

“Wine vat witches suffocate children”.
The Mythical Components of the Iberian Witch

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At the beginning of the 15th century, a new type of crime emerged in different parts of Europe. It was characterized by night flights to diabolical assemblies, apostasy, pacts with the Devil, and by causing illness and death through various means. The men and women found guilty of this crime received different names in the contemporary sources, such as *streghe*, *hexen*, *vaudois*, *sorcières* or *bruxas*, thus attesting to the various traditions behind the birth of this phenomenon. Some of those names clearly referred to an anti-heretical tradition, while others were related to maleficent magic, or evoked mythical figures associated with nocturnal attacks. During the last decades, several authors have focused on those different traditions in an attempt to understand the emergence of this new crime of witchcraft in late medieval Europe.

Regarding the Iberian Peninsula, we can easily recognize three different political, linguistic and cultural areas where the witchcraft phenomenon occurred during the 15th century. First, the Catalan area, where witch-hunts began as soon as 1424 led by secular authorities from the Pyrenean regions of the Principality of Catalonia (Valls 259-261; Castell 2013, 143-155). Second, the Basque area, where witches were also prosecuted by the secular judges of the Kingdom of Navarre during the central years of that century, particularly in the lands north of the Pyrenees (Landemont 49-51; Idoate 18; Bordes 207-210). Finally, the Castilian area, where only by the second half of the century some local authorities from the northern provinces of the Crown of Castile started bringing to justice people accused of witchcraft (Gorosabel 353-354; Orella 108-109). As for the Catalan area, the new crime of witchcraft was associated with the term *bruxa*, an expression documented in Catalan sources since the thirteenth century, and originally related to a night spirit. At the beginning of the fifteenth century this word would be used for the first time in Catalonia to designate the members of a new diabolical sect, accused of attending the sabbath and performing some nocturnal acts previously attributed to that mythical figure. It was then that the word *bruxa* appeared in the Basque and Castilian areas, being often associated with the Basque-rooted term *sorgina*, which also presents a mythical origin. Both epithets would be used by Castilian authors since the mid-15th century to designate the members of the witch sect.

The first serious attempt to describe the mythical complex of this Iberian witch was undertaken by Campagne in an inspired paper published in 2008. The author called the attention to “the indubitable Pyrenean character of the term *bruja*”, recorded for the first time in Catalonia and associated with an archaic mythical complex that had its origin “in the furthest northern part of the Peninsula, from where it spread to the rest of the region, even reaching Portugal, the Canary Islands and Hispanic America” (Campagne 2008, 398). This author analyzed the behavior attributed to witches in the Hispanic sources, identifying the basic features of a series of mythical figures: the child-killing demon, the vampiric revenant, the Fairy Society and the Nightmare. A careful review of those sources, and their comparison with the Catalan ones, unknown to Campagne, reinforce even more this hypothesis and allow us to identify the mythical components of the Iberian witch.

The Evolution of the Word *bruxa*

No agreement has been reached among philologists as regards the etymology of the term *bruxa*, which presents a highly probable pre-Roman origin (Rohlf's 102-105; Hubschmid 112-119; Coromines 289-295). Among the few hypotheses linking this word to a Latin root, we can cite its alleged connection with the Latin form *strix*, noted by Roque Barcia, along with Caro Baroja's proposal, pointing to an unattested form *volucula* through an erroneous citation of García de Diego (Barcia 647; Caro Baroja 1987, 63; *cfr.* García de Diego 177). Recently, some scholars have put forward a new hypothesis by relying on the Latin *brucola*, diminutive for *bruschus* (the larva of the caterpillar), but which still remains a quite fragile attempt (Caprini and Alinei 169-216).

Some linguists have identified instead the term *bruxa* with the Gallic deity *Vroica*, associated with water courses and also related to the Gallic root **uroica* "heather" (Coromines 289-295; *cfr.* Dottin 238, 306; Aebischer 312). By relying on the semantic multiplicity of this term in Germanic languages (German *heide* becomes as well "heath", "field" and "pagan", a similar situation to that of the English heath, heathen and heather), some authors have then suggested a similar phenomenon based on the Gallo-Roman forms *bruscus* ("heath"), *bruscia* ("heather") and *bruxa*, hypothetically "pagan woman who gathers in heathlands" (Coromines 292-293; Cazalbou 89-98). Despite the colorful images about the alleged nocturnal assemblies in Pyrenean heathlands of *erica vagans* or even about the variety of heath used in the manufacturing of brooms (*erica scoparia*), this hypothesis has not yet been accepted by the linguists' community.

It is also possible to establish a link between *bruxa* and the Gallic word *brixta*, derived from the Indo-European root **bhrgh-tu-* "sorcery, enchantment". The words *brixta/brixtom* appear on a few ancient inscriptions from southern France, being associated either with a female deity (*Brixtae/BRICTAE*) or with a certain type of funerary magic performed mostly by women: *brixtia anderson* "the sorcery of the infernals", *andernados brixtom* "the sorcery of those from below", *bnanom brixtom* "women sorcery" (Delamarre 76-77; Lambert 162-174).

Leaving aside its problematic etymology, to which we will come back later, mentions of the word *bruxa* are rare prior to the fifteenth century and completely nonexistent outside the Catalan-speaking area. The first testimony to the use of this word is to be found in a medieval dictionary called *Vocabulista in arabico*, by Catalan Dominican friar Ramón Martí (c.1220-c.1285).¹ In this Arabic-Latin dictionary, written around 1257 in the *Studium Arabicum* of Tunis, Martí included some words from his own native language. Among these words we found the vernacular term *bruxa*, to which the author assigned three Arabic translations: *habîba*, *qarîna* and *kabûs* (Martí 272).

In Arabian mythology, the *qarîna* (from the root *k-r-n* "to unite") was a female demon similar to the *succubus* (thus the term *habîba*, "lover"), with origins in the beliefs of pre-Islamic Egypt and Arabia (Zwemer 107-124; Kazimirski 728; Wehr 760).² This figure was considered an evil spirit born at the time of the individual's birth and his constant companion through life, a sort of Double who was, in any case, jealous, malignant, and the cause of physical and moral ill, except to the extent that her influence was warded off by some sort of ritual. She prevented love between husband and wife, produced sterility and barrenness, and killed unborn and newborn children, sometimes dwelling in the body of a cat or a dog at nighttime. The *qarîna* also appeared at night in the shape of a beautiful woman to have

1 On the life of Ramon Martí see Berthier 267-311 and Fumagalli 119-122. On the vernacular terms used by this Catalan author see Griffin 251-337 and Corriente 1989.

2 *Qarîn*: 1. Joint, attaché, accouplé, attelé avec un autre. 2. Compagnon, inséparable; de là se dit de Satan, qui suit l'homme partout. 3. Époux, consort (Kazimirski 728); *Qarîna*: wife, spouse, consort; female demon haunting women, specifically a childbed demon (Wehr 760).

intercourse with the sleepers, who found themselves exhausted as soon as they were awoken, often claiming spiritual attack upon them. According to Tremearne, this belief occupied a prominent place in popular Islamic religiosity, where charms and amulets against the *qarîna* abounded unto the beginning of the 20th century (Tremearne 138-139).

Regarding the Arabic word *kabûs* (from the Semitic root *k-b-s* “to press, to squeeze”), it translates as “nightmare” and “*incubus-succubus*”, a meaning also present in other Semitic languages like the Aramaic *kābōšā* (Wehr 811; Corriente 1997, 453; Brockelmann 202).³ This word was used in the Iberian Peninsula by Muslim poets such as Ibn Quzman (1078-1160) or Ibn 'Asim (1359-1426) to designate an evil spirit that came down onto the sleepers during the night (Corriente 1984, 209; Marugan 105).⁴

The Arabic terms chosen by Martí illustrate the meaning attributed to the Catalan word *bruxa* during the thirteenth century, which clearly corresponds to a series of well-known figures of the European tradition. The suffocating attacks of the Nightmare, the oneiric relations with the demonic *incubi* and *succubi* or even the infanticidal activities of the classical *strigae* and *lamiae*, are all attributes attached to this medieval *bruxa*. The belief in that kind of evil spirits is well documented in European medieval sources and several scholars have analyzed their role in the formation of the witch stereotype (Russell 1972; Cohn 1975; Ginzburg 1989; Henningsen 1990; Behringer 1998; Pocs 1999; Broedel 2003; Davies 2003; Ostling 2011). Those nocturnal figures, originally seen as diabolical illusions by most of the clerics, would be gradually associated with real women having contact with demons or even accomplishing the same misdeeds attributed to them. This same phenomenon seems to have taken place in Catalonia, where the word *bruxa* would acquire an indubitable corporeal and demonolatrical sense being finally used to designate the members of the malignant sect of devil-worshippers.

A revealing document from the second half of the fourteenth century helps illustrating the semantic duality of this term in late medieval Catalonia. The workbook *Torcimany*, written by Lluís d'Aversó (c.1350–1412), includes the term *bruxa* among a long list of words sorted by termination, in the aim of helping poets finding good rhymes (Aversó 146). Unlike the rest of the words listed, Aversó recorded the word *bruxa* twice, adding a comment beside each entry. In the first one, the author wrote “*per la fentasma*” (“referring to the she-ghost”), whereas in the second one he noted “*per lo bruxar*” (“referring to the act of “witching””).⁵ This document reveals that, in fourteenth century Catalonia, the same word designating a female nocturnal spirit was also used to refer to certain women, considered maybe capable of the same actions attributed to the spirit itself. By the end of that century, Catalan authors such as Francesc Eiximenis (1330-1409) mentioned already the diabolical character attributed to the *bruxes*, while advising not to believe “that fairies, *bruxes*, fairy man and women or similar things are nothing, that the Devil has power over someone or in any way but only as God our Lord has allowed him or as man lets him” (Eiximenis 32-33).⁶

During the first decades of the fifteenth century, the word *bruxa* is documented for the first time outside the Catalan area. This term, that replaced or complemented previous appellatives, was also used to designate some nocturnal spirits as well as certain women allegedly capable

3 *Kāybûs*: incubus, nightmare; al-*Kābûs*: evil spirit who provokes emission of semen in dreams (Corriente 1997, 453); *Kābûs* pl. *Kawâbîs*: nightmare, incubus; terrible vision, phantom, bugbear (Wehr 811).

