

Responses to witchcraft in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Sweden

The aftermath of the witch-hunt in Dalarna

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The witch-hunts of the early modern period must have left a profound mark on many local communities. The intense trials and executions which took place during the second half of the seventeenth century were dreadful events that touched many people. All those involved, from the accused and the witnesses to the judges and the clergy, had to make decisions that changed and even ended people's lives. Other people too must have remembered the accusations, and felt the fear and hatred for a long time afterwards. Those involved had families, neighbours and friends who were, at the very least, emotionally affected by the proceedings. Moreover, such events were difficult not only for individuals but also for local societies as a unit. In a time when unity, neighbourliness and harmony were meant to characterise a good Christian society, the disorder that a large-scale witch-hunt created was especially threatening.

So what happened in a community following a witch-hunt? In the years that followed people had to go on living together. But what became of them? Were the accused witches who had not been executed reintegrated into the local society, or were they forever witches in the eyes of their neighbours? What relationship did the accusers have to the people they had accused, or the families of those who had been executed? Did the witch accusations go on in some other form? Were new conflicts created instead? The issue of the aftermath is important because witch-hunts did not begin or end with the trial proceedings. There was usually a long history of related events following a trial as well as leading up to it. In this context it is important to question both the ways in which local society affected a witch-hunt and how the witch-hunt altered the lives of everybody involved.

In the historiography of witchcraft it has been recognised that the background and the relationships between the involved parties in a witch-hunt were determining factors for how things would turn out. Even if accuser and accused had not been involved in face-to-face conflicts before the accusations were made, certain patterns can be detected in how the witch-hunt

developed. Of course, there is no way of exactly predicting who would be accused, when or by whom, and different researchers have different opinions about which determining factors were the most important. Yet the evidence shows that accusations were not made completely at random. Instead they were deeply embedded in the everyday relations between people in local societies.¹ Another factor revealed by previous research is the importance of continuity. Witch-accusations were not isolated events. When supposed witches were brought to trial it sometimes became evident that there had been suspicions and rumours about them for several years, in some cases decades, before the accusations reached the court.² In this context, historians' neglect of the aftermath of a witch-hunt is surprising. The events following a witch-hunt are of no less importance in terms of understanding the social significance of witchcraft than what came before or during it. In fact, in many cases the aftermath can probably shed light on events that took place earlier, and help explain why or how the witch-hunt itself came about.

One reason why post-trial aftermath has not received much attention is the difficulty of finding relevant source material. Quite often what we know about a witch-hunt is limited to the records of the courts that handled the case, and they naturally do not include events that took place after the trials. Information about the accused witches and their families is not always available, and in some unfortunate but not too rare instances not even the full name of an accused witch is known. But in some cases the conditions are better, and as some researchers have shown, it is sometimes possible to map out the lives of the persons involved in considerable detail. This has been done for instance in a number of studies of the Salem trials of 1692, in which the aftermath of the witch-hunt has actually received some attention even if it has not been thoroughly researched.³ When it comes to Sweden the conditions for studying post-trial histories are quite good. Even though some archives have been lost, there is plenty of information about both the accused witches and their accusers, particularly in parish population registers and local court records. These make it possible to gather enough information to build a quite detailed picture of the lives of the relevant individuals.

This article is part of an ongoing research project directed by the author and Linda Oja,⁴ focusing on the major Swedish witch-hunt that took place in the county of Dalarna 1668–71.⁵ The first trials and also the first executions were held in 1669, followed by two more years of frequent and intense accusations and prosecutions resulting in no less than forty-seven executions. We are concentrating on the process of social and communal normalisation after such a big witch-hunt, or rather whether communities were able to settle back to their pre-trial pattern. What kind of relationships did those tried but not executed, their families, those of the executed, and their accusers have in the years after the trials? Another important aspect of the aftermath is how local society, as a unit, dealt with this severe disturbance

to social relationships. What measures was it necessary to take before order was restored again? To examine these questions I shall deal mainly with one part of Dalarna, the parish of Rättvik, one of five parishes where trials were held at the time.

Witch trials were hardly unknown in this part of Sweden, but the previous trials differed significantly from what happened in 1669–71. To begin with, the scale of the witch-hunt was previously unheard of. In the parish of Rättvik around sixty people were put on trial accused of witchcraft, and more than 500 children testified against them. The involvement of such large numbers of people is extraordinary considering that the population of the parish numbered less than 3000. Likewise, in the neighbouring parish of Leksand with just over 4000 inhabitants, around 130 men and women were accused as witches, and there were around 500 witnesses.⁶ Other differences compared to earlier cases concern the witnesses and the accusations. Central to this witch-hunt was that children, or at least young persons, were the main accusers. Some of them were very active as witch-finders and proclaimed themselves to be witch apprentices, while others took on the role of the innocent bewitched. Almost all the witch accusations started in the same way: children who said they were abducted during the night and brought to the witches' sabbath accused their abductors of being witches. Some of them also gave details about the sabbath, including the identity of witches and children they had seen there.⁷ The alleged witches were older than their accusers, but not all of them were elderly. Instead they varied in age from the late teens up to over sixty years old.⁸ The main accusation made during the trials was that the accused had brought local children with them to Blåkulla, a notorious fictional place where it was widely believed witches held their sabbath with the devil. This kind of accusation was not entirely new in Dalarna. In a few trials before the main 'hunt', such as in Älvdalen (1664) and Lima (1665–66), the sabbath had also been mentioned in court. Never before, however, had the accusation been so frequent or spread in such epidemic proportions.

