

Article

“Charming Sorcerers” or “Soldiers of Satan”? Witchcraft and Magic in the Eyes of Protestant/Calvinist Preachers in Early Modern Hungary †

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† The present study is the translation of Chapter 3 of my book entitled “Ördögi mesterséget nem cselekedtem.”

A boszorkányüldözés társadalmi és kulturális háttere a kora újkori Debrecenben és Bihar vármegyében (“I have not done any diabolic deeds.” The Social and Cultural Foundation of Witch-Hunting in Early Modern Debrecen and Bihar County) published in Debrecen (Hungary) in Hungarian in 1998. The book examines the witch-hunting in Bihar county and its largest city in Eastern Hungary between 1575 and 1766. During this period, 217 trials were conducted against 303 accused, and my study explores the social and religious foundations of the accusations. The witch-hunts in Bihar county were of rather small size (1–3 accused per annum) and intensity (only 32% of the trials concluded in death sentence). A possible explanation for this relative mildness could be provided in my view by a complex consideration of legal, religious, and local social circumstances. Chapter 3, published here in English, discusses Hungarian Calvinist demonology which remained rather sceptical about the concepts of diabolical witchcraft. Consequently, the magistrates of Debrecen and Bihar county were not inclined to identify masses of witches, alleged representatives of a sect directly associating with the devil. The text is a result of a thorough archival exploration that I carried out twenty-one years ago in the special collections of various libraries in Budapest. I still find the conclusions included in it relevant and sound, so I decided to leave the argumentation as it was in 1998. I am grateful to Gyöngyvér Horváth PhD for the English translation. Chapter 5 of the same book on the macro- and micro-scale social contexts of local witch-hunting is also available in English, see (Sz. Kristóf 2017; an earlier version Kristóf 1991/1992). For a survey of the research of witchcraft and witch persecution in Hungary in general, see (Sz. Kristóf 2013), mentioning further details about Debrecen and Bihar county witch trials.

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Abstract: The present study is the translation of Chapter 3 of the book of Ildikó Sz. Kristóf, entitled “Ördögi mesterséget nem cselekedtem.” A boszorkányüldözés társadalmi és kulturális háttere a kora újkori Debrecenben és Bihar vármegyében (“I have not done any diabolic deeds.” The Social and Cultural Foundation of Witch-Hunting in Early Modern Debrecen and Bihar County) published in Debrecen, Hungary in 1998. The book examined the witch-hunting in Bihar county and its largest city, the headquarters of the Calvinist church in Eastern Hungary between 1575 and 1766. During this period, 217 trials were conducted against 303 accused, and the book explored the social and religious foundations of the accusations. The witch-hunts in Bihar county were of rather small size (1–3 accused per annum) and intensity. A possible explanation for this relative mildness could be provided by a complex consideration of legal, religious, and local social circumstances. Chapter 3, published here in English, discusses Hungarian Calvinist demonology which remained rather sceptical about the concepts of diabolical witchcraft (e.g., the “covenant” or pact with the devil, the witches’ attendance at regular meetings (sabbath), etc.) throughout the early modern era. The author has studied several Calvinist treatises of theology published between the late 16th and the early 18th century by the printing press of Debrecen, those, for example, of Péter Mélius (1562), Tamás Félegyházi (1579), Péter Margitai Láni (1617), János Kecskeméti Alexis (1621), Mátyás Nógrádi (1651), Johannes Mediomontanus (1656), Pál Csehi (1656), István Diószegi Kis (1679; 1681), Gellért Kabai Bodor (1678) and Imre Pápai Páriz (1719). According to her findings, Calvinist demonology, although

regarded the worldly interventions of the devil of limited scope (excepting, perhaps, the Puritans of the 1650s/1680s), urged the expurgation of the various forms of everyday magic from urban and village life. The suspicion of witchcraft fell especially on the practitioners of benevolent magic (popular healers/"wise women", midwives, fortune-tellers, etc.) who were presumed to challenge and offend divine providence. The official religious considerations sometimes seem to have coincided with folk beliefs and explanations of misfortune concerning, among others, the plague epidemic in which witchcraft played an important role.

Keywords: Protestant demonology; Calvinist demonology in Hungary; witch-hunting in Hungary; witch-hunting in Debrecen/Bihar county; popular/vernacular magic in Hungary; witchcraft and sorcery in Hungary

Members of the clergy belonging to various Christian denominations contributed to the elaboration of demonological concepts such as the witches' alliance with the devil, their attendance at the witches' sabbath, and their harm caused in various ways to their community. As is well known, one of the earliest "hammer of witches", the *Malleus maleficarum* (1486) was the work of two inquisitors of the Dominican order. During the 16th and 17th centuries, lawyers, doctors, and even kings, such as King James I, ruler of England and Scotland, took part in the discussion about Christian demonology. The early modern churches, even though they had to renounce their right to judge witchcraft cases so that the majority of such cases would be brought before secular courts from the 16th century, maintained a considerable influence on the determination of the nature of that "sin" and the principles of its judgement for a long time. They provided legitimate descriptions of the nature of witchcraft in the religious worldview of the early modern era.

The Reformed church regarded the secular magistrates as the executor of God's will and placed the biblical penal law above the secular ordinances. The judgement of witchcraft, based on the divine law, was of great importance in the criminal forums of the city of Debrecen and the surrounding Bihar county in Hungary, areas whose witchcraft persecution has been investigated thoroughly by the author of the present study. The city spared neither money nor efforts to make the *Lex Politica Dei* (Lipsiai 1610) available beyond the Bible.

It is a widespread belief in Hungarian scholarship that there was no demonological literature in that country; that is, there were no manuals propagating the elements of the scholarly image of demonic witchcraft (Klaniczay 1986, p. 282; Makkai 1981; and to some extent (Schram 1982, vol. 3, p. 68)). In my view, however, this belief needs to be corrected in many respects—according to both the latest interpretations of Protestant demonology and my own archival explorations. On the one hand, a few shorter and longer works focusing on the subject of witchcraft are known from Protestant authors in Hungary, such as the Lutheran Péter Bornemisza's *Ördögi kísértetekről* (*The temptations of the devil*) in his five-volume collections of sermons (1579); Péter Melius's treatise, published as an appendix of his so called *Debreceni hitvallás* (Confession of Debrecen, 1562); or the chapters on the devil's practices in the Puritan Mátyás Nógrádi's collection of preachings, entitled *Lelki Probakó* (Spiritual touchstone, 1650) (Bornemisza [1579] 1980; Melius 1562; Nógrádi 1651). On the other hand, the fact that these works seem to reflect on the effect of diabolical witchcraft only in a limited way, and therefore can hardly be regarded as belonging to the scholarly literature of demonology, has to be re-evaluated in the light of recent research, primarily that of Stuart Clark and William Monter.

According to Stuart Clark, Protestantism, due to its internal belief system and the practical activities of the preachers, elaborated a special *Protestant demonology*, which, in its main features, seems to be distinct from the corresponding Catholic ideas. The Protestant approach, which bestowed an exclusive role upon the divine providence, considered the power and activity of the devil to be rather limited. Because the "hands" of Satan were so tightly bound, Protestantism, as Clark argues, was not really concerned with the ways and details of his evil deeds. His operation was regarded to be

dependent on God's will in all its aspects, and therefore was considered illusory. As a consequence, the activity of witches, the alleged allies of the devil, was not discussed by the Protestants with such an emphasis as it was by their Catholic colleagues. The devil was thought to make witches believe that they can do harm—an argument both Luther and Calvin stressed upon. However, he was also thought to betray them just as he betrays any other Christian mortals.

Accordingly, the argument goes, Protestant demonology can hardly be regarded as a specific genre. It has emerged mainly from the traditional practices of exegesis, and it may turn up in any dissertation, treatise, or preaching that uses examples relying on the parts of the Bible that deal with the power of the devil.

Clark's second argument is that the absolutization of the divine providence prevented the inclusion of positive (intentionally benevolent) magic in Protestant belief, and apparently diabolized it. Those who wanted to heal with magical means or wanted to know the future, and even those who turned to them for help, were almost automatically regarded as persons not trusting enough in the power of God, the guardian of allness. Only the tempting devil could suggest such thoughts. Thus, if a healing was accomplished or a prophecy came true, the Protestants tended to attribute it to the devil.

