *streghe* (in fact just healers/white witches), whose wide adamantine morality saved them from the suspect of having done harm to children or any other person.²³

19 Friar Andromaco's remark is the only hint we have on Angelica's wealth.

20 "The basic problem, therefore, is that of how the initial suspicion came to be formed" (Thomas, 1973, 658).

21 But it was not a proper sermon. It seems that Nerini, as he confessed, being he under trial, read during the Mass a *novula* probably taken from an official Edict of the Holy Office.

22 See the appreciation on Antea, Angelica's daughter, made by some witnesses, who considered her a "spirituale" (spiritual person); *Processi*, 17, p. 813.

23 See in 1588 the cases of Lisa from Gallena and Caterina from Ricomagno, and in 1645, of Maddalena

Unfortunately, Angelica was not a spiritual woman.²⁴ The moral inheritance of her mother plus her scold-like personality plus her venal attitude towards co-villagers plus the very fact of not cohabiting with her husband,²⁵ must eventually have short-circuited, casting a black shadow on Angelica's *power*.

Nevertheless, the Radicondolesi looked for her. And some of them, consciously did so at their own risk. But she had developed a strong reputation as a specialist in children illnesses, and mothers sought out her help. Like Lavinia, wife of Giacomo, whose six sons had never been wasted away, but their sicknesses were natural ones. Lavinia "turned to Angelica because everybody took advantage of this woman; it was customary to turn to her because when infants (*putti*) are sick she has a good hand (*una buona mano*)" (Processi, 17, pp. 633-633v). And like Contessa who reported: "I sent always for her despite the fact that since I had children I had had the suspicion that she was a witch, but I thought she was also able to heal, because I was told she had a good hand" (Processi, 17, p. 661).

Evidence has remained of 54 infants treated by Angelica in the span of nine years.²⁶ On answering the inquisitor, Isifile of Salvatore, summarizes the medical care of infants in Radicondoli as follows: "*Question*. Do you know that some people have taken persons to her [to Angelica] to be cured. *Answer*. In this land it is universally known that as soon as rotten infants (*putti guasti*) are discovered they must be taken to Angelica and she heals them" (Processi, 17, pp. 621v-622). Definitely, shouldn't we consider this woman a "paediatrician" *ante-litteram*?²⁷

6. Evidence from *New State* Siense inquisitorial trials heavily confirms the *Radicondolese* scenario and runs counter the European one so far known, where only

from Chiusi, though she was never called *strega* (Di Simplicio, 2000, 131-140). It is worth remembering that "even the white witch was a marginal figure and could turn towards her neighbour with malice if she was involved in a quarrel, or became unpopular through overcharging, or was accused of failure in her magic..." (Larner, 1984, 38). See also Thomas, (1973, 519-520); Macfarlane, (1999, 115); and on this "two-way magic", Monter, (1976, 174).

24 Even in this trial we run into a striking case in point of what meant to be reputed a spiritual woman. One night Bartolomea, wife of Agostino, three month after having given birth to a *putto*, had a vision. She dreamt of Antilia, a country villager, who was approaching and touching the baby while he was in bed. Few days after the infant fell sick. Bartolomea, "anguished and depressed (*in pena*)", tried to have Antilia come over in the belief that she could be able to heal (*sanare*) the baby, as she herself had caused him to rot. Antilia, guessing the dangerous trick, refused to go, and complained about the occurrence with Bartolomea's landlady, the Siense noblewoman Francesca Berlinghieri. Antilia was saved by her very village-wide reputation of "*donna spirituale*" (Processi, 17, c. 823). It is worth emphasizing that "Witch hunting [...] emerged in a context of increasing anxieties about mothers and the maternal role" (Willis, 1995, 17).

25 Reasons of this *de facto* separation are not clear. There is evidence in the Siense sources of some husbands that deserted their witch/wives for fear of their maleficent fame.

26 According to the most remote case registered in the depositions: Processi, 17, pp. 621v, 816. How many infant clients had she had before the age of 64 or 65?

27 There is evidence of just two adults cured by Angelica: Processi, 17, pp. 631-631v; 813.

another Mediterranean country (Spain) seems to represent a notable exception.²⁸ There is in fact an overwhelming number of depositions to prove that concern for infants' health is a deafening leit-motif of *maleficium* accusations in this part of Italy. In 1591, Basilio Nelli, the parish priest of Frosini, alarmed for spreading rumours concerning the malefic actions of Mentia of Lazzaro, who lived in the bordering village of Gerfalco, gathered in his vestry 17 mothers of the parish and "took note of all they said" (Processi, 16, pp. 195-196). Seventeen infants were reported to be *maleficiati* (*guasti*) by Mentia.

Since cases of children reported wasted or killed by witches in the last decade of 16th century are numerous, it is well worth pondering the question whether the 1590's witnessed a particular peak of witchcraft accusations overlapping a more serious general societal crisis (Behringer, 1997).²⁹ In any case, this steady concern for strange infant illnesses persisted throughout the first half of Seventeenth century.

Our attention should be now drawn to the sick infants' syndromes, by the signs discovered on their corpses. In 1605 Castelnuovo Berardenga, a *notitia criminis* was reported by the Sienese nobleman Lattanzio Petroni, a local landowner and that year podestà. "Father Inquisitor I had news of the death of a little nephew of mine, Francesco, [...] who died while being brought up by the wet-nurse out of this land, and that he died because of witchcraft (*stregarie*) of which he was carrying signs (*segni*), having a bruise (*fitta*) on his head, though unbroken the scalp [...] and his right side of the breast was livid, and the right thigh livid too [...] And my brother Ascanio and the reverend Ascanio Bandini, who had been sent there by me, found the same signs [...] and publicly Gaia and Gioma are held to be suspect" (Processi, 21, p. 350). The common opinion on wasting and consuming of infants is concisely registered in a family book of another Sienese nobleman Federico Palmieri, a landowner of Pieve a Pascina, a hamlet not far from Castelnuovo della Berardenga.

"Today May the third 1603 Giovanbattista my second son was born. Today May the twelve he was given to Nora of Santi, wife of Francesco of Ippolito, a wet-nurse. Today July the seven 1604 the wet-nurse's husband brought the said son back, saying he had been caused to rot and sucked his blood [...] The day after I gave him to Tofano, the miller, and his wife Agnesa, a wet-nurse; but he remained sick, and they brought him back home where he died soon after, and after death tooth marks (*dentate*) were discovered on his neck, and that part of the body was livid". Federico Palmieri's diary records exactly the same sequence of facts for his first son Bernardino, born on May 27, 1602, dead within three months; and for the third son Emilio, born May six, 1604 dead within a year. The nobleman concludes. "I myself did not fail to secure them with medicines and [two] physicians, which both seeing

28 "In sixteenth century Aragón, the deaths of children were at the centre of accusation against witches" (Fausier, 2001, 180). See also the fine German cases provided by Roper (1994, 199-225).