After almost three years of accusations, trials and executions the Dalarna trials died out, though in the years that followed the witch-hunts spread to several other counties in the northern half of Sweden, before finally coming to end in Stockholm in 1676. They finished in dramatic fashion, with some of the children who had acted as semi-professional witch-finders being exposed as liars and frauds, and subsequently punished. This unravelling of events did not, however, benefit those already convicted and executed for witchcraft. In the years between 1669 and 1676 somewhere between 275 and 300 persons were executed, forty-seven of them in Dalarna.⁹

Compared to most other parts of Europe, this witch-hunt occurred quite late in time. Maybe because of this, even before the witch-finders were exposed in Stockholm in 1676, many people expressed doubts that there was any validity in the witch accusations. This was especially true in Rättvik, when

the witch-hunt reached the parish in 1670. Gustaf Duwall, who was the governor of Dalarna, claimed that it was impossible to know who was guilty and who was not, while the bishop suggested that people had imagined or dreamed up some of the amazing activities attributed to the accused. At the parish level in Rättvik the local clergy, civil servants and also some ordinary people had a hard time deciding what to believe. Even if they admitted that witches were a dangerous reality they were not certain that the women of their own parish really were witches. When the bishop asked the vicar of Rättvik if there was any truth in the accusations about children being brought to the witches' sabbath, or if the whole thing was just some satanic trickery, the vicar responded that he could not give a good answer about 'these dark matters'. He said that some people really believed themselves to be taken away at night, but that the truth was very difficult to find out.¹⁰ Another conundrum for the authorities concerned the action to be taken against those accused. It was suggested both by the clergy and the secular authorities that the solution to the problem lay with prayer and education, especially for the children. Trials and executions were to be a last resort. This circumspection of the secular authorities made them reluctant to deal with the accusations, so they left the clergy in charge of the initial hearings and postponed the trials for almost a year. But pressure from the parents of the afflicted children and the wider public made it impossible to delay things for too long.¹¹

The outcome of these trials was, however, not one that most people expected. In previous trials in the area numerous people had been decapitated and burned, and so people would have confidently assumed that the same result would occur once again. Yet in Rättvik nobody was executed. Of the sixty or so people who were accused of witchcraft the court sentenced only three elderly women to death. Even then there was little risk of these three being executed, because the death sentence was only to be carried out if they confessed. Over the course of a year the three women were questioned repeatedly, and on each occasion they denied having any dealings with the devil, and refuted the accusations made against them. These three women were among the most heavily accused, but equally significant, perhaps, was that all three women had had a long-lasting bad reputation. At least two of them, the sisters Håll Karin and Håll Ingel, were also known as cunning-women. They confessed that they had knowledge about healing, and it was reported by persons from their home villages that they at times had tried to heal men as well as horses and other animals. Both of the sisters seemed to be disliked and feared by other people, and five years earlier Håll Karin had in spite of her own denial been convicted for having used magic to harm one of her neighbours' cows.¹² Twelve other women escaped the death penalty, but received other punishments instead. Some of them had to pay fines, while others were to be put in the stocks in front of the church on two Sundays. These women were, however, not convicted of witchcraft but for other minor

offences such as being quarrelsome or having sought the aid of cunning-folk. Of the remaining forty people accused the court ruled that they were to be sentenced by God. In practice, this meant that they were free to go, but if any other evidence ever came up against them, their case could be reopened and they could then be punished by death. Although no legal proof had been found that these people were witches, they were not entirely acquitted either. They headed back to their communities without their names being properly cleared.¹³

Besides the sentences passed over the accused witches, some of the witnesses were also punished for making false accusations. Five years before the defining exposure of witch-finders and false-accusers in Stockholm, something similar happened in Rättvik. About twenty young men and boys who had acted as witch-finders or who had told stories that the court had found too fanciful, were flogged in public or received other similar punishments.¹⁴ This exposing of mendacious witnesses did not, however, make the judges doubt all of the given testimonies, at least not openly. But perhaps the knowledge that not all of the witnesses had been telling the truth made the judges careful enough not to pass out death sentences that would actually be carried out. In Rättvik, then, more people were punished for lying about witch-accusations than were actually punished as witches. This must have created some confusion among the inhabitants of the parish. The crucial question of the existence of witches in Rättvik had not been given a satisfying answer. Instead the normal order had been turned upside down. The outcome of the trials posed even more questions for the people of Rättvik. Was it the accusers and not the witches who were most responsible for all the pain and suffering? Were any of the accused persons really a witch? Or had the witches somehow deluded the judges and been set free so that they now could go on with their evil doings and continue to torment innocent children?

Many people in Rättvik obviously did not share the sceptical attitude of the authorities towards the witch-accusations. It was reported that many of the parents of the afflicted children were adamant about what had happened and who was to blame. For them the outcome of the trials must have been something of a nightmare scenario. If the witches had been executed they would have been rid of their enemies, but as this did not happen, the witches remained in the local society where everybody had to deal with the fear and anger that had built up in the previous years. To this another hostility must be added – that of the previously accused persons and their families towards the witnesses. The pranks and stories of the testifying youngsters could have cost several persons their lives, and the fear and anxiety experienced by the accused in the months running up to the trial must not have been easily forgotten.

Rättvik, like most of seventeenth-century Sweden, was an agricultural community. There were no cities or large towns in this quite poor part of

Dalarna, and most of the population lived in villages scattered around Lake Siljan. During the second half of the century the area was quite densely populated, though, and the farms often did not produce enough to support all its inhabitants. The conditions for agriculture were rather poor compared to other regions of Sweden, and there were many years when the harvest failed and people starved. It became common, therefore, for people to leave Rättvik and work somewhere else for part of the year.¹⁵ If we see the aftermath of the trials against this background, it becomes clear that in some ways it seems that the lives of those involved did not change very much despite what had happened. Very few of them matched the stereotypical poor beggar-woman before the trials, and they did not descend to that state through ostracism afterwards either. Instead they seem to have been quite average people who paid their taxes as they should, and even if they were not the richest in their village, they definitely were not poor outcasts either.¹⁶ Most of the young women who had been accused of witchcraft subsequently married and had children. One of them, Brita Jonsdotter, married only a few months after the trials, while the others did the same just one or a few years later.¹⁷ Almost all of them belonged to solid households and remained firmly rooted in their home village. They did not try to start a new life elsewhere, where the accusations made against them were unknown. Even when, some years later, quite a large number of families from the parish migrated to Swedish Pommerania, in what is now northern Germany, hardly any of the accused were amongst their number.¹⁸

The lives of the accused women and men ostensibly continued very much the same as those around them. But at a more subtle level they were stigmatised by what they had been through. They could work hard for social acceptance through being good wives and mothers who kept a decent household, but to be accepted as good Christians was another matter. So even if village life went on as if nothing had happened, social relations did not get back to normal when it came to the very important religious side of community life. This was evident directly after the trials had ended, as it took some months before the previously accused witches were allowed to go to church again. Before they could do that and, most importantly, take communion, they first had to take part in a special ceremony in the church. They also had to go to hearings with the clergy where they had to demonstrate their knowledge of the scripture and that they knew their prayers.¹⁹ These two occasions very effectively singled out those who had to participate. That some had to take part in these ceremonies proved that there was something wrong with them, even if many of them had not actually been convicted of anything. It clearly indicated that even if they were not witches, they definitely were not good Christians.

