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MEN STANDING TRIAL FOR WITCHCRAFT
AT THE ŁOBŻENICA COURT
IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 17th CENTURY

For many years research on witch trials held in Europe in the early modern period focused on witches, for it was mainly women who were accused of witchcraft and collusion with the devil, and it was mainly women who were sent to the stake. Men did play a very important role in every witch trial, mainly as prosecutors, judges, assessors, executioners, priests, rulers (secular and spiritual), inquisitors, lawyers, demonologists, confessors and witnesses and also as defenders or opponents of witch-hunting¹. But in course of time they too became victims of witch-hunting².

In the Swiss canton of Waadtland (Pays de Vaud), one of the centres of witch-hunting in Europe, 1,700 persons were burnt at the stake for witchcraft in 1580–1665, of whom about one-third were men³. Scholars engaged in research on the persecution of persons practising witchcraft have so far accepted that men were

¹ E. Labouvie, *Männer im Hexenprozess. Zur Sozialanthropologie eines "männlichen" Verständnisses von Magie und Hexerei*, in: *Hexenverfolgung in der dörflichen Gesellschaft*, hrsg. von W. Schieder, Göttingen 1990 ("Geschichte und Gesellschaft", 16. Jg., 1990, H. 1), pp. 56–78.

² The following writers have recently dealt with men as victims of witch-hunting: R. Schulte, *Hexenmeister. Die Verfolgung von Männern im Rahmen der Hexenverfolgung von 1530–1730 im Alten Reich*, 2nd ed., Frankfurt am Main 2001; L. Lambrecht, *Tabu und Tod: Männer als Opfer frühneuzeitlicher Verfolgungswellen*, in: *Geschlecht, Magie und Hexenverfolgung*, ed. I. Ahrendt-Schulte, D. R. Bauer, S. Lorenz, J. M. Schmidt, Bielefeld 2002 (Hexenforschung, Bd. 7), pp. 193–208; R. Schulte, *Hexenmeister: Männliche Opfer in der Hexenverfolgung. Realitäten und Rezeption*, in: *Realität und Mythos: Hexenverfolgung und Rezeptionsgeschichte*, ed. L. Moeller, B. Schmidt, Hamburg 2003, pp. 203–207; E. Labouvie, *Männer im Hexenprozess*, pp. 56–78.

³ G. Modestin, *Hexenverfolgungen im Waadtland. Bernisches Herrschaftsgebiet 1536–1798 zählt zu den Kernländern der frühneuzeitlichen Hexenverfolgungen*, *Historicum. net. Fachgebiete: Hexenforschung; E-Tekste*, 21.02.2003, p. 1.

the main victims on the peripheries of Europe, e.g. in Iceland (90%), Estonia (ca 60%) and Finland (50%)⁴.

In the German Reich, too, more men were accused of witchcraft in the 16th–18th centuries than has been assumed for many years in the literature dealing with this subject. It follows from Rolf Schulte's research that every fourth person accused of witchcraft in the German Reich in the 16th–18th centuries was a male⁵. It is not known what these proportions were in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in the early modern period for Polish historians, including Bohdan Baranowski⁶, have not examined this question in detail⁷.

One of the reasons used to explain the overwhelming preponderance of women among the persons accused of and sentenced to death for witchcraft in the 17th century Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth was that women were more defenceless than men in the society of that time⁸. Moreover, if we take a close look at the roles played by men and women in folk magic we shall see a clear difference⁹. Women dominated in the fields of magic connected with birth, death, love and reproduction and also in plots

⁴ M. Madar, *Nõiaprotestid Estis XVI sajandist XIX sajandini*, in: *Religiooni ja ateismi ajalooost Estis: Artiklite kogumik*, 3, Tallinn 1987, pp. 124–145, here p. 276 (summary in German — the author says that of the 206 persons accused of witchcraft in Estonia 59.2% were men); eadem, *Estonia I. Werewolves and Poisoners*, in: *Early Modern European Witchcraft Centres and Peripherie*, ed. B. Ankarloo, G. Henningsen, Oxford 1990, p. 266; L. Hastrup, *Sorcerers and Paganism*, *ibidem*, p. 386.

⁵ R. Schulte, *Hexenmeister*, p. 81.

⁶ B. Baranowski, *Procesy czarownic w Polsce w XVII i XVIII wieku (Witch Trials in Poland in the 17th and 18th Centuries)*, Łódź 1952; idem, *O hultajach, wiedzmach i wszetecznicach. Szkice z obyczajów XVII i XVIII wieku (On Rascals, Witches and Harlots. Essays in 17th and 18th Century Customs)*, Łódź 1988.