29 Economic and demographic conditions of Sienese state fit to this model (Di Simplicio, 2000, 88-89).

the said children said they were irrecoverable, and that they had been caused to rot by witches (*guasti dalle streghe*)" (Processi, 21, pp. 376-377). In 1655 Radicondoli, Crescentio Fortini a law doctor, made a detailed survey of the corpse of a three years old baby. Bruises were found spread everywhere, and one in the shoulders "looking like finger marks [...] and in the waist appeared tooth-marks (*segni di morsi*)" (Processi, 21, p. 377v).

The attack of a witch is always reported with the expression *tocco* (touched; or *maneggiato/manipulated*) *dalle streghe*. Dark purple colour of bodies, tooth marks, finger marks, scratches and bruises scattered all around the little corpses are the signs of *maleficium*.³⁰ The emphasis given by witnesses of all social classes to this clinical picture is almost obsessive. Sieneese witchcraft trials lack the figure of the witch finder³¹ and the pan-European revolting practice of searching bodies of suspected women. It is the *corpus delicti* on the proscenium that attracts people's attention. Witch doctors (female healers/*streghe*) or even more powerful *stregoni* (male healer) scrutinize the victim's body to discover the passing of the witch. Even the inquisitors' judgment is strongly biased by this syndrome. In 1588, during the trial against Angelica, the judge asked Bartolomea of Agostino: "*Question*. What sickness did the *putto* have. Did you see any holes or bruises (*lividi*) [?] *Answer*. No signs (*segni*) whatsoever were seen in his body. *Question*. If he had no bruises nor signs whatsoever why did you say he had been wasted away [?]" (Processi, 17, p. 821v).

IV

7. The quality of interpersonal relations among villagers is to be considered a crucial, conducive factor to a witchcraft accusation. But people did not always run to the inquisitor to denounce a witch, but looked for other solutions too.³² Whether they sought to overcome a bewitchment by resorting to orthodox (the exorcist) or illegal (witch doctors/*streghe*; *stregoni*) counter-magic, or to a direct confrontation with the witch, the victims' mind was already revolving on the ideas of causation common in the time. On a close examination of Sieneese witness depositions one arrives at the

30 Apparently bruises were not under suspicion in Venice: "References to the devil placing his mark on the witch's body as a token of the contract between them are wholly absent [...] There were certain types of disease or symptoms which were more likely than others to have been caused by witchcraft. Paolo, in 1627, confirmed that one boy must have been bewitched as there had been no sign of any fever and his body was completely black (*tutto negro*) by the time he died" (Martin, 1989, 206; 195-6). This is the only quoted case. See also in 1599 Modena, where Diamante de Bisa, accused "for 'having destroyed [guasta] and killed a child' through witchcraft", and here likewise no bruises are mentioned (O'Neil, 1987, 195).

31 These specialists are well attested all around Europe, even in Spain (Monter, 1990, 265, 275).

32 See the distinction between "natural" and "unnatural" methods to control witchcraft made by Lamer (2000, 131 ff).

conclusion, already advanced by the studies of Macfarlane and Thomas, that blaming a witch was to explain misfortune in personal terms.

In a theoretical treatment of the history of the concept of causality, Hans Kelsen wrote: "Personalistic thought and causal thought cancel each other out [...] When he wants to explain something, primitive man does not ask, as civilized man endowed with scientific education: 'How did that happen?'; but 'Who did it?' " (Kelsen, 1992, 75-76). The interpretative scheme of facts leads the individual to explain misfortune "on the basis of social norms, and particularly on the basis of the *lex talionis*" (Kelsen, 1992, 14). In medieval and early modern Europe the concept of private revenge was a corollary of personalistic thought. We should not think of the feud, in general sense, as an impulse of the soul; in fact "it could emanate from a moral or juridical obligation" (Brunner, 1983, 32).³³ No wonder, the concept of *vendetta* is deeply absorbed in the Sieneese witchcraft trials, as is proved by the behaviour of the parents of bewitched children who were eager to take revenge. Judges, witnesses, victims, and defendants keep interpreting the world "according to the categories of friend and enemy" (Brunner, 1983, 47). This personalistic causality and the *lex talionis* must be considered closely connected in the mentality of villagers.³⁴ It was a centuries old 'stop in the mind' that prevented an unknown proportion of early modern European population from getting rid of a cognitive system that excluded the principle of causality and personalized explanations of facts.³⁵

8. Given the substantial disappearance of witchcraft accusations from sources of the second half of 17th century, the treatment of the subject must be speculative, mostly based on indirect evidence and inferential procedure. Nevertheless, unlearned people did make their voices heard. The contact with villagers is not lost. Inquisitorial depositions abound from the same areas previously interested by *maleficium* cases; only they are no longer concerned with *putti guasti*. On closer analysis of testimonies, we discover that in trials for therapeutic magic identical medical contexts regarding sick or dead children now induce different verbal reactions, or no reactions at all. Should we decode the new language of depositions as a sign of cultural change? Were these different wordings signs of a stronger individual scepticism, a

33 For an emphasis on the concept of *inimicitia* see Fra Eliseo Masini, (1990, 150-153).

34 Personalistic aetiology described by some anthropologists is consistent with the above interpretation: "A personalistic medical system is one in which disease is explained as due to the *active, purposeful intervention* of an *agent*, who may be human (a witch or a sorcerer), nonhuman (a ghost, an ancestor, an evil spirit), or supernatural (a deity or other very powerful being). The sick person literally is a victim, the object of an aggression or punishment directed specifically against him, for reasons that concern him alone. Personalistic causality allows little room for accident or chance" (Foster, 1976, 775).

35 "The many deaths by 'misfortune' listed in the Essex coroner's inquisitions suggest that English society may have already passed beyond this stage and people may have accepted that illness and death often occurred without purpose" (Macfarlane, 1999, 194). This assumption can be applied to the Sieneese state.

barometer that the explanation of misfortune in personal terms was becoming unsatisfactory?

Two historical processes transformed the Sienese *New State* in a more complex society, integrating local communities into higher systems (the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the post-Tridentine Church), affecting the quality of interpersonal relationships, and eventually contributing to modify the idea of causation among uneducated people and reduce "the area where personalized explanations in terms of human will were thought" (Macfarlane, 1999, 205).

