

Curse, *maleficium*, divination: witchcraft on the borderline of religion and magic

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This chapter is concerned with a special form of witchcraft that is practised, to my knowledge, only amongst Hungarians living in Transylvania. It is possible that it is common among the Romanian population of Transylvania as well, but so far I have not found any relevant information in the Romanian literature. My analysis is based on fieldwork conducted several years ago with my university students in Csíkkarcfákva and Csíkjenőfalva, two villages in the old county of Csík inhabited by Roman Catholic Hungarians.¹ The two villages are in Transylvania, in the Hungarian block of the Székely land bordering on Orthodox Romanian areas. The Hungarians here have scarce cultural contacts with Romanians; indeed, the cases described below are almost the only examples of any connection between their respective religions. The time spent in the field was unfortunately insufficient for a comprehensive survey of the system's functioning or for the elucidation of its social and mental environment. What we have managed to observe and record was in fact not so much the practice as the narratives about it, from which we can make only indirect and conditional inferences about the real situation. What follows is a preliminary overview of the findings based on around one hundred collected narratives.

Until recently, little was known about the religious variant of witchcraft described here.² In Csík the priest actively participates in the system of witchcraft. He not only helps remove bewitchment from the sick, but helps carry out bewitchment as well. In this form, witchcraft as a social system regulating personal conflicts, and as an ideological system, has several features that distinguish it from other forms known in Central and Western Europe including aspects of divine jurisdiction, ordeal and divination; in fact, in many respects it functions subordinated to them. The classic West European suspicion-accusation bewitchments can be found in Hungarian and Transylvanian witchcraft trials from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and some of its features are still discernible among the twentieth-century Hungarian population of both Hungary and Transylvania.³ Witchcraft as a

social system in village communities typically functions within the network of malefactor-injured-identifier-healer.⁴ In most cases the role of the malefactor is fictitious. The *maleficium* (bewitchment) employed by the witch is an occult interaction between two people, and it is either accompanied by some *actual deed* or not. What this basically means is that if I have suffered some misfortune, I *attribute* the intention and performance of *maleficium* to somebody that I have good reasons to impute such plans to: I believe my misfortune to be the result of his or her *maleficium*. According to this interpretation of witchcraft, in fact, there are no actual witches: the witch is almost always the *other person*, a scapegoat selected for specific reasons. Accordingly, the bewitchment narratives, which provide the basis for the description and interpretation of Central European witchcraft, usually relate events from the perspective of the victim.

Such narratives can be found in Csík as well, and from them we can posit a minor role for 'classic' witchcraft in communities there. However, the majority of the narratives we collected through fieldwork reflect a different kind of attitude and another system of witchcraft. One of its main characteristics is the actuality of the act of bewitchment: witchcraft is not just an *accusation*.⁵ People either perform it themselves or have it performed by someone else. This is what Willem de Blécourt has termed 'practised witchcraft' or 'active bewitchment', and what Per Sörlin defined as 'maleficent witchcraft'.⁶ In this environment *maleficium* is a practice dispensing justice and restoring order, performed as a response to misfortunes. It fulfils the function of norm control as a 'punitive', individual kind of jurisdiction. This is particularly clear in those cases when someone is employed to perform the bewitching, which is much more frequent than its personal effectuation. Here the *maleficium*, the key factor of witchcraft, is usually not a direct (real or virtual) interaction between the two persons involved, in other words the malefactor and the victim. Instead, it is carried out through a mediator who is employed by villagers to perform the witchcraft, or to use the local term *megcsináltat* ('to have someone done in'). This mediator is in most cases a *kaluger*, a Romanian Orthodox monk or priest,⁷ although sometimes a lay magician – a *guruzsló* or *gurucsáló* – from the same or a neighbouring village provides the same service. Compared to the large number of clients of the Romanian priests and monks, though, these mostly female magicians were, at least by the twentieth century, less frequently employed.

The *kaluger's* curse, commissioned by individuals who want to harm other people, is a specifically religious method of projecting fate and divine justice, for resolving communal conflicts. Thus the usual cast in witchcraft conflicts is joined by an external mediator representing the religious sphere, thereby intertwining and integrating popular witchcraft and certain religious normative jurisdictional systems. The discrepancy between witch *beliefs* (and the related terminology) and the actual *practice* of witchcraft also implies that at

least two different systems of different origins have been superimposed on each other. In spite of this discrepancy, there are several factors connecting the various coexisting systems of witchcraft as well. One such link is that the bewitchment – the ‘doing in’ – can be the explanation or cause of the same types of misfortune and injury. The narratives reveal the following examples: incurable and undiagnosable diseases lasting for a long time (even for decades), ataxia, paralysis, paralysed limbs, shrunk limbs, loss of eyesight and loss of speech. We also find sudden death due to accidents, estrangement of spouses or lovers, ailing animals and cows going dry. A quick succession of misfortunes can also be suspicious. As a woman put it quite expressively, ‘when this devastation starts to come one after the other, somebody’s hands must be in it’.