In late seventeenth-century Sweden there were several mechanisms for the reintegration of convicted criminals into both the religious and secular

community, with the church playing a key role. It was common for offenders to appear in church before his or her parishioners to express regret for having committed an offence, and thereby assure the community that they were reformed characters. That this was done in public was of importance, because it served both as a punishment and as a warning to others.²⁰ With the accused witches of Rättvik the situation was unusual, as most of them were not convicted criminals, but due to the nature of the accusations made against them, it was still deemed necessary to treat them as if they were. That those found not guilty should have to undergo such an ordeal seems unfair, but it was important. After it was done nobody could formally question their presence in church or at communion. To prove further their deep Christian faith, it seems that many of those tried for witchcraft also donated money to the church and to the poor in the months after the trials. Among them were several of the most heavily accused women and men, including Håll Ingel, who had been one of the three women sentenced to death. It was of course nothing extraordinary for people to do so, but the church records shows that they were much more frequent givers than other parishioners during this period.²¹

There is evidence that these efforts were not enough for others to trust persons who had once been accused as witches as good Christians. It is obvious that the reputation of being a witch was something that stuck with them for many years. Annotations made by the parish clergy in their journal show that several women were accused of witchcraft again. Only a few weeks after the trials in Rättvik there are further complaints about children being brought to Blåkulla by witches. In the months afterwards more accusations followed, aimed at some of the women who had been accused the year before. One such woman was Feel Malin, a soldier's wife from the village of Altsarbyn. In January of 1672, a year after the trials, she was once again accused of being a witch by the parents of two children in her home village. The substance of the accusations levelled at her and other alleged witches was the same as it had been before, that they took children out of their beds at night and forced them to go to the witches' sabbath at Blåkulla.²² One thing was strikingly different, though: this time the accusations were not received in the same manner by the authorities as they had been a year or two earlier. If the local civil servants had been doubtful about what to do with the accusations during the witch-hunt, they now acted with more certainty and subsequently none of these cases were ever tried in court. It was very clear that the era of the witch-hunts was most definitely something of the past in Rättvik. This meant that even if the accusations continued, none of the accused women were prosecuted for witchcraft again. But the fact that people reported their suspicions and accusations to the vicar shows, however, that even if there were no more trials, things were not forgiven and forgotten.

That other people had doubts about the faith of those acquitted is also evident if we look at one important commission of trust for the good Christian, that of being a godparent. During the baptism it was the godparent who renounced the Devil in the place of the child, and in case anything happened to the real parents, it was the duty of the godparents to make sure that the child received a proper Christian upbringing. Quite naturally, these things were hardly seen as suitable for somebody who had been suspected of being a witch, no matter what the verdict of the court. Consequently none of those tried for witchcraft in Rättvik were chosen to act as godparents for at least several years after the trials. But their bad reputations did not rub off on kin relations in this respect. Their husbands and other household members were asked on several occasions to act as godparents.²³ This shows that the existence of a previously accused witch did not exclude the whole household from the community in religious matters.

The study of the aftermath of a witch-trial can provide new insights into the dynamics of accusations and shifting authoritarian responses to accusations. If we only look at the trials in Rättvik in 1671, it appears as if the seemingly enlightened and benevolent attitude of the clergy, and other persons in authority, enabled the accused witches to get off with just a fright. The witch trials in January 1671 had not ended in the same horror in Rättvik as previous trials had in other places, including the neighbouring parishes where a large number of persons had been executed. But a study of the aftermath of this witch-hunt shows it was not really that simple. For the persons who were accused as witches, the witch-hunt did not really end with the trials. After the trials the persons who had been accused as witches went on with their lives, which in many ways probably did not turn out to be very much different from what it would have been if they never had been involved in the witch-hunt. But in some ways it is clear that the witch-hunt had seriously disturbed the relations among the people in the community. Special arrangements were made in order to reintegrate the accused men and women into the religious community. This could restore the peace and harmony of the local society, but at the same time it singled out these people even further. Furthermore, the accusations and the fear and the hatred lingered on for a long time afterwards. Even if there were no more trials, the men and women who had not been convicted by the court did not lose their reputation as witches. They therefore had to live in fear that one day their case would get reopened and then the ongoing accusations could lead to a death sentence. Their status as untrustworthy persons was even further confirmed by the fact that they were singled out as being not good Christians. They were simply people who were not trusted to have the right faith.

The superstitious other

Linda Oja

In 1780, the Swedish merchant Abraham Hülphers (1734–98), wrote in a description of the province of Ångermanland: 'In the past, visions and superstitions caused much confusion in this province and elsewhere. In our enlightened time such things are regarded with contempt and even the famous journeys to Blåkulla and witchcraft are now mentioned without fear, showing the misbelief and confusion of the past.'²⁴ This way of describing witchcraft and magical beliefs was typical of the male 'enlightened' elite of eighteenth-century Sweden. Among many scientists, clergymen, civil servants and other men with a university education, there was a sceptical jargon concerning witchcraft and magic which came under the label of 'superstition',²⁵ and in the following discussion this term will be used in the pejorative sense that it was used at the time. This terminology shows a clear tendency to keep what was identified as superstition at a safe distance, placed within contrasting contexts both temporally and socially. The writers located 'superstition' in past times of dark paganism, shady Catholicism or the 'witch-crazy' seventeenth century. In the learned circles of eighteenth-century Sweden, history was generally understood as a story about improvement,²⁶ and progress was often described by using the common metaphor of light versus darkness.²⁷ Man had moved from the darkness of the heathen times and medieval papism to the light of evangelical faith and the natural sciences. In this division of time into dark and light ages, so-called superstition was of course assigned to the former.