If this mental change took place, it happened in an economic and social setting characterized by prolonged seventeenth century declining grain prices, depressed agriculture, and stagnating population (Parenti, 1943). Whatever the effect of this *Phase B* on the subjects of Medicean *New State*, they were certainly influenced by post-Tridentine Catholicism and politics, now labelled by some historians as an age of confessionalisation.³⁶

9. It would not be incorrect to date the beginning of modern Sienese church history at 5th July, 1575. On that day a Perugian bishop of strict Borromian observance started an apostolic visit to the Sienese dioceses (AAS, Sante visite, 21 (1575), *Visita apostolica di monsignor Bossio*). It was a thorough survey of churches, holy furnishings, nunneries, hospitals, graveyards, and holy ministers that gave a big push to the organisational renewal of Sienese Church. It is true that the reforming impulse promoted by a papal visitor was not expected to outlast two or three decades, but in Siena the core of Bossi's policy was handed over to general vicars. Waving an 'un-rusty' sword, it was they who fought for a domestication of the clergy, probably the most challenging reforming goal of post-Tridentine church.³⁷ The rooting of a parochial structure had a momentous impact on moods and minds of villagers.³⁸ The systematic introduction of parish registers, the strong opposition to the constraints of

36 "The concept of confessionalisation [...] is based on the fact that in Europe [...] religion and politics, state and church were structurally linked together, so that under the specific conditions of the early modern period the effects that religion and the church had upon society were not separate parts of a larger phenomenon, but rather affected the entire social system and formed the central axis of state and society [...] Confessionalisation signifies a fundamental process of society, which had far-reaching effects upon the public and private life of individual European societies" (Schilling, 1992, 208-9). For the Sienese state see Di Simplicio (1997, 380-411).

37 Figures concerning parish priests deviance in the Sienese dioceses from 1604 to 1800 are as follows: in the 17th century 251 cases; in the 18th century 64. For an analytical description, Di Simplicio (1994, 100-101, 130-132). The domestication process could have been slower in the suffragan diocesis, mostly in Maremma.

38 Drawing on case studies from Liguria and Piedmont it has been stated that the Italian "tight parochial model decayed and fragmented through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" (Bossy, 1995, 23). The widening to all Italy of this assessment would sound as, say, to extend to all early modern England case studies of a 'civilizing process' taken from Westmorland. Below, Bossy nuances his stance: (1995, 27).

the *sponsalia de futuro* often implying pre-nuptial copulations,³⁹ the fight against clandestine marriages and polygamy (in fact bigamy) carried by means of a growing implementation of the *processetti matrimoniali* (small trials to prove that spouses from different parishes were not already married); and, in conclusion, the successful enforcement of the Tridentine marriage procedures, were events that affected the categories of thought of early modern villagers (Di Simplicio, 1994, 177-312).

A growing trust of villagers in their *parroco* (parish priest) is documented by a growth in the frequency of Confession and Communion reported in the depositions of witnesses recorded during Inquisitorial witchcraft trials. In the whole *New State* the transition from a sixteenth century once-a-year practice (for Easter) to a late seventeenth century monthly or even more frequent reception of sacraments, now administered to villagers by their *proprius sacerdos*, is widely charted.⁴⁰ This *apprivoisement* of the faithful with the *parroco*, together with the increased frequency of the sacrament of Confession eventually favoured a more individualistic religious experience and a more detached interpersonal relationship.

If interpersonal relations among villagers lost some harshness and reasons of local *inimicitiae* diminished, the process must certainly have been fostered by another religious experience widely witnessed in late seventeenth century Sieneese state, namely the phenomenon of religious missions performed by Jesuits, Vincenzo de Paul's Lazarists, and during the 18th century by Passionists. All of them worked "patiently at peacemaking [and] confronted the ethics of feuds" (Bossy, 1995, 26-27).

The impact factor on people of this highly dramatized religious experience must not have been negligible.⁴¹ From a 1669 mission in Grosseto, we have a report of the faithful leaving the church "very much numbed by our sermons [and] they told us they could not sleep [...] and were terrified by very appalling dreams (*sogni spaventosissimi*) having visions of the devil that in terrible shapes grasped their waist to

39 In 1596 the nobleman Metello Bichi bishop of Sovana recommended that "Wishing to get rid of the abuse, customary among spouses, that immediately after having exchanged the promise of getting married, they see each other, and consequently thus causing many deadly sins, he therefore orders and commands the spouses not to dare to enter each other's homes [...] or talk with each other [...] until they have exchanged the wedding rings according to the dispositions of the holy council of Trent [Those who fail to obey] will be fined 10 escudos, and excommunicated"; Archivio Vescovile di Piti-gliano, Visita pastorale del vescovo Metello Bichi, p. 117v.

40 I have scores of these testimonies taken from all types of inquisitorial trials.

41 In eighteenth century Tuscany, between 1705 and 1784 missions only by the Lazarist agency amounted to 1267. No surprise that this real invasion might have tired out local populations. In Piti-gliano, where Lazarists performed in 1706, 1716, 1733, 1742, 1756, 1761, 1774 and 1780, the mission of 1716 was a half failure, because inhabitants "were fed up (*stracchi*) with missionaries", because three years before there had been other priests (Jesuits?) who "did not want to give up (*desistere*) administering confessions [...] and communions" (Bollati, 1999, 379). On Lazarists' missions see also Giorgini (1968).

choke them" (Romana, 184, p. 122).⁴² A leitmotif running through these reports reminds us that bickering, suspicion, malevolence, intrigues, and vindictive revenges were rife in villages. The friars were toiling hard "to take away the vice of gossip (*mormorazione*) reigning with great complaints" (Missioni, I, p. 30; in Monteroni); "to uproot the abuse of talebearings (*cicalamento*)" (Missioni, I, c. 31; in Cuna); to settle "disunions caused by interests and may-be more by the envy that ordinarily is so common in small places" (Romana, 184, p. 30; in Casole and Monteguidi).

Let us now focus on an area of the *New State* already dealt with. In 1668, in Angelica's village of Radicondoli 5000 confessions and communions were administered,⁴³ "and before the communion [...] people asked each other for pardon [...] and a very dangerous enmity among twenty people was tamed here by the fathers" (Romana, 184, pp. 19-19v).⁴⁴

And what about witchcraft? Unluckily a direct account of witches is lacking in such Sieneese missions, but we have several scattered hints at beliefs in magic. In 1668 Chiusdino, few miles from Radicondoli, "several policies attesting pacts made with the devil were burned" in the same year (Romana, 184, p. 20).⁴⁵ In 1679, where we are informed that at Pari "the reformation of superstitions, sorcery (*sortilegi*), abuses of holy things and similar sacrilegious actions introduced among those people was very great" (Romana, 184, p. 192).⁴⁶ Interpretations of these important episodes in the long protracted process of acculturation of peasantry may surely vary (Chaunu, 1969, 906), but I share Bossy's assumption that we should not "respond with scepticism to the achievement they claimed: we may believe that people were often waiting for a suitable occasion to lay down the burden of social hostility without dishonour" (Bossy, 1995, 28).

