CHAPTER SIX

HEALTH

If marriage was not an expectation in a relationship, then a pregnant woman had three possible courses of action: she could have the child and hope for the best; she could attempt to abort the child; or she could kill it at birth. It is difficult to determine the rate of infant murder in Eichstätt. Only one case of infanticide seems to have been prosecuted successfully between 1603 and 1627.¹ The rate of single motherhood is likewise difficult to uncover, as are the local attitudes towards it. Motherhood seems to have made Kunigunda Pronner’s situation more precarious than it had been, keeping her out of employment. Her situation only stabilized after the death of her third child, and then through the employment offered by Anna Widman. What the witch-trial transcripts do reveal, however, is the presence of at least one woman in the community who possessed a reputation for terminating unwanted pregnancies. This woman, Anna Harding, had other medical skills too. The transcripts also show that women of all classes used folk medicine as a complement or in preference to the prescriptions of authorized medical practitioners like barbers and physicians. Another medical figure who dominates the earlier interrogations of 1617 to 1619 is the midwife. This is partly because at least two among the first witch-suspects arrested at that time were practising midwives, partly because midwives entered one confession as the godmothers of the suspect, and partly because midwives possessed knowledge of where the bodies of children’s corpses were buried.

¹ Margretha N. (known as Brot Wölfin) had had sex ‘with persons of easy virtue’ at Schernfeld and borne a male child in a cowstall. Margretha had then thrown the baby down a farmer’s well or water-hole where it had been found eight days later, DiöAE, “Urfehdebuch”, ff. 57r–58r. The date of this case is not given, but it immediately precedes that of Hans Öder who was executed on 2 September 1606, ibid., ff. 58v–60r.
From her own testimony, it would appear that Anna Harding was trusted as a healer by the women of Eichstätt. Her particular skill, as she informed her interrogators, was to control menstruation in women, both married and ‘young’ (meaning unmarried);\(^2\) she could reduce its flow where it was too heavy or induce it where it ‘failed to materialize’.\(^3\) This she accomplished by dispensing advice that certain herbs (‘Alamander’, ‘Muselblue’ and ‘Galgans’) be taken mixed in a drink an appropriate number of times.\(^4\) Occasionally there was a medical reason why a young woman’s periods ceased. The daughters of Father Johann Reichard’s cook and Margretha Hözler both sought Harding’s advice because they had ‘lost’ their periods at times of fever.\(^5\) It may be, however, that such explanations for the cessation of menstruation were mere pretexts for securing an abortion. Hözler’s daughter was also listed by Harding among those unmarried women whom she had helped because they were concerned that they might be pregnant.\(^6\) The others included Silbereis’s daughter, Maria Mayr, Valtin Lanng’s maid with the red frizzy hair who had slept with a cobbler, the daughter of a bricklayer of Obereichstätt, and Eva (daughter of the Old Spiegel and wife of Biebel Lenz).\(^7\) Several of these women were arrested for witchcraft. Eva Lenz, for example, would have been the Biebel Lenzin who had allegedly had sex with Paul Gabler at a nocturnal gathering of witches; and Maria Mayr’s case is the subject of the next chapter.

Whilst Harding seems to have had no problem helping young unmarried women with their menstrual problems, her attitude to potential clients who were married seems to have been mixed. Harding claimed to have refused to aid the gravedigger’s wife who had also come to her wanting an abortion. Harding’s alleged words to this woman are vague and difficult to interpret: ‘You have a husband, and may perhaps have

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\(^2\) StAN, Hexenakten 48 (A. Harding), 21 February 1618 (a.m.).

\(^3\) Ibid., 21 February 1618 (a.m.).

\(^4\) Ibid., 21 February 1618 (a.m.). It is difficult to determine what plants these might be. ‘Galgans’ might, however, be a local name for the mandrake as that plant is associated with both the gallows and medicine.

\(^5\) Ibid., 21 February 1618 (a.m.).

\(^6\) Ibid., 18 June 1618 (a.m.).

\(^7\) Ibid., 21 February 1618 (a.m.), 10 March 1618 (p.m.), 14 March 1618 (p.m.), and 18 June 1618 (a.m.).
a large body, and because of that want to abort the birth’.8 One could argue, for example, that the words hint at adultery: the wife needed to abort the foetus because it did not belong to the husband. Or perhaps she did not want any more children. Whatever the woman’s motive, Harding’s refusal to help was based on the fact that she already had a husband whose presence could legitimate any birth. The same marital circumstances did not, however, prevent Harding from helping Barbara Apotheker. Secretly (outside Apotheker’s butcher’s shop), she gave Barbara herbs which would stop ‘her husband’s thing’, his penis, operating.9 In dealing with her clients, therefore, Harding seems to have worked to her own ethical code. She had no moral problem helping unmarried women to abort foetuses, and she does not seem to have been short of clients for advice on this practice. This suggests that in the moral economy of the town, which was based on pragmatic solutions to temporal problems, women regarded abortion, at least through herbal medicine, with less abhorrence than bearing the illegitimate offspring of men they did not, perhaps, expect to marry. Possibly the women who sought Harding out also took comfort in the idea that abortion prior to the moment of quickening was not murder because the foetus did not yet have a soul, although Harding did not refer to this possible understanding of her activities.