In Stuart Clark's opinion, the internal logic of Protestantism could have been the reason that in the areas that embraced this religion, in England, for example, the accusations of witchcraft were mostly directed at traditional folk magic experts; and further, that the ideas about witches being in an alliance with the devil or attending the witches' sabbath, were not prevalent. On the other hand, preachers, wishing to transform contemporary folk culture, to purify and reform it according to their religion, focused on all kinds of magical procedures present in the everyday life of their flock. They condemned magic strictly, if not even more harshly than they condemned harmful witchcraft also present in contemporary folk beliefs (Clark 1990, pp. 45–81; Monter 1976, pp. 30–31).¹

As we will see below, the ideas about witchcraft of those Protestant/Calvinist preachers who were working in the area of Bihar county, East Hungary, strongly support Stuart Clark's arguments. These ideas can be traced in detail in the publications of the printing press in Debrecen, the biggest city of the county and the headquarters of Calvinism in Hungary. Péter Melius (1532–1572), who possibly played the greatest role in the consolidation of the Calvinist reformation in Hungary, came to Debrecen in 1558 as an associate pastor and, as early as 1561, he was elected as a bishop of the Tiszántúl Region Diocese. He kept the position of Debrecen's first pastor until his death in December 1572. He has published several sermons, ceremonial books, catechisms and psalmbooks, a translation of the New Testament, and a *herbarium*, a treatise on plants and herbs, a popular genre of the era (Szűcs 1871, vol. 2, pp. 542–53; Makkai 1984, pp. 505–11). For his opinion on witchcraft, the most important publication of his oeuvre is the *Confessio Ecclesiae Debrecinensis*, which he wrote in 1561, together with György Ceglédi (?–1584) and Gergely Szegedi (1536–1566), pastors from Nagyvárad and Debrecen, respectively. The book, commonly known as the *Confession of Debrecen*, was published in 1562. It has established the dogmas of the Calvinist reformation; in addition, several sections of it deal with the problem of witchcraft (Kiss 1882, pp. 68–284). In the "Dedication", the authors explain their motivation in including this issue in their work. The argument here supports my assumption that the problem of witchcraft in the 1560s did not exist only at a theoretical level in Debrecen. As Melius and his co-authors describe, "Many souls were perplexed due to the malicious opinions about ghosts, witches and infestations . . . They called us out inappropriately and flooded us with all those questions that we wrote here, and even our own relatives urged us with arguments in order to openly bring forward these conflicts and overcome the controversies over these issues, because there were only few who were contacted with these issues and could answer according to the same manners and principles. Therefore, our good reader, do not think that we put this down in a flurry" (Op. cit., p. 76).

¹ See also (Clark 1997), which was unfortunately not available when I submitted the book to the editors.

The historian László Makkai considers Péter Melius's ideas about witchcraft to be surprisingly progressive in the preacher's age (Makkai 1981, p. 127). Essentially, Melius's thoughts can be divided into two groups. The first could be summarized under the title of 'the limited power of the devil and the witches'. The second includes the condemnation of those magical practices that Melius attributed to the power of the devil. According to him, the practitioners of these procedures and those who turn to them would be possessed by the Satan. Let us first turn to his previous group of ideas.

The problem of witchcraft is treated by Melius as "a matter of nature rather than of faith". It is possible that when he speaks of "this evil that may have been wickedly and wrongly given to the people as Satan's works", he condemns the position of the Catholic religion (Kiss 1882, p. 76). According to the Protestant approach, Satan can only act with the permission of God: "neither the wicked or any other creature can be harmed by the devils bound with the strings of hell without divine motivation and heavenly power," says Melius (Op. cit., p. 91). One of the most important delimitations of Satan's activity in the preacher's train of thoughts is the following: "The devils . . . are not able to take on real functional bodies or bodies united with souls . . . they are unable to engage with the sexes" (Op. cit., p. 228). This position fundamentally questions the idea that the devil appears in an animal or human form on witches' sabbath or is able to have intercourse with witches. When Melius discusses the belief about the *incubus* [*lidérc*], he says directly that "the satan . . . is not able to spread his seeds or mix them, because it has no organic body. It is believed that ejaculation means getting into a relationship with the satan, even though it is against the nature of the devil" (Op. cit., p. 229).

The act of squeezing/pressing [*megnyomás*] and conjuring/giving an evil eye [*igézés; szemmel verés*] attributed to witches were explained by Melius in a rational way. He describes witches' harm as a kind of illness. When someone, he says, lies on his/her back for a long time, "the lungs become compressed, and the vital force (*spiritus vitalis*) recedes from the end of the nerves and goes under suppression and ceases." In all these processes, the devil and the witches could only have a limited role, as he says, "the compressed brain fabricates images about the burden that weighs it down." To cure, he recommends bloodletting, purgation, and "remedies for thick humours" (Op. cit., p. 284). According to his opinion, conjuration/evil eye is also an illness, which goes hand in hand with atrophy, "weight loss and delusions", and has a natural cause. Therefore, as he says, "that babies and others can be bewitched, sickened or dried by looking, feeling, praising, is evil speech." Once again, Melius's phrasing suggests that this question could have had a practical significance at the time his work was written, because, as he noted, "pastors are being asked about these issues frequently". With his opinion on conjuration/evil eye, he wished to provide a guidance for both the pastors, "whose answers often evoke a laughter and give opportunity to a little foolery", and the "nosy news eater and imaginative" members of the congregation in order to get rid of this "evil superstition" (Op. cit., pp. 229–30).

In Melius's text, it is a recurring argument that the devil and the witches under his leadership rarely harm the "pious", but they rather tease the "evil" with the consent of God. Behind this argument stands one of the most frequently mentioned statements of the Calvinist literature published in the 16th and 17th centuries in Debrecen, that the troubles and misfortunes penalize primarily those who transgress godly life, and God punishes those who turn away from him with his own means, that is, the devil. When bringing misfortune, God, however, only tests the "pious", such as Job of the Old Testament, for the strength of their faith. Therefore, everyone should look for the cause of their troubles in themselves. In connection with the belief about the *incubus* [*lidérc*], which he interpreted as an "infection with ejaculation", Melius expresses directly that this is "the Lord's whip, who punishes the sin of lust with the desire of lust." The main antidote to God-sent troubles is turning away from sin and keeping penance. Apart from "controlling drugs", the "illness" of the *incubus*, according to Melius, can be healed with "fasting and praying, that is, with true penitence" (Op. cit., p. 229).

Now, we will turn to the second group of his thoughts. There was a widespread Protestant view, shared by both Luther and Calvin, that the "miracles" of Satan and his allies, witches or magicians, are not real and are merely illusions. This is not so obvious at Melius. In the section on "night ghosts, witches, wandering souls, or squeezers/pressers [*megnyomók*]", he says, for example, "Undoubtedly,

when [the incredulous] get into the hands of satan, the satan does miracles by [using] them as they would be his own [fellows], not deceptively but truly, just as he would do through sorcerers. With the Lord's permission he reveals the signs beforehand and the coming [events], as he predicted, would happen." He claims elsewhere that "it is certain that witches, night ghosts, and stray souls are controlled by the devil, and are led to evil. They are capable of entering houses, shops and other fortresses, not by penetrating bodies or openings, but the devil creates ways to his own [fellows] by his own methods." Moreover, according to Melius, the devil "is able to pick up the whole man with his flesh and soul and take him wherever he wants, and [does this] with the consent and agreement of God" (Op. cit., p. 228). Strikingly, when he speculates on squeezing/pressing, conjuring/evil eye, and on the *incubus* [*lidérc*], he explains, as we have seen, the limited power of the devil, but at the same time he always makes references to what extent this power is *not* limited. It should not be questioned, he writes, that the devil actually tortures people, "ties them, fools them, or cripples them in various ways through his sorcery". And if the looks and praising words of nurses and witches cannot hurt little children, their "poison and harmful touchings" can (Op. cit., p. 229).

Finally, the most important part of the second group of Melius's thoughts is what we could summarize with the preacher's own words: "we believe that delusion, sorcery, prophecy from inspecting dead bodies, or palm reading are the work of satan" (Op. cit., p. 228). The reasoning behind this statement reveals the position of Protestantism in condemning even the positive or benevolent magic. Apart from two exceptions, measurement-based sorcery [*méréssel történő varázslás*] and astrology [*csillagjósolás*], Melius did not refer to the magical practices of his own age, but the cases of sorcery mentioned in the Bible. However, he still considers his argument to be valid in his era. According to Melius, when one makes predictions for the purpose of finding out future fortune or misfortune, which is otherwise within the scope of divine providence, he reveals the weakness of his faith, violates the Supreme God, and lets the devil into his soul. Such prophecy is strictly prohibited by Melius. Astrology is likewise forbidden, because, as he says, in this case "our life and our progress" is tied to "silent stars"; with this, we become idolaters, and the devil's booty. According to him, fortune telling is allowed when it is done "free of superstition" [*babona nélkül*], and merely for the purpose of decision-making in "doubtful cases". However, the preacher does not specify the boundaries between the doubtful cases and predicting the vicissitude of fortune. Therefore, practically *any* prophecy may fall into the demonic category (Op. cit., pp. 230–31, 275).

To sum up, Melius both narrows down and extends the concept of "demonic witchcraft." It narrows down in a sense that evil actions cannot be performed without the permission of God and also because he attributes different spiritual and material nature to the devil and the humans, with which he excludes even the possibility of fornication between the witches and the bodily form of the devil. This idea was actually the most widespread commonplace idea of Western demonology. Further, it narrows down because he explains few—but only a few—beliefs of his era in a rational way. At the same time, Melius does not deny that the devil and the witches are able to harm people in other ways, for example, that they can intrude their houses, or can kidnap humans; he asserts that these actions are not phantasmagoric. With labelling the practices of positive magic as "demonic", he indeed extends the content of this notion.

It would be difficult to determine which group of thoughts was more significant to Melius. Considering his meticulous treatise on the power of the devil, the two areas, the operational territory of Satan and its limitations, were certainly intertwined. It is much more important that during his more than ten-year stay at Debrecen there were no witchcraft-related trials at the court. The executors of the "divine law" seem to have embraced the first group of Melius's thoughts. Although his teachings about the evil eye and the nightmare (squeezing/pressing) did not abolish these ideas from the popular

belief of Debrecen, as László Makkai thought (Makkai 1981, p. 127)², it is possible that in Melius's era the magistrates had treated such cases according to his intentions; that is, they were *not* willing to start legal cases in such situations.