During this sluggish drift towards a "modernisation" of the countryside, interpersonal animosity of close-knit communities slowly but steadily got weakened, and motifs of witchcraft accusations lost its grip.⁴⁷ Besides, the post Tridentine Italian

42 And likewise in 1677 Cetona, Romana, 184, p. 182.

43 It is important to notice that in Radicondoli people fit to receive the communion could have amounted up to some 500. Therefore the faithful must have showed up from all the surrounding *podesterie*.

44 In the near Montieri, that same year, there was a concourse of 2000 villagers to receive the sacraments, "and several reconciliations of people deadly offended took place" (Romana, 184, p. 26). Still in 1668, from April the 29th to May the 11th "the fathers toiled in the land of Gerfalco", not far from Radicondoli, where 2000 faithful flocked to hear them and pray "and some enmities for greater validity (*per maggior attestazione*) were settled legally (*giuridicamente*)" (Romana, 184, p. 23v).

45 In the late 17th century we have a much stronger evidence of this Faustian attitude among educated and uneducated people.

46 In 1668 Montieri is reported a "very strange superstition. Some amulets (*brevi*) had to be put in a new made reed hut, and then, after putting them under a stone, every single beast was made to cross it" (Romana, 184, p. 27v).

47 The above changes have been defined as an "institutional integration between the parish church, with its localized religious community, and higher-level religious institutions" (Rowland, 1990, 175).

Church was not left alone in the hard task to model the mentality of the subject and the faithful anew. The process of confessionalisation evidently implied a strong support of Medicean dynasty, through an effective cooperation of its officials (captains of justice). The two witchcraft trials dealt with by secular officials⁴⁸ are to be seen as a clear sign that Sieneese agencies of the control of people were marching in the same direction, apart from conflict of jurisdiction.

Social disciplining of ecclesiastics was paralleled by the imposition of stricter norms to the laity, eventually ending in a remarkable self-control of individuals. A steady process of regional state formation was therefore a concurring event to the consolidation of a tight parochial model, with the most visible outcome of strengthening a state centred enforcement of law.⁴⁹ All social classes were increasingly deterred from the century old practice of *se faire justice soi-même*.⁵⁰ A growing rule of law that is symbolized by a powerful social phenomenon, the utter domestication of the Sieneese nobility⁵¹. In the highly hierarchized early modern society the withdrawal from the practice of interpersonal violence of these social betters, members of two crucial social figurations such as the clergy and the nobility, was offering the common people more 'civilized' models of behaviour.⁵²

10. However, only a comparison between the specific infant *maleficium* prosecutions of the years 1580c-1650c and the late 17th or early 18th century therapeutic magic trials with their instances of sick and dead infants, can offer some hard evidence to answer our primary question: did witchcraft accusations stop from below?

48 See above, note 9.

49 In this context, the connection between the process of state formation and witchcraft doesn't work in the conventional direction: "Whereas it was previously held that the introduction of a comprehensive judicial system led to increase in persecutions along the lines of well-known, fundamental, early modern processes ('social disciplining' for example) the opposite argument now holds sway. Successful and early state-formation in large states like France, Austria, Bavaria, Saxony or Brandenburg promoted a specific type of rationality..." (Behringer, 1996, 89).

50 A noteworthy distinction is to be drawn between 'centre' and 'periphery'; between the better developed sharecropping areas mostly set in the Sieneese dioceses and the malaria ridden pastoral areas of Maremma (dioceses of Grosseto or Sovana). Still in the 1620's and 1630's, there is in fact strong evidence of bloody feuds that were upsetting all social relationships in Montorgiali, small village near Grosseto perched in a horrid hard to get high hill. And yet, these and other possible local *faide* (feuds), unthinkable near Siena, were only witnessing a temporary slackening down of the state centred criminal justice administered by the Sieneese nobility in the 8 *capitanati di giustizia* (captaincies of justice) of the *New State*. For more details: see Di Simplicio (1997b).

51 From the records kept by the captain of justice, figures concerning the domestication of Sieneese nobility are as follows. Blood crimes: 1603-1632, 245; 1633-1662, 105; 1663-1692, 81; 1693-1722, 22, 1723-1752, 4; 1753-1772, 1; (Sources: ASS, *Capitano di Giustizia*, nn. 648-716). For an analytical examination of the deviance of Sieneese nobility, Di Simplicio (1994, 31-34; and 1996, 72-129).

52 The process of a "conquête politique et mentale des campagnes" was certainly an European wide phenomenon. For the late 17th century Cambrésis it has been maintained that "la société paysanne s'était restructurée...la vision du monde des campagnardes avait évolué, intégrant de plus en plus les messages du catholicisme régénéré et conquérant" (Muehembled, 1987, 182-183).

To this purpose three factors are now going to be examined: the state of medical knowledge; hints, in court papers, at possible popular scepticism; and finally the textual evidence from therapeutic magic trials.

It has been stated recently that "the medical dimensions of the history of witchcraft still remain one of its great uncharted areas" (Sharpe, 1996, 271). In fact, even the noticeable development of studies concerning the history of medicine could not overturn a Macfarlane's evaluation on the point: "It does not seem that changes in belief can be explained merely by reference to the medical condition and changes of the period" (Macfarlane, 1999, 178). And yet, a more positive approach might turn out preferable. Instances of cultural change, after all, crop up from different European medical milieu. In 1634 England, four women out of some twenty people involved in the Lancaster case "were brought to London and re-examined. Ten London midwives 'made diligent search and inspection of those women' in the presence of a panel of distinguished physicians headed by William Harvey" (Holmes, 1993, 66). In France some three decades before (1598-1599), during the celebrated case of Marthe Brossier, a medical team headed by Michel Marescot concluded: "Pauca a morbo, multa ficta, a daemone nulla" (Mandrou, 1971, 191). In 1660 Franche-Comté, the Besançon physician François Bouvot, in the preface to his translation of Frederic von Spee *Cautio criminalis* wrote: "I do not doubt that at least the proof of the so-called supernatural Marks will soon be abolished." (Monter, 1976, 164). From a German witch trial held in late 17th century Langebury the influence of the new studies of anatomy can be shown. The evidence of this case study points out that some suspicious deaths could be explained in many ways, and without any recourse to witch belief (Robisheaux, 2001, 198). A direct link emerges between the study of forensic medicine in German universities and the much more developed Renaissance anatomy centred in Padua.

Certainly, medical knowledge did not improve the expectations of life in the second half of 17th century Europe, but from the generally available evidence the assertion of Keith Thomas that the difference between the coming century (from 1650 to 1750) and the previous one (from 1550 to 1650) must have been not in "achievements" but in new "aspirations" (Thomas, 1973, 788), seems correct.