To the witch commissioners the abortions, regardless of the predicament of the girl involved and the theology which underpinned quickening, seem to have been nothing but murder which would explain why they persistently returned to Harding’s activities as an abortionist. Harding must have been aware of the interrogators’ view of her activities. She had begun to tell of them in response to the admonition: ‘one does not want to know what good she did, but she should tell what evil she caused, and whom she murdered with her art and diabolical work, of which one has good knowledge that she has given drink to young people and others many times, doubtless to no good purpose’.10 In her subsequent tales of helping women with their menstrual problems, Harding revealed her understanding of the ambiguous moral status of abortion. She was careful to maintain, however, that what she had done

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8 Ibid., 10 March 1618 (p.m.). This is the only occasion in Harding’s confession when she seems to have used the verb ‘to abort’ (‘abtreiben’).
9 Ibid., 4 May 1618 (a.m.).
10 Ibid., 21 February 1618 (a.m.).
was not diabolical in origin.\footnote{Although she was describing morally dubious and criminal actions, Harding denied, in answer to a specific question about it, that she used diabolical ointments and powder in her medicine, ibid., 21 February 1618 (a.m.).} In Harding’s descriptions of the abortions one can identify an ongoing conflict between pre- and post-Tridentine Catholicism, between secular pragmatism and strident religiosity, which the prince-bishop’s new footsoldiers (the Jesuits, the organizers of the lay confraternities and the witch commissioners) could only hope to win by forceful means. In this respect the attack on witches was clearly linked not only to the contemporary vigorous suppression of Fastnacht and similar celebrations, but also to the rooting out of traditional practical, if illicit, solutions to personal dilemmas.\footnote{It was no doubt also related to local decrees against unsuitable marriages, idle servants, drinking during worship and fornication among single people, such as “Benewal beuelch in alle deß Stifß Eyßtett Ambter abgangen datirt den 2 Octob Ao 1620. 1. Der Ehehalten Vnzeittig aussehen. 2. abschaffung Vnnutzen gesindleins vnd 3. Trinckhens vnder dem Gottesdienst. 4. Auch forniciationes der ledigen Personen vnd dero straffen bet.,” in Hochstift Eichstätt Literalien 59 “Kopialbuch, die unter Bischof Martin und seinen Nachfolgen erlassenen Generalbefehle und Ausschreibungen enthaltend. 1457–1626”, ff. 372v–373r.}

Whether Harding also understood the gravity of her attempt to make Apotheker impotent is not clear. That she helped his wife at all suggests that she regarded the hindrance of generation by men as within the community’s moral compass. It was one example of the precautions and prophylactics probably sought by many couples or wives hoping to avoid pregnancy and may not have been as morally ambiguous as the abortion of what would, in the case of the gravedigger’s wife, have been regarded as a legitimate child.\footnote{For brief examples of contraception in practice, see Rublack, The Crimes of Women in Early Modern Germany, p. 148, and Henry Kamen, European Society 1500–1700 (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 30–1.} It is interesting that the witch commissioners did not try to diabolize the attempt to cause impotence. In the demonology of Heinrich Kramer, for example, dismemberment and other means of preventing a man from performing sexually were prominent among the harmful activities of the witch.\footnote{Kramer, Malleus, II/1,6–7, pp. 417–28.} If the interrogators had forced Harding to translate the herbal remedy into a diabolical powder in this instance, this would have been the only extant case of a man being made impotent by witchcraft in Eichstätt. In fact the commissioners did not force Harding to diabolize her activities as an abortionist either. Like much of the prostitution to which she
confessed, the abortions were already a serious enough crime without the addition of the Devil.\footnote{15 In the Constitutio criminalis Carolina of 1532, abortion carried the death penalty, Evans, Rituals of Retribution, p. 29.}

