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No One Expects the Spanish Inquisition: Witchcraft Trials in Basque Spain and Southwestern Germany

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No One Expects the Spanish Inquisition: Witchcraft Trials in Basque Spain and
Southwestern Germany

By

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Of the Requirements for
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ABSTRACT

STEED, ALEXANDRA No One Expects the Spanish Inquisition: Witchcraft Trials in
Basque Spain and Southwestern Germany
ADVISOR: Steven Sargent

The age of witch trials lasted from 1450 to 1750 and encompassed most of Western Europe. Seventy-five percent of all witchcraft trials took place in Germany, and 480 occurred in Southwestern Germany. Germany lacked centralized leadership, and lack of control over a region's governing body meant a prince or a bishop could burn as many people as he saw fit. The trials in Southwestern Germany lasted from 1562 to 1684 and killed between 1,000 and 1,500 people.

The trials in Southwestern Germany are Central because they all shared similar elements. Many of the towns were undergoing social shifts because of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. They relied heavily on the information in the *Malleus Maleficarum* by Kramer and Sprenger, which led to women, especially those of the lower classes, being the primary victims. By contrast, few men and children were accused and even fewer were executed. Finally, hundreds of people were executed by strangulation and their bodies burned.

Unlike the German trials, the Basque trials were part of the Periphery. Peripheral trials are more difficult to categorize because the nature of the trials in the periphery is different. The Basque trials lasted from 1609 to 1614 and had several factors that differentiated them from central trials: the number of deaths, the involvement of the Inquisition, child witches, and skeptics. More than 7,000 witches were accused over the course of the Basque trials, but only eleven people were executed, five burned in effigy and six burned alive.

The largest group of accused was children, while adult men and women were accused almost equally. The Edict of Grace probably led to the large number of people being accused. Yet despite the large number of accusations and the potential for mass executions, most people escaped with little punishment. The Spanish Inquisition had sole jurisdiction over cases of superstition, including witchcraft, and this meant that the Basque trials had a system of checks and balances in place that could prevent any one figure, secular or otherwise, from gaining too much power. The Inquisition maintained control and ensured that no one could create hysterical witch-hunts in the Basque region.

Moreover, skeptics like Inquisitor Salazar and Bishop Figueroa pointed out the flaws in the Basque accusations. Bishop Figueroa wrote the Inquisition and encouraged them to reject the *Malleus Maleficarum*, because he thought the book was nonsense. Inquisitor Salazar's reports explained that he had tested much of the evidence himself and the results were inconclusive. Salazar also wrote that he thought the confessions were false and were the result of fear inspired by local authorities.

The concept of the witch in the Spanish Basque Provinces – someone who had been seduced by the Devil, renounced their Christianity, and used their powers to harm the people around them – was similar to the witch concept that existed in the central trial. However, Basque trials differed from the Central trials because of the trials themselves and how they were handled.

Chapter I: Background to Witchcraft Hunts and Trials

Public memory focused on the larger than life trials in areas like Switzerland, France, and the Holy Roman Empire. In these trials a convicted witch would often be strangled or garroted and then their corpses would be burned as a means of purification.¹ During the Swiss witchcraft trials from 1540 to 1782 nearly 10,000 witches were tried and 5,000 were executed.² In the French witchcraft trials from 1542 to 1679, 3,000 people were tried and 1,000 people were executed legally and 300 were executed illegally.³ The Holy Roman Empire controlled much of western and west-central Europe. Focusing only on German-speaking territories from 1530 and 1750, between 20,000 and 25,000 people were executed.⁴

Before the 1420s the notion of the maleficarum and Devil worshipping witch that used violent magic against her neighbors was almost non-existent. During the early 1300s accused witches were usually magicians that used magic to try and further their political career. From 1330 to 1375 political cases halted and more trials for sorcery appeared, but with little mention of maleficarum or diabolism. From 1375 to 1420 numbers accusation and trials rose and charges for diabolism became more common.⁵ Beginning in 1420 the stereotypical concept of the witch arose and flourished. These fifteenth century trials “denote the beginning of the European witch-hunt.” The 1400s also produced the first treatise on witchcraft, The

¹ Brian P Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2016), 86-87.

² Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 195.

³ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 198.

⁴ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 192-93.

⁵ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 184-85.

Malleus Maleficarum.⁶

The *Malleus Maleficarum*, or the Hammer of Witches, by Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger was written in 1486 in Germany. Kramer and Sprenger were two Catholic clergymen who wrote the *Malleus Maleficarum* in response to the lack of centralized knowledge about witches and witchcraft trials. The *Malleus* shows the prevailing attitudes toward women as well as the common procedures in witch hunting and in the trials within center territories.⁷ Kramer and Sprenger give detailed explanations as to why women were more likely to become witches than men. Women were wicked, overly emotional, more superstitious, and more impressionable. The witches were temptresses, they gossiped, and they were weaker than men both physically and intellectually.⁸ These were the prevailing theories about women in central regions like Germany. Although some women might have been good and trustworthy, in the eyes of men like Kramer and Sprenger they were all predisposed to fall under the power of the Devil and become witches.

Once they fell under the Devil's spell, the witches could inflict real damage on the world around them and especially on the men around them. Kramer and Sprenger believed witches could hurt or kill livestock, prevent procreation, "deprive a man of his virile member," change people into animals, possess people, kill children, and change the weather.⁹ The aim of the *Malleus Maleficarum* was to educate people on the existence of witches, the danger they posed to others, and

⁶ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 185.

⁷ Heinrich Kramer and Jakob Sprenger, *The Malleus Maleficarum of Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), viii-x.

⁸ Kramer and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, 43-45 & 47.

⁹ Kramer and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, 114, 117, 118, 122, 137, 140, & 147.

how to catch and kill them. The *Malleus* is specific when it comes to the procedure of interrogating and prosecuting witches. Kramer and Sprenger describe how to choose witnesses, how to examine the witches, whether or not to imprison a witch, whether a witch should be allowed a barrister, how to sentence a witch, and what their punishment should be.¹⁰ The papal bull written by Pope Innocent VIII, at the beginning of the book gave it credence in the eyes of magistrates and other authorities.¹¹ This book was propaganda against women from two men who genuinely believed that women were the cause of all the problems in the world. Kramer and Sprenger believed that real evil existed and in that time came in the form of the witches that hurt and killed the people, animals, and crops around them for no other reason than a pact with the Devil. This book helped spread the stereotypical concept of witches that, in later years, became more damaging and led to larger more violent trials than had existed before.

The central trials “foundations in theology and law were everywhere the same. Their victims were mostly women. They occurred in the period 1450 to 1750, and their history is coincident with that of...the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.”¹² Most areas had similar concepts of witches and witchcraft: a pact with the Devil, sex with the Devil, a Sabbath, flight, maleficarum, and all of the witches had a demon or familiar. The witches were almost always women. Few men and children were accused and executed in central trials, because women were thought to be more susceptible to temptation than others and even then the

¹⁰ Kramer and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, 205-209, 214, 217, 227, 233, & 240.

¹¹ Kramer and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, viii-x.

¹² Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen, *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centers and Peripheries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 9.

stereotypical witch was female.¹³ The women accused were often easy scapegoats for tragedies like the Plague or famine. Middle aged or elderly women were typical victims especially if they had no husband or other family to help them. They often had similar personalities or were accused of similar behavior. Some had exhibited signs of dementia, they often cursed at their neighbors, or were involved in certain vices like lust.¹⁴ Many of the women were healers or wise women and others were midwives, because their jobs involved a bit of white magic.¹⁵ Social and economic status had an impact on who could be accused, but high social and economic status did not necessarily mean one would escape accusations of witchcraft. People from lower classes were accused more often than those from upper classes. However when trials became more politically motivated the rich and the nobles often came under attack.¹⁶

The Center and the Periphery

Nearly seventy-five percent of witchcraft trials took place in Germany and of those 480 occurred in Southwestern Germany between 1562 and 1684. During the various trials Southwestern Germany was experiencing the confusion and chaos of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Making the situation more difficult, Germany was not at this point a unified nation. "The judicial system was highly decentralized...and the degree of central control within each province varied widely."¹⁷ The country was divided into various principalities and this lack of

¹³ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 129 & 131.

¹⁴ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 146.

¹⁵ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 133.

¹⁶ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 143-144.

¹⁷ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 196.

centralized leadership and no control over a regions governing body meant a prince or a bishop could burn as many people as they saw fit.¹⁸ Between 1562 and 1684 238 men and 1,050 women were accused. Eighty-two percent of those accused and tried were women. The trials in Southwestern Germany were characteristic examples of central trials. Many of the towns were undergoing social shifts because of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Women were the primary victims with men and children only being accused occasionally. Many of the women accused were poor until some of the trials got more out of control and accusations worked their way up the totem pole. The Holy Roman Empire executed around 45,00 people for witchcraft. The trials in Southwestern Germany lasted from 1562-1684 and killed between 1,000 and 1,500 people out of about 3,000 trials.¹⁹

The Basque trials were almost completely different from the trials in Southwestern Germany. These trials lasted from 1609 to 1614 and in that time more than 7,000 witches were accused and examined. Of those only eleven people were executed, five burned in effigy and six burned alive.²⁰ The number of people executed is the biggest difference between the Southwestern German trials and the Basque trials. However, there are other differences that are not as glaringly obvious that set the Basque trials apart. The first being the accusers and the accused. In the Basque trials children were the largest group of people accused and they in turn accused hundreds of other people. Adult men and women were accused at nearly equal rates, but the child witches of the Basque trials are unique. Most witchcraft

¹⁸ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 196.

¹⁹ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 20-21.

²⁰ Gustav Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate: Basque Witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition, 1609-1614* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1980), 198-200.

trials end almost immediately after children become involved. When children became the primary focus for a part of the Basque trials the number of accusations skyrocketed because scared children were being interrogated by their priests and parents. However, due to the Edict of Grace all of the people accused escaped with a scolding and little other punishment.²¹

The next difference was how the Basque trials were handled. In Spain the Spanish Inquisition had sole jurisdiction over cases of superstition, including witchcraft. This meant the Basque trials had a system of checks and balances in place that would prevent any one figure, secular or otherwise, from gaining too much power over those accused. The inquisitors managing the Tribunal at Logroño, Becerra, Valle, and Salazar, all reported to a council in Madrid who reported to the Inquisitor General who, technically, reported to the King of Spain.²² The Inquisition kept tight control and ensured no one would blow the Basque trials out of proportion and create the large violent hysteria that enveloped countries like Germany. Because of the inquisition the Basque trials had no unsanctioned arrests, torture, or deaths. People actually preferred to be interrogated by the Inquisition rather than local authorities because the Inquisition was less cruel in this case.²³

Another factor that helped keep the Basque trials under control were the skeptics. Figures like Inquisitor Salazar and the Bishop of Pamplona Antonio Venegas de Figueroa pointed out the flaws in the Basque trials especially in the

²¹ Alonso de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents: Inquisitor Alonso de Salazar Frías and Others on the Basque Witch Persecution*. Edited by Gustav Henningsen (Boston: Brill, 2004), 79.

²² William D. Phillips and Carla Rahn Phillips, *A Concise History of Spain* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 150.

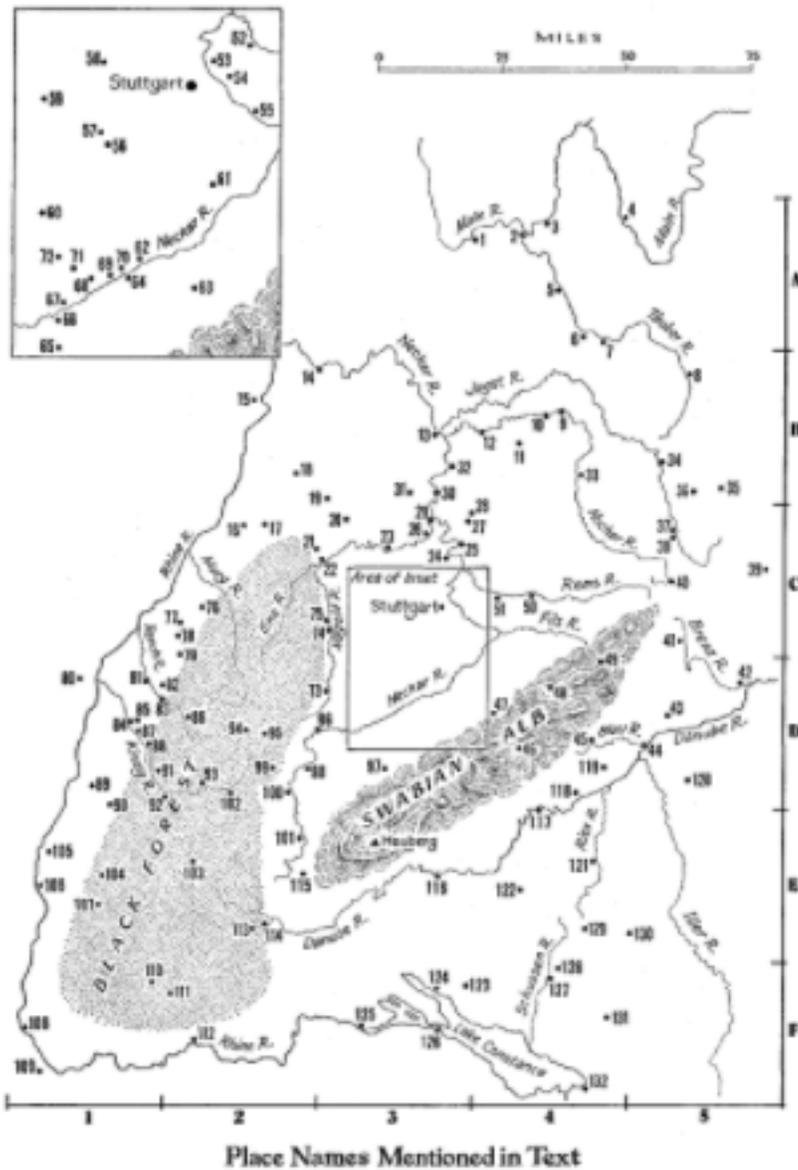
²³ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 63.

evidence and the confessions. Salazar's reports explained that he had tested much of the evidence himself and the results were inconclusive should not be used in a trial.²⁴ Salazar also wrote that he thought the confessions were false and were the result of fear inspired by local authorities, priests, and family members.²⁵ Due to these factors, the number of deaths, the Inquisition, the child witches, and the skeptics, the Basque trials are part of the periphery. These elements of the Basque trials are uncommon, especially when compared to other witchcraft trials.