So, we can draw the conclusion that in each system – including the existing traces of the Central European type – people are ‘done in’ within the same social environment and due to the same witchcraft-inducing tensions and conflicts, whether the rites of *maleficium* are performed by, or attributed to priests or lay persons. In the narratives, the alleged causes of the ‘doing in’, the tensions and conflicts forming within a network of personal interrelations may become manifest in debates, brawls or fights. Some of the most common types of conflicts are: skirmishes about land boundaries, family conflicts, litigation, perjury in inheritance debates, the breaking-off of an engagement, jilted lovers, breach of promise, the lover’s or the spouse’s jealousy, bad marriages, unfaithful husbands, divorces, abortion, murder (of a family member, which has not led to criminal prosecution perhaps due to the lack of evidence); theft (of money, corn, animals, clothes, bedclothes, food, jewels); denunciations to the authorities (for example about the distillation of brandy or political denunciation), conflicts with communal leaders, hostility, hatred, brawling and fights for indefinable reasons within the family or among neighbours.

Many times the objective of the *maleficium* according to the narratives is not to cause damage but to set right the previous *maleficium* and to make up for the damage – to make the (bewitched) sick person recover, to catch the thief, to get back the stolen clothes, animals or money. In the context of ‘justified revenge’ the most common element is theft. In these cases the aim of the *maleficium* is basically to recover the stolen property and at the same time to punish the thief. My informants believed that this *maleficium* can be performed in several ways, and although they are essentially identical they relate to whether they perform it themselves, or they have employed someone else to do it:

- (1) Manipulation with objects based on the principles of contagious magic, such as carrying out *maleficium* using the belongings of the intended victim (handkerchief and matches, for example) or other objects (such as

bone, wool, hen's heads, thread and chain), or creeping into his or her property (courtyard, house) and placing the bewitching object there so that she or he will get into contact with it unknowingly.

- (2) The most characteristic personal technique is the curse. This is actually a religious form of curse, in which one does not just wish evil things to someone else but in doing it refers to a higher authority: it is the par excellence form of curse, essentially a kind of exorcism. Instead of the 'pure' form of word magic ('May you break your neck'), one must use its religious form: 'May God break your neck'. By delegating it to God, the human method of *maleficium* is elevated into the supernatural sphere, from which it strikes down upon mortal men as a divine blow even if not performed through priests: 'The scourge of God shall find him. He who deserves it shall be found.' Thus in a certain sense individual cursing can also be regarded as a characteristic element of 'religious witchcraft'. As an example, here is a curse text, which allegedly came true (the 'target person' died in a traffic accident): 'May the blessed Lord let your neck get under the wheels!' The mother of one of our informants cursed someone by kneeling down at the middle of the road, holding up her hands and asking God 'never to give her luck'. In this case we have a ritual form in which the motif of the oath's publicity itself signifies that the motives of the curse are held to be justified.⁸ According to the general opinion, the curse can only fall upon the guilty. This underlines the ordeal-like character of cursing, the fatefulness of its realization instead of the interpersonal aspects of magic, and it provides, as it were, a kind of exemption for the curser. Our informants talk about their wish to have their curses come true quite openly, even if it causes a serious illness or even the life of a fellow being; they do not consider it a sin or malevolence, only the just punishment of fate or God.
- (3) The third important method of *maleficium* is *fasting*. Together with a curse or in itself, it can be effective to pledge a ritual fasting 'against' someone, for example, on every Tuesday, on nine Tuesdays, on three Tuesdays, etc. (on these occasions they do not eat anything during the day or until noon, they only drink water or eat everything but rich food). These may also go on as long as their objective comes true – until the target person gets sick, becomes paralysed or dies.

As for having someone done in by *another person*, our data reveal little about the techniques of magicians. Nevertheless, the beliefs related to them and their helping spirits are apparently more vivid today than their actual role in the system of witchcraft. As I have said, our data present 'doing someone in' through Romanian *priests* as the most common method of *maleficium*.

According to the common belief, people went to the *kaluger* mainly to

ask for curses or to have a mass said as *maleficium*, and we have abundant data about the firm conviction in the effectiveness of the *kalugers'* rites. 'Their prayers are effective', it is said. In contrast to the Hungarian and Roman Catholic priests, the Romanian ones 'have greater power'. Thus what matters is not merely the professional skill related to the required cursing rites but often also the supernatural power of the *kalugers* as holy men, and the influence radiating from monasteries as holy places.

The people visiting the *kaluger* sometimes only want to find out the identity of the wrongdoer through the priest's divination rites. However, quite often the above-mentioned interpersonal tensions and conflicts inducing the intention to have someone done in are also revealed. In such cases they evidently know the identity of the wrongdoer, and their primary aim is personal revenge, the miscreant's just punishment through the priest's curse. As in other types of witchcraft, the purpose of the priest's *divination* may be to verify the fact of *maleficium*, to find out the identity of the malefactor, and even to discover the future fate of the bewitched person and his or her chances of recovery. When the motive of the *maleficium* is to retaliate for a theft by an unknown culprit, or to take vengeance and strike back for an earlier *maleficium*, it is the natural task of the *kaluger* to disclose the identity of the malefactor. The injured party probably has his or her own suspects, but the person to be bewitched is also selected through divination, through the 'casting of fate'. Personal interaction, one of the basic requirements of witchcraft appears to have no role in the procedure; individual responsibility is shifted over to fate. The mechanism of shifting responsibility is the same when a factual suspicion about the guilt of a given person is reinforced by the *kaluger's* divination: this way he soothes his client's conscience about the rightfulness of the *maleficium*. The most important divination rite attributed to the *kaluger* is the opening of the book, when he finds out the identity of the wrongdoer from the Bible – i.e. *sortes biblicae*. Other methods include *katoptromantia*, *hydromantia* as well as pouring hot lead into water or burning candles.

