

Father Confessors and Clerical Intervention in Witch-Trials in Seventeenth-Century

Lutheran Germany: The Case of Rothenburg, 1692*

On 10 June 1692, a forty-seven-year-old widow named Barbara Ehneß was led out of the Lutheran imperial free city of Rothenburg ob der Tauber to the place of execution which lay just beyond the city wall. Here she was beheaded for the attempted murder by poisoning of her lodger, Hans Georg Rupp, and his family; after her arrest in late January 1692, Ehneß had admitted that she had indeed put arsenic into the milk-soup that the Rupp family had eaten on 11 January of that year. According to the law of the Holy Roman Empire, this admission was enough to condemn Ehneß to death as a poisoner; however, during her weeks in custody, Ehneß had also confessed that she had killed her husband by poison, given herself to the devil to satisfy her lust, and attended witches' gatherings. It was because of her apparent identity as a witch that Ehneß's remains were burned after her beheading; as the authorities put it in her *Urgicht* - the official summary of her case and sentence drawn up at the end of the trial and read out publicly on the day of her execution - she was not just a poisoner, but also an 'accursed bride of the devil',¹ who had fallen into such abomination 'that the earth could bear her presence no longer'.² In the midst of this savage condemnatory rhetoric, however, one paragraph of the *Urgicht* stands out strangely, dealing as it does with confessions retracted, and demonic details omitted rather than wallowed in. This paragraph dealt with what Ehneß

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¹ Statdtarchiv Rothenburg (hereafter StAR) B665 fos. 215r-218v, 'verfluchte Teufelsbraut' (fo. 218v).

² Ibid., '... daß die Erde Dich nim[m]er ertragen kan'.

had said in custody about the other people she had supposedly seen at the witches' gatherings she had described. The authorities were careful to name no names here; moreover, the *Urgicht* stated that Ehneß had subsequently retracted her testimony about these other alleged witches and now insisted that she could say nothing bad about them, and was willing to go to her death professing their innocence. In case anyone listening to the public recitation of Ehneß's crimes was wondering why she had mentioned their names in the first place, the *Urgicht* noted - as briefly as possible, using just nine words in the original German - that she claimed to have been misled into denouncing other supposed witches to the authorities by another, also carefully unnamed, person.³

With this unassuming paragraph, the members of the inner city council - the sixteen men of the urban patriciate who ruled Rothenburg and its rural hinterland and also acted as the territory's highest criminal court - were drawing an official, public line under the unprecedented events of the preceding three and a half months; namely the attempt by the leading Rothenburg cleric, Church Superintendent Sebastian Kirchmeier, to start a witch-hunt in a territory where witchcraft allegations were traditionally treated with relative legal restraint, and where there had been only two executions (in 1629 and 1673) for the crime before 1692.⁴ Kirchmeier had sought to do this by suggesting to Ehneß the names of people

³ StAR B665 fo. 218r: '. . . und Eines andern Verlaiten solch angeben die Schulde beÿgemessen'. This was as close as the *Urgicht* (the only part of the trial-record to reach a public audience) came to mentioning Sebastian Kirchmeier.

⁴ For discussion of the restrained pattern of witch-persecution in Rothenburg, see A. Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany: Rothenburg, 1561-1652* (Manchester, 2003), and 'Eine Stadt ohne Hexenwahn. Hexenprozesse, Gerichtspraxis und Herrschaft im frühneuzeitlichen Rothenburg ob der Tauber', in H. Eiden and R. Voltmer, eds., *Hexenprozesse und Gerichtspraxis* (Trier, 2002). Rothenburg was self-governing, answerable only to the Holy Roman Emperor, with 5-7,000 inhabitants; the councillors also ruled 10-11,000 subjects who lived in an extensive rural hinterland outside the city. The councillors adopted Lutheranism in 1544; for an

she should denounce as witches when he visited her to offer her spiritual solace in the city gaol; his efforts might have succeeded had it not been for Ehneß's bravery in subsequently retracting the denunciations and exposing Kirchmeier's actions. From the richly-detailed trial records, which include a lengthy defence of his behaviour by Kirchmeier, we can unpick the processes by means of which a larger-scale witch-hunt might have been triggered, had Ehneß and the city councillors behaved differently.⁵ We can also gain invaluable insights into the interpersonal interactions between a clerical confessor and an alleged witch; these interactions are usually (at best) merely hinted at and (at worst) completely absent from the historical record because they occurred in secrecy behind the walls of city gaols under the seal of the confession, and were not technically meant to form part of the legal process.⁶ Kirchmeier's intervention in the Ehneß case is also noteworthy because it was the final and most extreme example of clerical involvement in a Rothenburg witch-trial, and the last chapter in a long-running dispute between the Superintendent and the city councillors over the relative spheres of secular and ecclesiastical power in the territory. This dispute had begun shortly after Kirchmeier's appointment as Superintendent in 1681;⁷ that such disputes

overview of the late-medieval/early modern history of the territory, see Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, pp. 3-5.

⁵ All case-documents are in StAR A925 fos. 1r-129v, although some of the individual items in this run of pages are unpaginated.

⁶ Little has been published on the role of the Lutheran father confessor in witch-trials; a notable exception is Thomas Robisheaux's excellent micro-history, *The Last Witch of Langenburg. Murder in a German Village* (New York and London, 2009), in which Robisheaux discusses the role of the Langenburg Court Preacher Ludwig Casimir Dietzel in questioning accused witch Anna Schmiege about her sins, see pp. 178-92.

⁷ Kirchmeier (born 19 Mar. 1641, died 16 Oct. 1700) was born in Uffenheim and studied at Altdorf and Wittenberg, see W. Dannheimer, *Verzeichnis der im Gebiete der freien Reichsstadt Rothenburg o. T. von 1544 bis 1803 wirkenden ev.-luth. Geistlichen* (Nürnberg, 1952), p. 80. Although he was the brother-in-law of his predecessor as Rothenburg Superintendent, Johann Ludwig Hartmann (see Dannheimer, *Verzeichnis*, p. 65), and

found expression in witch-trials highlights the extent to which such trials could be used (more or less strategically) as tools in power struggles between individuals or groups of men of the local political elite. The Ehneß case was also the last time that the Rothenburg councillors were willing to take the ideas of demonic and maleficent witchcraft seriously at law. Ironically then, Kirchmeier's overzealous intervention in the 1692 trial helped finally to convince the councillors that, in order to protect their own political power and the primacy of secular over ecclesiastical authority, it was best to stop prosecuting witches altogether.

Born in Rothenburg on 31 August 1644, Barbara Ehneß belonged to the lower class of the city's resident population.⁸ Her father, Eberhardt Matthes, had been a peasant-turned-vintner and citizen of Rothenburg who was long since dead by 1692.⁹ Barbara had married Hans Ehneß on 7 February 1676.¹⁰ Hans had come to Rothenburg as a day-labourer from Kühnhard near Feuchtwangen, marrying his first wife in the city hospital's church of the Holy Ghost in

his mother was from the patrician Rothenburg family of the Bezolds, Kirchmeier had the disadvantage of being 'foreign' to Rothenburg; he also had no pastoral experience before becoming Superintendent, having been in charge of the Regensburg grammar school beforehand.

⁸ The councillors checked the baptism registers to establish her birth-date during her trial, StAR A925, between fos. 44r-45r, and fos. 46r-49v.

⁹ Eberhardt Matthes was described as a deceased citizen and vintner in Barbara's *Urgicht*, StAR B665 fo. 215r. He attained citizenship of Rothenburg on 21 Jul. 1625, when he was described as a peasant from Kalberg (probably Kallenberg, Landkreis Backnang), see StAR B42 fo. 71r. I am grateful to Dr Ludwig Schnurrer for allowing me to use his register of citizenship records.

¹⁰ See the marriage registers of the church of the Holy Ghost, vol. 2, fo. 13r. All original church registers for Rothenburg are held in the Landeskirchliche Archiv der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Bayern in Nuremberg; I have consulted the copies held in the Evang.-Lutherisches Dekanat in Rothenburg (hereafter ELDR).

1652, gaining citizenship in 1657, and at some stage attaining the position of tithe-gatherer for the hospital.¹¹ Barbara seems to have had an unhappy marriage to Hans, who was over twenty years her senior.¹² In custody in 1692 she referred to the fact that Hans had been unable to have intercourse with her properly – a poignant yet calamitously unguarded admission on her part which served only to reinforce her interrogators’ suspicions that she would look instead to the devil for the satisfaction of her sexual desires.¹³ Hans had died, aged around 70, in early January 1690;¹⁴ he had suffered a bout of vomiting some weeks earlier after eating porridge cooked for him by Barbara, and had openly blamed his subsequent ill-health on the porridge.¹⁵ In 1692 Barbara was living on New Street;¹⁶ her

¹¹ Hans Ehneß was described as the hospital tithe-gatherer in the register entry for his marriage to Barbara in 1676 (see footnote 10) and as the deceased hospital tithe-gatherer in Barbara’s *Urgicht* in 1692, StAR B665 fo. 215r. For his acquisition of citizenship on 4 Mar. 1657, see StAR B42 fo. 116r; for his first marriage on 3 Feb. 1652 (to Barbara, the daughter of Leonhard Butz from Gammesfeld), see ELDR marriage registers of the church of the Holy Ghost, vol. 1, fo. 477r. The name of Hans’s first wife may explain why Barbara Ehneß (née Mathes) was known by the nickname of Butzen Berbel (ie: Bärbel).

¹² Barbara said that Hans was 70 or 71 when he died in Jan. 1690, StAR A925 fo. 25r.

¹³ StAR A925 fos. 24v-25r (during her first interrogation on 25 Jan.).

¹⁴ A neighbour and friend of Hans Ehneß, Andreas Brümmer, confirmed that Hans had died on 6 Jan. 1690, StAR A925 fos. 9v-10r. According to Barbara, he had eaten the porridge around 11 Nov. 1689 and had died nine weeks later, StAR A925 fo. 22v. It is likely that Hans had some underlying health problem which ultimately caused his death but which the vomiting induced by the poisoned porridge probably exacerbated; crucially for Barbara, she, Hans and her neighbours imagined a causal link between the porridge and Hans’s death.

¹⁵ StAR A925 fos. 3r-3v, 8r-8v. Ehneß told the authorities on 20 Jan. 1692 that her husband had complained about his illness to their father confessor (ie: parish minister), Johann Georg Joch (see fos. 8r-8v); this probably meant that Joch, who was one of the three clerics who visited Ehneß in gaol after her arrest, was predisposed to think the worst of her.

economic situation had deteriorated since her husband's death and she was trying to make ends meet by begging (with official permission from the council) and watching at sick-beds,¹⁷ as well as by taking in lodgers.¹⁸ Hans Georg Rupp, a drayman, his wife, and their four children (aged eight and under) had lodged with Barbara since 1 May 1691. Rupp went to the town hall on 13 January 1692 to report that the whole family had fallen ill during the night of Monday 11 January with vomiting, bloated stomachs, and severe abdominal pains, after eating a milk-soup for supper that evening; Rupp's wife had prepared the soup but had left Barbara alone to watch over it on the hearth for a time while she went out.¹⁹ Barbara had tried to help the stricken Rupp and his family during the night by giving them salt and pepper to make them sick and by fetching medicine for them from the local apothecary.²⁰ However, while so doing she had told Rupp about the porridge she had cooked in November 1689 which had made her husband, herself, and their previous lodger (a woman called die

¹⁶ Barbara explained during questioning at the town hall on 20 Jan. 1692 that the house on New Street (*Neugasse*) belonged half to the council, and half to her (StAR A925 fos. 5r-5v), suggesting that she was having to pay rent and a mortgage on the property.

¹⁷ See note 42.

¹⁸ Ehneß's *Urgicht* referred to the fact that she begged for alms, StAR B665 fo. 215r; she explained during her first interrogation on 25 Jan. 1692 that she had had to start begging after her husband's death, StAR A925 fo. 26r. Poignantly at the end of her last interrogation on 24 May 1692 she asked that her begging license be passed on to a man called Heinrich and his children, and thanked the authorities for the alms she had been allowed to gather, StAR A925 fo. 124v.

¹⁹ For Rupp's account of events, which began the legal investigation into the poisoning, see StAR A925 fos. 1r-4r.