4 “I get sleepy in the middle of the reunion / and I fall aside like a water pipe, / and at the end of the night / the al-Kabus and the Farazdaq come down on me seven times” (Corriente 209); “As the hand of the Kabus: put it on top and it goes down <referring to the letter bā’>” (Marugan 105)

5 The author does of the sort with the variant “*broxa*”, that appears also twice with the comments “*per la fantasma*” and “*per bruxar*” (Aversó 146)

6 “E de creure que fades, bruxes, hòmens o dones encantades o semblants coses sien res, que lo Diable haia poder sobre algú ne en altra manera sinó tant com a Nostre Senyor Déu ha plagut dar o l'om permet usar.” (Eiximenis 32-33)

of entering the houses and killing little children. A confessors' manual written by the 14th-century Castilian author Martín Pérez provides an illustrative example. The earliest copy of this work is a 1399 Portuguese version, in which we read the penance established for those who believed that some women entered houses at night to harm little children:

Aos que creen e afirman que as molheres se tornan estreitas⁷ e que saen de noute e andom pollos aares e por as terras e que entran por os furacos e comen e çugam as creaturas, poolhe aquella penitência dos XL dias e dos setes annos. (Martins 48; *cfr.* García 1976, 201-217).⁸

In a Castilian copy of this manual, written at the beginning of the fifteenth century from the Portuguese version, the expression “the women become *estreitas*” would now be replaced by “the women become *bruxas* and *estrias*”; whereas in a later copy from 1437 we simply read “the women become *bruxas*” (Pérez 608; *cfr.* Campagne 2002, 471).

The gradual adoption of the form *bruxa* outside the Catalan-speaking area runs parallel to a phenomenon that was taking place at that time in some Catalan courts: the use of the word *bruxa* against women in judicial proceedings concerning the death of newborn children.

Bruxas on Trial: the Case of Sança de Camins

In 1419, the episcopal court of Barcelona, together with a Dominican friar, tried the mid-wife Sança de Camins on charges concerning the death of an infant. The preserved document only includes the woman's interrogation, entitled “*De bruxes*”, in which Sança claims her innocence and explains some magical practices that she used to perform among her neighbors. The court had initiated the interrogation by asking “if she had never went with some women called *bruxes*, or had been in the company of those, or if she knew anyone that did that type of things” (Hernando 88).⁹

The expression “to go with the *bruxes*” points to the mythical component of the Iberian witch figure. In Catalonia, this type of expression had been used before to refer to the night travel with the *bones dones*, the “good ladies” some women claimed to have walk with at night, and to whom people left food and drink with the purpose of attracting abundance. In the 14th-century pastoral visitations from the Catalan area, we often find women who are said to go along with (*vadit cum / ambulat cum*) the good ladies, and inquisitorial records from the time of the Catalan inquisitor Nicolau Eimeric (1316-1399) also include the case of a woman that “divinat et ambulat de nocte cum spiritibus malis qui dicuntur in vulgari bones dones” (Castell 2011, 223-224; Vincke 171).

The works of some authors from the 13th century already show the amalgamation operated during the Late Middle Ages between those good ladies, the infanticidal *strigae* or *lamiae*, and the *incubus*-type Nightmare. Gervais of Tilbury wrote in 1212 about the *lamiae*, also called *strigae* or *mascae*, that went by night with Diana and entered houses taking food and drink from the cellars, afflicting sleepers and abducting children off the bed to suck their blood (Tilburiensis III, 86).¹⁰ This blend is also attested to in the work of Jean de Meung,

7 The original Portuguese “*estreitas*” translates as Castilian *estrechas* (narrow), but it could also be a mistranslation of some original *estrias* form related to the Latin *striga*.

8 “To those who belief and affirm that women become [narrow] and that they go out at night and travel through the air and through the lands and that they enter through the holes and eat and suck the children, you must put them the penance of the XL days and that of the seven years.” (Martins 48, trans. by the author).

9 “si ella seria jamés anada ab algunes dones qui són appellades bruxes, ni ha haguda companyia de aquelles, ni sap alguna persona qui use de aquelles coses.” (Hernando 88).

10 “Lamie dicuntur esse mulieres quae noctu domos momentaneo discursu penetrant, dolia vel et confinos, catinos et olla perscrutantur, infantes ex cunis extrahunt, luminaria accendunt et nonnunquam dormientes affligunt [...] comoedere videntur et lucernas accendere, ossa hominum dissolvere, quin nonnunquam dissoluta

who, in his addition to the *Roman de la Rose* (1275-1280), talked about the people that claimed to be *estries* and go by night with *dame Abonde* and the *bonnes dames* entering houses through chinks (Meung 229-230).¹¹ The Catalan expression “to go with the *bruxes*” also evokes similar formulations used in the Italian area, where, according to 14th-century preacher Jacopo Passavanti, some women went by night “in tregenda colle streghe” guided by Diana and Herodias, together with a procession of demons transformed into people or beasts to commit “alcune cose disoneste” (Passavanti 319).

Back to Sança's trial, those nocturnal rides previously attributed to the *bones dones* appear now associated with the murderous *bruxes*, anticipating a malignant pattern that will reappear in the following centuries: children's death at the hands of the *bruxes* by crushing or poisoning. In this regard, the court asked Sança “if she had said to someone that there was a company of three women that anointed the infants”, and then she was also interrogated about her ability to identify the acts of witches through the marks left on children's corpses, because she told the mothers: “I already warned you that I found marks in which I knew that the *Trip* or the *bruxes* must have come” (Hernando 88).¹²

The popular belief in the witches' infanticidal attacks and the marks left on children's bodies is widely attested to in 15th-century European sources, and it would also become a constant feature of Catalan witchcraft trials, being used by the witnesses to substantiate their suspicions against the accused (Kieckhefer 1998, 91-109; Castell 2013, 114-141). In a 1453 witchcraft trial presided by the royal magistrate of Lleida, the neighbors threw their accusations against a woman based on the state in which a dead infant was found, who “was all blue, with twisted feet and hands [...] and some women presumed that *bruxes* must have done it [...] and that the aforementioned woman must have done it” (Camps and Camps 251).¹³ This widespread belief is also reported in the 1459 work of the physician Jaume Roig, who derided the procedures of mid-wives in cases of children's diseases:

Ella y apella	ara salada,
moltes madrines:	adés gelada;
mil medeçines,	troben que bull;
meneschalies	ffan li per ull.
he burleries;	Res no profita.
unten he faxen,	Prenen sospita
sovint desfaxen,	si u han fet bruxes
refreden, guasten;	<si> en pits e cuxes
suor li tasten:	blavós trobaven.

(Roig II, 4, vv.3300-3317)¹⁴

cum ordinis turbatione compaginare, sanguinem humanum bibere et infantes de loco ad locum mutare.” (Tilburiensis III, 86).

11 “Maintes gens, par lor folie, / cuident estre par nuit estries / errans avecques dame Habonde; [...] Qu'il vont trois fois en la semaine, / si cum destineé les maine, / et par tous ces ostex se boutent, / ne clés ne barres ne redoutent, / ains s'en entrent par les fendaces, / par chatieres et par crevaces, / et se partent des cors les ames, / et vont avec les bonnes dames / par lius forains et par maisons.” (Meung 229-230).

12 “Si ella deposant haurie dit a neguna persona que tres dones eren de companyia que pomejaven los infants. [...] Yo ho havia ja dit a vós que yo trobava monjoyes en les quals jo conexia que lo Trip o bruxes hi devien venir” (Hernando 88). The mention of that company of “three women” also recalls the figure of the *Tria Fata* or *Parcae* from classical tradition that, according to Harf-Lancner, would be the basis for the elaboration of medieval fairies, but that appear associated in Sança's trial with the figure of the witch and the use of deadly ointments (Harf-Lancner 10-25).

13 “Lo dit infant mort era tot blau e los peus e les mans torçudes [...] e altres dones dehien que presumien que bruxes ho devien haver fet [...] e que la dita dona, que aquella ho devia haver fet.” (Camps and Camps 251).

14 “She call upon / many mid-wives: / a thousand medicines, / veterinarian remedies / and mockeries. / They anoint and wrap, / often unwrap, / they cool, they waste, / they taste his sweat: / now it is salted, / then it is

This might well have been the case of Sança de Camins, a mid-wife capable of identifying this kind of attacks, and who was also reputed to perform some sort of fertility rituals with the placenta of the mothers, as she herself recognized. The climate of suspicion against those kind of practices might have motivated the accusation made against her by the family of the dead child. Despite the insistence of the court, Sança denied all the charges brought against her, but confessed the use of a certain ritual to protect the newborn babies from the attacks of some nocturnal figures, defined as *bruxes* or as “*lo Trip Reial*” (the Royal Tribe):

Que moltes vegades de nits aparellava la taula de menjar, e posave-y tovalles, e pa, e vi, e aygua, e un mirall en què-s mirasen los del Trip, e que-s torbassen en menjar e en beure e en mirar-se en lo mirall, e no matassen los infants petits. [...] E que en aquesta guisa l'infant serie deliure, que no calie aver por ni peril per lo dit Trip. (Hernando 88)¹⁵

The ritual described by that woman reminds the practice of leaving food and drink for the visit of the good ladies and other nocturnal spirits related to “the food of the dead” tradition, replaced here by the *bruxes* and the so-called *Trip Reial* (Deonna 53-81; Tragni 2006). This last name designated, in the Catalan-speaking area, a sort of spiritual procession in the line of the nocturnal armies of the European tradition (Galiana 69; Coll 148-150; Gómez 37-43). Gervais of Tilbury mentioned in 1212 the vitality of this belief in Catalonia, where people thought that a group of warriors armed with spears appeared on a rock in the middle of a plain, but disappeared as soon as someone approached (Tilburiensis III, 63).¹⁶ This mythical figure follows the logic of the pairs of opposites (*Holda-unholda, benandanti-malandanti*) and appears as a negative version of the royal procession that brings good presents to the children, and to whom (still today) people leave food and drink on the eve of the Epiphany. We must bear in mind that some of the first descriptions of the *Magi*, from various fifth-century apocryphal gospels, depicted the travel of the three kings accompanied by twelve captains that led twelve-thousand horse riders, which corresponds to the number of the tribes of Israel and the number of those chosen in the Apocalypse (Cardini 29-30). This may help to explain the name given to that nocturnal ride in the Catalan-speaking area, “the Royal Tribe”, probably related to the belligerent tribe of Juda mentioned in the Old Testament (49:8-12).

