

## **Gender, Ungodly Parents and a Witch-Family in Seventeenth-Century Germany.**

In the late spring of 1689, the peace of the Lutheran imperial city of Rothenburg ob der Tauber was disturbed by an eleven-year-old boy called Hans Adam Knöspel, who claimed he had been taken to a witches' sabbath by his mother on Walpurgis Eve of that year. The Knöspels lived on Gallows Street, a main thoroughfare running into the city centre from the Gallows Gate in the city wall; the street was soon abuzz with gossip about Hans Adam's tales. While his stories were circulating, rumours also arose that his mother, Anna Maria, had lamed a neighbour called Catharina Dorndorf by witchcraft, shortly after Catharina had given birth on Maundy Thursday. These events proved to be the catalyst for a witch-trial that began in June, lasted until August, and saw Hans Adam and his mother gaoled and interrogated, and his father and sister formally questioned, about the alleged acts of witchcraft connected with their family. This judicial phase of the case ended with the banishment of Anna Maria Knöspel from Rothenburg; Hans Adam's father was forced to give up his citizenship and leave the city with his daughter, and the boy was consigned to the municipal hospital, where he was kept until his death in 1698, and where he was subjected to a long and, at times, brutal effort by the Rothenburg clerics to redeem his soul. Overall the case produced over 250 pages of written documentation (including medical, theological and legal opinions, as well as witness statements and interrogations), and regular entries in the minute-books of the Rothenburg Church Council, or *Consistorium*.<sup>1</sup>

Drawing on these sources and a wealth of prosopographical material relating to the Knöspels, this article offers a close analysis of the events of 1689 which furthers our understanding of 'witch-family trials' and the gendered beliefs that underpinned such trials

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<sup>1</sup> The legal records are in Staatsarchiv Nürnberg Rothenburg Repertorium (hereafter StAN Ro. Rep.) vol. 2087 fos. 620<sup>r</sup>-872<sup>r</sup>; the *Consistorium* minutes in StAN Ro. Rep. vol. 2094. For their help in enabling me to research this article, I am grateful to the staff of the Staatsarchiv in Nuremberg, Angelika Tarokic and Ludwig Schnurrer of the Stadtarchiv in Rothenburg, Herbert Eiden, Bernhard Mall, and Rita Voltmer.

and their handling in a late-seventeenth-century Lutheran context. A key aim will be to assess the extent to which the patriarchal elite of late-seventeenth-century Rothenburg was willing to adopt a new stereotype of the nuclear witch-family, in which ungodly witch-parents were imagined as giving their children to the devil, which I will argue emerged from Catholic parts of Germany as a result of the interplay between trials, demonological texts, and print culture, between 1580 and 1630. I will also suggest that such ‘witch-families’ spoke to wider concerns amongst post-Reformation elites about the importance of the godly upbringing of children and their doubts about parental ability to deliver this adequately; ‘witch-families’ thus evoked anxieties about ‘bad’ parenting which helped shape longer-term developments in state-organised education and official intervention into allegedly ‘failing’ families.

## I

The term ‘witch-family trial’ (*Hexenfamilienprozess*) was first coined in 1987 by Wolfgang Behringer in his book about witch-prosecution in the Catholic Duchy of Bavaria, to denote a distinct category of witch-trial which emerged in the 1650s, was particularly prominent between 1690 and 1730, involved the prosecution of whole families rather than just their female members, and began with a child’s denunciation of its own immediate relatives.<sup>2</sup> Since 1987, however, no work has been published which takes the witch-family trial, or the stereotype of the witch-family, as its specific focus for a German territory; indeed, despite the fact that historians have long recognised that a familial relationship to another reputed, accused or executed witch placed an individual at higher risk of accusation him- or herself, little work has been done which takes the witch-family (understood as both an individual household and lineage) as its central category of analysis. Notable exceptions to this generalisation are articles by Willem de Blécourt, on witch-families in the Dutch province of

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<sup>2</sup> Wolfgang Behringer, *Hexenverfolgung in Bayern. Volksmagie, Glaubenseifer und Staatsräson in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Munich, 1987), 350-2.

Drenthe, and Deborah Willis, on the witch-family in the print culture of Elizabethan and Jacobean England. Both authors make invaluable contributions to our understanding of the ways in which early-modern witch-families were imagined and how such ideas were gendered in specific regional contexts. De Blécourt, for example, painstakingly delineates the family connections of people who were slandered as witches in Drenthe to argue that witchcraft reputation was gendered, with whole families categorised under the stereotype of either the male profit-making, or the female harming, witch, and that it was passed on, usually across (at most) three generations.<sup>3</sup> De Blécourt's work shows the importance of exploring popular beliefs about the intergenerational transmission of witchcraft reputation from a gendered perspective, but the fact that he chose to do this through slander cases from a region which was relatively free from witch-trials and the influence of demonological ideas means that the impact of these factors, which could reshape ideas about witch-families, is absent from his work. Willis's argument that a new stereotype of a witch-family in which children were taught witchcraft by their parents emerged 'as an alternative to that of the solitary witch' in printed pamphlets about English witch-trials between 1590 and 1620 is important and will be discussed further below, although she seems unaware of the extent to which the emergence of this stereotype was probably driven by developments in continental European demonology.<sup>4</sup> Willis's suggestion that the making of this stereotype was linked in England mainly to class-based concerns that witch-families 'were a subset of a larger group of the undeserving and probably irredeemably poor'<sup>5</sup> is also overplayed; moreover, the limitations of the English source material (printed pamphlets, in which an often anonymous author summarised the main features of a witch-trial for public sale), mean that Willis is

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<sup>3</sup> Willem de Blécourt, 'Hexenfamilien-Zauber(er)geschlechter. Das Beispiel Drenthe (17.-19. Jahrhundert)', in Eva Labouvie and Ramona Myrrhe (eds.), *Familienbande – Familienschande. Geschlechterverhältnisse in Familie und Verwandtschaft* (Cologne; Weimar; Vienna, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Deborah Willis, 'The Witch-Family in Elizabethan and Jacobean Print Culture', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 13 (2013), 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

unable to explore the dynamics of the trial as a process, which in the German context acted as a crucible within which different ideas about witch-families could be gathered, tested, and even re-worked, and in which family members could be treated with nuanced difference, according to their age and gender, and the ideas and priorities of the men judging them.

The Knöspel case from Rothenburg offers an exceptional opportunity to examine beliefs about, and the social and legal treatment of, an alleged witch-family in a late-seventeenth-century Lutheran context, for a variety of reasons. The fact that the case can be linked to an earlier witch-trial involving Hans Adam's paternal grandparents in 1663, means that beliefs about the intergenerational transmission of witchcraft reputation within the family, and the key points at which neighbourhood rumours about the family crystallized into formal accusation, can be explored in forensic detail. The richness of the trial records, and the availability of other municipal sources (tax-lists, church-registers, and records relating to craft-groups, guardianship, and the acquisition of citizenship), make possible the creation of life-histories of the major protagonists, an approach which enables us to set the exceptional episode of their witch-trials into the wider context of this family's history, and demonstrates the importance of prosopography for the witchcraft historian.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the complexity of the Knöspel case, and the fact that it involved clearly differentiated judicial and pastoral phases, also mean that we can explore how and why different members of the Knöspel family were treated in different ways by the authorities, and identify the differing opinions on the boy and his parents held by the jurists, physicians and clerics who advised the city councillors.

## II

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Gisela Wilbertz, 'Hexenverfolgung und Biographie. Person und Familie der Lemgoerin Maria Rampendahl (1645-1705)', in Gisela Wilbertz, Gerd Schwerhoff and Jürgen Scheffler (eds.), *Hexenverfolgung und Regionalgeschichte. Die Grafschaft Lippe im Vergleich* (Bielefeld, 1994).

Formal investigation of the Knöspel family began on 1 June 1689, when the city councillors (the sixteen men of the urban patriciate who ruled Rothenburg and its rural hinterland and acted as the territory's highest criminal court) ordered Hans Adam Knöspel and two of his neighbours to appear at the town hall to give statements.<sup>7</sup> Successive generations of Rothenburg councillors adopted a cautious judicial approach towards witchcraft allegations throughout the early modern period, refusing to categorise witchcraft as an exceptional crime, and preferring to treat unfounded rumours of witchcraft as instances of slander, factors which combined to ensure that the city experienced only three executions for witchcraft (in 1629, 1673 and 1692) and no large-scale witch-hunts.<sup>8</sup> However, the councillors usually felt compelled to take official action in cases involving children like Hans Adam, with which they had been grappling since the late-sixteenth century. This was because a child's stories of witches' gatherings unsettled a community, damaging the reputations of people named as sabbath-attenders, either of the child's own volition, or in response to questions put by those keen to use the child as a 'witch-identifier' who could make public hitherto unspoken suspicions of witchcraft. Such children also posed difficult legal, theological and practical questions for the authorities: Were they malicious liars or victims of the forces of evil? Were they legally reliable witnesses against others? Which parts of their stories were real and which fantasy? And how should they be treated during and after their trials?<sup>9</sup> From the late 1620s the councillors tended to believe that such children had been seduced against their will into witchcraft by the adult women whom they invariably claimed had taken them night-flying, but this view was never set in stone, and was tested afresh with each new case. The Knöspel case had the added complication of involving a child who accused his own, living mother of witchcraft. This had not happened in Rothenburg since 1587, when a six-year-old

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<sup>7</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 621<sup>r</sup>-625<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Alison Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany: Rothenburg, 1561-1652* (Manchester, 2003), esp. 14-80.

<sup>9</sup> The councillors dealt with eleven youngsters telling seduction stories from 1587 to 1709, see Alison Rowlands, 'Hexenprozesse gegen Kinder in Rothenburg ob der Tauber, 1587-1709', in Wolfgang Behringer and Claudia Opitz-Belakhal (eds.), *Kinderhexen – Kinderbanden - Hexenkinder* (Bielefeld, forthcoming 2015).

boy from the village of Hilgartshausen had told a story (almost identical to that of Hans Adam Knöspel) of flying with his mother to a witches' dance.<sup>10</sup> After 1587, the adult female witch-seductress remained central to all witchcraft narratives constructed by self-incriminating child-witches, but until 1689 she was imagined as a woman with a quasi-maternal relationship to the child (a god-mother, foster-mother, or mistress), or a birth-mother who was already dead, rather than a living mother, as was the case with Hans Adam and Anna Maria Knöspel. A final factor which prompted council intervention in 1689 was that local memories would still have been fresh of the execution for witchcraft of twenty-two-year-old Anna Margaretha Rohn, the daughter of a Rothenburg plasterer, in 1673, after she had claimed to be a witch and the victim of demonic afflictions since 1664.<sup>11</sup> Hers was only the second execution for witchcraft ever to take place in Rothenburg and the first of a member of a citizen/craftsman's family, an occurrence which must have heightened communal fears about the presence of evil at the heart of the city.

Hans Adam Knöspel was small for his age; on 1 June the councillors noted that he looked about nine years old, although they established subsequently that he was eleven by checking the registers of the city's parish church of St James.<sup>12</sup> Baptised there on 9 February 1678, he was the youngest of the seven children of Georg Adam Knöspel, a citizen and master cartwright, and his wife, Anna Maria (née Wägner),<sup>13</sup> six of whom were still alive in 1689: Michael (born 1665); Georg (born 1667); Maria Margaretha (born 1671); Magdalena Barbara (born 1672); Anna Maria (born 1674);<sup>14</sup> and Hans Adam. Only Hans Adam and

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<sup>10</sup> Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, 81-104. This trial was stopped because the boy was deemed too unreliable a witness; he and his mother were released unpunished.

<sup>11</sup> Rowlands, 'Hexenprozesse gegen Kinder', 262-3.

<sup>12</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 623v, 691r.

<sup>13</sup> Evang.-Lutherisches Dekanat Rothenburg (hereafter ELDR), *St Jakob Taufregister* vol. 5 fo. 223<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> ELDR *St Jakob Taufregister* vol. 5 fos. 11<sup>r</sup> (Michael); 31<sup>r</sup> (Georg); 101<sup>r</sup> (Maria Margaretha); 123<sup>r</sup> (Magdalena Barbara); 148<sup>r</sup> (Anna Maria). Hans Adam was named after a brother who had died soon after birth in 1670, *ibid.*, fo. 7b<sup>r</sup>.