²⁰ The herbal remedy Ehneß fetched from Schwarzmann, the local apothecary, was theriac; ironically, Ehneß had also bought the arsenic-based mouse-powder with which she poisoned the soup from Schwarzmann, see footnote 28. For Ehneß's confession to the Rupp poisoning, which largely confirmed Rupp's story, see her first interrogation on 25 Jan. 1692, StAR A925 fos. 17r-21r.

Schneemännin) sick, and from which Hans Ehneß had subsequently died. These untimely comments heightened Rupp's suspicion that Barbara had poisoned her husband's porridge as well as the Rupp family's meal.²¹

Barbara protested her innocence on being called to the town hall for questioning on 20 January.²² Over the next few days, however, the councillors gathered enough circumstantial evidence against her to arrest her.²³ She was questioned in the city gaol for the first time on 25 January; eight further interrogations followed before her execution, the last on 24 May.²⁴ As was standard practice in criminal trials in Rothenburg, Barbara was interrogated by the *Turmherren* (the two members of the inner city council deputed to this role), in the presence of the mayor of the outer city council, and the court scribe who recorded all that was said.²⁵

²¹ Rupp told the authorities on 13 Jan. 1692 that Ehneß had aroused suspicion by her own words, so that he felt obliged to report the matter, StAR A925 fos. 4r-4v. In so doing he killed two birds with one stone, making public the suspicion (which had almost certainly been circulating in the form of rumours) that Ehneß had poisoned her husband as well as his suspicion that Ehneß had poisoned his family. The councillors' interrogations of Ehneß duly pursued both.

²² StAR A925 fos. 5r-9r.

²³ This included statements from neighbours on New Street about the suspected poisoning of the Rupp and Hans Ehneß (StAR A925 fos. 9v-11r); a second statement by Rupp (fos. 12r-15r), and a report by the municipal physician, Johann Bernhard Winterbach, about the Rupp's symptoms (fos. 16r-16v).

²⁴ There was a long gap in the trial between Ehneß's seventh interrogation (on 23 Mar. 1692, StAR A925 fos. 114r-118r) and her eighth (on 20 May 1692, fos. 119r-122v). This was because of the complications that had arisen in relation to Kirchmeier's role in the case (as her interrogators told her on 20 May, fo. 119r); the gap suggests that the councillors needed time to discuss how best to handle the unusual situation.

²⁵ The members of the inner city council were Georg Albrecht Renger (all interrogations) and Johann Stellwagen (interrogations 1-7)/Johann Conrad Hofmann (interrogations 8 and 9); the mayor of the outer city council was Johann Philip Styrzel; the scribe, Johann Ludwig Vogtmann. Styrzel was only present at the first

The written records of her interrogations (and other documents pertaining to her trial) were then discussed at the full meetings of the inner city council held in the town hall, at which decisions about how to proceed, and the verdict in the case, were reached. These discussions were (deliberately) not recorded, although the councillors' ongoing decisions in the trial are clear from what happened next in the investigative process, while their final collective verdict on Ehneß and her crimes was given in the publicly proclaimed *Urgicht* which closed her case.²⁶ Decision-making power in criminal trials lay entirely with the sixteen men of the inner city council, who were all members of the city's leading urban patriciate families. The councillors looked to the municipal jurists for advice and assistance in the Ehneß case, as they had done in witch-trials since the 1580s;²⁷ jurist Johann Georg Albrecht drew up the lists of questions to be put to Ehneß, his colleague Johann Georg Krauss wrote three legal opinions for the councillors, and one or other of the jurists was present at Ehneß's interrogations from the third session onwards.

Ehneß probably surprised her interrogators in her first interrogation on 25 January by confessing almost immediately to having put poison (an arsenic-based powder intended for

six of Ehneß's interrogations, not the last three (from 23 Mar. 1692 onwards). This may reflect a sense on the part of the members of the inner city council that the case was too sensitive for Styrzel's involvement.

²⁶ This way of proceeding enabled the councillors to demonstrate a united front publicly, even if they had disagreed with one another in discussion.

²⁷ On the role of municipal jurists in Rothenburg witch-trials, see Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, pp. 22-33, 48-67; A. Rowlands, "...wie der Pöbel gemeinlich auss einer Mucken einen Elefanten zumachen pflegt." Ratskonsulent Friedrich Prenninger und seine Gutachten in drei Hexenprozessen im frühneuzeitlichen Rothenburg ob der Tauber', in K. Borchardt and E. Tittmann, eds., *Städte, Regionen, Vergangenheiten. Beiträge für Ludwig Schnurrer zum 75. Geburtstag* (Würzburg, 2003), pp. 285-304.

killing mice) into the Rupp's milk-soup, adding that she had done so out of anger.²⁸ She was at odds with the Rupp family for various reasons. Rupp's wife refused to share milk with her when she had some, Barbara explained; moreover, the Rupp children behaved so badly that she tried to spend as little time as possible in the house with them.²⁹ She admitted that she occasionally hit them for their misbehaviour, and that her interference annoyed Rupp.³⁰ Her main grievance, however, was Rupp's scathing and public criticism of her cooking; on Friday 8 January, when they had been socialising at the house of a neighbour called Karren Adam, Rupp had said that Barbara's cooking was slapdash and much worse than his wife's, explaining that all Barbara did was mix peas, lentils and cabbage together, add some boiling water, then say the meal was ready. Others present at Karren Adam's teased Barbara about her cooking that evening as a result.³¹ The strength of Barbara's emotional reaction to the comments and teasing is clear from the fact that Rupp testified that she had wept bitterly in response, and had not spoken to him again until the following Monday.³² Her anger stemmed probably from the public humiliation she had suffered at Karren Adam's and her frustration at what she described as her despised status as a widow, which left her dependent on begging

²⁸ StAR A925 fos. 17r-27v, fol. 17v. Ehneß explained that she had bought the powder over a year earlier from the assistant of the local apothecary, Herr Schwarzmann; on 27 Jan. 1692 the assistant (Johann Nicolaus Wolfgang Feuerbach) confirmed that he had once sold Ehneß six knife-points full of 'mouse-powder', or white arsenic, but could not recall exactly when this had happened, fos. 30r-30v. Ehneß told her interrogators that she wanted to confess because she had a 'heavy heart' (ie: bad conscience) about what she had done, fo. 18r.

²⁹ StAR A925 fo. 18v.

³⁰ StAR A925 fo. 6r; Rupp told Ehneß that if she hit his children, he would hit her.

³¹ For accounts of the evening at Karren Adam's, see StAR A925 fos. 10v-11r (given by Christian Schließe, a New Street neighbour); 12r-15r (Rupp); 19v-20v (Ehneß).

³² StAR A925 fo. 14v.

and the whims of her lodgers for economic survival.³³ In this context her poisoning of a family meal prepared by Rupp's wife constituted both the sabotage of the latter's apparently superior housewifely skill and the ultimate in Barbara's own 'bad' cooking; it was also one of the few ways in which a poor, middle-aged widow could seek revenge on a younger married couple.³⁴ Towards the end of her first interrogation Barbara also admitted that she had poisoned the porridge which had made her husband fall ill in 1689. She had wanted to be rid of him because he could not satisfy her sexually, although she now regretted her actions because her life was so hard as widow.³⁵ Under increasing pressure from her interrogators to enumerate all the sins to which what they called the *Hurengeist* (or 'whoring spirit') had driven her, she added that she had had sex with a journeyman from Hohenfeld named Hans Adam Widmann in 1674, while she was in service and before her marriage to Hans Ehneß.³⁶ She denied being a witch, having a pact with the devil, or having poisoned anyone else,³⁷ however, although she did her cause no good by adding that 'she wished to God that she could work witchcraft, then perhaps her life would not be so hard'.³⁸

³³ Ehneß lamented her status to the authorities when first called to the town hall for questioning on 20 Jan. 1692, StAR A925 fos.8r-8v.

³⁴ The councillors may have been particularly anxious about the threat posed by poisoners because of the infamous 'Affair of the Poisons' which had rocked the court of Louis XIV between 1677 and 1682.

³⁵ StAR A925 fos. 23v-26r.

³⁶ StAR A925 fo. 25r. The speed, unguardedness, and detail of Barbara's confession on 25 Jan. 1692, and the fact that she maintained her admissions of guilt on these three points (the poisoning of the Rupps and her husband, and sex with Widmann) fairly consistently throughout her trial, suggest that she was indeed guilty of them, although perhaps unaware of the legal consequences of her confessions.

³⁷ StAR A925 fo. 26r-27r (in response to specific questions on these points put to her by her interrogators).

³⁸ StAR A925 fol. 26v: '. . . sie wolte Gott sie könnte das Hexenwerck, so gienge es ihr vielleicht nicht so hart'.

Ehneß's fate – execution for the Rupp poisoning, to which she had confessed – was sealed by this point, as clause 130 of the *Carolina* (the code of criminal legal procedure issued for the Holy Roman Empire in 1532) imposed the death penalty for poisoning (which was regarded as a particularly heinous crime, because of its secret nature), even if the victims survived.³⁹ However, the councillors continued with the case, unwilling to believe that the true extent of Ehneß's depravity had yet been revealed,⁴⁰ and unable to accept that a woman could be motivated to attempt murder by anger alone.⁴¹ They investigated what they now regarded as the suspicious deaths of neighbourhood children to whom Barbara had given small gifts of food or whom she had nursed during their illnesses over recent years;⁴²

³⁹ G. Radbruch, ed., *Die Peinliche Gerichtsordnung Kaiser Karls V. von 1532* (Stuttgart; 6th edn., ed. A. Kaufmann, 1984), p. 87.

⁴⁰ Ehneß's fairly free admissions of desire for sexual fulfilment and of pre-marital fornication seem to have damned her in the councillors' eyes from the start of the case.

⁴¹ This had also been the case in 1629, when Magdalena Dürr (a woman arrested for infanticide), confessed to having killed her baby out of anger, and was then pressed to admit that the devil had prompted her to murder her child. Dürr was the first woman to be executed for witchcraft in Rothenburg (like Ehneß, she was beheaded and then her remains burned), although infanticide was a capital crime anyway. For discussion of this case, see Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, pp. 136-43.

⁴² The councillors investigated the suspicious deaths of the son of Hermann and Margaretha Hagensick (who had fallen ill in 1690 after eating dried peas given to him by Ehneß, who had then helped to nurse him); the child of Michael Frantz, who had lodged with Ehneß in 1688; and the child of Mathes and Ursula Pfisterer, whom Ehneß had nursed during illness, see the statements given by the Hagensicks on 27 Jan. 1692 and 3 Feb. 1692 (StAR A925 fos. 28r-29v, 46r-49v); Frantz on 28 Jan. 1692 (fos. 31v-32v); and the Pfisterers on 16 Feb. 1692 (fos. 65r-66r). In all three cases the parents were called to give statements at the town-hall; there, none of them accused Ehneß directly of having poisoned their children, but they all gave indirect evidence that was prejudicial to her. Hagensick linked his child's decline directly to Ehneß's nursing of him, and added that he did not like Ehneß coming into his house, while Frantz recounted that had quarrelled (with words and blows) with

explored rumours of other alleged acts of sexual impropriety on her part;⁴³ and (given the close association between harmful magic and poisoning in early modern Europe) exhorted her to admit that she was in league with the devil.⁴⁴ Barbara was adamant that she had harmed no children, but finally conceded during her third interrogation on 12 February that the devil had put the idea of poisoning her husband and Rupp into her head;⁴⁵ her subsequent (reluctant) confession to having had sex twice with the devil came only after she had been led by the municipal executioner into the torture-chamber and shown the torture instruments.⁴⁶ She repeated this confession in her fourth interrogation on 27 February, during which she was also searched for a devil's mark and tortured (for the first and only time during her trial) with thumbscrews.⁴⁷ Despite her suffering, she tried to keep her confession of witchcraft as minimal as possible; she maintained that the devil had forced her into intercourse, and that

Ehneß, who had criticised him for delaying his child's burial. The Rupp poisoning thus gave these other families the chance to articulate formally suspicions they had probably held against Ehneß since at least 1690.

