

Article

Angels or Demons? Interactions and Borrowings between Folk Traditions, Religion and Demonology in Early Modern Italian Witchcraft Trials

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Abstract: In 1638 Caterina di Francesco, from the town of Siena (Tuscany), was accused by the Roman Inquisition of invoking the devil through a spell called “the white angel spell” or “the spell of the carafe” (*incantesimo della caraffa*). She was interrogated, tortured and kept in and out of prison for nine years. Despite the accusations of the witnesses being focused on her practice of love magic, specifically her ability to bind men to “other” women rather than their wives and to help the disgruntled wives to have their husbands back with the use of a baptised magnet, the Inquisition focused its attention on her practice of the white angel spell, a divination spell to find lost or stolen objects with the help of shadows seen inside the carafe. This was a well-known spell not only among all levels of Italian lay society but also well known to the Inquisition, so much so that the 17th-century Inquisition manual *Prattica per Procedere nelle Cause del Sant’Officio* lists this spell among the *sortilegij qualificati*: Those spells presenting serious heretical elements. Using archival sources, this article will examine the effects of borrowed concepts between the theological/elite and folk witchcraft traditions within a specific case-study.

Keywords: Witchcraft; inquisition; spells; love magic; divination; sorcery

1. Introduction

The surge of European witchcraft studies characterizing the last two decades of historical research has created a new, reinvigorated interest in the topic among Italian scholars. This, substantiated by the opening of the Roman Inquisition archives in the 1990s, has contributed to a fresh approach to Italian witchcraft studies.

Before this period the status of the existing Italian literature regarding witchcraft studies reflected a sort of geographical fragmentation (Moretti 2018, p. 2). The north of the country, especially the Alpine area, being closer to the epicenter of the origins of the mythology of the sabbat and the witch-hunt phenomenon, has been covered abundantly by secondary sources (Olgiati 1955; Monter 1972; De Biasio and Facile 1976; Kieckhefer 1976; Monter 1976; Muraro 1976; Cardini 1979; Mazzali 1988; Martin 1989; Ginzburg 1990, 1991; Portone 1986; Marcaccioli Castiglioni 1999; Nardon 1999; Ostero et al. 1999; Kieckhefer 2000; Ankarloo and Clark 2002a, 2002b; Behringer 2004, pp. 57–63; Duni 2007; Kieckhefer 2006; Levack 2006, p. 4761; Panizza 1997, pp. 95–126; Lavenia 2015).

The rest of the country less so and more randomly (Tedeschi 1986; Moretti 2018, pp. 2–7).

All in all, the existing research has covered witchcraft in connection to other more orthodox and broader topics such as the interaction between witchcraft and medicine in early modern Italy and the importance of so-called witches in providing medical care and sometimes psychological support to those people who could not afford official medical care (Coltro 1983; Cardini 1989; Parinetto 1991; Gentilcore 1992; Gentilcore 1998; Cardini 2000; Pazzini 2001; Gentilcore 2004; Zucca 2004; Gentilcore 2008; Weber 2011; Corsi 2013; Lavenia 2014); the relationship between inquisitorial, episcopal and

secular tribunals possessing jurisdiction over witchcraft and operating in the same geographical and political areas (Deutscher 1991; Del Col 1998; Black 2009; Deutscher 2013; Lavenia 2001; Trenti 2003; Lavenia 2015; Lavenia 2012; Caffiero 2015, pp. 33–66) and the role of the Roman Inquisition in maintaining this relationship with other tribunals (Romeo 1990; Prosperi 1996; Tavuzzi 2007; D'Errico 2012). Perhaps the most popular field among Italian historians—touching witchcraft obliquely—is the study of the Inquisition as an institution and its *modus operandi* in the handling of witchcraft cases among all other cases (Seitz 2001; Messana 2007). The most extensive and up to date scholarly publication on the history of the Roman Inquisition in the Italian peninsula, from its origin to its contemporary version, was carried out by Del Col (2006). Last but not least and worth mentioning, is the extensive corpus of scholarly publications regarding Italian witchcraft in the context of Renaissance natural and high magic (Walker 1958; Lavenia 2012; Montesano 2018).

Despite the large number of publications of which but a short list was given above, an opus magnum listing all the known witchcraft archives and relative trials region by region remains to be done. A survey of all the primary sources and their status—catalogued, published or neither—their location and accessibility with maps indicating the density of witchcraft trials similar to what Larner (1981) did for the Scottish witchcraft trials, would be a powerful tool for the understanding of witchcraft in Italy. Comparative analyses of the different typologies of Italian witchcraft would also be welcome. In this respect, the author's doctoral thesis wants to be one of the first steps in filling this gap (Kieckhefer 2006; Moretti 2018).

One of the most debated witchcraft-topics in the extant Italian literature is the historic argument regarding the trustworthiness of the trial documents as primary sources for the understanding of witchcraft in popular beliefs. Following the publication of his seminal work *I Benandanti* (The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries) (Ginzburg 1966), where in his research on the *benandanti* he applied the microhistorical approach which he would develop a few years later in his other historical best seller *Il Formaggio e i vermi* (The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-century Mille) (Ginzburg 1976), historian Carlo Ginzburg affirmed that the trial records produced by ecclesiastic and secular tribunals could be compared to anthropologists' work-notes recording fieldwork performed a century ago (Ginzburg 1989, p. 156). He believed that the trials from Friuli have an extraordinary ethnographical importance. The inquisitors, to get to the "truth", recorded not only the words of their prisoners, but also gestures, silences and reactions almost as imperceptible as sudden blushing, and in reading them Ginzburg felt almost to be there, standing behind the shoulders of these inquisitors, spying on them and, as them, hoping to hear the accused talking of their secret beliefs. Ginzburg's theory was criticised by many, mostly by Italian historian Andrea Del Col.