Maria Margaretha were living with their parents at the time of the trial.<sup>15</sup> The other sisters were probably in service in other households; one of Hans Adam's brothers (probably Michael, who had completed his apprenticeship as a cartwright with his father between 1683 and 1686<sup>16</sup>) was working as a journeyman in the town of Uffenheim.<sup>17</sup> Hans Adam's life experience and life chances differed markedly from those of his siblings, as he had suffered from birth from epilepsy; he may have inherited the illness from his paternal grandmother, although this was not remarked upon in his trial-records.<sup>18</sup> His epilepsy was severe and probably the cause of his sudden death at the age of twenty on 2 September 1698.<sup>19</sup> According to evidence given by his father in 1689, Hans Adam suffered two or three seizures a day, injuring himself in the course of some seizures by falling and hitting his head on furniture.<sup>20</sup> Hans Adam's mental and social development had almost certainly been affected by his illness and any additional head injuries he may have sustained over the years in falls. In 1689 he was still unable to recite the Lord's Prayer (the first and most essential element of faith a Lutheran child was meant to learn by rote) fluently;<sup>21</sup> his school-master and his mother told the authorities that he was a slow learner, with the former describing him as a 'fool' and his mother stating that he was a foolish boy who was not right in the head.<sup>22</sup> Hans Adam began to attend school only shortly before the fateful events of 1689 because (according to

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<sup>15</sup> Maria Margaretha was probably at home because she was needed to help with Hans Adam, or because she was between terms of service as a maidservant; she had been in service since the age of thirteen, StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fo. 693<sup>r</sup>. No legal action was taken against the Knöspel children who were not living at home in 1689, because the council did not want the trial to escalate, and because their geographical separation from the household weakened their reputations.

<sup>16</sup> Stadtarchiv Rothenburg (hereafter StAR) *Geburts- und Lehrbriefe* B523 fo. 183<sup>v</sup>-184<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fo. 784<sup>v</sup>. Journeymen cartwrights had to work for at least two years before they could become masters, see StAR *Handwerkerordnungen* A1294a, fos. 189<sup>r</sup>-192<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Hans Adam's paternal grandmother was Barbara Wirth, whose trial for witchcraft in 1663 is discussed later in this article; her trial-records note that she 'pretended' to be ill with epileptic fits, see StAR *Urgichtenbuch* A902 (unpaginated), second interrogation of Barbara Wirth (23 July 1663). In 1689 Hans Adam's parents and sister confirmed that he had had epilepsy from birth, see StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 627<sup>v</sup>-628<sup>r</sup>, 651<sup>v</sup>, 693<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 620<sup>r</sup>. He was buried on 5 September, see ELDR *St Jakob Sterberegister* vol. 1642 II fo. 230<sup>r</sup> (which designates him a hospital inmate).

<sup>20</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 627<sup>v</sup>-628<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 698<sup>r</sup>, 701<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 691<sup>r</sup>-691<sup>v</sup> (schoolmaster), fos. 654<sup>v</sup>, 710<sup>v</sup> (Anna Maria Knöspel). It was also noted that Hans Adam could form no letters when asked to do so on 1 June 1689, fo. 625<sup>r</sup>.

his parents) the family was too poor to afford the school-fees for him;<sup>23</sup> his parents may, however, have taken the pragmatic decision to invest less in his education than that of his siblings because of the unlikelihood of him ever being able to earn his own living.<sup>24</sup> He spent his days at home and on Gallows Street, where he would have been socially marginalised because of the horror and fear that epileptic fits evoked in early modern onlookers.<sup>25</sup> In this context it is easier to understand why he began to tell his story of the witches' gathering; it was a way of gaining attention and small treats from neighbours, some of whom gave him pennies or marbles in return for a repetition of his tale.<sup>26</sup>

During questioning in 1689 Anna Maria Knöspel told the city councillors that Hans Adam had been born with epilepsy because she had seen a local epileptic man having fits during church service while she was pregnant with the boy.<sup>27</sup> The idea that a pregnant woman could affect her foetus unwittingly by means of what she experienced physically or saw externally was a commonplace in early-modern Germany;<sup>28</sup> it clearly held such strong explanatory sway in late-seventeenth-century Rothenburg that no-one in the course of the Knöspel trial suggested that Anna Maria might have caused her son's epilepsy by malevolent

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 651<sup>v</sup>, 797<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Children suffering from serious mental or physical illness or disability (including epilepsy) could not go into service or apprenticeship; if poor or unsupported by their families, they often fell into vagrancy or a life of crime, unless they were lucky enough to be admitted to a municipal hospital, poor-house or foundling home; see Joel F. Harrington, *The Unwanted Child. The Fate of Foundlings, Orphans, and Juvenile Criminals in Early Modern Germany* (Chicago and London, 2009), esp. 187-8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 262. Harrington notes that this was because of the spectacle of the seizure and the (erroneous) fear of contagion on the part of onlookers. In Rothenburg, concerns about the spectacle of an epileptic man having fits during church service were raised at the *Consistorium* in April 1690, perhaps in direct response to the Knöspel case. The man lived in the hospital but attended the parish church of St James. The urban clerics decided that he should be encouraged to attend the hospital church instead; if he insisted on going to St James, he would have to sit in a specific seat where he would be largely hidden from the view of the rest of the congregation, see StAN Ro. Rep. 2094 fo. 199. (This volume is paginated on recto and verso sides).

<sup>26</sup> Andreas Schneeberger gave Hans Adam a marble for his story and Johann Michael Leupold a penny, StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 622<sup>v</sup>-623<sup>r</sup> (Schneeberger), 634<sup>r-v</sup> (Leupold).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 735<sup>v</sup>. This was recognised by contemporaries as a possible cause of epilepsy, see Owsei Temkin, *The Falling Sickness. A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginnings of Modern Neurology* (revised second edn, Baltimore and London, 1971), 186. Anna Maria called this man Melbers Michael; he was probably the epileptic referred to in 1690 (see n. 25 above), as Hans Adam Knöspel referred in 1692 to an epileptic called Falling Michael who lived in the hospital, StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fo. 802<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Ulinka Rublack, 'Pregnancy, childbirth and the female body in early modern Germany', *Past & Present*, 150 (1996).



magical means. This was despite the fact that she had a longstanding reputation for harmful witchcraft which predated his birth and which she had had from her youth.<sup>29</sup> Born in 1638 or 1639,<sup>30</sup> she had grown up in Niederstetten in the small territory of Haltenbergstetten, which was ruled by the Counts of Hatzfeld and lay to the immediate northwest of the Rothenburg rural hinterland.<sup>31</sup> Her aged mother, Anna, was still alive in 1689, although completely blind.<sup>32</sup> Anna Maria insisted to the Rothenburg councillors that she had only ever been taught to fear God and to work hard by her mother and father (the two core duties of all pious parents);<sup>33</sup> however, further enquiries made by the councillors of the Hatzfeld authorities elicited confirmation that Anna Wägner had a considerable reputation for harmful magic in Niederstetten, and that people thought little of her daughter Anna Maria as a result.<sup>34</sup> It is unclear why mother and daughter had such poor reputations; the Hatzfeld authorities stated that no formal charge of witchcraft had ever been brought against them and that their reputations were based only on the idle gossip of the common man.<sup>35</sup> However, a clue may lie in the fact that, when Georg Adam Knöspel appeared before the Rothenburg city council on 26 October 1664 to take his citizenship oath alongside Anna Maria, she was described as a miller's daughter from Niederstetten.<sup>36</sup> Millers' families were at heightened risk of attracting suspicions of witchcraft because communities depended on millers, yet also distrusted them and suspected them of enriching themselves at their neighbours' expense; members of millers' families were a distinct sub-group of those executed for witchcraft in the villages of Ruwer and Eitelsbach during Germany's first mass witch-hunt in Electoral Trier in the late-

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<sup>29</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 723<sup>r</sup>, 715<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> Anna Maria said that she thought she was fifty on 8 June 1689, *ibid.*, fo. 651<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Wilfried Beutter, 'Niederstetten unter den Hatzfeldt', in Walter Krüger (ed.), *650 Jahre Stadt Niederstetten* (Niederstetten, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 704<sup>r-v</sup>. Anna must have been in her 70s or 80s by 1689.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 651<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 704<sup>r-v</sup> (letter from the councillors to the Hatzfeld authorities); 705<sup>r-v</sup> (their response, 20 June 1689).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>36</sup> StAR *Bürgerbuch* B42 fo. 131<sup>r</sup>. Anna Maria's father was dead by 1689 and not named in the trial-records.

sixteenth century,<sup>37</sup> for example, while the last person executed for witchcraft in the Lutheran Principality of Hohenlohe, parts of which adjoined the Rothenburg hinterland to the west and southeast, was a miller's wife, in 1672.<sup>38</sup>

Anna Maria thus brought at least a latent reputation for witchcraft with her when she settled in Rothenburg in 1664; she and Georg Adam Knöspel married in the church of St James on 15 November 1664, shortly after Georg Adam had acquired citizenship of the town.<sup>39</sup> Georg Adam had slightly deeper familial roots in Rothenburg than his wife; his mother, Barbara (born February 1613), was the third daughter of a Rothenburg butcher, Georg Schubert.<sup>40</sup> Georg Adam's father was Adam Knöspel, a baker from Falkenau in Saxony,<sup>41</sup> where Georg Adam had probably been born in 1638 or 1639.<sup>42</sup> Adam Knöspel died while Georg Adam was young; Barbara returned as a widow to Rothenburg with her son and married for a second time, to Michael Wirth, on 5 October 1647.<sup>43</sup> Michael Wirth was also a widower at the time of their marriage. He had first married (and gained citizenship rights in Rothenburg) in 1646;<sup>44</sup> his first wife had probably died in May 1647.<sup>45</sup> He was originally from Gammesfeld, a village in the Rothenburg hinterland; his father, cartwright Hans Wirth, had moved his family to take up citizenship of Rothenburg in 1641, probably to seek safety

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<sup>37</sup> Rita Voltmer, 'Ruwer und Eitelsbach in der Frühen Neuzeit: Dörfer vor Gericht – Ruwer und Eitelsbach während der grossen Hexenverfolgung am Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts', in Matthias Kordel (ed.), *Geschichte und Kultur des Trierer Landes* (vol. 2; Trier, 2003), esp. 121-2.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Robisheaux, *The Last Witch of Langenburg. Murder in a German Village* (New York and London, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> ELDR *St Jakob Eheregister* vol. 3 fo. 148<sup>f</sup>. We do not know how Anna Maria and Georg Adam met; she may have been in service in Rothenburg before their marriage.

<sup>40</sup> ELDR *St Jakob Taufbuch* vol. 3 fo. 329<sup>f</sup>. Georg Schubert from Archshofen became a Rothenburg citizen in 1607, StAR *Bürgerbuch* B42 fo. 35<sup>f</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 131<sup>f</sup>; ELDR *St Jakob Eheregister* vol. 3 fo. 148<sup>f</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> Georg Adam's mother, Barbara Wirth, confirmed he was twenty-four during her trial for witchcraft in 1663, StAR A902, third interrogation of Barbara Wirth (27 July 1663).

<sup>43</sup> ELDR *St Jakob Eheregister* vol. 3 fo. 101<sup>f</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 97<sup>f</sup>; StAR *Bürgerbuch* B42 fol. 163<sup>f</sup>. Wirth's first wife was Sabina Elisabeth Falck, daughter of Rothenburg musician Lorenz Falck.