⁴³ Hermann Hagensick (StAR A925 fos. 29r-29v) and Anna Margaretha Döllinger (fos. 53r-54r) suggested that Ehneß had behaved 'loosely' with the Saxon soldiers quartered in the city in 1688; Eva Wolff testified that Ehneß had used her as a go-between to send love letters to a man called Michael Held, presumably after Hans Ehneß's death (fos. 49r-49v). Throughout her interrogations, Ehness steadfastly denied ever having harmed any of the children or having sex with anyone apart from Hans Adam Widmann, Hans Ehneß, and the devil.

⁴⁴ In learned discourse, *veneficium* referred to both harmful magic and poisoning, see StAR A886 fo. 283r. This view was doubtless shared to some extent at the popular level, given that harmful magic, like poisoning, was often imagined as being effected through the use of powders and ointments.

⁴⁵ StAR A925 fos. 55r-64v, especially fos. 57v-58v, 60v; again, this was largely because her interrogators refused to accept that she had acted out of anger alone.

⁴⁶ StAR A925 fo.61r. Again, the interrogators' questions were highly leading: Ehneß was told that she must have had sex with the devil because she was so given to whoring, and that if she confessed willingly she would be taken out of the torture-chamber.

⁴⁷ StAR A925 fos. 67r-75r, especially 74r-75r; she suffered the thumbscrews for nearly fifteen minutes.

she had never abjured God, been taught witchcraft by anyone else, performed any acts of harmful magic, nor attended any witches' gatherings.⁴⁸ At the end of this fourth interrogation, and doubtless desperate for solace in her ordeal, Barbara asked that her parish minister – or 'father confessor' (*Beichtvater*), as he was known in Lutheran Germany – be allowed to visit her in gaol.⁴⁹ Permission was granted, as condemned criminals were always given pastoral support in preparation for their executions. Barbara was visited by, and talked with, three of the city's nine urban clerics on several occasions between 27 February and 14 March. The three were her *Beichtvater* Johann Georg Joch, the minister of the city hospital (and her parish) church of the Holy Ghost⁵⁰; Superintendent Sebastian Kirchmeier, the head of the church in Rothenburg and its rural hinterland;⁵¹ and Johann Georg Herrnbauer, a deacon from the city's main parish church of St James,⁵² although the trial-records show that Kirchmeier took the lead in questioning Ehneß.

As a result of this clerical intervention, Ehneß made dramatic additions to her confessional narrative during her next two interrogations on 14 and 15 March. On 14 March

⁴⁸ StAR A925 fos. 74v-75r.

⁴⁹ StAR A925 fo. 75r.

⁵⁰ Johann Georg Joch (born 13 Jan. 1647, buried 15 Mar. 1695) was born in Rothenburg, studied at Wittenberg, and became minister of the city hospital church of the Holy Ghost in 1675, after holding the rural living of Schweinsdorf from 1668-9 and the position of Sub-Rector of the Rothenburg grammar school from 1669. He was the third most important cleric in the territory (after the Superintendent and Preacher of Vespers at the church of St James), according to the 1695 Rothenburg *Ordinance of Rank*, see L. Schnurrer, 'Rangordnung', *Die Linde* (58), 1966, pp. 78-9.

⁵¹ See note 7.

⁵² Johann Georg Herrnbauer I (born 23 Oct. 1634, buried 27 Mar. 1699) was born in Rothenburg, studied at Strasbourg, held the rural livings of Neusitz and Kirnberg from 1657-62, and the parish of Rothenburg St Leonhard from 1662-4, before becoming a deacon at the church of St James in 1664; he rose no higher in the clerical hierarchy thereafter; see Dannheimer, *Verzeichnis*, p. 69.

she gave the interrogating councillors and jurist Albrecht an account of her seduction into witchcraft at the age of eight by her (since-deceased) godmother, and the subsequent abjuration of her Lutheran faith to the devil which, as she (almost impatiently) told the men questioning her, she had already recounted to her *Beichtvater* (Joch).⁵³ The sudden introduction of this seduction narrative, the reference to Joch, and the theologically-specific way in which Barbara expressed her abjuration (as the surrender of her *Taufbund*, or ‘christening covenant’) all point to the influence the clerics had had on her over the preceding fortnight.⁵⁴ She also now conceded that she had attended witches’ dances held in the poor-house, a building that formed part of the city hospital complex, where she had seen the following Rothenburg inhabitants: Adelheit Jäger, a bricklayer’s wife from Jews’ Street; Appolonia, the wife of butcher Johann Crämer; Appolonia Schwarz, a poor widow; Anna Schöppler, a former maidservant at the hospital; Barbara, the wife of Georg Schmetzer, a minor hospital official; Hans Adam Knöspel, an epileptic boy and self-confessed witch who had lived in the city hospital since his own trial for witchcraft in 1689, and one of the women who watched over him there, Barbara Weiser.⁵⁵ Hans Adam Knöspel was brought from the hospital to the gaol on 15 March to confront Ehneß; he confirmed that he had seen her at a witches’ gathering.⁵⁶ On 15 March Ehneß added that the minister of the rural parish of Tauberscheckenbach (Johann Craft), had also been at the gatherings; he had preached in

⁵³ StAR A925 fos. 76r-79r; see fo. 76r for her reference to Joch.

⁵⁴ The idea that adult female witches seduced children into witchcraft by persuading them to give up their ‘christening covenants’ in favour of a demonic pact had been central to the case of self-confessed boy-witch Hans Adam Knöspel, in which Joch, Kirchmeier and Herrnbauer had been involved since 1689. The Knöspel case is discussed in A. Rowlands, ‘Gender, Ungodly Parents and a Witch-Family in Seventeenth-Century Germany’, *Past & Present* (forthcoming), 2016.

⁵⁵ These names were listed on 14 Mar. (StAR A925 fo. 77v) and 15 Mar. 1692 (fos. 84r, 90r).

⁵⁶ StAR A925 fos. 88r-90v.

Latin and christened two of Anna Schöppler's daughters in the devil's name.⁵⁷ Even at this stage, however, Ehneß tried to express her disquiet at the role of witch-identifier that she felt she was being forced to play. On 15 March she told her interrogators that she had denounced these people because she had been terrified into so doing by Superintendent Kirchmeier, who had told her she would otherwise be 'damned and lost [ie: to God]'.⁵⁸ He had suggested their names to her for confirmation; he had also suggested the names of many 'vornehme' ('distinguished', or upper-class) women to her, but she had denied that they were at the gatherings.⁵⁹ She added bitterly that she had expected the ministers to comfort her with God's word, but that Kirchmeier had instead wanted to compel her to accuse certain people as witches.⁶⁰

Kirchemier's intervention in the Ehneß case was the final, most extreme example of clerical involvement in witch-trials in Rothenburg which had begun in 1627, and increased in intensity in the second half of the seventeenth century. This development had three inter-linked causes. One was the growing preference of the city councillors to gather as much expert advice as possible before reaching verdicts in witch-trials; in addition to their traditional reliance on the municipal jurists,⁶¹ the councillors began to call on the theological expertise of the city's clerics (from 1627)⁶² and the medical expertise of its physicians (from

⁵⁷ StAR A925 fos. 85v-87r.

⁵⁸ StAR A925 fo. 84v: '... sie were verdambt und verlohren, wenn sie es nicht sage'.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ StAR A925 fo. 85r.

⁶¹ See footnote 27.

⁶² See footnote 67; the councillors also sought the opinions of clerics in 1652 (two cases), a long possession/witchcraft case (1664-73), and the Hans Adam Knöspel case (1689-94).

1652),⁶³ as well as occasionally seeking advice from university faculties of law and theology (from 1671).⁶⁴ The second cause was the wider cultural context of seventeenth-century Lutheranism, especially in the aftermath of the Thirty Years' War, when concerns about human susceptibility to demonic temptation were especially acute and found expression in Rothenburg in a new emphasis on witchcraft as a spiritual crime involving a demonic pact, and new anxieties about the possibility of demonic possession.⁶⁵ In this context the importance (and perhaps self-importance) of the urban clergy as spiritual advisors to demonically-afflicted individuals and as religious advisors to the city council (in cases of blasphemy and unorthodoxy as well as witchcraft and apparent possession) increased significantly.⁶⁶ The third, most important, cause of growing clerical involvement in witch-trials in seventeenth-century Rothenburg, however, was the increased frequency of trials involving self-incriminating child-witches, which the councillors and jurists found particularly disturbing and hard to handle. Such a trial triggered the councillors' first request for clerical assistance in 1627, when they asked the-then Church Superintendent, Georg

⁶³ See the 1652 case of Margaretha Horn, Rowlands, *Narratives of Witchcraft*, pp. 180-205.

⁶⁴ The councillors first sought the opinion of a university law faculty in the trial of Appolonia Glaitter in 1671, see A. Rowlands, 'Witchcraft and Old Women in Early Modern Germany', *Past & Present* (173), 2001, pp. 50-89. They also sought an opinion from the University of Altdorf in the trial of Anna Margaretha Rohn in 1673 (StAR A909 fos. 357r-361v). The councillors were traditionally reluctant to seek legal advice outside the city, see Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, pp. 64-7.

⁶⁵ These points are discussed in A. Rowlands, "'When will the burning start here?'" Demonological texts, judicial procedure, and the spread of ideas about witchcraft in early modern Rothenburg ob der Tauber' (forthcoming). The wider context of seventeenth-century Lutheranism is wonderfully evoked in M. Rieger, *Der Teufel in Pfarrhaus. Gespenster, Geisterglaube und Besessenheit im Luthertum der Frühen Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 2011).

⁶⁶ Several such cases were bound together in a special volume of records pertaining to the Rothenburg Consistorium, see Staatsarchiv Nuremberg Rothenburg Repertorium (hereafter StAN Ro. Rep.) 2087.

Zyrlein, to advise them on the case of a thirteen-year-old peasant girl called Margaretha Hörber, who claimed to have been taken to witches' dances by older female witches. Zyrlein visited and questioned Margaretha in the city gaol three times. The detailed opinion he wrote for the councillors established the key principles by which the Rothenburg authorities subsequently categorised and treated other child-witches; as the victims of adult witch-seductresses and the devil, who were in need of spiritual instruction to enable them to resist the forces of evil, rather than judicial punishment.⁶⁷ In practice, this usually meant confining the child in the city hospital for a period of weeks, months or even years, where she or he could most easily be subjected to intense religious education by the urban clerics. This pastoral approach towards self-incriminating child-witches saved their lives and gave them some chance of social re-integration,⁶⁸ but also had the unintended effect of increasing the exposure of urban clerics to stories of the terrifying parallel world of the devil and the witches, told by children who claimed to have been taken there in reality. Clerical interaction with such children thus strengthened clerical belief in – and anxiety about – the threat posed by witches to the godly community.

Sebastian Kirchmeier cut his teeth on just such a case, involving the self-confessed child-witch Hans Adam Knöspel, between 1689 and 1692. Knöspel was tried for witchcraft alongside his mother, Anna Maria, whom he had blamed for taking him to witches' dances, in 1689, and was then sent to live in the city hospital after his mother, father and sister were

⁶⁷ For Zyrlein's opinion, see StAR A886 fos. 283r-286v; for discussion of the Hörber case, see Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, pp. 103-24.

⁶⁸ This happened in the Hörber case and others involving child-witches in 1639, 1652, 1664-73, and 1689-94, see Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, Appendix, pp. 212-28; and A. Rowlands, 'Hexenprozesse gegen Kinder in Rothenburg ob der Tauber, 1587-1709', in W. Behringer and C. Opitz-Belakhal, eds., *Kinderhexen-Kinderbanden-Hexenkinder* (Bielefeld, 2016), pp. 257-66. This policy created an imagined association between the city hospital and the supernatural which peaked in the early 1690s.

banished. Over the next three years the urban clerics participated in an exceptionally long and labour-intensive pastoral effort, spear-headed by the zealous Kirchmeier, to rescue the boy from the devil. This involved subjecting the boy to regular sessions of religious instruction, beatings, and verbal examinations before the city's *Consistorium* (the administrative body in charge of churches and schools in the territory) in preparation for a public church ceremony at which he renounced the devil on 6 November 1690, and again thereafter when the boy claimed to have fallen back into the devil's clutches. Kirchmeier and his clerical colleagues were also requested by the councillors to write the unprecedented number of four theological opinions on Hans Adam Knöspel between September 1690 and the spring of 1692. As a result of his frequent interactions with the clerics, Hans Adam (unsurprisingly) was forced by them to develop his original, relatively crude, story of night-flying with his mother to witches' gatherings at a local inn into a richly-detailed narrative of seduction into witchcraft by his mother, sexual intercourse with his mother and the devil, and abjuration of his faith by being rechristened and given a new demonic name (*Phantastalein*) which was written into Hell's register in his own blood; once in the hospital, he encouraged another boy-inmate called Hans Georg Nunn to make similar claims, and was also used by other, adult inmates and local inhabitants as a conduit by means of which long-held suspicions of witchcraft against neighbourhood women could be made public. For Kirchmeier, the lengthy, leading and official role he played in the pastoral 'treatment' of Knöspel laid the groundwork for his overzealous intervention in the case of Barbara Ehneß in 1692, as it encouraged him to assume (erroneously, as far as the councillors were concerned) that he had acquired the expertise and license to do so.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ For discussion of the Knöspel case and Kirchmeier's role in it, see Rowlands, 'Gender, Ungodly Parents, and a Witch-Family'.