Apart from the Church fathers and the Bible, Melius referred only to Luther in the witchcraft-related sections of the *Confessio*. However, we can list some of the thinkers who have influenced his studies and the evolution of his convictions, and who themselves discussed the subject of witchcraft. In the academic year of 1556/1657, Péter Melius studied at the university of Wittenberg, which was associated with Luther's ideas (Bucsay 1985, p. 64.; Szűcs 1871, vol. 2, pp. 549, 552). He could not study under Luther himself, but he did attend the lectures of Philippe Melancton (1497–1560). Niels Hemmingsen (1513–1600), a Danish Lutheran and a disciple of Wittenberg and Melancton, published a dissertation in 1575 in Copenhagen with the title *Admonitio de superstitionibus magicis vitandis*. It is worth juxtaposing some of its observations with the second group of Melius's thoughts.

In Hemmingsen's opinion, people use both malicious and positive or benevolent magic at the suggestion of the devil, and their effectiveness also depends on him irrespectively of whether there was an obvious alliance with him or not. The practitioners of positive magic turn their backs to God just as the practitioners of malicious magic, as he says, "their belief is not firm, they reject God's choices, leave the fear of God, ignore God's commandments, question his heavenly word, and disobey the requirements of Christian patience". The ultimate conclusion of Hemmingsen's treatise is that pastors should eliminate the popular belief that the sins of the practitioners of positive magic count less than that of the malicious magic, including witchcraft. Hemmingsen's treatise is based on the text of Book V of Moses, the Deuteronomy: "Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead" (18: 10–11) (See Clark 1990, pp. 55, 67–68).

Hemmingsen and Melius both condemned benevolent magic and considered it as "demonic", and they did it in a rather similar way. This coincidence was probably due to the intellectual atmosphere of the university of Wittenberg, a place that had a definitive role on their education. Similarly, we may suspect an indirect influence, perhaps also that of the university of Wittenberg, when we place side by side Melius's opinion on the different nature or the structure of man and the devil and a statement of Johann Weyer (1515–1588), a Lutheran humanist, published in his treatise *De praestigis daemonum* in 1563. Weyer was a court doctor of William, the Duke of Jülich-Clèves-Berg (1516–1592). He has written a treatise against the witch hunts, in which he mocked the notion of the devil's pact, arguing that the devil, having no material body, could not even give his hand to the witches wishing to form an alliance with him (Trevor-Roper 1969, pp. 73–75; Baxter 1977, pp. 53–54).

Two thinkers might have influenced Péter Melius more directly when forming his opinion: the Lutheran Johann Brenz (1499–1570) and the Calvinist Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575). Undoubtedly, they had an impact on the evolution of his theology; it is right to assume that Melius not only knew their opinion on witchcraft but used it as a source (Bucsay 1985, p. 64).

Heinrich Bullinger, a reformer from Zurich, published his opinion about the "black art" (*Schwartzte Kunst*) in 1586, well after Melius's death; however, his thoughts were evidently formed earlier. It is possible that Melius's argument, according to which God gives power to the devil and through him the witches in order to punish those who have turned away from pious life, and further, to test the faith of the "pious", was partly influenced by Bullinger's similar ideas. Unlike Calvin, neither Bullinger nor Melius came to the conclusion that witches, the "tools" of God's wrath, should be punished. Both Melius and Bullinger agreed that the only way to avert troubles is to practice penitence and return to God (Clark 1990, p. 61).

² His opinion according to which such beliefs would not occur again in the witch trials after the age of Melius is contradicted by the documents of the trials themselves. See chapter 4 of my book. (Kristóf 1998).

Johann Brenz, a Lutheran preacher from Tübingen, developed his opinion on witchcraft during the 1520s and 1530s. Several elements of his system of thoughts seem to correspond with that of Melius's. Brenz was one of the first representatives of the Lutheran preachers' tradition in southwestern Germany, which, according to Eric Midelfort's analysis, questioned the belief in witchcraft on the basis of the laws laid down in the *Canon episcopi*, a 10th-century collection of medieval canon law (Midelfort 1972, pp. 30–36). A passage from the *Canon episcopi*, which originated as early as the 9th century, has strictly condemned that some "evil women . . . misled by the delusion and phantasm of the demons believe and openly admit that during the night they ride various animals with Diana, the pagan goddess and countless other women, and in the tranquillity of the silent night they travel to distant lands, and they obey the commands of [Diana] as if she were their goddess, and on certain nights they are bound to serve her". This belief has originated from the ancient Roman, and especially German, concepts of the so called *strigae*, who were women during daytime but transformed into birds in the night, kidnapped children, and were sucking people's blood. The Carolingian legislation has already labelled the belief in nightly female witch-like demons as paganism and condemned it. According to the *Canon episcopi*, this belief comes from nothing else than the illusions created by the Satan, and is extremely dangerous, because "deluded by this misbelief, many people consider these things to be true, and when they turn away from true faith and return to the deviations of the pagans, they suppose that there is some divine power beyond the one and only God" (Cohn 1994, both citations are from p. 263).

When Johann Brenz discussed the cause of hail and storms at the beginning of the 16th century, he relied on similar arguments as the authors of canon law. As he writes, hail is sent by God as a punishment to people, and is not, as the popular belief holds, caused by witches. However, some "witches" still think that it is induced by their magical practices; the delusion of the devil stands behind this idea. Satan can become aware of God's intentions, says Brenz, and may suggest to the witches when to begin their practices. This way, the foolish women are deluded, just like the supposed followers of Diana, and eventually they might believe that they are capable of performing such magic (Midelfort 1972, p. 37). To argue this way, Brenz obviously had to extend the devil's power and his range of activity; this is where a common point of his thoughts and that of Melius's is apparent. As was said previously, the devil, according to Melius, anticipates the future, and is able to see into God's intentions; perhaps this is why he emphasizes that the devil's "miracles" are not always delusions. As a consequence, and both Brenz and Melius agreed on that, witches alone have no power (Op. cit., p. 38). Neither at Brenz nor at Melius appear the concept of the orgiastic witches' sabbath, or the pact with the personalized devil. In the case of Brenz, this is obviously due to the impact of the tradition of canon law.

As was mentioned earlier, Melius, who perhaps had been influenced by Johann Weyer in this question, regarded the ability of the devil, as a spiritual being, to incarnate into a material body as impossible. However, we might venture on the idea that the interpretation of witchcraft in canon law could also have had an impact on Melius's system of thought, whether through Brenz or directly. A 12th-century Hungarian law, the First Decree of Coloman, the Learned [Kálmán Könyves] (1070–1116) King of Hungary, seems to have been written in the spirit of the *Canon episcopi*. It stated that *strigae*, that is, blood-sucking nightly female demons do not exist; however, at the same time, it has put in order that *maleficae*, that is "maleficent (female) persons", that is, ordinary people who practice magic, should be punished ((*Magyar Törvénytár/Corpus juris hungarici 1000–1526 1899*, pp. 112–13)).³ We might recall that Melius regarded certain beliefs as superstition, condemned them, and tried to explain them in a reasonable way, while he did not doubt the effect of certain magic practices and saw the devil's contribution behind them. He rejected the concept of nightly squeezing/pressing witches and the belief

³ King Kálmán Könyves § I. 57: "De strigis vero quae non sunt, nulla questio fiat."; § I. 60: "Malefici per nuncium archidiaconi et comitis inventi, judicentur."

in *incubus* [lidérc]. Therefore, he labelled exactly those concepts as superstition that correspond with the belief about mischievous, nightly flitting demons, which had been doubted by both the Carolingian laws and the *Canon episcopi*. When he speaks about the impossibility of conjuration [*igézés*], it seems that he is using the phrases of Brenz and the *Canon episcopi*: “the Satan tricks the wicked with his delusions and seduces them in order to believe the lie but not the truth” (Kiss 1882, p. 230). At the same time, just as the law of Coloman the Learned, he condemned those who perform magical practices.

Finally, the thoughts of Melius and Brenz are similar in a way that, in contrast to popular belief. Both regarded the main cause of illness, misery, or misfortune as a result of God’s punishing anger or testing intentions; according to both authors, ceasing troubles can be achieved by penitence and by returning to God and not by the extermination of witches. Concerning the punishment of witches, Melius was undoubtedly closer to Bullinger, who, as was mentioned earlier, did *not* see witches to be responsible for the troubles that had occurred. However, Brenz considered them to be punishable for their wickedness, that is to say, for their crime of conscience (Midelfort 1972, p. 37).

The thoughts expressed by Péter Melius were echoed in several authors of the 17th century in Debrecen. Right after his death, the pastors who determined the judgment of witchcraft in the city seem to have held a stricter opinion than he had. The first witch trials took place in Debrecen three years after the death of Melius, and the first death penalty was prescribed in 1575.