⁷ Two women and three men were accused in the five witch trials which were held in the Starogród castle court in the first half of the 18th century; J. Wijacka, *Procesy o czary przed sądem zamkowym w Starogrodzie w pierwszej połowie XVIII wieku (Witch Trials Held at the Starogród Castle Court in the First Half of the 18th Century)*, in: *Cała historia to dzieje ludzi... Studia z historii społecznej ofiarowane profesorowi Andrzejowi Wyczańskiemu w 80-tą rocznicę urodzin i 55-lecie pracy naukowej*, ed. C. Kukło in association with P. Guzowski, Białystok 2004, p. 299.

⁸ J. Tazbir, *Procesy o czary (Witch Trials)*, "Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce" 1978, vol. 23, p. 169.

⁹ For magic and witchcraft in Poland's folk culture at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of early modern times see S. Bylina, *Magia, czary i kultura ludowa w Polsce XV i XVI w. (Magic, Witchcraft and Folk Culture in Poland in the 15th and 16th Centuries)*, "Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce" 1990, vol. 35, pp. 39–52.

with spirits and demons and in divination of the future. Male magic was focused on everyday practices, e.g. protection of fields and crops¹⁰. This is why men's magic skills were regarded as more transparent and less secret than the skills of women, and this may be the reason why men were less frequently accused.

Many witch trials were held in Great Poland in the late 16th and early 17th centuries¹¹ and their number even increased in the second half of the 17th century. An anonymous author of *Czarownica powołana (Summoned Witch)*, a work which was published in Poznań in 1639, wrote: "witches, whether real or alleged, are multiplying, they are spreading like fire in our Great Poland so that no other issue is discussed at conferences, even at ordinary meetings"¹².

In the 16th–18th centuries there were 11 towns¹³ in the region of Krajna¹⁴, the strongest urban centre being Łobżenica, which lay on the Great Poland — Gdańsk trade route. On February 9, 1314, Prince Ladislaus the Elbow-High gave Wincenty Piotrowic the right to found a town in Łobżenica on the basis of Magdeburg law¹⁵. It is not known exactly when the privilege was implemented but in 1404 Łobżenica was unequivocally defined as a town¹⁶.

¹⁰ E. Labouvie, *Perspektivenwechsel. Magische Domänen von Frauen und Männern in Volksmagie und Hexerei aus der Sicht der Geschlechtergeschichte*, in: *Geschlecht, Magie und Hexenverfolgung*, p. 46.

¹¹ S. Salmonowicz, *Procesy o czary w Polsce. Próba rozważań modelowych (Witch Trials in Poland. Tentative Model Reflections)*, in: *Prawo wczoraj i dziś. Studia dedykowane profesor Katarzynie Sójce-Zielitńskiej*, ed. G. Bałtruszajtys, Warszawa 2000, p. 313.

¹² Quoted after B. Baranowski, *Procesy czarownic w Polsce*, p. 23.

¹³ P. Szafran, *Osadnictwo historycznej Krajny w XVI–XVIII w., 1511–1772 (Settlement in Historical Krajna from the 16th to the 18th Century, 1511–1772)*, Gdańsk 1961, pp. 37–38. I assume, after Szafran, that the territory of Krajna was identical with the old district of Nakło.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

¹⁵ Z. Kulejewska-Topolska, *Nowe lokacje miejskie w Wielkopolsce od XVI do końca XVIII wieku. Studium historyczno-prawne (Foundation of New Towns in Great Poland between the 16th and the End of the 18th Century. A Historical-Legal Study)*, Poznań 1964, p. 64; J. Pakulski, *W sprawie początków i lokacji Łobżenicy. Przyczynek do dziejów wielkopolskich Pakuków w XIV wieku (The Beginnings and Foundation of the Town of Łobżenica. Addendum to the 14th Century History of the Pakuks in Great Poland)*, "Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici" 1992, vol. 26, pp. 97 ff.; A. Mietz, J. Pakulski, *Łobżenica. Portret miasta i okolicy (Łobżenica. Portrait of the Town and Its Surroundings)*, Łobżenica-Toruń 1993, pp. 21–26.

¹⁶ A. Mietz, J. Pakulski, *Łobżenica*, p. 26.

In the middle of the 16th century Łobżenica passed into the hands of the Krotoski family whose members must have been good managers for they contributed to the great development of the town. Andrzej Krotoski, castellan of Inowrocław, allowed the Bohemian Brethren, expelled from Bohemia in 1548, to settle in the town and on his estates. His son, Jan Erazm, who had become a member of the Bohemian Brethren's Unity, allowed Lutherans from Tyrol, Salzburg, the Mark and Pomerania to settle in the town¹⁷. It was under his management that Łobżenica became the largest urban centre in the Krajna region. In about 1580 the town had 2,250 inhabitants despite the heavy death toll during the 1569 plague¹⁸. Jan Krotoski opened a mint in the town at the end of the 16th century¹⁹.