The *kaluger's* most important activity is holding masses, saying prayers and casting curses according to the wishes of his clients who pay the money for the mass in advance and tell him what they want with it. According to the narratives, *maleficium* is an act consciously carried out by the priest.⁹ The narratives mention instances of *maleficium* that came true: the target person became paralysed, lame, blind, mute, divorced his/her spouse, became a beggar, the marriage was never celebrated, and the family came to decline. The most severe 'objective' is total destruction: the person 'done in' pines away, becomes weak and dies. Family members may also be mentioned in connection with sickness and death; it was especially against sons-in-law and daughters-in-law that such steps were taken within the family.

Those who go to the *kaluger* must tell him what the prayer, curse or

mass should be *for*; and they have to define the exact degree of misfortune – ‘she gave the money so that he should become lame’; or somebody gives money for a mass to have his wife die. According to my informants the *kalugers*’ curse was a prayer in which they asked for ‘the punishment of the guilty’. The ritualistic forms of the priest’s curse legitimize individual cursing and the whole system built upon it. By delegating it to God, the human method of *maleficium* is elevated into the supernatural sphere, from which it strikes down upon mortal men as a divine blow even if not performed through priests: ‘The scourge of God shall find him. He who deserves it shall be found.’ According to the general opinion, the curse can only fall upon the guilty. This underlines the ordeal-like character of cursing, the fatefulness of its realization instead of the interpersonal aspects of magic, and it provides, as it were, a kind exemption for the curser. My informants talk about their wish to have their curses come true quite openly, even if it causes a serious illness or even the life of a fellow being. They do not consider it a sin or malevolence, only the just punishment of fate or God. An important aspect of this ritualistic curse is that it can only affect the wrongdoer and never the innocent.

As a technique of harmful magic, the *priest’s curse* can function by itself or with other methods of magic. The people ordering the *maleficium* quite often bring some object of the future victim to the *kaluger*: a piece of clothing, a kerchief or some earth from his/her garden, and the *kaluger* ‘says a mass’, ‘recites’, ‘sheds a curse’ on it. The *kaluger* curses this object, and it then has to be placed in the garden or around the threshold of the future victim, from where it can exert its evil effect. In a quite serious and mortal version of this, the curse is pronounced upon some earth taken from the graves of nine dead people. The devices of black magic, also used in individual *maleficium*, thus become a kind of negative version of the church sacraments: ‘religious’ objects, parts of a ‘sacred’, more effective system. The mass has, according to the narratives, a distinctly black mass-like variant, which is held at night and considered particularly evil in its effect – it causes death.

Besides the curse-rite performed by himself, the priest may prescribe for his clients various individual methods of black magic such as a fasting vow mentioned above, while at the same time he undertakes and performs the mass or the curse. The fast may include the burning of candles or lamps in a prescribed way: with this, through analogy, the victim’s life is, as it were, burnt out. This has the same ‘negative sacrament’ function as the objects mentioned earlier. The ordeal-like quality of having someone done in is quite evident in the case of the fast prescribed by a priest as well. The fast ‘vowed for evil’ functions the same way as cursing. It can only make someone sick if he or she ‘deserved it’, if he or she had ‘done something bad earlier’. If it is directed towards an innocent person, it will eventually harm the fasting person’s family instead.

The priest's curse does not exclude the alternative of a 'good' solution. According to one informant, a *kaluger*, who had recited a mass against a thief, told his client that if his geese did not turn up within thirty days, he was to go back to the *kaluger* to have the wrongdoer 'done in' again. However, this had the desired influence on the thief, as the geese arrived home just in time. Ordering a curse-mass could be motivated only by the wish to alarm the wrongdoers. In fact, they could be scared with mere threats of such masses. According to the narratives, during a quarrel the malefactor may utter threats and thus proclaim his or her resolution to have her opponent done in. This threat is again something of a 'call of fate'; it is the first step towards elevating the everyday act of *maleficium* into the sphere of divine jurisdiction. During a quarrel about the boundaries of a hayfield one of the parties uttered the following threat: 'Don't you say so, for I will see justice done, for I will go to the *kaluger*!' According to the logic of the narratives, this kind of threat allows for certain alternative solutions such as the wrongdoer 'undoing' the damage that has aroused the conflict. This textual motif again highlights the ordeal-like character of the whole process of 'having someone done in'. In a narrative about the theft of dress-materials, the curser knew the identity of the thief and threatened her with the following words: 'hear me, good woman, if you took it ... tell me ... because I will put a black mass on you'. In a story about a stolen lamb, the old woman from the injured family deliberately put it around the village that they would have the thief done in so that he should hear about it. He returned the stolen lamb the next night. These narratives concerning theft make it particularly clear that the mere threat of having someone done in can fulfil the priestly curse's function of restoring order and dispensing justice in itself.

Some of our stories, mostly about having thieves 'done in', also feature the motif, perhaps a legendary one, of withdrawing the *maleficium*; an act towards restoring the equilibrium, this serves to reinforce the fiction of '*maleficium* as just punishment', which is deeply embedded in the villagers' consciousness. If the wrongdoers make amends for their transgressions, the punishment will be stopped. In such cases the person ordering the *maleficium* may go to the *kaluger* to take it back. Thus as a result of the mass ordered against the thief of three lambs, one bewitched wrongdoer went to the gate of the curser: 'Oh, Vilma! Oh, oh, Vilma, don't you say masses any more, don't you order masses any more ... for it was I who stole the three lambs.' It is clear from such data that in the world-view of Csík the rite of 'doing in' also constitutes a system of ethical norms and of sanctions against those who transgress against them.