From the 1570s to the 1590s, two preachers who were working in the city were assumed to have encouraged the initiation of witch-hunting. György Gönczi Fabricius (?–1595), who was an urban pastor from 1565, and who became the successor of Melius at the position of a bishop from 1577, had studied at foreign universities for eight years. Although I have not been able to trace his opinion on witchcraft, it may be suggestive that he studied in countries such as Switzerland, Germany, and northern Italy in the 1550s and 1560s, where he could have met witch hunters or embrace the idea of witch hunts (Szűcs 1871, vol. 2, pp. 542–43, 563–64). His views seem to have had no immediate effect on court practice after returning home, because during Melius’s lifetime, he filled only the position of an associate pastor. The role of the other pastor, Tamás Félegyházi (c.1540–1580), however, can be discussed with more certainty. He was sent to Kolozsvár [Cluj-Napoca] in the 1560s by Melius in order to defend the Calvinist trend against the Anti-trinitarians. Félegyházi returned to Debrecen one year after the death of Melius and became a fellow pastor of Gönczi. I could not determine where he studied but in case he indeed had a role in witch-hunting in Debrecen, we may suspect the impact of Kolozsvár itself. During his stay in Kolozsvár, the magistrates had heard several witchcraft-related trials and even returned a verdict of a death sentence (Op. cit., p. 543, 564).

In 1579, Félegyházi published his treatise *A keresztyén igaz hitnek részeiről való tanítás* [Teachings on the sections of true Christian faith] for the first time. The passage on the sin of idolatry in this treatise condemned “superstition” [*babonaság*] and “all kinds of sorcery [*varázslások*]”. Similar to Melius, his anger was directed at those who performed magical practices banned by the laws of the biblical Moses and also those who turned to the former. As he warned, “Don’t turn to magicians, do not ask the fortune tellers, and avoid getting contaminated by them”. Unlike Melius, Félegyházi has already emphasized that such people *deserve* the death penalty. He announced with Moses that “I will set my face against anyone who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute themselves by following them, and I will cut them off from their people.” (III, 20:6); and “Let no one be found among you . . . who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead” (V, 18:10–11) (Félegyházi [1579] 1583, p. 306. I used the edition of 1583).

It is not a coincidence, therefore, that three of the earliest four defendants of the witch trials in Debrecen were experts of folk medicine, a positive magic condemned by Protestantism/Calvinism. One of them was also accused of poisoning (*intoxicatio*) and making a magical drink.

The period between the 1620s and 1640s, which saw the first summit of witch-hunting in Debrecen and the highest proportion of witch burnings, can be characterized by the strict policy of the Reformed orthodoxy. The preachers of the era published numerous works on the regulations of moral life, and another series of sermons were dealing with the subjects of fornication, swearing, theft, suicide, etc. (Makkai 1984, pp. 531–35). The first mentions of the devil's pact and the witches' sabbath can also be found in this period in two collections of sermons published in the city.

Péter Margitai Láni (157?–1629) was a pastor in Debrecen between 1615 and 1618. Then he was elected as bishop in 1629. He pursued higher education in Wittenberg at the end of the 16th century. He was a schoolmate and a good friend of Alexis János Kecskeméti (1570?–1618?), who went to study in Heidelberg after Wittenberg. He published Kecskeméti's collection of sermons in Debrecen, whose opinion on witchcraft probably had a great impact on him (Op. cit., Szűcs 1871, vol. 2, p. 543; Kecskeméti Alexis [1621] 1974, pp. 16–24). Margitai also produced a collection of sermons that was published in 1617, in which, similarly to Félegyházi, he wrote about devilry [*ördögösség*] in connection with idolatry. This, in his view, is “a covenant with the Satan, which is executed through certain ceremonies in order to achieve certain things with his help”. Margitai does not name the source where he could have read about these “ceremonies” and except the quotation above, he says no more about the topic. His interpretation of the covenant with the devil is peculiar. Apart from the devilish woman of the Bible, Margitai first brings up the names of two popes—Pope Sylvester II (c. 946–1003) and Pope Gregory VII (c.1015–1085)—as an example for being a devil's mate. Then he notes that “one can still find many of these people, both men and women creatures” [*asszonyi állatok*]. Following the tradition of Wittenberg and that of Melius's, he classifies them as experts of magical practices. Just as Hemmingsen at the end of the 16th century, Margitai also refers to the passage of Moses V, 18:11; and as Félegyházi, he argues that they deserve the death penalty. Paraphrasing Moses he proclaims, “be they men or women creatures, if the spirit of devilish fortune-telling is to be found in them, they should be killed . . . you should stone them, they themselves make up the cause of their deaths” (Margitai Láni 1617, p. 78).

Margitai's friend, Alexis János Kecskeméti was a pastor first in Kecskemét, then in Nagybánya. His collection of sermons, published in 1621 in Debrecen, is a commentary on the Book of Daniel; the sections on dreams and magic deserve our attention.

Kecskeméti classified dreams into several groups. One of these categories is “diabolicum somnium”, a devilish dream, under which he explained his views on the witches' sabbath. These views were most probably inspired by the Lutheran tradition that was based on canon law, as I discussed it above. The dream of those “bewitching-healing mates of the devil”, as he emphasized, is imposed by the devil upon those who “come together, as they say, each year before the first day of the month of the Pentecost, and they go to a high mountain (they know where it is) on a broom; the sorcerers [*bűbájosok*] from different countries used to gather together there. And as a testimony, they even say what they have seen there.” All of this is, in Kecskeméti's opinion, merely an illusion, as “the devil plays with them. Not that they could really be corporeal, but the devil would make them believe that they went far away.” He also considered as demonic delusion “when they see that some are being transformed into cats or wolves”. He supported his argument with Luther's authority, quoting one of his cases of an “ointment using midwife”. The woman—as the story tells us—wanted to prove to her priest that the witches were actually going out and gathering in a place. “For this reason, she applied an ointment on herself in front of the priest and many other people, and then raised her hands as if she wanted to fly. But suddenly she fell off and laid almost dead for a few hours on the ground. And when she got up after a long time, she said with great joy: herein you see that I was gone.” Kecskeméti summarised with irony the moral of the story: “So plays the devil with them” (Kecskeméti Alexis [1621] 1974, pp. 144–45).

Kecskeméti did not explicitly say that the witches deceived accordingly would deserve death, but he judged more severely the activities of the experts of magical practices, just as several of his fellow preachers did.

Kecskeméti distinguished two types of magic/conjuration. The first kind, which, as he says, “stays in his true power” is not to be condemned, but to be regarded as “very good”, because it is merely a “study of things by nature”. However, the other kind of sorcery, which is “based on a covenant with the devils”, is forbidden. Moreover, its practitioners are worthy of the death penalty. Like Hemmingsen and Margitai, he also supported his argument with Moses V, 18:10–12. When he listed the various types of “demonic practices”, such as fortune-telling from water, mirror, fire, palm, smoke, sieve [*rosta*], or nail, he condemned magical procedures that were also to be found in the popular/vernacular practices of his era (Op. cit., pp. 136–37). Further, he listed a few types of the experts of the condemned magical practices. Besides the biblical examples, just as Margitai, he mentioned six Roman popes as well. Of the “demonic men and women creatures” of his era, most of all, he raged against the fortune-tellers and the midwives, but he also condemned the gypsies, who “used to tell prophecies from beans.” Kecskeméti listed what forbidden fortune-telling [*jóslás*] might concern: when and where one would die, whether his/her spouse loves or not, whether (s)he would have a child or not, whether (s)he would have a son or a daughter. Fortune-telling was very strictly condemned by Kecskeméti; “no type of man is worse”, as he said, than the fortune-teller, “because they are bound to something they are not sufficient for”, that is, they are trying to compete with the divine providence.

Similarly, Kecskeméti rages against the practice of midwives, who performed healing activities, too, in the era. According to his opinion, midwives violate the divine providence, because they “want to become doctors of medicine, and try to cure with superstitious instruments, such as measurements [*mérések*], incantation [*ráolvasások*], or slips of paper [*cédula*] to be hung on the neck”. Kecskeméti explained the topic in the form of a dialogue, as if a rural preacher, representing the official religious view, would educate a local peasant, who was considered to be simple and superstitious. For example, the latter asks a question: “Is it wrong when the conjuring midwives heal by measurements [*mérések*] [and] they do not say that it is a *hagymáz* [kind of a feverish illness] [that is, an epidemic sent by God]?” According to the preacher, it is undoubtedly wrong, because illnesses are imposed on people by God, and it also lies in His power to abolish them. The midwives and those who turn to them, therefore, express the weakness of their faith in God when they are trying to cure a disease with threads, strings, or [some form of] coal. The next question is: “. . . if such a measurement remedy is against God, how come that it may sometimes help the patients? Further, some women creatures even say that if this good woman could not help me I would have died”. The preacher argues: these medicines help because they were *destined* to heal, and this might happen because God is testing the strength of the faith of the people. Other “simple” questions ask whether certain elements used in church rituals can also be used for healing, such as quotations from the Bible written on a piece of paper and attached to the patient’s neck, or incantations with the words of the Credo or the Lord’s Prayer. According to the pastor, all this is, obviously, paganism and superstition, because these were not created to be means of healing. Prayer, for example, was “not created by Christ . . . to make patches out of it, and tie [i.e., heal] diarrhea, gout, or *hagymász*”. As a consequence, the act of those, who “go right to the whispering midwives who do magic when they, or their wives or children get sick . . . is surely a great sin before God. My son or daughter was enchanted, if someone would recite an incantation above him/her, (s)he would recover”. The preacher requires the “superstitious” villagers to follow the only legitimate way according to the dominant religious view for getting rid of illnesses: “Listen, appeal to God, call him for help, and believe him to be healed . . . Because he says: invoke me, call me to help in the time of misery, I will liberate you”. In the end, Kecskeméti declared that both the fortune-tellers and the healing midwives are “worthy of the worldly fire and the fire of Gehenna of hell as well” (Op. cit., pp. 148–55).