In the middle of 1622 the town was owned by the Polish cup-bearer Mikołaj Sieniawski²⁰. When he died without issue Łobżenica passed into the hands of the voivode of Kalisz, Zygmunt Grudziński (ca 1572–1653). Grudziński was an enterprising man. At first he had only 10 villages but when he was dying he possessed 6 towns, 114 villages and parts in another 3 towns and 21 villages²¹. The Grudzińskis owned Łobżenica up to 1687, when Stefan Adam Grudziński died without issue and the Łobżenica estates, together with the town, were taken over by his cousin, Jan Korzbok Łącki. It was he who in 1693 gave Łobżenica an extensive statute which regulated all sectors of life in the town²². At the end of the 17th century the town had 3,000 inhabitants. In 1725 the chamberlain of Wschów Józef Stefan Radoliński bought Łobżenica from Władysław Łącki²³. The town remained in the hands of the Radoliński family until the partitions of Poland.

In the Noblemen's Commonwealth administration and jurisdiction in Łobżenica were regulated by the provisions of Magdeburg law introduced by the municipal charter in 1314. Even

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 46–47.

¹⁸ P. Szafran, *Osadnictwo historycznej Krajny*, p. 83, table 18; A. Mietz, J. Pakulski, *Łobżenica*, p. 48.

¹⁹ J. Pakulski, *Jeszcze o mennicy łobżenickiej w końcu XVI w. (More on the Łobżenica Mint at the End of the 16th Century)*, in: *Discernere vera et falsa*, Lublin 1992, p. 332; A. Mietz, J. Pakulski, *Łobżenica*, p. 48.

²⁰ A. Mietz, J. Pakulski, *Łobżenica*, p. 49.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 50.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 52.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

though Łobżenica was a private town, it had a municipal council headed by a mayor, and a bench with a bailiff. The bailiff headed the bench and was an elected functionary; it was jurisdiction over the town's population that was one of his main duties. In the 17th century (most probably at its end) his powers were extended to include cases of adultery and witchcraft²⁴. The cases were defined by the ordinance of 1693 which implied that the existence of the mixed bailiff-mayor court was detrimental to the town. This is why the powers were divided. The mayor was to pass judgements on Tuesdays, the bailiff with the bench on Fridays²⁵. It follows from Zofia Kulejewska-Topolska's study that in Great Poland, in addition to the judicial powers executed separately by the bailiff and the bench and the judicial competence of the municipal council, there were cases which were within the competence of both offices²⁶. In Łobżenica witchcraft was one of them²⁷.

In the 17th century some 30 witch trials were held at the Łobżenica court, of which only a few are mentioned in the monograph devoted to the town and its surroundings²⁸. We have detailed information only about 27 trials; the sources referring to the other cases are in such a state that it is impossible to research them (they are illegible). I will present here the Łobżenica trials in which men appeared as the main defendants or were called to testify.

The first trial known to us in which a man was the chief defendant opened on September 30, 1676, when Michal Hygman, an innkeeper from Trzeboń, standing before the Łobżenica court composed of Tomasz Postrzygacik, Jan Fengler and Mathias Łomański, accused Piotr Kaca, a sheep-farmer from Trzeboń, of witchcraft, saying that Kaca's witchcraft had harmed his health and caused damage in his cow-shed. Jan Kosior as well as Ernest and Jakub Borzymowski acted as witnesses. Jakub, a miller from Wiskitno, said that Kaca had stolen three lambs from him when he was in his service and had been punished for that deed by the deputy-starost Paweł Malinowski. Evidence was also given by

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ Z. Kulejewska-Topolska, *Nowe lokacje miejskie w Wielkopolsce*, p. 108.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 109.

²⁸ A. Mietz, J. Pakulski, *Łobżenica*, pp. 96-99.

Wojciech Płóciennik²⁹. It is not known how the case ended, but it is a fact that in the early modern times sheep-farmers were regarded as wizards. The occupation required greater qualifications than those a shepherd had to have, for a sheep-farmer had to know a lot about the physiological needs of the animals, e.g. how to look after the sheep when they had littered. The sheep's frequent diseases required veterinary knowledge, which frequently passed from father to son and was sometimes a secret knowledge. Some sheep-farmers acted as quack doctors in their village³⁰.

On May 29, 1690 another trial with a man as the main defendant started at Łobzenica. Michał, Walenty, Paweł and Andrzej stated under oath that their neighbour, Maciej Piskula from Piesna, had done them much damage by witchcraft. Jakub Grab, who was also an accuser when the case opened, retracted the accusation when asked to take the oath³¹. The accused asked "for water" (trial by water) for, as he told the court, "people maintain that water will clear the innocent of guilt"³². Immersion in water was accepted as evidence in witchcraft trials not only in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth but also in other European countries. Belief in the infallibility of the water ordeal was widespread in the rural societies of German countries in the 17th century. Women accused of witchcraft asked for the water ordeal themselves, to be exculpated from the charge³³. The practice was continued during the Age of Enlightenment; the reliability of the water test being recognised in many countries, including England³⁴.

