INTRODUCTION

When Margretha Bittelmayr, the wife of a councillor and town scribe of the prince-bishopric of Eichstätt, was arrested for witchcraft on 15 October 1626, she was in her early fifties.¹ Over the next month, she was interrogated by a team of witch commissioners which had been operating in the principality since about 1614. By the time she was executed on 20 November 1626, she had confessed to a familiar range of witch activity: being seduced by the Devil, desecrating the host, making fun of the Virgin, attending witches' sabbaths, performing weather-magic, and exhuming the bodies of dead children.² In addition to these witchcraft activities, Bittelmayr confessed to attacking five children (murdering at least four of them), killing three head of cattle, inducing madness in a maid-servant, and scattering her powder on a wall to harm any living thing that went by.³ She also said that she had entered the cellars, animal stalls and bedrooms of several neighbours to damage property and harm the owners.⁴ And she named thirty other Eichstätt inhabitants as her accomplices.⁵

As an older woman, Margretha Bittelmayr would seem to have been a conventional early modern witch. She was certainly typical of her alleged accomplices in the witch sect persecuted in the prince-bishopric and particularly its capital, also called Eichstätt, between 1590 and 1631. During the course of the witch-hunts there, between 240 and 273 people were arrested for witchcraft or, rarely, slandered as witches. Over 85% of them were women (see Table 1). Many of the convicted witches in the territory, regardless of gender, also seem to have been aged forty or more.⁶

¹ StAN, Hexenakten 45 (M. Bittelmayr), 15 October 1626 (a.m.).

² Ibid., 15 October (p.m.), 16 October (a.m. and p.m.), 23, 24, 26, and 27 October, and 9 and 10 November 1626.

³ Ibid., 17 October (a.m. and p.m.), 19 and 21 October 1626.

⁴ Ibid., 12 and 13 November 1626.

⁵ Ibid., 29, 30 and 31 October, and 2, 5, 6 and 7 November 1626.

⁶ It is not possible to give a precise age for every witch-suspect, even though each one was asked by the interrogators when he or she was born (StAN, Hexenakten 49 (Interrogatory), Question 2—see Appendix 1 “The Interrogatory of 1617”). In many cases the *inquisitio* no longer exists or that part which records the age, being near the beginning of the document and therefore most vulnerable to damage, is missing. Several suspects were certainly under forty years old when they were arrested: the brothers Georg and Enders Gutmann and Maria Mayr were in their twenties (StAN, Hexenakten 48 (G. Gutmann), 13 December 1617 (p.m.), (E. Gutmann), 14 December 1617 (a.m.), and (M. Mayr), 23

Bittelmayer and the other Eichstätt witches would therefore seem to have been German counterparts of Margery Stanton, the exemplar of the typical witch cited by Keith Thomas, or Barbe Mallebarbe, the sixty-year-old witch of Charmes whose ‘familiar’ story sets the scene for Robin Briggs’s *Witches and Neighbours* (1996).⁷ Not only were they generally old and female like these witches, but they confessed to committing the same range of harm against their neighbours’ bodies, children, property and livestock.⁸

Table 1. Numbers of women and men suspected of witchcraft in the prince-bishopric of Eichstätt, 1590–1631.⁹

Year	Women		Men		Unknown sex	
	Min.	Max.	Min.	Max.	Min.	Max.
1590–2	19	26	–	–	–	–
1593–1602	7	8	2	2	–	2
1603	20	20	–	–	–	–
1604–16	10	10	–	1	–	–
1617–31	155	172	27	32	–	–
Total	211	236	29	35	–	2
	(88%)	(86%)	(12%)	(13%)		(1%)

June 1618 (p.m.)); and Margretha Geiger, Valtin Lanng, Anna Wunder and Walburga Knab were in their thirties (ibid., (M. Geiger), 22 March 1618 (a.m.), (V. Lanng), 23 March 1618 (a.m.), (A. Wunder), 9 July 1620 (a.m.), and (StAN, Hexenakten 45 (W. Knab), 29 July 1621 (a.m.)). Statements of age and years of marriage in the *inquisitiones* or *relations*, the existence of adult children, references to being ‘old’ (although this usually meant ‘the elder’ rather than being an indication of age), and references to events that had happened to an individual some years before her interrogation, suggest that most of the Eichstätt suspects were over forty.