²⁴ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 268.

²⁵ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 340.

Chapter II: The Center: German Witchcraft Trials



Patterns of the Trials in Southwestern Germany

Religion played a large part in sparking and driving the trials in Southwestern Germany. The Reformation took shape over several years, from about 1517 to 1648, and created an atmosphere of panic and paranoia, particularly in

areas like Wiesensteig, which shifted between Protestant and Catholic. However, while the religious confusion and controversy helped create the environment necessary to start witchcraft trials people were rarely, if ever, targeted based on their religion. The number of trials in Southwestern Germany between 1561 and 1670 rose as the years passed and reached shocking heights between 1570 and 1640. The largest number of trials Southwestern Germany had in one year was fifty-two trials and the least was four. In total Southwestern Germany held nearly 480 trials. Of those 163 were Protestant and 317 were Catholic. The Catholic trials were also more violent and ended in more executions. The total number of people executed in Protestant trials was 702 while the total number of people executed in Catholic trials was 2,527.²⁶

The victims of these trials were primarily women. In European Witchcraft trials the percentage of accused witches that were women surpassed seventy-five percent. In central regions that percentage could have been as high as ninety percent.²⁷ While some men and children were occasionally accused, these denunciations happened less often. In Southwestern Germany between 1562 and 1684 238 men and 1,050 women were accused. Eighty-two percent of those accused in Southwestern Germany were women.²⁸ In the larger Germanic territory, the Holy Roman Empire, between 1530 and 1730, 4,575 men were accused and 19,050 women were accused. seventy-six percent of the accused of the Holy Roman Empire

²⁶ Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen, *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centers and Peripheries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 32.

²⁷ Brian P Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2016), 128.

²⁸ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 129.

were women.²⁹ Children were accused in smaller amounts and more often than not when accusations against children started growing the trials ended so little information remains.³⁰

Trials in Germany

Wiesensteig (1562-1583)

The first large witch-hunt in Southwestern Germany took place in Wiesensteig in Helfenstein on the Fils River. In the sixteenth century this area of Germany was still largely Catholic. Around the year 1555, however, popular opinion demanded reform. A famous theologian, Jacob Andre, was introduced to the area and his sermons came after similar preachings in areas that were undergoing reform. Many of the reformers argued among themselves, causing a great deal of discord. Ulrich von Helfenstein, an ardent reformer in Wiesensteig, was enticed back to Catholicism in 1567 by his wife and the death of his brother. He remained Catholic despite attempts to coax him back to the Reformation.³¹

This struggle caused Ulrich a great deal of personal tumult, and he lashed out against perceived witches and had several women arrested. The arrests followed an awful storm on August third, which caused serious damage. Another city, Esslingen, started a witch-hunt around the same time and wrote letters to Ulrich in Wiesensteig to find out how to proceed. Ulrich's letters reveal that he had already executed six of the accused witches. In the Esslingen cases the three women who were arrested were released. Ulrich took the opposite approach. Disgusted with

²⁹ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 129.

³⁰ H. C. Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany: 1562-1684, The Social and Intellectual Foundations* (Stanford: Calif., Stanford University Press, 1972), 160.

³¹ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 88.

leniency, Ulrich had already executed sixty-one women by December 1562. Unfortunately, due to a large fire in 1648 many of the trial documents were destroyed, and most of the information involving this trial was lost.³² The area of Wiesensteig fluctuated between Catholicism and Protestantism before the trials started. When the town was Catholic more witches were burned. Aside from the Ulrich trial in 1562, twenty-five witches were executed in 1583, fourteen were executed in 1605, and four witches were executed in 1611.³³

Rottenburg and Horb (1578-1609)

The town of Rottenburg and Horb in the county of Hohenberg hosted another large trial. By 1528 Rottenburg suspected a witchcraft problem due to the creation of a “truth potion” that forced suspects to confess even when torture failed. Horb began executing witches in 1559, but Rottenburg avoided executions until 1578. From 1578 until 1585 Rottenburg and Horb collectively executed 67 witches.³⁴ After the trials in 1585 magistrates in Rottenburg ordered a pause because Rottenburg was running out of women. However, Horb took up their trials again in 1589 and burned five women suspected made a pact with the devil and were trying to hurt people. Rottenburg burned three more witches later that year.³⁵

Some Protestants made accusations against the trials in Rottenburg and Horb, claiming that the Catholics were using the trials to rid the area of Protestants. However, these trials followed the typical pattern: one witch would denounce the others and eventually, over the course of the trials, the social status of the victims

³² Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 89.

³³ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 90.

³⁴ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 90-1.

³⁵ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 91.

rose until even a member of the minor nobility was accused.³⁶ These trials ended with the nobility stepping in to save one of their own and bribing the officials with 10,000 gulden and the return of Catholicism to certain reformed lands, to end the trials.³⁷ The very worst trials in Rottenburg took place in 1596 when thirty- five witches were executed. The records from 19 of these trials indicate that the accused women confessed that they had been enticed by the Devil and claimed that he had made them rich.

The pattern of the 1589 trial repeated itself in this trial and others in 1597, 1598, 1599, 1600, and 1601. During these trials 58 people were executed in total.³⁸ In a trial in 1602 a famous witch hunter, Hans Georg Hallmayer, was accused of having sex with the Devil and was arrested. He later died in his cell. When members of the highest social levels and officials were accused, Rottenburg and Horb descended into panic. The trials continued through 1613, when a lawyer from the University of Tubingen was consulted and advised the officials in Rottenburg that the evidence they had been using to convict was not sufficient. However, this advice came too late and over the course of thirty years 150 people were executed.³⁹

Obermarchtal (1586-1588)

Obermarchtal, an imperial abbey, suffered extensive witchcraft trials in the 1580's, and the trials were primarily to drain the surrounding countryside of money. The witches of Obermarchtal were poor and therefore any witch hunting done in the area was not lucrative. However, the abbot of Obermarchtal was more

³⁶ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 91.

³⁷ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 92.

³⁸ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 93.

³⁹ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 94.

interested in saving the abbey from debt than anything else. This may have been the cause for the sharp spike in witch-hunts and trials in the 1580's. The population of Obermarchtal was around 700. The trials claimed the lives of about seven percent of the inhabitants. This trial followed the same template as those in Rottenburg. One witch was accused, she accused others, and these denunciations often led to torture to try and extract a confession. Unfortunately, few of the trial records from this set of trials survived, leading to more questions than answers.⁴⁰

Ellwangen (1611-1618)

In the *Furstpropstei* of Ellwangen was a Catholic territory until 1460, when Pope Pius II changed the local monastery to a secular collegiate chapter. This secularization meant that members of the clergy no longer had to follow the rules of Saint Benedict and secular activities were not under any external supervision. During the sixteenth century, the *Furstpropstei* started to shift their judicial procedure to an inquisitorial form. Johann Christoph von Westerson wrote an instruction on the new trial procedures. It included such guidelines as reduction of torture and a shorter trial. Naturally, this ideal was rarely followed closely.⁴¹ In trials during 1528 and 1588 through 1589, 13 people were executed, but the years before these large trials were quiet. Just before 1611 Ellwangen suffered several violent storms, the death of several livestock, and a bout of the plague.

In April of 1611, 70-year-old Barbara Rufin was arrested, beginning a series of violent trials that lasted until 1618. Barbara underwent horrific torture on seven separate occasions before she broke and confessed, naming other witches in the

⁴⁰ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 97-8.

⁴¹ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 98-9.

process. As the trials proceeded, the examiners became more efficient in their torture and in forcing confessions. Heightening the panic, three priests and an organist from the church were accused, found guilty, and executed in 1615.⁴² These accusations of honorable men and women, many of whom were pillars of the community, shook everyone's beliefs and suddenly it seemed more likely to the public that anyone could be a witch. When the witches confessed they usually claimed to have had sex with the devil, even though they did not know he was the Devil at first, having desecrated the holy sacrament, and *maleficia*.⁴³ In each of the cases the witches were presumed guilty from the moment they were accused. Sometimes their property was confiscated. Due to the hysteria and wild rumors some people started turning themselves into the officials rather than waiting to be accused.⁴⁴

The Ellwangen officials never heeded the protests against the trials, one made by a judge trying unsuccessfully to save his wife before he himself was accused. A neighboring territory, Ottingen, attacked Ellwangen's motives for perpetuating the trials to stock their treasury with the convicted witches' possessions even going so far as to accuse Ellwangen of malfeasance. The Ellwangen officials believed they "were justified in seeking out witches in order to convert them to God and save their eternal souls" and everyone should be grateful for their efforts⁴⁵ All of the witches had admitted to serious secular crimes, including murder, as well as spiritual crimes, and this further relieved the officials of guilt. However,

⁴² Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 103-04.

⁴³ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 106.

⁴⁴ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 107-08.

⁴⁵ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 110.

despite the complaints, Ellwangen's status and independence made it practically untouchable. By 1618 the officials, possibly out of regret or fear of loss of trade, ended the trials after nearly 450 people died.⁴⁶

Schwäbisch Gmünd (1613-1617)

Schwäbisch Gmünd was an imperial city that retained its Catholicism during the Reformation. In the time before the Thirty Years War, Schwäbisch Gmünd underwent a series of bad storms and cattle disease. However, the witch hysteria in Schwäbisch Gmünd was likely caused by the letters from Ellwangen, detailing their trials. Like the trials in Ellwangen, Schwäbisch Gmünd's trials focused heavily on the witches' sexual escapades with the Devil. However, unique to the Schwäbisch Gmünd, the interest in the sexual accusations did not result in accusations of impotence and infertility as was documented in the *Malleus Maleficarum*. The good people of Schwäbisch Gmünd happily took the denunciations of the accused witches as fact. One woman denounced over two hundred people, and the trials started in 1613. By 1617 the accusations had started reaching people of high status, and killing several people including a priest.⁴⁷ Officials in Schwäbisch Gmünd confiscated the accused's property and added it to their own treasury. Dr. Leonhard Kager, a lawyer and counselor, was consulted about the cases and he found that the evidence presented in the cases, the witches' powers and the confessions, was weak. The witches' powers were illusions and delusions and the confessions were forced and feeble and the denunciations were worthless. However, Kager strongly believed in witchcraft and "insisted on sharply separating harmful magic, known as maleficium,

⁴⁶ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 111-112.

⁴⁷ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 113.

from a mere pact with the devil."⁴⁸ Kager's opinions did not make him popular in Schwäbisch Gmünd. Ultimately, despite his assessment, The Schwäbisch Gmünd trials killed at least 40 people.⁴⁹

Ortenau (1627-1630) and Offenburg (1627-1629)

Ortenau and Offenburg, two cities along the Rhine River, fought almost constantly due to the religious strife caused by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. However, they agreed on witchcraft and the dangers witches posed and often joined forces to combat the witch problem.⁵⁰ Both cities often compared notes on each of their trials and traded suspects back and forth. In 1627 trials in Ortenau began with four women's arrest, torture, confession, and accusations against other witches. Each of the captured witches confessed to a pact with the Devil, sex with the Devil, attendance at a Sabbath, and doing harmful acts against their neighbors. The trials ended abruptly in 1630 having, apparently, killed many people although records are sparse so exact numbers are unknown.⁵¹ Offenburg had dealt with a few isolated trials in the past, but the larger hunts and trials began in earnest after Ortenau accused Offenburg of negligence in prosecuting witches. In 1627 the trials in Ortenau sparked the trials in Offenburg, because when some of Ortenau's witches confessed they denounced people from Offenburg. In these trials accusations and executions even reached the wives of council officials and not just poor isolated women.⁵² These trials ended in 1631, although there were small

⁴⁸ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 115.

⁴⁹ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 115-16.

⁵⁰ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 125.

⁵¹ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 126.

⁵² Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 128.

episodes up to 10 years afterwards, after having killed most of the female population.⁵³

Oberkirch (1631-1632)

Oberkirch was ruled by the bishop of Strasbourg and was governed by Wurttemberg. Essentially Oberkirch was a Catholic population ruled by Protestants. However, the dukes of Wurttemberg were stopped from forcing any religious changes on the population. The trials began in late 1629 and separate courts were created for each of the six townships in Oberkirch and those courts were under the control of a *Schultheiss*, ducal commissar. Several people were accused and forced to confess they had been seduced by the Devil, denied God, had harmed their neighbors, and finally they accused others. These people were then sentenced and executed. Some of the courts descended into the hysteria and tortured and executed people without hesitation while other courts were more logical. One of the worst trials happened in Sasbach's court, 150 people were denounced and at least sixty-three of them were executed, including members of the court itself.⁵⁴ By March of 1632 the trials had died off due to the judges' crisis of confidence.⁵⁵

Mergentheim (1628-1631)

The Mergentheim trials were one of the few central trials that extensively involved children.. The area was primarily Catholic and was, like Ellwangen, a mix of church and state.⁵⁶ The trials started in 1628 when a father became concerned that

⁵³ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 131.