²⁹ State Archives in Bydgoszcz, Documents of the town of Łobzenica (henceforward referred to as SA Bydgoszcz, DtŁ), call number 11, leaf 89v.

³⁰ B. Baranowski, *W kręgu upiórów i wilkołaków (Among Ghosts and Werewolves)*, Łódź 1981, p. 237.

³¹ SA Bydgoszcz, DtŁ, l. 521r.

³² *Ibidem*, l. 521v.

³³ Old Hasinowa, accused of witchcraft in the county of Lippe in 1663, not only asked to be subjected to the water ordeal but committed herself to pay the costs of the ordeal and of the trial if the ordeal did not clear her of the charge; R. Walz, *Hexenglaube und magische Kommunikation im Dorf der frühen Neuzeit. Die Verfolgungen in der Grafschaft Lippe*, Paderborn 1993, p. 356. See also: G. E. R. S. M. A. N. N., *Wasserproben und Hexenprozesse. Ansichten der Hexenverfolgung im Fürstbistum Münster*, "Westfälische Forschungen" 1998, Bd. 48, pp. 449-479; e a d e m, *Gottesurteil und Alltagsbrauch: Zur Bedeutung der Wasserprobe in der Frühen Neuzeit*, in: *Wasser. Internationaler Kongress im Forum Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle Bonn 1998*, ed. Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Wissenschaftliche Redaktion B. Busch and L. Förster, Bonn 2000, pp. 157-168.

Since the ordeal did not end as the accused hoped it would, the court decided to subject Piskuła to torture. The accused admitted under torture that he had learned witchcraft from a certain female Bobkowa from Piesna, with whom he had also been on the bare mountain outside Lechowo. They ate, drank and danced there. He testified that “young (women) also come there but they don’t let themselves be known”. During his stay on the bare mountain he played the pipe while the young Jan Figulus from Rataje played the violin. Piskuła added that he was in contact with a devil called Marcin who had promised him a good life and enough money; he had also found him a deaf servant³⁵. The mayor–bailiff court passed the verdict on June 1, 1690, sentencing Maciej Piskuła to the stake for witchcraft³⁶.

But that was not the end of the trial for Piskuła charged Jagna Figulusowa, her son Jan Figulus, her daughter Kaśka and her sisters Jadwiga Bosacka and Regina Bosacka *alias* Borowa with witchcraft³⁷. All the accused lived in the village of Rataje and they all asked to be subjected to the water ordeal. Their request was granted and on June 5, 1690 they underwent the test but they all floated on the surface. “It was said that the master (executioner) did not let the rope go, and kept raising them in the water with a pole”, but this turned out not to be true, “for the master treated them as the usual practice was”³⁸. The summoned complained that the water was “treacherous” and refused to admit guilt. They were therefore subjected to torture. The executioner started by torturing the old Figulusowa, but she did not admit to having done anything wrong; neither did her daughter Kaśka.

Jadwiga Bosacka was examined the next day (June 6), but since she did not want to admit of her own free will that she was a witch, she was subjected to torture. She admitted then that Parchal had been serving her for two years and wanted “to sleep with her but she did not agree”. She added that this Parchal, or rather a devil called Jakub, “who wore black clothes, promised

³⁴ B. P. Levačk, *Witch–Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, London–New York 1987, p. 211.

³⁵ SA Bydgoszcz, DtŁ, l. 522r.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, l. 532v.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, l. 532v–533r.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, l. 533r.

her wealth³⁹. She said she had been on the bare mountain where Jan Figulus played the violin⁴⁰.

Regina Borowa, Jadwiga's sister, admitted during the first round of tortures that she was living with Marcin, a devil who wore satin clothes. She had been sleeping with him; she said that a dozen years had passed since she renounced God. She had been many times to the bare mountain at Jastrzębiec outside Luchowo; before going there she used to smear her body with an ointment which she kept in a box in her chest. During the witches' sabbath she danced and drank with women: Piskulina and her daughter Anna (who had strangled the lord's sheep), with Jagna and Kachna Figulusowa. Her sister Jadwiga had also been there twice. They danced to violin music, played by the defunct Piskuła (the sentence must have been already carried out) and Jan Figulus. Before the water ordeal the devil promised he would add weight, "but this was but a needle, he left her in the lurch"⁴¹.