Again, it could not be a coincidence that there were six people (five healers and one midwife) among the nineteen defendants of the witch trials in the period between the 1620s and 1640s in Debrecen who were punished for their various medical practices. Three of them were sentenced to death. However, the devil’s covenant or the attendance at the witches’ sabbath did not appear in the text of the indictments or judgements of the era.

Kecskeméti, as was mentioned previously, studied first in Wittenberg and then in Heidelberg at the end of the 16th century. The references in his collection of sermons include the names of Johann Brenz, Bullinger, and Luther, and even Caspar Peucer (1525–1602). The latter was Melanchton's disciple, son-in-law, and the head of the medical and mathematics department at the university of Wittenberg. In connection with the discussion on dreams, Kecskeméti referred to Peucer's treatise, the *Commentarius de praecipuis divinationem generibus*, which was published in 1555 in Wittenberg (Clark 1990, p. 55). Besides the Lutheran tradition in Wittenberg and the presupposed impact of canon law, the intellectual milieu of the university of Heidelberg might have also influenced Kecskeméti's concept of witchcraft. At the university of Heidelberg in the decades of 1570s and 1580s, two opposing opinions existed on the adjudication of witchcraft. Both opinions responded to the treatise written against witch hunt, *De praestigiis Daemonum* (1563) by the above-mentioned humanist and Lutheran doctor, Johann Weyer. According to Weyer, the ideas about the devil's pact and the witches' sabbath in the forced confessions of the tortured witches by no means have a real basis. Those are illusions created by the devil, or ideas due to a mental disorder, or "melancholy" of the accused. In Weyer's opinion, those accused of witchcraft are innocent and should not be punished. He, too, however, condemned the sorcerers and the experts of magic, and ordered them a punishment (Trevor-Roper 1969, pp. 73–75; Thomas 1987, p. 693; Baxter 1977, pp. 53–54). Among the opposers of Weyer's views at the university of Heidelberg, one can find Thomas Erastus (1524–1583), whose work, the *Disputatio de Lamiis seu Strigibus* (1572), deserves attention here. Erastus denied that the witches would merely be mentally ill, he was convinced that they indeed deny God and worship the devil. He thought that the witches actually fornicate with the devil and are able to harm their fellow human beings. Even if they are not capable of performing miracles by their own power, and this is all Erastus allows here, they deserve the death penalty because of their evil intentions (Midelfort 1972, p. 56).

Obviously, Kecskeméti did not share Erastus's opinion. His views were much closer to the thoughts of Hermann Witekind (1522–1603), a Heidelbergian mathematician, with which he defended Weyer's position. Witekind, just as Kecskeméti, was convinced that people tend to blame others for their bad luck, someone "on whom we can take revenge for all our trouble and loss, since God, who is the real cause of everything, is too high for us to reach and understand". As Witekind argued, the right path to avoid trouble is faith in God. He denied that the damage caused by the devil or the witches would be realistic and raised his voice against the punishment of those accused of witchcraft (Op. cit., p. 57).

As is apparent, Kecskeméti's system of thoughts reflects both the Wittenbergian Lutheran and the Heidelbergian Witekind's traditions as long as it considers witches to be innocent means of the devil but expects the practitioners of magic to be punished.

After the siege of Heidelberg in 1622, the Hungarian Calvinists started to attend British and Dutch universities. The study trips to England were of great importance for the town of Debrecen, because this is where the tendency of Puritanism, which consolidated in the 1660s, got inspiration from. Many of the Puritan preachers of Debrecen have expressed their views on witchcraft. One of them, Mátyás Nógrádi (1611?–1681), wrote a long treatise about "demonic practice".

Mátyás Nógrádi had studied in Leyden between 1644 and 1647, and also visited London. He was a preacher in Debrecen between 1649 and 1661. In 1661, he became the dean [*esperes*] of the Debrecen diocese, and in 1665 he took the position of the bishop of Tiszántúl Church District; he died in September 1681. His work, the *Idvösség kapuja* [*Gate to salvation*], published in 1672 in Kolozsvár, was translated from English; most probably his collection of sermons, entitled *Lelki Probakő* [*Spiritual touchstone*] and published in 1651 in Debrecen, was influenced by his experiences in the Netherlands and England. The appendix of this work is a short piece, a so-called *Rövid Tracta* [*Brief treatise*], which was intended to explain *Az Ördögi practicáról mint kellyen ítélni e világon a keresztyén embernek* [*How a Christian should judge the devil's practice in this world*] (Herepei 1966, vol. 2, pp. 183–86; Nógrádi 1651).

The ideas found in the *Rövid Tracta* themselves can be divided into two groups, in which the author determines whether the power of the devil is limitless or not. First of all, pastor Nógrádi admits that “Deus est author naturae”, so that He is the only one with supernatural power. He, however, allows the devil to send rain, wind, and lightning, but, as Nógrádi warns the readers, neither Satan, nor the witches, the “ugly bugs”, are able “to do true wonders, but only do admirable things”. Consequently, sorcerers are able to harm people but only as long as God allows them; they can only harm people’s bodies and the “external stuff”, but not their souls (the biblical Job is an example). These damages are the trials of God, and indeed serve people. Nógrádi argues that God allows people to get hurt only to “weed out his sons and lovers, or to verify faith and peaceful acceptance”. He does this in order to punish the sinners and, on the other hand, to determine (at this point, the preacher turns to his readers) “whether you love the Lord, your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Nógrádi 1651, pp. 183–86, 164–65).

Nógrádi, just like the other pastors discussed earlier, ascribes to the divine providence an absolute power in this world; further, he stress that Satan “non realiter sed apparenter” can do supernatural things. These are not miracles, but just “amazing delusions” (Op. cit., p. 186).

Nevertheless, it seems that when describing the sins of sorcerers and witches, Nógrádi followed a much stricter doctrine than his predecessors. In his system of thoughts, in some cases, the principles of supreme good and supreme bad were given equal weight. For example, he says, that “sorcery means the abandonment of God, the *Summum Bonum*, and embracing the devil, the *Summum Malum*. This way God is condemned and the devil is worshiped”. He argues elsewhere: “The sorcerer is an embodied Devil, just as the Antichrist, who, with the help of Satan’s enormous power does all kinds of miracles and great signs on this earth”. Nógrádi emphasizes that “no other sin offends God as much as sorcery does”, because this “nasty obnoxious activity” defaces the name and memory of God, Christ’s Cross, and the Holy Spirit (Op. cit., pp. 161–62).

Compared to the opinions presented here so far, the main novelty in Nógrádi’s argument is that he not only describes in detail the different types of the devil’s pact, but, as it seems, he thinks such pacts might actually be feasible. Considering Satan’s field of operation, as much as it is submitted to God, it is regarded as most excessive compared to all other preachers’ opinions discussed here previously. According to Nógrádi, “a full pact with the devil” is “when a person violates and breaks his faith in God, and further, dedicates his body, soul, and life to Satan through an alliance of a certain mark. This is a clear indication of witchcraft” [*boszorkányság*]. Witches [*boszorkányok*] embrace an upside down world (See Clark 1980), an idea that appears at Nógrádi for the first time in Debrecen: “we [witches] made a bond with death, we got peace through fire, lie is the strong shield of ours, we take pride in delusion, our prophecy is a sweet endearment”. And they do all this, as Nógrádi condemns them, because Satan “promises a reward to his speedy scudding locust-tailed soldiers” (Nógrádi 1651, p. 174).

According to the preacher, “the covenant with the devil” or “pactum” can be “expressum”, that is, evident, and can be “implicitum”, that is secretive or “clandestine”. In the first case, when one offers himself to Satan, the covenant can be made verbally or in writing (with blood), or it can be achieved through a mutual agreement, when both of the parties offer their services to one another. Nógrádi does not explain this further in detail, nor does he mention any characters he thinks about.

As for the “clandestine” type of the covenant, Nógrádi lists five different cases under that category, including the experts of magical practices and those who turn to them. They have also been condemned by the previously mentioned Calvinist authors; Nógrádi seems to systematize them. Firstly, he considers the fortune-tellers to be allies of the devil, these tell the future by “tin casting”, “turning of the sieve”, “the sound of the birds”; then the “healers, who apply ointments” to cure. These sorcerers violate the scope of the divine providence.

Certain parts of the *Rövid Tracta* allow us to construct two rather different stereotypes about witches in Nógrádi’s system of thoughts. The first we might call an “ecclesiastic” or “official” model: it comes from those statements in which Nógrádi describes what makes man a sorcerer or a witch, and what are the “convincing” and “certain” signs of witchcraft. The second, the so called popular/“vernacular”

model, is composed of those characteristics that do not make someone a witch from the point of view of the Reformed church; that is, the probable but not certain (“*probabilia sed non certa*”) signs of witchcraft.