Some 'enlightened' writers talked of an unspecified, superstitious era – of 'ancient times', 'the old days' or 'bygone days'. Even the expression the 'superstitious times' was used.²⁸ However, others were often more exact, with the Reformation frequently being cited as the defining moment when society moved out of the dark ages. This meant crudely contrasting their own Protestant era of enlightenment and reason with a chaotic time when greedy priests and monks deceived people with all sorts of superstitions, and tyrannical popes burned masses of innocent people as witches. The Catholic Church was accused of having suppressed reason in Sweden, and of having pursued a deliberate policy of increasing ignorance and false religion.²⁹ In 1742, for example, the reverend Magnus Sahlstedt wrote of 'the fog of popery' and of 'popish delusion and prejudice'.³⁰ There were also writers who located the temporal boundary between superstition and enlightenment in more recent times, for instance in their own childhood. It was not so important to point

out the exact period as long as superstition was safely deported to a past clearly separated from the present. The crucial point was that superstition ceased to exist; at least it was *almost* gone. The country was largely cleansed of 'pernicious' Catholic influences, and even if some superstition lingered on, it did not really belong to the present but was a relic, a remnant of the past. Furthermore, the superstitious character of the superstition was sometimes questioned. Certainly people maintained some superstitious traditions, it was thought, but they did not take them seriously and they had no real meaning. Overall the prognosis was good; although superstition had not yet completely disappeared, it was definitely on the wane.³¹

The pockets of surviving superstition were sometimes located within specific social groups, namely peasants, sailors, Finns, Saamis, gypsies and vagrants. But again vague blanket descriptions were also used to define who was superstitious, such as the 'ordinary people,' the 'simple-minded crowd' or the 'mob'. This notion of superstition as connected to the lower social strata fits in well with the general seventeenth- and eighteenth-century elite image of peasants and 'common people' as stupid, childish and credulous.³² Women were also often identified as extraordinarily superstitious – an apprehension which was in harmony with the view, common among the male Swedish eighteenth-century elite, of women as being unenlightened, irrational, emotional and busy with thoughtless chatter. Yet there also existed women of high social status who were regarded as intelligent and sensible. A notable example is the Countess Charlotta Taube who was made the very symbol of the Enlightenment struggle against superstitious witch-hunts. The Countess gave judicial and economic help to a group of women from the province of Dalarna who were accused of witchcraft, imprisoned and tortured in 1757. This was the last large witch trial in Sweden, initiated from below and pursued by lower officials, with the support of a conservative bishop. Soon, however, the process was reversed and the torturers were prosecuted instead. Before the trials had even ended, the political and intellectual elite praised Charlotta Taube for her intervention, and several decades later she was still being held up as a beacon of reason and humanity.³³ The example of Taube highlights that the stereotype of the superstitious woman had an important class dimension. The significance of this is also reflected in the use of formulations connecting superstition to 'hags' or 'crones', leading to such terminology as 'hag-fancies', 'the testimony of a superstitious and confused old woman' or 'old wives' tales'. These expressions conveyed an image, not of any female person, but of an old and ugly woman – often but not always socially inferior.³⁴

All these groups mocked, scorned and depicted as stupid and credulous became the 'superstitious other', forming a suitable contrast to the positive self-image of the men who considered themselves enlightened, reasonable and progressive. Members of the elite used their traditions and beliefs as a source of amusement. They were cited as nuggets of entertainment in literature

describing Swedish natural history and popular culture and even in official church records. An attitude of irony and ridicule – sometimes combined with a distanced scholarly interest – was common. Beliefs and customs were variously referred to as trifles, lies, fancies, nonsense and fairy-tales.³⁵ They were collected and studied within a proto-folkloristic tradition, but when such collections were published it was essential to emphasise how they were meant to be regarded.³⁶ One example is the following passage from a book of travels written in the 1740s by the scientist Pehr Kalm: ‘I have not included the views of the common man for the purpose of accepting them but only to amuse the reader and to thus show the darkness of the past. I hope that the reader will attach the same value to them as I do and agree with me that superstition is superstition.’³⁷ This marking of a cultural and social distance towards witchcraft and superstition can be viewed as a part of shaping and strengthening an enlightened identity among parts of the elite. Martin Pott who has analysed the early German and Dutch Enlightenment has previously described this process.³⁸ Witchcraft and superstition were used as components in a negative image, forming an essential opposite to enlightenment. Other important elements of this image were ignorance regarding God and nature, fear, emotionality, belief in authority (as opposed to critical, independent thought), tyranny and despotism.³⁹

However, to be fair one must point out that stereotypical apprehensions of witchcraft and magic also existed among other social groups besides the ‘enlightened’ elite. At the popular level, among peasants, artisans and soldiers, knowledge of witchcraft and magic was often ascribed to people considered different and strange, like Saamis, Finns and vagrants. Actually, it could suffice to name a person a Saami, a Finn or someone coming from the North to indicate that that person was skilled in witchcraft and magic. Whether people labelled thus really were Saami, Finnish or from the North is difficult to elucidate but at least in some events it is obvious that they were not. In a legal case from the small town of Enköping in 1728–29, an itinerant woman named Maria Persdotter Lind was tried for magical healing and other similar services. During the trial Maria revealed that she told people she was a Saami woman to get more customers, a strategy that clearly alluded to the common connection between magical skills and certain social or ethnic groups. The difference between these popular conceptions and those of the elite is that while the latter associated the ‘other’ with superstitious belief in magic, the peasantry made an image of the strangers as having real knowledge of magic.⁴⁰

The secularisation of magical beliefs

An important prerequisite for the essential role of superstition as a ‘counter-concept’ to enlightenment was a certain degree of secularisation. I do not

mean secularisation in the sense of the decreasing influence of the church and the individualisation of religion. The kind of secularisation I have in mind was rather a forerunner to these processes and involved what is sometimes called the 'disenchantment of the world'. More specifically, it meant stressing the difference between natural and supernatural phenomena and redefining the previously supernatural as natural or as purely imaginary. In other words, witchcraft and superstition were disqualified from reality and deported to the marginal regions of delusion and fearful fantasy. One example of this process is found in legislative developments. Towards the end of the seventeenth century legal commentaries on past and present laws began distinguishing between poisoning on the one hand and malevolent magic (witchcraft) on the other. Prior to this period these crimes had been lumped together under the same name (*förgörning*), but now the two were separated and placed in different chapters of the legal code. Magic was specifically labelled as a supernatural phenomenon and poisoning as a specifically natural one. In court both the authorities and ordinary people used these revised definitions in their arguments.⁴¹ This contrast between magic and the natural was often also made clear in other contexts.