<sup>45</sup> A daughter was born to the couple in May 1647, ELDR *St Jakob Taufregister* vol. 4 fo. 500<sup>f</sup>; Sabina Elisabeth probably died in or shortly after childbirth.

behind the city walls from the depredations of the Thirty Years War.<sup>46</sup> It is unclear when the Wirths took up residence on Gallows Street, but Hans Wirth was described as a cartwright from Gallows Street in the church register entry for his burial on 11 April 1647.<sup>47</sup> Michael Wirth served his apprenticeship as a cartwright with his father between 1640 and 1643,<sup>48</sup> and would then have left Rothenburg to ply his trade as a journeyman elsewhere for at least two years. He probably took over the Wirth family's Gallows Street premises after his father's death in April 1647, an event which also necessitated his second marriage to Barbara Knöspel in October of that year. A tax-list from 1651 put Wirth in the middle rank of urban wealth;<sup>49</sup> in 1653, he bought the Gallows Street property, which had presumably been rented previously by the family.<sup>50</sup> Michael and Barbara Wirth had six children: Hans (born 1648); Stefan (born 1651); Margaretha Barbara (born 1653); Helena Barbara (born 1655); an infant who died at birth in 1656; and Joseph (born 1657).<sup>51</sup> They raised Georg Adam Knöspel alongside these step-siblings; this explains why he completed an apprenticeship as a cartwright with Michael Wirth between 1654 and 1657, rather than following the trade of his birth-father by becoming a baker.<sup>52</sup>

### III

Georg Adam Knöspel's life changed dramatically in 1663 when the flourishing household of his stepfather and mother was destroyed by accusations of witchcraft against them. Michael Wirth was the main target; he was accused of having murdered his neighbour, a citizen and master farrier/blacksmith called Georg Leupold, by means of a bewitched drink. Wirth's

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<sup>46</sup> StAR *Bürgerbuch* B42 fo. 97<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> ELDR *St Jakob Sterberegister* 1642 vol. 2 fo. 22<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> StAR *Einschreibebuch der Schmiede- und Wagnerlehrlinge* B755 (unpaginated), entry for 1643.

<sup>49</sup> StAR *Steuerliste* 1651 B1269 fo. 118<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> Reference was made to the purchase of the house by Wirth in December 1653 by city mayor Johann Georg Styrzel, see StAR *Amtsbüchlein Styrzel* B197 fo. 65<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> ELDR *St Jakob Taufregister* vol. 4 fos. 532<sup>r</sup> (Hans); 573<sup>r</sup> (Stefan); 595<sup>r</sup> (Margaretha Barbara); 630<sup>r</sup> (Helena Barbara); 653<sup>r</sup> (Joseph); ELDR *St Jakob Sterberegister* 1642 vol. 2 fo. 52<sup>r</sup> (stillborn infant).

<sup>52</sup> StAR *Einschreibebuch der Schmiede- und Wagnerlehrlinge* B755 (unpaginated), entry for 1657.

neighbours also believed he could wither fruit-trees by his touch and that he possessed a book of ritual magic which he used to give himself an unfair advantage at musket-shooting contests.<sup>53</sup> Barbara Wirth had supposedly helped her husband in his supernatural activities and was thus guilty by association. This assumption lay at the heart of the official summary of her case,<sup>54</sup> and was also reflected in gossip circulating in the city; a woman called Rummel Meigel had been overheard commenting that if Barbara had been taught witchcraft, then it was by her husband, not her parents.<sup>55</sup> This statement is noteworthy as it suggests that, while the transmission of witchcraft knowledge between spouses was believed possible, with married couples who were reputed to be witches cropping up occasionally in the city's legal records,<sup>56</sup> the intergenerational transmission of such knowledge (and thus of reputation for witchcraft) was imagined as most common in early modern Rothenburg.<sup>57</sup> This reflected a view (prevalent in many parts of Europe) of witchcraft as a learned art, the skills, rituals and even paraphernalia of which were imagined as being passed on from older initiates to those younger than themselves, often in the context of the household.<sup>58</sup> The neighbourhood anxieties expressed against Michael Wirth as a harming witch, and the authorities'

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<sup>53</sup> See Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, 164-8; StAR *Urgichtenbuch* A902 (unpaginated), December 1662-July 1663; StAR *Blutbuch* B665 fos. 75<sup>v</sup>-77<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> StAR A902, statement by Jonas Schneller, 31 July 1663.

<sup>56</sup> See for example the case of Barbara Brosam of Wettringen (1561), whose husband Paulus was accused of having helped her in her witchcraft; his parents (Elisabetha and Veit Brosam) were also reputed witches. In the seventeenth century, married couples began to feature in some children's stories of seduction into witchcraft, although the woman was always the dominant figure and the main focus of legal investigation; see the cases involving Catharina and Mathes Leimbach of Wettringen (1652) and Anna and Leonhardt Maas of Rothenburg (1673). All cases are listed in Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, 212-28.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*; Barbara Brosam was thought to have been taught witchcraft by her parents-in-law; Appolonia, Anna and Georg Kellner of Finsterlohr by their mother (1563); the mother and grandmother of Anna Weh of Oberstetten were reputed witches (1582), as were those of Babelein Kuch of Hilgartshausen (1587); and the Gebssattel herdsman was believed to have passed on his reputation to his children (1627, 1652). The idea that older witches initiated youngsters into their art was also central to cases involving self-incriminating child-witches.

<sup>58</sup> This view was so important it was enshrined in law in the early sixteenth century; clause forty-four of the code of criminal law issued for the Holy Roman Empire in 1532 listed 'offering to teach other people how to do magic' and 'keeping particular company with other sorcerers' as two of the four key proofs of witchcraft, see Gustav Radbruch (ed.), *Die Peinliche Gerichtsordnung Kaiser Karls V. von 1532* (Stuttgart; 6<sup>th</sup> edn, ed. Arthur Kaufmann, 1984), 52. For examples of this belief from other parts of Europe, see Voltmer, 'Ruwer und Eitelsbach', esp. 135-7 (Electoral Trier); de Blécourt, 'Hexenfamilien-Zauber(er)geschlechter', (the Netherlands); Willis, 'Witch-Family', (England).

willingness to take them seriously, were also unusual for Rothenburg, where the stereotype of the harming witch was gendered as female, strongly at the popular level and very strongly amongst the urban elite.<sup>59</sup> What probably made people at all social levels more willing to believe Wirth might be a harming witch was not any family reputation of his own (no reference was made in 1663 to any previous suspicion of witchcraft linked to the Wirth lineage) but the fact that he had been a ringleader of protests against the councillors over their financial management of Rothenburg in the early 1650s.<sup>60</sup> By 1663 he was probably generally perceived as a witch-like disturber of the social peace, and treated accordingly. This perception would have been strengthened by Wirth's defiant actions in 1663. He travelled to Ansbach, the capital city of the neighbouring territory of Brandenburg-Ansbach, at an early stage of the investigations into the charges against him on the pretext of a business deal, and decided not to risk arrest by returning to Rothenburg.<sup>61</sup> From Ansbach he pursued a vigorous campaign in his own defence, employing a lawyer, accusing his detractors of slander, and sending long letters protesting his innocence to the Rothenburg council.<sup>62</sup> While Wirth's reaction seems sensible to us, his flight would have been taken as a sign of guilt (and further evidence of his rebelliousness) by the councillors. His efforts were anyway fruitless; he was deprived of his citizenship and banished from Rothenburg and its rural hinterland in absentia on 1 August 1663 for the crime of sorcery.<sup>63</sup> Barbara Wirth (Georg Adam Knöspel's birth-mother), who had been left behind in Rothenburg with her children, suffered this fate in

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<sup>59</sup> Wirth was the only man who was not already a reputed cunning man or treasure-seeker prosecuted for harmful witchcraft in Rothenburg, see Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, 135-79.

<sup>60</sup> M. Weigel, *Rothenburger Chronik* (Rothenburg ob der Tauber, 1904), 222.

<sup>61</sup> He seems to have been an unusually skilled craftsman whose coach-building skills were sought out from far afield. A Rothenburg chronicler suggested that Wirth fled after being warned (presumably about his imminent arrest) by friends, StAR B27 *Albrecht Annales*, entry for 1663. Although both Lutheran territories, the relationship between Rothenburg and the Margraviate of Brandenburg-Ansbach had long been strained.

<sup>62</sup> StAR *Urgichtenbuch* A902, letters by Wirth from March, April and July 1663.

<sup>63</sup> StAR *Blutbuch* B665 fos. 75<sup>v</sup>-77<sup>v</sup>.

reality, after being arrested and interrogated three times, once under threat of torture.<sup>64</sup> Her subsequent pleas for clemency fell on deaf ears;<sup>65</sup> the Wirth children were left in Rothenburg in the care of officially appointed guardians;<sup>66</sup> thereafter both she and Michael Wirth disappeared from the city's historical record.<sup>67</sup>

The events of 1663 were a double-edged sword for twenty-four-year-old Georg Adam Knöspel. His stepfather's sudden departure from Rothenburg and the youth of his stepbrothers enabled him to attain the status of an independent adult male more quickly than would have been the case otherwise. He became a citizen and married in 1664,<sup>68</sup> and almost certainly took over the Gallows Street workshop vacated by Michael Wirth as a master cartwright around the same time, a prized position in the hierarchy of his craft-group and the city community that would otherwise have gone to Michael Wirth's eldest son Hans, who was only fourteen, and still an apprentice cartwright, in August 1663.<sup>69</sup> However, his mother's treatment (by his stepfather and the councillors) must have engendered feelings of resentment in Georg Adam, while the banishment of his mother and stepfather weakened his networks of family support, and put him and his own family, as the descendants of convicted witches, at greater risk of being accused of witchcraft themselves. This may explain why

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, and StAR A902, interrogations on 21, 23 and 27 July. Anyone banished from Rothenburg was marched down Gallows Street and out of Gallows Gate; Barbara thus had to walk past her own house on her way out of town.

<sup>65</sup> Barbara wrote to the council in 1664 begging to be re-admitted to Rothenburg, signing her letter Barbara, née Schubert, to emphasize her father's lineage and dissociate herself from Wirth, whom she appears not to have joined in exile, and listing all that she had been forced to abandon in Rothenburg in 1663 (house, property, children, siblings, friends), StAR A902, letter dated 15 June.

<sup>66</sup> StAR *Vormundschaftsbuch* B674 fo. 186<sup>v</sup>. The councillors' severity towards Barbara was probably due to their failure to get their hands on Michael in 1663.

<sup>67</sup> As a master-cartwright, Wirth was better placed than his wife to earn a living elsewhere; he did not (as might have been expected, given his flight there in 1663) gain citizenship of Ansbach; I am grateful to Dr Wolfgang F. Reddig of the Ansbach City Archive, for confirming this.

<sup>68</sup> See n. 36 and n. 39 above.

<sup>69</sup> Hans was born on 22 December 1648 (ELDR *St Jakob Taufregister* vol. 4 fo. 532<sup>v</sup>) and began a three-year apprenticeship with his father in 1661 (StAR *Geburts- und Lehrbriefe* A1573 fos. 448<sup>r</sup>-451<sup>v</sup>). Hans left Rothenburg, became a soldier, and finally settled as a successful cartwright/innkeeper in Nordsteinke in Lower Saxony in 1674, despite a reputation for white magic, see *ibid.* and Ludwig Schnurrer, 'Rothenburg in der Fremde', *Die Linde* 51 (1969). His brother Stefan was refused admission to an apprenticeship by the Rothenburg butchers in 1666 because of their father's reputation, StAR *Amtsbüchlein Styrzel* B198 fos. 240<sup>f</sup>, 244<sup>f</sup>.

Georg Adam married the already reputed Anna Maria Wagner in the aftermath of his family's disgrace in 1664; in urgent need of a wife in order to found his own household, she was probably the best spouse he could hope for, and vice versa. This suggests that, in some early modern German towns, the offspring of reputed witch-parents may have had to inter-marry, like the children of municipal executioners, to keep their dishonour contained, and that witchcraft was seen as akin to a dishonourable and defiling trade.<sup>70</sup> Georg Adam and Anna Maria probably hoped they could escape formal prosecution for witchcraft by working hard, being neighbourly, and expressing the expected levels of Lutheran piety, especially as they had the good fortune to live in a territory where witchcraft allegations more likely to be treated as instances of slander than the catalyst for witch-trials by the authorities. The Knospels used this precedent to their advantage on at least one occasion some years before 1689, when the Gallows Towerkeeper's wife blamed her son's illness on Anna Maria's witchcraft. The Knospels complained about this to the city council and the Gallows Towerkeeper's wife was forced to retract the rumour as slander.<sup>71</sup>

Even so, the Knospel household had become socially isolated by the 1680s; no neighbours testified unequivocally on their behalf during the legal investigation of 1689. Moreover, Georg Adam Knospel's name was conspicuous by its absence from the records of his occupational group of master cartwrights and farrier/blacksmiths; he appears to have trained no apprentices other than his own son, Michael.<sup>72</sup> By 1689 he was in debt and Anna

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<sup>70</sup> See Joel F. Harrington, *Die Ehre des Scharfrichters. Meister Franz, oder ein Henkersleben im 16. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2014), 53-4, and Kathy Stuart, *Defiled Trades and Social Outcasts. Honour and Ritual Pollution in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 2006). Like that of an executioner, Anna Maria's presence and touch were regarded by her neighbours as polluting and dangerous, see n. 85 below.