11. In Italy these aspirations, along with the need to surpass the axioms of ancient medicine, predated this European trend. Even the *Instructio pro formandis processibus in causis strigum, sortilegiorum et maleficiorum* (1620) (Tedeschi, 1997, 126-136), prescribing that local doctors had to inspect the bodies of sick or dead people, suggests a possible osmosis of knowledge between the Paduan school of anatomy and clerical hierarchy. In a letter sent from Rome on September the 18th 1627 to the Siense inquisitor, cardinal Millino wrote: "Before going any further against the said [Frasia] provide to check the *corpus delicti* namely the alleged infanticide, about which the second and third testimonies are talking, trying to verify whether he died

of *maleficium*, and to this effect ask the physician [...] to well specify the attributes (*qualità*) of the illness [...] and how he knows that the baby died of witchcraft and not of disease" (Lettere, *ad diem*). Unfortunately, no forensic surveys of corpses supposedly wasted by witches have been discovered.⁵³ In the Sienese witchcraft trials, some scattered comments of doctors show no evidence of an alternative interpretative paradigm of those mysterious scratches and bruises on infant corpses.⁵⁴ Nevertheless it is not an improbable speculation to maintain that new knowledge might have been implemented in various medical milieu. After all, recent studies in the history of science and medicine have demonstrated that in Medicean Tuscany the presence of Paracelsus had not been marginal. And there is good documentation to prove that the influence of his writings on medical faculties was not irrelevant (Galluzzi, 1982, 31-64). What is lacking, however, is direct evidence of a new generation of university trained physicians practising in the Sienese state and probably influencing with their authority some village based surgeons and *cerusici*;⁵⁵ we have no clear medical consultation on an infant corpse questioning that the death was due to an unnatural illness.⁵⁶ However, we have proof that a new semiotic consciousness was already taking shape among common people (Robisheaux, 2001, 212).

12. So far, in the attempt to explain the changing attitudes of villagers towards *maleficium*, factors owing much to the sociology of state-building, the 'civilizing process' and confessionalisation theories have been singled out. I don't consider the projection of methodological explanatory frameworks of contemporary historians on the lives of people who believed and experienced witchcraft as tainted with anachronism. Sienese subjects were conscious that their world was undergoing such a transformation, even if their labelling of these changes differs from our own. As a matter of fact historians are challenged by the thorny task of decoding past languages. And of all human feelings, those expressing personal emotions of joy, pain, anguish and love are the most difficult to grasp. Norms of reception of past texts change in time and problems of decoding represent a major obstacle.

53 Not a single forensic survey of a death of *maleficium* has been found by Pastore (1998).

54 In 17th century Sienese state, figures for the prosecution of abortions and infanticides are as follows: 1604-1613, 3; 1614-1623, 3; 1624-1633, 0; 1634-1643, 2; 1644-1653, 1; 1654-1663, 5; 1664-1673, 1; 1674-1683, 0; 1684-1693, 2; 1694-1703, 4. Beginning with 1662 reports include vague references to medical surveys made mostly by *cerusici* (barbers); Sources: ASS, Capitano di Giustizia, 648, pp. 233, 285, 288; 651, p. 1135; 656, p. 658; 657, p. 475; 660, p. 294; 661, p. 434; 662, pp.100-101v; 664, p. 28; 665, pp. 103-107, 679, pp. 478-485; 680, pp. 550-551v; 681, p. 303; 682, pp. 99-108, 633-639; 683, p. 501.

55 But see *infra* an interesting 1666 case in Pitigliano. On the *cerusici*, scattered information can be drawn from Garosi (1935, 1-27). And see now Gentilecore (2000, 360-383).

56 In 1622, in Figline, in a *maleficium* case concerning an adult woman, the lawyer of Ippolita, the witch, denied the validity of the trial because the corpse "had not been examined by experts (*testimoni periti*)"; see *Processi*, 30, no page numbers. It would certainly be too much for the times to expect from a medical survey a blunt denial of a supernatural cause of death.

Our task is therefore to scrutinize a new set of court depositions to decipher "the relationship between belief and behaviour, language and reality" (Clark, 2001, 7). Mostly between 1580 and 1630, an expressive code the villagers used to describe the clinical picture of *maleficium* cases, included a repetitive pool of technical terms: *dentate*, *ditate*, *graffi/graffiature*, *lividi/lividure*, *morsi*, *guastare/guasto*, *maneggiato*, *tocco*. Some two or three generations later, verbal expressions for the same clinical pictures have changed. In court, common people are uttering different words. How are we going to translate this new linguistic reality?

As far as I know, the problem of what might be termed 'popular scepticism' has never clearly been addressed by historians and would in any case be very difficult to document. It is a topic bordering on 'popular unbelief', a sin or crime that can be widely charted in the Sienese state villages scrutinizing the scores of bulky trials for *bestemmie ereticali* (blasphemy) that accounted on the average for some 13% of all crimes (Di Simplicio, 2000, 21). In these inquisitorial court papers, as well as in the archiepiscopal ones (Di Simplicio, 1994, 226-241), some good evidence shows that disbelief of these unlearned ancestors "could emerge [...] in reflection on personal experience" (Davidson, 1992, 82). It is the same sort of personal experience reported by some wise women in the villages. Depositions are in fact not completely void of expressions in contrast with the common witch belief, and occasional examples of individual scepticism pop up here and there. In 1588 Chiusi Bernadine, when summoned to witness in a trial against Agnes, confirmed the reputation of witch of her country fellow, but as to the real meaning of bruises seen on some dead infants she was very doubtful: "I cannot even say whether my first son died because he had been *stregonato* (destroyed by a witch) [...] It is true that the *putto* was livid after his death, but that could have come from his previous disease. Moreover my mother used to say that it is quite common for infants after the blows they receive to become livid (*ordinariamente le rede per le battiture che fanno, per il male apparivano tutte peste*)" (Processi, 42, p. 498).⁵⁷ In 1588 Sovana, Bartolomea, the wife of Augustine, also inherited the same attitude of mind from the oldest women of the village. Witness in a trial against Angela, Livia, and Meca she declared: "I don't know anything about them, but when a *rede* (infant) dies immediately the voice runs that it is them. I had thirteen of them [infants], and now have none but I did not think of such things and used to say God has given them to me, God is taking them away from me, and also mine used to become livid" (Processi, 5, c. 183v). And in 1595 in San Cascian de Bagni, Bimba, a supposed healer of minor reputation, refused to confirm that Portia's son had been wasted by a witch: "It is true that the *putto* died, but I think he died from hunger [...] And once I told his father to save an egg for him" (Processi, 7, p. 120).

57 Here we should not exclude an indirect hint to the consequences of a widespread practice: parents used to sleep in the same bed with babies, and quite often hurt and even choke to death them. It was a grave sin whose absolution was reserved to the archbishop (*caso riservato*).