The allegation made by Ehneß under interrogation on 15 March - that Kirchmeier had suggested names of alleged witches for her to confirm - clearly rattled the councillors, and left them in a quandary about how to proceed. Despite the fact that her interrogators suggested to Ehneß that she must have invented the allegation to exonerate herself,⁷⁰ the councillors' actions implied that they feared there was some truth in what she had said, as they subsequently prohibited the clerics from visiting her again in gaol. Her *Beichtvater* Joch complained about this on 17 March, when he was called to the town hall to confirm what Ehneß had confessed to him about pastor Johann Craft's presence at the witches' gathering. Joch insisted that that he be allowed to visit Ehneß, as it took longer to save the souls of witches than of other criminals, and because it was bad for his reputation if he appeared to be failing in his duty to her. The councillors told him bluntly that it was the clerics' fault that complications had arisen in the case, and that Kirchmeier, with his improper questions and suggestions, was the chief culprit – in other words, the clerics had only themselves to blame for the current situation.⁷¹ At the same time, however, the councillors took further action against most of the people Ehneß claimed to have seen at the witches' dance, calling Adelheit Jäger, Appolonia Crämer, Appolonia Schwarz, Anna Schöppler, and Barbara Schmetzer to the town hall on 17 and 18 March for questioning about their reputations as alleged witches,⁷² and taking statements about the character of the Tauberscheckenbach minister Johann Craft from several of his parishioners.⁷³ This tactic backfired, however, as all the women denied

⁷⁰ StAR A925 fo. 85r.

⁷¹ StAR A925 fos.92v-93r.

⁷² StAR A925 fos. 91r-92r, 102r-103r, 104r-111v.

⁷³ StAR A925 fos. 93v-98r. Johann Craft (1642-1720) held the living of Tauberscheckenbach from 1669-1720, although he swapped livings with the pastor of Spielbach, Jeremias Fuchs, from 1685-90, see Dannheimer, *Verzeichnis*, p. 57 (Fuchs), p. 83 (Craft). This was why the councillors also called on Fuchs and Spielbach parishioners for testimony about Craft's character in 1692. The reports about Craft were almost entirely

vehemently that they were witches, while the investigations into Craft's reputation galvanised him into writing a letter to the councillors in his own defence which offered further evidence of Kirchmeier's impropriety in the Ehneß case.

In his letter, Craft explained that Ehneß's allegations had been put to him by Kirchmeier, in the presence of Joch and Herrnbauer, after he had been peremptorily summoned into Rothenburg for a meeting for this purpose on 15 March 1692. Craft gave a detailed account of the verbal exchanges he had had with Kirchmeier at the meeting, which made clear that Kirchmeier had tried to browbeat him into a confession. Kirchmeier had exhorted Craft to admit to being a witch, saying he would otherwise have to bear his sin on his conscience and answer for it on the Day of Judgement; Craft had replied that he was innocent and would affirm his innocence before any court or prince (even the Emperor), and that, even if he were punished in body or goods, no-one could take Jesus from his heart. Kirchmeier had responded by saying that he doubted if Craft had Jesus in his heart; even after Craft had sworn his innocence on his soul and clerical office to Kirchmeier, the latter remained unconvinced, claiming that he could tell Craft was guilty because he could not cry (the inability to shed tears was regarded by many contemporaries as proof of a person's secret identity as a witch). Craft said that he had told Kirchmeier he was crying tears of blood in his heart (rather than crocodile tears for the Superintendent to see), and that he could not admit falsely to witchcraft, as this would make him guilty of lying and self-murder. Craft lamented that Kirchmeier wanted to make him into a witch by force; when Kirchmeier had told him that God was revealing Craft's hidden, evil actions to the world through Ehneß, Craft had said that Ehneß was moved, not by the spirit of truth, but by the spirit of lies and murder.

negative; he swore, drank too much, fulfilled his duties poorly, and was unpopular with parishioners. Craft's mother was also a reputed witch (see StAR A925 fos. 85v, 116r), which put him at greater risk of gaining such a reputation himself.

Craft's letter must have further alarmed the councillors; by summoning and questioning Craft and making him swear his innocence in response to Ehneß's allegations, and by referring to witchcraft proofs, Kirchmeier was claiming a quasi-legal authority in the case and, by divulging confidential information, potentially prejudicing any future legal action that might have been taken against Craft. Moreover, by refusing to accept Craft's protestations of innocence, and suggesting that Craft's 'true' identity (as a witch) had been revealed by God to Kirchmeier through Ehneß, Kirchmeier was suggesting that his expertise and authority as a cleric to interpret God's revelations equalled (and indeed even exceeded) the revelatory power of the legal process, as implemented by the councillors as secular judges.⁷⁴

The turning-point in the case came on 23 March, however, when Ehneß, in her seventh interrogation, denied that she had ever been to any witches' gatherings and retracted the denunciations she had made, stating that she had been forced to accuse people by the Superintendent, who had read the names out to her from a list written on a slip of paper. As Ehneß now explained, the list had included another rural minister, Georg Leonhard Rücker of Bettwar; three more ordinary women of Rothenburg (the wives of two shoemakers and a man called Schwab Lenlein); and, most explosively of all, several women of the urban upper-class, whom Ehneß named for her interrogators but who were recorded only by the initial of their surname in the trial records.⁷⁵ Her interrogators told Ehneß that Kirchmeier denied having read names out to her; this suggests that the Superintendent may have been informally

⁷⁴ StAR A925 fos. 112r-113r. The letter is undated but must have been written after Craft's meeting with Kirchmeier on 15 Mar. and before 21 Mar. 1692 (when it was discussed at a council meeting); the almost verbatim detail of the verbal exchanges Craft reported suggests that they were fresh in his mind. In the letter, Craft dated Kirchmeier's enmity against him to 1688, when suspicions of witchcraft had first been raised against him by a parishioner; this explains why Kirchmeier suggested his name to Ehneß in 1692.

⁷⁵ StAR A925 fos. 114r-118r; the pastors were named on fol. 116r; the elite women were listed as *die G.*, *die K.*, *die H.*, and *die St.* on fol. 115v.

questioned about his actions by one or more of the councillors at some point between 15 and 23 March.⁷⁶ Her interrogators also tried to persuade Ehneß that her retraction was the work of the devil, but she denied this and stuck doggedly to it on 23 March and again during her next interrogation on 20 May, when she added that Kirchmeier had also read out to her the names of his own wife, and those of another urban cleric and his wife.⁷⁷ On being asked why she had originally named specific people as witches apparently voluntarily (on 14 March), she explained that she had done so out of fear,⁷⁸ as Kirchmeier had treated her so severely when he had visited her in gaol, telling her that she would not receive God's mercy if she did not name all the other witches.⁷⁹ In addition to threats, Ehneß said that Kirchmeier had used persuasion in some of their conversations, 'smooth-talking' her into naming others.⁸⁰ Ehneß also said that Kirchmeier and Joch (who was present on at least one occasion when Kirchmeier suggested names to her) had told her that she should bravely confess everything to them, as they would keep secret whatever she divulged,⁸¹ with Joch exhorting her to 'go and empty her heart [ie: repeat all that she had confessed to them] to the secular authorities [councillors]', and calling on God to strengthen her in this undertaking.⁸² With this combination of threats and false promises, Joch and especially Kirchmeier were behaving in the same way as the clerics condemned in the searing critiques of the cruelty and injustice of

⁷⁶ StAR A925 fo. 117v.

⁷⁷ StAR A925 fos. 119r-122v (20 May); for an explanation of the gap between these interrogations, see footnote 24.

⁷⁸ StAR A925 fos. 114v, 115r.

⁷⁹ StAR A925 fo. 115v.

⁸⁰ StAR A925 fo. 118r.

⁸¹ StAR A925 fo. 116r.

⁸² StAR A925 fo. 117r: '... gehet hin, und schüttet Eüer Herz vor der weltlich[en] Obrigkeit aus, Gott stärke eüch in eüerem Vorhaben'.

excessive witch-hunts published by the Jesuit Friedrich Spee von Langenfeld in 1631, and the Lutheran theologian Johann Matthäus Meyfahrt in 1635.⁸³ In their texts Spee and Meyfahrt both criticised over-zealous confessors who attended witch-suspects in gaol but who, instead of showing them Christian gentleness, threatened to withhold spiritual solace and absolution from them unless they made false confessions of guilt.⁸⁴ Kirchmeier knew of Meyfahrt's work (it was one of three demonologies he cited specifically in 1692), although he seems to have identified more with the over-zealous confessors and advocates of witch-hunting criticised by Meyfahrt than with Meyfahrt himself.⁸⁵

The councillors spared Kirchmeier the ignominy of testifying in person at the town hall, but at some point after 23 March they wrote formally to him asking him to explain his role in the Ehneß case in response to twenty-nine questions drawn up by the municipal jurists.

Kirchmeier wrote a long reply at some point during Holy Week (Easter Sunday fell on 6 April in 1692); his letter is organised in a question and answer format which (ironically) gives us a clear sense of the concerns raised against the author as well as his defence of his

⁸³ Friedrich von Spee, *Cautio Criminalis seu de processibus contra sagas liber (A Warning on Criminal Justice, or A Book on Witch Trials)*, 1631; Johann Matthäus Meyfahrt, *Christliche Erinnerung an gewaltige Regenten (A Christian Reminder to Powerful Princes)*, 1635. On Spee, see G. Jerouschek, 'Spee, Friedrich (1591-1635)', in R. M. Golden, ed., *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft. The Western Tradition*, IV (Santa Barbara, CA, 2006), pp. 1076-7; on Meyfahrt, see W. Behringer, 'Meyfart (Meyfahrt), Johann Matthäus (1590-1642)', in *ibid.*, III, pp. 757-8.

⁸⁴ For Spee's critique, see Spee, *Cautio Criminalis*, ed. and trans. by Joachim-Friedrich Ritter (Munich, 1982; 6th edn., 2000), pp. 72-8, 136-54, 285. Spee claimed for example to know of one priest who had accompanied 200 condemned witches to the stake, and who told prisoners that they could die like dogs, without the last rites, if they did not confess their guilt to him, pp. 76-7.

⁸⁵ Kirchmeier referred briefly to Meyfahrt's text in his letter to the councillors, StAR A925 (unpaginated, after fo. 122v), in response to question (hereafter q.) 4.

actions.⁸⁶ Kirchmeier began by explaining how he had become involved in the case in the first place; Joch had come to him saying that two confessors were needed to minister to Ehneß and Kirchmeier had immediately gone with Joch to the gaol because Herrnbauer (the deacon who should have taken on this task) had not been on hand. Kirchmeier justified his eagerness by saying that he had acted for God's sake and the good of Ehneß's soul; he tried to give what the councillors saw as his unrequested intervention a legitimate gloss by saying that Joch (and by implication he) had been acting on the town mayor's orders.⁸⁷ Kirchmeier admitted that he had suggested names to Ehneß during questioning, but tried to justify his actions by explaining that this had happened on the spur of the moment in the first hour of his first, unplanned meeting with her; to establish the innocence of many of those named; and in order to test the veracity of her claims about the witches' gatherings she said she had attended.⁸⁸ Kirchmeier had done this by suggesting to Ehneß a mixture of names, some of people already known to him personally as reputed witches, some of people he knew to be innocent, and several others that had simply occurred to him at the time.⁸⁹ He denied ever having had a list of names drawn up on a piece of paper, which he had read out to Ehneß, as she had claimed.⁹⁰ He did, however, admit to having had a sheet of paper with him in his interviews with Ehneß, on which he had prepared what he described as 'necessary' and

⁸⁶ Kirchmeier's letter (hereafter KL) is bound into StAR A925 after fo. 122v; it is nine pages (ie: eighteen sides) long, with extensive marginal comments by jurist Krauss. The English witch-hunter Matthew Hopkins adopted the same approach (ie: listing the criticisms against him as questions which he answered) in his published defence of his actions during the East Anglian witch-hunts of 1645-7, see Matthew Hopkins, *The Discovery of Witches* (London, 1647).