⁵⁴ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 136-37.

⁵⁵ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 138.

⁵⁶ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 143.

his nine-year-old son, Johan Bernhard, had “been seduced into witchcraft.”⁵⁷ This would not be the first accusation against a child in the Mergentheim trials and these accusations eventually became more serious. Johan Bernhard was sentenced to death and burned, opening the door to further accusations against children. They were questioned and started denouncing other people around them. This led to more executions and burnings. The trials ended with the last burning in 1631 after killing 126 people and ruining hundreds more lives.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 144.

⁵⁸ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 154.

Chapter III: The Periphery: Basque Witchcraft Trials



The Basques

During the *Reconquista*, while other Spanish provinces were trying to drive the Muslims out of Spain, the Basques were trying to free themselves from both the Spanish Christians and the Muslims and establish their own separate kingdom.⁵⁹

The Basque Country is an area in the North of Spain bordering the Pyrenees Mountains. The land is somewhat separated from other parts of Spain and France because of the forests and mountains that surround the area, and as a result

⁵⁹ Derek W Lomax, *The Reconquest of Spain* (London: Longman, 1978) 34-5.

developed its own culture and dialect.⁶⁰ The country is divided up into two territories: Northern and Southern Basque Country. The Northern Basque Country lies partially within France and is divided up into three provinces: Labourd, Lower Navarre, and Soule. The Southern Basque Country lies within Spain and is the largest most populated section of the Basque Country. This section is divided up into two sections: the Basque Autonomous Community and the Chartered Community of Navarre.⁶¹

Before anyone else tried to occupy the territory, the Basque peoples held it. This group of people is separate genetically and linguistically from other Indo-European peoples. Some historians and geneticists believe the Basques are the sole remnants of the earliest inhabitants of Western Europe. During the Roman occupation several different tribes occupied the Basque Country. However, they did not or could not hold on to territory for very long. The Visigoths were the largest tribe that held onto the Basque Country the longest and the most successfully.⁶² During the Middle Ages the Basque Country attempted to claim their freedom from the Franks and the rest of the Iberian Peninsula.⁶³ However, because of their desire to become a separate country, during the *Reconquista* “centers of resistance were gradually established in the north of the country.”⁶⁴ After the *Reconquista*, when the Basque Country was brought back under Iberian Christian control, several

⁶⁰ Paddy Woodworth, *The Basque Country: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 24.

⁶¹ Woodworth, *The Basque Country*, 1-2.

⁶² William D. Phillips and Carla Rahn Phillips, *A Concise History of Spain* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 18-19.

⁶³ Woodworth, *The Basque Country*, 26.

⁶⁴ Phillips and Phillips, *A Concise History of Spain*, 34.

prominent families within the Basque country fought constantly from 1362 until 1443 for power and territory. Eventually the Spanish Crown had to step in and stop the fighting. This became known as the War of the Bands. After that incident the Basques tried to keep to themselves, despite some internal conflicts due to nationalistic tendencies.⁶⁵

Before the Basque Trials

The hysteria of witchcraft trials spread to northern Spain from France. The Basque Country is split between Spain and France by the Pyrenees Mountains. However, despite the difficult terrain, people frequently traveled back and forth over the mountains visiting and trading. This led to the spread of ideas, like the hysterical fear of witchcraft, something almost non-existent in Spain. The trials in the Basque country were sparked by trials in France, led by Pierre de Lancre. De Lancre was a French magistrate, instructed in 1606 by the French King Henry IV, to investigate rumors of witchcraft in the Basque-speaking province of Labourd. In 1612 de Lancre published his *Description of the Inconstancy of Bad Angels and Demons*. This treatise was written to convince the public that witches were a real danger in their lives and that people needed to act against that danger.⁶⁶ The treatise covered all manner of subjects, including the witches' Sabbath, homosexuality, and "the demonic coupling of the devil with male and female witches," something he described in unfortunate detail.⁶⁷ The French trial created a

⁶⁵ Woodworth, *The Basque Country*, 27-28.

⁶⁶ Brian P Levack, *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 104.

⁶⁷ Brian P Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2016), 48.

panic that eventually spread across the Pyrenees Mountains into Spanish Basque Country.⁶⁸

The Start of the Trials

The Basque Trials in Spain started in 1608 with Maria de Ximildegui from the village of Zugarramurdi in Spanish Basque Country. De Ximildegui had just returned from a three-year stay in the village of Ciboure, in Labourd, where de Lancre was holding his witchcraft trials.⁶⁹ De Ximildegui returned to Zugarramurdi to take up work as a servant. As soon as she returned home she told her family and neighbors about her life in France. Most notably, she recounted her induction into a witches' coven, the renunciation of her Christian faith, and the coven's secret gatherings. These Sabbaths were held in Labourd and Zugarramurdi. de Ximildegui stated she knew all of the witches at the Sabbaths by name. The first person accused by de Ximildegui was Maria de Jureteguia. The two girls were brought together and de Ximildegui described everything she had seen at the Sabbaths while de Jureteguia repeatedly denied the claims. However, de Ximildegui's description was so vivid that other townspeople pressured de Jureteguia to confess, at which point she fainted.⁷⁰

After her recovery, de Jureteguia immediately went to confession and confirmed everything de Ximildegui had said. During her confession, de Ximildegui named another woman, her aunt, Maria Chipia de Barrenechea as the woman who

⁶⁸ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 148 & 173.

⁶⁹ Gary K Waite, *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 207.

⁷⁰ Gustav Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate: Basque Witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition, 1609-1614* (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 1980), 30-31.

had inducted her into the coven and instructed her "in the evil arts."⁷¹ De Ximildegui then accused other girls of witchcraft and they, like de Jureteguia, made public confessions in front of the community and a priest and begged forgiveness. Between December of 1608 and January of 1609 about ten people, both men and women, were accused of witchcraft and confessed.⁷²

From the confession of de Ximildegui onward, the situation steadily spun out of control. Maria de Jureteguia, paranoid and terrified, thought the witches would come and take her away or that the devil would come to reclaim her. She and her husband Esteve gathered a large group of their neighbors to stay the night with them at their father's house. That night the group saw the witches and the Devil, who had come to reclaim de Jureteguia, outside of the house in the shape of dogs, cats, and pigs. Other witches broke into the house and tried to find de Jureteguia and threatened the crowd. The witches only dispersed after de Jureteguia raised her rosary over her head and declared her intent to return to God. In the morning, the crowd discovered the witches had destroyed de Jureteguia's father-in-law's property.⁷³ This incident helped create an atmosphere of suspicion. Neighbors broke into each other's houses looking for imps, thought to accompany witches at all times. Others were dragged to the priest and told to confess and when they did not they were threatened with torture to force a confession. During these interrogations, people not only confessed to witchcraft but also named other witches, generally the people who brought them into the coven or taught them the

⁷¹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 32.

⁷² Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 32-33.

⁷³ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 32.

art of witchcraft.⁷⁴

Zugarramurdi's inhabitants decided the witches would confess, be reconciled, and pardoned. This compromise was agreed upon by everyone in the village and would have been the final word on the matter until the inquisition got involved. "In Spain the authority of the ecclesiastical courts was so great that they were able, even in the seventeenth century to mitigate the severity of sentences that secular courts imposed in witchcraft cases."⁷⁵ In January of 1609, an inquisitor and a notary arrived in Zugarramurdi to formulate a report.

Enter the Inquisition

This report was sent to the inquisitorial court at Logroño and arrived on January twelfth and its contents stupefied the inquisitors. The Logroño Tribunal had not dealt with a case of witchcraft since 1596, which had been handled by a different generation of inquisitors. The current inquisitors, Becerra and Valle, thought the group of witches in Zugarramurdi were a new sect based on the worship of the devil. However, Becerra and Valle were not worried until they opened the archives and found evidence of this sect and the inquisition's involvement with them dating back almost a century. Becerra and Valle then sent a letter to the Inquisitor General and the Council of the Inquisition in Madrid revealing proof of the sect and started considering what should be done.⁷⁶

Becerra and Vale summoned four of the most "notorious" witches, Estevania de Navarcorena, Maria Perez de Barrenechea, Juana de Telechea, and Maria de

⁷⁴ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 34-35.

⁷⁵ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 85.

⁷⁶ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 51-52.

Jureteguia, to them in Logroño "to interrogate them in accordance with the old questionnaires used in cases of witchcraft, and to investigate whether the affair in Zugarramurdi rested on firm foundations or was caused by dreams and illusions."⁷⁷ The four "witches" confessed with little prompting, reaffirming everything they had stated in Zugarramurdi. Meanwhile, the other witches left in Zugarramurdi started to worry over the fates of their neighbors taken by the Inquisition as well as worrying about their own futures. Graciana de Barrenechea, Maria de Yriarte, Estevania de Yriate, Juanes de Goiburu, Miguel de Goiburu, and Juanes de Sansin traveled to Logroño to tell the inquisitors the real facts of the case. The inquisitor's minds were made up and the group's visit and explanation, at least in Becerra's and Valle's minds, only added to the evidence that Zugarramurdi was under the control of a sect of devil worshipping witches.⁷⁸ Becerra and Vale sent those confessions to the Inquisitor General and the council in Madrid and closed the letter asking for further instructions. Despite the request for orders, the inquisitors had already decided their course of action and arrested the six travelers on February 14, 1609.

In the days following the arrests, Becerra and Valle questioned the witches asking if they had heretics in their families, if they had been baptized and confirmed, did they go to confession, did they go to church, and finally had to recite the Ave Maria and the Creed. The six confirmed that they were good Catholics and had no heretics in their families, trying to convince Becerra and Valle of their innocence. The inquisitors, however, still believed that the witches were conspiring to deceive them and the Church so Becerra and Valle halted the hearings but left the witches in

⁷⁷ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 52.

⁷⁸ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 54-55.

prison.⁷⁹ In March of 1609, *la Suprema*, the high council of the Inquisition, returned the four records of interrogations to Becerra and Valle along with a questionnaire to disprove the existence of the cult of the witches that had been arrested and those that remained in Zugarramurdi. Even after receiving the letter from the council with updated instructions and the questionnaire, Becerra and Valle continued interrogations for two months. Becerra and Valle had made journeys and visitation trying to find other witches in the village and hear their confessions, but few suspected witches came forward.⁸⁰

In June of 1609, the council sent Salazar Frias to fill a vacant inquisitorial post with the Logroño Tribunal. A month after his arrival, all records of the trial and the completed questionnaires were sent to *la Suprema* and the council and were given approval for future actions.⁸¹ The type of questioning used by the inquisition was designed to distract and confused the person being interrogated in order to force them to confess. Unfortunately, this line of questioning often led to innocent persons feeling caught up in the questions and confessing to crimes they did not commit.⁸²

The Witches' Cult

The confessions of the accused witches painted a picture of the rites and organization of the sect in Zugarramurdi, further convincing Becerra and Valle of its existence.⁸³ The god they worshiped was the Devil, though it did not have a specific

⁷⁹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 56-7.

⁸⁰ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 59.

⁸¹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 61.

⁸² Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 62-63.

⁸³ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 69.

name. The *akellarre*, witches' Sabbath, was divided up based on experience novices were at the bottom and senior witches were at the top, while child witches were in a class all their own. The witches were headed up by a "queen," Graciana de Barrenechea in this case, was in charge of running the assemblies and organizing the witches.⁸⁴ One of the witches, Miguel de Goiburu, described the Devil as a cross between a large intimidating man and a he-goat.⁸⁵ The inquisitors believed that several different sects of witches existed in Spain, each led by their own Devil.⁸⁶ The witches met with the Devil regularly in a meadow outside of Zugarramurdi. During these meetings, called *akellarre*, the witches anointed themselves and reaffirmed their commitment to and worship of the devil. When initiated into the sect, the witches denied God, Mary, and all of the Saints and took the Devil as their Lord and Savior.

During their initiation, each of the witches were given a witch mark and an imp in the shape of a toad.⁸⁷ Admission into the sect gave the witches the power to shift into different animals, but little other magic.⁸⁸ On festival days, the witches gathered after the sun went down and celebrated, leaving offerings to the Devil on an altar covered in black cloth. The Devil would hear confession before "services" then dress up like a priest and conduct mass, during which he encouraged the witches to hold on to their beliefs and not to seek out other gods.⁸⁹ After the mass,

⁸⁴ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 91.

⁸⁵ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 70.

⁸⁶ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 92.

⁸⁷ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 73 & 75-76.

⁸⁸ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 79.