There was a trend to examine phenomena and causal connections, which had previously been interpreted supernaturally, with the purpose of revealing them as resulting from natural processes, whether medical, mental or chemical. In other words, what seemed to break the laws of nature was shown really to follow natural laws. Through true knowledge of nature all old misunderstandings would be cleared up.⁴² Journeys to the witches' sabbath were increasingly redefined as fantasies caused by mental or physical illness. In 1746 a young girl in the province of Dalarna accused her master and his family of having had the Devil over for a visit. According to the girl, they had also taken her for a nightly ride through the air. After thorough investigations and interrogations, the local court came to the conclusion that the girl must have dreamed the whole thing 'as she must very well understand that it is impossible for her and other people to fly a mile through the air and then back again'. The court surmised that the heat of the stove had affected the blood in the girl's head, and that this had caused the bad dream. This conclusion was based on the testimony of the girl and others, that the night before the alleged visit and flight, she and her master's son had stayed up late talking by the warmth of the stove.⁴³ Witchcraft as the reason for good fortune was also replaced by an explanation focusing on natural skilfulness. This redefinition was explained by among others the clergyman Jöns Hornaeus (1715–78). He thought that accusations of witchcraft often originated from the fact that some women were extraordinary housekeepers. They were envied and regarded as witches when they really were just good at tending animals, churning, baking and the like. Correspondingly, Hornaeus also reinterpreted suspicions of witchcraft as an explanation for ill fortune.

Untalented housekeepers readily blamed alleged witches for their misfortunes when they really should have blamed their own incompetence.⁴⁴

Knowledge about nature could also be used to examine critically stories about pacts with the Devil. In 1753, a young man called Erik Olsson Ernberg confessed that one night he had met with the Devil and made a pact with him. He was cross-examined extensively about every detail concerning his meeting with Satan and his testimony enabled the court to find inaccuracies in his story. Erik said that he could see what the Devil looked like because the moon was out. However, the court officials consulted a calendar and established that the moon had not been out on that particular night. Thus this voluntary confession was rejected and regarded as based upon an illusion or a dream. The young man protested but could not persuade his judges.⁴⁵ In the courts, this sceptical line of argument was also used to justify and explain acquittals of people accused of witchcraft. This shows that the secularisation tendencies were not just something rhetorical but that they also affected the actual treatment of magic by Swedish authorities.

The above developments did not mean, however, that the Swedish courts became uninterested in taking measures against the use of magic in general. The most common accusations dealt with what was legally termed 'superstition', in other words magic put to benign use, such as for curing diseases, fortune-telling and the recovery of lost property. Prosecutions involving these crimes actually became increasingly common during the eighteenth century, and in most cases the defendant was convicted and punished, usually with a fine or shorter imprisonment.⁴⁶ Charges of superstition were much easier to prove legally than accusations of witchcraft and diabolism, because superstition did not have to produce an effect to be punishable. It was sufficient to have merely performed a magical act. The defendants were also much more willing to confess to superstition than the more serious crimes of witchcraft and diabolism.⁴⁷ A certain degree of secularisation is also discernable in the legal treatment of superstition. Particularly from the end of the seventeenth century onwards, representatives of the courts expressed scepticism regarding the effectiveness of magical ceremonies and the activities of cunning-folk. In several cases from the eighteenth century harmless magic was actually redefined as fraud. This of course implied a sceptical attitude, but it also meant that the crime of superstition changed character from a religious offence against God to a crime directed against the people.⁴⁸

Stereotype versus reality

According to the stereotype, then, the country was finally free – or at least nearly free – from superstition. Yet at the same time, as already mentioned, there was an increase of court cases against superstition in Swedish secular courts. It should be noted, though, that the Church seems to have stopped

dealing with similar cases during the early eighteenth century, probably as a result of changes regarding the areas of responsibility of secular and Church courts.⁴⁹ The peak of the trials concerning popular magic came in the middle of the eighteenth century, and although little research has been done they probably continued a while into the nineteenth century.⁵⁰

In terms of legislation little substantial legal change regarding the crimes of witchcraft and magic took place until the late eighteenth century. A new law of 1734 retained the crimes of witchcraft and magic, while pacts with the Devil continued to be legislated for in an older royal ordinance. It was only in 1779 that the crime of witchcraft was abolished altogether, with reference to its obsolete and unenlightened character. King Gustav III, who formally initiated the legal reform, argued that witchcraft was ‘an absurd crime, invented by papist imaginations’. The same year, pacts with the Devil were legally redefined as ‘superstition’, in other words it was a pernicious but false belief. Subsequent attempts to reach agreements with Satan were to be judged according to the law concerning fortune-telling, magical healing and the like, which remained in legislation until 1864. Not even then was the crime of superstition removed from the law books. Instead, it was reformulated as an economic crime, in other words fraud, and placed in the statute dealing with deception and dishonesty. This paragraph was not removed until 1942.⁵¹

If further evidence were needed for the continuance of magical beliefs and practices, it can be found in the numerous ‘collections of superstitions’ made by members of the eighteenth-century elite. Amongst clergymen and other local officials, as well as travelling scientists of the Linnaean tradition, it became fashionable to record the manners and customs of ‘the people’, which in practice meant country folk rather than urbanites. Among descriptions of peasant weddings, folk costumes and Christmas traditions, one often also finds accounts of so-called superstition – sometimes quite extensive and detailed.⁵²