The witch commissioners did, however, attempt to look further into the three deaths of children which Anna Harding described when she was first asked what harm she had done with her diabolical ointment and powder. She had already voluntarily ascribed the deaths of a small selection of livestock (cattle and pigs) to her use of such substances which she said that she had helped to make from the eucharist. As the owner of these animals, she was the victim of her own malevolence, and all but one of these murders had happened whilst she was still resident in her home town of Jettingen.\footnote{16 StAN, Hexenakten 48 (A. Harding), 19 February 1618 (a.m.).} Independent witnesses were unnecessary in these instances. In contrast, the children who died at Harding’s hand were not her own. Two of them had been brought to her by their mothers (one from the town of Eichstätt and the other from the village of Adelschlag); the third she seems to have visited in the parents’ home, also in the town.\footnote{17 Ibid., 20 February 1618 (a.m.).} In Harding’s narrative, the mothers had clearly sought her help because she had a reputation for healing. In these cases, she had been unsuccessful in curing the children. Given the quality of medical knowledge at this time, it is not surprising that a healer acknowledged some failures. That the children had died suited Harding’s purpose at this point in her confession narrative, to supply enough relevant information to forestall the application of further torture. Harding did not, however, state that any of the deaths were the result of witchcraft—in each case she had smeared an ointment on an already sick child, but it had died\footnote{18 Ibid., 20 February 1618 (a.m.).}—nor did she confess that she had acted out of enmity (indeed, the mothers had sought her out) or at the instigation of the Devil. The witch commissioners were left to infer these details for themselves.

When the interrogators looked for witnesses, however, they encountered difficulties which Harding may have anticipated. The father of the first child whom she had treated about two years before her arrest was himself now dead. Yet the scribe recorded in the margin to the transcript ‘befindt sich’ (‘found’; ‘confirmed’), without stating how the
commissioners had reached that conclusion. The witnesses to the second death were either also deceased or keeping a low profile, or the commissioners were unable or unwilling to send someone to Adelschlag with a summons. No judgement is recorded for this alleged crime. In the case of the third death, the interrogators were provided with very few substantial details. Harding claimed that five years previously she had attempted to cure a tall baker’s daughter who was then eight years old and lived in the Western Quarter. At first Harding confessed that she had died. On further questioning, she said that she couldn’t be sure if she was dead. At that point the interrogators drew the session to an end. There were numerous bakers in Eichstätt, many of whom lived in the Western Quarter, and presumably many more daughters of bakers (see Appendix 2). Faced with a lack of detail, the suspect’s determination not to add to her testimony on this point, and the probable reluctance of witnesses to come forward, the commissioners simply had to give up any attempt to substantiate the claim of murder. Despite her many self-confessed capital offences as a healer, therefore, Anna Harding was convicted of several counts of harmful witchcraft against her own livestock and only one (dubious) count of harmful witchcraft against others.

Other suspects’ confessions of acts of malevolent witchcraft follow much the same structure as those offered by Anna Harding. Livestock and children bore the brunt of the witch’s alleged malice, although neighbours might sometimes also be attacked. In many cases the human victims were already sick and the witch merely hastened an inevitable death. Frequently these victims were also relatives of the aggressor, and the harmed livestock would often belong to the witch too. Enmity was rarely cited as a motive to attack others—the few instances where it was I have discussed in chapter 3 and even in these the victims do

19 Ibid., 20 February 1618 (a.m.). The scribes were inconsistent about the details they recorded in the margins beside the confessions of malevolent witchcraft after the interrogation of witnesses. In the case of Barbara Haubner, the scribe sometimes wrote ‘beidt sich nit’ or ‘beidt sich’. Occasionally he added further information. Next to Haubner’s confession that she had killed the tall Liendel’s daughter at six weeks, the scribe noted ‘confirmed, but it had only been three weeks old’, StAN, Hexenakten 48 (B. Haubner), 3 February 1618 (p.m.).

20 This was not the same tall baker’s wife, Elisabeth Deth, who lived in the Eastern Quarter and was executed on 10 April 1620, DiöAE, “Urfhebedbuch”, ff. 181v–182v.

21 StAN, Hexenakten 48 (A. Harding), 20 February 1618 (a.m.). Harding’s amended testimony was not recorded in the transcript of this session of interrogation, but added to the margin by the scribe at a later date.
not seem to have thought that they had been attacked out of malice. As I also observed in the same chapter, witchcraft was unlikely to be identified as the cause of one’s misfortune. If the trial transcripts do not tell us about communal conflicts which led to aggression through witchcraft or other means, they do inform us about medical practice and community bonds.

Anna Harding was a healer. She was not a cunning or wisewoman like Magdalena Pößl who confirmed that Jesse Vockher’s child had been killed by Georg Claßner’s wife. She did not perform any of the ancillary functions of such an individual (finding lost objects, divination or unwitching), nor did she employ spells, blessings or amulets. What she offered was the pharmaceutical advice one would expect from a chemist or herbalist. She prescribed herbs which had a proven record for the job in hand. I have not been able to identify ‘Alamander’, Harding’s herb of preference for inducing menstrual flow.\(^{22}\) It may have been a plant similar to alexanders (horse parsley). According to Nicholas Culpeper, alexanders ‘is usually sown in all the gardens in Europe, and so well known, that it needs no further description’.\(^{23}\) Among its many virtues, he recorded that ‘it is good to move women’s courses, to expel the after-birth, to break wind, to provoke urine, and helpeth the strangury’;\(^{24}\) it was to be taken for medicinal purposes bruised in a little wine. Harding advised her clients to take the same or a similar common herb for at least one of the conditions noted by Culpeper (restoring menstrual flow) and in the same method. Whilst she might have obtained the herb for a client, however, she did not prepare it for them. That was a job which required no great skill or secrecy and could be left to the woman concerned. Despite the social and gender distances between the Eichstätt prostitute and healer and the London