The divination-like quality of having someone done in is strengthened by the prediction of the patient's fate, which, according to the narratives, takes place simultaneously with the process of divination. Based on whether they have been done in 'with good intentions' or 'with evil ones', the priest

announces whether the sick persons will recover or die, when they will recover (after forty days for example), when the damage will be compensated, or predicts a speedy degradation of the victim's health. In the case of the latter, a frequent motif of narratives is that the *kaluger* hurries his clients so that they should not find the target person already dead, lame or mute upon arriving home. He urges, for example, that the client drive fast, 'because the old woman will be dead by the time you get home'.

Unfortunately, we cannot as yet see clearly the degree to which the everyday life and world-views of the given society are affected by the belief system and ritual of having someone 'done in'. The greatest problem is that we can only see the co-operation of the 'holy persons' from 'below', from the point of view of the malefactors employing these services and their victims. We cannot make any final statement on this topic until we conduct a detailed research at the site of the priests' *maleficium*, among priests and monks, in Romanian monasteries, to find out how they see this system and what exactly they consider it to be; how they take part in it according to their reality, in their interpretation. For the time being, there are still many vague areas about the actual role of the Orthodox priests and monks in taking upon themselves the performance of curses and masses 'with evil purposes' – in essence, the active participation in witchcraft.

At present the real points of connection between the ideas and practice of the villagers related to *maleficium* and the system of priestly rituals are unclear; but my data imply a closely interwoven system and shared principles between the participants of the ritual's sacred and profane spheres. This phenomenon cannot be studied in itself. We must also consider the other services of the priests performing these rites, and, more generally, the broader context of the religious systems into which, as I believe, the system of popular witchcraft became integrated.

The benediction and healing activities of the priests and *kalugers* are not limited to the mental sphere and system of connections here referred to as witchcraft. It is in fact more general in its scope. Our narratives show that as a person who divines and heals, the Orthodox priest (and in this respect the Hungarian Catholic priest as well) exercises his influence over a wide range of everyday life experiences. It is not only to order black masses that the Hungarians in Csík went to the Romanian *kalugers*. They also had other positive objectives: to achieve the recovery of a person 'done in', to ask for blessing upon the restoration of family peace and, in general, the maintenance of peace and prosperity – though they could also receive these services from the Hungarian and Roman Catholic priests, and at the nearby shrine of Csíkszentdomokos. From the marriage of a daughter to the successful future of the family, from a peaceful and easy death to the recovery of stolen objects, 'masses for good purposes' were held for a wide variety of purposes. Priestly healing also had its place in the Csík system of religious witchcraft; as we

have seen, the mediator-priest could also act as healer in a given case of *maleficium*. Clients quite often requested two services from the *kaluger* simultaneously: to heal someone who has been 'done in', for example, and also to recite a curse in revenge upon the person they suspected. According to our data, for instance, the *kaluger* recites seven 'benevolent' masses on the sick person whose clothes or photos are taken to the church by his or her family members. The *kaluger* blesses these objects, recites a mass upon them and thus brings recovery and blessing to the sick person. In another type, oil or sugar is taken to the priest, who confers a blessing upon it. By this means it becomes a kind of sacrament, which helps when the family uses it to cook food for the sick person. The opening of the Bible 'for luck or for health' and the priest's prescription of magical fasting 'for good purposes' also appear in this context.

All this is the positive equivalent of the bewitching activities the *kaluger* is commissioned to conduct, and in many instances their actual alternative. This is evident in several bewitchment-narratives in which *maleficium* and healing, curse and benediction appear as solutions that alternate and merge into one another. In a narrative from Karcfalva, for example, somebody's animals died one after the other until he went to the *kaluger* who 'opened the book' and told him who the malefactor was. Then his client had to pay for masses for nine days to repair the damage and to bring some earth and salt from his home to have them blessed. After this, he buried the earth and the salt, now conferred with a healing power, into the foundation of his house – and the problem was indeed solved and the animals stopped dying.

The most characteristic feature of religious witchcraft in Csík is the integration into the system of the holy person's ordeal and rites conferring blessing and curse. The good and evil alternatives of the same system are in the hands of the priest acting as the instrument of fate. An archaic ambivalence is manifested in his person; he is simultaneously a *blessing* and *cursing* priest, who balances the personal inner relations of witchcraft from outside and from above. With his practice of ordeal, he is one of the pillars of the villagers' world order especially with regard to ethical norms. The Western examples of church rites make it all the more clear that here the system of popular witchcraft has been integrated into an actual religious system run by priests. We have two systems, sanctioning grievances by different ways and punishing with different methods those who upset the moral equilibrium of the community.

