

Outcasts or Scapegoats? A Portrait of the Victims of Witchcraft Trials in Early Modern Transylvania

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Article history: Received: 31.01.2021; Revised: 20.02.2021

Accepted: 07.05.2021; Available online: 30.11.2022.

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Abstract: Based on fifteen court records from the national Archives of Sibiu and Braşov, dating to 1692-1785, this paper will examine the main characteristics of the individuals that had been involved in witchcraft trials in early modern Transylvania (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries). Furthermore, this study will try to investigate the social mechanisms that encouraged the community to start seeking a scapegoat in order to provide an explanation for misfortunes that occurred in everyday life. Taking into consideration the fact that regional historiography showed little interest in the social dimension of witchcraft accusations, the present study will attempt to explore the social context for the trials, while contending with the well-known stereotypes about witches.

Key Words: witch, social tension, scapegoat, Transylvania

Rezumat: Fundamentat pe cincisprezece protocoale de judecată identificate în Arhivele Naţionale ale oraşelor Sibiu şi Braşov, articolul de faţă îşi propune să examineze caracteristicile indivizilor care au fost implicaţi în procesele de vrăjitorie din Transilvania modernă timpurie (secolele XVII-XVIII). Mai mult, acest studiu va încerca să examineze mecanismele sociale care au încurajat comunitatea să caute un ţap ispăşitor în vederea explicării evenimentelor nefaste care tulburau liniştea cotidiană. Având în vedere faptul că istoriografia regională nu a prezentat interes pentru dimensiunea socială a acuzaţiilor de vrăjitorie, analiza de faţă îşi propune să exploreze contextul social al proceselor, punând sub semnul întrebării stereotipurile legate de vrăjitoare.

Cuvinte cheie: vrăjitoare, tensiuni sociale, ţap ispăşitor, Transilvania

On October 10th 1699, Georg Schobel and his wife were officially accused of witchcraft by their neighbours, being consequently executed a couple of days later.¹ Blamed for the death of several animals but also for the poor harvest of the year in question, the couple sought to rehabilitate its reputation by filing a defamation lawsuit which turned, unfortunately, against them. This example perfectly illustrates the manner in which most witch trials occurred in early modern Transylvania (slander, followed by the attempt of the victims to clear their name, a sometimes brief trial, sentencing and execution), raising questions concerning not just judicial procedure, but also the profile of the victims involved in these court cases. These questions encourage an investigation regarding the social status of the defendants. The relevance of this approach is further highlighted by existing literature on witchcraft, which, despite its richness has failed to draw a sufficiently complex portrait of the witch.

Although, western historiography has long been interested in portraying the victims of the witchcraft trials, it has ultimately provided a rather stereotypical image of the witch. From the 1920s to the 1980s, scholars have been involved in a debate regarding the relationship between witch-hunting and gender, which polarized them into two different and competing factions – the exponents of gender studies and the anthropologists. On the one hand, feminists like Margaret Murray,² Andrea Dworkin,³ Barbara Ehrenreich, Deidre English,⁴ and Mary Daly⁵ argued that patriarchy and misogyny were the main causes of the witch trials, depicting witchcraft accusations as an expression of a war against women. The first, as well as the second wave of feminism distorted the

¹ Friedrich Teutsch, 'Sächsische Hexenprozesse' *Archiv des Vereins für Siebenburgische Landeskunde*, 39 (1915): 708-803, especially 712-731.

² In *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1921), Margaret Murray argues that witches were members of an ancient religion that preceded Christianity. Moreover, according to her hypothesis, this cult was rooted in a matriarchal agrarian civilization that managed to survive for centuries, only to be systematically destroyed by Inquisition.

³ In *Woman-Hating: A Radical look at sexuality* (New-York: Dutton, 1974), Andrea Dworkin claimed that nine millions women were burned as witches in Europe from Middle Ages to Modern times. The statement was hardly based on any historical evidence and the number mentioned by the author was clearly exaggerated.

⁴ Ehrenreich and English are known in the context of witchcraft studies for their claim that witch-hunting was a systematic attempt to eradicate midwifery, coordinated by male doctors. This hypothesis made the subject of their book, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses* (New-York: Feminist Press, 1973).