⁷ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 662–3; and Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of Witchcraft* (London: HarperCollins, 1996), pp. 17–19. Briggs claims that whilst Barbe cannot be regarded as a typical witch because no witch was typical, her story was a familiar one (p. 19).

⁸ Children and livestock bore the brunt of Stanton’s aggression according to *A Detection of damnable Driftes* (London, 1579), reprinted in Marion Gibson (ed.), *Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 41–9 (here pp. 45–8), although she was only tried for killing a gelding and a cow (*Calendar of Assize Records: Essex Indictments: Elizabeth I*, ed. J.S. Cockburn (London: HMSO, 1978), 1063). Barbe’s catalogue of injury and murder included more adult victims than Stanton or Bittelmayer, but her ire was effectively directed at livestock and children too, Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, p. 18.

⁹ Fuller details are given in “Appendix 1: Distribution of witch trials in Eichstätt:

Explaining the vulnerability of older women to accusations of witchcraft in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has preoccupied historians for the past four decades. A common functionalist interpretation of this vulnerability, drawn from the work of Keith Thomas and Alan Macfarlane, is that a witchcraft accusation was symptomatic of a prior enmity between the alleged witch (generally a woman who existed on the margins of society) and her victims which could no longer be resolved through traditional means.¹⁰ In this context, one might argue that Bittelmayer's confessions of harmful witchcraft reveal that she was not at peace with her neighbours. As this witchcraft was directed primarily at children, cattle and a single woman, one could also argue that, like Ursula Grön in Augsburg, Bittelmayer had come to embody contemporary fears about the sexual rapacity of crones and their desire to destroy fertility and new life.¹¹ Given the conjunction of the agrarian crises, epidemic diseases, inflationary cycles and political instability which beset Europe at this time, one might further claim that Bittelmayer's trial had become a metaphor for the ills of contemporary society.¹² I do not think, however, that Bittelmayer or the other Eichstätt witches were very much like Stanton, Barbe or Grön. That they were all older women is largely coincidental. Nor do I think that they were prosecuted either as scapegoats for the misfortunes which had plunged Europe into crisis or as a means of exorcising the hag-ridden nightmares which apparently disturbed early modern Europeans.

One of the problems of much witchcraft historiography, especially that available in English, is the tendency to concentrate on individual trials and small-scale witch panics rather than systematically examining large-scale witch-hunts. By large-scale hunts, I do not mean episodes of prosecution involving the rather low figure of ten or more arrests popularized by Brian Levack.¹³ If one compares supposed local witch

gender", in Jonathan Durrant, "Witchcraft, Gender and Society in the Early Modern Prince-bishopric of Eichstätt" (PhD thesis, University of London, 2002), pp. 298–303. The table includes cases which did not end in the execution of the suspect.

¹⁰ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 672–4, and Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study* (1970; 2nd ed., London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 192–8.

¹¹ On Grön as an archetypal old crone, see Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 170–2.

¹² Wolfgang Behringer claims that witch persecution might be seen as a metaphor for these ills in "Weather, Hunger and Fear: Origins of the European Witch Hunts in Climate, Society and Mentality", *German History*, 13 (1995), pp. 1–27 (p. 27).

¹³ Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-hunt in Early Modern Europe* (2nd ed., London: Longman, 1995), p. 174.

sects to other marginalized groups persecuted by early modern authorities—recusants, gypsies or vagrants, for example—this figure appears small in scale. In 1582, the year in which the Essex magistrate Brian Darcy conducted his witch-hunt in St Osyth and its neighbouring villages, sixty-two other inhabitants of the county were presented at just one of the many quarter sessions for non-attendance at church, many of them known recusants with strong connections to one another.¹⁴ This figure dwarfs the total number of suspected witch-felons (just ten, most arrested on Darcy's authority) tried at both Essex assizes of that year.¹⁵ I mean, rather, the hunts in Cologne and Westphalia, Würzburg, Bamberg, Ellwangen or Eichstätt in which hundreds of people found themselves arrested and executed for witchcraft over a short span of time.