⁸⁷ StAR A925 KL, q. 1.

⁸⁸ StAR A925 KL, qs. 5 and 8.

⁸⁹ StAR A925 KL, q. 6.

⁹⁰ StAR A925 KL, qs. 9 and 10.

‘useful’ questions for her. Although Kirchmeier claimed that he had subsequently destroyed the paper, he repeated some of the questions it had contained in his letter to the councillors: Had she [Ehneß] seduced children into witchcraft? Had she abused the Eucharist? Had she signed a pact with the devil, or been rechristened or forbidden to pray by him? The questions clearly show Kirchmeier’s preconceived assumption that Ehneß was, indeed, in league with the devil.⁹¹

The issue of denunciation - the naming of alleged participants at witches’ gatherings - was at the heart of the Ehneß case, for various reasons. In other parts of early modern Germany, such denunciations fuelled the exponential growth of large-scale witch-persecution, as individual suspects were tortured into confessing their own guilt and implicating others they had supposedly seen at sabbaths, thus providing the next batch of suspects for the courts. The number of denunciations made against an individual mattered; this encouraged some persecuting authorities to keep lists of the people denounced by each condemned witch for the purposes of comparison and cross-reference. Infamous examples of such lists include the chillingly-detailed *Register of Witches* compiled by the legal official Claudius Musiel, which helped expedite the exceptionally severe late-sixteenth-century witch-persecution in the territory of the (Catholic) Abbey of St Maximin in Trier,⁹² and the *Black Book* from the Lutheran city of Lemgo, which experienced severe witch-hunts in the later-seventeenth century.⁹³ The making of such ‘witches’ registers’ had its counterpoint in

⁹¹ StAR A925 KL, q. 10.

⁹² R. Voltmer and K. Weisenstein, eds., *Das Hexenregister des Claudius Musiel. Ein Verzeichnis von hingerichteten und besagten Personen aus dem Trierer Land (1586-1594)* (Trier, 1996).

⁹³ G. Wilbertz, ‘Hexenverfolgung und Biographie. Person und Familie der Lemgoerin Maria Rampendahl (1645-1705)’, in G. Wilbertz, G. Schwerhoff and J. Scheffler, eds., *Hexenverfolgung und Regionalgeschichte. Die Grafschaft Lippe im Vergleich* (Bielefeld, 1994), pp. 145-79, see pp. 174-5.

the new, post-Reformation practice of keeping registers of baptisms, marriages and deaths; the existence of these real registers of the ungodly and the godly doubtless helped shape what seems to have been a predominantly seventeenth-century Protestant belief (first articulated in a witch-trial in Rothenburg in 1673)⁹⁴ that the devil also kept his own register or book of witches' names. The legal – and arguably even quasi-magical – significance of written denunciations can be seen in the fact that the Lemgo authorities felt that the best way to draw a line under the city's sorry history of witch-persecution was to burn the *Black Book* itself in the city market-place in 1715.⁹⁵ In Rothenburg in 1692 the councillors were loath even to write the names of the elite women suggested by Kirchmeier to Ehneß in full in the trial records, opting instead to refer to them only by the initials of their surnames,⁹⁶ and scoring through (deliberately and to the point of complete illegibility) any fuller reference made to them in error in the documents;⁹⁷ the interrogating councillors even took the unprecedented step of seeking the mayor's permission before writing down what Ehneß had said (and the names she had named) during her eighth interrogation on 20 May.⁹⁸ Small wonder, then, that Kirchmeier denied ever having made a list of names and that he stressed that he had destroyed the list of questions he had drawn up; his apparently innocuous sheet of paper carried potential legal weight, and symbolised a dangerous rival investigative authority that challenged the formal legal power (and written records) of the council.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ This happened during the trial for witchcraft of Anna Margaretha Rohn, see StAR A909 fo. 211r.

⁹⁵ See footnote 93.

⁹⁶ See footnote 75.

⁹⁷ See for example StAR A925 fos. 119v, 120r, 121r, 122r.

⁹⁸ StAR A925 fo. 121v.

⁹⁹ See footnote 91.

Even if Kirchmeier had not made a list of names in writing, his admission that he had suggested names of alleged sabbath-attenders verbally to Ehneß for confirmation or rejection would have appalled the councillors. Rothenburg had a strong tradition of treating unfounded allegations of witchcraft as slander; the authorities generally sought to keep the social peace (and to curb their inhabitant's enthusiasm for making accusations of witchcraft) by adhering to the dictum (which was displayed on a board in the town hall) that 'an honourable man should not talk [ie: publicly] about that which he cannot prove [ie: legally]'.¹⁰⁰ As an outsider, Kirchmeier (who had taken up his post as Superintendent from Regensburg in 1681) may have been unaware of the strength of this local tradition, which was one of the key factors in explaining the low number of witch-trials in Rothenburg and its rural hinterland throughout the early modern period. More probably, however, Kirchmeier may have felt that such legal niceties were unimportant compared to the greater task of doing God's work in unmasking witches; he probably also assumed that it would be obvious to all which names were those of 'real' witches, and which were the names of innocent people, thrown into the mix to test Ehneß.¹⁰¹ Unfortunately the men of Rothenburg's secular elite did not share this view and regarded Kirchmeier's association of their wives' names with a witches' dance as detrimental to their families' honour. On 8 April 1692, Johann Georg Grieninger of the inner city council, Niclas Geltner of the outer city council, and Christoph Sigmund Geÿß, the overseer of the city chancellery, brought slander suits against Kirchmeier before the councillors and demanded to be sent copies of the Ehneß trial-documents; they must have heard that a woman whose surname began with a 'G.' had been named in them, and

¹⁰⁰ See Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, pp. 22-9, especially p. 24.

¹⁰¹ Although this way of thinking rendered his idea of a test of Ehneß redundant! That Kirchmeier may have been trying to pursue a feud with the Staud family in the Ehneß trial is hinted at in references to Herr St.'s stepdaughter in Ehneß's interrogation on 20 May 1692, StAR A925 fos. 119r-122v. The feud is described briefly later in this article.

presumably wanted to see if she was one of their womenfolk.¹⁰² This slander suit continued until mid-June; on 13 June Kirchmeier complained to the town mayor that Grieninger, Geltner and Geÿß were still unwilling to let the matter drop, despite the fact that he had personally assured them that he believed that they and their wives were honourable people.¹⁰³

The actions of Grieninger, Geltner and Geÿß in early April pointed to another aspect of the Ehneß trial that alarmed the councillors and for which they blamed Kirchmeier, namely the leaking of confidential and legally potentially damaging information to the rest of the city from the *Büttelhaus*, the building which housed the cells for holding suspected criminals, the torture-chamber, and the room in which interrogations were conducted, as well as the archive of trial-records. Rumours about the Rupp poisoning would have spread after Ehneß's arrest anyway, and anxiety about witchcraft had doubtless been high amongst the city's inhabitants since 1689, because of the trial and pastoral 'treatment' of the boy-witch, Hans Adam Knöspel, in the city hospital. However, Kirchmeier stoked rather than dampened these communal anxieties in various ways in 1692. The councillors were particularly critical of the fact that, on leaving the *Büttelhaus* at the end of his first visit to Ehneß, Kirchmeier had turned to the gaoler and told him that 'she had confessed that she was an absolute witch, and more besides'; this increased the likelihood of rumours about the case (and speculation about the further detail of Ehneß's confession) spreading via the gaoler to the rest of the city. The councillors also took issue with the implied criticism of their legal procedures in Kirchmeier's aside (that he, rather than they, had gained a full confession from Ehneß). Kirchmeier admitted in his letter to the councillors that he had said this to the gaoler, but

¹⁰² StAR B48 fo. 242r.

¹⁰³ StAR B48 fos. 243v (15 Apr.), 250v (20 May), 254v-255r (13 Jun.), 256v-257r (15 Jun. 1692).

excused himself by explaining that he had done so out of joy that God had blessed his efforts in persuading Ehneß to confess her sin.¹⁰⁴

The councillors also accused Kirchmeier of having mentioned the names of two of the upper-class people who had been linked with the case in conversation with Johann Ludwig Vogtmann, the court scribe and keeper of trial-records, at the *Büttelhaus* one day. Kirchmeier denied this and said that Vogtmann must have misheard what he had said, but this was another (admitted) example of an inappropriate conversation about the case that could have been overheard by others, and a possible conduit by means of which Kirchmeier's speculations could have reached the outer city council, of which Vogtmann was a member.¹⁰⁵ Kirchmeier further blotted his copybook by preaching a sermon on witchcraft in late March or early April in the city's main church of St James.¹⁰⁶ Kirchmeier described the sermon as a pastoral admonition to his flock but municipal jurist Krauss, who made many (highly critical) marginal comments on Kirchmeier's letter to the councillors, noted that Kirchmeier had said in his sermon that witches' souls could only be saved through execution (ie: after full confession). If, as seems likely, this was a reasonably accurate record of what Kirchmeier had preached then it would have displeased the councillors, as it not only pre-empted their verdict in the Ehneß case but also threatened to inflame popular desire for more severe action against other reputed witches in the city.¹⁰⁷

The councillors and jurists were also critical of Kirchmeier on the issue of confession, for two reasons. First, while allowing that it was proper and necessary for the clerics to

¹⁰⁴ StAR A925 KL, qs. 16 and 23.

¹⁰⁵ StAR A925 KL, q. 17.

¹⁰⁶ The Superintendent's office incorporated that of preacher at the church of St James, see Dannheimer, *Verzeichnis*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁷ StAR A925 KL, q. 27.

persuade Ehneß to a ‘penitent recognition’ of her sins in preparation for her execution, the councillors put it to Kirchmeier that it would have been better to leave that which was hidden or obscure to God’s judgement, rather than to keep asking her more and more questions.¹⁰⁸

The repeated questioning of Ehneß was not only theologically unnecessary (as it went against an older Lutheran tradition of confession in which pastors were advised not to probe sinners’ consciences for hidden sins) but also politically problematic, as it suggested a lack of confidence on Kirchmeier’s part in the councillors’ judicial interrogation of Ehneß.

Kirchmeier defended the clerics’ actions by explaining that Ehneß had been hindered by the devil in offering up a full and willing confession to them; they had therefore had to give her the opportunity to open herself up to them (ie: by questioning her further) so that they could save her soul.¹⁰⁹ Kirchmeier also denied having terrified Ehneß into making her confessions and denunciations, although it is clear from his description to the councillors of what he had actually said to her (and the manner in which he had said it) that his behaviour could all too easily have been perceived as terrifying by a poor, uneducated widow, awaiting execution. As Kirchmeier put it, he had exhorted Ehneß, in all earnestness and with ardent sighs to God, that if she wanted to find mercy she must confess her sins, otherwise they could not be forgiven nor her soul healed.¹¹⁰ Even more seriously, the councillors accused Kirchmeier of having broken the ‘seal’ or secrecy of the confessional (and thus by implication his godly duty as a father confessor), by passing on information confessed to him by Ehneß to other people.¹¹¹ This allegation was made most explicitly in relation to Ehneß’s naming of the rural pastors Craft and Rücker as participants in the witches’ gathering; the section of his letter to

¹⁰⁸ StAR A925 KL, q. 4: ‘. . . bußfertige Erkenntnis. . .’.

¹⁰⁹ StAR A925 KL, q. 3.

¹¹⁰ StAR A925 KL, q. 14.