The system of priestly curses functioning in Csík has some parallels in both Eastern and Western Christianity. These shed more light on the religious systems into which popular witchcraft was, in our presumption, integrated in some of the realms of Orthodoxy in south-east Europe. We have parallels from present-day south-east Europe about the intertwining systems of popular and church divination, but such parallels are even more

frequent in the medieval and early modern period of Western Catholicism. Todorova-Pirgova has written about 'religious magicians' in Bulgaria, who conduct their divining activities with the priests' moral support. Similarly, the explicit role of priestly divination in the identification of *maleficium* is not without parallels – even from modern Western Europe.¹⁰ Although scattered, our contemporary European parallels seem to imply that the coexistence of populations with differing nationalities and religions must have played a major role in the survival of such sacred services. In the century of the Reformation German Protestant peasants secretly visited Catholic holy places to seek cures or participated in processions aimed at averting hail. It is all the more remarkable that in the twentieth-century Netherlands in Utrecht and Gelderland with a mixed Catholic and Protestant population the Protestants were especially inclined to employ the services of Catholic witch doctors.¹¹ Todorova-Pirgova describes similar interconnections between Bulgarian Muslims and Orthodox Bulgarians.¹²

With his practising of magic, healing and divination, the figure of the Romanian priest resembles the 'Christian magicians' of the Western Middle Ages, as Valerie Flint termed those figures working on the borderline of magic and religion. Flint describes magician-priests from the fourth to the fifth centuries, who conducted 'sanctified magical activities', prophesied from the Bible and identified thieves by divination.¹³ Some of the methods of priestly magic and divination found in Csík have direct parallels with the realms of Western Catholicism. The type of Bible divination known as 'the opening of the book' has a long medieval tradition. Schreiner's research on the subject suggests it is rooted in ancient traditions from the sixth century.¹⁴ Prohibitions of divining from the Bible as well as data on the use of the Bible and the Psalms for divination and magic, such as finding the identity of a thief with the help of a suspended Bible or psalm, reoccur throughout the medieval and early modern periods.¹⁵ According to Richard Kieckhefer, methods for spotting a thief or finding stolen goods were in common use during the medieval period, though they were often considered a subtype of demonic magic.¹⁶ It is telling that from the Council of Laodicea to the sixteenth century it was not only the Western churches that felt obliged to denounce repeatedly priestly magic and divination.¹⁷ Ryan's research on early modern data on Russian priests accused of *maleficium* and magic, as well as the large number of prohibitions of priestly magic and divination from the same period, attest to a very lively priestly practice in Russia.¹⁸

Another important area where witchcraft and priestly practice interconnected concerns the clerical activity of healing and conferring benediction, which has survived to this day in Orthodox Eastern Europe. Indeed, in this region it seems to exist with almost the same intensity in the twentieth century as we know it did in medieval Western Christianity. The medieval church could satisfy the various everyday magical needs of the laity by healing

and averting natural catastrophes.¹⁹ The sacred place provided a kind of social shield for the community surrounding it. For the medieval person it was a basic need to be in a constant state of baptism, as it were, through repeated benediction as a protection against the demonic outside world. As Gur'evich observes, blessing was essentially a form of protective magic, an amulet against curses.²⁰ In Western Europe priestly healing through church benediction was quite common until at least the seventeenth century, after which the memory of healing priests and monks were still kept alive in Protestant areas by popular incantations that had originally been benediction texts said over various diseases. In Orthodox Eastern Europe, along with village healers, priests and monks continued to have a much stronger role in healing, blessing, some types of cursing, as well as exorcism, which was practised by Western priests as well.²¹

By providing a sacred protection benedictions are, as we saw in the system of Csík, the alternative of curses. The two can easily change places in a system of divine ordeal where the priest conferring the blessing or curse is only an instrument of higher powers, and where curse formulae related to exorcism are originally parts of a legitimate rite.²² Furthermore the priest legitimizes the idea that the cursing of humans is directed against the work of Satan, against the sins imparted to man by Satan, and is a just punishment meted out in the name of God. There are several medieval forms of ritual cursing in the realms of Western Christianity that are almost exact equivalents of the Csík system of 'having someone done in' through priests. The most important of these is the *clamor*, the ritual curse upon those who committed an offence against the religious community or church property. Its formulae were recorded from the ninth century, and are known to have been in use in Frankish territory (present-day Western France) from the eighth century to the twelfth century.²³ The malefactor was publicly denounced and his punishment requested in prayer, which, at least in the final section of the *clamor*, took the shape of a curse. The *clamor* ritual could be complemented with fasting,²⁴ just as magical fasting is found in Csík.

Even before the standardization of the *clamor* ritual we have data on cursing as a liturgical threat from the sixth and seventh centuries. Lester Little quotes a number of stories, most of them about punishing thieves of the church property, from this period.²⁵ From the eighth to the thirteenth centuries there are a strikingly large number of stories about the sanctioning or threatening of thieves with curses. Keith Thomas even describes cases from late medieval England in which thieves of church and monastery property, or people who failed to pay back loans, were punished by curses or threatened in a public cursing rite.²⁶ The public threats served partly to appease the injured party's thirst for revenge: the wrongdoer got sick, perished, his animals died – justice was done. In other cases the *clamor* was a warning shot. The harmful act could be reversed, stolen goods returned without the realization

of the curse; the equilibrium was restored between the injurer and the injured, whether a private person or the community of a monastery.²⁷ Thus the *clamor* was in essence a divine ordeal just like the priest's curse in the system of Csík witchcraft. Both served as a form of compensation as well as a means of maintaining or restoring social stability. As Little writes, 'the *clamor* was a ceremony in which social disorder and concomitant suffering were acted out and accepted hierarchies were inverted'.²⁸

The data from Csík also reveals a form of priestly magic that is less legitimate than the *clamor* rite, in other words the celebration of a black mass to cause disease and death. According to Klaus Schreiner's research, the saying of requiems for the living, as well as the practice of *Totbeten* or *Mordbeten*, in other words the recital of mortal curses within prayers, was a recurring phenomena in medieval Western Europe.²⁹ The requiem celebrated for the living is pure black magic. It could be accompanied by such similarly 'common' magical acts as fasting to provoke misfortune. According to thirteenth-century data, mendicant friars were specialists in this field.