The historiographical problem with smaller witchcraft episodes is that they involved fewer people. It was clear to contemporaries how Stanton, Barbe, Grön or the witches prosecuted in St Osyth were situated in their communities.¹⁶ The witchcraft narratives produced during the investigations and trials were consequently relatively coherent and detailed. It is therefore a fairly straightforward exercise to locate the conflicts which produced the accusations of witchcraft and identify the agenda of the local hostile authority, like Darcy or the *prévôt* of Charmes, who helped pursue the witch or witches. Once the witch had been prosecuted (although not always convicted), the panic tended to dissipate providing a very clear end to the story.¹⁷ Much of our understanding of the persecution of witches, especially their emergence at this moment in history and the predominance of women among the accused, rests on these studies of isolated cases, and interpretations

¹⁴ ERO, Q/SR 79/100 and 81/31.

¹⁵ *Calendar of Assize Records: Essex Indictments: Elizabeth I, 1300–1341 passim.*

¹⁶ Despite the existence of W.W.'s extensive pamphlet, *A true and just Recorde, of the Information, Examination and Confession of all the Witches, taken at S. Oses in the countie of Essex* (London, 1582; repr. in Gibson (ed.), *Early Modern Witches*, pp. 75–124), and various sessional, assize and contextual sources in the Essex and Public Record Offices, a thorough analysis of the St. Osyth trials is wanting. The witches' confessions as reported in the pamphlet have, however, been used as examples in the work of Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 36–7, 57–9 and 85–8, and Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 104–5 and 167–70.

¹⁷ Thomas does not alert his readers to the failure to successfully prosecute Stanton, but this is noted by Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, p. 83.

drawn from these studies have found their way into some recent work on the larger German witchcraft episodes. Rainer Walz's typology of conflict for the Lippe experience of witch persecution, for example, is firmly grounded in the work of Macfarlane and Thomas, and expands it in ways which mirror developments in witchcraft scholarship in Britain and the United States.¹⁸ It is clear from these latter studies of witchcraft in places like Rye and Salem, as well as Lyndal Roper's and David Sabean's work on German material, that the conflicts which might have led to accusations of witchcraft need not have been located in a refusal of charity or the failure to meet traditional social obligations. They could also have been located in personal psychological or wider political or religious tensions.¹⁹

A variety of approaches to the study of witch persecution in different national historiographies can only promote a deeper understanding of this complex phenomenon. The dominance of perspectives which focus on small episodes of witch prosecution and the conflicts which precipitated them has, however, tended to obscure the fact that most witchcraft narratives were not so easily packaged. Most witches, for example, were *not* accused by the alleged victims of their harmful magic. Three women in the prince-bishopric of Eichstätt, a mistress and her maid and an unfortunate neighbour, were certainly arrested on the basis of accusations which followed neighbourly conflict, and a handful of other trials which were not directly related to the main phases of persecution in the territory may have originated in similar circumstances.²⁰ Although one cannot now reconstruct the sequence of

¹⁸ Walz's typology is discussed and contextualized in his *Hexenglaube und magische Kommunikation im Dorf der Frühen Neuzeit: Die Verfolgungen in der Grafschaft Lippe* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1993), pp. 1–65.

¹⁹ On Rye, see Annabel Gregory, "Witchcraft, Politics and 'Good Neighbourhood' in Early Modern Rye", *Past and Present*, 133 (1991), pp. 31–66. The classic account of the Salem trials is Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976). On personal tensions, see Lyndal Roper, "Witchcraft and Fantasy in Early Modern Germany" and "Oedipus and the Devil", both in ead., *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 199–225 and 226–48 respectively, and David Warren Sabean, "The Sacred Bond of Unity: Community through the Eyes of a Thirteen-Year-Old Witch (1683)", in id., *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 94–112.