⁵ Mary Daly, stated in her book, *Gyn/Ecology – The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon, 1987) that witchcraft accusations focused primarily upon spinsters and widows; in other words, only women who rejected marriage or survived it were considered targets because they did not fit the standards of a patriarchal society.

views towards this subject by popularizing the idea that witchcraft was a gendered assault in which *maleficium* accusations were used in order to oppress women who did not comply with social norms. On the other hand, historians and anthropologists like Hugh Trevor Roper, Erik Midelfort, Alan Macfarlane and Keith Thomas have rejected the feminist perspective on witchcraft trials, based on the results of their own researches. Moreover, Robin Briggs claimed that he did not identify with the feminist theories because they are simply "irrational".⁶

Scholars seemed to have been exclusively focused on women as the main victims of the witch craze, ignoring or overlooking the male individuals that had been prosecuted for witchcraft. However, Alan Macfarlane, Erik Midelfort, William Monter and Eva Labouvie in their studies of witchcraft trials from Essex, Southwestern Germany, Normandy, Switzerland and Austria managed to identify and discuss several examples of men accused of witchcraft, presenting different hypotheses which could explain such rare and unusual cases. Macfarlane stated that men used to be accused of witchcraft only when associated with female suspects,⁷ while Midelfort considered that court trials involving males suspected of *maleficium* only took place in areas where the witch-hunt escalated into a mass panic and the standard stereotype of the female witch was ignored.⁸ William Monter's hypothesis is also particularly interesting, suggesting that men were involved in witchcraft cases only in areas where witchcraft was associated with heresy, such as Normandy.⁹ Eva Labouvie concluded that for the areas she studied, the percentage of men was, indeed, higher than that of women. A significant aspect of her case study was that men seemed to have been accused only for practicing popular magic, deeply rooted in agricultural life, and not for *maleficium*, the harmful magic¹⁰. Although these researches, based on quantitative analysis, tried to prove that the victim of the witch craze wasn't always the stereotypical rebellious and eccentric woman, they

⁶ Robin Briggs, 'Many reasons why': witchcraft and the problem of multiple explanation', in Jonathan Barry- Marianne Hester - Gareth Roberts (eds.) *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe-Studies in Culture and Belief*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 49-63.

⁷ Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England - A Regional and Comparative Study* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1970), pp. 127-158.

⁸ Erik Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562-1684. The Social and Intellectual Foundation*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1972), pp. 180-190.

⁹ William Monter, 'Toads and Eucharist: The Male Witches of Normandy 1564-1660', *French Historical Studies*, 20, nr.4, (1997), 563-565.

¹⁰ Eva Labouvie, 'Männer in Hexenprozeß. Zur Sozialantropologie eines männlichen Verständnisses von Magie und Hexerei', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 16, (1990): 56-78, especially 56-72.

only managed to highlight the fact that men were considered suspects solely in special or unusual circumstances.

In the 1990s, scholars tended to become more and more interested in studying the demonological texts and their manner of depicting the witch. In his seminal work, Stuart Clark discussed the view of the elite towards witchcraft by means of demonological texts written between the fifteenth and eighteenth century. The image he succeeded to conjure was that of a vile woman, capable of horrific acts and willing to sell her soul to the devil. Clark doesn't mention any textual reference to male witches, which may suggest that men were not part of the demonological discourse articulated by the clerical and secular elite.¹¹ Sigrid Brauner also tried to decipher the demonological discourses, examining the infamous *Malleus Maleficarum*, alongside some post-Reformation texts written by Martin Luther, Paul Rebhun and Hans Sachs.¹² Brauner argues that Sprenger and Kramer's treatise presents the first gender specific definition of the witch. In their view, the witch was a woman whose wickedness was rooted in her insatiable sexuality. As for the Lutheran trio – Luther, Rebhun and Sachs – the historian stated that it redefined the image of the witch according to the new moral and social values of Protestantism. Brauner concluded that in all of the four examined examples, the witch was a woman who failed to conform to the social, economic and religious demands of that time.¹³ Another contribution to this subject was made by Lara Apps and Andrew Gow, who argued, based on *Malleus Maleficarum* and other medieval demonological texts, that witchcraft was never sex specific and that witch accusations applied to both men and women.¹⁴ This book critiques historians' hypotheses about the victims of the witch trials by using statistics, challenging the marginalization of male victims by the exponents of gender studies. The main vulnerability of this book is that it tries too much to convince the readers that men were victims of the witch trials in the same proportion as women, adopting a reductionist attitude when analyzing the source material.