The prophylactic ritual performed by Sança in 1419 Barcelona was then aimed to avoid the death of children at the hands of those nocturnal beings, in the houses where “the *Trip* or the *bruxes* must have come”. Nevertheless, the questions formulated by the episcopal court seemed to want to identify the accused as a member of that malignant company, as it would very soon be the case in some secular courts.

In that regard, the municipal authorities of Girona tried a woman in 1427 on some charges similar to the activities traditionally attributed to the infanticidal *bruxes*, characterized by an unequivocal demonolatrical mark. In a letter sent to the Catalan king, those noble citizens claimed that the woman “has invoked demons, worshiping them and offering the meat of dead newborn babies”. According to a witness, “at night, *januis clausis*, she enters in the chambers

frozen, / they find that he burns, / they do for the evil-eye, / nothing profits him. / They suspect / that *bruxes* have done it / if in chests and thighs / they found some blueness.” (Roig II.4, my translation).

15 “That she often set the table at night with food and a tablecloth and bread and wine and water and a mirror, so that those of the Trip would look into it and trouble themselves eating and drinking and looking themselves in the mirror, and thus they wouldn't attack the little children. [...] And that in this manner the child would be delivered, that there would be no need to fear for the Trip.” (Hernando 88, trans. by the author).

16 “De militibus qui apparent. In Catalonia est rupes in aliquantam planitiem extensa, in cujus summitate circa meridianam horam conspiciuntur milites arma gestantes seseque more militum hastis impellentes. Si vero ad locum quis accesserit, nihil prorsus huiusce rei apparet.” (Tilburiensis III, 63). This passage presents a surprising similarity with some descriptions of the witches sabbath in the Catalan-Provençal area, often celebrated on a plain where the Devil appears on the top of a rock.

where women in labor lie, with the aim of taking away the newborn children". Those accusations took place in the context of the deaths caused by an enormous earthquake that devastated the region. For that reason, the authorities of Girona insisted on a swift condemnation, that was being prevented by the local inquisitor, "because it is time for such heresies to be extirpated" (Claudi 48-61).¹⁷ As for Sança's case, we ignore the outcome of the trial, which presents several elements close to the figure of the *lamia* like the entering of houses through closed doors, and the abduction and killing of children, reformulated in an heretical and demonolatrical sense.

During the years between those two trials, the new crime of witchcraft would be formulated for the first time in Catalonia in a legal ordinance from the Pyrenean valleys, far from the control of royal or inquisitorial justice. In this document, the word *bruxa* would be used for the first time in relation to the members of a new heretical sect of devil-worshippers.

The Emergence of the Sabbatical *bruxa*

The first Catalan document describing the crime of witchcraft was issued in 1424 by the count and the notables of the Pyrenean valley of Àneu. This document, a legal ordinance against "the enormous crimes recently committed against God and the valley", referred to some people that gathered at night to abjure the faith and pay homage to the Devil (called "the he-goat of Biterna") and also went by night and abducted children from the side of their mothers to kill them afterwards, provoked illnesses, caused infertility or impotence and poisoned people to death, "as it has been proven by the confessions of those tried in court" (Padilla 148).¹⁸ The ordinance, that stipulated the death by fire and the confiscation of the goods of those convicted, also included a change in the judicial proceedings, allowing the use of torture on the basis of public reputation, the attribution of trial costs to the convicted, the recording of the inquests and the prohibition of being tried by other courts outside the valley. The expression used to refer to the participants in those diabolical gatherings was very close to the one used in Sança's trial, as they mentioned that those "enormous crimes" were committed by men and women "who go by night with the *bruxes* to the he-goat of Biterna":

Com en la dita vayll se agen comessos crims molt innormes de envés Déu e la dita vayll, çò és que van de nit ab les bruxes al boch de Biterna¹⁹ e aquell prenen per senyor, fahent-li homenatge, renegant lo nom de Déu, anans de nit, levant los inffants petits dels costats de lurs mares e aquells maten, donen gatirrons o buxols, donen metzines en diverses maneres, segons de tots aquests crims se apar per processos e confesions pròpies dels dellats. [...] Que tal hom o fembra qui semblants delictes cometrà perda lo cors; e tots los béns, axí setis com mobles, sien confiscats al senyor. Lo cors sie executat en aquesta manera: que com la sentència serà donada per la dita cort que perd cos e béns, que lo delat sie mes en una sàrria bé ligat, enaprés la dita sàrria sie ligada a la coha d'una bèstia e sia stiraçat fins al

17 "Que ha invocats dimonis, els ha adorats e fets sacrificis de carn de infant o albat mort. [...] de nits, januis clausis, entra en las cambras on jaen les dones parteres per pendre e portar-se los infants parits. [...] car temps tenim que tals heretjies deuen ésser extirpades" (Claudi 48-61).

18 The first edition of this manuscript was published by Ferran Valls (Valls 259-261), and the part concerning the witchcraft crime was edited independently by Jean-Joseph Saroihandy (Saroihandy 1917). We follow the recent edition in Padilla 1999. A French translation can be found in Castell 2011, 239-241.

19 This expression to designate the Devil is attested to in the Catalan-Provençal area from the beginning of the thirteenth century, when it appears in a poem by the Occitan troubadour Guillem Raniol d'At: "Per nos laissez vostre floc, / et avetz el suc maynt loc, / Guillem, don a meyns maynt floc, / cara de boc de Biterna!" (For us you left your habit, / and you have many places in your head, / Guillem, where many locks are missing: / he-goat of Biterna-face!) (Riquer 1245). The homage to the he-goat of Biterna would become a constant feature in Catalan witchcraft trials during the 15th and 16th centuries, especially in the Pyrenean region (Castell 2013).

loch on se farà la justícia e aquí sia mes al foch e del seu cos feta pólvora. (Padilla 148)²⁰

This Pyrenean ordinance attests a total blend of the traditions relating to the nocturnal spirits, the condemnation of poison and maleficent magic, and the existence of heretical and demonolatrical sects, a triple fusion that marked the birth of the new witch stereotype in the Catalan area. Similar ordinances were being issued at that time by local authorities all over the Principality, often inspired by the pastoral efforts of Dominican preachers such as Vicent Ferrer (1350-1419). During his preachings in Catalonia, Valencia and Languedoc, initiated after the council of Perpignan (1408), Ferrer hardened his eschatological claims by asking the crowd and the local authorities for decisive action against sorcerers, diviners and poisoners to avoid the wrath of God, even demanding the promulgation of new ordinances and the burning of the members of that malignant society:

Que si havem necessitats, que no anem a devins ne fetillés, mas a Jhesu Xrist tant solament. [...] Los Jurats ja hi han provehit bé, mas no reste sinó la execució que·s faça. Si la feu, si no, diu Déu que ell la farà e metrà·u tot per terra. Axí encerquats, <e> si n'i ha nengú en la ciutat, provehits-hi, si no Déu ho farà. [...] E quin exemple han ací los regidós? que la ley que és feta. [...] Vejam: ha y nengú que face contra estes ordinacions? Fora! E punir-los més que als altres. [...] Axí, per amor de Déu, tant com més se acosta la fi del món e de aquell traydor Antixrist, tan més devem escapar dels mals adevins e conjuradós e sodomites: axí, si·n sabets, accusats. (1413 sermon in Valencia) (Sanchís 86-88)²¹

Quod debemus recurrere ad Christum, non ad sortilegos, qui non possunt tibi dare nisi Infernum. [...] Et dimittatis sortilegos, quia gravissime est Deo ad eos ire nec eos sustinere, et ideo ne habeatis carenciam lignorum, sed, scita veritate, comburantur. [...] Sed similes persone talia operantes non debent sustineri, ymo comburi vel eici de villa vel civitate. (1414 Sermon in Lleida) (Robles 115)

Sicut Dominus in isto campo, scilicet in mundo, seminavit semen veritatis, sic diabolus seminavit semen falcitatis, scilicet divinationes, mezinarias et similia in terra. [...] “Malignus” quasi “male igneus”, quia non solum malus sibi sed toti patrie, sicut sortilegia, divinationes et similia. Et quando tales persone sustinentur, ira Dei est in patria, et pro uno sufficiens est quod tota patria destruat. Ideo debent tales persone maligne comburi. (1416 Sermon in Clermond-Ferrand) (Perarnau 361)

20 “Since in this valley enormous crimes have been committed against God and the valley, that is, that they go by night with the bruxes to the he-goat of Biterna and they take him as their lord, paying homage to him, abjuring the name of God, going at night, abducting little children from the side of their mothers and killing them, provoking the goiter and giving poisonous herbs, administering poisons in different manners, as it has been proven by the confessions of those tried in court. [...] The man or woman who commits such crimes has to lose the body; and all of his/her properties, both movables and immovables, are to be confiscated by the lord. The body has to be executed in this manner: when the sentence of body and property loss is passed by the court, the offender must be tied up into a pannier attached to a beast and then dragged to the place where justice will be served, and there s/he is to be put to the fire and his/her body turned into ashes.” (Padilla 148, trans. by the author).

21 “That if we are in necessity let us not go to diviners nor *fetillers*, but only to Jesus Christ. [...] The councilmen have already provided well, but now the execution is required. You must do that, if not, God says that He will, and then He will tear everything apart. So do search and if there are some of those in the city, see to it, if not, God will. [...] Which is the example that the councilmen have here? The law which has been issued. [...] Let's see: is there anyone that acts against those ordinances? Out! And punish them more than the others. [...] In this way, by the love of God, as the end of the world approaches and <the coming of> that traitor Antichrist, even more so, we have to escape from the bad diviners and conjurers and sodomites: so if you know of them, do accuse.” (Sanchís 86-88, trans. by the author).