The next person to fall into the executioner's hands was Jan Figulus. During the first tortures he said that when he had once gone out of Łobżenica half a year before, a man crossed his path; the man, who "was dressed the French way in russet-coloured clothes, urged him to be his servant, promising him money and fine clothes, so he took up the service"⁴². He had been on the bare mountain outside Luchowo; he had gone there with other people, in a carriage. The daughter of Borowska served him as a wife there. He had also had the she-devil Baszka with whom he had intercourse whenever he wanted, as if she had been his wife. She used to wear a cotton frock and was young; it was "a greater pleasure to have her than to have other women, but she was cold"⁴³. They used to go to the bare mountain on Thursdays, they ate oil cakes there, played and blew the trumpet. He also had the devil Froncek in his service; he wore a red dress, "like the Polish noblemen". He had got him from Piskuła and it was through that devil that he did mischief. His mother's devil was called Józwa⁴⁴.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, l. 533a.

⁴⁰ Tortured again, Jadwiga Bosacka confirmed what she had confessed before and added that apart from Kuba she had two more devils, Joachim and Stach; *ibidem*, l. 534r.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, l. 533v.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, l. 533a.

During the second round of tortures old Figulusowa continued to assert she was not guilty. But her daughter, Kaśka, broke down and during the successive tortures admitted to having a devil Marcin, whom she had got a year before from a female innkeeper in Rataje. He wore red satin Polish garments and had "a sexual intercourse with her; his penis was as cold as a sword pommel"⁴⁵. She had been on the bare mountain with Stoikowa *alias* Kukawczyzna, Piekarka and Olejnicka, widow of Paweł whom Olejnicka was said to have strangled herself. Old Korpalka, who had an old grey-haired devil, Jan, who wore black clothes lined with white fox, was also there. Korpalka's daughter had "a sinful devil" whose name she did not know, he was followed by two servants. On the bare mountain he would sit on a gold chair and would "take two children, a boy and an older girl"⁴⁶.

The verdict was returned at Łobżenica on June 7, 1690. The judges sentenced Kaśka Figulusowa, her brother Jan Figulus, Jadwiga Bosacka and Regina Borowa to the stake because they had admitted to having contacts with the devil and harming people. Old Figulusowa escaped death for she had endured the tortures and had not admitted to being a witch. The sentence was carried out on June 26, 1690 in Plesna, the home village of the accusers and the accused⁴⁷.

Another man, Jan Censław, from the village of Młotkowice, stood trial after 1695. He was accused by his neighbour called Brach, a farmer who asserted that his sister had died because of Censław's witchery. Asked by the court how he knew that it was the accused who had caused the death, Brach said: "my sister had been quarrelling with his wife's sister, who threatened her saying 'you will come to a bad end', and this happened a week later, she was struck dumb, shrivelled up and died after two weeks"⁴⁸.

Jan Steinkie, an innkeeper from Młotkowice, was the first witness. Asked by the benchers of Łobżenica whether the accused was guilty of the act of witchery he was reproached with, he said: "I know nothing against this man Censław who is now in prison, all I know is what the neighbours are saying, I don't know, but

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, l. 534r.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, l. 534v.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, l. 620r.

I stand by them"⁴⁹. The head of the village, Jan, also told the court: "I know nothing against this Censław and do not suspect him of witchery but Brach came to me and complained that his sister had been harmed and they wanted to take her to his house but I prevented this"⁵⁰.

The other witnesses, Jakub Betkier, Michał Steinkie, Piotr Bucold, Ertman Litkie and Martin Steinkie were unable to give any proof that would have indicated that it was Censław who was responsible for the woman's death. The fact is that the accused must have been in conflict with the whole village for 14 persons suspected him of witchcraft. The reason for the conflict may have lain in what Martin Steinkie said during the trial; he testified that the accused had made threats, saying "I shall now be protected by spirits, you will give that corn back to me"⁵¹.

The judges did not know what to do, for according to them the accusers had no proof of guilt but they "were bent on not letting the accused go free, they wanted to make him swim and die, so that he should perish like a wizard"⁵². However, the court did not agree and sent the case to the owner of the estate⁵³. It is not known how the case ended.

In other trials held at the Łobżenica court men were frequently accused of having played various instruments during the witches' meetings on the bare mountain. During a trial held in the village of Sypniewo in the spring of 1663, Marcinoch from Witrogoszcz was accused of having played during a witches' sabbath⁵⁴. We do not know how the case ended. Grzech, a field worker from (Great) Dźwierszno was said to have played a pipe on the bare mountain, as was stated in 1673 by a woman Regina Skalicina from the village of Topola⁵⁵. Gerusza, a woman tried at the same time, stated that during the witches' sabbaths on the

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, l. 620v.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ *Ibidem*. "This is why the noble gentlemen have had to sign that the 14 of them accuse this Censław and will not withdraw the case, for they regard him as a sorcerer and want to put him under oath and finish him". We know from the document that Franciszek Szadekierski, Jerzy Ottlob, Jan Fenger, Marcin Wysocki, Jan Melka and Marcin Dydrychowski were judges in this case.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, l. 241v.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, l. 351r.

bare mountain two peasants played some instrument, "they knew nothing about sorcery, they could only play". These were Wojciech Wolnik (Wolny) from Suchoręczek and the tailor Jan Ślepek (Szlepek)⁵⁶. The accused men probably saved their necks and were not tortured for Skalicina, who was sentenced to death, withdrew her accusations⁵⁷.