The early 2000s manifested a vivid interest in the visual culture associated with witchcraft. Charles Zika's books provided the most significant contribution to the study of visual aspects of witchcraft in

¹¹ Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons. The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.106-149.

¹² Sigrid Brauner, *Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews. The Construction of the Witch in Early Modern Germany*, (Massachusetts: Massachusetts University Press, 1995).

¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 1-29; pp. 111-121.

¹⁴ Lara Apps, Andrew Gow, *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 95-151.

early modern Europe. In *Exorcising our Demons* (2003),¹⁵ a collection of previously published articles, he managed to underline the connections between visual representations of the witch and textual sources of late medieval Europe, while in *The Appearance of Witchcraft* (2007),¹⁶ his second book, he focused primarily on woodcuts and engravings depicting witches. In all of the visual sources analyzed by Zika, the witch is a crone, almost always depicted naked, in the middle of an obscure act, either cannibalistic, or sabbatical.

In contrast to Western literature, Romanian historiography showed little interest in this subject of research. An exception to the rule is Șarolta Solcan's study, which relies on several collections of documents concerning witch trials from early modern Cluj,¹⁷ aiming to draw a portrait of the individuals accused of witchcraft.¹⁸ The research method was, however, flawed because Solcan chose to draw an image of the victims based on several roles associated with women – the daughter, woman, mother and wife. The categories selected by the historian were not particularly helpful, nor relevant when analyzing the source material, because they depict different stages in a woman's life, ignoring the features and the conduct that made a woman vulnerable to the accusation of witchcraft. Consequently, the results of this study were distorted by the poor choice of categories of analysis.

Taking into consideration the absence of research dealing with the social status and the profile of the victims of witch trials in Romanian historiography, along with the resilience of clichés concerning witches and witchcraft in European historiography, the aim of my research is to identify the characteristic features of the persons that were prosecuted for witchcraft in early modern Transylvania, more precisely at the end of the seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth century. Furthermore, this

¹⁵ Charles Zika, *Exorcising our Demons. Magic, Witchcraft and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*, (Leiden: Brill, 2003): 608.

¹⁶ Charles Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft. Print and Visual Culture in Sixteenth Century Europe*, (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2007): 320.

¹⁷ *A Magyarországi boszorkányperek oklevéltára* [Documents regarding Witchcraft Trials in Hungary], ed. A. Komáromy (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia 1910); *Magyarországi boszorkány perek* [Witchcraft Trials in Hungary] , vol. II, ed. F. Schram (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiado, 1970); *Magyarországi boszorkány perek*, vol. III, ed. F. Schram (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiado, 1982); *Magyar boszorkány perek. Kisebb forások* [Witchcraft Trials in Hungary. Selected Sources], vol. I (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiado, 1989); *A Magyarországi boszorkányság forrásai*, [The Sources of Witchcraft in Hungary], eds. A. Kiss- S. Pál-Antal (vols. 3, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiado, 2002).

¹⁸ Șarolta Solcan, 'Imaginea femeii pe baza documentelor proceselor de vrăjitorie din Transilvania din secolele XVI-XVIII' [The perception of women based on the witchcraft trials from Transylvania between the 16th and the 18th centuries], *Tyragetia*, vol. XII, nr.2, (2018): 45-53, especially 45-50.

study wishes to examine the social mechanisms that encouraged the community to start seeking a scapegoat in order to provide an explanation for the misfortunes that occurred in everyday life.

In order to determine whether any particular trades or crafts were more easily associated with the occult, this paper will consider a number of categories, including the accused's gender, their social and professional status, their marital status, and whether they were valued and respected members of the community or outcasts.

This study is based on fifteen court records from the years 1692-1785 that were identified in the National Archives of Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben) and Braşov (Kronstadt, Brassó). These court documents have been very helpful for this research since they provide for the identification of the victims' gender, age, occupation, and marital and family status. Additionally, the testimony of the witnesses during these trials proved to be highly helpful in explaining the victims' social behavior.

