

PREFACE

This volume is a collection inspired by the contributions to witchcraft studies of Willem de Blécourt, to whom it is dedicated and who provides the opening chapter, setting out a methodological and conceptual agenda for the study of cultures of witchcraft (broadly defined) in Europe since the Middle Ages.¹ The other contributions from historians, anthropologists, literary scholars and folklorists who have collaborated closely with de Blécourt explore some or all of the themes and approaches which he has pioneered and apply them to cases which range in time and space across all the main regions of Europe since the thirteenth century up to the current time. While some draw heavily on texts, others on archival sources and others on field research, they are all based on a commitment to reconstructing the meaning and lived experience of witchcraft (and its related phenomena) to Europeans at all levels, respecting the many varieties and ambiguities in such meanings and experiences and resisting attempts to reduce them to master narratives or simple causal models. Although this is now a well-established

¹A full bibliography of de Blécourt's publications, together with some unpublished work and discussion of his methods, may be found at his website: <http://historicalanthropologist.eu/>. Only a selection of those writings, particularly those in English, will be cited in what follows. His contributions to the history of unorthodox medicine and sexuality in modern Europe and to the history of the werewolf concept as part of the wider history of animal/human metamorphoses and relationships are not considered here, except insofar as they overlap with the history of witchcraft, but for the latter see his key essay 'The Differentiated Werewolf. An introduction to cluster methodology' in Willem de Blécourt (ed.), *Werewolf Histories* (Basingstoke, 2015), 1–24.

approach, it has not previously been articulated so explicitly as in the opening essay, nor embodied so coherently in a collection of this scope.

De Blécourt grapples critically with the work of French ethnographer Jeanne Favret-Saada. Her self-reflexive study of immersion in the world of witchcraft discourse in a Normandy community in the 1970s has been widely referenced in surveys of early modern witchcraft, in addition to influencing other anthropological and sociological studies of European witchcraft belief. For de Blécourt, anthropology ‘is a way to look at witchcraft’ rather than using it as a comparative tool. It provides a means of understanding the ‘witchcraft discourse’, differentiating it from a ‘discourse on witchcraft’.² In his chapter, he applies this approach to newspaper reports of witchcraft from the last three decades of the nineteenth century in Rotterdam and the area to the south. The results question Favret-Saada’s view that historic witchcraft discourses cannot be fully recovered.

The next two chapters, by Christa Agnes Tuczay and Ruth Bottigheimer, look at the representation of witches in fairy tales, folktales and legends. De Blécourt has written extensively about these genres as sources in Dutch and German contexts. His work has much broader implications, however, in that he sees them as texts that need to be historicised and ‘anthropologised’ in terms of the relationship or discourse between narrator and collector.³ Christa Tuczay surveys the different

²For his views on this see also ‘Time and the Anthropologist; or the Psychometry of historiography’, *Focaal* 26/27 (1996), 17–24; ‘The witch, her victim, the unwitcher and the researcher. The continued existence of traditional witchcraft’ in Willem De Blécourt, Ronald Hutton and Jean La Fontaine, *Witchcraft in Twentieth-Century Europe* (1999), 141–219; ‘Witchcraft—Discourse and Disappearance: Württemberg and the Dutch documentation’, *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft*, 5 (2010), 103–107; “‘Keep that woman out!’: Notions of space in twentieth-century Flemish witchcraft discourse”, *History and Theory*, Forum: At Home and in the Workplace: Domestic and Occupational Space in Western Europe from the Middle Ages, ed. Beat Kümin and Cornelia Osborne, 1.52 (2013), 361–379.

³For his work on legends and folktales, including his incisive critique of transhistorical models of popular mythology underlying witchcraft concepts such as the Sabbath, see ‘Bedding the Nightmare. Somatic experience and narrative meaning in Dutch and Flemish legend texts’, *Folklore*, 114 (2003), 227–245; “‘I Would Have Eaten You Too’: Werewolf Legends in the Flanders, Dutch and German Area”, *Folklore*, 118 (2007), 85–105; ‘The Return of the Sabbath: Mental Archeologies, Conjectural Histories or Political Mythologies?’ in Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies (eds.), *Palgrave Advances in Witchcraft Historiography* (Basingstoke, 2007), 125–145; ‘Sabbath Stories: Towards a New History of Witches’ Assemblies’ in Brian P. Levack (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America* (Oxford, 2013), 84–100; ‘The Flying Witch: Its Resonance in the Sixteenth-Century Netherlands’, *Magic, Ritual & Witchcraft*, 11 (2016), 73–93.