Among these allegedly superstitious people were, as has already been made evident, women. This understanding, too, is contradicted by the legal archive. During the eighteenth century the share of male defendants in court cases concerning magic increased. This can be explained by the fact that the rise in magic trials resulted from an increase in two specific categories: ‘superstition’ and pacts with the Devil.⁵³ The vast majority of those accused of making pacts with the Devil were men,⁵⁴ while women made up a small majority of those accused of ‘superstition’. In southern Sweden, between 1635 and 1754, 43 per cent of defendants in cases of superstition (in other words popular magic and divination) were male, and in a similar sample of 234 legal cases from central Swedish secular and ecclesiastical courts between 1599 and 1779, approximately 42 per cent of the defendants were male. Furthermore, in the latter survey more than 50 per cent of the people accused of being

professional *kloka* or cunning-folk were men.⁵⁵ This category of defendant was treated much more severely than those who were accused of trying magic for their own use, or those prosecuted for merely consulting cunning-folk. The *kloka* were regarded as the serious criminals responsible for promoting superstition and spreading false beliefs across the country.⁵⁶ Contemporary writers commented on this apparent gender distinction. The clergyman Jöns Hornaeus expressed worries about the increasing number of cunning-men in Sweden. In his childhood there had been a cunning-man in every province but now, he thought, there was one in every parish, and soon there would be one in each village. Hornaeus saw the male dominance among the cunning-folk as Satan's way of deceiving new groups of people. Earlier women had been deluded but now men were the targets.⁵⁷ Hornaeus's perception of the increase in male superstition was an exception though, and most of his contemporaries kept referring to superstition as something primarily female.

A third element of the stereotype was the routine-like ascription of superstition to the lower classes or 'the mob'. This connection may seem to be confirmed by the fact that the majority of the defendants in cases of superstition (as well as other kinds of magic) were from the households of peasants, artisans and soldiers.⁵⁸ Yet, at the same time, representatives of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie gladly devoted themselves to animal magnetism, spiritualism, fortune-telling and other similar activities. Especially in the late eighteenth century there was a strong interest for different kinds of mysticism in the higher social strata. This interest was channelled both within the framework of various orders, such as the Masons, and in other forms. The purpose of these activities was often of the same kind as the purpose of the benevolent magic or superstition tried in the courts, in other words the healing of sickness and the acquirement of knowledge about the future.⁵⁹ This elite mysticism was severely criticised by 'enlightened' groups, and the criticism was formulated very much in the same way as that against popular 'superstition'.⁶⁰ Furthermore, it does not seem to have been unusual that the very 'superstitious' ceremonies, for which farmers' wives and fishermen were prosecuted for, such as divination and love magic, were well known and even used by clergymen, the bourgeoisie and noblemen.⁶¹ In conclusion, the heavily emphasised connection between superstition and the common people in the writings of the eighteenth-century Swedish elite did not reflect reality. Nevertheless, the folklorist-romantics of the late eighteenth century reinforced the stereotypical image of superstition as a 'popular' phenomenon. It is the stereotypes formed in this period that still influence our understanding of magic in pre-industrial society today. Often we take for granted that witchcraft and superstition are connected to 'the people', or more specifically 'the country folk', when, actually, witchcraft and superstition seems to have been relatively common in the towns – or so it appears from late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Swedish court cases.⁶²

The purpose of the stereotype

Why was this stereotype so widespread and popular among the 'enlightened' elite? I think it served many purposes. As already mentioned, the stereotyped image of the 'superstitious other' constituted a negative opposite of enlightened goals and ideals. The point was not solely to put the Enlightenment movement and its advocates in a favourable light but also to establish what Enlightenment actually was. The philosophical current was certainly popular but also severely criticised and questioned. By repeatedly and emphatically demonstrating what Enlightenment definitely was not, Enlightenment was defined and described and the enlightened identity of its upholders strengthened. The continuous connection between superstition and certain social groups could also be used to discourage people from devoting themselves to superstition. The aim was hardly to influence the peasant women, old Finns and other groups stereotypically described. The image of the 'superstitious other' was conveyed in writings not often read by such people – writings such as books of travel, autobiographies, descriptions of certain districts and similar texts. Instead, the message was probably intended for the members of the elite, in other words the writers' own social class. According to the 'enlightened' elite, the 'superstitious other' were their inferiors in rank, education and intellect. Thus the threat of being associated with the simple mob, the silly country women or the barbaric Laplanders was presumably thought quite an effective instrument for keeping the elite from trying anything even vaguely superstitious. As different kinds of magic were actually used among the elite, the 'enlightened' writers no doubt felt the need for such a threat. In conclusion, the stereotype was meant to function as 'self-education' or even 'self-disciplining'.

A similar idea has previously been presented by Sigrid Brauner considering the development of the image of the evil witch in Germany during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and by Sofia Ling regarding the understanding of quackery in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Sweden. Both Brauner and Ling have concentrated on the gender aspect. Brauner argues that the image of the witch worked as a symbol of female unruliness, disorder and irrationality and that it was used to discipline both women and men. Men were also considered to harbour the negative, female 'witch characteristics' and thus it was essential to discipline not only the women but also the 'witch' within the men.⁶³ Ling discusses the fact that medical doctors often used expressions like 'the art of old women' or such like when describing so-called quackery. In other words, they depicted the activities of their competitors in the medical field as negatively feminine. This criticism was used against male as well as female 'quacks', and it seems that the attack on quackery was actually aimed more at male than female practitioners. Therefore, Ling regards the tight connection between old women and quackery as

mainly a message to male quacks. Furthermore, she stresses that the stereotype also functioned as a manifestation of the positive qualities of official male medical science.⁶⁴ I find the reasoning of Brauner and Ling most useful but, at least in the case of the ‘superstitious other’, gender must be combined with other social dimensions to produce an understanding for the role of the stereotype. The ‘superstitious old hags’ were part of a broader picture where not just female gender but also inferior social class and certain kinds of ethnicity were used as negative elements.