¹¹¹ StAR A925 KL, qs. 15, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25.

the councillors in which Kirchmeier describes how this came about is also an excellent example of the process by means of which a suspect in a witchcraft case could be forced, by leading questions and psychological pressure, into producing plausible denunciations of others, even without torture.¹¹²

Kirchmeier explained that, in the midst of pressing Ehneß for details about who else she had seen at the witches' gatherings, he had asked her if she had seen any clerics there. Ehneß had said yes, at which point Kirchmeier said he had asked her the (test) question: Did you see me, to which she had answered no. He had then put the specific names of other clerics to her, telling the councillors in his letter that these men had occurred to him because of what he had already known about what he called their less than praiseworthy lives; in other words, these were ministers who had already come to Kirchmeier's attention in his office as Superintendent because of their failure to fulfil the exemplary role of the godly *Beichtvater*. From this list, Kirchmeier said that Ehneß had singled out Georg Leonhard Rücker of Bettwar freely, a point which glosses disingenuously over the fact that Kirchmeier had suggested the names to her in the first place.¹¹³ Ehneß's confirmation of Craft's presence at the witches' gathering, and her description of his activities there (preaching in Latin, christening babies in the devil's name) doubtless also came about in this way, as a result of suggestions and leading questions by Kirchmeier.¹¹⁴ Kirchmeier admitted in his letter that he had broken the seal of confession by telling the city mayor what Ehneß had said about these

¹¹² StAR A925 KL, q. 20.

¹¹³ Kirchmeier had done much the same in relation to Ehneß's godmother, her supposed *Lehrmeisterin* (the woman who had taught her witchcraft), but excused himself by saying that he had not broken the seal of confession in this instance because her godmother was already dead, see StAR A925 KL, q. 25.

¹¹⁴ Although Ehneß found Craft a more plausible witch than Rücker, because Craft's mother was a reputed witch; as Ehneß said on 15 Mar. 1692, '... man sage, wann es die Mutter könne, so könne es das Kind auch' (StAR A925 fo. 85v): 'it is said that, when the mother can do it [witchcraft], so also can the child'.

ministers, but he defended his actions by saying that he had spoken only privately on the matter to the mayor in the mayor's house, and that he had done so for the greater good of God, God's church, and the community in Rothenburg.¹¹⁵ This statement was untrue; Kirchmeier had also called Craft into town to answer Ehneß's allegations in the presence of Joch and Herrnbauer. It was also an example of Kirchmeier's consistent and, in the councillors' eyes, dangerous habit of justifying what they saw as his unseemly interference as God's work; on this basis, Kirchmeier could claim the right to do just about anything in the case. Kirchmeier also admitted in his letter to the councillors that he had broken a promise, which he and Joch had made to Ehneß, that they would keep secret everything she told them. Kirchmeier explained to the councillors that he had meant that he would keep secret all that was possible according to his conscience; this of course gave him complete discretion to decide when to break Ehneß's confidences.¹¹⁶

Why was Kirchmeier so quick to intervene in the Ehneß case, despite not being specifically requested to do so by the council, and why did his intervention - his pressure on Ehneß to confess that she was a witch and to name other witches - take the form that it did? There seems no reason to doubt his apparently genuine belief – expressed in his letter to the councillors - that Ehneß was in thrall to the devil, and that her soul could only be saved (and Rothenburg spared the effects of God's wrath) by eliciting a full confession of her sins.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ StAR A925 KL, q. 21.

¹¹⁶ StAR A925 KL, q. 22.

¹¹⁷ In addition to the demonologies by Meyfahrt (see footnote 83) and Schultheiss and Remy (see footnote 124), Kirchmeier also referred in his letter to the councillors to the *Hand-buch für Seelsorger (Hand-book for Pastors)* (Rothenburg, 1680), written by his predecessor as Superintendent, Johann Ludwig Hartmann. Hartmann was a prolific author of pastoral texts and 'one of Franconia's best-known Lutheran confessors' (Robisheaux, *Last*

Such ideas were fairly standard for their time; they reflected changes of emphasis in the wider context of German Lutheranism, which in the second half of the seventeenth century was especially characterised by an increased anxiety about human susceptibility to demonic temptation on the one hand, and a greater emphasis on the importance of the individual sinner's spiritual redemption through confession on the other.¹¹⁸ By 1692, however, Kirchmeier had also developed a marked personal interest in, and commitment to, witch-finding, almost certainly as a result of the intense experience of the still-ongoing pastoral treatment of the boy-witch Hans Adam Knöspel. Knöspel's repeated confessions of seduction into witchcraft and attendance at witches' gatherings in Rothenburg seem to have convinced

Witch of Langenburg, p. 359, n. 5), although Kirchmeier did not refer to the text Hartmann wrote specifically on confession: *Absolution-Buch* (Rothenburg, 1679). On Hartmann, see footnote 7, and A. Rowlands, 'Superstition, Magic, and Clerical Polemic in Seventeenth-Century Germany', in S.A. Smith and A. Knight, eds., *The Religion of Fools? Superstition Past and Present* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 157-77.

¹¹⁸ See Rieger, *Teufel im Pfarrhaus*; Rowlands, *Narratives of Witchcraft*, pp. 192-200; Robisheaux, *Last Witch of Langenburg*; and on Lutheran confession more generally: H. C. Rublack, 'Lutherische Beichte und Sozialdisziplinierung', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* (84) 1993, pp. 127-55; R. Dürr, 'Confession as an Instrument of Church Discipline: A Study of Catholic and Lutheran Confessional Manuals from the 16th and 17th Centuries', in S. Müller and C. Schweiger, eds., *Between Creativity and Norm-Making: Tensions in the Early Modern Era* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 215-40, and, 'Private Ohrenbeichte im öffentlichen Kirchenraum', in S. Rau and G. Schwerhoff, eds., *Zwischen Gotteshaus und Taverne: öffentliche Räume in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Cologne, 2004), pp. 383-411. Much of the literature on Lutheran confession focuses on the contested move towards the implementation of private confession, see for example J. C. Wolfart, 'Why was Private Confession so Contentious in Early Seventeenth-Century Lindau?', in B. Scribner and T. Johnson, eds., *Popular Religion in Germany and Central Europe, 1400-1800* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 140-65; R. K. Rittgers, 'Private Confession and Religious Authority in Reformation Nürnberg' in K. J. Lualdi and A. T. Thayer, eds., *Penitence in the Age of Reformations* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 49-70, and 'Private Confession and the Lutherization of Sixteenth-Century Nördlingen', *Sixteenth Century Journal* (31:4) 2005, pp. 1039-85. More work is needed on the role of the father confessor and Lutheran clerical masculinity in this context.

Kirchmeier that there really was a hidden network of witches in the city that he, as Superintendent, needed to uncover, while his lengthy, official involvement with Knöspel probably deluded him into thinking that his intervention in the Ehneß case was justified, and would be welcomed by the councillors. Kirchmeier certainly seems to have imagined the two cases as intertwined, and Knöspel and Ehneß as co-conspirators in a wider demonic plot, without realising that he was largely responsible for making the links between them. As Kirchmeier told the councillors in his letter, he had acquired the names of the already-reputed witches that he had put to Ehneß on 14 March for confirmation as sabbath-attenders from information which he had elicited from Hans Adam Knöspel and Hans Georg Nunn (the other boy-inmate of the city hospital who also claimed he was a witch).¹¹⁹ Knöspel had in fact first been persuaded to name Appolonia Schwarz and Adelheit Jäger as witches in 1689 and 1690 respectively;¹²⁰ one can imagine Kirchmeier regarding the arrest of Barbara Ehneß as a God-given opportunity to pursue these women, and understand his desire to rush to the gaol to question her as quickly as possible. In his letter to the councillors, Kirchmeier added that he had also known the names of these already-reputed witches from complaints, and requests for advice, about acts of harmful magic that had been made to him over the years by inhabitants of the city and rural hinterland.¹²¹ This reference points to a wider sense of anxiety about witchcraft that was shared in, and probably heightened by, pastoral conversations between father confessors and individual members of their flocks, and which usually (given the councillors' traditional reluctance to prosecute witchcraft at law) had little or no legal outlet.

¹¹⁹ StAR A925 KL., q. 6.

¹²⁰ See StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 744r-745r (Schwarz); Ro. Rep. 2094 fo. 240r (Jäger). Rumours about Jäger had been circulating since at least 1673, see StAR A909 fo. 211r.

¹²¹ StAR A925 KL., q. 6.

It also shows Kirchmeier once again introducing information given to him in confidence in a pastoral context into the Ehneß trial.

Kirchmeier's experience of the Knöspel case also convinced him that the councillors were too soft on witches; he probably saw the Ehneß case as his chance to show the councillors how witches (or at least adult female witches) should really be dealt with. After Knöspel's mother, Anna Maria, had been banished for witchcraft in August 1689, Kirchmeier referred openly to her as 'fireworthy', implying that she should have been burned at the stake;¹²² he also suggested in a theological report to the councillors in 1690 that she should be brought back to Rothenburg for more stringent questioning and then given over to her father confessor, so that more information could be obtained from her and her soul saved.¹²³ Kirchmeier's suggestion was ignored in relation to Anna Maria Knöspel; it is plausible to suggest that he came to regard Ehneß as a surrogate for her in 1692. Kirchmeier may also have been encouraged in his belief that more severe action was needed against witches by two demonological texts, which he cited in his letter to the councillors: Nicolas Rémy's *Demonolatriy* (published in 1595) and Heinrich von Schultheiss's *Ausführliche Instruction, wie in Inquisition Sachen des grewlichen Laster der Zauberey....zu procediren* (*Detailed Instruction, on How to Proceed against the Dreadful Crime of Witchcraft*, published in 1634).¹²⁴ It is striking that both of these (Catholic) authors were zealous and fanatical judicial officials who presided over major witch-persecutions, in which witchcraft was treated as an exceptional crime and suspects were tortured into confessing their own supposed guilt and denouncing other people as witches. The councillors had asked Kirchmeier whether it was

¹²² StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fo. 788r.

¹²³ StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fo. 784v.

¹²⁴ On these demonologists, see W. Monter and E. Peters, 'Rémy, Nicolas (ca. 1530-1612)', and R. Voltmer, 'Schultheiss, Heinrich von (ca. 1580-ca. 1646)', in Golden, ed., *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft*, IV, 955-7, 1012-13.

not best to avoid suggesting names to witchcraft suspects when questioning them in either a secular or ecclesiastical context. He had responded by saying that he did not agree, that the matter was not so simple in relation to magical crimes, and that if one waited until witches confessed of their own volition it would be a slow process, citing Remy and Schultheiss in support of his stance, and suggesting that godly magistrates (and by implication the Rothenburg councillors) failed in their duty if they did not pursue witches vigorously.¹²⁵

The idea central to the sermon that Kirchmeier preached in late March or early April 1692¹²⁶ – that the soul of a witch could only be saved by execution (after a full confession) – was almost certainly taken from Remy, who emphasized this point in *Demonolatry*,¹²⁷ and can again be read as a criticism by Kirchmeier of the council's verdict in the case of Anna Maria Knöspel and an attempt by him to influence the outcome of the Ehneß trial. These Catholic demonologies, based as they were on the idea that witches' sabbaths really took place, may also have encouraged Kirchmeier to believe that the witches' gatherings referred to by Knöspel, Nunn and Ehneß were actual events, rather than (as was the traditional interpretation in Rothenburg) delusions planted in people's minds by the devil to draw them away from God and to cause social discord within communities.¹²⁸ Kirchmeier told the councillors that one of the reasons why he had suggested the names of people to Ehneß in custody was to establish whether or not the witches' gatherings had really taken place;¹²⁹ the tension (or confusion) between these two ways of imagining sabbaths was also evident in the testimony of Hans Adam Knöspel, who confirmed that he had seen Ehneß at the witches'

¹²⁵ StAR A925 KL, q. 7.

¹²⁶ See footnotes 106 and 107.

¹²⁷ See Remy, *Demonolatry*, trans. E. A. Ashwin, ed. M. Summers (London, 1930), pp. 94-5.

¹²⁸ For this view of witches' gatherings in Rothenburg, see Rowlands, *Narratives of Witchcraft*, pp. 55-60.