\(^{22}\) ‘Alamander’ cannot be the plant allamanda as that was only named after a Swiss botanist of the eighteenth century. It is also not a name which occurs in either dictionaries of early modern German, for example, Frühneuhochdeutsches Glossar, ed. Alfred Götze (7th ed., Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1967), or histories of herbal medicine, such as Dieter Beckmann and Barbara Beckmann, Alraun, Beifuß und andere Hexenkräuter. Alltagswissen vergangener Zeiten (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus, 1990). There have been a whole range of plants which were once held to perform similar contraceptive or abortive functions. For an account of these, see, John M. Riddle, Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992).


\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 16.
astrologer and physician, they drew on a common stock of knowledge which was more closely tied to medicine in its prescriptions and practices than to folklore.25

The descriptions given by Harding and other female witch-suspects of their malevolence towards children also suggest that certain forms of medical knowledge, which were either known among local gossips or accessible through healers like Harding, were being diabolized in the construction of the confession narratives. Harding herself confessed that she had killed two children brought to her for healing. This last detail, that the mothers brought their children to her, is unique in the Eichstätt material; usually the witch-suspect claimed that she had gone to the children. Both of the children seen by Harding were ill and, as the mothers no doubt expected, she rubbed ointment on them. In the confession, however, the healing action permitted the deception by which Harding managed to bring about the children’s deaths. Here one has a conflation of two images, the healer and the witch which is reminiscent of the conflation of the lover and the witch in the stories of diabolical seduction. Both touched the body in exactly the same way to affect the health of the patient/victim. There were, after all, few other alternatives to hands-on and herbal medicine or secret, yet non-violent, physical harm.

In other confession narratives, too, a diabolical gloss barely conceals stories of unsuccessful attempts to heal sick children. Among the nineteen acts of harmful witchcraft to which Walburga Knab confessed between July 1621 and February 1622, for example, two were perpetrated against children living in her household who were already sick. Her son Lorenzlein, aged five, had been suffering from smallpox and she confessed to strewing her diabolical powder in his bed so that he would die, which happened the following night.26 After describing how she killed the eight-week-old infant of a soldier quartered on her household by scattering her powder on him, she observed that he had already lain ill for a long time beforehand.27 Margretha Bittelmayr, too, confessed to killing sick children with her diabolical powder. One of

25 Rublack, for example, also cites the case of Elisabetha Eggenmann of Constance who was treated by several healers (including a former executioner, a female healer and a civic doctor) for misdiagnosed conditions which turned out to be pregnancy, Rublack, The Crimes of Women in Early Modern Germany, pp. 174–5. These treatments were prescribed in much the same way as those by Harding and Culpeper.
26 StAN, Hexenakten 43 (W. Knab), 30 July 1621 (a.m.).
27 Ibid., 6 August 1621 (a.m.).
these was her daughter Cecilia who had lain ill for thirty-six weeks.\textsuperscript{28} The other two were sons of Haimen Enderlin: Thoma, who was ill with smallpox; and six-week-old Michaelin who lay all miserable on a cushion.\textsuperscript{29} In other cases, suspects claimed to have murdered or, more often, harmed adult neighbours by smearing chests, stomachs, eyes, heads or legs with their ointments. Here, too, one can see a basic method of healing beneath the demonological gloss imposed by the suspects’ interrogators.

Whether or not these particular instances of harm were diabolizations of actual attempts to cure (or perhaps even mercifully kill) people or simply fictions, they were grounded in the ordinary experiences of women as mothers and neighbours. Women had an intimate knowledge of the deaths, illnesses and accidents which beset their own and other households and especially the children in them; and their experiences of pregnancy (their own and others) and birth, child-rearing and the nursing of the sick and elderly provided an equally intimate knowledge of the body, its weaknesses, strengths and transformations.\textsuperscript{30} This accumulated knowledge facilitated a woman’s role as the primary carer in the household and was an integral part of its economy. A proportion of this knowledge must have been learnt through a process of teaching as well as hands-on experience. Indeed, it is interesting to note that many witch-suspects claimed to have learnt their witch skills, the most prominent of which was the harm caused to neighbours (mainly children), not from the Devil or a demon, but from older women. Eva Susanna Moringer claimed, for example, that the Old Schweizerin had ‘taught her that she should murder and do harm to livestock and people, for which she gave her a red ointment’. This was the same Old Schweizerin who, she claimed, had also allowed her to spend time with her lover, the huntsman, in her house when they were both single.\textsuperscript{31} Although this relationship was partly diabolical and partly anti-social (from the perspective of a reform-minded clergy), it was founded on the normal processes by which a young woman became integrated into