Del Col forcefully cautioned historians dealing with the inquisitorial documents to keep a critical and cautious attitude. He explained that to be able to use these documents correctly it is essential to know the organisation, competence and the procedure of the organisation producing them. He rightly pointed out that the questions to be asked are how much these inquisitorial trials truly reflect how the interrogations happened in reality and how much they truly reflect the ideas of the inquisitors and the defendants. To be able to answer these questions, the documents need to be studied within their social and cultural contexts but also within the political and religious agenda of the organisation creating them. These trial documents cannot be seen as a verbatim report of the interrogation or as a recording made by a tape recorder. They were written down by notaries who had to understand the local dialect spoken by the defendants and sometimes interpret concepts not familiar to them or to the judges. Most importantly the judges, differently from anthropologists were not truly interested in the defendants' cultural background or beliefs (Del Col 1984, pp. 32–44; Nardon 1999, pp. 8–11).

Of course, these documents were heavily biased by the education, culture and personal agenda of the judges and inquisitors. Although very little analysed, the personality and culture of the individual inquisitor ended up having a fundamental importance in the trial proceedings. During the trials the defendants would get familiar with and influenced by the theological and personal interpretations

given to magic and witchcraft by the judges (Keenan 1940; Bailey 2001) and they would include and absorb the judges' narrative into their own narratives which presents also some elements of their own folklore, beliefs and myths. On their part the judges would use their own experiences and what they have learnt of popular magic and witchcraft during the trials to write new manuals which will form the judicial educations of new judges and inquisitors creating "a circle of borrowed concepts" (Moretti 2018, p. 36).

The author believes that the confrontation of Del Col/Nardon's approach and Ginzburg's approach shows that their academic argument has a very important common element that cannot be ignored: as biased as the trial records might be, they are—together with material culture—still the closest and most direct records we possess of popular culture and beliefs at a specific point in time. And, although they give us "hardly a direct look at the views of the people questioned [. . .] it is by far the closest access we have" (Lansing 2003, p. 90), and even if not strictly the truth, what was recorded in the trials had to be somewhat credible, and therefore acceptable, by the cultural parameters and understanding of the specific time in question (Moretti 2018, p. 38).

Following also the more recent focus on the inner lives and self-narratives of self-proclaimed witches/magic practitioners/cunning folks or those accused of magic/witchcraft practices connected to the history of emotions and selfhood currently characterising English speaking witchcraft studies and literature (Gaskill 2001; Gaskill 2008; Bever 2013; Kounine and Ostling 2017; Kounine 2018), the aim of this paper is to give a clear example on how, if read carefully and within the relevant context, some trials documents and inquisitorial documents can truly provide a glimpse—albeit minimalistic—on the perceptions and concepts of witchcraft beliefs from both the accused and the inquisitor and the more general cultural background within which these witchcraft beliefs and traditions were developed.

Many are the voices the historian hears and the recovery of the unbiased fragments of history from these voices can prove difficult. The essential job of the historian is to allocate those voices to the right cultural and social environment, and place them in their own context (Moretti 2018, p. 28). For this reason, the author of this paper will leave the accused, accusers and the authorities to unravel the story themselves.

2. The Siena Inquisition

The case study presented in this paper sits at the centre of the newly reinvigorating spur of studies caused by the opening of the Roman Inquisition archive in the 1990s (Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei 1998, 2000). Specifically, the witchcraft documents covered in this paper come from the Inquisition archive of Siena in Tuscany. The Roman Inquisition was established in Siena in 1570. The jurisdiction of the Siennese Inquisition included a geographical area bigger than the territories of the old republic of Siena (Di Simplicio 2000, pp. 17–24).

This archive was transferred to Rome in 1911 and it was re-discovered after the sensational opening of the archives of the Holy Office (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) held by the Vatican, between 1991 and 1998. The archive of the Inquisition of Siena is almost intact and covers approximately two hundred years, from 1580 to 1780. The entirety of this archive has allowed researchers to use its records to generate statistics of all sorts (shifting balances between types of prosecutions, gender of those prosecuted, urban versus rural offenders and so forth) from the mid-16th century to the late-18th century (Moretti 2018, p. 13). Examples of this approach are the outstanding works of the two leading experts on the archive of Siena: Di Simplicio (1999, 2000, 2005, 2009) and Nyholm Kallestrup (2015a, 2015b).

Witchcraft in Siena and its surroundings was a very simple concept. The *maleficium* was the main element. People were only concerned with the damage a witch could inflict on somebody rather than the demonic aspect of a witch. As result of this perception, the sabbat is extremely marginal in the Siennese archive. Of hundreds of people involved in the accusations and trials, nobody ever accused a witch of having a pact with the devil and of flying to the sabbat. Of eighty-one trials carried out between 1580 and 1666, only seven produced confessions of ten women who admitted participating

in the sabbat. Seven of them admitted going to the sabbat only after torture and one was delirious with fever when she confessed but changed her confession after recovering from her illness. Only two women confessed “spontaneously” without torture (Di Simplicio 2000, p. 305). The invocation of the devil is in many cases a personal, innocent act of desperation or rebellion which does not present malevolent intent or, to a certain extent, predetermination (Moretti 2018, p. 120). Generally speaking, the Siena confessions are quite far from the amazingly elaborated tales of the sabbat of other European countries, rich in adoration of the devil, copulation with demons and cannibalism (Hutton 2017). Somehow, everyday people in Siena and surroundings were not interested in the devil or his relation with the witch. They were only concerned with the damage a witch could cause to their children, family, animals and harvest (Moretti 2018, p. 23). From the archive of Siena it is possible to understand that fear of *maleficium* was endemic and mainly coming from the lower groups of society, and it appears that the crime of *maleficium* is a “neighbourhood” crime, a crime that will be attributed to those people who will not conform to the standardised archetypical village behaviour (Briggs 2002, pp. 12–19, 77–79).