The court records represent an unique source, often difficult to interpret due to inherent ambiguities and formulaic language. The gender of the people prosecuted is mentioned in all of the selected trials, which makes it easy to estimate the percentage of women and men that had been accused of witchcraft, showing that the number of women was, indeed, higher than that of men. As I have previously demonstrated in already published work, six of the fifteen defendants in court cases were men, two of whom were charged along with their wives, and one was charged along with his daughter; twelve of the victims were women.¹⁹ The accused's age had to be deduced from the context and the clues provided by the witness testimony, however, as these records omit to indicate it. Therefore, if the victim's marriage is mentioned, it is reasonable to assume that the victim was an adult. The victim was often either married or a widow or widower. Georg Schobel²⁰ and Simon Schnell²¹ for example, were indeed married, as they were charged along with their wives, while Bieltz (the midwife), Rosa Kannegieserin,²² Dobra Câmpan²³ and Climen²⁴ were widows. As for the other analysed

¹⁹ Diana Ursoi, "Es war einmal eine alte Hexe..." - The Witch: between Stereotype and Historical Reality', in *Philobiblon*, XXVI/2 (2021): 187-196, especially 193-196.

²⁰ Teutsch, 'Sächsische Hexenprozesse', pp. 712-731.

²¹ Teutsch, 'Sächsische Hexenprozesse', pp.755-768.

²² Braşov, Arhivele Naşionale Române, Fund: Primăria Oraşului Braşov, Seria: Acte judecătoreşti. Registre instrumente contemporane de evidenţă, Registru protocol cu evidenţa cazurilor penale (1695-1703), [Braşov, National Archives of Romania, City Hall of Braşov, series: Judicial Acts, Protocol Registry: criminal records], pp. 8-25.

²³ Sibiu, Arhivele Naşionale, Serviciul Judeţean Sibiu Fondul Magistratul oraşului şi scaunului Sibiu. Judicat- Acte juridice neînregistrate [Sibiu, National Archives of Romania, Magistrate's records of the Municipality and District - unregistered acts].

individuals, it has been difficult to determine their marital status, since the archives remain silent from this point of view.

Often, the trials' protocols mention the victims' economic and professional status. The fifteen court cases selected for this study appeared to show that the victims were not poor, nor on the edge of poverty: Bieltz²⁵ was a midwife, Rosa Kannegieserin²⁶ was a laundress, Georg Berner²⁷ was a cooper, Peter Vosch²⁸ a doctor, while Georg Schobel²⁹ and his wife ran an inn. Bieltz's case perfectly illustrates how the occupation of the accused was a source of disagreement and envy among the members of the community which determined conflicts between the victims and their neighbours, as she was suspected of murdering several newborns, causing the towering rage of the community. Midwifery wasn't a profession that was respected at the time; on the contrary, women who chose to make a career from it were frequently rejected by the community since they were connected to the image of blood and filth. Prior to Maria Theresa's reign, the legal status of the midwife was also ambiguous; it wasn't until the Generale Normativum de re Sanitas was approved in 1770 that this status was clarified and made subject to professional standards. This decree mandated that before being granted a practice license, doctors, surgeons, pharmacists, and midwives would have their credentials thoroughly evaluated.³⁰

The Schobels had also carved out a life from a line of work that was typically looked down upon. In popular culture, the inn served as a hub for conversation, rumors, and gossip and was frequently associated with immorality and promiscuity. In his investigation of the reputation of innkeepers in eighteenth-century Germany, Michael Frank claimed that theologians and doctors of the modern age were responsible for the spread of a bad perception of people who ran taverns or inns. From their perspective, the innkeeper was the Devil's agent, attempting to manipulate the locals into spending their money on booze.³¹

²⁴ Daniel Nekesch-Schuler, 'Chronik', in *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Brassó*, Vol. IV, (Brassó, 1903): 225.

²⁵ Carl Göllner, *Hexenprozesse in Siebenbürgen* (Cluj, Dacia, 1971), pp. 126-135.

²⁶ Braşov, Arhivele Naţionale Române, [Braşov, National Archives of Romania], IV. D, No. 2, pp. 8-25.

²⁷ Sibiu, Arhivele Naţionale, [National Archives of Romania, Sibiu] unregistered acts.

²⁸ Ioan Albu, 'Procesul vrăjitoarelor din Chirpăr' [The Chirpăr Witchcraft Trials], *Sargetia*, XXVII.1 (1997/1998): 633-648; preluat din Biblioteca Muzeului Brukenthal, fondul 830.1 [The court protocol is archived in the Brukenthal Museum's Library, deposit 830.1].

²⁹ Teutsch, 'Sächsische Hexenprozesse', pp. 712-731.