The effect of this kind of preachings is documented in Catalan sources, which often show the emergence of accusations of diabolical sorcery or even the adoption of new ordinances by the local authorities after the passage of a preacher. In 1413, a man from Barcelona expelled his lover from his house accusing her of being “*metzinera* and *fetillera*”, after hearing a sermon preached by Ferrer. The woman was judged and banished after suffering public scorn.²² Another example is provided by the municipal records of the city of Tarragona, where after sermons delivered in 1422 by Ferrer's disciple, Pere Cerdà, the councilmen legislated against “*fatillers, fatilleres, men and women conjurers [...] and other public sins, by promulgating ordinances like the ones adopted in Vic and other cities*”.²³ The Àneu ordinances appear then in a context of secular legislative changes influenced by the pastoral efforts of late medieval preachers, that encouraged local authorities to take action against the malignant members of society. But unlike most of those legal statutes against sorcery and divination, the Pyrenean ordinances presented for the first time an explicit condemnation of a heretical group that not only performed maleficent magic (*fetilleria*) or poisoning crimes (*metzines*), but that had also abjured the faith and paid homage to the Devil, gathering at night and carrying out some actions traditionally attributed to nocturnal infanticidal spirits.

Those actions, described in the 1424 ordinance, are very close to the ones alleged against Tuscan and Roman *streghe* during the 1420's, which also include the night gatherings, the apostasy and the pact with the Devil, followed by the *maleficia* and the killing of infants (Mammoli 30-40; Siena 1004-1007; Mormando 72-77; Montesano 132-152). In the well known case of Mateuccia of Todi, her trial was also inspired by the preachings of Bernardino de Siena and preceded by the adoption of new ordinances by the local authorities, allowing the use of torture and stipulating the death by fire of those found guilty of enchanting demons and using maleficent magic (Bigaroni 116-117).²⁴ The coincidence with the Catalan case also includes the ritual performed at the execution, consisting in the public scorn of those condemned, who were to be tied up wearing a grotesque hat and carried on a donkey to the place where they were to be executed.

Also the secular authorities from Languedoc prosecuted several women between 1422 and 1447, accused of gathering *in factum hereticalibus*, abjuring God and Christian faith, paying homage to the Devil (called *le bouc de Biterne*), entering houses through closed doors and killing by poisoning (Frayssenge 189-206; Ghersi 116-117). Similar proceedings led by secular and inquisitorial judges are documented at that time in the Alpine region, from the Dauphiny to the Valais. The traces of those trials, mentioned by authors like Claude Tholosan (1436), Jean Nider (1436-1438) or Hans Fründ (1437-1446) and collected by modern scholars as Pierrette Paravy, Catherine Chène or Chantal Ammann-Doubliez, present a content similar to that of the Pyrenean ordinances: apostasy and homage to the Devil, infanticide, sterility, lycanthropy, poisons and maleficent magic (Ostorero *et al.* 23-98, 355-438; Paravy 771-905). Death by fire and the confiscation of goods are also the penalties most commonly used against

22 Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó (ACA), Processos en quart, 1424: “Que lo dit Guillem deia públicament que la dita Eulàlia era gran metzinera e fetillera, e que de fet la havia treta de casa sua per aquesta rahó, [...] que la ha tenguda <per amiga> fins que mestre Vicens fou vengut en la dita vila.”

23 Arxiu Històric de Tarragona (AHT), Concilium, 1421-1422, d/s: “Primo sobre les ordinacions que l venerable prehicador frare Pere Cerdà en sos sermons e en altra manera ha prehicat e amonestats los honorables cònsols e consell que sien fetes per esquivar fatillers, fatilleres, conjuradors e conjuradores, juradors, despitadors e renegadors, jugadors, logrés, alcavots e altres pecats públics, sien fetes ordinacions segons en la ciutat de Vich e en altres parts se són fetes, de les quals és stada dada còpia als honorables cònsols, les quals són stades lestes en lo parlament.”

24 “De pena incantatorum et facturariorum. Item decreverunt ordinaverunt et reformaverunt, quod nullus debeat incantare demones seu facere aut fieri facere aliquas facturas seu malias. Et qui contrafecerit in predictis igne comburatur. Et possit potestas et quilibet alius officialis precedentibus in legitimis inditiis dictos incantatores, maliarios sive facturarios torquere secundum facti qualitatem et personarum conditionem.” (Bigaroni 116-117).

the perpetrators. Some of those persecutions were also accompanied by legal statutes issued by local communities as Loèche (1428), Morel (1430) or Rarogne (1434), promulgated against those who performed “the art of sorcery and maleficent magic” (Gremaud 33-35).²⁵

It would seem then that during the 1420's a new type of crime began to emerge in an area comprised between the Pyrenees, the Alps and the central Apennines, presenting some local particularities and receiving different names by his prosecutors. In central and northern Italy the women accused were called *facturaria*, *maliaria* and *strega*; in German-speaking areas the members of the sect were defined as *hexen* and *zauberer*, while in the French-speaking regions, from the Alps to the Pyrenees, they were known mostly as *fachurières*, *valdenses*, *sorcières* and *poisonnières*, all of them accompanied by the Latin terms *maleficus*, *sortilegus* or *novus hereticus*.²⁶ Regarding the Catalan area, despite the sporadic use of the word *fetillera*, it was the term *bruxa* that came to unequivocally define the members of that new sect, characterized by strong infanticidal tendencies and harshly prosecuted by Catalan authorities from the second quarter of the 15th century onwards.

In the years that followed the Àneu ordinances, the expression “to go with the *bruxes*” disappeared from Catalan sources, as the women prosecuted would simply be accused of “being” or “becoming” *bruxes*. In 1440 some citizens of Barcelona suspected that Agnès de Modoy “anave bruxant” (went around “witching”), while Antonia Pentinada from Tarragona was accused in 1453 “de crimine heresis, maxime de bruxa, et que occidit infantes”.²⁷ In the aforementioned trial from 1453, presided by the royal magistrate of Lleida, the court also asked the accused if “there was in the city any woman who was a *bruixa* and knew how to perpetrate *maleficia* to the infants or the people”.²⁸ One of the most explicit documents is the aforementioned work published around 1459 by the physician Jaume Roig, in which the author referred to the persecution that had been taking place in the Principality of Catalonia:

Ab çert greix fus,	mengen e beven,
com diu la gent,	après se lleven,
se fan hungüent	per l'ayre volen,
he bruxes tornen:	entren hon volen
en la nit bornen,	sens obrir portes.
moltes s'apleguen,	Moltes n'an mortes,
de Déu reneguen,	en foch cremades,
hun boch adoren,	sentençiadades
totes honoren	ab bons proçessos,

25 “Certarum personarum utriusque sexus, ut saltim presumitur, artis sortilegii, fetonissarum, incantacionum et huiusmodi, ex qua presumunt ipsam communitatem et singulares personas palam et occulte multa opprobria, dampna et gravamina sustinere et multipliciter in ipsorum personis, animalibus et bonis.” (Gremaud 33-35).

26 “feminam male conditionis vita et fame, publicam incantatricem, facturariam et maliariam et stregam. [...] diabolico spiritu instigata, quampluries et pluries ivit stregatum infantes devastando, sanguinem ipsorum lactancium sucando” (Mammoli 14-30); “infelicium hominum ac muliercularum, qui suo salvatore relicto, retro post Satanam conversi, demonum illusionibus seducuntur, qui vulgari nomine stregues vel stregones seu waldenses nuncupatur” (Hansen 18); “die boßheit, das mord und die ketzerÿe der hexssen und der zu^obrern, beide wiben und mannen, die da heissent "sortileÿ" ze latin” (Ostorero et al. 30); “quedam horrenda et detestabili apostasia a fide seu secta, que valdesia vulgariter seu faicturerie gallice nuncupatur [...] qui vulgo ibidem faicturiers et faicturières nuncupatur” (Hansen 188); “illam plagam et morbum diabolicum fachurerie et valdesie” (Paravy 804); “De septem maleficorum exerciciis. Quomodo comedant pueros. Quomodo artem istam profiteantur. [...] multos utriusque sexus incineravit maleficos et alios fugavit” (Ostorero et al. 144-152); “Helas tu n'as parlé des masques, [...] j'entens les vieilles cauquemares, et de ces vaillans faicturieres [...] dy nous de ces bonnes sorcières” (ibid. 452); “estoit diffamée notoirement et publiquement XXV ans a au pais de par-delà d'estre sorcière et poisonnière et de aler avec les autres sorcières tuer les enfants et faire autres maulx” (Gherisi 116-117);

27 Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona, Fons Consellers, 1C.XVIII, n^o5 doc.s/n.

28 “en la ciutat n'i hage dona nenguna que sie bruixa ni sàpie fer malefiscis a infant ni a persones nengunes.” (Camps and Camps 252).

la llur cavern
qui·s diu Biterna;

per tals exçessos
en Catalunya.

(Roig III, 1, vv.3354-3375)²⁹

Little has survived of those “good trials” mentioned by Roig and performed by the independent secular courts of jurisdictionally fragmented Catalonia. Most of the records have been lost or still remain in private hands, while the better preserved royal or episcopal sources don't contain any traces of a prosecution led mostly by local authorities from the independent Catalan seigniories. It is only by the second half of that century that we can find the first series of trials preserved in some Pyrenean archives or in private collections like the one from the aristocratic Medinaceli family (Castell 2013, 29-40). The women accused in those group trials are invariably described with the words *bruxa* and *metzinera* (“witch” and “poisoner”), together with the Latin terms *malefica* and *venefica*. The mythical components of their alleged actions are widely documented throughout the proceedings, revealing a pattern that will reappear in Catalan courts during the numerous witchcraft trials from the 16th and 17th centuries.

Before analyzing these mythical components, we must first assess the situation of the term *bruxa* outside the Catalan-speaking area, given that the evolution of this word would also have its reflex on the neighboring Iberian areas, specifically the Crown of Castile and the northern kingdoms of Aragon and Navarre.

Mentions of Sabbatical *bruxas* Outside the Catalan Area

During the first decades of the fifteenth century, the word *bruxa* began to be used as an insult against women in the northern regions of the Kingdom of Navarre, together with the Basque-rooted word *xorquina* (Idoate 18). This last word, originally related to a sort of chthonic figure of Basque mythology close to the infanticidal *laminak*, experienced a similar evolution to that of the Catalan *bruxa*, thus becoming the usual designation for “witch” in the northwestern part of the Peninsula (Barandiaran 72-76; Caro Baroja 1941, 25-65; Arana 107-127). In a Latin-Castilian glossary from the end of the 14th century, the voice *xorquina* is given as a translation for the Latin *no(c)tigina*, a term documented in medieval and early modern sources in reference to a sort of infernal deity and also to the diabolical Furies (Castro 72).³⁰ The relation established between this Basque-Castilian *xorquina* and the sabbatical

29 “With a certain melted fat, / as people say, / they make an ointment / and become *bruxes*. / They rush in the night, / many of them gather, / they abjure God, / adore a he-goat, / they all honor / his cavern / called Biterna. / They eat and drink, / then they take off / flying through the air, / they enter wherever they want to / without opening doors. / Many of them have been killed, / burned in the fire, / sentenced / by good trials / for those excesses, / in Catalonia.” (Roig III.1, trans. by the author).