The full spectrum of witchcraft cases present in this archive has allowed the identification of at least five typologies of magical practices: (1) Love magic; (2) therapeutic/healing magic; (3) divinatory magic; (4) malevolent magic; (5) invocation of the devil.¹

The case study analysed here falls in the typology of love magic and divinatory magic.

3. The Case

A very popular *sortilegium* in the New State of Siena was the spell of the carafe (*incantesimo/esperimento della caraffa*) which provided insight into stolen or lost objects and money. From the testimonies in other archival records, it seems in fact that this spell was also very popular in Venice and its domains, Bologna and very likely in the rest of Italy as well (Fioni 1992; Duni 2003).

On the 16th of October 1638, a disgruntled and rather upset wife presented a heart-felt accusation to the Inquisition tribunal of Siena. The accusation was carried out against “some loose/indecent women”. Her husband, by his own admission, misbehaved towards her—by cheating on her and ignoring her—because he was a victim of bewitchment. In her rage-filled accusation, the wife did not question her husband’s justification of his behaviour but instead she created a very convincing background, depicting him as the ultimate victim. She tells us:

Father, my husband, called [. . .] is not giving me peace: he cannot stay with me and he does not want to see me, nor does he want to engage in any conjugal relations. And all this is caused by a connection he has with a certain woman called [. . .], and this woman together with [. . .] and Caterina Caponero, all three of them living in Siena in different locations, and they are known to be witches (the exact words used are *maliarde* and *streghe*). They have put a spell on him (the exact words used are *ammaliato*, *affascinato*, *fatturato*) and I know this because my husband himself told me when I complained of his ill behaviours towards me: leaving me to go to dirty whores, making me suffer but treating them well. He told me he cannot help himself, every time he tries to cut this connection and leave them, he feels like dying, dying in his heart, he cannot live nor be at peace without them and he is forced to go to them and do everything they tell him to do and they make him run to them.

(Moretti 2018, pp. 132–33).²

¹ To see the differences between the author’s typologies and the typologies identified by Di Simplicio and Nyholm Kallestrup see (Moretti 2018, p. 120).

² Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (ACDF) *Archivium Inquisitionis Senensis*, (Cause 1638–1646) 1, fos. 1–68; transcribed and translated by DM. The document transcribed is a copy of the trial itself: This means that it was for Caterina and her defense and it presents some lacunae, especially the names of the witnesses intentionally left out by the notary.

The wife carried out a double accusation: One, of the women having an affair with her husband and the other one, of the woman who provided the “other women” with evil love spells to bind the adulterous man. What follows indicates an ambivalent and troubled relationship between the betrayed wife and the woman providing the evil, binding love spells:

This woman mentioned above [. . .] uses the help of Caterina called Caponero, mentioned above, she lives in Salicotto,³ she is more or less fifty years old and she is the one who does maleficia. (Moretti 2018, p. 133)

Almost in the same breath she affirms:

I can confirm this (that Caterina practices maleficia) as a while ago, lamenting to her that my husband [. . .] does not want to see me, he does not love me, he does not appreciate me, he beats me up and he never stays in the house with me, she (Caterina) said: “leave it to me. I will make sure that your husband will not be able to be with other woman but you”. After that, she told me that she has bound him. (Moretti 2018, p. 133)

What we can understand from this first accusation is that our Caterina di Francesco known as Caterina Caponero was a middle-aged woman who lived in the Salicotto district of the town of Siena—an infamous district because it was favoured by prostitutes as a working and living location. Caterina was well known in Salicotto and other parts of Siena for practicing sorcery, love spells and magic bindings, for keeping bad company, favouring prostitutes and ultimately for being a woman of dubious and evil character—a loose woman. This last point makes sense if placed within the broader narrative related to prostitution and magical practices. It was rather normal for a practitioner of magic and sorcery in Early Modern Italy—and Europe—to have favoured prostitutes: they were good customers and represented good financial revenues for the practitioner. It was also rather normal for prostitutes to be practitioners of magic themselves. Their livelihood depended on their capacity to retain clients at all costs.

Caterina’s situation appears frequently among the alleged witches ending up in front of the inquisitorial tribunals. Very often their status is that of “loose women” with no husbands, families or connections to support them in a society where female roles are extremely limited and censored (Ruggiero 1993, p. 25; Brown and Davis 1998; Bever 2002, pp. 955–88). In Siena, like Bologna, Venice and Modena for example, love magic was connected to prostitution (Zaffanella 2008, pp. 105–17). Love magic was not only an attempt to keep clients or attract more clients, it was also a way to supplement their income, and maybe, as stated by Scully (1995, p. 858) “witchcraft was a role available to women to manage their lives, operating as individual players on the social stage” although, on the basis of the testimonies above, it seems they choose this path only because they had no other choice (Moretti 2018, p. 138).

From the documents it seems that Caterina’s most profitable “work” was indeed love magic, specifically her ability to bind men to “other” women rather than their wives and to help the wives to have their husbands back with the use of a baptized magnet. Clearly, she had a brain for good business.

An example of her profitable love magic comes from the accusing wife:

To make sure that her work was a success and to make sure my husband would love me, she sold me a piece of white magnet. She told me to touch my husband with it, and that I would keep it in my mouth while kissing him. Although Caterina Caponero sold the magnet to me, I never used it. I have heard from many people whose names I cannot recall, that this woman Caterina Caponero keeps under the *capezzale*⁴ of the bed many strings to bind men with and other things to make maleficia. She has not only bound and put a spell on my

³ An area of Siena.