Advocating the avoidance of untimely death and the preparation for death, the more spiritual Christianity of the late Middle Ages conflicted with the magical service of the requiem for the living.³⁰ It nevertheless survived for a long time. This must have been due to the strong popular traditions of cursing and black magic with the same kind of duality of church and secular traditions that we find in twentieth-century Csík. This question of a duality of popular and church rites has been raised by those who have researched curse-rites in the medieval Church.³¹ We may agree with Little's opinion that the various European popular curse traditions cover a widespread, perhaps universal phenomenon, which provided a mental framework for the more formal, studied religious cursing.³² The role of cursing is quite important in medieval and early modern village societies, both in a religious context and more generally as a means of verbal conflict regulation, to use Eva Labouvie's phrase.³³ As we have seen, in Eastern Europe the duality of secular and church usage of ritual curses has survived until the modern age. In the light of this duality, it appears quite natural that, just as cursing has a priestly religious variant, the popular system of witchcraft, which is to a large extent based on communal forms of cursing, should also have a parallel 'priestly' layer. Furthermore, the two layers are not unrelated: as we have seen in Csík there are ritual, public forms which appear in witchcraft as well.

We can find, then, several close similarities between religious-magical practices in the contemporary Orthodox sphere of influence and the medieval rituals of the Western church. These correspondences are probably due to the fact that Orthodox Christianity has preserved until the modern period – legitimately or illegitimately – ritual forms that have already become extinct in the West. Although it is the Orthodox priestly practice, among others, that has preserved them, we still cannot consider them specifically Eastern

European or Orthodox (let alone Hungarian) features, although we can evidently account for local characteristics and differences that have developed through temporal deferments and cross-cultural encounters. The Western examples of church rites make it all the more clear that here the system of popular witchcraft has been integrated into an actual religious system run by priests. We have two systems, sanctioning grievances in different ways and punishing with different methods those who upset the moral equilibrium of the community. The reason why they could merge so easily is that a common element in both is the damage caused by a person within the community: this is the common factor that could connect the category of individual *maleficium* or revenge and that of the 'just' punishment restoring order in the community. In medieval Europe, and apparently in Eastern Europe in the modern period, the priests' role in satisfying everyday 'magical needs' involved the act of *maleficium* causing death and sickness, but only in an ambivalent system subordinated to divine ordeal.

In the light of our medieval Western examples, the curse ritual performed by priests in Csík could and can exist *without* witchcraft, just as popular systems of cursing could exist without it. No witchcraft ideology was needed to proceed, for instance, against offenders of property, which was the most frequent motive in Western *clamor* cases. The important role of having thieves 'done in' in Csík is defined here as witchcraft only for the reason that the explanation of individual problems in terms of *maleficium* involves the presumption of a person with bewitching powers 'entering' the system. We may suppose that this rural system of witchcraft, cursing, and black magic as a form sanction is the result of the merging of two factors with differing origins: Hungarian popular witchcraft and a Romanian curse-ritual similar to the Western *clamor*. What we do not know is whether a similar Romanian-Romanian fusion has ever taken place; in other words, whether Romanian popular witchcraft has had a system like the Hungarian one or whether a *clamor*-like institution was sufficient there to satisfy all the relevant needs.

These rites of curse-blessing within ordeal systems have an important ideological basis in the archaic, one could say Old Testament-like concepts of sin, punishment and justice, which disappeared from Western Christianity earlier than from its Orthodox form. That these systems survived longer in the Orthodox east was most likely due to several factors. I can mention two of these in connection with the material under scrutiny here. One of them is the greater importance accorded to the role of the Devil in Eastern liturgy. In relation to this, in Orthodox Eastern Europe the peasants' world-views and the popular beliefs of witchcraft are closely related to the church demonology's concept of the Devil. In Western and Central Europe the heyday of the demonological concept of witchcraft, and the identification of *maleficium* with possession by the Devil, was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the east these beliefs – perhaps due to the proximity of Orthodox

Christianity – survived or revived. Possession by the Devil is still a cause and explanation for diseases among the villagers of Csík, and they go to Romanian monks and priests to have the Devil exorcised in the same way as in the requests discussed above.³⁴ The priest is in a constant struggle with Satan, who tries to gain ascendancy over men. It is a part of his everyday practice to purify people and their environment with benedictions, sacraments and exorcisms, and thereby limit the Devil and the Devil's sphere. The other factor is the clearly more populist attitude of Orthodox priests: their greater readiness to cater to the concrete, daily magical needs of the people, to employ magical methods based on face-to-face relationships. It seems that Roman Catholic Hungarians have a need for these services which Hungarian priests may not provide but Orthodox priests are ready to perform.