Sceptical attitudes towards supernatural deaths of infants are in any case rare events in court papers. And still in 1660, in Radicondoli, it is possible to run into the tenacious belief that some marks found on the corpses of babies were proof of witchcraft. It is the case of the local sergeant Salvatore Tonci, whose ten sons "all in their childhood, and the eldest aged ten [were dead] and in all of them there were very clear signs (*segni evidentissimi*) that they were made to die through poisonings and witchcrafts (*di veneficii e stregonerie*)" (Processi, 44, p. 494).⁵⁸ Nevertheless, no description of these signs is given.

Sergeant Tonci was not alone to blame Brigida Ascarelli for her maleficent actions. It is unclear why and when the old widow was made a witch. From several testimonies we reconstruct the usual revealing episodes of a contrasting (economic) relations between Brigida and some villagers, eventually ending in curses, threats, and confrontations.⁵⁹ All her country-fellows report to have been informed, by hearsay, about the night when she touched Simone Marini's baby, and "he began to crumble (*tracollare*) and died in few days" (Processi, 44, p. 501). And yet, in this familiar scenario important details are missing. At the specific, insistent inquisitor's interrogations whether the baby's corpse had been seen, all witnesses answered negatively. To the historian this insistency of the judge on visual testimony, and the lack of the usual signs on infant corpses, retrospectively sounds as a creeping turnaround.

A quite relevant change in mind and attitude can be discerned in 1666 Pitigliano. The trial concerned Finitia, called Sciabacca, an old woman blind in one eye, and the only harmful Jewish witch to be found in the Sienese state sources. No racial or religious motifs were involved in this case. Sciabacca was a tough woman, a real scold, also according to Febo of Angelo, an elder of the small local Jewish community. "I know nothing about her life – said the old man –; I have heard her cursing several times, saying 'cursed this and that man' and on such occurrences she uses to kneel in the street, with her hands raised to heaven, crying out for vengeance, and she is always fighting now with one, then with another" (Processi, 47, p. 732). And because of her the reverend father Bartolomeo Lorenzi, an exorcist, reports that "in Pitigliano you hear only that such a man is bewitched and such a woman is possessed" (Processi, 47, p. 717v). Domenica Mazzini told the inquisitor that her three year old child Francesco had been wasted away by Finitia, but the "physician thought it was a natural disease" and tried to cure the child without success. Domenica took then the child to the exorcist who said: 'Poor Francesco, you have been badly fixed (*l'hanno accomodato bene*)'. Also Benedetto of Giacinto, a surgeon, visited the child but did not remember his sickness well. The inquisitor asked him whether he had ever had any experience of *maleficia*. Benedetto answered negatively, but he added: "Sometimes there are persons that with their eyes harm men or boys, and they are mostly women"

58 See *supra*, in 1655 Radicondoli, a clearer *maleficium* case.

59 Processi, 44, p. 496, a confrontation between Brigida and Giobatta.

(Processi, 47, p. 718). Clemente Caselli, another local surgeon, went and saw little Francesco too: "I stuck a leech to him and saw him languishing [...] and he was unable to keep his head straight (*aveva scapozzato il collo*) His parents were blaming the witches". Even a notary took note of his conditions: "Visus et repertus fuit quidam puer in lecto jacens, concavis oculis et qui inter brachia retentus et in altum elatus undique caput inclinare visus fuit, atque minime substentatione, et [...] agnitus fuit consummatissimus" (Processi, 47, p. 721).

In this trial, no signs of *maleficium* were pointed out by medical practitioners. It would come as useful information to know if these minor local professionals were familiar with a law treatise published some years before the trials against Brigida and Finitia, namely Anton Maria Cospi's posthumous *Il giudice criminalista*. The book, in a passage of relevance with our topic, discloses a scenario that the reverend Bartolomeo Lorenzi would have very likely endorsed.

"In case the court claims that somebody could have been made sick or killed by these witches (*maliarde*), first the dead or the sick will have to be visited, and then the corpse inspected [...] In infants (*putti*) it has to be observed whether they have holes in their waist, and particularly in the head, or if the breast fork (*forcella del petto*) was pushed inside. It will also be necessary during such visits to be accompanied by physicians (*medici fisici*) and barbers (*cerusici*), and they have to observe intestine and brain; and they have to consider whether infants are stained or *magagnati* (rotten) or *guasti* or altered to the point to have caused a natural death [...] or on the contrary, they will have to conclude whether the disease was a consequence of an occult and supernatural cause through bewitchement and devilish means [...] It will also be a sign of the child's bewitchment, serving as a *corpus delicti* in matters hard to prove, if from the place where the child's body is lying a thick and green mist will be seen lifting, and soon after the child will lose weight and get pasty, and will not be able to retain food, and the physicians won't give a natural explanation of it" (Cospi, 1643, 355).

We won't ever know if "poor Francesco's" body released green fumes. However, before introducing some hard evidence to prove the issue of this article it is necessary to stress one point: old and new hypothesis on people's attitudes towards disease could very well coexist everywhere. The analysis of the Pitigliano case shows a sharp contrast between the exorcist and the health workers that could be generalized for the whole of Europe. Old and new illness aetiologies were likewise transmitted to common people from the different 'social figurations' locally available. As to doctors, in the late 17th century Sienese state, we didn't probably have "a victory of rationality over magic, but rather the criticism of magic got *some* purchase" (Lloyd, 1999, 264). As to popular classes, whose language we are going to examine now, we won't certainly notice any rejection of deep-seated beliefs. The history of their ideas remains highly problematic. But we have the chance to speculate, "and the best we can hope

to do is to scrutinize possible suggestions as closely as we can." (Lloyd, 1999, 235).

13. As has been already anticipated, in the last decades of the seventeenth century and early in the next one, when no more indictments for *maleficium* are recorded, clinical pictures of sick or dead infants are to be looked for in trials for therapeutic magic. Descriptions made by parents denote even greater novelties. A new setting unfolds. If we look at the way diseases are represented by villagers, shouldn't we venture the conclusion that the relation between sick infant parents and the disease has changed? Common people's accounts are void of references to livid and strange tooth marks, finger marks, nail marks. It is a prose revealing an agnostic stance on illness, an empirical attitude towards infant diseases. Parents carry on their uphill fight against death, resorting to doctors, healers, and prayers to have children recovered, but explanations used in the past are not hinted at.