¹²⁹ StAR A925 KL, q. 5.

gathering at Adelheit Jäger's house in the flesh,¹³⁰ and Ehneß, who (before retracting this confession altogether) insisted that she had only seen people at gatherings in her thoughts, or in spirit form.¹³¹ Kirchmeier's citing of Remy and Schultheiss, along with the Lutheran witch-hunt critic, Meyfahrt, in his letter should not be seen as surprising; seventeenth-century clerics and jurists in Rothenburg tended to use demonologies eclectically and selectively, referring to texts to support arguments and approaches to which they were already committed, often for political, pragmatic or personal reasons.¹³²

Several Protestant areas (Sweden, Lemgo, New England)¹³³ experienced the worst witch-hunts in their histories in the second half of the seventeenth century, so the Rothenburg councillors' decision to close the Ehneß case with her execution rather than follow Kirchmeier's lead towards more zealous witch-persecution was not a foregone conclusion. There were various reasons for their decision. The first was Ehneß herself. Her bravery in retracting the denunciations she had made and telling her interrogators about Kirchmeier should not be underestimated. She also stuck doggedly to the retractions once made, even in the face of her impending execution.¹³⁴ This gave her words religious as well as legal significance, as it was widely believed that condemned criminals – or 'poor sinners', as they

¹³⁰ StAR A925 fo. 88v.

¹³¹ StAR A925 fos. 77v, 78r, 87r, 88v.

¹³² These ideas are discussed in Rowlands, 'When will the burning start here?'

¹³³ On Lemgo, see Wilbertz, 'Hexenverfolgung und Biographie'; on Sweden, see B. Ankarloo, 'Sweden: The Mass Burnings (1668-1676)', in B. Ankarloo and G. Henningsen, eds., *Early Modern European Witchcraft. Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 285-317; on New England, see for example M. B. Norton, *In the Devil's Snare. The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York, 2003).

¹³⁴ Ehneß was told at the start of her interrogation on 15 Mar. 1692 that she was already worthy of the death penalty, StAR A925 fo. 79r.

were known in early modern Germany – would not perjure themselves before meeting their maker.¹³⁵ Interestingly Ehneß also sought to retract her earlier confession of guilt for the death of her husband, Hans, during her final interrogation on 24 May; it was noted in the interrogation record that she had apparently also said to the gaoler that if a learned man like the Superintendent was allowed to lie about how he had questioned her, then she could lie as well.¹³⁶ Whether Ehneß meant that she had originally lied about poisoning Hans, or was now lying by retracting her confession about his death is unclear, although the latter interpretation seems most plausible; overall the trial records suggest that she may well have put poison into the fateful porridge that Hans had eaten in late 1689. What she may have meant with this late retraction was that she had not intended to kill Hans by her actions; after all, she and their lodger had also eaten the porridge and survived, and Hans himself had died several weeks after the meal. However, the comment she made to the gaoler suggests that she had developed her own ideas about guilt and hypocrisy, and an awareness of the power of her words as a ‘poor sinner’, during the trial process in (albeit unequal) dialogue with her interrogators and confessors, and that she was trying to reconcile her final confession with her conscience on her own terms.¹³⁷

The Rothenburg councillors also stopped proceedings with the execution of Ehneß in June 1692 because Kirchmeier had introduced the names of elite women into the trial. This was hugely problematic for two reasons. First, and as the actions of Geßß, Grieninger and

¹³⁵ See Robisheaux, *Last Witch of Langenburg*, pp. 302-9.

¹³⁶ StAR A925 fos. 123r-124v.

¹³⁷ As Johannes Junius, mayor of Bamberg, had done in a letter to his daughter in 1629, before his execution for witchcraft in the horrific hunts experienced in the Prince-Bishopric of Bamberg between 1625 and 1630; see R. Walinski-Kiehl, ‘Males, “Masculine Honour”, and Witch Hunting in Seventeenth-Century Germany’, in *Men and Masculinities* (6:3) 2004, pp. 254-71.

Geltner showed, this risked triggering an avalanche of slander suits by elite men who felt compelled to defend the honour of their wives and families. These suits would have been socially divisive and the cause of more damaging rumour about witchcraft in the city, as well as time-consuming for the councillors to resolve; the councillors also wanted to protect their authority in criminal matters by ensuring that no copies of the trial-records were made for wider circulation, as Geÿß, Geltner and Greininger had requested. It is highly unlikely that the councillors would have allowed any women of the urban elite to be dragged into a witch-prosecution in 1692. This had never happened before in the city's history, and on the rare occasions when elite women had become the subject of rumours about witchcraft, the councillors had closed ranks and quashed such talk by treating it as slander.¹³⁸ Affection (one assumes) for their womenfolk was at work here, although the strongest force was a political self-interest which encouraged members of the inner city council to maintain a united front in order to protect their own collective power and prestige vis-à-vis external threats and internal challenges. The strength of this class-based self-interest can be seen clearly in the Ehneß case. The councillors were willing to take action against five lower-class women in the course of the trial, calling Adelheit Jäger, Appolonia Crämer, Appolonia Schwarz, Anna Schöppler, and Barbara Schmetzer to the town hall on 17 and 18 March for questioning, citing the denunciations made by Ehneß, Knöspel and Nunn as evidence against them.¹³⁹ Some of these women had pre-existing reputations for witchcraft amongst the city's inhabitants, many of whom would probably have welcomed their banishment, if not execution. However, once it was known outside the gaol walls that elite women had been

¹³⁸ See for example the case of Barbara Rost, a maidservant banished from Rothenburg in 1629 for slander for starting witchcraft rumours against her mistress, mayor's wife Anna Maria Bezold, Rowlands, *Narratives of Witchcraft*, pp. 27-8, 35.

¹³⁹ StAR A925 fos. 91r-92r, 99r-111v.

named in connection with the trial, the councillors could not proceed further against only the lower-class women (even though, as the trial records indicate, they wanted to), as this risked them being seen by their subjects as *Gunstrichter* – judges who applied the law with favour, rather than impartially. Awareness of this risk was clearly expressed in the questions put to Kirchmeier and in the comments made on Kirchmeier's responses by municipal jurist Krauss, who probably also resented Kirchmeier's muddying of the legal waters in the case on the basis of professional rivalry.¹⁴⁰ Any suggestion of unfair application of the law would have been very damaging for a council which defined its political power in large part through its authority as dispenser of criminal justice throughout its territory.¹⁴¹ The councillors were particularly sensitive to allegations of favouritism or secrecy in the aftermath of the Thirty Years War, when they had been accused by disgruntled citizens of apportioning the tax burden unfairly and in their own interests; the councillors had begun to keep formal minutes of the decisions reached at council meetings since 1664 as a result of these protests, in order to show their citizens they had nothing to hide.¹⁴² Kirchmeier tried to defend his introduction of the names of elite women into his questioning of Ehneß in his letter to the councillors by saying that it had been spontaneous, and done only to test Ehneß (and that by implication all the elite women were obviously innocent of witchcraft).¹⁴³ While the spontaneity of the suggestions may have been genuine, and fits with a general impetuosity of character

¹⁴⁰ See StAR A925 KL; for example, Krauss noted (on Kirchmeier's response to q. 5) that it was equally bad of the Superintendent to have suggest the names of lowly women and distinguished women to Ehneß.

¹⁴¹ See Rowlands, *Narratives of Witchcraft*, pp. 1-13; A. Rowlands, 'Rothenburg gegen Würzburg. Durchsetzung von Herrschaftsansprüchen im Hexenprozeß der Margaretha Hörber, 1627', in R. Voltmer, ed., *Hexenverfolgung und Herrschaftspraxis* (Trier, 2005), pp. 113-27.

¹⁴² Rowlands, *Narratives of Witchcraft*, pp. 185, 195-7.

¹⁴³ StAR A925 KL, q. 5.

observable in Kirchmeier in other contexts,¹⁴⁴ the Superintendent was surely being either arrogant, foolish, or disingenuous in thinking that his actions could have been devoid of legal implications, either for the women involved or for the council's overall prosecution of the case.

The final reason why the council disapproved of Kirchmeier's actions in 1692 was because they blurred the boundary between secular and ecclesiastical authority in ways which the councillors found threatening; their refusal to follow his witch-hunting lead in 1692 was testimony to the strength of their desire to protect the supremacy of the secular arm of government against encroachment by the ecclesiastical. With the benefit of hindsight we might argue that the councillors were being somewhat unfair; they had, after all, invited this encroachment by calling for ecclesiastical advice in cases of witchcraft, demonic affliction, blasphemy and unorthodoxy from 1627 onwards.¹⁴⁵ However, Kirchmeier clearly went too far in the Ehness case; he intervened without being asked, was critical of how the councillors were handling things, and used his role as a father confessor and preacher as a means by which to influence the progress and outcome of the trial.¹⁴⁶ His intervention was almost certainly perceived as particularly threatening (if not downright malicious) by the councillors because it raised unfortunate echoes of the bitter dispute they had had with Kirchmeier in the early 1680s. This dispute had started in late 1681, shortly after Kirchmeier's appointment as Superintendent; he had begun his tenure by criticising the councillors for being too lenient on

¹⁴⁴ This is clear in several of the letters written by, to, and about Kirchmeier in his dispute with the city councillors in the early 1680s, see footnote 148.

¹⁴⁵ See footnote 66.

¹⁴⁶ This differed markedly from the stance taken by his predecessor, Johann Ludwig Hartmann (see footnotes 7 and 117). Hartmann was asked by the councillors for advice in the case of witchcraft/demonic affliction involving Anna Margaretha Rohn in 1673; Hartmann offered theological advice but told the councillors to ask the jurists and not the clerics about what to do next, see StAR A909 fos. 218r-220r.

people guilty of sexual sins. In early 1682 Kirchmeier had then put forward proposals for reform (or as he put it ‘improvement’) of the Rothenburg *Consistorium*, the administrative body in charge of religion and education in the territory which, although chaired by the Superintendent, was in practice dominated by its three lay members (two city mayors and a third member of the inner city council) and functioned as a sub-committee of the inner city council. Kirchmeier’s suggested reforms sought to change this balance radically, and to give the *Consistorium* (and thus the Superintendent) a much stronger role in the policing and punishment of immorality and ungodliness; his theocratic vision had much in common with the ideas on Lutheran church law expressed by the seventeenth-century Saxon jurist Benedict Carpzov, who argued that territorial rulers should share their powers of religious supervision with the clerical estate.¹⁴⁷ In his attempts to redraw the boundaries of legal power in favour of the clerics and to defend the urban community against what he saw as the spiritual threat posed by witchcraft, the Wittenberg-educated Kirchmeier thus both espoused and epitomised the sort of zealous Orthodox Lutheranism which Miriam Rieger has identified as a marked feature of German Lutheran writing on ghosts, possession and the devil for the period 1650-1692,¹⁴⁸ and which I argue elsewhere characterised the stance of the Rothenburg clerics in the 1680s and 1690s.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ I. Hunter, *The Secularisation of the Confessional State. The Political Thought of Christian Thomasius* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 116-21, especially p. 121.

¹⁴⁸ M. Rieger, *Der Teufel im Pfarrhaus. Gespenster, Geisterglaube und Besessenheit im Luthertum der Frühen Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 2011).

¹⁴⁹ Rowlands, ‘Gender, Ungodly Parents, and a Witch-Family’. I am unable to say how these events linked to the development of Pietism in Rothenburg as the only published study of Rothenburg’s Reformation stops in 1580, see P. Schattenmann, *Die Einführung der Reformation in der ehemaligen Reichsstadt Rothenburg ob der Tauber (1520-1580)* (Gunzenhausen, 1928). Like Kirchmeier (see note 7), the father confessor of Ehneß, Johann Georg Joch, had also been educated at Wittenberg (see note 50), the bastion of Orthodox Lutheranism.

The Rothenburg councillors rejected Kirchmeier's power-sharing proposals in no uncertain terms in a lengthy response to him written on behalf of the council by the city jurists, in May 1682. Their rejection was unsurprising in view of the longer-term history of the city's Lutheran Reformation which, from its inception in 1544, had been grounded on the basic principle that the (secular) city councillors controlled the *Consistorium* and had the final say in all matters pertaining to the governance of the city and its hinterland. Greater clerical influence was possible within this context, but only when it was requested and sanctioned by the councillors and when there were reasonably harmonious personal relationships between councillors and clerics. Unfortunately for Kirchmeier, his chances of establishing a good working relationship with the councillors had deteriorated rapidly after his appointment as Superintendent because of a personal feud that began in 1681 between Kirchmeier and Johann Balthasar Staud, the senior city mayor and Kirchmeier's colleague on the *Consistorium*. By 1684 this feud, and the litigation and wider social discord it had caused, were so serious that the councillors felt compelled to seek advice from the legal and theological faculties of the University of Tübingen about what was, by this point, Kirchmeier's almost untenable position in the city.