⁴ A thin, rectangular and narrow cushion to elevate the real pillow to a more comfortable position. Not much in use today.

husband, but also (on) a certain [...] who tried to stop this connection (to practice sexual intercourse) with her [...] but ultimately he cannot because he is saying he is spell-bound by her. (Moretti 2018, p. 133)

This is not the first time that Caterina is accused of love magic. The same disgruntled wife accusing her above, spontaneously appeared in front of the tribunal, at the suggestion of her confessor, to denounce some of her practices concerning the Holy Office—for which the confessor would not absolve her. The event took place eight years previously:

I came in front of the Holy Office because of the ill behaviour my husband had toward me, for the habit of drinking and getting involved with a certain prostitute called [...] and others [...] with whom he had connections and because of this he could not have marital relations, he could not stay at home and he told me he could not help it going there [...], (I) lamented this to [...] who lived [...] and is now dead, she suggested to me to do something about my husband and she mentioned Caterina Caponero, and she (Caterina) treated him. She brought to me a piece of stone as big as a *ceccherchia*,⁵ grey or white-ish in colour, which she told me to be a baptised magnet. She said that if I put it in water I would have seen the stars and I would have recognised the moon. She also told me that when in bed with my husband, I had to put the magnet in my mouth and kiss him. In this way he would love me again. We kept this affair quite between me and her and no other person heard of it and I think I gave her [...] as reward, because I did not have any money but I decided not to do anything with all this so I threw it in the [...] and I was almost dead and shaken with fear, this not being the right way to do proper things, and I was almost dead and this [...] told me that Caterina Caponero knew how to do those things and it is publically known that to her will go all those people that want to do maleficia or other things connected with binding and love. I presented myself in front of the Holy Inquisition also because before I [...] the above mentioned magnet [...] lamented to Caterina Caponero, above mentioned, and she said: “leave it with me, I will make it that your husband will not be able to have intercourses with women other than you” and she said afterwards that she bound him and (she) wanted him to love (me) and [...] sold me a piece of white magnet [...] baptised and with this I should touch [...] and I should keep it in my mouth when [...] kissed and [...] him, I don’t remember what I told him [...] in truth nothing because he seemed to understand [...], because she was also a healer [...] Caterina said she made herself the strings to bind these men and she would put them inside the cushions of these men when she could, and then she put ours (?) in the cushion, and if she could not go to those men’s houses she would put the strings inside her pillow. I have heard the same things said by many other people but I don’t remember exactly who but if necessary I could tell those things to Catherina’s face, but, when we did our business and when she gave me the magnet, nobody was present (Moretti 2018, p. 136)

The tradition of love magic is of course ancient and wide spread (Luck 1985; O’Neil 1987; Wilson 2000) among the earliest Italian trials for sorcery, love magic and potions were the most obvious (Montesano 2018, pp. 186–90). The traditional use of the magnet in love magic but also in spells to attract money, success and power, is well attested in Early Modern Italy as seen in Tedesco’s (2016) article on the use of baptized magnets in Italian Inquisition trials.

In this case study, both the accuser and the accused describe in detail how the spell of the magnet worked.

When the cheating husband was asked about Caterina he said:

⁵ Very likely to be *cicerchia*: *Lathyrus sativus*.

I have heard things of Caterina Caponero from the Nigra called corvuccia, they are neighbours in Salicotto, and it seems they heal people and this is said by everybody but I do not remember who told me precisely. Sometimes I have been in the house of Caterina Caponero and I have heard other people [. . .] saying that this Caterina could heal all illnesses, for this [. . .], but I have never observed or saw Caterina doing or saying incantations (Moretti 2018, p. 133)

So Caterina's fame seems to be well attested in the neighbourhood and the witness seems to be well acquainted with her. So much so that the cheating husband informs us:

I had experienced this (sexual) impediment not only with my wife, but with other women as well. I could not do it with anybody but the above mentioned women, with whom I would eat and drink together and with said [Caterina] of whom people said she was an enchantress. This was a while ago but I do not remember who I talked to about this. (Moretti 2018, p. 134)

In this passage it is possible to see the social role played by Caterina within her neighbourhood. It is publicly known that she is an enchantress, *maliarda*, practising love magic and healing and it is publicly known that she partakes of the company of loose women and her way of life is clearly upsetting some of her neighbours.

From Caterina's defence against the accusations of practicing love magic we can understand the deep social connection, interaction between the accusers and accused of witchcraft. The people in question knew each other and were involved socially with each other. If one was to interpret this connection in modern terms one would refer to a love-triangle badly managed. In Early Modern terms, the interpretation is more complexed and multi layered.