\textsuperscript{28} StAN, Hexenakten 45 (M. Bittelmayr), 17 October 1626 (a.m.).
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 21 October 1626.
\textsuperscript{30} Merry Wiesner has argued, for example, that it was this association of women with health within the household which facilitated the acceptance of midwives in the ‘public sphere’, Merry E. Wiesner, “The Midwives of South Germany and the Public/Private Dichotomy”, in Hilary Marland (ed.), \textit{The Art of Midwifery: Early Modern Midwives in Europe} (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 77–94 (p. 89).
\textsuperscript{31} StAN, Hexenakten 48 (E.S. Moringer), 15 February 1619 (p.m.).
the wider female community. This means of sharing knowledge about health then not only sustained the local social and kin networks which I analysed when looking at food and feasting, it helped to create them.

Male witch-suspects, in contrast, only rarely confessed to attempting to physically harm their neighbours or their children. Although they were asked the same standard questions about their harmful witchcraft as the female suspects, Valtin Lanng, Peter Porzin and Hans Stigeliz, for example, did not confess to attacking any individual directly. Instead, male defendants tended to confess, in these examples exclusively, to killing livestock. This livestock was not generally their own as it was when female defendants told of harming animals, but belonged to others. Among the seven acts of harm confessed by another male witch, Michael Hochenschildt, three were attacks on the livestock of other men, two of whom were in his debt and had exchanged ‘evil words’ with him; the third had once hit him. Hochenschildt did not confess to harming his own livestock. Here again one finds enmity in the witchcraft sources, but it is not the kind of animosity which invited an accusation of witchcraft to help resolve it. It does not therefore fit the stereotypical witchcraft narrative. One might, however, interpret the imaginary harmful magic directed against the livestock of these particular individuals as a revenge fantasy. In avenging the ‘evil words’ and the violence in this context, Hochenschildt was perhaps attempting to manipulate the narrative to restore his own honour and sense of manhood which may have been damaged after the original encounters.

The different responses to the same set of questions about malevolent witchcraft reflect gendered roles within the community. The female world was largely domestic and centred on the health of those within their own and their neighbours’ households. Women had access to the bodies of individuals within the household and could at least imagine

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32 In this context, one might also add the spinning bees in which women gathered together to work and gossip, and where they presumably also shared knowledge about love, health, housework, marriage, and so on. Lyndal Roper has noted that men sometimes accused the women who attended these gatherings of participating in orgies. Roper, The Holy Household, p. 179. In its structure therefore this kind of women’s network differed little, both in practice and fantasy, from the imagined sabbaths attended by mainly female witches.

33 StAN, Hexenakten 48 (V. Lanng), 29 August 1618 (p.m.), and Hexenakten 45 (P. Porzin), 15 September 1627 (p.m.), and (H. Stigeliz), 16 and 17 May 1628.

34 StAN, Hexenakten 45 (M. Hochenschildt), 16 March 1628 (a.m.) and 21 March 1628 (p.m.).

35 Ibid., 16 March 1628 (a.m.).
touching some of them in a way which might be interpreted as medical or diabolical depending on how one reads a confession narrative. When children were sick it was the mothers who sought advice from healers like Anna Harding, individuals with an intimate knowledge of the body and the herbs which might remedy maladies.\footnote{StAN, Hexenakten 48 (A. Harding), 20 February 1618 (a.m.).} When they discussed the deaths of their own livestock, they seem to have been imaginatively attacking the welfare of the their own household; their concern was domestic and where these animals had actually died (of some natural cause) their deaths may have led to genuine hardship for the woman’s family. Male witch-suspects did not interpret harmful witchcraft in terms of an attack on the welfare of the household and the health of its members. Instead, they chose to articulate its consequences through a discourse of economic exchange and honour. These were the public dimensions of the household unit embodied by its male figurehead.