Finally, despite many confident declarations about how the world functioned and many bantering comments about the stupid magical beliefs of the common people, eighteenth-century Sweden was characterised as least as much by hesitation and insecurity as by confidence and certainty regarding natural and superhuman powers. Uncertainty was widespread not least within the elite.⁶⁵ A quotation by a dean, Olof Broman, well exemplifies this: ‘It is best to strike the golden mean and neither be too credulous nor too certain but to submit all of it to the Almighty Father in heaven.’⁶⁶ Considering this uncertainty the triumphant exclamations about all superstition being rooted out, or at least marginalised, may also be seen as hopeful self-encouragement. By expressing confidence in the ability of science to constantly increase knowledge and solve problems, and at the same time making fun of ‘superstitious’ traditions and beliefs, the ‘enlightened’ elite may have tried to counteract the profound uncertainty, which prevailed. The image of the almost extinct superstitions may even be seen as an optimistic incantation, trying to shape the world according to enlightened ideals.

Notes

- 1 See for instance Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge and London, 1974) and Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York and London, 1987).
- 2 John Putnam Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (Oxford, 1982); Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York and London, 1996).
- 3 See for instance Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*; Demos, *Entertaining Satan*; Richard Weisman, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Religion in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts* (Amherst, 1984).
- 4 The project is funded by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation.
- 5 For a general overview of Swedish trials in this period see Bengt Ankarloo, ‘Sweden: The Mass Burnings (1668–1676)’, in Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen (eds), *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 285–317; P. Sörlin, *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden, 1635–1754* (Brill, 1999).
- 6 Sentences 4/2 1671, Leksand, in C. G. Kröningssvärd (ed.), *Blåkulle-Färderna eller Handlingar om Trolldoms-Väsendet i Dalarne åren 1668–1673* (Stockholm, 1849), part 3, pp. 3–10; Birgitta Lagerlöf-Génétay, *De svenska häxprocessernas utbrottskede 1668–*

1671. *Bakgrund i Övre Dalarna. Social och ecklesiastik kontext* (Stockholm, 1990), p. 98; Lennart Andersson Palm, *Folkmängden i Sveriges socknar och kommuner 1571–1997, med särskild hänsyn till perioden 1571–1751* (Göteborg, 2000), p. 272. The population numbers are for the year 1699, but it can be estimated that they were approximately the same in 1671.
- 7 Lagerlöf-Génétay, *De svenska häxprocessernas utbrottskede*, pp. 121–5.
 - 8 Lagerlöf-Génétay, *De svenska häxprocessernas utbrottskede*, p. 100.
 - 9 Letter from Gustaf Duwall to the government 15 April 1671, *Blåkulle-Färderne*, part 3, pp. 11–14; Emanuel Linderholm, 'De stora trolldomsprocessernas upplösning i Sverige', *Historisk Tidskrift* (Stockholm, 1913), p. 169; Bengt Ankarloo, *Trolldomsprocesserna i Sverige*, (Stockholm, 1984), pp. 194–214.
 - 10 Letter from Gustav Elvius to bishop Rudbeckius 30 August 1670, Linderholm 82, Uppsala University Library; Lars Rudenmark, 'Trolldoms – och häxväsendet 1670–1671', in Gunnar Ekström (ed.), *Rättvik, 1:2. Socknen och kommunen* (Västerås, 1967), pp. 153, 156–7. This sceptical attitude was also voiced by the members of the council and the regency for king Charles XI; Bengt Ankarloo, 'Sverige: det stora oväsendet', in Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen (eds), *Häxornas Europa 1400–1700* (Lund, 1987), p. 256 (this is the original edition of Ankarloo and Henningsen, *Early Modern European Witchcraft*).
 - 11 Ankarloo, *Trolldomsprocesserna i Sverige*, pp. 128–9.
 - 12 Sentences 11–12/1 1671, Rättvik, Linderholm 82, Uppsala University Library.
 - 13 Sentences 11–12/1 1671, Rättvik, Linderholm 82, Uppsala University Library.
 - 14 Sentences 11–12/1 1671, Rättvik, Linderholm 82, Uppsala University Library.
 - 15 Göran Rosander, *Dalska arbetsvandringar före nya tidens genombrott* (Stockholm, 1976), pp. 18–20.
 - 16 Tiondelängder and avkortningslängder, Kammararkivet, Riksarkivet, Stockholm.
 - 17 Vigsellängder and doplängder C:3, Rättviks kyrkoarkiv, Uppsala landsarkiv, Uppsala.
 - 18 'Hushåll förreste till Pommern och annorstädes ifrån socknen skingrade', Husförhörslängder, AI:1, Rättviks kyrkoarkiv, Uppsala landsarkiv, Uppsala.
 - 19 Annotations by the clergy in Rättvik 2 February 1671, Linderholm 82, Uppsala University Library.
 - 20 Marie Lindstedt Cronberg, *Synd och skam. Ogifta mödrar på svensk landsbygd 1680–1880* (Lund, 1997), p. 268.
 - 21 Räkningar över kyrkans och de fattigas inkomster och utgifter 1670–1671, Räkenskaper för kyrka och fattigvård 1676–96 Lib:2, Rättviks kyrkoarkiv, Uppsala landsarkiv, Uppsala.
 - 22 Annotations by the clergy in Rättvik 21 April 1671, 24 October 1671, 2 November 1671, 3 November 1671, 12 January 1672, Linderholm 82, Uppsala University Library.
 - 23 Doplängder C:3, Rättviks kyrkoarkiv, Uppsala landsarkiv, Uppsala.
 - 24 Abraham Abrahamsson Hülphers, *Samlingar til en beskrifning öfver Norrland. Första samlingen om Medelpad 1771 samt fjerde samlingen om Ångermanland 1780* (Umeå, [1780] 1985), p. 43.
 - 25 Linda Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur. Synen på magi i 1600- och 1700-talets Sverige* [Neither God nor Nature. Attitudes towards magic in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Sweden] (Stockholm/Stehag, 1999), pp. 93, 259ff.
 - 26 Sten Lindroth, *Svensk lärdomshistoria. Frihetstiden* (Stockholm, 1975), p. 611.
 - 27 About this metaphor see for example Harry Payne, *The Philosophes and the People* (New Haven and London, 1976), p. 3; Margaret Iversen, 'Imagining the Republic: The Sign and Sexual Politics in France', in P. Hulme and L. Jordanova (eds), *The Enlightenment and its Shadows* (London and New York, 1990).