⁸⁹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 81.

the witches "would devote themselves to the customary carnal pleasures."⁹⁰ On special occasions, the witches would return to the village, break into the church, and vandalize the inside of the building.⁹¹

After a witch died and was buried, the senior witches accompanied the Devil to the graveyard outside of the church. There the Devil and his minions dug up the coffin, their next of kin, and anyone they had killed. Then the bodies were quartered and disemboweled with axes. The entrails, blood, and winding sheet were left in the coffin and the grave was covered again so they it looked like it had never been touched. The quartered corpses were then taken to the witches' meeting place. At the *akellarre*, the corpse was served to the other witches. The heart was the greatest delicacy so only the Devil was allowed to eat it. All parts of the body were used if not for food then for poisons, powders, and ointments.⁹²

One of the most important aspects of being a witch in this sect was the damage they inflicted on other people, animals, and crops. Witches "would present their complaint to the Devil and beg either for sick for sickness or death to fall on the person concerned."⁹³ The Devil would grant their request but the witches had to carry out the acts. In the middle of the night, the Devil and the witches gathered at the house of the victim and the devil "blessed" the house, putting the inhabitants into an enchanted sleep. The witches then entered the house and force-fed the inhabitants a powder that made them violently ill. "The effects were nausea and violent vomiting...those who did not vomit anything either died quickly in fearful

⁹⁰ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 83.

⁹¹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 84.

⁹² Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 83-84.

⁹³ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 86.

agony or wasted away slowly."⁹⁴ Lesser actions against others were a stomachache, fever, or paralysis. Young children were killed by sucking their blood or cutting their temples with nails. Powders and poisons were also used to kill off crops and domesticated animals. The Devil spread the powder while the witches followed along in their animal form to further destroy the crops. Ritual storms could also be used in place of powders. These confessions from the witches in Logroño were not enough for the Inquisitors and they decided to go to the source.⁹⁵

The Visitations and the Violence that Followed

In 1609 Valle traveled to Zugarramurdi to seek out more witches. He had all of the village's inhabitants gather in the church at High Mass and declare their faith and loyalty to Jesus and the Church. Then Valle sent out the Edict of Faith charging every citizen in the area to meet with the visiting inquisitors and make a report on any suspicious actions.⁹⁶ If someone knew or saw something they had to report it to the inquisition, under threat of excommunication. These visitations and edicts spread from Zugarramurdi to other villages in the Basque Country while the trials themselves were centered in Logroño. The Edict of Faith and the visitations by the inquisitors created a culture of fear and betrayal. Neighbors went to the inquisition with every scrap of information and gossip they may have seen or heard trying to keep suspicion off of themselves. However, informers faced danger besides excommunication, most were at least threatened and some were physically assaulted. If anyone in the community was excommunicated the rest of the citizens

⁹⁴ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 88.

⁹⁵ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 88.

⁹⁶ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 98.

had to ignore and ostracize them.⁹⁷

During these confessions, the witches accused other people of witchcraft, usually those that had inducted them into the sect or those that they had inducted. Juanes de Goiburu accused his father, stating that he had made him a witch. Miguel de Goiburu stated he had presented his son and nephew to the Devil when they were about three years old and they were inducted at age ten. Juanes de Sansin started taking part in ceremonies when he was seven years old and was admitted into the sect when he was ten.⁹⁸ These confessions, along with confessions of shape shifting, murder, cannibalism, and Devil worship all had to be verified during the visitations. Five new witches emerged due to the Edict and were interrogated, leading to confessions, and new facts about the sect. Maria de Lecumberri (or Maria Chipia), Juana de Telechea Garagarre, and Maria Perez de Burga all turned themselves in to the inquisitors on one of their visitations to Zugarramurdi.⁹⁹

Valle and Salazar went from Zugarramurdi, to Lesaca, to San Sebastian, and finally to Tolosa. At each stop, the inquisitors dutifully reported to the council in Madrid, sending letters with updated information and new findings.¹⁰⁰ In these letters, Valle seems pleased with the progress the investigation was making. In Lesaca Valle discovered the Devil had recruited twelve children for that particular sect. He believed children as young as nine or ten renounced their faith and worshiped the Devil and, therefore, had to be gently persuaded to confess.¹⁰¹ In

⁹⁷ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 103-04.

⁹⁸ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 76-78.

⁹⁹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 110-111.

¹⁰⁰ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 115-117.

¹⁰¹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 118.

autumn of 1609 in *Las Cinco Villas* the witch hysteria, sparked by Valle's visitation and the six confessions that resulted, became a reality. Initially, Valle's visit to Lesaca was a heretic hunt but *Las Cinco Vilas* gave in to the paranoia. This led to the Bishop of Pamplona, Antonio Venegas de Figueroa, personally visiting to form a report for the inquisitor general and find out if the cause of the witch-hunt was actually witches or fear over Valle's visit.¹⁰²

The Child Witches

The confessions Valle extracted were used as a form of propaganda, a tactic Lorenzo de Hualde the priest at Vera heartily approved of. He prompted on of his parishioners, Maria Martin, to confess and coached her in what to say. He even assembled a large group of children and adults from all parts of the town to teach them to confess properly. Many parents believed witches had stolen their children and forced them to swear allegiance to the Devil so they sent their children to Hualde in hopes that he could save them. During their stay, Hualde reported the children came to him and told him they dreamed they were taken to the Sabbath.¹⁰³ Hualde listened to and recorded the confessions of the child witches after receiving orders from the tribunal to take further steps, an order Hualde eagerly complied with. Despite Hualde's enthusiasm, other inhabitants of the valley were skeptical and during Salazar's visit two years after Valle's many of the child witches recanted. However, the damage had been done. Over a thousand people had been ostracized because they had been accused of or had been coached into confessing to charges of witchcraft. The inquisitors, aside from Salazar, were upset over the loss of the

¹⁰² Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 127-28.

¹⁰³ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 133-34.

witches' confessions.

Life for the Witches Before the *Auto de Fe*

In 1610, sixteen of the most notorious witches from the visitations were arrested and sent to Logroño. By the time the *auto-de-fe* was given out in the fall of 1610 two epidemics had wiped out a majority of the witches. Conditions at the prison were inhumane. They were overcrowded, nutrition was poor, and disease spread easily. In August of 1609, the first epidemic began and six witches from the first and second groups of prisoners from Zugarramurdi died. The second epidemic began in August of 1610 and killed another seven witches. The dead included Old Estevania, the "queen of the witches," Graciana de Barrenechea, and her daughter Estevania. During the epidemics, the inquisitors still attempted to interrogate the witches but at the time most were hallucinating and spoke nonsense. Salazar and Becerra wrote to the council in Madrid to inform them of recent events. In the letter, they blamed the Devil for the deaths of the witches. The inquisitors were convinced the Devil had killed the witches to prevent them from confessing further and leaving his "congregation."¹⁰⁴ Some of the accused died in prison awaiting trials and only a few were given last rights and a Christian burial. However, death was not a deterrent for the inquisition. Instead, they continued with the trials against all of the witches, including the dead, to convict the guilty parties¹⁰⁵

Only nine of the twenty-one witches, whose cases were involved in the *auto de fe*, confessed and admitted to the charges. Of those confessions, Maria de Zozaya's was the most revealing. De Zozaya was recruited at ten years old by a

¹⁰⁴ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 150-51.

¹⁰⁵ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 153.

neighbor and as an adult recruited twenty witches total to her sect at Renteria out of a personal need for revenge in two of the eight cases of bewitching she was accused of. She killed one neighbor with a poisoned apple, killed another neighbor with a poisoned pear, killed several neighbor children through vampirism, and paralyzed a ship's captain. However, as these were not the only accusations against de Zozaya, she was likely the scapegoat for her village. In other instances, she was accused of molesting children and affecting a priest's hunting prowess by wishing him good luck.¹⁰⁶ De Zozaya's confession was similar to confessions made by other witches and the inquisitor's main argument, the center of all of their cases against the witches, was the similarity of the descriptions of the Sabbath ceremonies.¹⁰⁷

During the trials, the accused had little knowledge of the charges against them and what witnesses had been called to give testimony. Nineteen of the witches had confessed and the inquisitors recommended that these witches complete penance and reconciliation. The exception was Maria de Zozaya, who was sentenced to the stake.¹⁰⁸ The judgment against the nineteen that confessed was simple and, mostly, unanimous. The trials of the other twelve witches were more difficult. Salazar did not find the evidence compelling enough to convict the twelve *negativos*, witches who refused to confess their guilt, he wanted to continue torturing them for information. Henningsen stated, "torture was a means of proof resorted to by the Inquisition only if...doubt still prevailed as to the guilt of the accused person."¹⁰⁹ Becerra, Valle, and the other judges disagreed.

¹⁰⁶ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 158-59.

¹⁰⁷ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 165.

¹⁰⁸ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 167.

¹⁰⁹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 170.

Becerra and Valle wanted to send the twelve witches straight to the stake. The decision was sent to la Suprema along with a report reminding the council that this amount of death sentences was not unheard of, a case against witches in 1508 and 1509 ended in execution “with far less evidence than we have now.”¹¹⁰ The *fiscal*, the person appointed to present and investigate accusations, for the tribunal produced several similar arguments, citing other cases to try and force *la Suprema’s* hand and agree with Becerra and Valle. The inquisitors also requested that they be allowed to “confront the witches with one another in court; the inquisitors were certain this would save much time.”¹¹¹ This long letter was bundled in with the trial records and sent in July of 1610.

La Suprema passed judgment and returned the records on September 9, 1610, having noted in each case what the inquisitors should do, agreeing with Becerra and Valle, eleven of the witches should be executed.¹¹² The only exceptions were a monk, Pedro de Arburu, and a priest, Juan de la Borda, who had been accused during the visitations. In this case, he agreed with Salazar, the monk and priest should be tortured into a confession before the inquisitors could proceed. The monk and the priest never confessed. Finally, the inquisitors decided to deprive both men of “all priestly orders” and sentenced them to five years of unpaid labor in the king’s galleys.¹¹³ Of the ten other *negativos*, only six were still alive after the second epidemic and the inquisitors were still divided over what to do with them. However, Becerra, Valle, and Salazar decided to proceed and hope that the witches would

¹¹⁰ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 168.

¹¹¹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 169.

¹¹² Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 169.

¹¹³ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 170-71.

confess at the last minute. In another letter to *la Suprema*, the inquisitors informed the council they had decided to hold the *auto de fe* on November 7, 1610, to better accommodate farmer's schedules and ensure maximum attendance. *La Suprema* and the council gave the inquisitors permission to proceed and announcements for the *auto de fe* were released on October 19, 1610, to great public enthusiasm.¹¹⁴

In October of 1610, King Philip III ordered bishops to send preachers to the mountains to stop the spread of the witch sect. At the same time, the king sent a letter to the inquisitors asking about the date of the *auto de fe*, because the king was staying close by. However, the king decided not to visit the Tribunal so to keep Philip III up to date with the proceedings the inquisitors composed a report of the *auto de fe* to send to the king.¹¹⁵ Salazar believed firstly that reporting directly to the king rather than sending a report through *la Suprema* was inappropriate and secondly that the time spent writing the report for the king was a waste. *La Suprema* agreed and reprimanded the inquisitors.¹¹⁶

The Auto-de-Fe

Twenty-five heresy cases were prepared for the *auto de fe* alongside the six witchcraft cases.¹¹⁷ The *auto de fe* was to be held in the main square and the town prepared accordingly. They constructed a stage in the middle of the square, with a stage in the center for the inquisitors, and stands were built for the spectators. On Saturday November 6, 1610, some thirty thousand, according to an anonymous inquisitor, spectators converged on Logroño from all over Spain. The *auto de fe* was

¹¹⁴ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 172-73.

¹¹⁵ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 173.

¹¹⁶ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 174-5.

¹¹⁷ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 181.

not just a trial and sentencing, this was a spectacle full of pomp and ceremony. The proceedings began at two o'clock on Saturday with the "Procession of the Green Cross."¹¹⁸ The officials, religious and otherwise, involved in the case paraded through the town, giving ordinary citizens a chance to watch in awe, until the officials arrived in the square and mounted the stage. Nothing further happened that day.¹¹⁹ Meanwhile,

The six witches waiting within their cells were well aware of what was to come as the death sentences had been announced earlier, in an attempt to force them to confess. The six *negativos* were to be burned alive because they refused to make a false confession even to save their lives. Before sunrise on Sunday morning the prisoners were taken to the courtroom where they were clothed and fed before the *auto de fe*. At six o'clock, the prisoners, witches and heretics alike, proceeded out of the Tribunal's building. All the delinquents went barefoot and each one walked between two Brothers of the Inquisition. First came a group of twenty-one men and women; from their garments and from the symbols painted on them the spectators could see that they were to do penance for less serious offenses such as heretical utterances, blasphemy, and bigamy... after them followed another twenty-one delinquents... the painted symbols on their garments and caps showed that they were to be reconciled... there were in reality only fourteen persons in the group, for the others were present in effigy: these were the seven witches who had died... finally the eleven witches condemned to the stake...six of them were alive; the other five were in effigy.¹²⁰

When the procession reached the stage the prisoners were seated across from the spectators and the inquisitors were seated in their box. The *auto de fe* began with a sermon, preached by a member of the jury Fray Pedro de Venero, a Dominican monk. After the sermon, a list of the sentences was read to the crowd. On Sunday, the only sentences made public were those of the witches who were to be burned. These readings were long because each of the sentences was accompanied by the

¹¹⁸ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 185.

¹¹⁹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 185.