Although they tended to adopt separate roles within it, men and women had to know what was happening throughout the household and about its connections with the external political, social and economic environments in order for it to function effectively, and there is evidence of this wider knowledge in the witch-trial transcripts. Although his testimony is unusual in the context of the male Eichstätt witch-suspects, Michael Hochenschildt did confess to three acts of fatal malevolent witchcraft against children. Two of his young victims were the children of his godfathers;\footnote{StAN, Hexenakten 45 (M. Hochenschildt), 21 March 1628 (a.m.). Hochenschildt was ‘over fifty years old’ at his arrest (ibid., 14 March 1628). These deaths occurred eight and nine years before this date respectively. It is possible therefore that his godfathers were still fathering their own children.} he could not name the third child victim, only its mother, the Näherin who lodged with Heinrich Sudelkoch.\footnote{Ibid., 21 March 1628 (a.m.).} In citing these instances of death, Hochenschildt demonstrated, unwittingly, that he had taken notice of what was going on in his neighbours’ households. Godparentage was used to extend and strengthen neighbourhood ties and involved many male citizens in Eichstätt as both godfathers and godsons. It would have been an insensitive and unobservant man who could not recall the deaths of at least some of those he was called to watch over or who resided in the households of his godparents.
The several instances in which female suspects confessed to killing the livestock of other men and women confirm that they too were knowledgeable about the public economic world of men, who owned which animals, where they were herded for pasture and by whom. Anna Beck, for example, confessed to killing animals belonging to three others (the master of the Spital, a man called the Uglin of Ochsenfeld, and her godfather Thoma) on four occasions. After interrogating the witnesses, the commissioners discounted two instances of these animal deaths: the master of the Spital had had a black, not a red, cow which had become ill, but it did not die; and Thoma told of a black cow and its calf which remained together, not of a red cow which died. What the confessions of malevolent witchcraft do highlight are the areas of responsibility within the early modern household and the concerns which were uppermost in the minds of the men and women who ran them. These common responsibilities, together with family ties and more formal associations (in guilds, councils and confraternities), led to the formation of female and male networks of neighbours such as those I have discussed already in the context of Margretha Bittelmayr’s wedding trip, drinking among men and the entries into cellars.

One should not be surprised, therefore, that most of the women whom the healer Anna Harding claimed to have treated lived in households which contained one or more witch-suspects. Maria Mayr was already in custody when Harding confessed to helping her with her menstrual problems. Members of the other households from which her female clients came were also later arrested for witchcraft: Father Johann Reichard, Margretha Hözler and her daughter Joanna, Barbara Silbereis, Valtin Lanng and his wife, and Barbara Apotheker. None of these witch-suspects was arrested for procuring an abortion or abetting their maids or daughters in this crime; they were all denounced by each other and other witch-suspects under intense interrogation. They formed part of a network of households linked by marriage, craft and local political power, and it was in these households that female and male networks of neighbours and kin overlapped. Given that women looked after the physical welfare of the household members and that

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39 StAN, Hexenakten 48 (A. Beck), 3 February 1618 (a.m.). The failure of the witnesses to corroborate Beck’s testimony does not mean that Beck had got her facts wrong.

40 Joanna Hözler, the only one of these witches not yet discussed, was executed on 27 September 1624, DiöAE, “Urfehdebuch”, ff. 217v–218r.
Harding’s primary skill was the control of menstruation, one can plausibly argue that she was a point of focus for female neighbourhood networks. Her reputation was probably reinforced by gossip among women, and supported by verbal testimonials from those whom she had helped successfully in the management of their households or the protection of their sexual honour. That three women sought to persuade Harding not to name them in her confession would seem to confirm this. Harding was, however, also a person in whom male and female networks in the community again overlapped. At the same time that she was dispensing advice on health and abortion, she seems to have been selling her body to some of the married men of Eichstätt who at least lived in the same class of household as her female clients even if they did not reside in those very ones.

*Midwives*

Another woman who provided a focus for female networks within the community was the midwife. Towards the beginning of the final phase of persecution in Eichstätt two midwives, Barbara Khager of Pietenfeld and Barbara Haubner of Adelschlag, were arrested and executed as witches. I do not want to reopen the debate about the vulnerability of midwives to accusations of witchcraft from within the community. It has been satisfactorily argued elsewhere that midwives were not a focus for such allegations. In the case of the Eichstätt midwives, they seem to have come to the attention of the witch commissioners in the same way as their neighbours, through an accumulation of denunciations made by other witch-suspects under interrogation. Haubner’s list of malevolent acts constitutes a summary of cases to which she was called as a midwife, but which ended in the death of the infant. Three of these deaths occurred in labour; eight other children died in infancy between the ages of three weeks and one year. She also confessed to killing her own son, aged four. Apart from these acts perpetrated in her roles as midwife and mother, Haubner also testified to two failed attempts to cure headlice, eleven attempts to harm livestock, the crippling of Hans Hermann, the unsuccessful poisoning of ‘fishwater’,

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42 StAN, Hexenakten 48 (B. Haubner), 3 February 1618 (p.m.).
and the murder of Georg Gutmann’s wife. 43 Not all of these acts of harmful magic could be confirmed by the witch commissioners. Six of the infant deaths to which Haubner had confessed were rejected by the commissioners because the witnesses contradicted her testimony. 44 The details of the remaining four were confirmed by the alleged victims, as were the crippling of both Hans Hermann and a horse belonging to a former farmer of Weißenkirch who now lived at Pietenfeld, and the pains and loss of hair suffered by the Ochsen Barbel of Adelschlag after she had taken Haubner’s remedy for lice. 45 For the two acts of witchcraft against horses in her husband’s care, two more against her own livestock, and the murder of Gutmann’s wife, Haubner herself was the witness. It seems that no witnesses could be found for the other seven acts.