²⁰ StAN, Hexenakten 48 (A. Widman of Berching) and (K. Pronner), and Hochstift Eichstätt Literalien 298, ff. 131r–v. The wisewoman Magdalena Pöbl who had identified the alleged witch in this latter case was reported by the *Hofrat* (court council) to the authorities of the district of Obermässing, but her fate is not known.

events which led to the Eichstätt persecutions in 1590 and their resumption in 1603 and again in 1617, it remains possible that one or other phase could have been initiated by an accusation of witchcraft rooted in neighbourly tension. The ‘witch’ slanders alleged by Hans Bühler and Hans Frech suggest that neighbours were also able to manipulate local fears of the witch in their disputes.²¹ As far as one can tell, however, the vast majority of the Eichstätt witch-suspects, like Margretha Bittelmayr, were denounced by other witches under interrogation and convicted on the basis of their own confessions produced under torture.²² These confession narratives reflected the anxiety of the witch-suspects struggling to understand the situation in which they found themselves. This situation did not correspond to any preconceptions they may have had about the stereotypical characteristics of witches and how they came to be accused because they were ‘middling sort’ women who had been caught up in pure heresy trials rather than the isolated witch episodes commonly recounted in pamphlet literature. Unsurprisingly, the witches’ testimonies were frequently confused and contradictory.

If the local inhabitants of Eichstätt rarely brought accusations of witchcraft, they also refused the role of witnesses against their suspected neighbours. Very few witnesses were brought before the witch commissioners in Eichstätt to testify to the truth of the witches’ stories of harm, and those who did appear before them invariably failed to corroborate the suspects’ narratives. On the other hand, family members and neighbours did attempt to help and support the witch-suspects through the provision of food, drink, company and messages of good will. The Eichstätt situation does not therefore correspond to other examples of witch-heresy trials, like those in the Basque region, where the local population helped foment panic.²³ The same may be argued of the terrible persecutions in Ellwangen, Würzburg and Bamberg, all territories which had close political and religious connections to Eichstätt, despite the tendency of some of the historians of these episodes to dwell

²¹ These slanders are discussed in Peter Oestmann, *Hexenprozesse am Reichskammergericht* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1997), pp. 562 and 565.

²² Bittelmayr had been denounced by twenty convicted witches and one suspect who was still in custody when she was arrested, StAN, Hexenakten 45 (M. Bittelmayr), 15 October 1626 (a.m.).

²³ For a summary of the witch persecutions in the Basque region, including the role of villagers in forcing confessions, for example, see “Part One: The Context” in *The Salazar Documents: Inquisitor Alonso de Salazar Frías and Others on the Basque Witch Persecution*, ed. Gustav Henningsen (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 46–81.

on the few instances of harm which they inevitably encompassed.²⁴ In these circumstances one cannot simply assume that the witches' tales of harmful magic were rooted in real social conflicts, either in Eichstätt or elsewhere, or that these particular women were denounced because they embodied the characteristics of the frightful old crone.

Reading and understanding the confused and dislocated confession narratives produced during the Eichstätt witch persecutions is made more difficult by the fragmentary survival of the interrogation transcripts and other contextual sources. Much of this material will be discussed in detail in the following two chapters because an analysis of it is pertinent to the reconstruction of the background and course of the witch persecutions in the principality. Briefly, however, the material consists of two interrogatories, one from 1611 and another created in about 1617 (of which there are two copies), a quantity of interrogation transcripts and related material (abstracted information, judgements and sentences) mostly produced between the end of 1617 and the summer of 1631, periodic lists of witches who had been executed, and lists of denunciations laid against a few named individuals. Alongside a number of wills and a handful of bills submitted by the executioner, there also exist a bundle of correspondence relating to the legality of Maria Magdalena Windteis's incarceration for witchcraft and substantial material generated during an investigation into the treatment of Maria Mayr in custody. All of this material is contained in the fascicles Hexenakten 42–49 held in the Staatsarchiv in Nuremberg. Other material includes a register of felonies (the “Urfehdebuch”) which runs from early 1603 to late August 1627, and registers of baptisms, marriages and deaths from the period 1589–1618 which were accurately collated and cross-referenced towards the middle of the twentieth century by

²⁴ On the Ellwangen trials, see Wolfgang Mährle, “‘O wehe der armen seelen’. Hexenverfolgungen in der Fürstpropstei Ellwangen (1588–1694)”, in Johannes Dillinger, Thomas Fritz and Wolfgang Mährle, *Zum Feuer Verdammt. Die Hexenverfolgungen in der Grafschaft Hohenberg, der Reichsstadt Reutlingen und der Fürstpropstei Ellwangen* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1998), pp. 325–500, H.C. Erik Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562–1684: The Social and Intellectual Foundations* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1972), pp. 98–112, and Wolfgang Behringer, *Hexenverfolgung in Bayern. Volksmagie, Glaubenseifer und Staatsräson in der Frühen Neuzeit* (3rd ed., Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1987), pp. 224–9. Friedrich Merzbacher, *Die Hexenprozesse in Franken* (2nd ed., Munich: Beck, 1970) covers both Würzburg and Bamberg, whilst the persecutions in the latter prince-bishopric are the subject of Britta Gehm, *Die Hexenverfolgung im Hochstift Bamberg und das Eingreifen des Reichshofrates zu ihrer Beendigung* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2000).