<sup>71</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 628<sup>v</sup>, 652<sup>f</sup>.

<sup>72</sup> Knospel was not listed in any of the entries in the book recording the taking on of apprentices by his occupational group of cartwrights and farrier/blacksmiths; by contrast, the names of his neighbour, farrier/blacksmith Georg Adam Leupold, and Leupold's brothers, Georg David and Georg Leupold (also master farrier/blacksmiths) occur regularly, StAR B755 (entries from 1636-1701).

Maria took in yarn to spin to support the household economy.<sup>73</sup> This may have been because trade was poor or Georg Adam a mediocre craftsman; however, it probably also indicates a household with which others were increasingly unwilling to interact for social or business reasons, because of its reputation for witchcraft. By 1689 Anna Maria was so strongly rumoured to be a witch in the Gallows Street neighbourhood that some local women were willing to testify that they tried to keep her away from them during childbirth and the lying-in period.<sup>74</sup> These were times when bonds of kinship and neighbourliness were strengthened between women by the visits paid to the mother by female relatives and friends; to be excluded from these visits was clear evidence of Anna Maria's social ostracism and other people's fear of her. It was therefore unsurprising that the rumours which helped start the trial in 1689 centred on maleficium worked in connection with child-birth. Tawer Georg Dorndorf, one of two neighbours called on to give statements about the Knöspels on 1 June 1689, asserted that Anna Maria was reputed to be 'such a woman' (that is, a harming witch) throughout Gallows Street, and that she had lamed his wife, Catharina. Dorndorf explained that Catharina had experienced sudden agony in her legs after giving birth on Maundy Thursday 1689, but only after Anna Maria Knöspel had insisted on helping Catharina's mother to wash Catharina's soiled child-bed linen.<sup>75</sup> Both Catharina and her mother corroborated this version of events later in June, thus painting a damning picture of Anna Maria as someone who interfered by helping where she was not wanted, and who could lame a person simply by touching their bed-linen.<sup>76</sup> Georg Dorndorf also stated that he had asked Anna Maria Knöspel to help his wife three times for God's sake; this ritual plea indicated that

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<sup>73</sup> Georg Adam was already in debt in 1686, see StAR *Ratsprotokollen* B47 fo. 379<sup>r</sup>. Hans Adam referred to his mother spinning yarn during interrogation on 11 June 1689, *ibid.*, fo. 678<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 699<sup>r</sup>-700<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 621<sup>r</sup>-622<sup>r</sup>. Dorndorf confirmed his testimony on 11 June (*ibid.*, fos. 661<sup>r</sup>-663<sup>r</sup>); this was important, as he refused to retract his allegations despite the fact that the councillors now confronted him with the opinion of municipal physician Höchstetter that Catharina's illness was natural.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 636<sup>r</sup>-638<sup>r</sup> (statement by Catharina Dorndorf on 7 June), fos. 695<sup>r</sup>-696<sup>r</sup> (testimony of Catharina's mother, the wife of Ludwig Schmidt, landlord of the Ox Inn, on 18 June).



the Dorndorfs believed Anna Maria had caused Catharina's lameness by magic in the first place.<sup>77</sup> Anna Maria had responded to their request by advising Catharina to take a herbal bath,<sup>78</sup> but this made Catharina feel worse instead of better.<sup>79</sup> The other neighbour who testified against the Knöspels on 1 June was wood-turner Andreas Schneeberger, who confirmed that he had heard the story of Hans Adam Knöspel's attendance at a gathering on Walpurgis Eve (30 April, a night traditionally associated with the activity of witches), from the boy himself.<sup>80</sup> Schneeberger testified again on 7 June, calling Hans Adam a 'devil's child', confirming that people regarded Anna Maria with horror, and that the whole neighbourhood wanted the Knöspels driven from Rothenburg. Schneeberger also drew Georg Adam Knöspel into the web of suspicion, saying that the cartwright worked little but had much money and drank large quantities of wine, the implication being that Knöspel was a profit-making witch who used magic and/or the devil's help to earn money, rather than working hard and honestly like other craftsmen.<sup>81</sup>

The driving force behind what seems to have been a co-ordinated attack on the Knöspels in 1689 was, however, the Leupold family, their near neighbours on Gallows Street. Master farrier/blacksmith, Georg Adam, his wife, Anna Dorothea, and their son, fifteen-year-old Johann Michael Leupold, all appeared alongside Andreas Schneeberger to testify against the Knöspels on 7 June.<sup>82</sup> Johann Michael confirmed that Hans Adam Knöspel had told him the tale of the witches' gathering on Gallows Street recently, while Georg Adam Leupold and his wife blamed Anna Maria Knöspel for an illness from which the former had suffered since

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 622<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 652<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 622<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 622<sup>v</sup>-623<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 632<sup>r-v</sup>. This reflected the masculine stereotype of the profit-making witch as defined by Willem de Blécourt in 'The Making of the Female Witch: Reflections on Witchcraft and Gender in the Early Modern Period', *Gender & History*, 12 (2000). The idea that men used magic to assist them economically was also raised in Rothenburg in relation to craftsmen Hans Georg Hofmann and Michael Pfund (1605) and blacksmith Mathes Leimbach (1652), see Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, 162-4, 150-60.

<sup>82</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 632<sup>v</sup>-633<sup>v</sup> (Georg Adam Leupold); 633<sup>v</sup>-634<sup>r</sup> (Anna Dorothea Leupold); 634<sup>r-v</sup> (Johann Michael Leupold).

1684, which prevented him from sleeping in his own bed. Leupold added that the whole town believed he would regain his health if the Knöspels were expelled from Rothenburg.

Leupold's wife testified in dramatic fashion, weeping as she spoke of her husband's suffering and adding that she had used a barrow-load of herbs and sold their best furniture to pay for remedies to cure him, in vain.<sup>83</sup> She added that her parish pastor had advised her to bring the matter to the council's attention, in the hope that her husband would recover if Anna Maria Knöspel were arrested and forced to confess.<sup>84</sup> Both Leupolds stated that all their neighbours had an aversion to Anna Maria and preferred not to let her into their houses. Anna Dorothea emphasized this point in a second statement which she volunteered of her own accord on 10 June, in which she stated that Anna Maria Knöspel's malevolent power was so feared that she was no longer invited to child-bed festivities in the neighbourhood (but that she came anyway, uninvited), and that no neighbours wanted to touch any objects that Anna Maria borrowed from their households.<sup>85</sup> The Leupolds' desperate desire to be rid of the Knöspels was understandable; Georg Adam Leupold was the son of Georg Leupold, the master farrier/blacksmith of whose murder by witchcraft Georg Adam Knöspel's stepfather, Michael Wirth, had been accused in 1663. Georg Adam Leupold had been a teenaged apprentice in his father's household at the time, and had testified against Michael and Barbara Wirth during the investigation into the witchcraft allegations against them.<sup>86</sup> Given this experience, and the continued presence of Georg Adam and Anna Maria Knöspel so close to them on Gallows Street, Georg Adam Leupold and his wife would long have been predisposed to blame them for Leupold's illness, a point which suggests that inhabitants of late-seventeenth-century Rothenburg imagined family lineages of witchcraft victims, as well as of supposed witches.

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<sup>83</sup> Anna Dorothea was careful to avoid saying that she had used cunning folk in her attempts to cure her husband, as this was punishable by fine according to city ordinances.

<sup>84</sup> This was done to imply that her suspicions had clerical backing.

<sup>85</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fo. 660<sup>f</sup>.

<sup>86</sup> See n. 53 above.

## IV

The treatment of the Knöspel family members in 1689 differed according to their age, gender, and the strength of their reputations in the eyes of their neighbours and the authorities. Equally important in explaining the outcome of the trial, and what happened to Hans Adam Knöspel thereafter, however, were the intertwined legal, religious and political priorities of the councillors, and the jurists, clerics and physicians who advised them. Many of these priorities were based on precedent, especially as this related to the treatment of self-incriminating child-witches; however, the second half of the seventeenth century also saw greater emphasis on witchcraft as a spiritual crime in Rothenburg, and heightened concern on the part of the authorities about the devil's temptation of humans, developments which were partly caused by the growing influence on urban witch-trials by the city pastors.<sup>87</sup> The detailed delineation of this increasing clerical intervention is beyond the scope of this article,<sup>88</sup> but the pastoral phase of the Knöspel case, in which the pastors, led by Church Superintendent Sebastian Kirchmeier, took an exceptionally active role in seeking to bring Hans Adam back to the fold of Lutheran piety, constituted an important stage in the process. Clerical opinion on the Knöspel case tended to see the work of the devil and witches at every turn, whereas the physicians were more likely to attribute illness to natural causes, and the jurists to see the Knöspel family as 'Lumpengesind', meaning socially deviant riff-raff<sup>89</sup>. The councillors had to steer a course between these competing perspectives; behind the apparently united front of patriarchal authority as it was expressed in the public exercise of judicial power, then, lay significant differences of opinion between the individual men, and the professional sub-groups of men, who made up the Rothenburg governing elite.

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<sup>87</sup> Cf. Alison Rowlands, 'Superstition, Magic and Clerical Polemic in Seventeenth-Century Germany', in Steve A. Smith and Alan Knight (eds.), *The Religion of Fools? Superstition Past and Present* (Oxford, 2008); Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, 192-200.

<sup>88</sup> See Alison Rowlands, 'Father Confessors and Clerical Intervention in Witch-Trials in Seventeenth-Century Lutheran Germany' (forthcoming).

<sup>89</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fo. 714<sup>v</sup>.

Like the Wirth household in 1663, the Knöspel household was destroyed by the events of 1689. Georg Adam had to give up his citizenship, sell his house, and leave Rothenburg and all that he had worked for since his youth on 10 October as a result of the trial;<sup>90</sup> we last hear of him and his daughter Maria Margaretha in late 1690, living near the village of Windelsbach, on the boundary of the Rothenburg rural hinterland.<sup>91</sup> His sentence stated that he and his family could no longer be tolerated in Rothenburg because of his wife's reputation for witchcraft, the slovenly way in which he had brought up his children, and his debts.<sup>92</sup> His own reputation for witchcraft was not mentioned; this omission was probably deliberate, to give him a chance to find work to support himself elsewhere. Georg Adam's experience of the trial was, however, less traumatic than that of his wife and son. He was subjected to questioning at the town hall and to a confrontation with the other members of his family in the city gaol, but was not imprisoned or threatened with torture, nor was he formally banished like his wife, with the public humiliation this entailed. This was because the councillors were traditionally reluctant to use the full force of the law against urban craftsmen accused of magical crimes, as such men were likely to have the resources (social and economic capital; literacy; legal knowledge) to pursue judicial strategies in their own defence, as Georg Adam's stepfather Michael Wirth had done in 1663.<sup>93</sup> Women (especially peasant women and widows) lacked such resources and thus had less formal power to affect the outcomes of their trials.<sup>94</sup> Georg Adam also had only a weak or latent reputation for witchcraft by 1689. None of his neighbours accused him of harmful magic, and wood-turner

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 737<sup>r-v</sup>.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 771<sup>r</sup>. The councillors had implicitly given Knöspel the option of resettling in the rural hinterland by only specifying that he had to give up his citizenship. He was reduced to poverty; Maria Margaretha told the authorities on 30 September 1689 that after selling his house and paying his debts her father would have virtually nothing left to live on, *ibid.*, fo. 743<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 737<sup>r-v</sup>; his poor parenting was called 'liederliche Kindzucht'.

<sup>93</sup> Hardly any craftsmen were so accused, with Michael Wirth (1663), joiners Hans Georg Hofmann and Michael Pfund (1605), and cutler Leonhardt Maas (1673) the exceptions, see Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, 212-28. Legal opinion on Hofmann's case advised against torturing him in case he sought redress at the imperial court of appeal, *ibid.*, 164.

<sup>94</sup> They drew instead on personal courage and piety under questioning to resist confessing, and in some cases developed sophisticated strategies of verbal resistance; see Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, 180-92.