³⁰ Sandor Szekely, 'On the preparation of the Hungarian Health Act of 1876', *Communicationes De Historia Artis Medicinae*, (Budapest, 1,1973), p.59.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Rosa Kannegiesserin, who was struggling to make ends meet, was working as a laundress, a job that was denigrated in the neighborhood because it was associated with arduous labor, filth, and occasionally prostitution. Laundresses often had to sell their bodies to survive while living in poverty, which damaged their reputation.³²

These materials draw attention to the intriguing fact that all of the vocations mentioned fall somewhere between service and craft (midwife, cooper, laundress, innkeeper, physician). These individuals either carried out their activities in settings that were viewed as promiscuous (such as inns and taverns) or in the privacy of their clients' homes (the midwife, the cooper). They did not create anything concrete, such as a pair of shoes, a coat, or a hat, that could be judged for its obvious merits or lack thereof. The customer's whims and moods dictated how the midwife, laundress, innkeeper, or doctor carried out their duties. Because of this, whenever something happened that disturbed the quiet of the community, they were the regular suspects.

We can therefore conclude that both men and women, of diverse vocations and of various, primarily mature ages, were victims of witchcraft trials. Additionally, they appear to have been accepted rather than shunned by the community as they provided helpful services to their neighbours, including delivering their children, healing their bodies, washing their clothes, mending their barrels, and offering them drinks. They appeared to have led absolutely ordinary, banal lives while married or widowed in the majority of the cases, leaving one to question why they had been picked out for these claims. What made them stand out from the rest of the community to the point of being suspected of witchcraft?

In order to answer this question, the testimonies of the witnesses prove to be the perfect sources because they describe the behaviour, the attitude, the language used by the suspects and last but not least, the relationship the victims had with their neighbours.

The testimonies of the witnesses suggest growing dislike and animosity within the community towards individuals who broke the rules and disregarded social norms. For example, the midwife from Sibiu, Bieltz was considered to be both vulgar and ill-mannered since she had always started quarrels with her neighbours. Georg Schobel found himself in the middle of a conflict when a soldier from the Imperial Army stated that his wife was disrespectful since she wouldn't serve him properly. Events escalated quickly, as Schobel was also suspected of poisoning as well as

³² Carole Rawcliffe, 'A marginal occupation? The Medieval Laundress and her work', in *Gender and History*, 21/1 (2009): 147-169, especially 163.

injuring his neighbour's animals. Catharina Henning³³ was suspected of stealing goods from her neighbours, compromising her reputation, even though evidence was not to be found. Peter Vosch, the physician of Chirpăr, was suspected of jeopardizing patients' health and ended up accused of witchcraft alongside his daughter who apparently owned "suspicious" books that once belonged to her mother, who was also suspected of being a witch, many years before the occurrence of these events. Therefore, the social tensions that characterized these communities may have resulted in interpersonal conflicts between neighbours, who started to accuse each other of horrific acts, such as infanticide, homicide, poisoning and theft. The study of these types of conflicts revealed that there were several features that weighed heavily when the accusation of witchcraft was formulated, such as: the attitude of the suspect, his/her language, criminal history, as well as family history. Neighbours had petty complaints against each other, and some individuals were generally disliked due to their cantankerous nature. However, even petty quarrels could escalate against a background ridden by social and political tensions. As we have already seen, most victims were members of the community, who lived a simple and normal life; it was their behaviour, their language and their attitude towards their neighbours that made them stand out.

A careful examination of the court records suggests that testimonies reflected some of the social and political tensions prevalent at that time. At the end of the seventeenth century and the first decades of the eighteenth-century Transylvania was undergoing major political changes as it became part of the Habsburg Empire. The new political authority was problematic especially for the Saxons because it encouraged a centralized system of governance which was directly prejudicing the economic, social and political status of the Saxon community. Although theoretically *Diploma Leopoldinum*, the legal document of the new administration, warranted the traditional system and liberties of the Three Nations and Four "received" Religions, in practice, the Monarchy attempted to weaken the medieval tradition. Sever Oancea, in his study regarding eighteenth-century Bistrița, stated that the Habsburgs had tried to dismantle the former political tradition by two means: firstly, by developing a legislation that would facilitate the access of Catholics to key political and administrative positions; and secondly, by intervening in the process of free elections.³⁴

³³ Sibiu, Arhivele Naționale ale României, Procesele verbale ale judicaturii, Fondul Judicaturii, Serviciul Judicaturii [Sibiu, National Archives of Romania, court records of the judge], p. 33, 33v-57v.