Of the malevolence described by Haubner which the commissioners thought they had been able to verify, none of the witnesses alleged either witchcraft as the cause or the enmity of the midwife as the motive for the misfortune they or their children had suffered. They merely confirmed the details of Haubner’s testimony: Siz’s son Georg had died aged one year; Wirt Hensel’s wife had miscarried; the Schmidin of Eichstätt’s daughter was a breach birth and suffocated in labour; Groß Liendel’s daughter did die, but at three weeks rather than six; 46 Hans Hermann had become crippled as had the farmer’s horse; and Ochsen Barbel’s hair did fall out. 47 Even the last victim’s elaboration that she suffered ‘great pains’ in her head, was not directly ascribed to the ill will of the midwife, although she might have wanted to hint that the harm was inflicted deliberately. In the six unsubstantiated cases of infant murder, the witnesses did not take the opportunity to recast the deaths of their children and blame witchcraft. Indeed, in three of the four cases where the discrepancy between the suspect’s and the witnesses’ testimonies was noted, there is only a minor difference in the two stories. Two of Bastel Hans’s children had died, but neither at six weeks; the Maÿerin had not needed a midwife when her lad died; and whilst the tavernkeeper of Adelschlag’s daughter had died

43 Ibid., 3 February 1618 (p.m.) and 5 February 1618 (p.m.).
44 The conclusions drawn from the witnesses’ depositions (which have not survived in this case) were recorded in the margins of the interrogation transcript, ibid., 3 February 1618 (p.m.).
45 Ibid., 5 February 1618 (p.m.).
46 Ibid., 3 February 1618 (p.m.).
47 Ibid., 5 February 1618 (p.m.).
at three weeks, she did so of smallpox. 48 In the fourth of these cases, Haubner’s daughter stated that she had never given birth to a daughter of her own and, by implication, no one could have murdered it at age six months. 49 It is not easy to explain the inconsistency here. Why would a midwife who demonstrates a good knowledge of the fates of her neighbours’ children have forgotten that her daughter had never had one? She may, perhaps, have been confused, or her daughter may have lied to the witch commissioners to help her mother: Haubner could not be executed for crimes she had not committed. Together, however, the witness statements confirm that Haubner did not seem to have had a reputation for witchcraft or malevolence. Despite the failures which every midwife must have experienced regularly (and the interrogators’ questioning restricted Haubner to a sample of failures rather than successes), women continued to seek Haubner’s skills in labour and childcare over a period of years. 50 Alongside these particular skills, Haubner had seemingly developed a sideline in the riddance of headlice. As a midwife, therefore, she was able to cultivate a position as a central figure in the wider network of married women, regardless of age and perhaps class, in this locality. She shared their moments of happiness and grief, and maybe also their secrets.

Unlike many of her contemporaries, Haubner was explicit about the children’s corpses which she had exhumed for diabolical purposes, in her case to make weather-magic. The experiences of her profession gave her a larger number of infant deaths than ordinary mothers on which she might have drawn to make her testimony more substantial and appear more credible. From among these she selected two corpses which had been buried in the cemetery for innocent children. They had been born to the Dürschin and the Schmidin, both of Adelschlag and therefore her neighbours. 51 Another witch-suspect, Anna Widman of Berching, confessed to attending the exhumation of four children’s corpses conducted by a pair of deceased midwives. 52 She had earlier claimed that these midwives had brought unbaptized corpses to the

48 Ibid., 3 February 1618 (p.m.).
49 Ibid., 3 February 1618 (p.m.).
50 The murder of her four-year-old occurred seventeen years and the deaths in childbed ranged between six months and three years before Haubner’s arrest, ibid., 3 February 1618 (p.m.).
51 Ibid., 5 February 1618 (p.m.). Haubner had already confessed to killing these children in the previous session of interrogation, ibid., 3 February 1618 (p.m.).
52 StAN, Hexenakte 48 (A. Widman), 28 July 1618 (a.m.).
nocturnal gatherings of the witches. Again, it was the midwives in this narrative who could identify where such corpses might be found. It was they and not any man (including the gravedigger) or other woman who were perceived to have an intimate knowledge of the geography of the cemetery and its secrets. As it was connected to the processes and rituals of birth, one might argue that this specialized female knowledge helped to maintain a link between mothers and their offspring after death.