Kirchmeier managed to keep his post, and Staud's death in November 1685 calmed the tide of enmity against him, but the rejection of his proposed reforms, and the manner in which he had been defeated and humiliated by Staud, the council, and the municipal jurists who had drawn up the legal advice and opinions against him, must have had a profound impact on Kirchmeier and shaped his behaviour (and the councillors' reaction to it) in 1692. For Kirchmeier, the Ehneß case would have seemed like another (possibly last-ditch) chance to enhance clerical power and restore his own diminished reputation; for the councillors, the fact that it resurrected the threat to secular authority they felt had been laid to rest some years

earlier helps explain their lack of support for Kirchmeier's zeal.¹⁵⁰ It is noteworthy that the Rothenburg councillors adopted this position some years before the famously anti-clerical Lutheran jurist Christian Thomasius published his trenchant jurisprudential critiques of '...the theocratic form of criminal law' which had allowed for the prosecution of witchcraft and heresy and which had been a cornerstone of what Ian Hunter describes as '...the Protestant sacral state as it had emerged between the two treaties, of Augsburg (1555) and Westphalia (1648)'.¹⁵¹ The actions of the Rothenburg councillors in 1692 thus suggest that Thomasius's 'territorialist' position, in which he emphasized the territorial lord's sovereign control over the church and clergy in direct opposition to the Lutheran Orthodox idea of 'episcopalism' (which advocated clerical control over religious matters),¹⁵² was already shared by the rulers of at least some German territories, and was thus less radical in practice than it was in the context of jurisprudential writing and theory.

The trial of Barbara Ehneß ended with her execution on 10 June 1692; no further efforts were made to pursue the women she had been forced to name as witches. Kirchmeier escaped the consequences of his actions much more lightly. Municipal jurist Johann Georg Krauss drafted a (highly critical) account of Kirchmeier's intervention in the case for submission for advice to the legal and theological faculties at the University of Tübingen.¹⁵³ However, the

¹⁵⁰ The documentation relating to the Kirchmeier dispute is in StAN Ro. Rep. 2085 and 2088.

¹⁵¹ Hunter, *The Secularisation of the Confessional State*, pp. 149-50.

¹⁵² For discussion of episcopalism vs. territorialism, see J. Stroup, *The Struggle for Identity in the Clerical Estate. Northwest German Protestant Opposition to Absolutist Policy in the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden, 1984), pp. 46-7.

¹⁵³ StAR A925, unpaginated, bound into A925 after Kirchmeier's letter to the councillors, and an opinion on the case written by Krauss for the councillors.

councillors decided against sending a neat copy to Tübingen;¹⁵⁴ they probably felt that another public humiliation of Kirchmeier would end his career, and that it would do the city no good to wash its dirty linen in public. In the end, collective patriarchal self-interest won out and the councillors and jurists closed ranks to protect Kirchmeier. They could all agree that Ehneß was a malicious poisoner and ‘accursed bride of the devil’, who had given in to the devil to satisfy her abominable sexual lusts;¹⁵⁵ this way of thinking resonated with a wider, deeply misogynistic, perception of the archetypal witch amongst the male elites of seventeenth-century Rothenburg as an adult women who gave herself to the devil and seduced others (usually children) into witchcraft.¹⁵⁶ The events of 1692 appear also to have extinguished what little enthusiasm for witch-trials there had ever been amongst the secular elite of Rothenburg. In 1709, when the city councillors were next faced with a self-confessed child-witch (twelve-year-old Hans Caspar Kürlein, who claimed to have been taken to witches’ gatherings by his aunt), they arrested and interrogated the boy and his aunt, but rapidly resolved the case by releasing the aunt and punishing as slanderers the married couple who had initially encouraged Kürlein to tell his stories.¹⁵⁷ This approach signalled that the

¹⁵⁴ A note on the draft states that it was not sent to Tübingen for ‘certain reasons’ (‘gewisse Ursachen’).

¹⁵⁵ See footnote 1.

¹⁵⁶ Rowlands, *Narratives of Witchcraft*, pp. 95-6, 158-60. Ehneß would have been sentenced to death anyway because of her (confessed) crime of attempted murder by poison, see footnote 39.

¹⁵⁷ Rowlands, ‘Hexenprozesse gegen Kinder’, p. 264. Hans Caspar Kürrien lived with his cousin, Johann Eberhard Schuhmacher and the latter’s wife, Maria Appolonia. Maria Appolonia hated Johann Eberhard’s mother (Hans Caspar’s aunt), Anna Schuhmacher, and persuaded Hans Caspar to tell his tale of witchcraft against her. Hans Caspar also simulated epileptic fits as part of the attempted deception. Johann Eberhard and Maria Appolonia Schuhmacher were both banished for slander; this was a legal strategy that the councillors had used in other cases involving unfounded allegations of witchcraft, see Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, pp. 22-29, 212-28. In Hans Caspar’s case, the councillors regarded him as an innocent boy who had been deluded by the devil as well as persuaded by morally corrupt adults into the sin of slander rather than the sin of witchcraft.

councillors were no longer willing to take children's stories of witchcraft seriously or to allow the city's urban clerics to do so; thereafter witchcraft disappeared from the city's legal records as a matter of judicial concern.

To some extent these events can be viewed through the explanatory lens offered by the 'crisis of confidence' model propounded by Erik Midelfort, who argues that local elites who had overseen mass witch-trials in parts of southwestern Germany lost faith in the legal procedures available for trying witches as a result; this ended their willingness to pursue alleged witches at law long before they stopped believing in witchcraft.¹⁵⁸ However, this explanation needs qualification for Rothenburg; the secular elites there had never sanctioned or experienced mass witch-trials, but had nonetheless always been sceptical about their own ability to identify witches at law, unwilling to treat witchcraft as an exceptional crime and to risk executing potentially innocent people as witches, and convinced (for pragmatic and political reasons) that caution was better than haste in witch-trials.¹⁵⁹ These attitudes were tested in the course of the seventeenth century by the anxieties and dilemmas raised by child-witches and growing clerical influence in the handling of their cases, but never radically changed. The councillors' response to Kirchmeier in 1692 can thus perhaps be seen as a definitive

¹⁵⁸ H. C. E. Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562-1684. The Social and Intellectual Foundations* (Stanford, CA, 1972), especially pp. 121-63. This 'crisis of confidence' model has, for example, been usefully applied to the decline of witch-trials in the (Lutheran) Duchy of Württemberg by Edward Bever, see E. Bever, 'The crisis of confidence in witchcraft and the crisis of authority', in P. Benedict and M. P. Gutmann, eds., *Early Modern Europe. From Crisis to Stability* (Newark, NJ, 2005), pp. 139-67. Interestingly the Duchy of Württemberg's last mass trial was the panic started by and involving self-confessed child-witches in Calw in 1684, see *ibid.*, p. 154, and R. Walinski-Kiehl, 'The devil's children: child witch-trials in early modern Germany', *Continuity and Change*, 11:2 (1996), pp. 171-89; it was quashed by the intervention of the ducal authorities. The similarities between the events in Württemberg and Rothenburg in the 1680s and 1690s suggest that more detailed comparison of the relationships between child-witch trials, clerical intervention, and the politics and decline of witch-trials in Protestant parts of Europe and its colonies is needed for the second half of the 17th century.

¹⁵⁹ See Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*.

assertion of their own power over the city's clerics; in other words, as more of an 'expression' than a 'crisis' of judicial confidence. It would be wrong, however, to think that there was any scepticism about the devil at work in Rothenburg in 1692. On the contrary, the reason given by the jurists and councillors for their refusal to take stories of witches' gatherings seriously was because they believed that the devil had too much power to deceive, and would use this power to delude fallible humans into thinking they had been to witches' gatherings and seen certain people there when they had not really done so.¹⁶⁰ The devil did this to put innocent lives at risk and weaken people's faith; the councillors would thus be doing the devil's – rather than God's – work if they pursued witch-trials on this basis.¹⁶¹ This view of demonic power, which was based on the medieval *Canon Episcopi*, had been expressed more or less consistently in witch-trials in Rothenburg since the 1580s,¹⁶² and was not breached in 1692, despite Kirchmeier's best efforts.

This analysis of the Barbara Ehneß case has shown that it was possible for a Lutheran father confessor to act in the same way as the anonymous Catholic Witch Confessors pilloried in 1631 by Friedrich Spee; like their Catholic counterparts, Kirchmeier (and to a lesser extent Joch) used threats and false promises to force Ehneß into making a detailed confession of witchcraft. With his suggestions to Ehneß of the names of alleged participants at witches' gatherings, Kirchmeier had gone much further than his colleague, and behaved in a way

¹⁶⁰ StAR A925 KL, especially qs. 3, 7, 8 (questions and annotations by Krauss).

¹⁶¹ The jurors involved in the Salem witch-trials, which resulted in 19 hangings, apologised in 1693 for having been deluded by the devil into condemning innocent people to death, see 'The Recantation of the Salem Jurors', in A. C. Kors and E. Peters, eds., *Witchcraft in Europe 1100-1700. A Documentary History* (Philadelphia PA, 1972; 11th paperback edn., 1995), pp. 358-9.

¹⁶² See footnote 128.

similar to that of one priest described by Spee, who had passed on to the trial judges the names of alleged witches given to him by prisoners during confession, and listed the names of potential suspects in a notebook in order to make the process of identifying the guilty more efficient.¹⁶³ The similarities between Kirchmeier and Spee's confessors suggest that we need to look at the role of Catholic and Lutheran 'witch confessors' in trials both collectively and comparatively; to think more critically about the interplay between trial episodes and the developing seventeenth-century critique of the role of 'witch confessors'; and to consider the extent to which their abuse of their spiritual power was one of the bundle of factors which helped convince secular authorities to stop prosecuting witches altogether.

The Ehneß case also shows the extent to which individuals mattered in explaining the course of witch-trials and their outcomes. As the city's Superintendent, a father confessor to Ehneß, and a preacher, Kirchmeier had a great deal of power to try to shape, not just the Ehneß trial, but also wider communal opinion about witches and what should be done about them. That he was ultimately unsuccessful was in large part due to the political and class-based self-interest of the city councillors, but it was also linked to the fact that by 1692 Kirchmeier's personal popularity amongst his elite peers was at a low ebb, and to Barbara Ehneß's own bravery in retracting the denunciations she had initially made and explaining to her interrogators that she had been forced into making them by Kirchmeier. And, while Ehneß's voice was shaped by the context of her trial and impending execution, a genuine sense of her indignation at Kirchmeier and Joch, and their treatment of her, emanates from the written records. As she put it, she had expected them to comfort her with God's word, not force her into making denunciation, and certainly not lie about what they had done. Her experience taught her a clear lesson about the hypocrisy and fallibility of learned men, which the councillors were doubtless glad to draw a line under with her execution. In Kirchmeier's

¹⁶³ Spee, *Cautio Criminalis* (ed. Ritter), p. 78.

case, personal experience mattered too; it is unlikely that he would have sought, so rashly and zealously, to intervene in the Ehneß case in 1692, had he not spent the preceding three years trying to save the soul of the self-confessed witch-boy Hans Adam Knöspel. This suggests that an enthusiasm for witch-finding was acquired from experience rather than books, and that the links between the developing pastoral treatment of child-witches, and clerical anxiety about witchcraft and commitment to identifying and rooting out alleged witches, need to be explored more closely. Finally, the fact that several other Protestant areas (for example Lemgo, Sweden, Salem, and Calw) experienced challenging incidents involving children and youngsters who claimed to have been bewitched or seduced into witchcraft in the second half of the seventeenth century,¹⁶⁴ suggests that these episodes were shaped - to some extent at least - by the verbal and written exchange of ideas along networks of clerical communication and mutual influence which crossed geographical boundaries and which also need further investigation and analysis.

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¹⁶⁴ See footnotes 133 and 158.