30 Among medieval authors who mention these infernal figures we can cite Sedulius Scottus, Gautier de Châtillon, Bonifacio Veronese or Conradus Wimpina. Regarding Modern authors, Giordano Bruno mentions this figure when talking about the images of rage personified in the Fury *Erynnis*, considered the daughter of the virgin *Noctigena* and the mother of bloody war, while 17th-century authors such as Tobias Scultetus and Matthew Gwinne also mention *Noctigena* among other infernal deities as *Aphrosynam*, *Nemesi* and *tribus Furiis* (Bruni II, 5; Gwinne 1639). The expression *no(c)tigina* also recalls the one used by John of Salisbury to designate one of the Ladies of the Night that led the nocturnal assemblies where little children were abducted and offered to the *lamiae*: “aliqui Nocticulum quandam vel Herodiadem vel praesidem noctis Dominam, concilia vel conventus de nocte asserunt convocare, varia celebrare convivia [...] praeterea infantes exponi lamiis et nunc frustatim discerptos, edaci ingluvie in ventrem trajectos congeri, nunc praesidentis miseratione rejectos in cunas reponi.” (Saresberiensis II, 17). The only mention in Castilian literature appears in Gabriel de Castillo's *Lauerintho poetico* (1691), where the author cites the plural *Noctigenas* as one of the names given by the ancients to the infernal furies: “Noctigenas y Acherontigenas, son nombres con que se llaman las furias.” (Castillo 217, 717-

witch is suggested by a later Castilian glossary written at the beginning of the 15th century. In this glossary the expression *no(c)tigina* would be translated simply as *bruxa*, in what appears to be one of the first written mentions of this word outside the Catalan-speaking area (Castro 109). Despite the lacking of judicial proceedings, these mentions are noteworthy since Castilian authors would use the expression “bruxas y xorguinias” during the mid-15th century to designate the members of the witches’ sect.

The emergence of the new crime of witchcraft in the Pyrenean region during the 1420's, would soon be mentioned by some Castilian bishops like Alonso de Madrigal (c.1410-1455). In his *Commentaria in Genesim* (1436), Madrigal referred to what was happening at that time in the region of *Hispania*, where a sect of women called *maleficas*, through certain unctions and words, were believed to go at will to certain places to gather with other people and give themselves to all sort of pleasures, both gastronomic and sexual:

Quod diebus nostris accidit in hac regione Hispanorum: sunt enim mulieres quaedam, quas maleficas vocamus, quae profitentur facta quadam unctione cum certis verborum observationibus ire quando voluerint ad diversa loca, viros et feminas convenire ubi omnium voluptatum generibus, tam in cibis quam in complexibus perfruantur (Madrigal 1728, 326).

Madrigal added an *exemplum* in his *Comentaria* in the aim of proving the falsity of the beliefs of the “*mulierculae huius sectae*”. According to the Castilian bishop, one of them would have accepted to realize her unctions and formulas in the presence of witnesses, who had then verified how she lied *exanimis* during hours, despite being burned and beaten, affirming when she regained consciousness that she had went to other places together with other members of the sect, whose names she mentioned, to surrender herself to the aforementioned pleasures.³¹ A similar *exemplum* appears in the contemporary *Formicarius* of Jean Nider (1436-1438), where the author mentions the case of an old woman who had accepted to demonstrate her nocturnal ride with Diana and other women to a Dominican friar in the presence of witnesses. Sitting on a kneading-trough placed on a stool, and after anointing herself and uttering some sort of formula (*verbis maleficis et unguento*), the woman fell asleep with her head hanging back and moving so violently that she finally fell heavily to the floor, being then corrected by the salutary words of the friar (Ostorero *et al.* 134-137, 207-220).

As Catherine Chène states in her comment on Nider's work, this kind of *exempla* prove that the night flight was a subject of discussion at that time, running parallel to the spread of the belief in the witches’ sect. The same Alonso de Madrigal is a good example of those discussions as he himself addressed the same subject in 1440 with an explicit change of opinion, claiming that women and even men could in fact be transported by demons to gather with other people of their kind in a place where they honored the demons and gave themselves to all sort of luxury and indecency, as it had been proven in court (Madrigal 1596, 327-328).³²

718).

31 “Cuidam autem mulierculae huius sectae cum super hac de re non crederetur, praesentibus multis se id facturam pollicetur, factis autem verborum et unctionis observationibus, coram astantibus velut exanimis iacuit: cumque post aliquot horas in se reversa evigilasset, testatur se in talibus atque talibus stetisse locis, atque cum plurimis ejusdem sectae noti in ea regione personis, quas ex nomine appellavit variis se voluptatibus perfruitam asseruit. Noverant autem, qui aderant, eam in hac re falli, cum toto eo tempore praesentibus eis jacuisset exanimis.” (Madrigal 1728, 327).

32 “Quod autem dicitur de mulieribus, quae per noctem discurrunt per diversa loca, etiam verus est. Nam saepe hoc inventum est et iudicialiter punitum. Et aliqui, volentes imitari earum nefandas caeremonias, magna incommoda incurrerunt. [...] Ideo negandum non est, mulieres maleficas et etiam viros, factis quibusdam nefandis caeremoniis et unctionibus, a daemonibus assumi et per diversa loca portari, et multos huius generis in

Despite Madrigal's use of the Latin term *maleficas*, other Castilian authors began to use the word *bruxa* when referring to the actions perpetrated by the members of that alleged sect. This is the case of the bishop Lope de Barrientos (1382-1469), member of the royal court of Castile and author of a series of treatises where he addressed the subject of superstition from a Thomistic and empirical perspective. In the last chapter of his *Tratado de la divinança* (c.1450), he approached the subject of witches through the following question:

Conviene saber qué cosa es esto que se dize que ay unas mugeres que se llaman bruxas, las quales creen e dizen que de noche andan con Diana, deesa de los paganos, con muchas e innumerables mugeres cavalgando en bestias e andando e pasando por muchas tierras e logares, e que pueden aprovechar e dañar a las criaturas. (Álvarez 151; cfr. Hansen 123-124)³³

In his answer to this question, Barrientos provided arguments taken from theology and natural philosophy. Thus, “speaking theologically”, he advised to follow the Catalan Dominican Raimón de Penyafort (1180-1275) who, drawing on the *Canon episcopi*, had already attributed these things to “the operations of the malignant spirits who represent those phantoms into the phantasy of men and women”. Accordingly, Barrientos continued, one must not believe that those things happen corporally “except in dreams or by the operation of phantasy” (Penyafort I, 15; Álvarez 151).³⁴ On the other hand, “speaking naturally”, any wise man ought to ask himself “if those *bruxas* that claim to go through countless places and enter the houses through chinks, leave their bodies when they go to perform such acts or take their bodies with them” (Álvarez 152).³⁵ Barrientos himself provides the answer when claiming that, according to theologians and philosophers, it is impossible for the soul to leave the body at will, as it is also impossible “for a body with three dimensions” to go through such little spaces. Accordingly, one must not believe that women could enter through chinks or holes nor turn themselves into geese (*ansares*) and enter the houses to suck children. Instead, mothers should take good care of their babies and “if they died due to bad keeping, not to excuse themselves with the *bruxas* that entered through chinks to kill them” (Álvarez 152).³⁶

Barrientos' mention to the transformation of women into geese points to the northwestern part of the Peninsula, where this metamorphosis was an old attribute of the Basque mythological figures of the *xorginak* and the *laminak*. At the same time, both Madrigal and Barrientos' mentions are consistent with the judicial documents from the Catalan area, where local authorities had been prosecuting *bruxes* from at least 1424 with charges including the

unum locum convenire, et daemonibus honorem quendam exhibere ac libidini et omni turpitudini vacare.” (Madrigal 1596, 327-328)

33 “Let us know what is this that is being said about the existence of some women called *bruxas*, who believe and say that they go at night with Diana, goddess of the pagans, with many and countless women riding on beasts and passing through many lands and places, and that they can use and harm the children.” (Álvarez 151, trans. by the author).

34 “operaciones de los spíritus malignos, los quales representan aquellos fantasmas a la fantasía de los ombres e de las mugeres. [...] salvo en sueños o por operación de la fantasía.” (Álvarez 151); “De his dicit concilium aquienense, quod non a divino spiritu, sed maligno talia phantasma mentibus fidelium irrogantur: diabolus enim, cum animam alicuius per talem crudelitatem subiugaverit sibi, transformans se in diversarum personarum species, atque similitudines, et mentem, quam captivam tenet, multipliciter deludit, nec debet aliquis, vel aliqua in tantam venire stultitiam, ut credant haec amnia, quae in somnis, et spiritu tantum fiunt.” (Penyafort I, 15).

35 “si aquellas bruxas que se dizen andar por lugares innumerables e entrar en las casa por los resquiçios, dexan los cuerpos quando van en los tales actos o lievan consigo los cuerpos.” (Álvarez 152).

36 “segunt lo qual inposible es que puedan entrar por los resquiçios o agujeros de las casa e dezir que se tornan ansares e entran a chupar los niños. [...] Por tanto las mugeres deven poner buen recabdo en sus criaturas e sy murieren por mala guarda, non se excusen con las bruxas que entraron a las matar por los resquiçios de las casas.” (Álvarez 152).

demonolatrical gatherings and the entering of houses to kill newborn children.