Andreas Schneeberger was the only witness willing to testify that Georg Adam was a profit-making witch who used magic instead of hard work in his trade, an idea which probably seemed implausible to the councillors, given Georg Adam's debts. The councillors questioned Georg Adam about the poor reputations of his mother and stepfather,<sup>95</sup> and about the fact that he was apparently called Little Witch Knöspel by some people, including a butcher called Hans Georg Wolff.<sup>96</sup> They dropped these lines of enquiry relatively quickly, however, after Georg Adam insisted he was innocent of witchcraft, and Hans Georg Wolff testified that he could not remember calling Georg Adam Knöspel by his damaging nickname.<sup>97</sup>

Hans Adam Knöspel also maintained a conceptual dividing line between his parents in the stories of the witches' gathering he told the councillors during the legal phase of the case; at this stage, Hans Adam stated that his father could do no witchcraft,<sup>98</sup> and that his mother had taken him to the witches' dance from the bed in which they had been sleeping with his sister Maria Margaretha while his father had been away from home in Heilbronn.<sup>99</sup> It was only after his parents' expulsion from the city and his incarceration in the hospital that Hans Adam began to include his father, sisters, and as time went on even his brothers, in the ever-more detailed witchcraft stories that he was forced to develop by the clerics; by 1692, he claimed that both his parents had taken him on a fire-iron to the first witches' dance in 1689, and that 'his people were witches, one and all'.<sup>100</sup> According to the boy, his father accompanied his mother and the devil on magical flights to see him in the hospital, where they offered to take him away with them, and encouraged him to resist the clerics' efforts to

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<sup>95</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 628<sup>r-v</sup>.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 679<sup>r</sup> ('Drueten Knöspelein').

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 703<sup>r-v</sup>. Georg Adam testified that people might call him this in drink or to annoy him, but that he beat anyone who said it to his face (fo. 701<sup>v</sup>), a statement which confirmed rather than denied the existence of his nickname.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 674<sup>r</sup> (11 June 1689). Hans Adam said, however, that although his father could do no witchcraft he knew about the magical night-flying of his wife.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 624<sup>r</sup>, 653<sup>r</sup>, 654<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 797<sup>r</sup>-805<sup>r</sup>, esp. 798<sup>v</sup>: 'Sein leut [seien] alle samt hexen leute'.

bring him back to God.<sup>101</sup> These new stories were probably Hans Adam's expression of, and mechanism for coping with, the trauma he had experienced during the trial and the forced separation from his family, but they encouraged the men of the Rothenburg governing elite to take more seriously the idea that Hans Adam's seduction into witchcraft was the fault of his 'godless parents'.<sup>102</sup>

Even if they did not formally label Georg Adam a witch in 1689, however, the Rothenburg councillors clearly thought of him as a poor patriarch who had failed his son. At worst, Georg Adam had abnegated his patriarchal authority over his wife and household by allowing her to seduce Hans Adam into witchcraft; he had also failed to ensure that the boy could recite accurately the basic prayers that would have helped protect him against the temptations of the devil.<sup>103</sup> Another possible version of events was that Hans Adam was fabricating his story; in this case, Georg Adam had raised his son to be a liar.<sup>104</sup> A particular set of anxieties on the part of the councillors coalesced around Hans Adam's epilepsy, and the question of whether the symptoms he displayed during seizures were caused naturally by the illness, supernaturally by the devil, or fraudulently by the boy's play-acting.<sup>105</sup> Between June and August 1689 the possibility that the boy might be a fraud was entertained and tested by the councillors.<sup>106</sup> They asked the Knöspels' neighbours for eye-witness evidence about

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 770<sup>r</sup>-772<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>102</sup> The municipal physicians referred to Hans Adam having been sacrificed to the devil by his parents in July 1690, *ibid.*, fos. 773<sup>r</sup>-774<sup>r</sup>, esp. 773<sup>v</sup>; the urban clerics were making reference to Hans Adam's godless parents by the autumn of 1690, see n. 179 below.

<sup>103</sup> The councillors confronted Georg Adam with this criticism on 18 June 1689 (StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fo. 701<sup>v</sup>); Georg Adam protested that it was not his fault if the boy missed out a word or two.

<sup>104</sup> Georg Adam tried to defend his family by saying that Hans Adam had been taught the night-flying story by Andreas Schneeberger and other boys, *ibid.*, fo. 627<sup>v</sup>. The idea that a child could be persuaded to repeat (untrue) stories by other people was central to the first child-witch trial in Rothenburg in 1587 (see n. 10 above). In 1689 this line of enquiry was pursued but only half-heartedly; Schneeberger and Johann Michael Leupold admitted giving Hans Adam Knöspel gifts in return for his tale (see n. 26 above), but denied teaching him what to say.

<sup>105</sup> On the problem of distinguishing genuine epilepsy from possession and fraud, see Temkin, *Falling Sick*, 138-41, 164-9.

<sup>106</sup> The councillors were particularly sensitive to this issue because Anna Margaretha Rohn, the young woman executed for witchcraft in Rothenburg in 1673, had suffered fits and been diagnosed (erroneously) as epileptic; see n. 11 above.

Hans Adam's falls on the city streets,<sup>107</sup> and also asked the gaol-keeper to observe Hans Adam's behaviour after his arrest.<sup>108</sup> When they questioned Hans Adam on 12 June 1689, councillors Georg Albrecht Renger and Johann Philip Styrzel suggested that he (and by implication his parents) had been lying about his condition because the gaol-keeper had not seen him have any fits in custody; when the boy had a seizure a few moments later in front of their eyes the councillors noted that he was pretending to be ill and instructed the gaoler to reward him with a beating.<sup>109</sup> Both Georg Adam and Anna Maria were accused of encouraging their son in this apparent pretence; in Georg Adam's case, the councillors interpreted his kindly-meant suggestion (that Hans Adam should hold on to tables and chairs to stop himself from falling and injuring himself when he felt a fit coming on) as evidence of this pretence and Georg Adam's bad parenting.<sup>110</sup> It was only because Hans Adam continued to have frequent fits in the hospital, which were observed by his watchers,<sup>111</sup> and because of a medical report by the city physicians after their examination of the boy in June 1690 that the councillors' doubts on this point were finally allayed. In their report the physicians confirmed that Hans Adam had, indeed, suffered from natural epileptic fits from birth. However, they added that, ever since Hans Adam's parents had sacrificed him to the devil, the devil had intervened in Hans Adam's fits to demonstrate his power over the boy.<sup>112</sup> The seizures were thus both natural and supernatural, but definitely not fraudulent.

Under the pressure of intense questioning, Hans Adam, who was ill-equipped to deal with the situation because of his age and epilepsy, tried to say what he thought the authorities wanted to hear. He was called to the town hall to testify before councillor Johann Gottfried

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<sup>107</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 691<sup>v</sup>-692<sup>v</sup>, 703<sup>r-v</sup>.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 659<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 677<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 701<sup>r</sup>, 738<sup>r</sup>-739<sup>r</sup>, 623<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>111</sup> See n. 101 above.

<sup>112</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 773<sup>r</sup>-774<sup>r</sup>, esp. 773<sup>r-v</sup>. This explanation may have been strategic by the physicians, as it would have satisfied them and the clerics. However, they may also have genuinely believed it, as there was a medieval theory which held that the devil did not cause epilepsy, but intervened once a fit had started, see Temkin, *Falling Sickness*, 97.

Nusch on 1 June, and began by stating that his mother had given him a piggy-back to festivities at the Sun Inn in Rothenburg on Walpurgis Eve. However, this prosaic account was almost immediately replaced by the supernatural version of events which he had been telling on Gallows Street; he had flown to the Sun Inn with his mother on a fire-iron, he said, which she had first smeared with a magical salve. Nusch pressed him for more details, so the ‘completely terrified’ Hans Adam added that a black man had played the pipes at the gathering; further leading questions put to the boy encouraged him to confirm that his mother had kissed the black man, who had also taken blood from Hans Adam’s foot by biting him, and to name nine other people (five men and four women) whom he had supposedly seen at the inn.<sup>113</sup> After being gaoled and separated from his family, and during the interrogation on 12 June when he suffered the seizure and beating described above, Hans Adam was (unsurprisingly) extremely muddled in his testimony.<sup>114</sup> At first he tried to exonerate his mother by saying that one of Georg Adam Leupold’s sons had taken him to the witches’ dance, then he reverted to the story involving his mother, although he now denied what he had said on 1 June about his mother kissing the devil, and added that the black piper had pulled out one of his teeth after he had failed to draw blood from the boy’s foot (although the gaol-keeper stated that he had seen the boy pull out the tooth himself!) Hans Adam also vacillated between confirming and denying that his mother had lamed Catharina Dorndorf, and that he had given himself to the devil, who he now described as a yellow-haired man who lived just outside the city’s Castle Gate in Hell. The interrogation eventually broke down because of Hans Adam’s inconsistency.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 623<sup>v</sup>-625<sup>v</sup>; ‘ganz erschrocken’ (fo. 623<sup>v</sup>). The councillors took no action against the people named as sabbath-attenders because sabbaths were believed to be diabolic fantasies rather than real events in early modern Rothenburg, see Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, 55-60.

<sup>114</sup> Hans Adam was clearly traumatised; he tried to escape from gaol and run home on 10 June, then screamed for four hours after being recaptured, StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fo. 659<sup>f</sup>.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 667<sup>r</sup>-674<sup>r</sup>. Hans Adam told the councillors that his sister had told him to say that one of the Leupolds had taken him to the sabbath, in what seems to have been a forlorn attempt to shift official attention onto the Leupolds and away from their mother, *ibid.*, fos. 675<sup>r-v</sup>.



During interrogation on 18 June, Hans Adam repeated the core of his earlier statement (that his mother had taught him witchcraft, had a magical salve, and had flown with him to the witches' gathering at the Sun Inn), telling his interrogators that he knew his mother was a witch because the Superintendent said so.<sup>116</sup> This was a reference to a pastoral visit made by Superintendent Kirchmeier and the Knöspel family's minister, Johann Georg Herrnbauer<sup>117</sup> to the boy in gaol, and clear evidence of the clerics' influence on his narrative. Hans Adam adhered to and significantly developed this version of events after being consigned to the hospital and the 'care' of Kirchmeier and the urban clerics in August 1689, a tutelage which lasted several years and involved regular sessions of religious instruction (with beatings if Hans Adam proved recalcitrant) and appearances for formal questioning at meetings of the *Consistorium*, as well as surveillance of his behaviour by the hospital inmates assigned to be his watchers.<sup>118</sup> In these circumstances Hans Adam's story of his seduction into witchcraft became more fantastic and horrifying, including descriptions of his re-christening by his mother and the devil, his new demonic name (*Phantastalein*), which was inscribed in Hell's register in Hans Adam's own blood, and even acts of sexual congress with the devil and his own mother.<sup>119</sup>

Anna Maria Knöspel denied that she could work harmful magic or that she had ever attended a witches' dance (much less taken her son to one) throughout the case, which for her involved two sessions of formal questioning, confrontation with the neighbours who accused her; confrontation with her son, husband and daughter; then arrest and imprisonment, followed by two further interrogations under threat of torture. In her defence, she said that

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 709<sup>r</sup>-712<sup>v</sup>, esp. fos. 709<sup>r-v</sup>.

<sup>117</sup> Herrnbauer was a deacon of the church of St James. Jurist Schegk referred to him accompanying Kirchmeier to visit Hans Adam, *ibid.*, fo. 724<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 741<sup>r</sup>-872<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>119</sup> These developments occurred between 1690 and 1692 under the pressure of regular questioning by the clerics, see *ibid.*, fos. 783<sup>r</sup>-786<sup>r</sup>, 793<sup>r</sup>-796<sup>r</sup>, 787<sup>r</sup>-792<sup>r</sup>, 797<sup>r</sup>-805<sup>r</sup>. Hans Adam was also used as a witness against Barbara Ehness, who was tried and executed for poisoning and witchcraft in 1692, see Rowlands, 'Father Confessors'.