During a trial which opened on August 6, 1677, Regina Sobieska, accused of sorcery, testified that when she was on the bare mountain, a young farm-hand from Witrogoszcz, Fałek (Falek; Walek), dressed in a deep-blue coat, played for the dancers. She had danced two dances to his music⁵⁸. During a second round of tortures she mentioned Grzech, a farm-hand from Duża (Długa) Wieś (Dźwierszno Duże) who, like Fałek (Walek), played on the wooden plough⁵⁹. There is no evidence of their having been brought to court.

Grzech was also mentioned as a frequenter of the bare mountain by Zofia Szewcowa, one of the accused in the trial held at Mała Wieś (Dźwierszno Małe) in the spring of 1678. He was said to play on his fingers with a coin. The woman Agnieszka Karczmarka also accused him of frequenting the bare mountain, but during a successive interrogation she retracted her charge, saying that she had accused him out of hatred⁶⁰. During a second round of tortures Szewcowa testified that the tailor Jan Ślepek had been playing on the bare mountain and that after "taking a nail out of a board", he played so that the witches could dance⁶¹.

The peasant woman Regina, another defendant in this trial, also mentioned Fałek (Walek) from Witrogoszcz and the tailor Jan Ślepek; according to her, Fałek used to play the pipe and the tailor Ślepek played on the needle⁶². The tailor Ślepek was acquitted⁶³, but we do not know what happened to the other male defendants.

The woman Małgorzata Adamowa, who came up for trial in the manor house at Dźwierszno Duże in April 1679, testified that witches danced on the bare mountain to the music which the

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, l. 352r.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, l. 98r.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, l. 98v.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, l. 106v.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, l. 107v.

⁶² *Ibidem*, l. 108r.

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

tailor from Dźwierzno played on the needle, Fałek (Walek) from Witrogoszcz on the nail and Duży (the big one) on a fish's tail⁶⁴. The court decided that Małgorzata Adamowa was a witch and sent her to the stake⁶⁵. The verdict does not say anything about the men mentioned by her.

On July 11, 1678, another trial opened at Witrogoszcz before the Łobżenica court. Dorota Dudzina, summoned to the court, testified that when she was on the bare mountain she could not recognise any of the women present there for they were all covered, but she recognised the tailor Ślepak who was playing on the needle, and Fałek (Walek), Kasprowy's farm-hand, who was playing on the wooden plough⁶⁶. Another of the accused women, Katarzyna Maćkowa, from Izdebki, testified that she had often been on the bare mountain, on "the white marshes"; it was always on the Thursday after a new moon, and the tailor Ślepak played there on the needle. Since the main accused, Katarzyna Matyczka, withdrew her accusations of the men before her death, they were acquitted⁶⁷.

The tailor Ślepak appeared again in the trial of two peasant women from the village of Witrogoszcz, Barba Krolka and Jadwiga Szyszyna. Their trial opened at Witrogoszcz on August 1, 1679. During a second round of tortures Barba Krolka named several female witches and said that the tailor Jan (Ślepak?) from Dźwierzno, who played on the needle, and Fałek, who played on the wooden plough, were also engaged in witchcraft⁶⁸. Nothing happened to them.

During a sabbath Wojciech Drabczyk played for the witches for an hour on the needle; his name was mentioned during a trial held in the village of Liszkowo in 1684⁶⁹. During the interrogation, one of the accused women, Regina Kasprowa, asked whether this was not "despicable, unbelievable music", replied: "heigh-ho, it's beautiful music"⁷⁰. Regina Pasturka also said that Wojciech Drabczyk "played on various instruments, on the needle and on

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, l. 137v.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, l. 138v.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, l. 109v.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, l. 113r.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, l. 102v.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, l. 304v.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, l. 308v.

the wooden plough; if he started playing here for somebody, that person would have to dance round the hut, just as we did in the innkeeper's cottage⁷¹. It seems that Drabczyk too saved his neck

In the trial which started in the village of Samostrzele on June 7, 1684 Kuba Kupczyk was charged with playing on the rolling pin for the witches on the bare mountain⁷². Regina Budnicka testified that it was Łowis from Nakło who played for the dancing witches on the pipe and that he would mount on the top of the table when playing⁷³. It is not known what happened to the two male suspects.

Maciej Piskula from Plesna, accused of causing damage to his neighbours by witchcraft, admitted that he had played the pipe on the bare mountain⁷⁴. He added that the young man Jan Figulus from Rataje had played violin with him. Both men were sent to the stake.