By the second half of the 15th century, the expression “bruxas and xorguinias” began to appear in Castilian sources to designate the members of the new demonolatrical sect. This expression is attested for the first time in its Latin version (*xurgine sive bruxe*) in the *Fortalitium Fidei* written by Castilian Franciscan Alonso de Espina (1459). As bishop Barrientos did, Espina also considered the transformation of men and women into geese (*anserēs*), their nocturnal rides and infanticides to be a diabolical illusion, but he insisted instead in the heretical and apostatical character of those malignant people who gave themselves willingly to the Devil through unctions and formulas:

Decima differentia daemonum est eorum qui decipiunt mulieres aliquas vetulas maledictas, quae xurgine sive bruxe nuncupantur. Sciendum ergo est quod sunt quaedam malae gentes, viri et mulieres, apostatae in fide et haereticae creaturae et falsae, qui seipsos dant voluntarie Diabolo, et Diabolus recipit eos, et dat eis quod per suas artes falsas eis appareat quod ambulant ducentas leucas, et quod redeunt in spacium quatuor vel quinque horarum, et quod destruunt creaturas³⁷ suggestentes sanguinem eorum, et quod faciunt alia maleficia quae volunt secundum diaboli voluntatem, quod est eis et illis qui eis credunt magna deceptio et illusio Diaboli. Veritas autem huius facti est, quod quando istae malae personae volunt uti his pessimis fictionibus, consecrant se cum verbis et unctionibus Diabolo, et statim Diabolus recipit eos in opere suo et accipit figuram earum et fantasiam cuiuslibet earum. (Hansen 147)

Thus, despite considering the night flight and the infanticide as an illusion, Espina presented the demonolatrical aspect of the crime as something real and punishable, as it had already been punished by “the inquisitor of Toulouse”. The Franciscan also assessed the abundance of this kind of women in the northern part of the Pyrenees and in the Dauphiny, describing the night gatherings where they allegedly paid homage to the Devil by performing the *osculum infame*:

Nimium abundant tales perverse mulieres in Delphinatu et in [Gaschonia],³⁸ ubi se asserunt concurrere de nocte in quadam planicie deserta ubi est aper³⁹ quidam in rupe, qui vulgariter dicitur el boch de Biterne, et quod ibi conveniunt cum candelis accensis et adorant illum aprum osculantes eum in ano suo. Ideo capte plures earum ab inquisitoribus fidei et convicte, ignibus comburuntur. Signa autem combustarum sunt depicta, qualiter scilicet adorant cum candelis predictum aprum, in domo inquisitoris Tholosani in magna multitudine camisearum, sicut ego propriis oculis aspexi. (Hansen 148)

Once more, certain elements presented by Espina point to the Pyrenean region of Navarre, home of the geese-women, the *xorginak*. However, most of the elements related to the sabbath point clearly to the area of Catalonia and Languedoc, where the homage to the he-goat of Biterne is attested several times during the 15th century, and where the use of ointments and formulas to get to the coven will be a constant feature in witches' confessions (Castell 2013, 77-92)⁴⁰. During the second half of that century, witchcraft prosecutions began to take place

37 This word, often translated as “creatures”, is in fact a common latinization of the Castilian term *criaturas* (“children”).

38 The 1487 incunable reads *Gaschonia*, while the one from 1494 reads *Vasconia* (Montaner and Lara 2013).

39 The word *aper*, often erroneously translated as “he-goat” or “boar”, is here used by Espina in the sense of “devil or ferocious leader” a meaning attested to in the contemporary *Papias Vocabulista* and mentioned in Du Cange glossary: “Aper significat diabolum vel duce[m] ferum.”

40 A random example can be found in the confessions made by Guillema Casala during a 1471 series of secular trials in the Catalan bishopric of Urgell; Arxiu Nacional d'Andorra (ANA), Tribunal de Corts, doc.5947, fol.2^v: “Que la dita na Garreta l'a feta anar al boch de Biterne, car la dita Garreta li pasà la mà per les exelles e la untà. E li dix que digés: “Puya fulla”. [...] E axí anaren en l'ayre en una muntanya que no li recorde. E que y vehé un

in the northern regions of the Crown of Castile, following the same pattern documented in the Pyrenean region. The men and women accused were always described with the term *bruja*, sometimes accompanied by the words *sorguina* or *estria*. An illustrative example can be found in a royal letter from 1466 addressed to the local authorities of the autonomous province of Guipuzkoa, bordering with Navarre. The authorities had asked the Castilian king for permission to act freely against *brujas* and *sorguiñas*, a plea that was answered in the following terms:

Se falla que por algunas personas, así hombres como mugeres de la provincia, han sido usados e frequentados algunos maleficios de malas artes, así de brujerías como de echicerías, a los quales facen se llaman en la dicha provincia brujas e sorguiñas, de lo qual es pública voz y fama e parece por propias confesiones de algunos de ellos, que ficieron y han fecho muchos males e daños, ligando heredades e hombres y mugeres que non pariesen nin aian hijos ni generacion entre sí, y haciendo otras cosas mui malas e dagnadas como se pierden heredades e viñas e ubas e manzanos e otros frutos de la tierra que Nuestro Señor da; [...] e se encomendaron y encomiendan al Diablo y renegando de Nuestro Señor e de su Madre e de su Santa Fe, lo qual todo que es en deservicio de Dios y mío.” (Orella 108-109).⁴¹

According to the letter, the authorities of Guipuzkoa had already proceeded against those crimes, conducting surveys and condemning the guilty, but they asked now for a full jurisdiction to act without any legal restraint according to the nature of those misdeeds, which “are perpetrated by night or in remote places and very secretly and covertly, and because their provision is very difficult and impossible to know properly except from the same *sorguines* and *brujas*” (Orella 109).⁴² The king approved the petition and granted local authorities the right to proceed with total freedom all over the province against those witches, who were to be judged without the usual legal restraints and without the right of appeal. Similar regulations were adopted at that time by some Aragonese cities like Barbastro, that by the second half of the century issued a local ordinance entitled “Qualiter bruxe puniantur”, which established the trials without appeal against those suspected of being “*broxo* or *broxa*, *fetillero* or *ffetillera*, *metziner* or *metziner*, *sortílego* or *sortílega*, *devino* or *devina*” (Pano 1904, 34-

hom molt gran appellat lo Diable. He vehé que y eren entorn XX entre hòmens he dones. E los uns balaven, los altres menjaven fruyta. [...] He lavos creu que li besà lo cul he li prestà homenatge e-l pres per senyor, e renegà lo Crehador. E li promés que tota hora que pogera fer mal lo fera, e que aquel mal no confesare e que rebere cascun any Nostre Senyor. E axí dix interrogada que après usà ab ela depositant carnalment. E dix interrogada que tenie lo membre molt fret. E après se'n vingeren a casa.” (That the aforementioned Garreta has made her go to the he-goat of Biterna, since the aforementioned Garreta ran her hand over her armpits and anoint her. And told her to say: “Get up leaf” [...] And they went up the air to a mountain she doesn't remember. And she saw there a very big man called the Devil. And she saw about XX men and women. Some of them danced, the others ate fruit. [...] And then she thinks that she kissed his ass and paid him homage and took him as her lord, and she abjured the Creator. And she promised that she would do evil whenever she would have the occasion, and that she would never confess it and that she would receive Our Lord each year. And then he had intercourse with her. And she said that his member was cold. And then they all came back to their homes).

41 “It is known that certain people, men and women from this province, have used and frequented some evil art *maleficia*, both by witchcraft (*brujería*) and by sorcery (*hechicería*), those people are called in this province *brujas* and *sorguiñas*; and it is public and notorious and it appears so by the confessions made by some of them, that they did and have done many misdeeds and damages, binding (*ligando*) fields and men and women so that they could not give birth nor have children or generation among them, and perpetrating other evil things by which fields and vineyards and grapes and apple-trees and other fruits that Our Lord gives us are lost. [...] And that they have given and actually give themselves to the Devil abjuring Our Lord and His Holy Mother and His Holy Faith, which is in great disservice to God and Myself.” (Orella 108-109, trans. by the author).

42 “se facen de noche o en lugares apartados, e mui escondida e encubiertamente, e por que la providencia de ello es mui dificil e non se puede saver cumplidamente salvo de los mismos sorguines y brujas.” (Orella 109).

36).⁴³

During the following centuries, several witchcraft persecutions would be conducted in the northern regions of the Iberian Peninsula, leaving an unequal documentary trace. Following the pattern described by Levack, the territories with a lesser centralized judicial system (e.g. Catalonia, Aragon and Navarre) developed an intense persecution led mostly by local authorities, while the regions under effective royal or inquisitorial control presented a much lesser fierce persecution and even a total lacking of death sentences for witchcraft during Early Modern times (Levack 96-115). As regards the Principality of Catalonia, where the greater number of trials has been preserved, the surviving sources for the period 1450-1600 show that 86% of the proceedings for witchcraft were led by secular autonomous courts, in contrast with the royal and inquisitorial impotence, which was due to the great jurisdictional privileges of the Principality (Castell 2013, 41-44). This fact can also be assessed through the action of the Holy Office, established in the Hispanic domains after 1478, which often tried to take in hand the trials for witchcraft that had been initiated by secular courts (Tausiet 106, Castell 2013, 214). The Danish historian Gustav Henningsen, after going through thousands of inquisitorial records for the crime of “superstition”, observed that witchcraft cases appeared only in the northern regions of the Peninsula, as well as in some insular or colonial territories, while in the rest of the more centralized Hispanic territories the accusations for simple sorcery prevailed (Henningsen 1993, 72; *cfr.* Knutsen 2009).

Along these Early Modern witchcraft prosecutions, the word *bruxa* would be used invariably to designate the people accused (with the sporadic masculinized form *bruxo* and the Latin forms *malefica* and *venefica*), accompanied in Castile and Navarre by the expression *sorguina/sorguino*. A close analysis of some of those northern trials, especially the more abundant Catalan ones, will allow us to emphasize the mythical elements attached to the Iberian witch figure.

The Mythical Complex of the Iberian *bruxa*

The analysis of the extant Hispanic sources often reveal a pattern of prosecution, initiated from below, in a context characterized by the spreading of illnesses, crop failures, or deaths of children or cattle, attributed by the communities to the action of some malignant people, and thus requiring the intervention of the authorities. During the judicial inquests, most of the witnesses referred only to cases of poisoning or maleficent magic allegedly performed by the suspects, without any mention of the demonolatric elements that usually emerged during the questionings of the accused, often accompanied by the use of judicial torture.

Nevertheless, a closer analysis of the rich Catalan sources allows us to identify a series of elements that point to the mythical complex of the Iberian *bruxa*. On that regard, most of the trials included popular accusations against men and women for entering houses through closed doors, pillaging the cellars, abducting or crushing little children and attacking sleepers during the night. Some early examples can be found in the witch-hunts that took place in the Catalan bishopric of Urgell during the last third of the fifteenth century, led by the secular authorities of independent seignories such as Toralla, Andorra or Pallars (Castell 2013, 311-456).