Georg Adam Leupold had been ill before she came to Rothenburg and that Catharina Dorndorf had also suffered pains in her legs before Anna Maria had washed her child-bed linen,<sup>120</sup> so she could not have been the cause of their afflictions. In a theologically precise manner that should have pleased the authorities, Anna Maria also suggested that Georg Adam's illness was a test from God,<sup>121</sup> rather than the result of witchcraft. Any visits or offers of help she made to child-bearing women were motivated by neighbourliness, not malice.<sup>122</sup> As far as Hans Adam was concerned, she suggested that he had been taught to repeat the night-flying story by other people;<sup>123</sup> when this line of enquiry petered out, she could only suggest despairingly that he said such things because of his epilepsy and because he was not right in the head.<sup>124</sup> Her husband supported her as far as possible, testifying about the severity of Hans Adam's illness and stating that he knew nothing to suggest Anna Maria could fly magically.<sup>125</sup> However, Georg Adam unwittingly strengthened the case against his wife on 18 June, when they and Maria Margaretha were fetched from their house to the city gaol to be questioned and to confront Hans Adam about his claims. Fortunately for her, Maria Margaretha wept copiously at the sight of her brother; her ability to shed tears was interpreted by the authorities as evidence that she was innocent of witchcraft and she was spared arrest and trial, although she had to leave the city with her father in October 1689.<sup>126</sup>

The family confrontation on 18 June centred on a small tin box, which the gaol-keeper had found on searching the Knöspel house, and which Hans Adam claimed contained the magical salve which made his mother's fire-iron fly. Anna Maria had always denied

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<sup>120</sup> Anna Maria said this about Leupold and Dorndorf on 8 June, StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 655<sup>v</sup>, 656<sup>v</sup>; Georg Adam also said this about Catharina Dorndorf on 4 June 1689, see *ibid.*, fos. 627<sup>r</sup>-628<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 656<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 700<sup>r-v</sup>.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 698<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 710<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 627<sup>r</sup>-628<sup>v</sup>; 701<sup>r</sup>-702<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 709<sup>r</sup>-712<sup>v</sup>, esp. fo. 711<sup>v</sup>. Maria Margaretha also denied that she was a witch and stressed her piety and record of honest service as proof of her good reputation during questioning earlier in June and in September 1689, *ibid.*, fos. 692<sup>v</sup>-694<sup>v</sup>, 741<sup>r</sup>-743<sup>r</sup>.

possessing a magical salve;<sup>127</sup> she explained that the box had belonged to her husband's stepfather, Michael Wirth, and that she had cleaned it out on coming to live in the Gallows Street house in 1664. However, Georg Adam said that he and his stepbrothers had seen the box when his stepbrothers had visited the Knöspels in Rothenburg in 1688. They had commented on the fact that it looked greasy, and that it was the box in which Michael Wirth had kept a lubricant, made from stag-marrow, which he had used for cleaning the barrel of his musket. This apparently trivial domestic detail was, in fact, hugely damaging for Anna Maria (and the subject of significant comment in the final summary of her case), as it not only suggested that she had been lying about when the box had been cleaned, but also because it provided a tangible link between her and the convicted witch Michael Wirth, who had supposedly used magic to improve his accuracy in shooting. The tin box, then, which had probably contained a salve-like substance at some stage and been left in the house when Wirth fled Rothenburg in 1663, symbolised the passing on of the means of working magic between the generations, from the reputed Wirth to his likewise reputed step-daughter-in-law, and also re-gendered the imagined lineage of harmful magic in their family as female, in line with the contemporary belief in the harming witch as female.<sup>128</sup> The other factors which counted against Anna Maria were the long-standing reputation for harmful witchcraft she had acquired from her mother;<sup>129</sup> the fact that the Leupolds and Dorndorfs stuck to their allegations of maleficium against her;<sup>130</sup> the fact that she ultimately admitted that Georg Dorndorf had indeed asked her for help three times for God's sake (after first denying this);<sup>131</sup> and the fact that neither she nor her husband had taken the first pre-emptive step in

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 645<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 709<sup>r</sup>-712<sup>v</sup>. 'Using suspicious objects' was one of the four proofs of witchcraft listed in the Carolina, see n. 58 above.

<sup>129</sup> The municipal jurists called this her 'bad lineage' ('schlechtes Herkommen'), StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fo. 715<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>130</sup> They did so in direct confrontation with Anna Maria on 18 June 1689, see *ibid.*, fos. 691<sup>r</sup>-702<sup>r</sup>, and in light of the physicians' opinions that the diseases afflicting them were natural.

<sup>131</sup> Anna Maria said that Georg Dorndorf had asked her for a 'Hausmittel' (domestic remedy) on 8 June 1689, *ibid.*, fo. 652<sup>r</sup>. She admitted she had been asked for God's sake on 18 June, *ibid.*, fo. 695<sup>r</sup>.

1689 by bringing a slander suit against the Dorndorfs.<sup>132</sup> Anna Maria defended herself in tones which were occasionally defiant but which, on the whole, suggested a weary acceptance on her part that her position in Rothenburg had become untenable;<sup>133</sup> anything she tried to do, however well-intentioned, risked being interpreted as evidence of her inner malevolence by her neighbours.

By 19 June the municipal jurists were advising the councillors to close the Knöspel case; Johann Georg Krauss, for instance, said that they should not proceed further because Hans Adam's testimony was full of childish variations, and because it was better to proceed cautiously rather than hastily in the secret matter of witchcraft.<sup>134</sup> Hans Adam's age and inconsistency meant that there were no legal grounds to justify the torture of the boy or his parents, especially as the municipal physicians Johann Philip Höchstetter, Georg Nicolas Weinlin and Johann Bernhard Winterbach insisted that the afflictions suffered by Catharina Dorndorf and Georg Adam Leupold had natural causes.<sup>135</sup> The physicians' insistence stemmed not from sympathy with Anna Maria Knöspel but from their frustration with the fact that so many people sought magical cures from cunning men (and especially the municipal executioner) if the physicians' own treatments had no effect;<sup>136</sup> it thus made little sense for them to confirm that people's ill-health had been caused by witchcraft in the first place. This stance can be seen as part of an ongoing attempt by the physicians to assert their own expertise and status vis-à-vis the other professional men of the city's ruling elite, as well as in the eyes of their patients. It was crucial to Anna Maria because she would almost certainly have been tortured otherwise. As it was, the councillors took the advice of jurist Krauss that

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 653<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>133</sup> On 8 June, Anna Maria said that she had to suffer the allegations against her with patience (*ibid.*, fo. 653<sup>v</sup>). By 18 June her tone was more impatient; she denied she was a witch, adding 'that if she were she would teach the councillors a thing or two' (*ibid.*, fo. 711<sup>r</sup>). This was counter-productive, as her aggression would have been interpreted as witch-like by the councillors.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 713<sup>r</sup>-716<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 630<sup>r-v</sup> (opinion by Höchstetter on Dorndorf, 5 June 1689); fos. 683<sup>r</sup>-687<sup>v</sup> (opinion by all three physicians on Leupold, 13 June 1689).

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 630<sup>v</sup>.

she could be threatened with torture before her banishment.<sup>137</sup> This happened on 29 and again on 31 July; thanks to her steadfastness, she did not break down at the sight of the torture instruments and confess.<sup>138</sup> That this legally dubious course of action was suggested by Krauss and implemented by the councillors showed that they had come to believe that Anna Maria was a witch who had harmed her neighbours and corrupted her son; that the councillors went no further than to threaten torture also showed that their legal precedent of restraint in witchcraft cases still held firm. Anna Maria Knöspel was banished from Rothenburg and its hinterland on 2 August, and threatened with a flogging and the pillory if she returned.<sup>139</sup> The final summary of her case noted that she had been arrested because of her impiety, bad parenting,<sup>140</sup> and strong reputation for witchcraft. It also stated that she had responded poorly to Hans Adam's allegations about the witches' gathering, and that she had 'probably' possessed a magical salve and bewitched Dorndorf and Leupold. Although unproven, these suspicions, and the communal aversion in which she was held, were enough to ensure her banishment. Thereafter she was rumoured to have fled to a village near the north-German city of Lüneburg.<sup>141</sup>

## V

The idea that real families existed, amongst whose members the art of witchcraft was passed on, was widespread and of long standing by the seventeenth century, although more research is needed on how this idea was gendered; varied regionally; and was shaped by, and in turn

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 715<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 731<sup>r</sup>-733<sup>v</sup>, 735<sup>r</sup>-736<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 738<sup>r</sup>-739<sup>r</sup>. Like her mother-in-law, Barbara Wirth, in 1663, she would have been marched out of the city down Gallows Street past the family home.

<sup>140</sup> As had been the case with her husband, this referred to her failure to teach Hans Adam to be a good Lutheran. Anna Maria seems to have tried her best; she had taught him to bless himself in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost (*ibid.*, fo. 655<sup>r</sup>), and demonstrated a good level of Lutheran piety herself (for example, by consistently stating that suffering was a test from God, *ibid.*, fo. 656<sup>v</sup>).

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 771<sup>r</sup>. Niederstetten (her birthplace) and Windelsbach (where her husband resettled) were probably too close to Rothenburg for comfort for Anna Maria; as had been the case with the Wirths in 1663, the trial ended the Knöspels' marriage.

influenced, actual trials and demonological concepts. We need also to be aware of the dynamism underlying this idea, asking how families first gained and ultimately lost witchcraft reputation, why such reputation ‘stuck’ more to some family members than others, and how it was transmitted inter-generationally and spatially. This way of imagining the witch-family was demonised in the early modern period by men who feared that adult witches offered children to the devil, an anxiety first expressed in print in the *Malleus Maleficarum* in 1486, when Heinrich Kramer wrote of witch-midwives and witch-mothers who allegedly dedicated new-born babies to the devil.<sup>142</sup> This idea underwent significant development in demonological writing, trial-episodes and the interplay between them in parts of Catholic Europe between 1580 and 1630; as a result, a demonological stereotype of a witch-family emerged in which parents were imagined as inducting their offspring into the devil’s service. Detailed discussion of this development is beyond the scope of this article, but key milestones in France were the demonologies of Jean Bodin (1580) and Nicolas Remy (1595), in which the possibilities of parental (rather than solely maternal) seduction of children into witchcraft, and of whole families being infected with witchcraft, were discussed, in Remy’s case with examples from his knowledge of witch-persecution in the Duchy of Lorraine.<sup>143</sup> For Germany, the key demonology was that written by Peter Binsfeld about the large-scale witch-hunts ongoing in Electoral Trier between 1587 and 1596. The 1591 edition of Binsfeld’s text contained trial material relating to the Meisenbein family, five members of which (two female, three male) were executed between 1590 and 1592, which was recycled in the even more influential demonology published in 1599 and 1600 by Martin

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<sup>142</sup> Heinrich Kramer (Institoris), *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486; 1588 edn), trans./ed. P. G. Maxwell Stuart (Manchester, 2007), 166-9.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Paulette Choné, ‘Strafe und Erbarmen. Hexenprozesse gegen Kinder in Lothringen (1600-1630)’, in Hartmut Lehmann and Anne-Charlott Trepp (eds.), *Im Zeichen der Krise. Religiosität im Europa des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen, 1999), 378-9 (on Bodin); Nicolas Remy, *Demonolatry*, trans. E. A. Ashwin, ed. Montague Summers (London, 1930), esp. 92-9.

Del Rio.<sup>144</sup> The terrifying idea of the witch-family gained even greater publicity in Germany in 1600 in the illustrated broadsheet recounting the heinous crimes and executions for witchcraft of four members (father, mother, two adult sons) of the Pappenheimer family in what amounted to a show-trial in Munich.<sup>145</sup> This broadsheet had immense, long-lasting impact in Europe,<sup>146</sup> in part because of the horrific modes of judicial punishment it portrayed (the father was impaled, the mother had her breasts cut off), but probably also because it was the first printed image of a witch-family, and one that was dominated by men and headed by a father. The idea that children could be seduced into witchcraft by their fathers as well as by their mothers was also expressed by Catholic cleric Wolfgang Schilling in his 1629 tract about child-witches, in which he likened godless seventeenth-century German parents who seduced their children into witchcraft to New World cannibals who ate their offspring, and to parents in China and Japan who strangled their children to avoid poverty, as well as to the heathens of Biblical times who sacrificed their children to devils.<sup>147</sup>

The greater emphasis on the witch-family in English pamphlets between 1593 and 1620 was thus not, as Deborah Willis suggests, something new or original,<sup>148</sup> but almost certainly a regional reworking of developing continental ideas which found their way to England via demonologies and pamphlets<sup>149</sup>, and interpersonal contacts (and particularly the arrival of Jesuits from 1580 onwards<sup>150</sup>), and which was primarily driven by concerns about

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<sup>144</sup> See Rita Voltmer, 'Jesuiten und Kinderhexen. Thesen zur Entstehung, Rezeption und Verbreitung eines Verfolgungsmusters', in Wolfgang Behringer and Claudia Opitz-Belakhal (eds.), *Kinderhexen – Kinderbanden – Hexenkinder* (Bielefeld, forthcoming 2015), esp. 220-2, for a ground-breaking account of the importance of Binsfeld's use of the Meisenbein material for the dissemination of a new child-witch stereotype, and of the role of the Jesuits in helping create and spread it.