elements that characterised the witch and her diabolic relations in Austrian legends and folktales. As she stresses, it is important to distinguish between the two genres. The former purport to be factual, concerning real people rooted in specific times and places. Witches in the latter are works of fiction, though they share some characteristics with the historic witch. Tuczaý explores, in particular, how the witches depicted in legends show both similarities and major differences with the diabolic witch constructed by the early modern demonologists. By way of contrast, Ruth Bottigheimer ponders the absence or reconfiguration of the witch figure in early-eighteenth-century folktales by looking at the popular story ‘Prince Ahmed and Pari Banou’, as told in a collection of a *Thousand and One Nights* published in 1709 by Hanna Dyâb, a young Syrian from Aleppo. Dyâb created a wicked, conniving female character who was ‘witchy’ in certain ways but whom he called a ‘*magicienne*’. She is not categorised as a witch as understood in other historic contexts, and yet the popularity of the story had a significant influence on subsequent portrayals of witch-like female characters in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century European folk-tale collections. Her conclusions reinforce de Blécourt’s claims regarding the literary origins of fairy tales, often seen as deriving from oral tradition, and the transformative role of the Grimm brothers in creating a new model of the evil witch within modern fairy tales.⁴

Seventeenth-century personal stories and national identities are explored in the chapters by Rita Voltmer and Machteld Löwensteyn. As de Blécourt has explored, literary representations can play a significant role in spreading models of witchcraft, as well as in questioning them.⁵

⁴For his work on fairy tales see ‘On the Origin of *Hänsel und Gretel*: An Exercise in the History of Fairy Tales’, *Fabula*, 49 (2008), 30–46; ‘Fairy Grandmothers: Images of Storytelling Events in Nineteenth-Century Germany’, *Relief. Revue électronique de la littérature française*, 4.2 (2010), 174–197; ‘Metamorphosing Men and Transmogrified Texts. Some Thoughts on the Genealogy of Fairy Tales’, *Fabula*, 52 (2011), 280–296; *Tales of Magic, Tales in Print: On the Genealogy of Fairy Tales and the Brothers Grimm* (Manchester, 2012); ‘Fairy Tales as Belief Narratives’ in Zoja Karanović and Willem De Blécourt (eds.), *Belief Narrative Genres* (Novi Sad, 2013), 51–58; ‘The Witches of the Brothers Grimm’ in Claudia Brinker-von der Heyde, Holger Ehrhardt, Hans-Heino Ewers and Annkatrin Inder (eds.), *Märchen, Mythen und Moderne: 200 Jahre Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm* (Frankfurt am Main, 2015), 195–205.

⁵‘The Laughing Witch: Notes on the Relationship between Literature and History in the Early Fifteenth Century’ in Louise Nyholm Kallestrup & Raisa Maria Toivo (eds.), *Contesting Orthodoxy in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Heresy, Magic and Witchcraft* (Basingstoke, 2017), 255–277.

Voltmer traces the tangled publishing history and performance of a German stage play called *The Mirror of the Witches* (1600), written by a quarrelsome Lutheran minister named Thomas Birck. The play has not survived in its entirety, but the seventy pages that have show it included roles for no less than four witches, twenty-four magistrates, three advocates, two hangmen, one sorcerer, an angel, and Death. Voltmer shows how Birck wrote the play as a parochial didactic tool to discipline morals and religious behaviour and assesses what sources he may have drawn upon and how it relates to other German plays of the period that dealt with witchcraft and the Devil. Löwensteyn's chapter also focuses on one individual, an accused witch named Leentje Willems, and how her story came to have powerful national resonance three centuries later. In the mid-seventeenth century, the town council of Oudewater, in the Netherlands, was famed for the fact that it provided a weighing test for people who were the victims of witchcraft slander. One day in 1647, Leentje Willems went to have herself weighed to absolve her of any blame. Löwensteyn examines how the account of the Oudewater weighing test was mythologised and popularised in problematic ways during the mid-twentieth century and how Leentje Willems' story helps unpick the issues. Like Kallestrup's chapter discussed in what follows, Löwensteyn highlights the significance of gender issues in understanding specific witchcraft episodes, a theme developed by de Blécourt in a number of seminal essays, although he has been keen to stress the importance of exploring themes of masculinity as well as women's role in society.⁶

Hans de Waardt's essay puts early modern Dutch witch persecution in a regional perspective. After the Spaniards defeated Antwerp in 1585 the East–West division in the Low Countries became a North–South segmentation. The economic centre moved from Antwerp to Amsterdam, and Flanders and Brabant suffered a sharp economic crisis. Starting in 1587, these latter provinces, particularly Flanders, witnessed several witchcraft panics, whereas in the North trials came to a standstill. De Waardt analyses the relationship between these shifting patterns and the

⁶'Cunning Women: From Healers to Fortune Tellers' in Hans Binneveld & Rudolf Dekker (eds.), *Curing and Insuring* (Hilversum, 1993), 43–55; 'The Making of the Female Witch: Reflections on Witchcraft and Gender in the Early Modern Period', *Gender and History*, 12 (2000), 287–309; 'The Werewolf, the Witch and the Warlock: Aspects of Gender in the Early Modern Period' in Alison Rowlands (ed.), *Witchcraft and Masculinities* (Basingstoke, 2009), 191–213.