Franz Xaver Buchner.²⁵ There is at present insufficient material on the witch commissioners who interrogated the suspects in Eichstätt in the 1610s and 1620s. About ninety interrogation transcripts survive in complete or substantial form for the period from 1617; the suspect cannot, unfortunately, be adequately identified in all cases. The large quantity of prosopographical information contained in the trial transcripts and other material does, however, allow the partial reconstruction of the complex networks of kin, neighbours and friends enjoyed by the witch-suspects and their families.

In this book, I concentrate on the trial transcripts from 1617. This is because only one transcript survives for each of the two earlier phases of persecution (1590–2 and 1603). Generally, the interrogations followed the pattern of the interrogatory, but the witch commissioners had to deviate from this framework when a suspect proved reluctant to continue, retracted part or all of her confession, or began to tell of her heretical or criminal acts out of sequence. The problems inherent in reading the confused narratives of the suspects, particularly at the beginning of a trial, and in the uneven survival of the sources are compounded by the fragmentary nature of the confession narratives. These were produced over periods of time ranging from a few weeks to a decade and were not therefore always logical or coherent. All of the narratives were also constrained by the assumption of guilt and the emphasis on reproducing the story of heresy and harm familiar to the witch commissioners from their reading of contemporary demonology.

What is clear from the surviving material is that the stories of diabolical seduction, the descriptions of the sabbath and the tales of malevolence confessed by the Eichstätt witch-suspects were the products of their own imaginations and their diabolizations of ordinary experiences of village or small-town life. Confession narratives produced in this way cannot be read like freely-given accusation narratives because they represent not accounts of real episodes of alleged malevolent witchcraft located in actual conflicts, but the fantasy and knowledge of the witch-suspect under duress. This knowledge could have been gained from a vast array of sources: the leading questions of the interrogators; the sentences publicly pronounced on other convicted witches; the sermons commonly delivered at times of persecution; the gossip circulating about

²⁵ Franz Xaver Buchner, “Eichstätter Familienbuch 1589–1618” (compiled 1930s–1950s).

the suspects and their activities; and the pamphlets, broadsheets and plays which publicized sensational stories.²⁶ The analysis of the witches' own statements produced for the interrogators requires a fundamentally different methodology to that generally adopted in the reading of the witness depositions. I have drawn on the historical anthropology developed by David Sabean in *Power in the Blood* (1984) which allows one to focus on an analysis of the language used by the witch-suspects rather than the function of the witch-accusation in order to get beyond the conventional narrative of conflict.

In the first section of this book, I reconstruct the dynamics of witch prosecution in the prince-bishopric of Eichstätt and consequently the ways in which the suspects constructed convincing narratives of witchcraft activity. In this section, I also describe the types of people who were arrested for witchcraft in the principality. As I have noted already, many of those prosecuted for witchcraft in the territory were older women like Margretha Bittelmayer, but that is not the whole story. They tended to be women, also like Bittelmayer, from households which were highly integrated into the secular political structure of the town of Eichstätt. They also tended to be closely related through kinship, client-patron and friendship networks. This high level of integration sets the women arrested in Eichstätt apart from their contemporaries in Essex, Lorraine or Augsburg. Their predominance among the denounced witches demands an explanation, but the current analyses of the gender and age of the stereotypical witch seem insufficient for this case because they rely on an image of the witch as marginalized and easily targeted. A political and economic analysis of the context of the persecutions in Eichstätt does not provide any clues for the presence of these women either. The disproportionate numbers of female witches could only have resulted, I will argue, from the aggressive implementation of the Catholic Reformation by a zealous group of clergymen around the