Let us first see the “official” stereotype about witches. A witch is a person who “fully abandons the Lord and subjugates her or himself to the violence of the devil” and overtly makes a covenant with him. Humans with certain “particular sins” are predisposed to approach the devil. The examples include “idolatry, false worship, perjury, blasphemy, cursing, swearing, dirty desires [fornication], curiosity, hate, envy, the desire of vengeance . . . avarice”. According to Nógrádi, poverty can also be a reason for turning away from God. It is interesting to see that Johann Weyer’s opinion that witches are innocent melancholics is turned upside down by Nógrádi: he thinks that melancholia *attaches* a person to the devil.

Additionally, a witch is she who speaks before the court incoherently, “is a volatile vagabond giving incongruous responses”, and who admits his or her sin. A witch is she whose “superstitions and delusive actions” were proved by many living testimonies, and who is bespoken by other “sorcerers”. A witch is she who, instead of attending daily services, “visits the houses of disreputable sorcerers” during the night. Finally, a witch is she who “encourages others to deal with witchcraft” (Op. cit., pp. 163–69, 174, 182–83).

The other popular/“vernacular” stereotype that can be derived from Nógrádi’s system of thoughts is the following. Old people (those of “*decrepita aetas*”) who are surrounded by bad news or “rumors” are also considered to be witches. When hearing such “old news”, people tend to be suspicious, especially if the incriminate person belongs to a “similarly suspected family”, or has “impossible [*képtelen*] bodily marks originated from the devil” (Nógrádi has probably listed this feature at a wrong place), if (s)he is cursing or swearing often, threatening others, and if upon his/her touch a corpse starts to bleed. Finally, according to this model, too, a witch is characterized by a “poor and humble fate” (Op. cit., pp. 162–63, 180–82).

The purpose of Mátyás Nógrádi’s *Rövid Tracta* was to help the secular magistrates to judge witchcraft-related cases, because, as the preacher wrote, “it is so difficult . . . that often the divine lawmakers’ mind . . . get confused.” Undoubtedly, the ultimate suggestion of his work is that the magistrates should act with great caution when encountering such cases. Nógrádi suggested that the popular/“vernacular” model of witchcraft should not be regarded immediately as an evidence, and that even the elements of the other model, legitimized by the church, “should be carefully inspected not to make mistakes after hearing the testimonies”. His warning was directed to his congregation, too, “especially to the bad disobedient youth”, in order not to make “false testimonies” about their fellow humans.

Nevertheless, when Nógrádi discussed the punishment of witches, he judged them far more strictly than the previously discussed preachers. He condemned them not only to physical but spiritual death, and even to eternal perdition, and regarded them worthy to “suffer perpetually in a sulphurous burning lake”, making no distinction, unlike his predecessors, between those innocents deceived by the devil and those who were guilty of practicing magic. When reasoning for a strict punishment, he came up with a new argument not stated before. The witches and the sorcerers “by the covenant with the devil become enemies of the Ecclesia, and by this the civil society, the republica would [also] get confused”. It is very dangerous to endure this, he says, because God imposed his punishment on the Jews exactly for sorcery (Nógrádi 1651, pp. 190–92). The opinion that God’s punishment can be abolished by penitence was previously asserted in Debrecen, but at Nógrádi it seems less emphasized; whilst the approach, according to which witchcraft may be a *cause* of God’s wrath and only its complete destruction can help avoid the plague of God, is new in the city.

The popular/“vernacular” stereotype extracted from Nógrádi’s system of thoughts was probably based on the everyday experiences of the pastor and reflected the basic perception of witches in the contemporary congregation at Debrecen. The other model, due to the lack of local traditions, as I mentioned above, might have conceived during his travels in England. This was assumed by the

historian László Makkai, too (Makkai 1981, p. 117). Nógrádi visited England in 1645, when the biggest witch hunt in the country's history took place; it was led by Matthew Hopkins (?–1647) in Essex. According to the research of Alan Macfarlane, this was the time when, in the persecution of witches, the concept of diabolical witchcraft gained the greatest importance (Macfarlane 1970, p. 189). During his stay, Nógrádi could have been influenced either by pamphlets or reports of burnings, or by the English Protestant literature of demonology. László Makkai has suggested earlier that Nógrádi could have known the *Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft*, a book of the Puritan theologian, William Perkins (1558–1602), published in Cambridge in 1608 (Makkai 1981, p. 117). It appears that Makkai, although he did not compare the two works, was on the right track. Nógrádi did not refer to the English author by name. However, there are several common points in their treatises on demonology.

When Stuart Clark interpreted the concept of the witches' sabbath as an inversion of the social and moral order, he referred to the writings of William Perkins. Perkins made a commentary on Samuel I, 15:23, which says "For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry". He called witches "the worst possible traitors and rebels", who renounce God, the King of Kings, leave the company of the Church and people, become enemies of the state, and enter into an alliance with their supreme enemy, the Devil (Clark 1977, p. 176). This argument, as we have seen, first appears in Debrecen in Nógrádi's writings; the very strict punishment of witchcraft which he stands for is based on the betrayal of both the "Ecclesia" and the "Respublica".

Further, Perkins did not doubt the alliance of witches and the devil and this possibility was maintained by Nógrádi as well. The opinion of the English and the Hungarian preacher in the question of condemning benevolent magic also corresponds to each other, even though, as we have seen, by the age of Nógrádi, this approach had a significant local tradition in Debrecen. When Nógrádi says that no one is defacing the name of God, Christ's Cross, and the Holy Spirit more than the fortune-teller and "ointment user" sorcerers, he seems to be echoing Perkins's idea that the experts of positive magic, the "good witches", are even more threatening than the "black witches", because the former are not rejected by their community, so their successful practices weaken belief in the divine providence in the souls of their patients. The "good witches", as Perkins describes, are "the most disgusting and hateful monsters" (Thomas 1987, pp. 300–6).

In the 1660s and 1670s, Mátyás Nógrádi, first as a dean, and then a bishop, was one of the most prominent figures of Debrecen-based Puritanism. Before we analyze how the local witch hunt occurred under his office and influence, we need to consider other Puritan preachers who also expressed their opinion during this period in the city.

Five years after the publication of Nógrádi's work (1651), the issue of witchcraft was rediscovered in Debrecen. This time at two school exams, held under the presidency of the Puritan preacher György Komáromi Csipkés (1628–1678). The texts of these exams were later published in Latin in Nagyvárad [Oradea] (Mediomontanus Cimbalmos 1656; Csehi P. 1656). The exams were open to the public, and several prominent persons attended. Apart from Mátyás Nógrádi, Mihály Vigkedvű, the chief judge of Debrecen was there, and also several town senators and local pastors turned up, including pastors from Diószeg, Bihar county, the chief judge of Sárospatak, Zemplén county and his senators, the captain of Székelyhid, Bihar county, and other members of the council from different places.

The topics of the exams of the two respondents, András Csehi P. and János Mediomontanus C., were based on some ordinary questions of Calvinist demonology: the power of the devil and the witches, their limitations, the perception of benevolent magic, and the punishment of witchcraft. As is clear from their references, the respondents were deeply aware of the two traditions of the interpretation of witchcraft defined by Eric Midelfort and discussed above, that is, a tradition based on the *Malleus maleficarum* and another one based on the canon law. As it seems, they voted for the latter. However, just like Nógrádi, they did not completely rule out the possibility of the devil's pact.

Concerning the first topic, András Csehi P. explained that the devil has no power "beyond the air" ("supra aerem"); he is unable to move the stars or other celestial bodies, for example, to remove the moon from the sky, or cannot steal the light of the stars. And, "underneath the air" ("infra aerem") he

can only act with the permission of God, who, according to the widely used argument, allows him to operate in order to test the faithfulness of men and to ascertain the strength or weakness of their faith (Csehi P. 1656, chp. A2).

Of all the ideas on witchcraft found in the *Malleus maleficarum*, the two Puritan disciples only accepted that the witches gain their damaging power from the devil. András Csehi P., referring to Johann Weyer, denies that witches would be able to create lightning, winds, move clouds, destroy the crops, bewitch the human body by acquiring excrement, urine, blood, hair or nails, or move it from one place to another in a very short time. Based on Weyer's arguments and the "Jus Canonicum", they both claim that the demonic practices detailed in the *Malleus maleficarum* are not real but are merely illusions created by the Satan and only the sick souls, the melancholic and the fool believe them to be true. As Mediomontanus listed, "phantasticae et imaginariae sunt" that the witches take little babies, cook them and make grease for flight from their fat, unnoticeably invade houses through chimneys, windows, or small holes and disturb the inhabitants, travel several miles in four or five hours, and if they wish, they can be transformed into animals (cats, pigs, donkeys) or soulless things (plants, straw, cartwheel) (Mediomontanus Cimbalmos 1656, chp. B2). Mediomontanus considers another popular belief to be impossible and illusory—that during the night the flock of witches fly to the Gellért hill in Buda (the capital of Hungary, under Turkish occupation in the period) to dance and have a debauch.⁴

Concerning the question of the devil's pact, Mediomontanus compares Johann Weyer's and William Perkins's opinions and although he agrees with the former, he does not entirely exclude the possibility of such pacts. Weyer, as was said earlier, denied the possibility of an alliance between a witch and the devil based on the fact that the former is a material-corporal ("corporalis") but the latter is a spiritual ("spiritualis") entity. This antagonism precludes any relationship between those two in his opinion. Referring to Perkins, Mediomontanus disproves Weyer's statement with the power of the Bible saying that according to Scripture, an alliance *could* exist between God (an entirely spiritual entity) and flesh-and-blood humans, as testified by the cases of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. For such covenant, he argues, a union of *thoughts* and *will* is sufficient, physical presence ("circumstantialer") is not needed from any of the parties. In Mediomontanus's opinion, the pact with the devil is thus feasible. However, it is eventually the devil's delusion ("fraus et impostura") that can only be believed by the credulous or the mentally perplexed. Mediomontanus, as opposed to Weyer, does not conclude, however, that the innocent, deceived witches do not deserve punishment. He thinks that witches deserve death by burning because of their *intention*, which is obviously evil if they were looking for an alliance with the devil (Mediomontanus Cimbalmos 1656, chp. A3, B).