During a trial which opened in the village of Młotkowo on May 29, 1692, Katarzyna, a fisherwoman from Falmierowo, said that a certain Jan Papieżów had been receiving 3 groschen for playing the violin for the witches on the bare mountain. Papieżów was also said to have acted as the godfather of Katarzyna during her diabolical baptism when she had to renounce God and the Holy Virgin⁷⁵. The fact that he had played on the needle during the witches' meetings was confirmed by another female defendant, Katarzyna Drelina (Derlina?) from Gromadno. He was therefore subjected to the water trial but since he stayed on the surface, he was submitted to torture. He admitted he had often been on the bare mountain but said he did not know many witches; he had only met a woman, Błachowa from Falmierowo. That was not enough for the judges; "he was tortured as hard as this was possible but he did not say anything more, he only kept prattling"⁷⁶. The verdict is not known.

During a trial which started in the village of Samostrzele on June 7, 1684, one of the accused women, Zofia Mikołajowa, testified that a certain Kuklik was the "procurator" of all witches

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, l. 309v.

⁷² *Ibidem*, l. 318r.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, l. 319r.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, l. 522r.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, l. 584r.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, l. 587v.

who met on the bare mountain; he had keys "to everything"⁷⁷. The fact that Kuklik "ruled" on the bare mountain was confirmed by Regina Budnicka under torture⁷⁸. It is not known how the trial ended for him, not even whether he was brought to court.

It is worth adding that in the trials held at the Łobżenica court it was usually men who accused women, blaming them for practising harmful magic as a result of which they suffered losses in property or impairment of health. They were usually believed but it did sometimes happen that the Łobżenica court rejected their testimonies. On March 8, 1680, Michał Kustorek, a peasant from the village of Żelazno, appeared at the Łobżenica court and accused Regina Kuklikowa, a woman from the same village of witchcraft. Asked by the court how he knew this was witchcraft and what evidence he had, he replied that two years before a speckled dog had attacked his lambs, "goring 18 of them, so it could not have been an ordinary dog"⁷⁹. Another proof that Kuklikowa was practising witchcraft was the fact that the office in Kołdrąbsk⁸⁰ which he had consulted about this matter gave him a sacred herb and told him that the person who had done him wrong would come to him; and it was Kuklikowa who appeared in his house.

Another accuser was Wojciech, an innkeeper from Żelazno, who also testified against Regina Kuklikowa, charging her with witchcraft. "Asked about the reasons of his accusation and whether he could prove this, for human health was at stake", he replied that the defendant's son had told him about this before the carnival.

The third to testify was Wojciech Wapień, a rustic, who said that he could accuse neither Kuklikowa nor her son of witchcraft "for I know nothing against them except that Kuklik had taken my garden, and I ask the court to leave me in peace"⁸¹. Asked why he had come to the court although he had no complaint, he replied that Kustorek and the innkeeper had urged him to do so.

After a consultation the court stated that the accusers had not proved their charges against Kuklikowa "by any lawful evi-

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, l. 317v.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, l. 319r.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, l. 403r.

⁸⁰ It is not clear what place Kustorek had in mind; the nearest place with a similar name was Kołdrąb near Janowiec Wielkopolski.

⁸¹ SA Bydgoszcz, DŁ, l. 430r.

dence which they should have supplied" and therefore cleared Regina Kuklikowa of the charge⁸². Michał Kustorek and the innkeeper Wojciech were sentenced to two weeks in prison for having accused an innocent person without having any proof of her guilt. They were also ordered "to restore (Kuklikowa's) good name among the community"⁸³ and to pay a 50 marc fine to the court.

The wives of men who were proven guilty of witchcraft and burnt could easily be accused too. As an example let us cite the wife of Maciej Piskula from Piesna who was burnt at the stake on June 26, 1690. On April 7, 1691 a successive trial began in the village of Piesna in the presence of the prosecutor Jan Florkowski and three assessors: Fabian Słota (?), Maciej Duszkiewicz and Kazimierz Florkowski. The first to testify was Jan from Wacek's farm who said: "I give up on her for I don't want to contribute to her death". He was referring to Katarzyna Piskula who was accused of witchcraft. But Michał Zedla told the court that ever since Piskulina (Katarzyna Piskula) came to pluck cabbage in his garden the cabbage "has refused to grow". He admitted that he had once killed two geese which belonged to Piskulina but he had found them in his rye field. Soon after this event three of his geese got a nasty twist in their necks. During a quarrel which arose between them Piskulina threatened him "you will soon go to the dogs on this field"⁸⁴.