¹²⁰ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 186.

persons “ghastly deeds.”¹²¹ At the end of the day, the six *negativos*, along with the five effigies and coffins, were transferred into the custody of the secular authorities to be executed, or in the case of the dead damned to Hell.¹²²

On Monday, the remaining forty-two prisoners were sat on the stage and another friar, this time a Franciscan, preached another sermon. The sentences for the twenty-four heretics were read first and the inquisitors had decided, “twenty-one were to receive milder penalties... three were to be reconciled.”¹²³ The reading of the sentences along with the prisoner’s crimes took up most of the morning. Next, they read the crimes and sentences of the eighteen remaining witches, dead and alive. This reading also took a long time so the inquisitors agreed to shorten readings of any remaining sentences. After these readings, three heretics, eleven witches, and seven effigies were led to the inquisitors’ box where they would undergo the ceremony of reconciliation with the Church.¹²⁴ Eleven people were executed, five burned in effigy because they had already died and six others were burned alive.¹²⁵ Becerra, Valle, and Salazar sent the official report of the *auto de fe* to *la Suprema* that was largely based on the report they intended to send to the king.¹²⁶

The inquisitors viewed the *auto de fe* as a success, the sect of devil worshiping witches was now fact and the inquisitions power was reestablished in the boarder regions of Spain. However, the witch hysteria stirred up by the visitations and the *auto de fe* spiraled out of control not long afterward. In several of

¹²¹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 188.

¹²² Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 189.

¹²³ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 189.

¹²⁴ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 191.

¹²⁵ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 198-200.

¹²⁶ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 195.

the areas Valle visited, the effects were confined to small towns. For example, Renteria was the only victim of the violence against those accused of bewitching children.¹²⁷ In Zugarramurdi, the witch hysteria had peaked before the trials and was declining by the time the *auto de fe* ended. However, in other towns in the mountains were experiencing a rise in hysteria. A friar wrote to the Tribunal asking for help in rooting out the witches in their community. In the letter, Fray Leon also enclosed the confessions of five girls who had lapsed since Valle had pardoned them. The girls confessed to an *akellarre* and had recruited several children into their sect.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 203.

¹²⁸ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 204.

Chapter IV: The Aftermath

The Beginnings of Hysteria

In December of 1610, the inquisitors wrote an anxious letter to *la Suprema* because they had received many confessions and complaints, both in letters and in person, from and about new witches in new towns. Several of these new cases involved the bewitching and recruitment of children. By New Year's, the hysteria and persecutions had spread to all of northern Navarra.¹²⁹ The Inquisition's battle against witchcraft leading up to the *auto de fe* had, in many people's minds, solidified the existence of witches and witchcraft. Now the Tribunal had to send inquisitors back out on visitations to the towns and villages where nothing had previously been found. However, for many the inquisition was not moving quickly enough and they took matters into their own hands. Henningsen noted, "local authorities took the lead by sanctioning acts of violence, imprisonment, and torture, which cost a number of lives."¹³⁰ Lynch mobs, intent on protecting their children and homes, carried out most of these violent acts, often torturing and killing the accused witches.¹³¹

There were two stages to the witch hysteria. Rampant fear surrounded the bewitched children but most parents could not or did not believe in any supernatural enchantments surrounding their children. For example, in the village of Aranaz, the hysteria did not reach high levels until November of 1610. This witch-

¹²⁹ Gustav Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate: Basque Witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition, 1609-1614* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1980), 206.

¹³⁰ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 209.

¹³¹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 210.

hunt started with a father attacking a local cowman Yricia for bewitching his son. After this very public confrontation, thirty child witches came forward and confessed that Yricia and a widow Juana de Argarate of forcing them to join their witch sect.¹³² Incidents like this were repeated over and over in many towns and villages across Basque Country. In March of 1611, the Tribunal sent a letter to *la Suprema* with an initial report of the situations developing in these areas in Navarre, Guipuzcoa, and Logroño. By May of 1610, the inquisitors had collected confessions from nearly 500 witches and around 2,000 people were under suspicion.¹³³

Skepticism

Despite the hysteria that was gripping most of the Basque country at the time some remained suspicious of the sudden increase in supernatural episodes. Secular authorities and many local ecclesiastical leaders fought the Tribunal and Inquisitorial officials on the reality of witches. Father Martin de Yrisarri, initially a priest that sided with the Inquisition, crossed over to side with the skeptics when confronted with evidence provided by a Jesuit priest. The priest explained the experiments that had been performed on the witches and the bewitched as well as producing witnesses that revealed the Inquisition's and the parent's cruel tactics in making a child confess.¹³⁴ From that point forward, Father Yrisarri led the opposition against the inquisition and those that believed wholeheartedly in witchcraft. Yrisarri even went so far as to write to the Pope and try to obtain a letter

¹³² Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 212.

¹³³ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 216.

¹³⁴ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 217.

of indulgence, allowing the witches to confess without fear of repercussions.¹³⁵

Several skeptic priests appealed to the Higher Court of Navarra to start proceedings against the local magistrates that had taken the law into their own hands and arrested, tortured, and killed witches.¹³⁶ From April to June of 1611, the High Court sent commissioners to examine witnesses and people that had been persecuted under the accusations of witchcraft. The Tribunal, particularly Becerra and Valle, fought against these commissioners, sending letters of protest to the High Court. However, the High Court was unwilling to change their mind. In June of 1611, the Tribunal received orders from the Council in Madrid not to interfere with cases that were tried before the High Court.

The greatest victory of the skeptics was acquiring Inquisitor Salazar as an ally. Throughout the proceedings leading up to the *auto de fe* and the hysteria that followed, Salazar became increasingly irritated with his colleagues. Salazar reported all of the perceived offences to *la Suprema* in private letters, calling Becerra a despot. Salazar also complained the trials for witches was taking up too much time and informed the Council that the Tribunal had ignored records and allowed prisoners to talk to each other. These factors, Salazar believed, were crucial in several of the cases of witchcraft and when Salazar had tried to point that out to his colleagues they ignored him. When Yrisarri was denounced to the Inquisition and they attempted to arrest him, after the discover that his mother had been accused of witchcraft, Salazar refused to go along with his colleagues. Instead, the Council reprimanded Becerra and his attempts to arrest those who opposed his frantic

¹³⁵ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 217-18.

¹³⁶ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 220.

search for new witches. The letter from *la Suprema* in June of 1611 marks the turning point for the conflict between the Tribunal and the skeptics, forcing the Tribunal to go on the defensive, and marks the split between Salazar and the other inquisitors.¹³⁷

In March of 1611, the Bishop of Pamplona Antonio Venegas, was consulted by *la Suprema* about the possibility of witches in his area. The bishop had called a meeting of his preachers and consulted those that had spent time in the areas they thought were infested. The Bishop sent the written reports to the Council and in these detailed accounts the Bishop assured *la Suprema* that “there was a great deal of deception and swindling going on in this affair, ‘especially in all that related to the children.’”¹³⁸ Bishop Venegas believed children and “simple folk” repeating rumors they heard from France caused the rampant fear of witchcraft, but the inquisitors in Logroño were responsible for the persecutions. The inquisitors had commissioned the trials and used previously unheard of methods to get results. The inquisition’s approach to witch hunting and trials had practically sanctioned the hysterical persecutions after the *auto de fe*.¹³⁹ The reports Bishop Venegas received from the preachers he sent to infected areas confirmed his suspicions. The people who had confessed felt guilty about their false confessions and turned on their neighbors.¹⁴⁰

Based on this evidence, collected from the Bishop of Pamplona and other prominent figures, *la Suprema* finally made a decision about how the inquisitors would proceed. He decided there would be an Edict of Grace that would last for six

¹³⁷ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 225.

¹³⁸ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 230.

¹³⁹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 230.

¹⁴⁰ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 231.

months. The Edict of Grace was a *carte blanche* for a witch that wanted to confess. Any witches that confessed, even those already imprisoned in Logroño, would receive lighter sentences and only relapsed witches would be excluded. During this period, the inquisitors would travel to the infected areas to seek out new witches and hear confessions. During these interrogations, no one was allowed to pressure anyone else into a false confession, questions about accomplices were forbidden, and no priest could deny the sacraments to someone who had confessed. The inquisitors also had to work with secular and other ecclesiastical authorities should they decide to start their own trials.¹⁴¹ These new instructions from *la Suprema* favored the skeptics, something the Tribunal protested but unhappily accepted. Despite the new rules somewhat curbing their power, Becerra and Valle were more displeased by the fact that this visitation would be Salazar's. On May 22, 1611, Salazar set out on his visitation.¹⁴²

Salazar met with Bishop Venegas to discuss the witch sect and Venegas' investigations. While in Pamplona, Salazar also met with the viceroy of Navarra on behalf of Becerra and Valle to try and suspend the proceedings of the High Court. Something the viceroy did not intend to do, which irritated Becerra and Valle. After leaving Pamplona, Salazar traveled through northern Navarra, Guipuzcoa, Vizcaya, and Alva. While in these provinces, he read the Edit of Grace and the Edict of Faith aloud to the accused witches before starting interrogations.¹⁴³ In Santesteban, Salazar worked well beyond the normal hours of the inquisition hearing and

¹⁴¹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 231.

¹⁴² Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 235.

¹⁴³ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 238-9.

recording the confessions from the witches in and around Santesteban. During these interrogations, Salazar and his assistants also noted the demeanor and inconsistencies of the witches. For example, while examining Catalina de Yurita the clerk noted, “she showed much uncertainty and inconsistency when reexamined about the accomplices she named in her confession. We emphasize this so that it may be seen how little trust can be place in her testimony.”¹⁴⁴ This was a common theme in many of the examinations and reexaminations of the witches during Salazar’s visitation.

Conflict Within the Tribunal

Despite the fair treatment the witches were received at the hands of Salazar and the inquisition, some still wanted to recant their confessions after the ceremony of reconciliation. One priest in Santesteban informed Salazar that members of his parish felt guilty over their confessions, which they had claimed to be false, and wanted to recant. In a letter written to Salazar in June of 1611, Becerra and Valle stated that under no circumstances could Salazar receive recantations. Anyone who tried to recant their confessions after the ceremony of reconciliation should be sent to Logroño as a prisoner where they would be properly punished.¹⁴⁵ To avoid these consequences, Salazar refused to meet with anyone who wanted to recant their confession. In a letter to *la Suprema*, Becerra and Valle complained the High Court was continuing their investigation and apparently encouraged people to retract their confessions. *La Suprema* responded to Becerra and Valle, stating that they had to leave the High Court alone and be polite to those with different views of the witch

¹⁴⁴ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 245.

¹⁴⁵ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 251.

phenomenon, permitting Salazar to receive recantations. Salazar received his first recantation on July 14, 1611 and another eighty followed.¹⁴⁶

While Salazar was out on his visitation, Becerra and Valle stayed in Logroño with the Tribunal and the remaining group of prisoners. This group had been held captive since March of 1610 and only three had confessed. Five had died in prison but nine were still under arrest when the Edict of Grace was published. Each of the witches had been informed of the Edict, yet only two confessed and were released. While overseeing the confessions of the nine witches in prison at Logroño, Becerra and Valle still attempted to find more *akellarres* in the north. However, they were only successful in Alva, the areas around San Milan, and Santa Cruz de Campezo. Becerra and Valle also occupied their time with further witch hunting in Logroño.

They found and arrested three French witches, but after receiving their report *la Suprema* berated Becerra and Valle for arresting people during the period of grace.¹⁴⁷ During this time in Logroño, Becerra and Valle found their power and freedoms when it came to running trials and hearing confessions further limited by *la Suprema*. He refused most of their requests to sell off the property of the witches in Zugarramurdi, continuing the trials as they had been running them, and ratifying confessions as evidence.¹⁴⁸ Due to the sheer number of witches and the amount of time Salazar had to spend in each area the Edict of Grace was extended in order to benefit more people. Becerra and Valle were against the extension because they felt the Edict was doing little to wipe out the sect. If anything the sect seemed to be

¹⁴⁶ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 252.

¹⁴⁷ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 264 & 266.

¹⁴⁸ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 268.

growing during the period of grace. In a letter to from Pedro Ruiz, an inquisitorial commissioner, Becerra and Valle revealed that witches had attempted to murder tribunal staff with powders.¹⁴⁹

During the visitations, *la Suprema* asked the Tribunal to produce physical proof of the witches and the harm they had done. Part of Salazar's job on his visitations was to collect evidence and turn it over to *la Suprema*. However, the experiments performed to discover the viability of the evidence all failed to produce positive proof. Salazar and other commissioners studied the witches meeting place, their powders and ointments, and the witnesses to the witches' crimes. Salazar had thirty-six different witches lead him to the site of their *akellarre*. In Vera and Ciga the witches' answers agreed but in many other cities there was no consensus on the site of the *akellarre*.¹⁵⁰ Salazar also found proof that the Inquisition had been tricked by the jars of powders and ointments sent to the Tribunal in the spring.¹⁵¹ The investigation into the witnesses had similar results. Witnesses were sent to the sites of the *akellarre* and none of the inquisition approved witnesses' saw anything. Inquiries into the girls who supposedly had sex with the Devil resulted in the girls being examined by midwives and pronounced virgins.¹⁵² The results of Salazar's visitation largely supported the skeptic's claims. Salazar stated in a letter to *la Suprema*,

I have not found a single proof nor even the slightest indication from which to infer that one act of witchcraft has actually taken place...Rather I have found what I had already begun to suspect in

¹⁴⁹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 276.

¹⁵⁰ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 296-7.

¹⁵¹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 298.

¹⁵² Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 300-01.

these cases before my experiences during the visitation...without further support from external facts substantiated by persons who are not witches in insufficient to warrant even an arrest.¹⁵³

However, despite this overwhelming evidence in Salazar's and the skeptic's favor, Becerra and Valle stood firm on their position that the sect existed and was doing real harm.