Caterina denied of course practicing love magic or magic in general. When asked directly she tells us:

No, I cannot do it (sorcery on men) nor do I know anybody able to do any sorcery to men or women so that they cannot have intercourse; these things against me are all lies of *birri*⁶ because this man *birro* and his wife Isabella (Isabetta) have ill feelings towards me as I have already said. And Busciati of [. . .] is gone looking for women to testify against me and friar Giuseppe of St Martin persuaded them to be interviewed against me. The inspector told me in my house in front of my old mother while I was burning up, almost 20 hours with fever, last month of June and July. He came to check on me as I was just out of prison [. . .] Busciati (spoke) with Caterina, wife of one from Fiorenzuola whose name I do not remember. She lives in the Chiasso of Anella in Salicotto and has a child called Matthia. Caterina herself was in my house soon after I was out of here (Holy Office prisons), only my old mother was present, she was coming here to help out. She told me that Busciati asked her if she knew if I did something dodgy and to tell him and he would refer it to the Holy Office without revealing her name. (Moretti 2018, p. 137)

She is clearly a person considered uncomfortable by some of her neighbours because of her practices which herself explains to the inquisitor when asked:

I healed many country folks, *sbirri* and whores of illnesses, in specific Monte Lupi and his wife who was mad and ran out once naked in the square and so did her sister. Just before I was due to re-enter the prison, I met with Monte Lupi's wife, near the door of Mr [. . .] Bandini. She told me she was afflicted by *solaggine* (maybe heat stroke) and she asked me if I could give her a remedy for it. While I was treating the wife of Monte Lupi, called Maria, she moaned about problems with her husband. I told her that for those problems I could give her a white magnet which was given to me by Livia, for which I paid nine lire. My confessor

⁶ *Sbirri/birri/birro*: ante litteram police force.

told me to get rid of it but I did not get rid of it so Maria could have it if she wanted it and she should keep it in a certain way as I was told by Livia. (*ibidem*)

As not constituting a heretic practice, her work as a local healer seems to be irrelevant in the accusations and the inquisitor does not pursue it and refocus Caterina's attention on the love magic. So Caterina carries on:

This accusation comes from Elisabetta, wife of Mercurio *sbirro*. She sent two friars to my place to search the house and they told me that I was making a woman suffer and for this I should show them a *capezzale* where I was sleeping. I told them to go ahead and if they wanted me to open the *capezzale*, I would do so. They accused me of performing a binding on a man, making his wife suffer and thinking they were referring to Mercurio and Isabella, I told them: don't you think that if I knew how to bind him I would have done it already so he would marry me instead than punishing me. (Moretti 2018, p. 138)

Her logic is rock-solid and explicit. It also implies bitterness for a better life she could not have despite trying everything to have it and for a man she would never have: a love triangle and a social situation surprisingly common in the Inquisition trials related to witchcraft.

Caterina's implied self-narrative is however not heard and it is dismissed because it is not the magic spell per se to be the problem. It is the heretical act of baptizing an object to be used in a magic spell that ultimately will cost her freedom.

From St Augustine (Keenan 1940) onwards "for sorcery to fall under the purview of inquisitors, it had to manifest heresy, which generally meant the involvement of demons" (Bailey 2001).

For this reason, the accusations of love magic against Caterina Caponero are followed with accusations of divination. Or rather, the inquisitor questioning both accusers and accused focuses on those magical activities which would make Caterina guilty of heretical practices (Rosi 1898, pp. 10–25).

Her fame for the practice of the white Angel spell or spell of the *carafe* is widespread and three women testify against her.

The first one is Agnese. She is not only a witness but she is also implicated because she has done the spell herself. Her testimony is really important because it shows how much the spell of the *carafe* was popular in Siena and how it was connected to the presence of the devil in the *carafe*. She introduces herself saying: "My name is [Agnese], I live here in Siena and I am a *cortiggiana*, a whore that is". (Moretti 2018, p. 140).

Asked if she knew the reason why she was called here at the Holy Office and why she was interrogated she said she can imagine that it was because approximately a month ago, the person living above her lost some objects and she did the spell of the *carafe* to find what was lost.

Asked to explain this "experiment", this practice of the *carafe*, she said:

I sent somebody to get some holy water from the Duomo in a *carafe*. I put the *carafe* with the holy water on top of a table then I took and lit a holy candle from the *candelora* and then I asked the daughter of [. . .] to say some words which are: White Angel, Black Angel, for my virginity, for my purity, tell me the truth, what is true, who has taken (*ibidem*)

Asked by the inquisitor if she had carried out the same experiment after that time she said:

I did it one other time before that one, when I was a child of seven or eight years old. Caterina called Caponero of Salicotto from [. . .] made me do it. These things we have learnt from [. . .] I have never done it after these two times.

During her interview she blames Caterina for her bad ways:

I would like to repent with all my heart in the presence of God and I wish I could go back and undo what was done and I ask great penance and I am bitter and the Holy Office should punish that woman who taught me this, I have named her many times during the exam,

she is Caterina called Caponero, she lives in Siena in the neighborhood of Salicotto, parish of St Martin, she is a tertiary of St Francis. She made me do the carafe for a woman called [Clementia] who lives in Siena and she made me . . . [two words have been penned out] and she did not want me to tell about this to [anybody] because, I believe it was an evil thing. (Moretti 2018, p. 141)

Asked by the inquisitor if she saw anything in the carafe she said: 'I do not remember seeing men in the carafe but black things which scared me and I fell sick for fourteen months after that'.

This is of course what the inquisitor was waiting for and from now on he tries to feed her responses although Agnese maintains her own ground explaining a little of her beliefs. When the inquisitor asked her what black things she saw she replied: 'I saw some things with horns and I believed it was the devil but they [Caterina and the others] stopped me and moved me away from there' (Moretti 2018, p. 142).

Asked by the inquisitor if she believed she was doing these orations to the devil she said:

I believe that we do these orations, invocations and reverences to the black Angels and to the white Angels whom I believe they all are in Paradise as I have seen it represented in the Duomo and the other churches. (*ibidem*)

This is a controversial statement and the inquisitor tries to lead Agnese in the right direction asking her if the black angels seen in the carafe had horns but she confirms: 'No my Lord and I venerate the black Angels as much as the white Angels because I think they all are from Paradise (*ibidem*).