The statements of the witnesses gathered along dozens of trials often refer to some nocturnal attacks performed by the alleged witches, who appeared in chambers during the sleep to crush, suffocate or lacerate their body. Magdalena Ricarda explained in 1471 that one night, after giving birth, a *bruxa* came accompanied by a dark light and scratched her hand, and then

43 The dating error initiated by Coromines, that dated this document in 1396, is easily corrected by an attentive reading of the original edition by Mariano de Pano (Coromines 290; Pano 1902, 845-846).

walked away backwards while menacing her with her finger.⁴⁴ A similar testimony was given in 1489 by Joan de Riu explaining that a woman came during the night and grabbed the breast of his wife, who then felt all crushed and was unable to leave the bed until being perfumed with herbs, while he himself still carried a wound in his belly.⁴⁵ These kind of nocturnal attacks are often accompanied by the abduction and killing of children, as in the 1471 statement of Ricarda Berenguer, who claimed that a woman from the village climbed up to her bed during the night with the intent to take away her newborn baby.⁴⁶ An illustrative example of this kind of accusation is provided in the 1472 trial against Joana Call, in which one of her neighbors explained the following case:

E més dix interrogat que té opinió que la nit de Nadal li vingué una cosa en lo lit y muntà desús, que li semblà ne pesave com hun plom, que li palpave desús. Y creu ell testimoni li cercave la criatura que ere al lit per matar-la, sinó que ell testimoni la va penre y la atosà. Y creu ell testimoni que és la dita dona Joana. (ANA, Tribunal de Corts, doc.1760, fol.1^v)⁴⁷

Sometimes the death of children or beasts during the night was interpreted by the trial witnesses as a collateral effect of an attack directed to the adults in the house. In the aforementioned Lleida trial from 1453, a witness explained that the accused woman had said the following words regarding the death of an infant: “Ah, damn the hour! He was a pretty little child. And more than twelve have been there, but they were not there for the child but for the father. And since they could not have the father they had the little child” (Camps and Camps 250).⁴⁸ A similar testimony is given in a 1489 Pyrenean trial against Beatriu de Conilo, who allegedly appeared during the night on a couple's bed and crushed and scratched them violently. The next day, after finding the mare dead in the barn, a neighbor said to the victimized husband: “God has shown you mercy. They haven't got power over you or your wife, and then it has happened to the mare, since it was you or your wife that they were to kill”.⁴⁹

Along with those nocturnal apparitions close to the Nightmare type, one of the usual actions attributed to the *bruxes* corresponds to the entrance in closed houses to abduct children from the bed and kill them, following the infanticidal pattern of the *lamias* and *estrias*. In their confessions, the accused often describe those actions as surrounded with a demonological aura: the Devil opening the doors and illuminating the rooms. The killing of children is usually carried out by means of poisons and ointments, by crushing them, or even by throwing them from one *bruxa* to another. As we have mentioned earlier, those kind of

44 ANA, Tribunal de Corts, doc.1806, fol.5^r: “Huna volta ela havie infantat. E de nit, enves la miga nit, li vench una bruxa la quall li gretà la mà. E cremave lum, e feye-la tan foscha que casi no-s mostrava. E ella sentint-se gretar la mà, mes un gran crit e la dita bruxa tornà atràs tenint tostemps la cara ves ella testimoni, tornant-se'n a recules. E axí com fonch al peu del lit, la dita bruxa li manassà ab lo dit e axí se n'anà”.

45 Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó (ACA), Diversos, Sentmenat, Toralla, doc.7, fol.5^v: “Ans de migant poch més o meyns li vench al lit una dona, no sab qui és, enperò bé és ver que la gafà a la mamella. E aquella nit matexa se seguí que aquella nit matexa sa muller se sentí tota esclafada, que no-s pogué levar del lit fins la ageren perfumada ab erbes de Sent Johan. E ell testis que té un asgarayn en lo ventre que encara no-s pot senyar ni cordar”.

46 ANA, Tribunal de Corts, doc.1806, fol.4^v: “Que la mare del dit Amill li ere venguda en lo lit, e que puyave pel lit amont volent-li levar l'infant que havie hagut. E la dita Marguarida cridà, e axí cridant la dita mare d'Amill posàs les mans devant la cara e tornà arera, e axí se n'anà”.

47 “And he said that in his opinion, during Christmas night, a thing came into his bed and mounted onto him, and that he felt that it was heavy as lead, and that it palpated him. And he believes that it was searching for the child that was in the bed to kill him, but he grabbed it and punched it. And he believes that it was the aforementioned Joana.” (trans. by the auth.).

48 “Ha, en hora mala! Bonico mocico era. E más de XII hi són stades, emperò no y eran per lo mocico, que per lo padre hi eran. E pus que no han podido haver lo padre, han havido lo mocico.” (Camps and Camps 250).

49 ACA, Toralla, doc.7, fol.5^v: “que Déu li avia feta gràcia, que no avian poder ha ell testis ni a sa muller e s'ere segit a la egua, que ha ell ho a sa muller avien a matar”.

nocturnal attacks and the marks left on the children's bodies are one of the main features of the first witchcraft trials, and will keep appearing in later accusations. During the aforementioned secular witch-hunts in the bishopric of Urgell, several witnesses mentioned this kind of marks when being asked about the presence of *bruxes* in the parish. One of the witnesses explained that when her granddaughter died, “they found signals on her body, on her shoulders, so they suspected that evil people (*males gents*) must have done it”.⁵⁰ Some decades later, during a new series of trials initiated in 1532, a woman decided to leave her son's corpse untouched to be inspected by the bailiff, in order to show “that evil people had done it, since he was all broken and bruised”.⁵¹

The belief in that kind of marks as an evidence of witch attacks was so deeply rooted among people, that some courts included it among the questions of the judicial inquests. During a 1499 series of trials in the valley of Andorra the court asked several witnesses “if s/he knows or has heard that any women have found their children by their side dead or handled” or “if she has lost some child that has been handled or crushed”. The answers are quite explicit and they sometimes point directly to the accused:

E dix que hoc, que a ela matexa se trobà la mà fexada a la mamela e trobà tot l'infant desfaxat e que li exie lo maliget e lo bras tot contret. [...] Interrogada si ela, menejant la ditta infanta, si conegé que fos menejada ni macada. E dix que ere malament adobada e menejada e que encara s'i conexien los dits. Interrogada si veent axí ela ditta criatura, si conexie que fos stada tocada realment ni streta per mans de persones. E dix de prosomir ere, que la criatura tenie tots los costats blaus. [...] Que ela vegé hun infant mort de la Girauda que ere tot macat e sclafat e blau, e que avien sospita en les dittes Tomases. (ANA, TC, doc.5973, fol.2^r, 5^v and 12^r)⁵²

The same pattern is documented in 16th and 17th century trials, both from Catalan, Aragonese, Navarrese and Castilian areas. Any unusual succession of children's deaths immediately triggered a witch-craze, as it happened in Cuenca in 1519, where the children's corpses appeared covered with bruises and marks (Cirac 196; Cordente 23-27).⁵³ A similar phenomenon is attested to in the northern side of the Pyrenees, where in 1562 the *poisonières* from Seix allegedly suffocated children by exercising strong pressure on their chests (Le Nail 186, 201). In 1577, when the local authorities from the Catalan seigniory of Mont-rós asked their lord, the Marquis of Pallars, to take action against *bruxes*, they did so in the following terms:

En aquesta terra de la present Coma de Mont-rós estam molt oppresos, vexats y molestats per la gent venèffica, que de cadaldia nos trobam morts creatures y animals, y altres contrets y affollats. Y pretenem y pensam que axò no u fa ni devalla sinó de males gents y

50 *Ibid.*, fol.16^r: “que en la persona de la infanta xiqua, que havia qualque mig ayn com fonch morta, trobaren-li senyals sobre la persona de la infanta, en les espatles. E sospitaven-se'n que males gens no u agessen fet.”

51 ANA, TC, doc.2218, fol.2^r: “Disabte li morí hun fill de edat de hun any. [...] que li par ara com és mort que u han fet males gens, perquè és tot cascat y sanch truit, y també creu que l'han scanat perquè té axí mateix lo coll tot sanc troyt. E per çò ella testimoni ha fet venir a mossèn balle y que-l vehés, que may ella testimoni l'a volgut cosir ni cobrir fins fos vist.”

52 “And she confirmed that she herself had found a mark of a hand in her breast, and had also found the child all unwrapped, with his navel sticking out and the arm all crippled. [...] She was asked if she had noticed, while examining the child, that he had been handled or bruised. And she said that the child was mistreated and handled, and the marks of fingers were still visible. She was asked if, seeing the child like this, had she realized that he had been actually crushed by human hands. And she replied that she assumed so, since the child's sides were all blue. [...] That she saw Girauda's dead child, that he was all bruised, crushed and blue, and that they suspected the women from Tomassa's house.” (trans. by the author).

53 “Porque a su noticia es venido que en esta çibdad [de Cuenca] y en otros lugares de su obispado se han hallado algunos niños muertos y señalados de golpes, donde se tiene sospecha ser muertos y heridos de xorguinos e xorguinias.” (Cirac 196).

venèffiques, de les quals és fama pública que stam ben provehits. Y per sò, per scusar tant grans danys y maleficus y purgar la terra de tant enormes delinqüents, humilment supplicam a vostres mercès sien servits castigar semblants enormes delictes y punir los delinqüents de aquells. (ADM, Pallars, doc.510, fol.1^r-1^v)⁵⁴

The infanticidal tendencies of the *bruxes* would be complemented during the trials with other elements such as the unburying of children's corpses and the use of children's fat to fabricate ointments or powder. Nevertheless, such features appear in the Catalan cases only after torture had been applied, accompanying the descriptions of the apostatical and diabolical gatherings and the explicit confessions about the nocturnal attacks, that correlate exactly with the neighbors' suspicions mentioned during the inquests (Castell 2013, 139-148).