In 1708 Pienza Stefano Bartalucci, aged 32, had a sick baby. After having him visited by "the physician and the surgeon" he sent for Francesco Vannuccini a healer, who after touching him burst out "lousy bitch, you did that", and blamed the witches for the sickness (Processi, 77, p. 290v).⁶⁰ Even the disease of Agnesa Mariottini's daughter, aged four, "was unknown, and she was reduced in very poor conditions" (Processi, 77, p. 312v). Neither Stefano nor Agnesa made any further remarks on the disease.⁶¹

In 1690 Siena, Sebastiano Pichi, a barber aged 38, describes the sickness of his six months old baby in the following way: "He became sickly and four days was fine and eight sick, then suddenly lost weight and became a skeleton" (Processi, 56, p. 415). It was suggested he check the cushion for some spell, and found the usual strangely shaped stuff. He reported however to the inquisitor he could not imagine the reasons of the illness. Again, we notice the lack of technical terms referring to the area of *maleficium*.

In February 1690 Francesca Torrigiani, nicknamed *la Fabbra* (ironmonger), renowned healer based in Grotti, was summoned to heal the old *patriarca* of a sharecropper family living in Lucignano. As soon as she arrived she visited the old man and said a spell had been cast on him. Margherita, one of the daughters in law, reports: "The Fabbra healed also Sandra, a little nephew of mine, and said she had been visited by witches", and boasted to know who had manipulated the baby (Processi, 56, p. 613). In their depositions the parents don't add any detail to typify the disease of little Sandra. And still in another trial against Francesca, Emilia Paquini tells the inquisitor that the Fabbra once suddenly ended up home and "seeing my baby,

60 From an initial survey of 18th century *Causes* it seems to come out that the number of male healers is on the rise and that of female ones on the decline.

61 Interestingly enough, Francesco Vannuccini, questioned by the inquisitor, denies to have healed adult people: "I just went and healed little children (*cinini*), because the *cerusico*, being them too little, does not want to go for them, because he can't do anything" (Processi, 77, p. 343).

shortly after dead, in bed in such bad health, told me he had been manipulated by witches, and with some red and white wine prepared a water and washed the baby twice" (Processi, 58, p. 81). The mother mentions no signs on the corpse.

In 1715, Diana Grassi, a Siense healer of wide reputation, wife of Giovanni Borgiani, a porter, underwent her sixth inquisitorial trial since 1702. Diana's power was well known as a 'paediatrician' because "since she was born on Ascension Day her mother told her she would know herbs and sicknesses of infants (*creature*)" (Processi, 78, p. 517v). According to Giuseppe of Francesco, bricklayer, she used to cure infants in Siena and in the nearby countryside. On the very day when his son Francesco was baptised, he ran into Diana who said "the baby will not live three days" (Processi, 78, p. 520v). A month later the baby fell sick: "After several remedies and devotions my wife, seeing he suffered and did not recover, [sent for] Diana. She came and tried to cure him, washing and turning him upside down and muttering something [...] When he died I was a bit angry with her" (Processi, 78, p. 521v). Anger is mentioned, but no details on the baby's corpse are added. Even Giovanni Zucchetti, still in Siena, spares us any signs. His eleven-month-old son was consuming and he had him washed by Diana in a water mixed with wine and five sorts of herbs, but he died anyway. He considered Diana a "woman of good reputation, but some people say that those who know how to heal know how to waste away" (Processi, 78, p. 530).

14. The textual analysis of therapeutic magic trials proves instructive from several points of view. The very "context of communication" (Gaskill, 2000, 79) is under evolution as can be showed by the new meaning of the entry *witch*. During the trial against la Fabbra the inquisitor asks Margherita: "An cognoverit, vel cognoscat aliquem hereticum, vel hereticam, vel proferentem propositiones seu blasfemias hereticales, vel incantatorem seu incantatrices, vel maleficum aut maleficam, vel sortilegos vel non viventem secundum rituum SS. Catholicae Ecclesiae, vel aliquem aut aliquam quod exerceat artem medicinae superstitiosae." The woman answers: "Of the above mentioned people I know nobody but [...] a woman practicing superstitious healings. I tell you that a woman called Francesca the Ironmonger came to my house to heal" (Processi, 58, pp. 610-610v).

Here we run into a significant verbal disassimilation: *strega* is no more synonymous with healer. It is also important to notice that no parents are now hinting at the possibility that their children might have been bewitched. On the contrary, it is the healers (and the exorcists) who assert that witches are to be blamed for the wasting of babies.⁶²

Clearly, the discourse on infantile disease is taking a different tack, and decades astride the two centuries witness a probable momentous parting of ways. In this large

62 Even more redoubled is now "the crucial role of the local healers and cunning folks in sustaining witchcraft belief" (Briggs, 2001, 162).

part of Tuscan regional state, when tensions that fostered witchcraft accusation might have been on decline among villagers, on the basis of case studies mentioned above (and others could be added), we are inclined to think that people's attention has been drawn to health rather than to *maleficium*. In front of the high drama of incurable illnesses and still high infant mortality rate, explanations of misfortune in personal terms are losing ground.

As will be better shown when studying the endurance of 'magic' in 18th and 19th century Italy, healers, in a long drawn rearguard battle, exploiting a still powerful belief in magic, tried to maintain their clientele. And yet, as it has been argued most recently: "The increase in medical knowledge and capabilities gave rise to a professionalism within recognized medical science, widening the gap between recognized and unofficial medicine, both in terms of content and organisation [...] The more that advanced medical knowledge and healing techniques came to be accepted in local communities, the more the latitude and rationale for thinking and acting in terms of witchcraft decreased." (Gijswijt-Hofstra, 1991, 110). A decisive step towards a 'modern' way of thinking and acting was made when new ideas of causation, based on the question "How things happen", replaced the old personalistic causality.

"Who was then responsible for the shifting criteria, the use of different causalities to explain [disease] and death?" (Risse, 1997, 180). This article takes the view that religious, political, and cultural factors might have accelerated such process.⁶³ The hypothesis that some scepticism, grown autonomously from unlearned people's personal experiences, might have converged on the process is also suggested. This assumption, though hard to document, is grounded on the very fact that popular attitudes toward 'magic' weren't a set of immutable beliefs.⁶⁴ The purpose of my study has been to show that one of them – the connection between some deaths of infants and witchcraft – could have become obsolete earlier, and consequently could have induced a new idea of causation.

Shifts of this significance had for sure epochal implications well beyond the narrow limits of a small Italian region, but their geographical and temporal distribution in other European regions is not the scope of this article. An analytical investigation of new cultures of misfortune is certainly on the historians' agenda (Gijswijt-Hofstra, 1999, 175-190).

15. Witchcraft accusations rise difficult theoretical and methodological problems that are crucial to the history of early modern European people. To conclude, then, let

63 "The choice of assigning any causality to [illness and] death is never value free, but is governed by political, cultural, scientific, economic, and personal factors", (Risse, 1997, 181). As to economic factors, rather negligible in this study, it should be pointed out that there is some evidence of a late 17th century faster turnover of sharecroppers over farms: a factor that might have weakened the chances of a neighbourhood crime such as a witchcraft accusation.