³⁴ Sever Oancea, 'Absolutism without Counter-Reformation? The Catholicisation of Public Town Offices in Bistrița in the Eighteenth Century', *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai Historia*, vol. 1, (2013): 71-93, especially 71-93.

By adopting this attitude, the Monarchy took over the reins of local politics and disrupted the former Saxon urban elite, by promoting a clientele devoted to the Empire's interests. István Németh, in his socio-historical analysis regarding Sopron, identified a similar situation: as soon as the Habsburg authority was established, individuals who aspired to succeed to urban public offices were conditioned by conversion to Catholicism.³⁵ Therefore, the Saxons of Transylvania, Lutherans par excellence, were in a rather peculiar situation determined by the depreciation of their religious and political status.

The political and confessional purposes of the Habsburg Monarchy were intertwined; on the one hand, they aimed to control access to the town offices, on the other hand, the authorities endorsed a campaign of conversion to Catholicism by accommodating exponents of the Jesuit, Piarist and Franciscan orders in the Saxon towns.³⁶ The Habsburg's strategy was a top-down conversion, in the belief that if they succeeded in converting the elites, the people would follow suit. Lutherans' attitude towards this attempt was skeptical, although some individuals, such as Johann Drauth, citizen of Braşov, out of political opportunism, proved willing to compromise.³⁷ Retrospectively, the Habsburg's policy of conversion was not a success, because it failed to achieve mass conversions to Catholicism, as well as to establish a powerful and educated Catholic elite.³⁸

The monarchy's interference in the administrative and religious matters of the Saxons was also expressed through the reorganization of the public urban space. For example, in Sibiu, the Evangelical Parochial Church had been eclipsed by the construction of several structures belonging to the Catholic administration.³⁹ The decision of hiding symbols of

³⁵ István Németh, 'Venerable Senators or Municipal Bureaucrats? The beginning of the transformation of the Estate of Burghers at the Turn of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Hungarian Historical Review*, 1-2, (2012): 49-78.

³⁶ Angelika Schaser, *Reformele iozefine în Transilvania și urmările lor în viața socială. Importanța Edictului de concivilitate pentru orașul Sibiu* [Josephine Reforms in Transylvania and their consequences in social life. The importance of the Edict of Concivility for the city of Sibiu], (Sibiu: Hora, 2000,) pp.1-16

³⁷ Johann Drauth's case was documented by Sever Oancea in his study 'Eyle und Errette deine Seel. Convertirea braşoveanului Johann Drauth la catolicism în anul 1713'[The conversion of Johann Drauth from Braşov to Catholicism in 1713] in Marius Oanță (ed.) *Studii de Istorie Ecclesiastică* [Studies of Ecclesiastical History], (Craiova: Sintech, 2018), pp. 59-77. According to Oancea, Drauth sympathized with the Catholic cause even before his conversion in 1713. However, it is implied that the conversion was a consequence of the Jesuits' pressure, not of his own conviction.

³⁸ There were only 93 Catholic clerks in the Saxon chairs and districts in the 1773, the rest of 707 were Lutherans, in Sever Oancea, 'Absolutism without Counter-Reformation?', p. 93.

³⁹ I would like to thank Maria Crăciun for this suggestion.

the traditional elite in the public area was not uncommon; Catholic churches were elevated in the center of Evangelical towns, while Lutheran places of worship were condemned to expropriation.⁴⁰

Transylvania's economy was also diminished since the Empire decided to raise the taxes and to control the imports and exports of the Principality. Moreover, the military and financial affairs of the country were subordinated to the central authority, a situation that practically depreciated Transylvania's status.⁴¹

The Saxons had been opposed to the new authority from the beginning, since the Empire's policy encouraged religious intolerance and loss of the Saxon community's former political status.⁴² Not surprisingly, in 1688 the citizens of Braşov started a riot against the presence of an administration which seemed to act against the values of the traditional political and judicial culture, as it tried to hand over the city to the Imperials before the Treaty of Sibiu was signed.⁴³ Unfortunately for the citizens of Braşov, the riot had bloody consequences for its leaders who were executed on September 19th 1689 in the town's square. Moreover, only a couple of months earlier, on April 21st 1689, a great part of the inner structure of the Evangelical church of the city was destroyed in a fire allegedly set by the Habsburg army, an action perceived as a revenge for the town's resistance.⁴⁴ In order to dismantle the opposition that grew stronger, the Habsburgs sought to make use of the ethnic and religious

⁴⁰ Paul Phillippi, 'Ecclesia Theutonicorum Ultrasilvanorum', in *Altera*, 1, (1995): 125-151, especially 145-146.