As for the Romanians, our discussion so far may also suggest one more interesting connection related to Orthodoxy. One theory developing from the research on European witch persecution was that the discontinuation of the 'magical' services of the medieval Church may have provided an impetus to the blooming of witchcraft and witch persecution in the West. In Orthodox Eastern Europe, or at least in the Orthodox areas of Romania, these services have continued, and there was no official witch persecution. In the light of our analysis, it is understandable that by taking an active role in the popular system of witchcraft, the Orthodox Church never persecuted witches. The priests rather than the laity would be the most prone to accusations if a witch-persecution was set in motion.

Notes

- 1 As well as the data collected by myself, I have used some of my students' data, for which I would like to express my gratitude here.
- 2 In recent years a few studies have been published from various parts of Transylvania. In each case they focus on Hungarians living close to Romanians, who have integrated, like the people from Csík, the activities of Romanian priests/monks into their system of punishment and divination. See Vilmos Keszeg, 'A román pap és hiedelemköre a mezőségi folklórban [The Romanian Priest and His Belief Circle in the Folklore of the Mezőség.]', *Ethnographia* 107 (1996) 335–69; Tünde Komáromi, 'Rontásformák Aranyosszéken. A gyógyító román pap [Forms of Maleficium in Aranyosszék. The Romanian Priest as Healer]', *Néprajzi Látóhatár* 5 (1996) 87–98; Dóra Czégényi, 'Magyar–román interetnikus kapcsolatok vallási vetülete. A román pap alakja egy erdélyi közösség hiedelemrendszerében [Religious Aspects of Hungarian–Romanian Inter-Ethnic Contacts. The Figure of the Romanian Priest in the Belief System of a Transylvanian Community]', in Éva Borbély, and Dóra Czégényi *et al.*, *Változó társadalom* (Kolozsvár, 1999), pp. 29–43; Gyula Tankó, *Életvitel a Gyimesekben* [Way of Life in the Gyimes Region] (Székelyudvarhely, 2001).
- 3 For a general survey of Hungarian witch persecution and early modern witchcraft see Gábor Klaniczay, 'Hungary: The Accusations and the Universe of Popular Magic', in Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen (eds), *Early Modern European Witchcraft, Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 219–55; Klaniczay, 'La chasse aux sorcières

- en Europe Centrale et Orientale', in Robert Muchembled (ed.), *Magie et sorcellerie en Europe du Moyen Age à nos jours* (Paris, 1994), pp. 275–91.
- 4 One of the first European descriptions of the system is Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1970), but see also Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, 1971); Christine Lerner, *Enemies of God: The Witchhunt in Scotland* (Baltimore, 1981); Robin Briggs, *Communities of Belief: Cultural and Social Tensions in Early Modern France* (Oxford, 1989). On the characteristics of Hungarian witchcraft see, Éva Pócs, 'Maleficium-narratívok, konfliktusok, boszorkánytípusok (Sopron vármegye 1529–1768)' ['Maleficium Narratives – Conflicts – Witch Types, Sopron County, 1529–1768'], *Népi Kultúra – népi társadalom* 18 (1994) 9–66; idem, *Between the Living and the Dead: A Perspective on Witches and Seers in the Early Modern Age* (Budapest, 1999); Ildikó Kristóf, 'Ördögi mesterséget nem cselekedtem'. *A boszorkányüldözés társadalmi és kulturális háttere a kora újkori Debrecenben és Bihar vármegyében* ['I Did No Devilish Deed'. *The Social and Cultural Background of Witch Persecution in Early Modern Debrecen and Bihar County*] (Debrecen, 1998).
 - 5 Evidently, we do not know as yet the proportion between effectuated *maleficium* cases and those that were only narrated, or the real dimensions of the actual cases of black magic.
 - 6 Willem de Blécourt, 'The Witch, her Victim, the Unwitcher and the Researcher: The Continued Existence of Traditional Witchcraft', in Willem de Blécourt, Ronald Hut-ton and Jean La Fontaine, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Twentieth Century* (London, 1999) pp. 188–91; Per Sörlin, 'Wicked Arts'. *Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden, 1635–1754* (Leiden, Boston and Cologne, 1999), pp. 128–77.
 - 7 From the Romanian word *călugăr* (monk).
 - 8 The literature of witchcraft persecution features the role of cursing as *maleficium* causing physical problems, views on the rightfulness and justification of cursing and more generally the importance of cursing in medieval Europe as well. Thomas describes the significance of ritual cursing in early modern England, which can be traced back to the Middle Ages. He also mentions views on 'relapsing' curses similar to those from Csík: Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 598–611. In certain situations these were permitted or tolerated by the Church as well.
 - 9 According to the description in Tankó, *Életvitel a Gyimesekben*, p. 155, the monks of Romanian monasteries in Moldva and Gyimes or the wandering *kalugers* appearing in the fairs to collect the orders are usually entrusted by Hungarians in Gyimes with the practice of black magic and with holding curse-masses – as a form of dispensing justice or as a solution of family and social conflicts in a way very similar to Csík.
 - 10 For twentieth-century data of priests and monks fulfilling the role of witch doctors, see Jeanne Favret-Saada, *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 141–5; de Blécourt, 'The Witch, her Victim, the Unwitcher and the Researcher', p. 185; Inge Schöck, *Hexenglaube in der Gegenwart. Empirische Untersuchungen in Südwestdeutschland* (Tübingen, 1978), pp. 99, 143; 187–200; Ton Dekker, 'Witches and Sorcerers in Twentieth Century Legends', in Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra and Willem Frijhoff (eds), *Witchcraft in the Netherlands from the Fourteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Rotterdam, 1991, pp. 183–201.
 - 11 Dekker, 'Witches and Sorcerers in Twentieth Century Legends', pp. 187–200. See also the contribution of de Blécourt in this volume.
 - 12 Iveta Todorova-Pirgova, 'Witches and Priests in the Bulgarian Village: Past and Present', in Gábor Klaniczay and Éva Pócs (eds), *Demons, Spirits, Witches: Church Demonology and Popular Mythology* (Budapest, forthcoming). This principle is more widespread in Hungarian–Romanian (and Catholic/Protestant–Orthodox) relations than the discussion above indicates. Vajkai mentions other parts of Transylvania