According to the two respondents, harmful witches are not the only ones who enter into an alliance with the devil. The "lamia bona" or the "praestigiatrix juvans", that is, the "good witch", makes a covenant with the devil in order to do good, to heal bewitchment or make predictions. As can be read in András Csehi P., "inquiring about the patients by lead casting, belt measurement [övmérés], sieve rotation, or by the methods of old women ... just as ... whispering, incantation, healing are not only useless but superstitious and idolatrous" ("... non tantum inutiles sed et superstitiosae ac idololatriae sunt") (Csehi P. 1656, chp. B2).

The effect of Mátyás Nógrádi's treatise can be seen in that the above mentioned "ecclesiastic" vs. popular/"vernacular" stereotypes of witches are repeated almost word by word by András Csehi P. In Csehi P., the former also consists of "convincing" signs ("signa convincentia") while the latter of "false" or "conjectural" signs ("signa falsa, probabilia, conjecturalia"). According to him, those defendants can be punished who admittedly enter into an alliance ("foedus") with the devil or cause detriment to his fellow humans in a supernatural manner, and all this is proven by authentic witnesses. Referring to Moses II, 22:18, he regards these persons even worthy of death (Op. cit., A3, B).

⁴ For a Hungarian translation of this part of the argument of Mediomontanus, see (Klaniczay 1986, p. 283, note 117).

The idea of the covenant with the Satan cannot be found in any other works of the Puritan preachers in Debrecen. For example, Gellért Kabai Bodor (1640?–1681), who was a pastor in Debrecen between 1674 and 1681, mentioned in his collection of sermons entitled *Hegyes ösztön a Sátánnak angyala* [*Disturbing Instinct is the Devil's Angel*, 1678] that “sorcerers and charmers”, “seers”, and “men and women creatures whispering prayers learnt from the devil” are both companions and means of Satan, but he never spoke explicitly about such an alliance (Kabai Bodor 1678, pp. 23, 36).

By the middle of the 17th century, the pastors in Debrecen seem to have clarified for good the interpretation of the concept of the devil's pact. As we have seen, they considered it to be feasible to some extent. However, it was regarded to be a demonic illusion, a delusion of Satan. Neither the disciples of Mátyás Nógrádi nor that of György Komáromi Csipkés forced the originally Catholic notion of demonic witchcraft with the devil's pact onto the popular (or seemingly popular) notion of witchcraft, which was otherwise not necessarily trusted. Especially not because it was extraneous to both their religion and demonology (On the differences between Catholic and Protestant demonology see Clark 1990).

Lutheran preachers from southwestern Germany led by Johann Brenz formulated their main ideas about the omnipotence of the divine providence and the limited power of Satan and the witches in relation to the explanation of the causes of hail and storms. Calvinist preachers in Debrecen did this in connection with the diseases and their healing, as we have seen at Péter Melius or Péter Margitai Láni. It is worthy of note that plague epidemics were included in those diseases, especially in the era of the Puritanism in Debrecen.

Several preachers have expressed their opinions about the plague before the Puritans in the city, just like Péter Melius. However, it seems that until the second half of the 17th century, these works dealt with only two fundamental issues. The first, obviously, was the plague itself: it was regarded as God's punishment to sinful men. Many, including Péter Melius, thought that it is not possible to avoid it without penitential practices and returning to God. The second question concerned what “external devices”, such as drugs, can be used and in what extent apart from “internal or spiritual healing”. There was no agreement in this question among the preachers of the era (Kristóf 1991). There was one particular question, though, in which all preachers agreed, that the so called “superstitious” medications are not only unhelpful but their use falls under a strict ban. The reason for this is similar to that of the condemnation of positive magic, that is, the use of “medication that is not ordered by God” questions the belief in divine providence.

In 1579, Tamás Félegyházi wrote: “the medicines of magicians and sorcerers are forbidden in the Writings [of God], those who want to heal the sick with whispering words, casting and lifting the spell, or any other kinds of superstitions”. Such superstition was, for example, that “the first on whom the plague started off, should be dugged out from the ground and pulled under the gallows-tree”. Further, “a Christian man should not expect a cure from these associates of the devil, but instead, he should hold on to the Word of God, and apply only the remedies ordered by Him” (Félegyházi [1579] 1583, pp. 461, 463–64). Alexis János Kecskeméti wrote the above-mentioned sermon in 1621 during a plague epidemic. It is no coincidence, therefore, that when he condemned the activities of the healing midwives, he was referring to the example of “*hagymáz*”, a feverish illness: the word was also used for the plague in the era. As he wrote, sickness is given by God to sinful men. Thus, it was regarded extremely wrong that midwives are so courageous that through “measuring and incantation” cross the paths of God's unfathomable providence (Kecskeméti Alexis [1621] 1974, pp. 148–49, 348).

Concerning the origin of the plague, the early preachers of Debrecen seem to have argued with only two positions. One was the astrologers' opinion, who deduced the epidemics from some “negative constellation” of the planets, while the other opinion regarded it as “blind luck”. Only the Puritans, and among them firstly pastor István Diószegi Kis (c.1635–1698) from Diószeg, who knew the folk culture of his era so well, explored that there exists a third, very widespread alternative explanation of the plague. The one found in the popular belief of witchcraft.

In 1679, when Diószegi was preaching about “a variety of diseases”, a serious plague epidemic raged over the country. These sermons, as earlier in Kecskeméti, were published in a dialogue form. Reading Diószegi’s text feels as if a member of the congregation would ask questions about his own ideas from the learned preacher. From these questions, the third alternative interpretation can be constructed about the origin of the plague in late 17th-century folklore. For example, “Can one find out whether this illness is coming from the devil or from a witch?” Or, “If you could find out that this illness is coming from the devil, would it be allowed to cure it with the help of the devil or witches?” (Diószegi Kis 1679, pp. 159–60).

In his answers, Diószegi does not exclude this kind of explanation. However, as he says, the illness-bringing power of both the devil and the witches comes from God, who may use them as a means of expressing his anger. “The great power the devil has on this earth . . . with the permission of God he can make people cripple, blind, take away their health and even kill them, as seen in the story of Job and his sons” (Op. cit., p. 159). Therefore, “there is no need to struggle” to determine where the illness is coming from, because the ultimate reason is always the Almighty God. “There is no evil in the city that Jehovah would not beget”, and the devil “is not able to curl a hair unless God wants this”. Turning to a healing “witch” is useless, because he or she can not heal an illness which was sent by God as a punishment; and when (s)he tries, (s)he serves the devil and falls into idolatry. “If [the healer] was a good doctor and knew all the types of trees and herbs . . . this would [be idolatry] as (s)he would turn away from God and would turn to the devil” (Op. cit., p. 160).

That same year on St. George’s Day, when, according to the popular belief, witches are particularly active, Diószegi gave his sermon. This sermon is well known in the ethnographic scholarly literature, but it has been used only as a historical source of folk magic for the end of the 17th century (Dömötör 1981, p. 112). I want to draw attention to the fact that when Diószegi enumerated the great many methods of folk magic, his interest was not necessarily led by an interest in folklore. All the witches, “who mess up men with a spell, with the help of God, feed them or kill them”, and experts of positive magic “who enchant the hens to increase egg laying and the cows to improve the quality of their milk”, who contact the dead, “the fortune tellers”, and all those who turn to them, are in alliance with the devil, the preacher argues, and deserve to be burnt or stoned. Diószegi also blames the courts “who do not take care about these [cases]” (Diószegi Kis 1679, pp. 196–98).

István Diószegi Kis played an important role in disseminating the decisions of the 1681 Council of Margita. The Calvinist Council was assembled under the chairmanship of bishop Mátyás Nógrádi, and, among others, decided that “sorcerers, and those who contact them, must be expelled from the Temple”. On the request of the supreme church authorities, the topics discussed in the Council were spread by Diószegi verbally in sermons in his ecclesia, and also in print form published in Debrecen (TtREL, I.31.a, vol. 2, p. 526; Diószegi Kis 1682, chp. A2). The text of his “Varázslókrul való prédikáció” [Sermon about sorcerers] was Moses II, 22:18: “Do not allow a sorceress to live.” Conjuraton, as he explained, is a “repelling, obnoxious craftsmanship, in which, through the devil’s work, a sorcerer does an apparently extraordinary thing with the permission of God”. The decisions of the Council were obviously formulated under the influence of Mátyás Nógrádi; they maintained the traditional ecclesiastical opinion that the devil and the witches could only harm people with the permission of God, and their activity is not realistic, only “astonishing”. However, they also represented Nógrádi’s views that were strictly condemning sorcery and witchcraft. They concluded, as phrased by Diószegi, that “Sorcery is a deadly sin . . . because God says, do not allow a sorcerer to live . . . because (s)he contaminates the wakeful to death . . . because a sorcerer is a *spiritual fornicator* [*lelki parázna*] . . . because (s)he copulates with the devil . . . because (s)he is excluded from the land of God”. The sorcerer should be punished with “beating to death with stones, burning with fire, as a spiritual fornicator, and an associate of the devil” (Diószegi Kis 1682, chp. B, B2).