Salazar's Reports

Salazar arrived in Logroño after his visitation in January 1612, and found Valle managing the trials and Becerra sick in bed. This illness worried Becerra, age fifty at the time, enough that he requested a transfer to a post in Valladolid.¹⁵⁴ Becerra returned to work at the beginning of March. Meanwhile, Salazar wrote and submitted eight or nine more reports to the Tribunal. Upon reading his reports, Valle and Becerra were taken aback, because Salazar had become far more skeptical on his visitation than they had expected. They believed Salazar had used the visitation to gather evidence to oppose the sentences for the witches that had burned instead of finding new witches to convict. Becerra and Valle tried to urge Salazar not to send out his reports until after they had decided on how to proceed. Salazar refused. The reports reached Madrid at the end of March 1612, but were left untouched for some time because, Becerra and Valle had requested that the council focus on their considerations first and foremost. Salazar was forced to wait a year and a half in Logroño for the Councils reply to his reports.¹⁵⁵ During this waiting period, tensions were high between the three inquisitors. Becerra and Valle were

¹⁵³ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 305.

¹⁵⁴ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 307.

¹⁵⁵ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 311.

bitter about Salazar's opportunities with the visitation and his reports to the council. One inquisitor, Gregorio de Leguizamo, claimed, "the Devil had sent Salazar to Logroño." The inquisitors declared war on each other and this was affecting the Tribunal's work in and out of the courtroom.¹⁵⁶

In his reports, Salazar condensed his visitation down into more manageable sections. In the first section, Salazar analyzed the subject of the segment, for example the confessions regarding the *akellarres*. He summarized each of the confessions and the extraordinary assertions and contradictions of the witches. "They left their houses through chinks and holes in the wall...they met no one en route...nor did they get wet even if it was snowing." Salazar also gave his opinion on the confessions and other evidence, pointing out the impossibility and ridiculousness of these acts. In the second section, Salazar relayed the unusual experiences of the witches as told to Salazar by the witches. In the third section, Salazar wrote about the external evidence. He had closely examined each of the *actos positivos*, literally positive actions, which all produced negative results. These were the experiments performed on the ointments and powders and the virgins who had sex with the Devil. In the fourth section, Salazar stated his opinion in no uncertain terms. He believed that there was no legal legitimate reason to prosecute these witches. None of the evidence or the confessions amounted to any conclusive proof that a devil-worshiping sect of witches was suddenly infesting the Basque Country.¹⁵⁷

From Salazar's return in January 1612 to December 1612, the inquisitors

¹⁵⁶ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 312.

¹⁵⁷ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 317.

constantly sent letters to la Suprema, complaining about each other and the processes used for the trials. Salazar begged la Suprema and the Council to read his reports so the trials could continue. However, by October only Valle's reports of his visitation in 1609 had been returned to the inquisitors with comments from la Suprema attached. During this period la Suprema sent several scathing letters to the inquisitors, berating them for their childish behavior.¹⁵⁸ The inquisitors clashed again over the sentences of two petitioners Juanes de Sansin and Juanes de Goiburu, who were hoping to be released from the House of Penance. All three believed that the men should be released from their sentences under the Edict of Grace, but Salazar believed that they should be allowed to go home and Becerra and Valle thought they should not. The inquisitors wrote to *la Suprema*, drawing his attention to Salazar's reports as well as Becerra and Valle's unfinished reports. Becerra and Valle begged off normal service to work on the witch trials because they believed the Tribunal was in a state of emergency. *La Suprema* had the opposite view, refusing Becerra and Valle's request and ordering the next inquisitor to go on their visitation.¹⁵⁹

Salazar defended Becerra, who was supposed to leave on visitation, by pointing out that his reports still had not been voted on and therefore the next visitation could not begin. Salazar also wrote a memorandum about the lack of progress the Tribunal had made in thirteen particular cases, forcing Becerra and Valle to shut themselves away and finish their reports on their opinions of Salazar's visitation. This forced the Council to finally read Salazar's reports in a timely

¹⁵⁸ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 323.

¹⁵⁹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 327.

manner and make a decision on the outcome of the cases and the trials as a whole.¹⁶⁰

In August 1613, Becerra was informed that he had been appointed *fiscal* to the Council, a position he did not take up until October. By September, several cases mentioned in Salazar's memorandum were still untouched and Salazar was convinced that Becerra was trying to run out the clock on his promotion. This new position would allow him better access to the council and *la Suprema* to argue his position on the cases and urge them not to listen to Salazar. Instead of sitting idly by he wrote to *la Suprema* and asked that normal procedure be ignored in response to the new deadline. The three inquisitors had sent their opinions to the Council and now it should be up to *la Suprema* to make the final decision. Salazar also urged *la Suprema* to keep this matter secret from their colleagues. Unfortunately, this request did not stay a secret and Salazar, Valle, and Becerra returned to petty behavior and disagreements. In November 1613, Salazar was granted leave from the Inquisition effective as soon as the new inquisitor arrived. Salazar left Logroño in December 1613 for Jaen to assist the office of canon. However, he did not give up on the witch trials, instead, Salazar finished his November report and sent it to the council to force another decision from them.¹⁶¹

La Suprema's Examination

In March 1614, *la Suprema* finally started to handle "the great witch affair." A member of the council, Juan Zapata Osorio, wrote to Salazar and urged him to come to Madrid for the deliberations over his papers. Osorio explained that this debate

¹⁶⁰ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 331.

¹⁶¹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 336.

would likely last until Easter but Salazar should spend the time in Madrid and return to Logroño afterward. Four days later he received an official summons requiring his presence. The council also sent for all of the records from Logroño and, secretly, requested the presence of two witches Juanes Yribarren and Juanes de Goizueta.¹⁶² In April 1613, the Council finally received the documents and news of one of the witches, Goizueta, from Logroño, the other witch Yribarren was living as a beggar and was later convicted of larceny and assault.¹⁶³ Goizueta arrived in Madrid in July. During this waiting period, Salazar unsuccessfully attempted to start disciplinary proceedings against Valle. The deliberations over the trials started after the arrival of Goizueta and the documents. Salazar was only present during meetings when the witch affair was to be discussed and he had to give a report. During these meetings, *la Suprema* stood by his protégé and supported his opinions and assertions and clearly respected Salazar.¹⁶⁴ On August 11, 1613, the Council sent notice to the Tribunal in Logroño that Salazar had finished his work with the council and would be returning to Logroño. Valle promptly requested twenty days of leave, citing illness as the reason, and was granted two months.¹⁶⁵

The Council completed its deliberation in August and new instructions on how to further handle the trials were sent to the Tribunal. These new rules were largely adopted from a draft of instructions that Salazar wrote for *la Suprema* just before leaving Madrid.¹⁶⁶ Salazar and the new inquisitor Antonio de Aranda y

¹⁶² Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 358.

¹⁶³ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 363.

¹⁶⁴ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 365.

¹⁶⁵ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 366.

¹⁶⁶ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 377.

Alarcon drafted these new rules into a new edict called the Edict of Silence. This edict ended the vigilante violence against accused witches under threat of prosecution.¹⁶⁷ In September, *la Suprema* asked for an account of expenses for the Tribunal. Salazar and Aranda sent the list of expenses, totaling about 39,460 *reales*, along with a letter explaining each expense. The inquisitors had sold the witches' confiscated goods and acquired 9837.5 *reales*, which put the actual cost at 29,623 *reales* with 19,276 *reales* being owed by the prisoners. However, in the letter the inquisitors asked that the "poor mountain people of Navarra" not be charged because, they had already suffered under the burdens of the trials without extra strain being added to their lives when they were only starting to recover. Unfortunately, *la Suprema* did not agree with the inquisitors, as Henningsen stated, "justice was one thing and bills quite another."¹⁶⁸ Shortly afterward, when Salazar received a new posting in Granada, he revealed that the treasurer of the Tribunal had embezzled thousands of *reales*. When Valle returned to the Tribunal after his sick leave he found himself alone with new instructions on how to proceed with the trials he did not agree with and an embezzlement scandal.¹⁶⁹ However, he could not ignore *la Suprema* so instead he chose to work so slowly that little was accomplished.¹⁷⁰

Little is known of the fates of the witches afterward but, records show that the Tribunal was eventually split up due to their inability to work together. Salazar was sent to a Tribunal in Valencia in 1610, then became a fiscal to the Council in

¹⁶⁷ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 378.

¹⁶⁸ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 381.

¹⁶⁹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 382.

¹⁷⁰ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 383.

1628, and finally a member of *la Suprema* in 1631.¹⁷¹ The trials lasted from 1609 to 1614 and in that time nearly 7,000 witches were accused and examined, 31 were sentenced in the *auto de fe*, and 65 were reconciled by the Tribunal and the Edict of Grace. In all this, only 11 witches were sentenced to death and executed.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 386.

¹⁷² Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate*, 397-399.

Chapter V: Comparison

Similarities

Despite the fact the Basques tried, and often times succeeded, to keep themselves separated from other parts of Spain and Europe they had similar ideas about witches. The confessions from the Basque witches revealed that ideas involving witches and witchcraft were stereotypical: a pact with the Devil, sex with the Devil, a Sabbath, flight, maleficarum, and a demon or familiar of some sort. Based on the confessions during the trials in Southwestern Germany these concepts are common to central trials. True all of these categories do not necessarily exist in every trial, but the beliefs are still similar. The Basque trials really differentiated themselves based on who was accused and how the trials were handled.

Differences

Traditional views on witchcraft tend to stem from trials that took place in Southwestern Germany and reached their height in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.¹⁷³ Central, or normal, trials from these regions had so many similar attributes that they can be regarded as a “unified phenomenon.”¹⁷⁴ More specifically, the unified trials took place between 1450 and 1750, and they were sparked by the Reformation or the Counter- Reformation. Many Protestants attempted to establish their reformed religion in countries like Germany and found opposition to reform. Germany had no official national religion. Instead most

¹⁷³ Brian P Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2016), 193.

¹⁷⁴ Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen, *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centers and Peripheries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 9.

regions had their own based on the religion of the local prince or bishop. This sometimes led to a system of conversion and reconversion between the two religions, which led to conflict. Within the Protestant faction different denominations, like the Lutherans and Calvinists, fought amongst themselves.¹⁷⁵ The “accusations came from a fear of the rampant change,” which was taking place from 1450 to 1750. Nearly seventy-five percent of witchcraft trials took place in central regions like Germany.¹⁷⁶

Aside from the raging religious strife between the Catholics and Protestants in Europe, territories started to define themselves in terms of nationalism and began moving towards a modern nationhood. Suddenly, for the common people, the ordinary institutions in their lives, like the Church, were abruptly changing or had disappeared and their previous realities could no longer be trusted.¹⁷⁷ This uncertainty led to neighbors turning against each other, quarrels escalating to a level they had not reached before, and the sudden dissolution of the “neighborly” attitude in favor of an individualistic philosophy. This fear and distrust meant that anyone who behaved “differently” or started an argument with the wrong person could come under suspicion.¹⁷⁸ The trials flourished because of the “prevailing pattern of jurisdictional particularism,” which meant most regions lacked central leadership. They also lacked a system of checks and balances that ensured no one person gained too much power and authority like Ulrich von Helfenstein in the

¹⁷⁵ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 112.

¹⁷⁶ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 192.

¹⁷⁷ Ankarloo and Henningsen, *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, 437.

¹⁷⁸ Ankarloo and Henningsen, *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, 437-8.

Wiesensteig trials or the trials in Ellwangen.¹⁷⁹

Between 1561 and 1670, 480 witchcraft trials took place in Southwestern Germany.¹⁸⁰ In most of those cases, women were the predominant victims. In Weisensteig and Rottenburg, the two areas with near-constant witch-hunts and trials, ninety-eight to 100 per cent of the accused were women. In situations when more men were accused than in a typical hunt, twenty to forty per cent, they tended to end quickly and withstood the threat of renewed hysteria.¹⁸¹ Children often fell into the same categories as men, and were rarely persecuted. Adult women were, on average, the most persecuted group of the witch-hunts, but as time passed, and hysteria grew, more men and children became victims.¹⁸² Women's everyday behavior often led to them becoming victims. One indicator of witchcraft was melancholy, which was, in some cases, characterized by odd out of character behavior. This could happen to any woman no matter her age. The other indicator was isolation. Much of life during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was focused around families and the protection of a household. If a woman did not have a family or a household she was an oddity and was alone with no one to help her or vouch for her should she come under suspicion.¹⁸³ These assumptions about women and their character often stemmed from books like the *Malleus Maleficarum*, which assumed women were fundamentally weak in every way.

The Basque Province

¹⁷⁹ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 93.

¹⁸⁰ H. C. Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany: 1562-1684, The Social and Intellectual Foundations* (Stanford: Calif., Stanford University Press, 1972), 34.

¹⁸¹ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 179.

¹⁸² Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 183.

¹⁸³ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 185.