²⁶ In London, for example, theatre audiences and readers had a broad range of images of witches and other magic practitioners to draw on in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, among them Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* (late sixteenth century), Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (c. 1606), and the play *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) based on Henry Goodcole's pamphlet *The wonderfull discovery of Elizabeth Sawyer, a Witch* (London, 1621; repr. in Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, pp. 299–315). On the construction of plausible testimony in letters of remission, see Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), and in murder trials, see Malcolm Gaskill, "Reporting Murder: Fiction in the Archives in Early Modern England", *Social History*, 23 (1998), pp. 1–30.

figure of Prince-bishop Johann Christoph von Westerstetten (r. 1612–37). Witch persecution was one method among many deployed to bring the subjects of the bishop back within the fold of orthodox Catholicism.

Analysis of the individuals denounced as witches also offers a further intriguing set of data. A considerable number of men were named among the alleged accomplices of each witch. Margretha Bittelmayer's list of thirty accomplices included the names of twelve men.²⁷ In two cases, men accounted for over 70% of the accomplices allegedly seen at the witches' sabbaths.²⁸ Yet the proportion of men among those arrested for the crime was only about 12% (see Table 1). The witches under interrogation were not resorting to a stereotype of the old female witch when asked to name their accomplices. One has to ask why they failed to do so when the image of the old crone was, according to Lyndal Roper, prevalent at this time.²⁹ One also has to ask why the witch commissioners failed to treat denunciations of male and female witches equally, even though they diligently recorded and sometimes cross-referenced and tabulated the denunciations laid against alleged male accomplices.³⁰

In the second section of the book, I examine in detail the networks of association which are to be found in the witch interrogations and confirmed in prosopographical research. Too often studies of witchcraft episodes miss the opportunity to interrogate their sources for information about everyday experiences, particularly those of women, in early modern Europe. They seek to explain the rise and decline of witch persecution, the contexts of individual accusations, and the proportion of women among those accused of witchcraft. These are important areas of research, but what they tell us of early modern life is limited. We have a set of circumstances, for example, which may have led to episodes of witch prosecution, but did not usually do so. Even in Eichstätt only four of the nineteen administrative districts

²⁷ StAN, Hexenakten 45 (M. Bittelmayer), 29–31 October and 2 and 5–7 November 1626.

²⁸ StAN, Hexenakten 45 (P. Porzin), 20 and 22–25 September 1627, and (H. Stigeliz), 23–25 and 27 May 1628.

²⁹ Roper, *Witch Craze*, p. 162.

³⁰ The secretary to the *Hofrat*, Paul Gabler, was the subject of at least twenty-two denunciations listed and tabulated in three documents by the witch commissioners, StAN, Hexenakten 43 (P. Gabler—denunciations), 48 (P. Gabler—denunciations) and 49 (P. Gabler—table of denunciations). Gabler was never arrested. He did, however, attend at least one session of witch interrogation, StAN, Hexenakten 45 (P. Porzin), 10 September 1627 (a.m.).

experienced witch persecution on any scale.³¹ We also have a confused and contested set of explanations why women were more likely to be accused of witchcraft.³² The general comments about mentalities in early modern society and culture which conclude these studies tend to be framed negatively because the narratives which make up witchcraft prosecutions had to be presented to and by the witch hunters in that way. Although the existence of agrarian and fairy cults and sorcerers are acknowledged on the peripheries of Europe, early modern society at its centre and to the west seems inflexibly uniform.³³ It is portrayed as a world of rigid social and moral boundaries upheld by law, religion and custom. Most people it appears bought into this world out of necessity and projected their fears of disorder onto witches as they also did onto vagrants and marauding soldiers. In presenting witchcraft episodes negatively, however, historians have merely read the court records in the way that accusers, judges, theologians and pamphleteers wanted them to be read. Accusers wanted justice, judges wanted clear convictions, theologians wanted to eradicate a heretical sect, and pamphleteers wanted to sell stories which resonated in the market-place. But the witches' narratives were never so clear-cut. They had to balance the knowledge of their innocence with sometimes unbearable psychological and physical pressure brought to bear during an interrogation.