<sup>145</sup> *Kurze Erzählung vnd Fürbildung der vbelthatten welche von Sechs personen, als einem Mann, seinem Eheweib, zweyen irer beiden Söhnen, vnd zweyen anderen Ihren Gesellen, begangen....* (Augsburg, 1600), reproduced in Behringer, *Hexenverfolgung in Bayern*, p. 243.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 242-5.

<sup>147</sup> Wolfgang Schilling, *Newer Tractat Von der Verführten Kinder Zauberey* (Aschaffenburg, 1629); I am grateful to Rita Voltmer for her insights into the authorship of this tract.

<sup>148</sup> Willis, 'Witch-Family', 12.

<sup>149</sup> Although Willis makes only very brief reference to continental demonology in footnote 23, and to the English translation of the Pappenheimer pamphlet in footnote 30, *ibid.*, 24-5.

<sup>150</sup> Voltmer, 'Jesuiten und Kinderhexen', 226-9.

witchcraft, not the reprobate poor. Moreover, the more gender-neutral continental witch-family stereotype seems to have been only partially received in Protestant England; despite the presence of the occasional son or father in late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth-century pamphlet accounts of witch-trials, adult women still dominated. This was also the case in Lutheran Rothenburg, even by the late-seventeenth century. Reference was made during the Knöspel case to Hans Adam's godless parents, but the theological and judicial thinking behind the case was driven by a still strongly gendered way of imagining the archetypal witch as a godless mother, or adult woman occupying a quasi-maternal role. Superintendent Kirchmeier expressed this view most powerfully, referring to Anna Maria as Hans Adam's accursed mother, who was overwhelmingly to blame for the boy's seduction into witchcraft and re-baptism in the devil's name. After her banishment Kirchmeier described Anna Maria as 'fireworthy', and expressed the wish that she could be brought back to Rothenburg (with her daughters) for further interrogation; no such reference was made to Georg Adam and his other sons.<sup>151</sup> That the councillors and jurists shared this view was evident in their differing treatment of Anna Maria and Georg Adam Knöspel in the judicial phase of the case. As can be seen from the centrality of the adult woman to seduction narratives in witchcraft cases from Rothenburg more generally, the idea of the witch as a bad mother, who offered children to the devil instead of God, remained a constant stereotype throughout the early modern period.<sup>152</sup> This stereotype drew on a wider Lutheran emphasis on the importance of godly motherhood as the highest expression of female piety,<sup>153</sup> but was also linked to an older, confessionally-unspecific tradition of misogyny that had been articulated in the pre-Reformation *Malleus*.<sup>154</sup> It was so powerful in Rothenburg that, even when an attenuated

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<sup>151</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 783<sup>r</sup>-786<sup>r</sup>, esp. 783<sup>v</sup>, 784<sup>v</sup> (Sept./Oct. 1690); fos. 787<sup>r</sup>-792<sup>r</sup>, esp. 788<sup>r-v</sup> (26 July 1691); Anna Maria is called Hans Adam's 'foul fireworthy mother' ('verruchte feuerwürdige Mutter') on fo. 788<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>152</sup> See n. 9 above.

<sup>153</sup> Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, 94-6.

<sup>154</sup> See n. 142 above.



version of the witch-family concept developed, as happened in 1689, it did so around the imagined witch-mother.

Given the circulation of new and sensational accounts of witch-families and witch-parents in the print culture of late-sixteenth and seventeenth-century Germany, it seems likely that the Rothenburg councillors and their advisors rejected the dual-gendered witch-family stereotype deliberately, a stance which was particularly important in the late-seventeenth-century regional context as witch-family trials ending in multiple executions of adults and children emerged as a distinctive strand of persecution in parts of the nearby Catholic Duchy of Bavaria.<sup>155</sup> The Rothenburg councillors adopted this stance for the same reason that they and their predecessors rejected belief in the reality of the witches' sabbath and the treatment of witchcraft as an exceptional crime; because they did not want to execute people for a crime which was so difficult to prove at law.<sup>156</sup> This pragmatic approach gained increasingly confessional overtones from the 1620s, however, as large-scale witch-hunts in the Catholic ecclesiastical territories of Franconia encouraged the men of Rothenburg to regard such persecution as evidence of Catholic novelty, cruelty, and excess.<sup>157</sup> Their rejection of the witch-family stereotype was also an example of patriarchal self-interest, as it minimised the more general risk of men being dragged into witch-trials. Their treatment of Georg Adam Knöspel was a telling example of how far they were prepared to go in this direction. Although he was the son of a convicted witch-mother and stepfather, the husband of a reputed witch-wife, and the father of a self-confessed witch-son, the councillors had no interest in making Georg Adam Knöspel admit to being a witch himself, nor in pursuing Hans

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<sup>155</sup> See for example the trials in Haidau in 1689-94 and 1700-02 in which four families (including the parents and four boys and four girls aged between twelve and nineteen) were virtually annihilated, Behringer, *Hexenverfolgung in Bayern*, 351-2.

<sup>156</sup> Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, 22-43, 55-60.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-33, 55-67, 105-30, 206-11.

Adam Knöspel's assertion that 'his people were witches, one and all' to its logical judicial conclusion.

## VI

Perhaps foreseeing the problems that Hans Adam would continue to cause the authorities, Jurist Krauss advised the Rothenburg councillors to banish the whole Knöspel family, including Hans Adam, whom Krauss described as a dissolute boy, who could first be flogged for his malice and the many lies he had told in custody.<sup>158</sup> The councillors decided instead to follow the precedent that had been established in cases involving child-witches from 1627, 1639, and 1652<sup>159</sup> by placing the boy in the hospital under the care of the urban pastors.<sup>160</sup> This precedent was based on the idea, first articulated in 1627 by Church Superintendent Georg Zyrlein, that such children were the unwilling victims of seduction into witchcraft whose souls could be won back for God.<sup>161</sup> This idea underpinned the treatment of child-witches in other Lutheran parts of Europe, including the German city of Lemgo between 1654 and 1673,<sup>162</sup> and Sweden, which experienced mass witch-trials dominated by self-incriminating child-witches between 1668 and 1675.<sup>163</sup> The Rothenburg councillors would have heard of these events in Lemgo and Sweden (the pamphlet about the Swedish witch-trials was translated into German in 1670<sup>164</sup>) and may have been more anxious about the vulnerability of children to seduction into witchcraft by the 1680s as a result. Given that they regarded Hans Adam Knöspel's epileptic fits as demonic assaults,<sup>165</sup> the Rothenburg clerics would also have been influenced in their treatment of the boy by high-profile cases involving

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<sup>158</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fo. 714<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>159</sup> Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, 54-5, 106-24, 150-60.

<sup>160</sup> Hans Adam was in the hospital by 29 August 1689, StAN Ro. Rep. 2094 fo. 132.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-15. On the 'pastoralization' of child-witch trials, cf. Johannes Dillinger, *Kinder im Hexenprozess. Magie und Kindheit in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 2013), esp. 206-11.

<sup>162</sup> Rainer Walz, 'Kinder in Hexenprozessen. Die Grafschaft Lippe 1654-1663', in Wilbertz, Schwerhoff and Scheffler (eds.), *Hexenverfolgung und Regionalgeschichte*.

<sup>163</sup> Bengt Ankarloo, 'Sweden: The Mass Burnings (1668-76)', in Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen (eds.), *Early Modern European Witchcraft. Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford, 1993).

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>165</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2094 fo. 168; StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 783<sup>r</sup>-786<sup>r</sup>, esp. 784<sup>r</sup>.

supposedly demonically-afflicted individuals from other parts of late-seventeenth-century Lutheran Germany. The case of the former mercenary Peter Otte in Magdeburg was particularly significant in this regard; an influential account of his suffering under the assaults of the devil, and his deliverance from them, was published in 1672 by Christian Scriver, the minister who oversaw Otte's successful 'cure'.<sup>166</sup> Miriam Rieger has shown that such cases of apparent demonic possession were often used by Lutheran clerics as a means of scoring points about right religion against Catholics, and also in order to assert Lutheran orthodoxy against the late-seventeenth-century threats of atheism and Pietism.<sup>167</sup> The Rothenburg clerics may thus have seen their struggle for Hans Adam's soul in this specific confessional context, as well as in the context of a cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil.<sup>168</sup>

Superintendent Kirchmeier spearheaded the clerical mission to redeem Hans Adam with a zeal rooted in his doubtlessly genuine belief in the existence of witches who dedicated their children to the devil.<sup>169</sup> However, Kirchmeier also saw the case as an opportunity to win acclaim in the eyes of his clerical and secular colleagues, and to extend his own influence, and that of the clerics generally, over cases of witchcraft, which sat on the blurred boundary between secular/judicial and clerical/pastoral authority. This opportunity was of particular importance to Kirchmeier by the late 1680s as he had suffered humiliating defeats in disputes with the councillors over reform of the *Consistorium* (amongst other matters) since his appointment as Superintendent in 1681.<sup>170</sup> Unfortunately for Kirchmeier, Hans Adam's redemption was particularly challenging, as the boy vacillated between the roles of child-

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<sup>166</sup> Miriam Rieger, *Der Teufel im Pfarrhaus. Gespenster, Geisterglaube und Besessenheit im Luthertum der Frühen Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 2011), esp. 162-202.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-3, 203-78.

<sup>168</sup> They cited Christoph Ehinger's *Daemonologia* (Augsburg, 1681) during the Knöspel case, which recounted the demonic afflictions suffered by a shoemaker in Augsburg as evidence of the devil's activity in the world. They also referred to Luther's *Table Talk* in the same opinion written for the councillors on 29 October 1690, StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 793<sup>r</sup>-796<sup>r</sup>, esp. 795<sup>r-v</sup>.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 788<sup>v</sup>. Kirchmeier said he drew this belief from writings about witchcraft but made no reference to specific demonologies. He did, however, use the feminine plural German word for witches who sacrificed their children to the devil (*Hexen*), underlining his gender-specific view of witches as women.

<sup>170</sup> Rowlands, 'Father Confessors'.

witch and penitent Christian, unsure in his terror, illness, and confusion about which he should stick to. On the one hand, he continued to claim that he was in thrall to the devil and his witch-parents and sister, who visited him magically at night.<sup>171</sup> He also began to accuse other, unrelated adults of witchcraft<sup>172</sup> and developed a reputation as a harming witch in his own right, after barber-surgeon Georg Spriegel blamed Hans Adam for causing his facial skin disease. The disease had erupted on 19 June 1690, the day after Spriegel and the other municipal barber-surgeons and physicians had examined the boy, and Spriegel had commented that ‘one should drive the rogue [Hans Adam] out of town’.<sup>173</sup> By September 1690 Hans Adam had forced the closure of the hospital school (which serviced city families as well as hospital inmates) by claiming he could work harmful magic against other children,<sup>174</sup> and disrupted hospital life further by encouraging another inmate, fifteen-year-old Hans Georg Nunn, to claim that he too had attended witches’ gatherings in the hospital complex itself.<sup>175</sup> At the same time as these unsettling events were occurring, however, Hans Adam was subjected to an intensive programme of spiritual instruction by the clerics, and lessons in reading and the Catechism by the master of the hospital school (interspersed with beatings if he proved recalcitrant), to prepare him for a church service at which he would renounce the devil and take his first communion.<sup>176</sup> It took over a year to equip the boy with what the clerics regarded as the requisite amount of religious knowledge; he successfully passed an exhaustive verbal examination of his understanding of the Catechism by

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<sup>171</sup> See n. 100 and n. 101 above.