The Basque Provinces were separated physically, mentally, and culturally from other parts of Spain and the rest of Europe. Biological indicators show that the Basques are a distinctive ethnic type different from any others and many Basques use this fact as an excuse to disconnect from the countries that surrounded them and conquered them.¹⁸⁴ From their position in and around the Pyrenees Mountains the Basques remained untouched by the influences that shaped the rest of Spain. The Visigoths and later the Franks passed through the Pyrenees Mountains into Spain and fought back and forth until the Muslims came and conquered the Iberian Peninsula. Throughout the Reconquista and the religious purges the Basques tried to keep themselves as separated as possible and that ensured that the hysteria that affected other parts of Spain and other parts of Europe could not and did not affect them until much later.¹⁸⁵

Religious Purification

Spain was relatively separated from a majority of the religious chaos caused by the discord between the Protestants and the Catholics. After the *Reconquista* in 1492, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain knew that the best way to keep their country unified, after losing their common enemy in the Muslim rulers, was to give them a new one. Ordinarily this situation would be the prelude to a series of witchcraft trials, but instead, social attention shifted first to the Jewish people living in Spain and then to the remaining Muslims.¹⁸⁶ The Jewish population of Spain

¹⁸⁴ Paddy Woodworth, *The Basque Country: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 14.

¹⁸⁵ Woodworth, *The Basque Country*, 26.

¹⁸⁶ Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston: Little, Brown

flourished under Muslim rule, which allowed them to come out from the shadows, worship freely, and rise to high positions in the Muslim government. However, when Ferdinand and Isabella regained power and control over the Iberian peninsula this freedom and tolerance ended abruptly.¹⁸⁷

The *Reconquista* and the Alhambra decree of 1492 decisively ended any hope the Jewish people had of thriving in Spain. The Alhambra decree was an edict of expulsion, forcing all practicing Jews to either convert to Catholicism or leave the joint Kingdoms of Castile and Aragon.¹⁸⁸ Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand intended to remove the Jews from Spain and remind all conversos that their religion was Christianity. Many believed conversos had only pretended to convert to Christianity and continued to practice Judaism. The results of the Alhambra decree were the conversion of thousands of Jews to Christianity and the expulsion of several thousand more, who were forced to leave everything behind. Once wealthy Jewish families lost everything they once had, they were forced to restart their lives and began moving from country to country and trying to find a home.¹⁸⁹

After the expulsion and conversion of the Jewish population Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand set their sights on the small Muslim population that remained in Spain after the *Reconquista*. The *Reconquista* ended with the Treaty of Granada, which both ended the war and granted the Muslims still living in Spain a surprising amount of tolerance. They were allowed to continue speaking their own language, go to their own school, practice their own laws and customs, and continue practicing

and Company, 2002), 49.

¹⁸⁷ Menocal, *The Ornament of the World*, 165-65.

¹⁸⁸ Menocal, *The Ornament of the World*, 248.

¹⁸⁹ Menocal, *The Ornament of the World*, 251.

their religion. However, shortly after the persecution of the Jewish peoples in Spain, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand turned on the Muslims and started to strip them of the privileges granted by the Treaty of Granada.¹⁹⁰ Intolerant religious figures began purging Spain of Muslim influences like books and art, and they began forcing the conversions of Muslims to Christianity. In 1499 Muslims in Granada rebelled against the restrictions, which gave Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand the excuse they had been hoping for. They revoked the tolerant clauses of the treaty and, beginning in 1502, Muslims were given the option of conversion or expulsion.¹⁹¹ The focus on religion, particularly Judaism and Islam, and the social issues that surrounded the persecution of the different religions by the Spanish Christians allowed Spain to avoid being drawn into the witch hysteria of other countries.

The Spanish Inquisition

Another reason for Spain's evasion of the extreme witchcraft trials, like those in Germany, was the Inquisition. Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand created The Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition in 1478 to preserve Catholic tradition. Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand recognized that many *conversos* continued to practice Judaism after their conversion to Christianity. This new and improved Inquisition also replaced the Roman Inquisition, which was created during the middle ages and was under control of the Pope rather than the monarch.¹⁹² In 1484 and 1509 King Ferdinand mandated no one could appeal to the Pope against the Spanish Inquisition, if they tried they could be killed and have their property

¹⁹⁰ Derek W Lomax, *The Reconquest of Spain* (London: Longman, 1978), 169-170.

¹⁹¹ Lomax, *The Reconquest of Spain*, 171-173.

¹⁹² William D. Phillips and Carla Rahn Phillips, *A Concise History of Spain* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 132 & 148-9.

confiscated. This royal decree gave the Inquisition, and in particular the Inquisitor General, nearly absolute authority in service to the crown in Spain and all of its territories, including the Spanish colonies in the new world.¹⁹³ What began as a means to control *conversos* and convert more Jews to Christianity quickly became the Spanish monarchs' tool to repress and censor anything they considered heresy. This included blasphemy, bigamy, sodomy, freemasonry, women stepping out of traditional roles, and witchcraft.¹⁹⁴

The Inquisition's control over any and all witchcraft accusations meant no local religious or secular authorities could create the frenzy needed to establish large and violent trials. Other areas, like Germany, had no single body of investigators invested with the authority of the monarchy or holding the power to investigate, interrogate, and prosecute any crimes they see fit. In Spain local authorities could not investigate or prosecute a crime that fell under the Inquisition's jurisdiction without first informing the Inquisition.¹⁹⁵ After receiving this information, the Inquisition could choose to allow the local authorities to continue their investigation or to instruct their own inquisitors to take over the inquiry, as was the case with the Basque trials.¹⁹⁶ Inquisitors Salazar, Valle, and Becerra were sent by the council in Madrid to investigate claims of a witch cult in Basque country on orders from the council in Madrid. They arrived in Zugarramurdi, and other towns during their visitations, and appropriated the investigations of local secular and religious authorities. The inquisitors had almost

¹⁹³ Phillips and Phillips, *A Concise History of Spain*, 149.

¹⁹⁴ Phillips and Phillips, *A Concise History of Spain*, 150-1.

¹⁹⁵ Phillips and Phillips, *A Concise History of Spain*, 150.

¹⁹⁶ Phillips and Phillips, *A Concise History of Spain*, 151-2.

total authority, after deferring to *la Suprema*, in the areas they were investigating.¹⁹⁷

The best example of their authority was the Edict of Grace, which gave Salazar, Becerra, and Valle the authority to question and later pardon and witches that had been arrested by local authorities.¹⁹⁸ The control that the Inquisition had over any accusations involving superstition and witchcraft took power away from local authorities that might have accused people out of personal malice or created large, unruly witchcraft hunts and trials. People accused of witchcraft actually preferred the Inquisition to local authorities because the Inquisition was less cruel. In 1610 a woman brought her elderly mother and two daughters, who had been accused of witchcraft, to the High Court commissioner and asked that they be arrested by the Inquisition because they would not be treated as badly.¹⁹⁹

Occasionally, local authorities and village people, sometimes without the approval of the authorities, often used torture that was more violent than the Inquisition's. The Inquisition generally used three methods of torture: the iron collar called a garrotte, forcing the victim to swallow water, or hoisting. Furthermore, the Inquisition did not use torture to force a confession, unlike other more central trials.²⁰⁰ Local authorities, on the other hand, were much more violent and creative. Villagers tended to prefer rope torture to anything else because of the public spectacle it created. Wheel torture and hanging someone from a bridge and occasionally dunking them in the river until the person almost drowned, much like

¹⁹⁷ Alonso de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents: Inquisitor Alonso de Salazar Frías and Others on the Basque Witch Persecution*. Edited by Gustav Henningsen (Boston: Brill, 2004), 17.

¹⁹⁸ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 240-48.

¹⁹⁹ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 63.

²⁰⁰ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 64.

the cold water tests used to examine witches in central trials, were other popular methods of torture for local authorities and angry villagers.²⁰¹

The Skeptics

Another factor in the Basque Trials' position in the periphery was the large number of skeptics involved in the Basque witchcraft trials. Certain figures with power, like Salazar and the Bishop of Pamplona, believed that texts like the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the testimonies and confessions of the witches, and the evidence presented to the inquisitors were inconclusive and not enough to sentence anyone to death. Bishop de Figueroa wrote several letters to the Inquisition, stating, "I have always held it to be certain that there is much of falsehood and fraud in this affair...moreover...two thirds of what they [the witches] say is untrue."²⁰² The Inquisition itself, as a whole, doubted traditional witch hunting and prosecution and urged its judges to disregard the teachings of the *Malleus Maleficarum*.

Salazar's reports to the council in Madrid and *la Suprema* demonstrate the skepticism that some figures of authority felt towards the trials. While on his visitation Salazar carried out his mission from *la Suprema* to verify "all acts of witchcraft whenever possible."²⁰³ Salazar's report to *la Suprema* began with his investigation into how witches visit and return from the *akellarres*. He explains that all of the witches claimed to have gone in their sleep but were awake during the *akellarre* itself. They left their houses through cracks and holes and came back the same way. Salazar noted that, despite all of the witches' stories being almost

²⁰¹ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 73.

²⁰² de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 188.

²⁰³ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 268.

identical, some witches claimed they had not seen anyone else or heard any noises at the site of the *akellarre* while others had, which seemed odd to Salazar.²⁰⁴ Another oddity that Salazar pointed out was that no one in any of the towns and villages he visited noticed when the witches left their homes to visit the *akellarre*, even after people were aware of the witch cult. Salazar stated, “indeed it is remarkable that in a village where everybody is on watch for this event...they have never come across the witches.”²⁰⁵ In his report Salazar essentially dubbed the visitations ridiculous, claiming that the Devil would never expose his followers to the public.²⁰⁶ Salazar was also disinclined to believe the claim that the witches could influence the world around them like causing people to fall ill or destroy buildings. Salazar wrote that a witch in San Sebastian had tried to make Salazar and his family sick yet Salazar never felt the effects and as far as he knew none of the other witches’ so called victims had complained of being hurt.²⁰⁷

The external proofs of witchcraft were conclusive in Salazar’s eyes. Acts like a witch having sex with the Devil at an *akellarre* did not happen. For example Catalina de Lizardi, a virgin, claimed that she had sex with the Devil and yet, upon examination, she was still a virgin.²⁰⁸ Another example was Salazar’s investigation into the deaths of two infants in Leiza, he found that there was no conclusive cause of death and nothing that proved that witches killed them.²⁰⁹ Salazar also believed that the confessions of the witches had been, if he believed the witches, affected by

²⁰⁴ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 276.

²⁰⁵ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 276.

²⁰⁶ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 280.

²⁰⁷ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 288.

²⁰⁸ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 300.

²⁰⁹ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 310.

visitations from the Devil. Instead Salazar believed the witches and witnesses were deluding themselves and deluding the Inquisition and were, therefore, not trustworthy.²¹⁰ Salazar also felt people were confessing, or forcing their children to confess, to get the rights to sacraments back from the Church or because they were worried about punishment from the local authorities.²¹¹ Salazar, in his reports, is horrified and furious at the intolerance of the local authorities and religious figures because he thought many wrongly accused refused to recant their statements because they thought they would be punished or killed.²¹² Salazar's opinion was that the fear and feeling of defeat because of the actions of local authorities and religious figures meant that the confessions made by many of the witches were untrustworthy.²¹³

Salazar also wrote *la Suprema* about physical proof that had been presented as evidence against the witches and that he considered false. During the hearings, twenty-two pitchers and pots containing potions, powders, and ointments that many believed were used in witchcraft were presented as evidence. However, Salazar and other doctors proved, with the help of several tests, that the mixtures were "false and fraudulent and had been made by ludicrous methods."²¹⁴ During his visitation Salazar destroyed the "evidence" from the cases against the witches in the Basque trials, often pointing out how absurd much of the proof and many of the confessions were.

²¹⁰ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 318.

²¹¹ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 326.

²¹² de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 328.

²¹³ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 340.

²¹⁴ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 460.

Inquisitors Becerra and Valle's attitudes relating to the accused witches and the cult as a whole were in tune with the mindsets of more central regions like Southwestern Germany. They were determined to keep the strict plan of attack in terms of the trials and they dislike Salazar and his skepticism. They wrote to the inquisition, "we are still completely convinced...that when the Council reads our report...it will be bound to realize as a clear and obvious fact supported by unassailable arguments that this sect is a reality," and that the skepticism was simply the Devil trying to dissuade the Inquisition from pursuing him.²¹⁵ Salazar also worried about his colleagues stating, "as for my colleagues pledging themselves to refute my opinion...I besought them...to inspect the records of the visitation and to extract...anything that might be of assistance."²¹⁶ By the end of Becerra's, Valle's, and Salazar's time together working on the Basque trials Becerra and Valle sincerely disliked Salazar and the feeling was mutual. Becerra and Valle even went so far as to claim that their fellow inquisitor had been "blinded by the Devil" because he continued to defend the witches.²¹⁷ However, despite Becerra and Valle's roles as senior inquisitors, Salazar and the other skeptics prevailed, reasoning with *la Suprema* and the council in Madrid and preventing the trials from becoming unmanageable.

The Accusers and the Accused

Another reason for the marginality of the Basque Trials was the victims and accusers. These accused witches were predominantly women, although gender and

²¹⁵ Phillips and Phillips, *A Concise History of Spain*, 149.

²¹⁶ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 348.

²¹⁷ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 535.

age did not always matter and many men and children were accused. “The fact that heresy was not sex-linked” might explain why more men and children were accused in the Basque Trials.²¹⁸ The interrogations of the accused witches seemed to explain the order of the cult. Adult witches, both male and female, abducted children and recruited them to the sect. Theoretically, people could only join the cult after they gave their consent, but accused child witches often claimed that they had been abducted and forced to join the cult so they could not be blamed.²¹⁹ The cult was made up of witches of all ages and genders and those who were accused fell into one of three categories: people that were suspected of bewitching their neighbors, people that may have married into a witch family, and the poor.²²⁰

The child-witches are one of the unique aspects of the Basque Trials. In other, more central, trials when children were accused the hunts tended to end quickly. However, in the Basque Trials children made up the largest group of accused witches. The Bishop of Vera reported a priest, Lorenzo de Hualde, brought in child witches from all parts of the town. Hualde explained that it had been the parents that sent their children in hopes of a cure for the bewitching. Some of the children accused and questioned were as young as six years old.²²¹ Some of the children were willing to confess with only a little coaxing and the promise of a reward, something good to eat and drink. Others refused to confess to the priest and were treated more violently by the priest and by their parents.²²²

²¹⁸ Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 130.