Whilst the suspected witches told conventional stories of harmful magic and witchcraft activity, they had to ground their narratives in real relationships and events for them to be sustainable over the many weeks and sometimes months or years of an interrogation. They also had to be plausible to the witch commissioners, if not to the suspects themselves. The leading questions of the commissioners forced the suspects

³¹ The intensity of persecution in different parts of Europe is demonstrated neatly in Table 4.5 "The severity of witch-hunting in Europe" in Wolfgang Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts: A Global History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), p. 150.

³² The range of explanations why women bore the brunt of the witch persecutions is too broad to summarize here. A useful discussion of the limitations of these explanations may be found in Lara Apps and Andrew Gow, *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 25–42.

³³ Early examples from an increasingly broad literature include Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal; ed. Gregory Elliott (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1990); and Gustav Henningsen, "The Ladies from Outside: An Archaic Pattern of the Witches' Sabbath", and Antero Heikkinen and Timo Kervinen, "Finland: The Male Domination", both in Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen (eds.), *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 191–215 and 319–38 respectively.

to describe experiences of acrimonious neighbourhood disputes, but we should not be seduced into thinking that they inevitably drew on real episodes of conflict in the construction of their narratives. The relationships which emerge from the Eichstätt witch-trial transcripts were, in fact, mostly positive. These positive experiences can be reconstructed in part from the kinship and godparentage networks which can be traced through the baptismal and marriage registers for the town of Eichstätt. They are confirmed by examining the language used by the witches in their confessions to describe their relationships with their neighbours and the activities they engaged in together. For each of the Eichstätt witches, the final summarized confession (the *Urgicht* or *relatio*) written up in the “Urfehdebuch” provides basic details ranging from name, marital status, age and husband’s status to the number of denunciations laid against her by other suspects and the crimes of which she was convicted. In most of the cases where substantial or complete records of interrogation exist, they still include the *inquisitio*, the transcript of verbal exchanges between the suspect and the commissioners written up after each session of interrogation. How soon after each session one cannot know, but it is likely that the scribes were anxious to complete the record as soon as possible. The *inquisitiones* were working documents which contained the denials, confessions, revocations, recapitulations, supplementary questions, exclamations of pain during torture and later scribal annotations; they were used as the point of reference for future interrogations which may well have recommenced after lunch or early the following day.³⁴ It was therefore necessary to have them to hand. One can assume therefore that the degree of contamination by the authors of the *inquisitio* was not as great as in the edited *relatio*. There must have been some errors of mistranscription or memory (although very few are apparent in the extant transcripts), and demonological language was sometimes inserted where a colloquial word or phrase had probably been used by the defendant. It is doubtful, for example, that a suspect would have consistently used ‘maleficia’ for her alleged acts of harm. The main influence the commissioners and the scribe would have had on the witches’ confessions would have been in shap-

³⁴ Margretha Bittelmayer was arrested on Thursday 15 October 1626 and experienced morning and afternoon sessions of interrogation on that day and the two following days. Sunday was always a day of rest for the commissioners, but the questioning resumed on the Monday, StAN, Hexenakten 45 (M. Bittelmayer), 15–17 (a.m. and p.m.) and 19 December 1626.

ing the testimony according to the interrogatory, the list of standard questions asked of all the defendants, and the supplementary questions they decided to insert into the interrogation to clarify elements of the narrative.³⁵ Simply answering the questions with ‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘so many times’ and so on would not have made a convincing confession narrative. What the interrogators wanted and pressed for was detail, and that detail remains in the extant *inquisitiones*. It is personal and frequently unique and it is the basis for the four chapters which tease out the quality of the relationships which the witch-suspects had with each other and with their kin and neighbours.

As well as being generally positive, the witches’ relationships with their neighbours reveal a dynamic rather than passively gendered society. As we might expect, men tended to associate with other men, and women with other women, outside the confines of the household. Yet they did not always do so in ways which conformed to either the prescriptions of patriarchy or the social theology of the reformist Catholic clergy. Men of the secular political elite seem to have engaged regularly in drinking with their peers rather than accepting social norms and curfews which militated against drunkenness. Their wives and daughters seem to have been similarly unconstrained by normative behaviour. Rather than teaching sexual continence and driving unwed mothers away, these women facilitated sexual liaisons among unmarried young people and helped pregnant young women procure abortions. Margretha Bittelmayer even confessed to having a sexual relationship with another woman before she met her husband.³⁶ As Laura Gowing has observed, the problem of women’s consent to and desire for sex is ‘one of words and texts’.³⁷ A woman’s sexual point of view was almost always articulated in ways which wrote women’s agency out of the sexual narrative or equated it with whoredom or witchcraft. Despite this observation, however, Gowing’s study remains fundamentally an analysis of deep early modern anxieties about sex which were apparently shared by women and men. Most early modern women it seems were unable to articulate their enjoyment of sex outside of marriage and on the few occasions when, like Agnes Baker, they did present themselves as sexually