Aside from the Catalan cases, the ability to enter closed houses is also one of the features attested to in Early Modern Aragonese, Navarrese and Castilian trials, as well as the suffocating attacks on sleepers. In the 1534 trial against Dominica Ferrer, from the Aragonese town of Pozán de Vero, a neighbor claimed that "one night, laying [...] in his bed sleeping, he felt on top of him a great heaviness [...] and he found on top of him the said Dominica who had her hands around his throat and was choking him" (Tausiet 348).⁵⁵ Also during the 1519 Cuenca witch-craze, a priest testified that one night, when he was sleeping in his room, he felt a great heaviness and he noticed that someone was squeezing his hands and kissing him, after what he was able to see the silhouettes of three women running away (Cordente 32).

Finally, another interesting feature of the Iberian *bruxa* clearly points to the various traditions related to the Fairy Society and other household spirits, amalgamated into the witch figure during the Late Middle Ages. In that regard, several witnesses as well as some alleged witches mention elements related to the *topoi* of the fairies' gold, the spinning, the white clothes or the fairies' laundry. In a Navarrese trial in 1576, a boy mentioned that after the sabbath "they all went to the river of the said place of Anocíbar and stayed there a while, cleaning some cloths and sounding a drum" (Idoate 345). In the aforementioned 1489 trial of Beatriu de Conilo various witnesses testified that "the said woman did laundry during Saint John's day", while in a 1471 Pyrenean trial against Margarida Anglada a witness explained "that he had seen her the morning of Saint John in a meadow with a distaff and tending a tablecloth in the meadow".⁵⁶ Also one of the witnesses of the 1577 Mont-rós witch-hunt claimed that one night, being in her bed alone, she was able to take a "very white towel" from a female figure that came upon her and disappeared afterwards, and that she suspected one of the women accused.⁵⁷ As for the confessions of the alleged witches, several people accused in a 1548 witch-hunt in the same seigniorship of Mont-rós confessed that the coins given to them by the Devil became lumps of coal after a few days, a phenomenon also attested to in the

54 "In this land of Mont-rós, we are very oppressed, abused and harassed by poisonous people (*gent venèffica*), so that every day we find dead children and cattle and others crippled and wasted. And we claim and think that this comes only from evil and poisonous people, of which it is publicly known that we are well provided. And so, to avoid such great harm and maleficence and purge the land from such enormous criminals, we humbly beseech Your Mercies to proceed into the correction of such enormous crimes and the punishment of the criminals." (trans. by the author).

55 "una noche, stando [...] en su lecho durmiendo, sintió encima de sí muy gran peso, [...] y que se trobó encima de sí a la dicha Domenica presa, y que tenía las manos a la gola y que lo ahogaba." (Tausiet 348).

56 ACA, Toralla, doc.7, fol.10^r: "la dita dona lo jorn de Sent Johan faya bugada"; ANA, TC, doc.1806, fol.9^r: "que ell l'avie vista lo matí de Sanct Johan en un prat ab la filosa que portave, e que stiraçave unes tovalles per un prat."

57 ADM, Pallars, doc.510, 15^v: "Y estant jo en lo llit parexia-m que sentia seroll y que alguna cosa me venia a mi. Exequí-m en lo llit y allarguí les mans on sentia y paria era lo seroll, y par-m'i que posí les mans sobre lo cap de alguna dona, y strenyent les mans me romangué en aquelles una tovallola molt blanca. Y lo presonatge se n'anà aquí mateix perquè jo posí-m a cridar "via fora!". Y quant la gent sentí los crits llevaren-se, emperò no y foren a temps a veure res."

1611 trials initiated by the secular judges of Guipuzcoa (Castell 2009, 163; Caro Baroja 1985, 231). This fusion of mythical elements has persisted in oral tradition and in toponymy throughout the Pyrenean area. Ethnographic research shows that many informants from the Catalan and Aragonese valleys place certain female figures in caves or water courses doing laundry, described either as fairies or as witches (Gari 1993, 246-252; Coll 64-65). Jean-Pierre Piniès confirms a similar situation in the Languedoc, where in most cases, when the word *brèish* is mentioned, the informants answer with stories about fairies (Piniès, 32, 54, 165, 250, 254).

Among these references that connect the figure of the witch with the tradition of fairies, one of the most explicit corresponds to the entering of houses to eat and drink from the cellars, following the pattern of the good ladies of the night mentioned in medieval sources. During the 1471 proceedings led by the local authorities of the bishopric of Urgell, the accused Guillema Casala confessed having entered a house by night together with other women, where they “ate and drank good wine [...] and danced” before abducting a child from his bed to crush him.⁵⁸ Also during the 1548 witch-hunt in Mont-rós, one of the accused confessed that “they entered the house and went to the chamber, where they crushed a little child. [...] And that same night, having crushed the little child, they took bread and they went to the cellar and took wine out of a vat. [...] And they also spilled the grain from a chest” (Castell 2009, 164).⁵⁹ This pattern is very similar to the one already mentioned by medieval authors such as Gervais of Tilbury, who wrote about those women who went by night with the *lamiae* to search the vats and pots and eat from its contents, abduct children out of their beds, suck their blood and afflict the sleepers (Tilburiensis III, 86).

One of the most precious examples of this mythical component belongs to an Aragonese witchcraft trial held in 1572 and cited by María Tausiet. During the inquest, a witness explained that a young woman asked her mother: “Mother, there are no witches now”, to which the mother replied: “Daughter, now it is not time to walk around because there is not much wine; since when there is plenty of it, wine vat witches suffocate children” (Tausiet 1998, 76-77).⁶⁰ The expression “time to walk around” (*tiempo de andar*) recalls the medieval tradition of the night courtships that entered houses to eat and drink, later amalgamated with the infanticidal *strigae/lamiae* and the suffocating Nightmare, all of them personified here in the figure of the diabolical *bruxas*.

Conclusions

The early mentions of the term *bruxa* documented in Catalan sources indicate a certain type of nocturnal spirit characterized by the crushing or suffocation of sleepers, especially newborn babies. This fact allows us to assume a so far unexplored etymology for this term by pointing to the Indo-European root **bhreus-* “to smash, crush, break, crack”, which developed into the Old English *brysan* “to crush, bruise, pound” from Proto-Germanic **brusjanan*, as well as into the Old French *bruisier* “to break, shatter” probably from Gaulish **brus-* (Harper 2001).

58 ANA, TC, doc.5947, fol.3^v: “anaren una nit en una casa, no sab de qui, e menyaren he begeren de bon vi. E après dix que preneren de aquela casa del lit un infant e aquel menyaren, he balaren e puy tornaren aquel <al> lit.”

59 “entraren en dita casa y anaren a la cambra hon dormien y croyxiren-li una moceta. [...] aquella matexa nit, quont hagueren croyxida la criatura, prengueren pa. Y bayxaren al seller y tragueren vi de una cuba. [...] Y tantbé se vesaren lo blat de la archa.” (Castell 2009, 164). Similar confessions are attested in Early Modern Aragonese, Navarrese and Castilian trials, as the one held in 1590 in Toledo, where a woman confessed that in winter, about Christmas time, they took advantage of the longer nights to get drunk in the wine cellars they entered (Cirac 190).

60 “Madre, agora no hay broxas” [...] “Hija, agora no es tiempo de andar, que hay poco vino, que quando hay mucho vino las broxas de las cubas ahogan las criaturas” (Tausiet 1998, 76-77).

This same root could in fact be the origin of the Catalan *bruxa*, a nocturnal figure that crushed the sleepers, in a sense close to the Semitic *kabus*, the Latin *succubus* and the European variants of the **mahr* type (Nightmare, *Cauquemare*).

The nocturnal pattern of those *bruxas* was attributed to the members of the heretical sect of devil-worshippers during the first decades of the 15th century, when Catalan authorities started prosecuting people, under that same appellative, on charges including apostasy, homage to the Devil, poisoning, maleficent magic and entering closed houses to abduct or kill little children. From the mid-15th century onwards, the word *bruxa* was used, together with some semantical terms such as the Basque-Castilian *xorguina*, to designate people accused of witchcraft in other northern kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula.

Some authors have already insisted in the northern origin of the Iberian witch figure, born in the Pyrenean region and later adopted in other areas of the Peninsula (Lisón 23-38; Campagne 398; Gari 2010, 317-354). The surviving Iberian trials, complemented by the new Catalan sources, confirm this hypothesis while showing a conjunction of traits that includes entering closed houses, nocturnal attacks on children, adults or cattle and the pillage of cellars, together with the always present diabolical gatherings and the use of poison and maleficent magic. During Early Modern times the word *bruxa* is also documented in other regions such as Languedoc, Portugal and the Canary Islands, bearing the same suffocating and infanticidal tendencies, as well as the craving for wine (Campagne 387-388).

These mythical components are not limited to the Iberian witch. The Italian word *strega* (with parallels to Romanian, Albanian, Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian, Ladino and Greek), shows an interesting parallel to the Hispanic *bruxa*. Similarly, it has its origin in the nocturnal figure of the *strix* (from Latin *stringere* “to strangle, crush”) and was used at the beginning of the 15th century to denominate women who took part in the sabbath, made a pact with the Devil and entered closed houses to kill newborn children by sucking their blood. As for the German and French-speaking areas, despite the adoption of a different terminology, the influence of this kind of nocturnal figures is also acknowledged to in some of the earliest treatises on the crime of witchcraft, which mention the pillage of cellars as well as entering closed houses by night to kill little children. Both Frund's chronicle, Nider's *Formicarius*, Fougeyron's *Errores* and Tholosan's *Ut magorum* mention at some point the killing of children in the hands of the members of the sect, who grabbed them by the throat or sides to strangle or crush them, leaving finger marks as well as blue or black signs on the infants' corpses (Ostorero *et al.* 34-36, 154, 288, 296-298, 350, 400; *cf.* Modestin 230). Moreover, we have to bear in mind that around 1440 Martin Le Franc mentioned “des vieilles cauquemares” together with the “vaillans facturieres” and the “bonnes sorcieres”, that entered houses “sans porte ouvrir” to attack little children (Ostorero *et al.* 451-454).

These coincidences demonstrate the necessity for a comparative approach to the emergence of the witch figure and its mythical components during the Late Middle Ages. An attempt of such an approach was undertaken by Richard Kieckhefer in an article published in 2006, where the author opposed an “Umbrian paradigm” to a “Vadois paradigm” through Alpine and Italian sources of the 15th century (Kieckhefer 2006). The scheme used by Kieckhefer deserves to be completed in this post-Lamothe era by the new Catalan and Occitan sources, which could correspond to a “Pyrenean paradigm” yet to be explored.

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