With a more direct approach the inquisitor asks if she ever considered the black thing with horns she saw to actually be the devil and not a good Angel and she finally concedes:

[. . .] I recognize that also during that second time with that carafe we adored and invoked the devil and that we revered him to be able to know who had stolen [. . .] I did it and I repent and I ask God for forgiveness as I know I did wrong. (*ibidem*)

She was eight years old when she did it the first time for Caterina Caponero. The second time she did the experiment of the carafe, it was before she was called to appear in front of the Holy Office so she had known this spell for all her adult life, accepting to a certain extent the negative implications of the spell but also understanding very well the necessity to cross the invisible line of what is good and pious into a darker territory for the success of the act performed: The recovery of material goods essential for survival. She has clearly seen the representations of angels and demons in the Duomo and she seems to imply that she understands that even demons were created in heaven therefore as useful as much as the angels in carrying out requests outside the sphere of human capability and power.

The second witness, Maria, tells us that two years after she was robbed by a man, a woman told her to consult Caterina to find the stolen object. Maria reluctantly accepted to have Caterina's help and goes to her house but she did not stay long because "I did not want to go up because I was hearing around that certain things could have been seen in the carafe" (Moretti 2018, p. 142). She did not see anything in the carafe because in the end she left before the conclusion of the spell. As payment for her help Maria would give bread and wine when Caterina went to visit her.

Cecilia's story, the third witness, is similar to Maria's. She had some objects stolen more than twenty years ago. Seeing her desperate some people suggested to her to seek the help of Caterina who could see in the carafe who took the stolen objects. She was not sure this was a good idea as she was told that Caterina was an evil woman and she was worried that her own husband would find out she frequented such a woman and would beat her up. She went anyway to Caterina's house and when there:

we went upstairs and entered a room without a bed and from what I remember it could have been a living room, and here we found with Caterina [Agnese] who, at the time, was a young girl of seven or eight years, together with other four or five young girls not known to

me and I do not know who they were or what their names were, and I found that on top of a table there was a carafe full of water and [. . .] looked inside the carafe and I do not know what she said and I cannot recall if she was on her knees or crouched, I only know that in the end she said “Jesus Maria! I see a man and a woman; one is lifting the chest lid and the other takes the stuff out and then puts back the lid”. Caterina told me to look for myself and I did look but I did not say anything as I only saw my shadow and I did say to Caterina I only saw my shadow and I told her that I wanted to go away because I had left [. . .] and it was the end of July or first day of August, I don’t remember, and it was morning, approximately twelve o’clock, and maybe she [. . .] gave Caterina an offer and [. . .] I don’t remember giving Caterina anything on that day but when she was coming at my place I would give her food and wine. And I remember even more: after the carafe Caterina told me the (stolen) stuff was nearby my house because those (thieves) seen in the carafe were not moving anywhere but they were sitting on the chest and I should send the authority right away and I asked: to whom should I send the authority and Caterina said: “to those you have closer to you and to those you think they are of [. . .]. And I think I really did see them [. . .] those, of whom I was suspicious, those who, after falling in misery came to ask for forgiveness for robbing me. But I did not mentioned them to Caterina and I told her I did not want to send him [policeman] to [. . .], and she replied that I did not really care to have my stuff back and for this I should confess myself as it is a mortal sin (to lie?) and I did confess to the Father of our order of [. . .] and he questioned me if I did see anything. I told him no and he replied [. . .] over their conscience and he gave me the absolution and I do not recall anything else.

This testimony is important because it would prove the belief in Caterina Caponero’s ability of divining through the spell of the carafe and the belief in the results of the spell itself but it is also testimony to the almost natural, everyday recurrence of magical thinking in Early Modern society.

As explained by Bailey (2001, p. 969) “After healing and warding off disease, the discovery of theft and the subsequent divination of the guilty party, or simply the location of a lost item if no theft was involved, were among the standard uses of common magic”.

The spell of the white Angel and the carafe full of water was indeed well known and its use widespread in Italy across all levels of society. Even one of the most famous courtesans of Renaissance Italy—Veronica Franco, queen of the Venetian courtesans, loved by everybody and able to entertain the future king of France Henry III in 1574—was accused of witchcraft in 1580, for allegedly doing the spell of the white Angel to identify the person who had stolen goods from her house looking into a vase/flask (*inchistara*) full of water to which she freely admitted (Ruggiero 1993, p. 46).

In what is probably the most used inquisitorial manual in Italy, the *Prattica per procedere nelle cause del Sant’Officio*—a hand-written book in vulgar Italian dating to the first half of the 17th century based on the famous *Instructio pro formandis processibus in causis strigam, sortilegiorum et maleficiorum*, this spell is listed among the *sortilegij qualificati*, those spells presenting serious heretical elements:

Prostitutes [. . .] practice the sortilegium of the carafe using virgin children, virgin spinsters or pregnant women, making them recite Holy Angel, White Angel, for your sanctity and my purity—and for the pregnant women the “virginity I have inside me”. Often these spinsters and pregnant women said to have seen a figure or a shadow of some sort appearing inside the carafe which is interrogated to find stolen goods, hidden treasures or to know the future [. . .]. (D’Errico 2008, p. 169; Moretti 2018, p. 144)

This is a well-known spell not only among all levels of Italian lay society but also well known to the Inquisition. In the eyes of the authorities, the ability to summon demons to reveal the thieves or to find lost goods implies a pact—implicit or explicit—with the devil. This is the reason why Caterina’s accusers are questioned relentlessly.

Caterina herself is repeatedly interviewed with regard to this spell during the nine years of investigation while in and out of prison. During her interviews she mostly confirms her age—over fifty years old—that she is a spinner sometimes making extra money selling beddings and she is a tertiary of St Francis. This job, among others, was common during the Renaissance and Early Modern period in Italy.