- 28 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 237ff.
- 29 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 238ff.
- 30 Magnus Abraham Sahlstedt, *Stora Tuna i Dahlom och Bergom minnes-döme. Thet är: Utförlig beskrifning och underrettelse om then ort och christlige församling som har namn af Stora Tuna och är belägen i Öster-Dahls Bergslagen* (Falun, [1742] 1955), p. 121.
- 31 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 239ff.
- 32 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 243ff.
- 33 See Marianne Särman, *Charlotta Taube och den sista häxprocessen. Ett 1700-tals drama i flera akter* (Stockholm, 1996).
- 34 *Svenska Akademiens ordbok över svenska språket*, vol. 15, Lund 1939 columns 3708, 3710.
- 35 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 243ff, 259ff.
- 36 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 261, 273ff.
- 37 Pehr Kalm, *Västgöta och bohusländska resa 1742*, ed. C. Krantz (Stockholm, [1746] 1977), p. 8.
- 38 Martin Pott, *Aufklärung und Aberglaube. Die deutsche Frühaufklärung im Spiegel ihrer Aberglaubenskritik*, Studien zur deutschen Literatur, vol. 119 (Tübingen, 1992), p. 1ff.
- 39 See Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 36ff and the references used there.
- 40 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 171ff, 293.
- 41 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 56ff.
- 42 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 84, 262ff.
- 43 Ordinary session at Folkare tingsrätt (district court) 28 April 1746, § 5, Kopparbergs läns häradsrättsarkiv V AI:15, Uppsala landsarkiv, Uppsala.
- 44 Jöns Hornaeus, *Berättelse om vidskepelse och häxprocesser i Ångermanland, Ångermanland-Medelpad. Årsbok för Västernorrlands läns hembygdsförbund* (Uppsala, 1935), p. 149; Manuscript A 1031 (transcript of 'Sannfärdig berättelse om det för 100 år sedan förelupna grufveliga trulldoms-oväsendet i Sverige ... författad af Jöns Hornaeus, comminister i Thorsåker'), Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm, pp. 63, 71, 75.
- 45 Ordinary session at Söderbärke tingsrätt (district court) 30 March 1753, § 53, Kopparbergs läns häradsrättsarkiv 36 AI:13, Uppsala landsarkiv, Uppsala. See also Soili-Maria Olli, 'The Devil's pact', in this volume.
- 46 Sörlin, *Wicked Arts*, p. 40ff; Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 148ff, 153ff.
- 47 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 199, 201.
- 48 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 204ff, 225.
- 49 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 149.
- 50 Sörlin, *Wicked Arts*, pp. 21, 40ff; Fredrik Skott, 'Trulldomsprocessen i Södra Ny', *Svenska landsmål och svenskt folkliv* 325 (1999) 111–42. Such accusations also occurred much later. Kristina Tegler, historian at Uppsala University, is currently working on a doctoral thesis about witchcraft, magic and popular culture in nineteenth-century rural Scandinavia. The focal point of the thesis is an in-depth case study of the actors in an unexpected recurrence of witchcraft tensions in Gagnef, Dalarna, in 1858.
- 51 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 66, 97ff (quote on p. 66).
- 52 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 273ff. See also K. Rob and V. Wikman (eds), *Johan J. Törners samling af vidskeppelser med inledning och anmärkningar* (Uppsala, 1946).
- 53 Sörlin, *Wicked Arts*, pp. 39ff, 119. See also Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 148ff.
- 54 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 144; Sörlin, *Wicked Arts*, p. 120; Soili-Maria Olli, 'The Devil's pact', in this volume.
- 55 Figures for southern Sweden from Sörlin, *Wicked Arts*, p. 120; figures for central Sweden extrapolated from Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 121ff, 125ff, 139, 309ff.
- 56 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 165.
- 57 Hornaeus, *Berättelse om vidskepelse*, p. 174ff.
- 58 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 134ff, 139ff, 144ff.

- 59 Carl Forsstrand, *Spåkvinnor och trollkarlar. Minnen och anteckningar från Gustaf III:s Stockholm* (Stockholm, 1913); Martin Lamm, *Upplysningens romantik. Den mystiskt sentimentala strömningen i svensk litteratur* (Enskede, 1920), part 2, ch. 1; Karin Johannisson, *Magnetisörernas tid. Den animala magnetismen i Sverige* (Uppsala, 1974), pp. 39ff, 102ff; Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 280.
- 60 Lamm 1920 ch. 2; Johannisson, *Magnetisörernas tid*, pp. 46, 93ff; Tore Frängsmyr, *Sökandet efter upplysningen. En essä om 1700-talets svenska kulturdebatt* (Höganäs, 1993), ch. 7; Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 280.
- 61 Sofia Svensson, *Vidskepelse under upplysningstid. En analys av Johan J. Törners Samling af vidskeppelser*, unpublished paper at the Department of History at Uppsala University 1997; Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 247.
- 62 Sörlin, *Wicked Arts*, p. 133.
- 63 Sigrid Brauner, *Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews: The Construction of the Witch in Early Modern Germany* (Amherst, 1995), particularly pp. 95, 108, 118.
- 64 Sofia Ling, 'Kvinnlig och manlig läkekonst. Om "kvacksalveri" och genus som analytisk kategori', in G. Andersson (ed.), *Bedrägliga begrepp. Kön och genus i humanistisk forskning* (Uppsala, 2000), p. 108ff.
- 65 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 86ff, 210ff, 265ff.
- 66 Olof Broman, *Olof Joh. Bromans Glysisvallur och öfriga skrifter rörande Helsingland*, ed. K. A. Haegermarck and A. Grape (Uppsala, 1911–49), vol. 1, p. 768ff.