similarities of culture and experience between the western parts of the Low Countries and south-eastern England. We shift our attention northwards in the same period with Louise Nyholm Kallestrup's account of the repeated accusations of witchcraft made against the Danish noble woman Christenze Kruckow over two decades. Kallestrup uses the case to explore the role of gossip, gender, kinship and emotion in generating and perpetuating witchcraft accusations and shows how Kruckow's case maps onto national developments, as the religious and political ground was laid for the witch hunt that swept across the kingdom in the period 1617–1622. Eva Labouvie's essay continues the regional theme as she lays out the reasons behind the decline of the trials using examples from the Saarland and neighbouring areas in south-western Germany. Labouvie challenges the idea that the trials declined due to a 'philosophical turn' in educated society, exemplified by new perceptions of reality through scientific developments; emerging doubts about the judicial practice of trials expressed by jurists, theologians and members of the medical profession; the 'crisis of confidence' in the supernatural; and a 'humanisation of the Devil'. A consideration of both everyday experiences and socio-political change leads to a different conclusion, a pattern of reasoning based on different variables and a process of negotiations between authorities, experts, villagers and those affected by witchcraft. Each of these chapters reinforces de Blécourt's insistence on understanding the place- and time-specific character of witchcraft developments while also appreciating the need for comparative perspectives, as developed in his own work on witchcraft in the Netherlands over six centuries.⁷

The last section of the collection concentrates on the continued belief in witchcraft and magic from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century, using different sources and approaches. De Blécourt has long emphasised the need to integrate (both methodologically and substantively) the history of this modern period with medieval and early modern studies of

⁷See his essays (in Dutch) in Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra & Willem Frijhoff (eds.), *Nederland betoverd. Toverij en hekserij van de veertiende tot in de twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1987), some of them republished in English in Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra & Willem Frijhoff (eds.), *Witchcraft in the Netherlands from the Fourteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Rijswijk, 1991) and his *Termen van toverij: De veranderende betekenis van toverij in Noordoost-Nederland tussen de 16de en 20ste eeuw* (Nijmegen, 1990). He is writing a long-term history of witchcraft in the Low Countries from the fourteenth to the twentieth centuries entitled *The Cat and the Cauldron*.

witchcraft and questioned models of ‘decline’ and ‘survival’ based on outdated assumptions about the incompatibility of witchcraft beliefs and practice with modern society.⁸ Jonathan Barry examines the transmission of printed accounts of the supernatural during the long eighteenth century, exploring the varied motivations of those who retold the stories and the changes in form and meaning these entailed. He considers which stories were featured, how far new stories were added to the repertoire (or old ones discarded or revised) and what purposes each collection served for both publishers and readers. Owen Davies then looks at newspapers as a key source of evidence of ‘reverse witch trials’ in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century England. Such court cases concerned those accused of being witches prosecuting those who had physically or verbally abused them for practising witchcraft. Davies outlines three such projects he has conducted involving newspaper research in different counties and assesses what they do or do not tell us about the declining belief in witchcraft at a regional and local level, mirroring work done by de Blécourt on different Dutch regions.⁹ Gustav Henningsen, who came up with the term ‘witch trials in reverse’, delves into the Danish collections of local legends and folk beliefs to explore what it was popularly thought witches could and could not do. What he calls a ‘catechism of witch lore’ closely conforms to the experiences people had in reality, as described in early-modern witch trials and the later reverse trials. One of the most remarkable aspects of this catechism of witch lore is the total absence of the Devil.

Mirjam Mencej’s extensive ethnographic research into the continued popular belief in witchcraft and magic in south-eastern Europe rounds off the collection. Here she focuses on research conducted in 2016 in

⁸ ‘Witch Doctors, Soothsayers and Priests: On Cunning Folk in European Historiography and Tradition’, *Social History*, 19 (1994), 285–303; ‘On the Continuation of Witchcraft’ in Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester and Gareth Roberts (eds.), *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief*, Cambridge, 1996), 335–352; (with Owen Davies) ‘Introduction: Witchcraft Continued’, in Willem De Blécourt & Owen Davies (eds.), *Witchcraft Continued: Popular Magic in Modern Europe* (Manchester, 2004), 1–13.

⁹ ‘“Evil People”: A Late-Eighteenth-Century Dutch Cunning Man and His Clients’ in Owen Davies & Willem De Blécourt (eds.), *Beyond the Witch Trials: Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe* (Manchester, 2004), 144–166; ‘Boiling Chickens and Burning Cats: Witchcraft in the Western Netherlands, 1850–1925’ in De Blécourt and Davies (eds.), *Witchcraft Continued*, 89–106.

three different regions of central and western Bosnia, each with a prevailing Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox population respectively. She pays close attention to how the term ‘witch’ is used or not in daily discourse and discusses changes in the types of harm ascribed to magic in Bosnia in comparison to the past. This includes possible reasons for the revival of magic practices and counter-practices since the end of the twentieth century in relation to the general social and economic circumstances in post-war Bosnia and to the role of media in the process. Her chapter, with its exemplary ethnographic sensitivity to the context and nature of her fieldwork, demonstrates how recurring themes emerge in witchcraft research no matter the period or methodological approach, as demonstrated by the other contributions to this volume, confirming de Blécourt’s approach, as theorised in his opening chapter and practised across his long and fruitful career.

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