To sum up, I would say that the views of the Puritans in Debrecen were not alleviated, but rather deepened the specific duality that can be observed in the preaching tradition about witchcraft before the era of the Puritans. The opinion that the divine providence has absolute power over the things

of the world was maintained, just as the view that the devil and the witches can only act with the permission of God, and that all their actions are illusory. On the other hand, the Puritans accepted the view that the experts of traditional magical practices in folk culture, such as healers, midwives, fortune tellers, etc., commit crimes, because they turn away from the almighty, divine providence which is (and should remain) beyond human perception. In this sense, the Debrecen Puritans *diabolized* these practices, and considered their practitioners worthy of the death penalty.

As the case of Nógrádi and the disciples of Komáromi Csipkés have shown, the possibility of an alliance between the devil and the witches itself first emerged in the views of the Puritan thinkers. Even if they basically considered it to be phantasmagoria, they believed that it should be punished with the death penalty because of the *evil intentions* of the witches and their purpose of an alliance. With considering the alliance with the devil as a criterion of “punibilitas”, and so as a possibility, they indeed accepted the idea of the pact.

It is not a coincidence again that from the 1680s onwards, such phrases as the “devil’s mate”, “cum daemonibus colludens”, “diabolica cooperatio”, and even “contractus cum daemone” appear in the accusations in Debrecen and Bihar county witchcraft trials. Therefore, László Makkai’s assumption, according to which the number of witch trials between 1650 and 1680 decreased in Debrecen and the judgements were less strict by the influence of the Puritans (Makkai 1981, pp. 127–28), can be questioned based on several points. The mid-17th century, and especially the second half of it was a particularly difficult period with many local fights and wars. It can be rightly assumed that the reduced number of witch trials in Debrecen and Bihar county is due to the constant insecurity of life rather than the influence of Puritanist ideas. Four witch trials are known from this period, one of them was concluded with a death sentence; further, several defamation cases were documented. After the Council of Margita in January 1681, chaired by Mátyás Nógrádi, and perhaps due to the provisions taken against sorcerers, at least seven defendants were sentenced to death in Debrecen during the period between May to July. All of them, except one, earned the death penalty. Four of them were burned at the stake, one was stoned, and one was a victim of an unknown death penalty. Bishop Nógrádi died in September that year. As was mentioned earlier, between 1681 and 1740 the ratio of death penalties were 36.58% in the town. Although this was lower than the national average, but, concerning the town of Debrecen, it indicates a second wave of witch-hunting. Considering the period, between 1703 and around 1727, when the puritan preacher, György Komáromi Csipkés, and his similarly educated son of the same name served as counts of Bihar county, the *sedria* [county court] issued at least twenty death sentences. Based on these facts, I think, one should not look for attempts to reduce persecution in Puritanist thought about witchcraft, especially as the practice of benevolent magic was not considered less severely by the Puritan preachers than the negative one. For example, between 1677 and 1700, ten healers, a midwife and a “seer” were found among the twenty-five accused in Debrecen.

According to my knowledge, the last treatise in Debrecen, which discussed witchcraft and sorcery in detail, was published in 1719. It was the work of Imre Pápai Páriz (1649–1716), was entitled *Keskeny út* [Narrow Path], and was first published in Utrecht in 1647. It had several later print editions in Hungary (Pápai Páriz 1647; see also (Trócsányi 1936)). Pápai basically repeated the local pastor’s ordinary points in Calvinist demonology that were discussed earlier. As he writes, the devil and the witches can only do harm to people with the permission of God. They are, as Pápai says, “tied [to the Devil] with an alliance”, he, however, did not consider this point important enough to describe in detail. Pápai seems to have followed the local preachers’ tradition in condemning the practitioners of positive magic, too. According to him, the fortune-tellers and the seers are in connection with the devil. “They support each other and serve each other, the devil . . . is a quick and fast soul like lightning, travels far lands abruptly, finds the lost cattle, whispers into the ear of the seers as if (s)he is his mate thus the seer can often tell the truth”. And finally, Pápai is warning the reader: “never live in a forbidden world, not even for a great benefit. Do not appeal to the devil or his mates, because you are going to pay with suffer in the future” (Cited in (Trócsányi 1936, pp. 283–85)).

In the end of our survey of the early modern Protestant/Calvinist concepts of witchcraft in the city of Debrecen and the surrounding Bihar county, the following conclusions can be drawn. The Reformed Church in Hungary has indeed developed a discourse of demonology, but, due to the specific views of Protestantism, the devil played a rather limited role in it. This discourse narrowed down Satan's field of activity, questioned the possibility of his physical appearance, and generally regarded his activity and "miracles" to be a phantasmagoria. Therefore, it could not provide a proper "ground", neither for the idea of the devil's pact, nor for the vision of an orgiastic witches' sabbath. Even if these ideas were addressed in sermons or were mentioned in connection with the criminal code, *Praxis Criminalis* (Kristóf 1998, pp. 41–42), they never seem to have formed a coherent and detailed diabolic "mythology" of witchcraft as can be traced, for example in the Basque country, in French or certain German territories, where those ideas were inspired by Catholicism and were part of the demonological literature originating from the tradition of the *Malleus maleficarum* (Henningsen 1988; Midelfort 1972, pp. 58–64; Muchembled 1978, pp. 289–340; Muchembled 1981). Thus, we may presuppose, just as Eric Midelfort, and more recently William Monter and Stuart Clark assumed, that this specific, *limited demonology*, which diabolized the practices of benevolent magic and was prevalent in Protestant—and especially Calvinist—countries and was also present in the Calvinist areas of Hungary, was the reason that in these lands the witch persecution remained moderate in the early modern period, whilst it was largely directed against the experts of benevolent magic (Midelfort 1972, pp. 70–71; Clark 1990, pp. 45–81; Monter 1976, pp. 42–44; See also Horsley 1979).

[...] The belief of witchcraft was still a rather widespread phenomenon in the 18th century. In the investigated area, the city of Debrecen and the surrounding villages of Bihar county, both the accused witches and their alleged victims can be found among peasants, craftsmen, citizens and farmers, beggars and judges. I have found a pastor victim, and a "witch" who was the wife of a county judge.

[...] The Protestant/Calvinist church throughout the entire period of the witch persecution has strictly condemned and convicted the practitioners of positive magic, thus clearly placing their activities within the framework of witchcraft. It is remarkable that in the investigated area, between 1575 and 1766, no less than 74 of the 303 accused witches were persons with some kind of knowledge in everyday magic/sorcery. At this point, it seems that the idea of witchcraft corresponded in the "official"/ecclesiastic discourse and in folk culture. In Debrecen, between 1575 and 1759, there were 127 persons accused of witchcraft, of which 54 can be regarded as some sort of expert in positive magic. This includes 39 healers and six midwives, and another six defendants were linked to *táltos* [some kind of shamanistic] beliefs. The rest was described by the witnesses as "seers" [*nézők*], fortune tellers or "wise women/men". In Debrecen, healers/"wise women" were present among the defendants from the very beginning. The first "seer" and the first midwife were accused in the decades between 1610s and 1630s.

There were only 20 persons accused of positive magic from the villages of Bihar county between 1591 and 1766: among them were six healers, seven midwives, and one *táltos*; the remaining also had some kind of magical skills (seer, fortune teller or wise women/men). The proportion of magical experts as accused witches seems much smaller here than in Debrecen and this is certainly due to some local social factors.⁵ It is not easy to decide whether the *sedria* [county court] in Bihar county judged less strictly or more rigorously than in Debrecen in cases of the experts of positive magic. Not all the judgments have been left to us. I know, however, of two death penalties given to such kinds of healers (a woman in the village of Püspöki, 1721, and another one in Nagykereki, 1723).

In the city of Debrecen, the magistrates seem to have followed the path designated by the Calvinist Church: from the 54 accused, no less than ten healers and two midwives were sentenced to death. Thus, approximately 22% of the representatives of positive magic received the death penalty. At the same time, comparing the number of all the 104 judgements known to us to the number of those sentenced to

⁵ These are discussed in Chapter 5 of my book, see (Sz. Kristóf 2017) and also (Sz. Kristóf 2013).

burning at the stake (32%), one may conclude that the secular court judged the activities of those experts of benevolent magic *less strictly*.

Given the fact, however, that only a small number of cases are left to us, that there are no comparable data available from other courts so far, and further, as we have seen above, that the charge of positive magic functioned as an aggravating factor along the guidelines of Calvinist demonology, more elaborate conclusions should wait to be drawn.

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