<sup>172</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 744<sup>r</sup>-745<sup>r</sup>; 746<sup>r</sup>-751<sup>r</sup>; 754<sup>r</sup>-756<sup>r</sup>; 757<sup>r</sup>-760<sup>r</sup>; 761<sup>r</sup>-764<sup>r</sup>. They were Appolonia Schwarz, a poor widow, and Hans Böhm, a hospital inmate and former blacksmith; both were questioned by the council and denied the charges.

<sup>173</sup> ‘Man solte den Schelmen hinaus schaffen’, StAN Ro. Rep. 2087 fos. 776<sup>r</sup>-777<sup>v</sup>, see fo. 776<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 752<sup>r</sup>-753<sup>r</sup>; StAR *Ratsprotokoll* B48 fo. 84<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, and StAN Ro. Rep. 2094 fos. 253-254.

<sup>176</sup> StAN Ro. Rep. 2094 fo. 168, *Consistorium* meeting minute dated 27 February 1690 noting that Hans Adam should be visited weekly in the hospital by one of the deacons from the church of St James. This replaced an earlier arrangement in which the boy went from the hospital to the clerics’ houses, a change made to minimise his disturbing influence on the wider community.

Kirchmeier and the eight other urban clerics on 24 September 1690,<sup>177</sup> and publicly renounced the devil, apparently without any untoward incident, at a special service held in the church of St James on 6 November 1690.<sup>178</sup>

Hans Adam's treatment appears cruel to modern eyes but needs to be understood in the context of post-Reformation thinking about childhood which held that the most important thing for any child to learn (for its own and society's sake) was how to be a good Christian. It was, moreover, based on the essentially positive idea that a child-witch was not irredeemably corrupt and worthy of execution, as some demonologists (such as Nicolas Remy) argued.<sup>179</sup> This idea is noteworthy for two reasons. First, the fact that the Rothenburg authorities regarded child-witches as redeemable suggests that they had a less pessimistic view of the effects of original sin than Luther had espoused in the sixteenth century; the emergence of pastoral solutions to the problem of child-witches thus lends weight to the work of scholars such as Michael Heyd and Alexandra Walsham, who argue that 'attitudes towards man's intrinsic depravity were significantly modified and mitigated' in later-seventeenth-century Protestantism.<sup>180</sup> Second, belief in the redeemable child-witch shows that the Rothenburg authorities shared with their subjects the idea that witchcraft, understood as both maleficium and heresy, was a learned art - the product of bad nurture rather than inherently evil nature - which could be 'unlearned' before the young reached adulthood themselves. In their eyes, Hans Adam's allegiance to the devil was the result of his father's neglect of his godly upbringing and his mother's active induction of the boy into the witches' dance; it could be

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 239-249.

<sup>178</sup> There is no detailed record of what happened at the service, but the *Consistorium* meeting minutes note the planning for it (*ibid.* fos. 251-255), and that it took place before a large audience with a special sermon (*ibid.*, fo. 261). Some version of the verbal examination Hans Adam had undergone before the *Consistorium* on 24 September would have formed part of the service.

<sup>179</sup> See above, note 143.

<sup>180</sup> Michael Heyd, 'Original sin, the struggle for stability, and the rise of moral individualism in late seventeenth-century England', in Philip Benedict and Myron P. Gutmann (eds), *Early Modern Europe. From Crisis to Stability* (Newark, NJ, 2005); Alexandra Walsham, 'Moral biology: Hereditary sin in early modern England' (unpublished paper given at the *Sin and Salvation in Early Modern England* conference, University of Birmingham, June 2014), 19.

broken, but only by godly instruction given to the boy by clerics and schoolmasters outside the family context.

Hans Adam's redemption thus came to have immense symbolic value for the council and clerics, representing as it did the rescue of the boy's soul by public/godly education (connoted positively as male-dominated) from household/ungodly education (connoted negatively as female-dominated). Lutheran pedagogy had of course long been shaped by the depressing realisation that most parents were neither able nor willing to give their offspring what the reformers regarded as an adequately godly education within the household. However, anxieties about the godly education of the young became particularly intense in Rothenburg in the later-seventeenth century, as the councillors and clerics sought to make good the deprivations of the Thirty Years War. This period saw a flurry of ordinances dealing with the disorderly behaviour of the young, the reform of the city's grammar school, and the importance of school attendance;<sup>181</sup> it was surely no coincidence that the Knöspel case was bookended by ordinances promulgated in 1683 and 1695 which, for the first time, formally imposed on all households in the city and its rural hinterland the parental obligation to send children to school.<sup>182</sup> Here perhaps the Rothenburg authorities shared the concerns felt in Lutheran Sweden in the wake of the mass witch-hunts involving self-incriminating child-witches in the 1660s, when a public school system was suggested as a means of counteracting the pernicious influence of women on children within the family.<sup>183</sup>

Hans Adam was not just re-educated, however; he was also forced to renounce formally those who had nurtured him into witchcraft, and this meant his 'evil witch-parents'

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<sup>181</sup> See for example StAR *Ratsordnungen* A366a fols. 93-5, 129, 175, 185-98, 200, 206, 308-9, A366d fol 21; AA118 fol. 42; AA119 fols. 70, 72, 77; Walter Bauer, *Die Reichsstadt Rothenburg und ihre Lateinschule* (Rothenburg, 1979), 90-103.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-2; StAR A366a fols. 160 (1683), 417 (1695).

<sup>183</sup> Henningsen, 'Sweden', 316.

as well as the devil.<sup>184</sup> This was of course at odds with the Fourth Commandment's requirement that the boy honour his father and mother, although Kirchmeier and his colleagues solved this problem by teaching the boy to regard the city council (*Obrigkeit*) as his parents instead, as they showed a 'fatherly goodness and kindness' towards him,<sup>185</sup> and by emphasizing that Hans Adam (like all Lutherans) had other fathers to whom he could turn in 'childish' (*kindlich*) love and trust – most notably God as his 'heavenly father',<sup>186</sup> but also his *Beichtvater*, or 'father confessor',<sup>187</sup> as the Lutheran parish pastor was known. This rhetorical replacement of Hans Adam's parents by a hierarchy of godly fathers (including the father confessor) in his catechistical examination in 1690 was probably an attempt by Kirchmeier to assert clerical claims to political authority, by alerting the councillors to the indispensable power of pastors to rescue lost souls from the 'empire' of the devil.<sup>188</sup> However, it also mirrored the actual events of 1689, when the boy had been separated permanently from his parents and placed in the hospital. In 1530 Luther had argued that, if fathers and mothers neglected the godly education of their offspring, then 'children cease to belong to their parents and fall to the care of God and community'.<sup>189</sup> Luther had made this point to underline the importance of schools over parents in the godly education of the young, however, rather than as a blueprint for actual policy; early modern rulers had neither the logistical capacity nor desire to intervene so radically in too many of their subjects' households. The fact that the Rothenburg authorities took Hans Adam permanently from his parents in a process involving a dramatic, public ceremony of renunciation was thus highly

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<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 242 (reference to his 'verfluchte Eltern'), 243 (reference to the Fourth Commandment), 245 (reference to his 'böse zauberische Eltern').

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, fo. 243, 'väterliche gut vnd Wohlthat'.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 242-245.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, fos. 247-248.

<sup>188</sup> Hans Adam was questioned on the idea of the godless as subjects of the devil's empire during his examination on 24 September 1690, StAN Ro. Rep. 2094 fos. 244-245.

<sup>189</sup> Quoted in Harrington, *Unwanted Child*, 143.

unusual;<sup>190</sup> in earlier cases involving self-incriminating child-witches, the youngsters had been sent back to their families after a period of forced re-education in the city hospital.<sup>191</sup> This suggests that the phenomenon of the self-incriminating child-witch not only spoke to, and helped intensify, wider anxieties about the godly upbringing of the young in early modern Rothenburg, but also helped persuade the judges and clerics who encountered them that they needed rescuing from their own parents, as well as the devil.

## VII

Unfortunately for all concerned, the Knöspel case was not resolved with Hans Adam's renunciation ceremony on 6 November 1690. Thereafter the boy relapsed into his previous role of the demonically afflicted child-witch (perhaps unsurprisingly, given that his fits continued); he became embroiled in another witch-trial in 1692<sup>192</sup>, and was unable to establish plausible narrative consistency as a redeemed sinner until 1694.<sup>193</sup> His death in 1698 was probably viewed with relief by clerics and councillors alike, as it finally ended the difficult situation his witchcraft stories had engendered in the Rothenburg hospital and wider urban community. His death also ended the short-lived presence of the Knöspel family in Rothenburg; apart from a certificate of honourable birth provided in 1714 by the council to his older brother Michael, by that point a master of imperial ordnance in Hungary,<sup>194</sup> the family name disappears from the municipal records. Given the difficulty of tracing the life-histories of Hans Adam's siblings (or his father's step-siblings) it is hard to say whether, and via whom, the family's witchcraft reputation continued, although the fact that we can identify three generations of Wirth/Knöspel 'witches' in seventeenth-century Rothenburg lends some

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<sup>190</sup> On the idea of the deliverance of the demonically-afflicted as a theatrical spectacle in late-seventeenth-century Lutheranism, see Rieger, *Teufel im Pfarrhaus*, 162-200.

<sup>191</sup> See above, note 159.

<sup>192</sup> See n. 119 above.

<sup>193</sup> Other child-witches learned what was expected of them more quickly and played the part of the redeemed sinner more convincingly, see Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, 105-24.

<sup>194</sup> StAR B523 *Geburts- und Lehrbriefe* fos. 183<sup>v</sup>-184<sup>r</sup>.



support to de Blécourt's similar findings about the longevity of reputation in Drenthe. The gendering of the family's reputation was more complex than suggested by de Blécourt, however.<sup>195</sup> Michael Wirth was believed to use magic to cause harm and gain material advantage; his son Hans Wirth and step-son Georg Adam seem to have inherited reputations for white or profit-making magic,<sup>196</sup> while Wirth's harming power was thought to have been passed down to his daughter-in-law, Anna Maria Knöspel, and from her to Hans Adam. The trials within which the family became embroiled also helped make some of its members into witches; Barbara Wirth essentially stood proxy for her husband Michael in 1663, while Hans Adam Knöspel was forced through judicial and then intensive pastoral pressure to turn his childish fantasies of night-flying into detailed confessions of demonic seduction. Closer examination of the witch-family and issues of inter-generational transmission of reputation, then, needs to go hand-in-hand with attention to the experiences and fates of individual family members, and the ways in which these were shaped by gender, age, context and legal processes.

Witch-family trials must also be examined against the backdrop of new elite anxieties about ungodly parents who sacrificed their children to the devil. That this idea surfaced in Catholic and Protestant parts of Europe is unsurprising, given the concerns shared by the men of both confessions with witchcraft and the perplexing phenomenon of self-incriminating child-witches on the one hand, and the upholding of godly household order on the other. However, the extent to which the full-blown, dual-gendered witch-family stereotype was taken seriously, and applied in the context of the judicial persecution of alleged witches, varied. This was more likely to happen in those (predominantly Catholic) areas where the reality of a dual-gendered witches' sabbath was also accepted, and where the idea of the witch-family was terrifyingly confirmed and publicised by forced confessions and

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<sup>195</sup> See n. 3 above.

<sup>196</sup> On Hans, see n. 69 above.

executions. The stereotype was adopted in more attenuated form in Protestant areas like Rothenburg, where anxieties about the seduction of children into witchcraft continued to coalesce around adult women with maternal or quasi-maternal roles, while godless fathers (like Georg Adam Knöspel) were imagined as the neglectful, yet less culpable, patriarchs who allowed this to happen. This differentiated reception of the witch-family stereotype may help explain why fewer men were prosecuted as witches in Protestant than Catholic parts of Germany,<sup>197</sup> and may suggest a model that is applicable to other Protestant parts of Europe. Finally, the manner of Hans Adam's redemption suggests that the ways in which early modern authorities thought about and treated a child-witch can tell us much about their anxieties about 'bad' parenting; more research is needed to explore how these anxieties helped drive longer-term developments in the state provision of education, and state intervention in apparently failing families in a wider European context.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Cf. Rolf Schulte, *Man as Witch. Male Witches in Central Europe* (Basingstoke, 2009), 67-8.

<sup>198</sup> Willis, for example, notes that similar trends were apparent in English rhetoric about vagrant families ('Witch-Family', 27, note 40).