When she is told about the testimonies against her, she admits knowing Agnese but she denies doing the experiment of the carafe with her or anybody else. When made aware of Agnese's testimony she says: "So it is because of that big whore that I am here".

Asked by the inquisitor about her connection to this prostitute she says: "I see her passing in front of my house all the time wearing a plumage (head gear) and a whore dress and for this particular, I have recognized her" (Moretti 2018, p. 144).

Again, from a social history point of view, this is a very important piece of information because from the end of the Middle Ages and throughout the Renaissance, prostitutes were required by legislation to wear specific clothing which would identify them as prostitutes and separate them from respectable women.

The inquisitor requests a face to face confrontation between Agnese and Caterina, with the former recognizing Caterina and Caterina refusing to recognize her and just saying: "I did nothing and I told the truth" (Moretti 2018, p. 145).

Refusing to recognize some of the witnesses and refusing to admit practicing the spell of the carafe, Caterina is forced in a face to face confrontation with Clementia, but she still denies knowing her. Only after the insistence and threats from the inquisitor Caterina tells the truth:

Father, it is true that I did the carafe for this woman, but I was young then and I did not have a brain, it was probably twenty-two or twenty-three years ago, I learnt it from a woman from Rome who is now dead, from her I heard the prayer [. . .]; she was robbed of some things so she did the experiment and in a large group of young girls we went to see her and there I heard this [. . .] she said and it was: "Jesus, Mary make me find my stuff". For now I cannot remember well but I will think about it and I will do [. . .] being called. (ibidem)

Asked to explain in detail the experiment/spell of the carafe Caterina said:

I have done the experiment of the carafe and I did it this way: I prepared [. . .] a carafe of holy water and I put it on an empty table, I put the carafe near the effigy of the Virgin Mary and I also took two leaves of holy olive and a holy candle. I lit the candle and I attached it to the table and then Agnese said: "beautiful Angel, white Angel, holy Angel, for your sanctity, for your purity, for my virginity, tell me the truth, who did this?" And the above mentioned, the one who confronted me this morning at your Lordship's bidding looked at the carafe and said those words [. . .] many times, the above-mentioned Agnese saw in the carafe [. . .] the devil [. . .] and I learnt this experiment from a woman from Rome called Cecilia, she was a courtesan who died a sudden death (?) and I learnt it because I used to live near her and I used to visit her. I saw her doing this experiment of the carafe because she was robbed of some of her stuff by some men, one of her boys, more [. . .] looked into the carafe, there were present a certain Lucretia Ferrarini a prostitute now dead, the woman [. . .] in the converted (the converted were men and women who joined a convent, wore the religious garments but they did not take the vows. They would usually do the more humble jobs) of Bologna. When I did it for Clementia, the country peasant confronting me the day before yesterday, there were present Clementia herself, her friend (?) Petra, but only Agnese was kneeling down. (ibidem)

Asked her if she taught the experiment to Agnese she said: "Yes it is true that I taught her to say black Angel white Angel".

Asked to explain what does she means in calling the black angel and the white angel she said: "With the words black Angel I meant to call the devil".

Asked to explain the sanctity attributed to the black angel she said:

In this case we give the devil the title (?) of saint and sanctity, even if I know the devil is no saint, just so he can reveal to us who the thief is. I was aware that in doing the action of the carafe we were adoring the devil and that it was a sin. I do not remember telling Clementia that it was a sin but I do remember well telling Agnese when she came to pray when I did the experiment of the carafe for Clementia. Having learnt how to do it from Cecilia and having heard Cecilia saying many bad things while she was doing the carafe, I told Agnese it was a sin and she asked me please to do it and to teach her to do it because Clementia was poor. Agnese herself brought the carafe with the holy water into my house and we did it because the abovementioned Clementia was robbed of certain things but I did not ask her what.

Asked her if she thought it legitimate to invoke demons she said:

I do not think it is legitimate, in fact I do believe it is a sin, but back then I did think it was legitimate because I did not think I was doing evil. I believed that to be able to know who the thief was, it was legitimate to do everything possible and I believed that the devils spoke and revealed where and who took the robbed stuff.

This passage is extremely important to understand Caterina's beliefs—and those others practicing the same spell or any another spell invoking the devil—regarding the reality of the devil: The devil is subordinate to her, it is a means to get what is needed and wanted. She needs a supernatural power to help her out and it does not really matter if it is God, an angel, a saint or the devil, as long as she is able to cope with the hardship of her life.

This spell was certainly part of her status within the social milieu of Salicotto because she tells us:

It would be probably over twenty-one years ago I did the carafe for Clementia. I did not do the carafe again and I did not teach it to anybody else. It is true that I went around the streets saying: Ladies, I know how to do the carafe in the Roman way and I laughed. But I was not telling how to do it. For this reason Cecilia, the Roman woman sent a friend of hers to beat me up and he wounded me in the head; another woman [. . .] told me that these things cannot be said but then I had very little brain, being at that time still (young).

Her fame spanned two decades and it was widespread within her neighborhood. Caterina herself spread the word around and people clearly made use of her love magic, divination and healing.

The trial document does not tell us the punishment Caterina suffered, but a letter of the inquisitor from Rome—Giulio Roma—to the inquisitor of Siena—Francesco Sertorio da Castel Fidardo—regarding this case and dated Rome 24 February 1647 says:

Reverend father, you must submit Caterina Caponero to more torture *pro ulteriori veritate usu, complicibus et intentiones*. If she keeps to her ways, before the abjure *de vehementi*, she must be flogged without taking in consideration the unmarried niece.⁷ Agnese must stay *inter missarum solemnias* at the church door with a lit candle in her hand and must abjure *de levi* in secret. Clementia and Maria must be discharged with admonitions and beneficial penitence. This is what the council of the Holy Office have agreed upon. May God keep you. (Di Simplicio 2009, Letter 999, p. 275—Translated from Italian to English by DM)

This is a severe sentence compared to our modern context and parameters, considering the nine-year period for the duration of the trial. If, however, we put this sentence in an Early Modern context and more specifically within an inquisitorial context—we see how Caterina did indeed tick all the boxes to be accused of heresy and apostasy.