⁴¹ Schaser, *Reformele iozefine*...p. 35.

⁴² Opinions in historiography on the attitude of the Saxons towards the new administration are divided: Judit Pál stated that generally, setting aside the Braşov riot, the German community of Transylvania had a pro-Habsburg orientation, in Judit Pál, 'Integrarea Transilvaniei în Imperiul Habsburgic la sfârşitul secolului al XVII-lea' [The Integration of Transylvania in the Habsburg Empire at the end of the Seventeenth Century], in F. Bréda, V. Trifesco, L. Ignat-Coman, G. Altarozzi (ed.) *Austrian Influences and Regional Identities in Transylvania*, (Bratislava: AB-ART, 2012), pp. 18-26; Angelika Schaser, on the other hand, affirmed that initially, the new administration was embraced by the Saxons, because they shared the same German origin; it was only later when they became opposed to the new system, as a result of the Monarchy's decision to make the policy of centralization more visible, in Schaser, *Reformele iozefine*, p. 33; last but not least, Sever Oancea claimed that the Saxons had always been concerned over their political and confessional status, once Transylvania became part of the Empire, in Oancea, 'Absolutism without Counter-Reformation' pp. 72-94.

⁴³ Edit Szegedi, 'Răscoala de la Braşov din 1688 - între absenţa şi prezenţa administraţiei' [The Braşov riot of 1688- between the presence and the absence of administration], in F. Bréda, V. Trifesco, L. Ignat-Coman, G. Altarozzi (ed.) *Austrian Influences and Regional Identities in Transylvania*, (Bratislava: AB-ART, 2012), pp. 10-18.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

plurality which characterized Transylvania and started to rule under the aegis *divide et impera*, encouraging and amplifying conflicts between Saxons and Hungarians especially.⁴⁵

Consequently, the new imperial administration determined a major shift of the political culture; the Saxon cities were no longer able to self-administrate or to preserve their individual character, since they became part of a greater mechanism, the Empire. Moreover, the first decades of the eighteenth century turned out to be extremely challenging from an epidemiological point of view as well;⁴⁶ in Sibiu, the plague affected the community on a large scale taking 405 lives only in 1710, according to the records of the Evangelical church.⁴⁷ Many citizens of Sibiu sought to escape from the danger of the plague and left town in order to settle in a remote area, which determined a significant demographic decline in town. Georg Franz Kreybich, an artisan from Bohemia who transited Transylvania at that time, noted in his journal that on August 8th 1710 the plague made its first victim in the town of Sibiu and in a single night it spread quickly, taking fifteen lives. The very next day, the Imperial General, Jean Louis de Bussy-Rabutin ordered the healthy members of the community to leave town in order to save themselves.⁴⁸ The emergence, as well as the rapid spreading of the plague occurred when the Saxon towns and hinterlands were overcrowded due to the quartering of the Imperial soldiers.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Magyari András, 'Ocuparea militară a Transilvaniei la sfârșitul secolului al XVII-lea' [The Military Occupation of Transylvania at the end of the 17th Century], in Ioan Aurel Pop, Thomas Năgler, Magyari András (ed.) *Istoria Transilvaniei* [The History of Transylvania], (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română. Centrul de Studii Transilvane; Editura Episcopiei, Devei și Hunedoarei, 2016), vol. 2, pp. 349-350.

⁴⁶ The plague epidemic of the eighteenth century was not, however, the first to be faced by the Saxon community. It seems that the Saxons were the only group in Transylvania to have written specific sermons regarding the plague, the earliest examples dating from the sixteenth century. The authors of these sermons were two contemporary Lutheran priests, Damasus Dürr and Christianus Schesaeus, who believed that the epidemic was a divine punishment for the sinful behaviour of the Saxons, in Sabina Ganea, *Reception of the Plague in Transylvania. Official Discourses from the 16th -17th Centuries*, Master of Arts, Manuscript, Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest, 2016, chap. 3.2.