- where Orthodox Romanian shrines are visited by Hungarian Protestants: Aurél Vajkai, *Népi orvoslás a Borsavölgyében* [*Popular Healing in the Borsa Valley*] (Kolozsvár, 1944), p. 45.
- 13 Valerie Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, 1991), pp. 247–73, 375–80.
 - 14 Klaus Schreiner, 'Volkstümliche Bibelmagie und volkssprachliche Bibellektüre. Theologische und soziale Probleme mittelalterlicher Laienfrömmigkeit', in Peter Dinzelsbacher and Dieter Bauer (eds), *Volksreligion im hohen und späten Mittelalter* (Paderborn, Munich, Vienna and Zurich, 1990), pp. 337–8.
 - 15 Schreiner, 'Volkstümliche Bibelmagie', pp. 335–72.
 - 16 Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 84.
 - 17 Klaus Schreiner, 'Tot- und Mordbeten, Totenmessen für Lebende. Todeswünsche im Gewand mittelalterlicher Frömmigkeit', in Martin Kintzinger, Wolfgang Stürner and Johannes Zahltzen (eds), *Das andere Wahrnehmen. Beiträge zur europäischen Geschichte* (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna, 1991), pp. 341–5. For Eastern Europe see W. F. Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight: An Historical Survey of Magic and Divination in Russia* (Stroud, 1999), pp. 408–17.
 - 18 Ryan, *Bathhouse*, pp. 408–17.
 - 19 Adolph Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benedictionen im Mittelalter I-II* (Breisgau, 1909).
 - 20 Aron Gur'evich, *Problemy srednevekovoi narodnoi kul'tury* (Moscow, 1981), p. 84.
 - 21 See on the practice of incantation in monasteries, Fritz Pradel, *Griechische und süditalienische Gebete, Beschwörungen und Rezepte des Mittelalters* (Giessen, 1907); V. J. Man-sikka, *Über russische Zauberformeln mit Berücksichtigung der Blut- und Verrenkungssegen* (Helsinki, 1909).
 - 22 Richard Kieckhefer mentions several medieval Western European examples of the alternative usage of blessing and curse, priestly benediction and exorcism 'on the same level of consciousness': Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 69–84.
 - 23 Lester K. Little, *Benedictine Maledictions. Liturgical Cursing in Romanesque France* (Ithaca and London, 1993). Thanks to Gábor Klaniczay for calling my attention to this book.
 - 24 Little, *Benedictine Maledictions*, pp. 20–5.
 - 25 Little, *Benedictine Maledictions*, p. 84.
 - 26 Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 599–600.
 - 27 See also Gur'evich, *Problemy srednevekovoi narodnoi kul'tury*, pp. 88–92.
 - 28 Little, *Benedictine Maledictions*, p. 142.
 - 29 Schreiner, 'Volkstümliche Bibelmagie'; Schreiner, 'Tot- und Mordbeten'. For a summary of the sources see Dieter Harmening, *Superstitio. Überlieferungs- und theoriegeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur kirchlich-theologischen Aberglaubensliteratur des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1979), pp. 222–5. For relevant data from Ireland see Little, *Benedictine Maledictions*, pp. 168–70.
 - 30 Schreiner, 'Tot- und Mordbeten', pp. 340–3.
 - 31 Gur'evich, *Problemy srednevekovoi narodnoi kul'tury*, p. 66; Little, *Benedictine Maledictions*, pp. 154–85. Little mentions Greek, German, Scandinavian, and especially Irish pagan popular prototypes.
 - 32 Little, *Benedictine Maledictions*, p. 154.
 - 33 Eva Labouvie, 'Verwünschen und Verfluchen: Formen der verbalen Konfliktregelung in der ländlichen Gesellschaft der frühen Neuzeit', in Peter Blickle (ed.), *Der Fluch und der Eid. Die metaphysische Begründung gesellschaftlichen Zusammenlebens und politischer Ordnung in der ständischen Gesellschaft* (Berlin, 1993), p. 122. See also Thomas on the role of cursing in early modern village societies and in this context in witchcraft, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 599–611.

- ³⁴ For witches possessed by the Devil and for the most important related works, see Éva Pócs, 'The Popular Foundations of the Witches' Sabbath and the Devil's Pact in Central and Southeastern Europe', *Acta Ethnographica* 37 (1991–92) 343–6; Pócs, 'Patterns of Possession in Central-East Europe', in Klaniczay and Pócs (eds), *Demons, Spirits, Witches*. It is especially the Serbian and Romanian witches that are believed to be people possessed by devils or evil spirits, who obtain their power of *maleficium* through the possessing Devil.