⁷ Alleged witches with unmarried daughters or other female relatives would get punished in secret to prevent the “witchcraft” stigma affecting future marriages.

In the *Prattica per procedere nelle cause del Sant'Officio* we find a description of qualified *sortilegij* (heretical) and non-qualified *sortilegij* (not really heretical). Specifically, qualified *sortilegij* are those where there is evidence of the invocation of demons, obscure words or signs, abuse of sacraments and of sacramentals, use of human or animal blood, following of the lunar phases, inappropriate use of the name of God and the saints. The non-qualified ones are those where orations contain the name of God and crosses and passages from the Bible for protection. We also find that: “under the same name of *sortilegij* are included also witches (male and female) practicing *maleficia* on people in different ways, love or death and [killing] little children”.

Furthermore the author of the *Prattica* specifies that although witches would sometimes use words, objects and rituals typical of a more benign love magic (*sortilegij ad amorem*) for their *maleficia ad amorem*, in the majority of the cases their practices have a more sinister and dangerous nature where adjuration of demons feature heavily, contributing to the ultimate demise of their victims.

This implies therefore a well-defined and well perceptible differentiation between *sortilegij* and *maleficia* and for this reason and so for simplicity I differentiate it as being between sorcery and witchcraft; following therefore more modern generalized criteria which see sorcery as both harmful and beneficial magic, while witchcraft is seen always as harmful magic.

To understand better the concept of heresy among ordinary people and the ordinary clergy, specifically connected to the spell of the carafe it is perhaps appropriate to hear the words of a clergyman implicated in an earlier case of this type of spell. Between April 1580 and January 1581 Margherita di Mariano from San Gosme, wife of Cesare, the amphorae maker, and Paola wife of Ambrogio Milanese were accused of invocation of the devil and sorcery done with the carafe and abuse of holy water and candles. They were tried and flogged and then they were asked to *abjure de vehement*. They were prosecuted because they were asked to carry out the spell to help the friars of the order of the *Servi di Maria* to recover stolen items (Moretti 2018, p. 128). It was the prior of the *Servi di Maria* who commissioned one of the two women to find the lost goods.

Interesting is therefore the position of the prior of the convent of the *Servi*, friar Fabiano who ordered this spell to be done:

I did not witness the spell or divination you are telling me about but I know very well that this spell was done because a certain Messer Caio came and told me that as said by a woman, these *tovaglie* and *stagni* could be found without spending money, but only with a carafe, he did not tell me that this carafe had to be full or empty, only that a carafe was enough for such a trade. (Moretti 2018, p. 131)

When asked by the inquisitor if he knew why he was called in front of the tribunal he said: ‘because of the enmity and hate among the friars although in my part, I have forgiven everybody’ (ibidem).

Although a friar, at first he seems to have no idea on what must constitute heresy and superstition in the eye of the church, his church. He ordered people to make sure this spell would happen; he ordered that the materials necessary to do the spell should be delivered to the woman and he gave permission to two young friars to participate in the spell and saw no danger of heresy in it. The inquisitor picked on this and asked him if he believed divinations to be diabolic to which friar Fabiano replied:

I believe them to be superstitions but if they are diabolic or not, I refer to the holy church and therefore they are heretical things. I believe that these images and apparitions are diabolical because a man would not fit in a carafe, and I have never had anything to do with demons, knowing that it is not allowed [. . .]. (ibidem)

So he is fully aware, but as long as he is not physically present, then he is not a heretic. This, as we have seen in the above interrogations, is a straight forward, matter of fact and to a certain extent convenient perception of theological ideas. The perception everyday people—including religious people—of what was good and bad differenced substantially from the perception of the theological

elite (Roper 2006). The boundaries between angels and demons, religion and witchcraft and heresy and orthodoxy were blurred in the face of life struggles. Even the devil, within the limits of common magic and witchcraft, seems to become an instrument in the hands of the practitioner.

In Siena, as Venice, Modena and Bologna, the invocation of the devil and other supernatural agencies like the angels, the white/evening star or even ancient pagan gods like Zeus and Mars were popular, especially so among religious people (frustrated nuns and greedy priests and friars), nobility (frustrated women and greedy men) and literates. It is however obvious that the invocation of the devil seems to be connected to blasphemy and rebellion rather than demonic witchcraft.

Despite the new religious and spiritual interest, during the 16th and 17th centuries, in angels and demons and the increasing fascination of the fallen angel who is no longer a terrifying monster but a familiar figure sharing people's anxieties and sufferings, the devil seems to have a secondary importance as supernatural agency in witchcraft archives. And despite the church teachings and the sermons, for the common folks he offers an alternative to a brutal existence and albeit transient and illusionary, this alternative—the power to perform magic practices—fascinated people who embraced the mythology of this alternative thinking into their everyday lives, transforming the devil from ultimate supernatural agent to a dispenser of dreams and all-time favourite scapegoat. There is almost a sense of domestication of the devil, a figure which no longer is the supreme master of the witches, ultimate dispenser of evil and dark powers as featured in the most famous of the demonological treaties, but a figure whose supernatural agency can be easily replaced by others making the invocation and adoration of him, not a heresy but a practical and functional act.

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