Conclusion

Female neighbourhood networks were, therefore, structured around women’s domestic concerns within the household and the need for expert advice and skill in matters of health, pregnancy, childbirth and childcare. In this respect they transcended to some degree class divisions within the community. Women of the political craft elites sought some health advice from others lower down the social scale. Respected midwives, on the other hand, tended to pregnant women and mothers below them in status. These cross-class links do not seem to have evolved into bonds of friendship. When discussing eating and drinking, female witch-suspects, like their husbands, populated their narratives with friends from households of similar political and occupational status. There is no suggestion in any of the extant narratives, however, that the transactions between healers and patients exposed the former to accusations of witchcraft when the cure went wrong, even to the extent of producing extreme and uncomfortable physical symptoms (the loss of hair and onset of severe headaches, for example). In this respect, Willem de Blécourt’s caution that detailed work still has to be done on cunning folk and similar practitioners, especially in relation to witchcraft, needs to be reiterated. The various and disparate individuals who make up this group performed different social roles. Not all of them were able to identify witchcraft, unwitch the bewitched or bewitch the innocent.

53 The infants had ‘not come to baptism’, ibid., 27 July 1618 (a.m.).

Many may have been more like Anna Harding than Magdalena Pößl and were not connected by their clients and neighbours with any part of the witchcraft experience. In a society where persistent personal misfortune was commonplace, everyone must have understood the risks of failure when resorting to unreliable forms of medicine. In that sense the wider female community seems to have been relatively strong and was not wrecked by accusation and counter-accusation as the witch persecution in Eichstätt progressed. Certainly, as I have already stressed, few accusations of witchcraft originated from within the communities of the principality and no witness statement substantially confirms the malevolence behind any experience of misfortune.

Men seem to have been excluded from participating in the areas of concern upon which these networks of women were founded. That is not to say that they were ignorant of the illnesses which afflicted their kin and neighbours in other households. Men simply had different spheres of primary responsibility which placed them in networks of men who shared their particular concerns. It was not gender, therefore, but the efficient running of the household within a patriarchal society which determined the separation of spheres between men and women. Gender-based networks were complementary rather than divisive. Indeed, fathers also promoted associations between their daughters and important female figures within the community by the naming of godmothers. The secretary to the Hofrat during the witch persecutions of 1617–31, Paul Gabler, for example, chose Susanna, abbess of the cloister in Mariastein, as godmother to three of his daughters. This choice was perhaps courteous. Of more immediate importance to Gabler, who was a relative outsider to the Eichstätt polity, was the fact that Susanna was represented at the baptism by Regina Thiermayr, a relation of the vice-chancellor.55 In their turn, two men of lesser status, a cook named Andreas Weber and a tanner named Balthasar Mayer, chose Paul and Anna Maria Gabler as godparents to their children.56

Over the course of these last three chapters on food, sex and health, I have attempted to show that the confession narratives constructed

55 Buchner, “Eichstätter Familienbuch”, p. 127. At his appointment as secretary to the Hofrat in September 1608, Gabler was described as coming from Berching, Hochstift Eichstätt Literalien 47, “Hofgesinde- und Beamtenbuch unter Bischöfen Moritz (1539ff.), Eberhard (1553); Martin (1561), Kaspar (1590), Johann Konrad (1595), 1539–1612 (1666)”, f. 164r.

by the witch-suspects reveal a complex series of intimate relationships which bound the citizens of Eichstätt together. The picture which emerges from these narratives complements that which I found when looking at the suspects’ direct assessments of their relationships with their denouncers, victims and the witnesses to their alleged harm in chapter 3. It is a much more positive one than that which other historians have found for other regions in which intense witch persecution occurred. In this respect I would argue that the conflict which seems to inhere in the witches’ confessions was primarily a product of the process of diabolization. It was not a reflection of the actual quality of the defendants’ daily relations with their neighbours. The standard questions put by the witch commissioners to all suspects forced them to attempt to make sense of the heresy of witchcraft and the witches’ alleged encounters with the Devil, nocturnal gatherings, exhumations of children’s corpses, weather-magic, and entries into cellars, bedchambers and stalls, as well as their acts of malevolence. Where they could, the suspects naturally grounded their confessions in reality. When discussing nocturnal gatherings they described ordinary, if fictionalized, celebratory events. When they considered seduction, they told of episodes of real or imaginable sexual intercourse. When they described their harmful acts they diabolized acts of healing. In these confessions the diabolical receded from the foreground and became a superficial element of the testimony, there because it was required by the interrogators. In the following chapter, I will turn my attention to the investigation of the treatment of the witch-suspect Maria Mayr, wife of the court scribe. The evidence which emerges from the testimony of the town hall staff provides an alternative view of gender relations to the one which I have so far presented. Class, family and gender ties united many of the Eichstätt witch-suspects, allowing an image of strong social cohesion to filter through the witches’ confession narratives. In the experience of custody, however, these natural ties and the hierarchies which they reinforced were undermined.