⁴⁷ Paul Cernovodeanu, Paul Binder, *Cavalerii Apocalispuului* [The Horsemen of the Apocalypse], (București: Xilex, 1993), p. 132.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

⁴⁹ General Commissary Antonio Caraffa insisted on placing numerous imperial troops in the entire territory of Transylvania to protect the area from external threats, but also to better control the internal affairs. The defense system was mostly coagulated around towns as Sibiu, Brașov, Bistrița, Cluj, Chioar et caetera, in Magyari, 'Ocuparea militară a Transilvaniei', p. 350.

One may say that for the rural population, from which most of the examples of this study come from, it was the economic and the social change determined by the settlement of the imperial troops in and around Saxon towns that disturbed its life, causing tensions and anxiety, rather than the political developments which impacted on the functioning of the Saxon towns.

The animosity between the soldiers of the Imperial Army and the locals is suggested in the court records as well. Five of the court protocols selected for this study depict conflicts between soldiers and members of the local community, resulting in accusations of witchcraft. Johann Aegermont, lieutenant in Jung Printz Hannover's cuirasser's regiment, accused Georg Schobel and his wife of witchcraft based on their refusal to serve him wine in their inn. The record states that Schobel's wife had also insulted the lieutenant and his fellows several times, using words and threats that made soldiers believe that the woman had wicked powers.⁵⁰ Lieutenant Georg Roth accused Simon Schnell's wife of witchcraft, implying that the woman could turn into different animals.⁵¹ In Bielz's court record, a witness stated that a soldier complained that the midwife wanted to poison him by offering him bewitched food.⁵² Georg Herberth was also accused of witchcraft by an Imperial soldier, who believed that the suspect intended to kill his horse by using magic tricks.⁵³ Lastly, Catharina Henning was accused of witchcraft by Georg Rußbaumer, imperial soldier, since she was caught stealing goods from him. In his statement, Rußbaumer said he believed that the suspect was intending to bewitch his goods in order to harm him.⁵⁴ The soldiers of the Habsburg Empire might have been well aware of the opposition of the Saxon community towards Imperial administration, since they manifested such a suspicious and cynical attitude in connection with local individuals. As for the local individuals, they might have feared and marginalized the exponents of the Imperial Army, since the new authority disrupted the harmony of their everyday life.

The conflicts described in these documents seem to conform to a recurrent pattern. Misunderstandings and outright disagreements can occur either between a member of the community and a stranger/ an outsider, or between two members of the same community, in other

⁵⁰ Teutsch, 'Sächsische Hexenprozesse', pp. 712-731.

⁵¹ Ibid. pp.750-755.

⁵² Göllner, *Hexenprozesse in Siebenbürgen*, pp. 126-170.

⁵³ Teutsch, 'Sächsische Hexenprozesse', pp. 175-180.

⁵⁴ Sibiu, Arhivle Naționale ale României [Sibiu, National Archives of Romania], vol. 33, p. 33v-57v.

words, between a local and a soldier, or between two neighbours. One can assume that the accusation of witchcraft was preceded by a series of conflicting verbal interactions that involved insults and curses, followed by the death of several community members, as well as other events that disturbed the peace of the small community. The neighbours displayed the tendency to blame the suspect, once identified, for past disturbing incidents in order to support the accusation of witchcraft, in other words, they adopted what Reiner Walz calls, a *passive interpretation of events*.⁵⁵ Consequently, the individuals accused of witchcraft already had a bad reputation, a fact which proves that, for the early modern society, honour and reputation were extremely valuable.

This research highlighted that the modern witch was not always the typical crone, who lived on the margins of society, both feared and pitied by her neighbours. The court protocols revealed that individuals who ended up being accused of witchcraft were both male and female, who managed to earn a living and to be part of the community. It was their behaviour, attitude and vulgar language that made them stand out. These features, related to the unfavorable events that occurred at that time in Transylvania, turned these individuals into the perfect scapegoats.

⁵⁵ Reiner Walz, 'Schimpfede, Weiber, Frauen in lippischen. Beleidigungsprozesse des 17 Jahrhunderts', in Heide Wunder, Christine Vanja (ed.), *Menscher, Frauenzimmer. Frauen in der ländlichen Gesellschaft, 1500-1800*, (Göttingen, 1996), p. 180.