²¹⁹ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 79.

²²⁰ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 81.

²²¹ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 75.

²²² de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 76.

The child witches of the Basque Trials were, most likely, children telling fantasy stories about something that caught their attention, unaware of the implications or results of their little tales. One of the usual stories was that the children had been kidnapped in their sleep and taken to an *akellarre* where they were inducted into the cult. This dream epidemic was something else unique to the Basque Trials and the child witches.²²³ Unfortunately, very little information about these accusations, made by and against the children involved in the Basque Trials have been preserved so the exact number of child witches are unknown.²²⁴

The inquisitors visitations to other towns and villages helped news of the *auto de fe* and the newly discovered witch cult outside of Zugarramurdi and Logroño. Fear and paranoia spread, leading to rampant accusations. In most central trials adults accused other adults while in the Basque Trials, after the *auto de fe*, children were the main group of people that denounced adults and even other children. Most people, especially children, felt compelled to denounce others around them, especially if someone else had already denounced them. Children of both genders denounced hundreds of people. In his visitation to Vera, Salazar interviewed three children who, collectively, denounced over two hundred people. Another boy in Fuenterrabia condemned one hundred and forty-seven people.²²⁵

Unlike central trials, most of these denunciations and confessions were made out of fear of the witches and the Devil rather than malicious intent or some authority figure's hidden agenda. The Inquisition itself rarely had to pressure people

²²³ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 61-2.

²²⁴ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 75.

²²⁵ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 79.

to confess. Instead family would urge the accused witch to confess to avoid disgrace and hell. Despite the pressure to confess from friends and family, if a witch did confess they could be ostracized by the community and sometimes become the victim of vigilante violence.²²⁶ A Jesuit named Solarte described people stoning accused witches and destroyed their houses. Others could be denied the sacraments if they had been denounced, a threat often used by parish priests to force a confession.²²⁷

Executions

One of the most obvious differences between the Basque Trials and other central trials is the number of people that were executed, or burned in effigy. Almost seven thousand accused witches were examined over the course of the witch-hunt and trials. However, in the Basque Trials only eleven people were tried and sentenced to death at the *auto de fe* at Logroño in 1610. In many of the cases, both during and after the *auto de fe*, the accused witches were allowed to repent and reconcile with the Church and their community.²²⁸ Before the Basque Trials started in 1609 and the *auto de fe* in 1610 the last burnings for witchcraft were in 1538.²²⁹ Other Spanish trials have similar figures.

Saragossa's branch of the Inquisition had several witchcraft trials ranging from 1498-1693. In those trials gender did not matter. Men were accused at the same rate as women. Like the Basque trials, few were executed. Six of the accused

²²⁶de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 63.

²²⁷ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 74.

²²⁸ Gustav Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate: Basque Witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition, 1609-1614* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1980), 198-200.

²²⁹ Gustav Henningsen, "The Greatest Witch-Trial of All: Navarre, 1609-1614," *History Today*, November 1980. 38.

were sent from the Inquisition's care to secular authorities, which meant they likely received a harsher sentence like execution. However, after the accused left the Inquisition's responsibility they no longer record the person's fate. In other cases in Saragossa the punishment could be seclusion in a monastery or home for women, imprisonment, prayer, confiscation of goods, exile, flogging, or some combination thereof.²³⁰ In Valencian trials 356 people were put on trial for superstition. Of those 216 women were on trial, sixty-one per cent, and 140 men, thirty-nine per cent.²³¹

In Valencia, like in Logroño and Saragossa, the Inquisition continued to show relative leniency in terms of punishment. The Inquisition did not execute anyone in cases of superstition or witchcraft in Valencia. Most were punished publicly with a flogging, banishment, or a combination. Some managed to escape punishment completely. Twenty to fifty-one per cent of the defendants were let off with nothing more than a warning and about twenty per cent of trials ended in suspension or acquittal.²³² In Barcelona almost the same number of men and women went to trial. 147 women went to trial, fifty-one per cent, and 140 men, forty-nine per cent.²³³ Unlike Valencia, the Inquisition in Barcelona had executed witches in the early sixteenth century. In 1549 a convicted sorcerer was executed in effigy but generally Barcelona's rate of execution in trials for superstition was one per cent. Barcelona had a twenty-seven percent acquittal rate and twenty-three per cent of trials were

²³⁰ María Tausiet, *Urban Magic in Early Modern Spain: Abracadabra Omnipotens*, trans. Susannah Howe (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 219-31.

²³¹ Gunnar W. Knutsen, *Servants of Satan and Masters of Demons: the Spanish Inquisition's Trials for Superstition, Valencia and Barcelona, 1478-1700* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 66.

²³² Knutsen, *Servants of Satan and Masters of Demons*, 64-66.

²³³ Knutsen, *Servants of Satan and Masters of Demons*, 66.

suspended altogether.²³⁴ In the trials in Valencia and Barcelona children were still accused, but not nearly as many were accused. However, unlike the Basque trials when the accusations against child witches went no further than a confession to the Inquisition, likely because of the Edict of Grace, children in accused in Valencia and Barcelona went to trial. Though, in the trials at Valencia and Barcelona no single age group was singled out like the child-witches of the Basque trials.²³⁵

²³⁴ Knutsen, *Servants of Satan and Masters of Demons*, 64-5.

²³⁵ Knutsen, *Servants of Satan and Masters of Demons*, 69.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

The skeptics and the Inquisition helped keep the trials in the Basque country helped keep the trials to a minimum. From the Bishop of Pamplona writing to the Inquisition to explain his findings, or the lack thereof, to Salazar's belief in investigation and leniency, skeptics helped prevent an explosion of violence.²³⁶ Finally, the Inquisition, with their absolute control over any accusations of witchcraft or superstition, kept the country from spiraling out of control. "Witch-craze...was a sort of 'mutation', an explosive growth in the belief in witchcraft caused by a dangerous mixture of popular and learned tradition."²³⁷ The Basque trials had the potential to explode into a massive witch-hunt and trials leading to hundreds of deaths. The fear came with travelers from France, where trials were rampant and violent, and spread from Zugarramurdi to other towns. They did not become another name in a long list of large brutal trials because of the tight reign the Inquisition had over the situation.

While some areas broke out in violence, the incidents were small and contained. The Inquisition guaranteed that the frenzy and paranoia that accompanied the central trials in Germany never took root in Spain despite the size of the Basque trials.²³⁸ Because of that management very few people were executed for witchcraft in Spain, even after the accused was passed to the secular authorities.

²³⁶ Alonso de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents: Inquisitor Alonso de Salazar Frías and Others on the Basque Witch Persecution*. Edited by Gustav Henningsen (Boston: Brill, 2004), 188 & 192.

²³⁷ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 46.

²³⁸ William D. Phillips and Carla Rahn Phillips, *A Concise History of Spain* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 150- 51.

Although some aspects of the Spanish trials are similar to central trials, the actions of the witches, the appearance of the Devil, and the slight lawlessness of local authorities, Spain is securely set in the periphery in terms of witchcraft trials because Spain's treatment of its witchcraft trials was uncommon to say the least.

Witchcraft hunts and trials that exist in the public's memory tend to follow a similar pattern. Central trials often took place in the period from the year 1450 to the year 1750 and correlated with the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Poor women who were Middle-aged to elderly who heavily relied on their families or neighbors for assistance and were usually the community's healer or midwife were the most often accused. Men and children were rarely accused, and more often than not, when they were accused the trials tended to end quickly. However occasionally, when the hysteria rose, the number of men and children accused tended to rise. The most common theme for all of the central trials was that a large number of people died. Many of these trials resulted from the tension created from the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Reformists, far away from larger cities, suddenly took away the religion that had been central to people's lives. Some people reformed and became Protestant while others tried to cling to their Catholicism, and this drove a wedge through many communities.²³⁹

This tension, along with the prevailing theories about women's propensity to evil, and what made witches, made women and other powerless people of society easy victims. The *Malleus Maleficarum* was the source of many of these stereotypes,

²³⁹ Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen, *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centers and Peripheries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 9.

and produced several examples of women being evil and the danger they posed to their community. According to some, like Kramer and Sprenger, women were wicked, overly emotional, more superstitious, and more impressionable than men; they were temptresses, they gossiped, and they were weaker than men both physically and intellectually.²⁴⁰ These beliefs and the strain of the Reformation eventually led to the famous witchcraft hunts and trials in Germany and these trials fell into this category of commonplace or central trials because of the patterns that can be found in all of the trials.

Trials, like those in Wiesensteig, were run by Catholics desperately trying to prevent the Reformation and trying to maintain a Catholic stronghold. In those trials, as is evident in the documents that have survived, more than 104 people died and most of them were women.²⁴¹ The trials in Rottenburg and Horb sparked further strife between the Catholics and the Protestants when the Protestants accused the Catholics of killing innocent people in an attempt to rid the surrounding area of Protestants.²⁴² These trials killed over 150 people.²⁴³ The trials in Obermarchtal were motivated by money and the abbey's attempts to drain as much of the capital from the poor region surrounding the abbey as possible and killing seven percent of the population in the process.²⁴⁴ The trials in the *Furstpropstei* of Ellwangen were by far the worst simply because of the freedom the area had from

²⁴⁰ Heinrich Kramer and Jakob Sprenger, *The Malleus Maleficarum of Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), 43-45 & 47.

²⁴¹ H. C. Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany: 1562-1684, The Social and Intellectual Foundations* (Stanford: Calif., Stanford University Press, 1972), 90.

²⁴² Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 91.

²⁴³ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 94.

²⁴⁴ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 97-8.

most authority. These trials killed 450 people and spread the hysteria to other regions.²⁴⁵ Ellwangen's madness spread to Schwäbisch Gmünd, killing 40 people.²⁴⁶ These trials are only a few examples of the 480 trials that happened in Germany and nearly all of them fit the same central pattern.²⁴⁷

On the other hand, the Spanish Trials, especially the Basque Trials, fell into the periphery of witch-hunts and witchcraft trials. These trials deviate sharply from the standard pattern that the trials in Germany followed. In these trials, women were not the primary victims. Instead, men and women were accused at equal rates and in the Basque Trials a high percentage of children were accused. These child witches were, likely, children telling fairy tales, egged on by their parents and priests.²⁴⁸ No single profession, like healer or midwife, was singled out in accusations because both men and women were accused equally.

The Inquisition also put the Spanish Trials in the periphery. Despite being created by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand to root out heretics, the Inquisition also investigated crimes of superstition and witchcraft.²⁴⁹ The Inquisition kept tight control over the subjects in their authority and rarely let the fear and paranoia spiral out of control like in Germany. Skeptics worked within the Inquisition to keep the number of deaths low. Inquisitors like Salazar did not believe, not like others wholeheartedly believed, in the power of the witch cult and the Devil and the evidence that had been presented in the trials. Salazar's skepticism and the doubt of

²⁴⁵ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 111-112.

²⁴⁶ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 113.

²⁴⁷ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 34.

²⁴⁸ de Salazar Frias, *The Salazar Documents*, 61-2.

²⁴⁹ Phillips and Phillips, *A Concise History of Spain*, 149.

people outside the Inquisition like Bishop of Pamplona Antonio Venegas de Figueroa helped keep the death toll low.²⁵⁰ Only eleven people died during the Basque Trials, the largest set of witchcraft trials in Spanish history with over 7,000 people accused only eleven were executed.²⁵¹ The number of deaths is the biggest difference between the central trials and the peripheral trials. Germany's response to accusations of witchcraft were wild, violent witch-hunts, short trials, and inevitable executions. In the Spanish Trials the Inquisition might relax the accused to secular authorities and then they might be executed. However, generally, very few people were executed in witchcraft or superstition trials.²⁵² Instead, the Inquisition was more lenient, they preferred other punishments like exile or flogging.²⁵³

Witches and witchcraft trials invoke the idea of the old disabled woman who practices midwifery being burned at the stake, or the rampant violent witch hunts that led to the persecution of such helpless old ladies. Lynch mobs and torture were a common part of the central trials like those in Germany. The trials in Spain, on the other hand, existed in the periphery because they were different from those central trials. Though the Basque Trials had the potential to become as bloody as the central trials, the skepticism, the Inquisition, and the unique factors of the trials like the child witches kept these trials from spiraling out of control. The trials in Spain were

²⁵⁰ Phillips and Phillips, *A Concise History of Spain*, 149.

²⁵¹ Gustav Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate: Basque Witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition, 1609-1614* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1980), 198-200.

²⁵² Gunnar W. Knutsen, *Servants of Satan and Masters of Demons: the Spanish Inquisition's Trials for Superstition, Valencia and Barcelona, 1478-1700* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 66. María Tausiet, *Urban Magic in Early Modern Spain: Abracadabra Omnipotens, trans.* Susannah Howe (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 219-31.

²⁵³ Knutsen, *Servants of Satan and Masters of Demons*, 64-66.

more humane than the central trials in Germany, if that was possible.

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