

To Blåkulla They Flew: An
Analysis of the Child's Sabbath Narrative during the Swedish Witch Hunts

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Introduction

For ordinary people of the early modern period, worship was fairly conventional. They honored the Almighty during the Sabbath, with prayer and sacrament in a rather sedate affair. Whether Catholic or Protestant, things were taken seriously, mass was said, prayers to god were made, and everyone went home happy and pious. Witches of the early modern period, however, found the traditional sabbath too sedate, and decided they needed to go “all out”. They travelled to their sabbath through flight; on brooms, animals, or even hapless victims (usually men walking outside on days known for elevated levels of nefarious magical activity).¹ They celebrated their evils by trampling on the cross, listening to a sermon given by the dark lord, urinating on the altar, attending a feast of toads and twigs, and there were even lively bouts of nude dancing and group fornication, usually under the table, during the banquet.² Narratives of witches’ sabbaths spawned all over Europe, but this study makes a particular focus on those in Sweden, and their escapades at the legendary Blåkulla.

There is a staggering amount of research on the early modern witch hunts. It spans all across Europe, though much of the work of the hunts during this period focuses on the densest witch hunts on the continent, in Germany and France, in addition to the hunts in England. Outside of these regions, scholarship becomes more geographically specialized. Though this comes as no surprise, as hunts differed

¹ Östling, Per-Anders. “Blåkulla Journeys in Swedish Folklore”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 2006, Volume 62. pp. 92-98

² Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. pp. 197-198

immensely from region to region, even from town to town, especially when their character was not nearly as fervent as those in the peak areas.

The majority of background research in this study focuses on scholarship on the early modern witch hunts from the last 30 years. Prominent scholars include Brian P. Levack, Gustav Henningsen, Bengt Ankarloo, Stuart Clark, Carlo Ginzburg, among others. In Per Sörlin's book, *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden, 1635-1754*, he comments extensively on the perspectives of research on the early modern witch hunts, through the 20th century.³ Sörlin names three perspectives that dominate much of witchcraft scholarship: the "elite-oriented perspective (the acculturation model)", the "conflict and crises-oriented perspective", and the "systems-oriented perspective on magic..."⁴ Commenting on the entirety of the scholarship and perspectives of the European witch hunts in detail goes beyond the scope of this study, however as Sörlin states in his book, it is possible to point out one of the most widespread and glaring issues of studies focusing on narratives on witches' sabbaths during this period.

Much of the earlier scholarship in the 20th century focuses heavily on the impact that the educated elites had on the witchcraft and Sabbath narratives produced, to the point that it is heavily skewed, and neglecting other vital factors such as popular culture and regional folklore. Though, over the decades, scholarship has evolved to acknowledge the invaluable role of folk-belief in the construction of these narratives.⁵

³ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. 1999. Introduction, pp. 1-17.

⁴ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 12

⁵ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 9

However, this issue with older scholarship, according to Sörlin, still dominates much of the relevant research today. It is true that the educated elites may have taken much of their belief on witches from demonological literature, from works such as the widely distributed *Malleus Maleficarum*, and it is also true that some ideas behind witches congregating and working against God's holy hierarchy were taken from these works. As demonological literature was introduced to the witch hunts in Sweden, sabbath beliefs became more prominent, though the powers allowing these beliefs to gain traction came from both sides.⁶ Many scholars, such as Stuart Clark, argue that sabbath beliefs were fed solely from demonological literature. But according to Ankarloo, the Sabbath was more easily introduced into witch beliefs, because it worked seamlessly with pre-existing popular culture:

“The witches’ Sabbath was easily accepted in popular tradition, since it was perceived merely as an extension or elaboration of local beliefs, gone back at least to the late Middle Ages, in night-flying women and a witches’ gathering at Blåkulla.”⁷

It is impossible to ignore the role of popular culture in the development of sabbath beliefs, and it would be incorrect to assume all of the belief on the witches’

⁶ *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, edited by Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen. pp. 285-318, “Sweden: The Mass Burnings (1668-1676)”, Bengt Ankarloo. p. 290. “As in other parts of the North, the first decades of the seventeenth century were crucial for the introduction in Sweden of modern demonological and legal concepts of witchcraft. The witches’ Sabbath was easily accepted in popular tradition, since it was perceived merely as an extension or elaboration of local beliefs, gone back at least to the late Middle Ages, in night-flying women and a witches’ gathering at Blåkulla. If anything, the élite tradition was slower to absorb new ideas.”

