

argued that the uniformity of the confessions was proof positive of the reality of witchcraft, and consequently of the guilt of the accused:

... with so much agreement and conformity between the different cases, that the most ignorant persons convicted of this crime have spoken to the same circumstances, and in nearly the same words, as the most celebrated authors who have written about it. All of which may be easily proved to your majesty's satisfaction by the records of various trials before your parlements.

But the truth is just the opposite. These confessions agree because they had to conform to the stereotyped idea of witchcraft built up by theologians, inquisitors, lawyers, and judges. A glance at the manner of interrogating witches will clarify this point. The accused were asked questions, answers to which would prove their guilt. In the procès-verbal or court record which reported the questioning, the questions and answers often appear in parallel columns, each list consecutively numbered, as in the illustration of the examination of Catherine Blicher at Gross-Mühlhingen (Anhalt-Bernburg) in 1689. Usually the questions did not exceed three dozen; this interrogation, however, shows questions 130 through 133, the questions being in the left-hand column and Catherine Blicher's replies in the right (see p. 177). Interesting too is the confession, made under torture, of Nicholas Weilluft in 1650 at Swabian Gmünd, thirty miles east of Stuttgart, a Catholic free city of the Empire. Weilluft was accused of witchcraft by a beggar boy, Zacherlen. The scribe has not written down the real names of those whom Weilluft named as his accomplices, but has used Latin pseudonyms. This substitution may have resulted from Weilluft's implicating court officials, friends of the judges or men present during the torture. The records of this trial do not indicate Weilluft's fate, but, since he confessed, there can be no doubt of his death.

Sometimes the questions were written by the scribe in advance of the examination, and the accused's replies inserted during

the actual torture. A very famous late trial, that of Sister Maria Renata Sängler, subprioress of the Premonstratensian convent of Unter-Zell, Würzburg, 1749, illustrates this aspect. Here eleven questions have been written on the right side of the page, and the left side left blank. The page is headed with the Jesuit initials: O.A.M.D.G. (*Ad majorem Dei gloriam*) and B.V.I.H. In other European records, only the numbered replies were recorded and the questions omitted, implying that the court had a set prepared list which was so well known to the investigators and scribes that it could be omitted. One such list of obligatory questions was that used by the judges at Colmar in Alsace, year after year throughout the three centuries of the witch mania. It was headed:

QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED OF A WITCH

1. How long have you been a witch?
2. Why did you become a witch?
3. How did you become a witch, and what happened on that occasion?
4. Who is the one you chose to be your incubus [*compagnon*]? What was his name?
5. What was the name of your master among the evil demons?
6. What was the oath you were forced to render him?
7. How did you make this oath, and what were its conditions?
8. What finger were you forced to raise? Where did you consummate your union with your incubus?
9. What demons and what other humans participated [at the sabbat]?
10. What food did you eat there?
11. How was the sabbat banquet arranged?
12. Were you seated at the banquet?
13. What music was played there, and what dances did you dance?
14. What did your incubus give you for your intercourse?
15. What devil's mark did your incubus make on your body?
16. What injury have you done to such and such a person, and how did you do it?
17. Why did you inflict this injury?
18. How can you relieve this injury?

19. What herbs or what other methods can you use to cure these injuries?
20. Who are the children on whom you have cast a spell? And why have you done it?
21. What animals have you bewitched to sickness or death, and why did you commit such acts?
22. Who are your accomplices in evil?
23. Why does the devil give you blows in the night?
24. What is the ointment with which you rub your broomstick made of?
25. How are you able to fly through the air? What magic words do you utter then?
26. What tempests have you raised, and who helped you to produce them?
27. What [plagues of] vermin and caterpillars have you created?
28. What do you make these pernicious creatures out of and how do you do it?
29. Has the devil assigned a limit to the duration of your evil-doing?

When it is remembered that the accused had to answer these questions, that refusal to answer was taciturnity which necessitated still harsher torture, that the judges or other court officials would prompt the accused's memory, there is no mystery about the uniformity of confessions.

The same procedure was followed in England. Matthew Hopkins, for example, in his *Discovery of Witches*, gave leading questions (which he denied using):

- Q. You have four imps, have you not?
 A. She answers affirmatively, "Yes."
 Q. Are not their names so and so?
 A. "Yes," saith she.
 Q. Did you not send an imp to kill my child?
 A. "Yes," saith she.

Still other records show, not the answers of the accused, but merely the word *afirma* [he admits it]—there is no record of the questions to which the affirmative answers were given. In the illustration of the examination of Agnes Brusse of Brandshagen, widow of Michel Hooge, at Treptow, Pomerania, in 1679, the answers run from 35 through 66. [See illustration on page 502.]

At the conclusion of the trial, after the accused had been found Guilty, the scribe would write the *relatio*, a kind of official memorandum or press release of the entire procès, including the victim's confession, written in the first person as if dictated by the witch herself. This was the standard procedure, even when the witch had responded to the prepared questions only in monosyllables or by nodding the head, probably under torture. Before her death, the accused had to sign the full confession which had been written out for her.

At the burning, under the standard German code of the Emperor Charles (Article 60 of the *Carolina*), the sentences of the judges and the confessions of the condemned were always publicly read. In this way, the theory of witchcraft was taught the mass of the people by those in authority who had themselves propagated it; impressionable children especially would carry these vivid moments with them for the rest of their lives and come to believe in witchcraft without any doubting. For example, at Utrecht, on August 1, 1595, Volkart Dirxen and his daughter, after severe torture, confessed to being werewolves and to killing cattle. The man's three sons, aged eight to fourteen, were sentenced to watch the burning, after which they were to be flogged until the blood flowed.

In fact, uniform confessions, far from proving witchcraft, disprove it.

That there were always some who doubted confessions is clear from the fulminations of the demonologists. Nicholas Jacquier's *Flagellum* (1458) advised judges to examine accusations given under torture, lest they had resulted from terror. In *De Larnis* (1489), Ulrich Molitor took pains to convince the Archduke Sigismund of Austria that confessions under torture were admissible. Clever lawyers soon found a *rationale* to lull such doubts, and Vignati, for example, in 1468 was already pointing out that confessions under torture must be subsequently confirmed without torture!

As the cruelties increased, apologists felt more and more impelled to silence those who questioned the validity of the confessions. The *Malleus Maleficarum* suggested