The next to testify against Katarzyna Piskula was Paweł from Gnat's farm who told the judges how five of his horses and five oxen died. Before this happened Piskula's oxen had got into his barley, so he ordered his farm-hand to drive them into Piskula's barley. The same night a wolf ate his mare "just behind the fence". Paweł then killed Piskula's goose which he had caught in his rye and threw the carcass on the road. "Piskula and Piskulina then shouted at me, blustering out threats, and the next day an ox of mine which I had put out to pasture died". Paweł added: "and as I testified on oath against the deceased (Piskula), I can now testify on oath against her, for all this damage could have only been done by Piskulina". The Jews were giving him 50 Polish zlotys for the ox which died through Piskulina's witchcraft. He added that

⁸² *Ibidem*, l. 403v.

⁸³ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, l. 554r.

during a quarrel Piskulina told him: "you'll have no bread until hair grows on your hand"⁸⁵.

Three days later, on April 10, Piskulina "stretched during the first round of tortures" confessed that she had killed Paweł's goose behind her barn. She also admitted that when she was a small girl and lived with her parents at Sławianowo, she had killed the lord's lamb which was lying in a ditch by the road⁸⁶. Piskulina was subjected to another two rounds of torture on the same day. During the second lawful round she refused to plead guilty, saying that she was innocent of the acts imputed to her. Tortured for the third time, she admitted she had frequented the meetings on the bare mountain, where dance music was played on goat's horns and the devil wore a green dress. She started going to the bare mountain after the death of her husband. Piskulina was tortured for more than an hour, which was against the law, and the confession was extorted after that time: "and this confession was after an hour had passed, the woman was in pain, her arms were swollen and sore all over because of the ropes, so that it was difficult to fasten the ropes so they had to put a kerchief on her body to bound her wrists"⁸⁷. We do not know how the trial ended but since her husband had been executed as a sorcerer and she herself admitted to having visited the bare mountain, it can be assumed that Piskulina too was sent to the stake as a witch.

Thirty-two women and three men were accused during the 26 better known witch trials held by the Łobżenica court⁸⁸. While testifying, the accused called 132 women (including two who had already been burnt as witches) and 15 men to witness⁸⁹. Of these 15 men one, the tailor Jan Ślepek from Dźwierzno, was called to witness in five trials, being named as the man who played dancing tunes on the bare mountain. Fałek (Falek, Walek), the farm-hand from Witrogoszcz was summoned four times.

Let us add that men were tried by the municipal court at Łobżenica during the years when, according to Stanisław Salmonowicz

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, l. 554v.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, l. 554v-555r.

⁸⁸ These trials will be dealt with in a separate study.

⁸⁹ Let us emphasise that Jan Figulus was at first called to witness and later underwent trial.

witch-hunting reached its apogee in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, that is, in 1670-1730⁹⁰.

Of the above-mentioned 164 women accused of black magic and contacts with the devil, 36 were sentenced by the judges to the stake. Of the 17 men accused or suspected of witchcraft or participation in meetings on the bare mountain, two were sent to the stake, Maciej Piskula and Jan Figulus. In view of the ratio of women to men (164:17), it can be said that every tenth person tried by the Łobżenica court for witchcraft was a man.

Let us add for the sake of comparison that in the well known witch trials held in the Święty Krzyż region in the 17th and 18th centuries, mainly at the municipal court of Chęciny, at least 100 women were accused of witchcraft; ca 15% were sentenced to be burnt. During the same period only four men were accused of witchcraft in that region, and none was sentenced to death⁹¹. But the court in the town of Kleczewo, on the border between Great Poland and Kujawy, held several score trials in 1624-1700 in which 116 persons, 111 women and only 5 men, were accused of witchcraft⁹². It cannot therefore be said that every fourth person accused of witchcraft in the Commonwealth was of the male sex, as was the case in Germany. To determine more accurately the ratio of women to men among persons accused of and tried for witchcraft in Great Poland and other regions of the Commonwealth further research is needed.

(Translated by Janina Dorosz)

⁹⁰ S. Salmonowicz, *Procesy o czary w Polsce. Próba rozważań modelowych*, p. 314.

⁹¹ J. Wijaczka, *Procesy o czary w regionie świętokrzyskim w XVII-XVIII wieku (Witch Trials in the Święty Krzyż Region in the 17th and 18th Centuries)*, in: *Z przeszłości regionu świętokrzyskiego od XVI do XX wieku. Materiały konferencji naukowej, Kielce, 8 kwietnia 2003*, ed. J. Wijaczka, Kielce 2003, p. 71.

⁹² T. Wiślicz, *Tło społeczne procesów o czary w Kleczewie i okolicy. Próba ujęcia liczbowego (The Social Background of the Witch Trials in Kleczew and Its Environs. Tentative Formulation in Numbers)*, in: *Cywilizacja prowincji Rzeczypospolitej szlacheckiej*, ed. A. Jankowski and A. Klonder, Bydgoszcz 2004, p. 231 and diagram 12 on p. 243.