64 On this development, one may draw many insights from Sharpe (1966, 276-302); and Davis (1999).

me ask the following questions: has the hypothesis that accusations stopped also from below been proved? Has the delimitation of remit to cases of infant deaths shown that among villagers the explanation of misfortune through a personalistic causality underwent a mutation? Whatever the case, I want to be the first to question the point, quoting a letter a local minor medical practitioner (a barber, in fact) sent to the Sienese inquisitor in December 1705.

"Reverend father, one can find in Tirli an old woman called Pellegra having a son and three daughters [...] who are very ugly, and all this family is said to practice the art of witchcraft (*facci l'arte delle streghe*), because this family go and ask other people for help, and such people because of their poverty say no, after few weeks some misfortune happen to the said people, such as sudden deaths of children and very strange accidents of beasts too. And in the past months the said Pellegra wanted to borrow an ass from Mona Lucretia, midwife, [...] and since Mona Lucretia did not want to lend it, within fifteen days the ass was found dead in the stable. In past days Pellegra and one of her daughters got battered (*bastonate*), then they came over at night [asking] me to make a medical report for the Justice, as a *cerusico*, but not having seen nor healed the blows I answered I could make no medical report, and to that the said women went away sulky and grumbling, and then [they stopped greeting us as they used before]. But after fifteen days, in the morning of August the tenth 1701, at the first cock-crow, one of my sons, Giacinto, some two years old, who had gone to bed in good health and happy, lying at his mother side, suddenly at midnight the mother, while holding his little foot, felt as if the baby was pulled out from the bed with great force, and awake, though still drowsy (*sonniferando*), she started yelling "help me", because she felt she was going to be pulled out from bed with the baby, and I with great effort pulled him up, and the said baby began to say, as children are used to say, "dad, pain" (*babbo, bua*), and after I pulled him up he looked very pasty (*sembrava un cencio*), while before he was in good health, and was rotten (*guasto*) and in few hours passed away at that very cock-crow, and at once his right arm turned black, and his kidneys were discovered black when he became cold. And that very morning when he passed away it looked as if all the cats of the world were roaring [sic!] (*ruggire*) around the house" (Processi, 70, pp. 372-373).

This fine testimony conveys the savour of minds and moods supposed to be waning, and makes the writing of history disconcerting and fascinating in the same time.

ČAROVNIŠTVO IN DETOMOR (16.-18. STOLETJE)

Oscar DI SIMPLICIO

Univerza v Firencah, Oddelek za zgodovino, IT-50100 Firenze, Ul. San Gallo 10

e-mail: disimplicio@unisi.it

POVZETEK

Grafa na začetku prispevka razjasnjujeta bistvo referata. Graf 1 prikazuje trend vseh primerov magije (terapevtske magije, ljubezenske magije, magije za iskanje zakladov, vedeževalske magije, vraževerje, kvalificirano vraževerje, nekromantija) razen za maleficium (škodljivo čarovništvo). Graf 2 zajema le primere škodljivega čarovništva. Tako je očitno, da v obdobju, ki ga obravnavamo, magija ni oslabela, in da viri med tem govorijo o zmanjšanem številu procesov ali obtožb, ki zadevajo maleficium.

Trend v grafu 2 za zgodovinarje ni nekaj novega, vendar pa njegova krivulja, kljub temu da označuje širok evropski pojav, po mojem mnenju še vedno čaka na globalno pojasnitev. V opisu čarovništva in magije v Evropi bi za obravnavo splošnih vzrokov za padec obtožb na tem področju lahko rekli, da v zadnji analizi je še vedno nemogoče ugotoviti, do katere mere so družbene in gospodarske izboljšave in spremembe v kulturi po letu 1660 pripomogle k zmanjšanemu številu formalnih obtožb s strani članov nižjega družbenega razreda. Kadar skupnosti niso vložile tožbe proti svojim sosedom zaradi čarovništva, vsaj tako pogosto ne kot v preteklosti, so le poredkoma pustile pisne dokaze o razlogih za svojo inertnost. Torej lahko le ugibamo, ali padec v številu formalnih obtožb odseva resnično zmanjšanje števila in resnosti osebnih konfliktov na ravni vasi, ali bolj pragmatično ugotovimo, da sodne oblasti niso bile dovzetne za pritožbe, vložene pri njih. Še vedno pa nimamo kakih čvrstih dokazov, da pripadniki nižjih družbenih razredov ne bi bili pripravljeni sodelovati pri obtožbah čarovnic.

Tudi če je gornji argument dovolj uravnotežen, se rajši ne bi predal njegovemu pesimizmu. Po mojem mnenju nam sienski sodni procesi, skupaj z dokazi, ki jih imamo o lokalnih verskih, političnih in družbenih spremembah, dovoljujejo interpretacijo, da lahko vsaj dopolnjujejo današnjo potrjeno različico o zmanjševanju obtožb na račun čarovništva. Namen tega referata je torej ponuditi nekaj, kar bi omogočilo boljše razumevanje družbene stvarnosti, skrite za izginetjem obtožb in procesov.

Po grafu 2 bi morali zmanjševanje števila primerov sredi 17. stoletja pripisati povečanemu skepticizmu elit in tudi povsem novemu odnosu ljudi do nesreče. In prav to je tisto, kar bi rad dokazal.

Ali se je število formalnih obtožb, ki so jih vložili vaščani, zmanjšalo? Mislim, da je na osnovi neposrednih in nekaterih čvrstih dokazov mogoče priti do delno pozitivnega odgovora. Skratka, mogoče je reči, da so specifične obtožbe na račun čarov-

ništva v sienski državi zamrle. Pravzaprav se zdi, da je povezava med smrtjo nekaterih otrok in obtožb, ki zadevajo maleficium in so tako pogoste med pripadniki vseh družbenih razredov, izginila v zadnjih desetletjih 17. stoletja. Če hočemo to dokazati, je treba slediti dvema različnima pristopoma. Pri prvem je detomor definiran kot glavni predmet obtoževanja čarovništva na sienskem podeželju. Pri drugem pristopu mora biti procedura bolj ali manj (toda ne popolnoma) posredna, sklepna. Namen je dokazati, da so različni družbeni odnosi pospešili spremembo v ideji o kazalnosti na vaseh ob koncu 17. stoletja, kar je nazadnje napravilo konec primerom otroškega maleficiuma. Če smo bolj natančni in parafraziramo zelo ostro mnenje Alana Macfarlanea, se zdi, da sienski dokazi kažejo na to, da "nekateri smrtni primeri [otrok] na [sienskih] vaseh niso bili več obravnavani kot umori".

Ključne besede: čarovništvo, magija, detomori, Evropa, 16.-18. stoletje

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