³⁵ Two copies of the interrogatory used from about 1617 exist, StAN, Hexenakten 49 (Interrogatory, working copy) and (Interrogatory, fair copy).

³⁶ StAN, Hexenakten 45 (M. Bittelmayer), 16 October 1626.

³⁷ Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 82–3.

active, they were censured by the authorities.³⁸ The Eichstätt witch-trial documentation, because it did not concern itself with fornication and adultery directly, reveals a less anxious view of sexual behaviour at the level of the ‘middling sort’. This view is reinforced by the presence of probable concubines in priestly households and the failure of couples of local elite status to get married properly. Whilst honour and patriarchy were important to the structure of early modern legislation and behaviour generally, personality, agency and the proximity of families which had lived alongside one another for generations seem to have softened attitudes towards the indiscretions and lifestyles of one’s more intimate neighbours.

Not all of the relationships which emerge from the trial records were so positive. It would be unusual to find a society in which petty disagreements and clashes of personality did not manifest themselves during a witch persecution on the scale of the one which afflicted Eichstätt. A minority of witches did not always maintain good relations with their neighbours, but that does not mean that they were inevitably suspected of witchcraft. As I will argue, these bad relationships had little bearing on the course of the witch persecutions. There is, however, another more serious set of negative relationships which was identified and investigated by the witch commissioners. Early in the course of their persecution of the witch sect, the commissioners uncovered the abuse of the witch-prisoners by their warders. One might expect this abuse to occur against prisoners remanded for secular crimes, such as theft, but the abuse of the Eichstätt witch-suspects is troubling. Later medieval and early modern demonologists were ambiguous about the powers retained by the witch after she fell into the hands of justice. On the one hand, Heinrich Kramer argued that the witch lost all her powers when she was arrested. On the other, he was careful to note the danger of acceding to a convicted witch’s request to place a foot on the ground before the execution in case her powers returned and she killed many people.³⁹ There remained a possibility therefore that the incarcerated witch might harm those around her. Yet the Eichstätt warders regularly,

³⁸ Ibid., p. 104.

³⁹ Heinrich Kramer (Institoris), *Der Hexenhammer: Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Wolfgang Behringer, Günter Jerouschek and Werner Tschacher (Munich: Deutscher Taschen Verlag, 2000), III/2, 8, p. 652. This translation is a considerable improvement on Montague Summers’s English translation *Malleus Maleficarum: The Classic Study of Witchcraft* (1928) and is used in this book because of its accuracy.

and by their own confessions, verbally tormented, physically assaulted and sexually abused the witch-suspects in their charge.⁴⁰ Why they ran the risks of harm from the witch and punishment from the witch commissioners is a question which needs to be asked.

The commissioners had been alerted to the possible abuse of the warders' custodial powers by Maria Mayr's confession that she had 'gotten pregnant'.⁴¹ It is unlikely that they expected to uncover anything more than a simple case of corruption. Apart from the systematic abuse of prisoners, however, the commissioners soon discovered that some neighbours regularly attempted to maintain contact with the suspects (despite the risks to themselves), and that Maria's pregnancy had apparently been planned by her husband Georg, a former court scribe, with the help of the wife of the town hall caretaker and one of the bedwatchers who worked in the town hall at night. If she could prove herself pregnant, Maria would have been spared further torture and may well have hoped to secure a pardon, if not an acquittal. Maria's case is the subject of the final chapter of this book.

⁴⁰ StAN, Hexenakten 48 (Hans), (W. Huetter), (J. and B. Halm), (Anderle), (Bartle) and (L. Fendt).

⁴¹ StAN, Hexenakten 48 (M. Mayr—investigation), 23 November 1618 (a.m.).