⁷ See note six, *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, edited by Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen. pp. 285-318, “Sweden: The Mass Burnings (1668-1676)”, Bengt Ankarloo. p. 290

sabbath came solely from demonological literature. However, one cannot assume that demonological literature did not play any role whatsoever. Furthermore, one cannot ignore the factors that worked beyond popular culture and demonological literature. What is more plausible is that there was a complex process of the fusion of multiple branches of popular culture, folk belief, and the introduction of demonological literature, in the sabbath beliefs that developed during the trials.⁸ The fact that this research is skewed, or failing to fully acknowledge the role of folklore and popular culture in these narratives does not imply that past research is wholly unusable. In fact, it is opposite the case. There is however, a large gap within older research on the early modern witch hunts, that this study aims to help close. This study aims for the larger picture: to explore the complex interplay between a myriad of factors influencing these sabbath narratives, namely, what role popular culture and regional folklore had in these sabbath narratives in Sweden, and more specifically, in the narratives of children.

In addition to the issue with skewed research, much of the earlier scholarship also focuses almost entirely on continental beliefs, which differ greatly from beliefs surrounding the witch hunts in Scandinavia. One cannot apply the structure of hunts on the continent to Scandinavia, as beliefs were transferred at a different pace, and in many cases, Scandinavian hunts had a character independent of those of the larger hunts on the continent. That being said, much of witchcraft scholarship outside of this sphere is either focused on a very specific area, or the literature lumps together hunts

⁸ Clark, Stuart. *Protestant Demonology: Sin, Superstition, and Society* (c. 1520 -c. 1630). pp. 45-82. Ankarloo, Bengt. Henningsen, Gustav. *Early Modern Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. 1990.

that span across various regions, where they are not entirely compatible. As previously stated, works of demonological literature that had such a huge impact on the witch hunts of early modern Europe were not circulated in Scandinavia until after much of Europe had already consumed and implemented the practices found in these works. By this time, the Scandinavian witch hunts had taken flight in the absence of these ideas. Thus, the beginning of the hunts in Scandinavia were shaped far differently while void of continental beliefs, and contained characteristics that can only be compared to continental belief in its later stages. Like continental trials, sabbath was a much later belief in Sweden. But unlike continental beliefs, belief in the witches' sabbath was a much briefer characteristic, and testimonies of sabbath increased exponentially when children became more involved in accusations. The degree of demonological literature's influence on the sabbath narratives is obviously subject to debate, but it would be wrong to neglect the unique character of the Swedish hunts, and their extended lack of access ideas spawning from demonological literature.

Another issue that occurs within the scholarship vis-à-vis this study, is the heavy focus on the more numerous maleficia and non-harmful magic trials, as opposed to trials of diabolism. Most scholarship makes a clear distinction on the focus of their study, whether maleficia or diabolism, however since most of the scholarship focuses on maleficia, it limits the amount of material relevant to this study, on diabolic witchcraft.

The nature of maleficia and non-harmful magic trials and trials of diabolism differ greatly. Maleficia and non-harmful magic trials focus more on the individual's wrongdoings, and signing their soul to the devil is optional. When contrasting these

types of magic to diabolism, there is one key difference: the direction of evil.

Non-harmful magic does not provide a direct contrast to diabolism as maleficia does, because it is related more to authorities wanting to root out superstition, and the intention is more often, not to harm its target. Maleficent and diabolic magic both have the intention of harm, but their focus differs. Maleficent magic directs its power at a particular target, i.e. an individual. Whatever power the witch possesses, it is hers alone, and she seldom consorts with other witches, though it was not uncommon to pass on powers within a family, usually matrilineally. In contrast, the type of evil in diabolic magic has no particular target, no particular focus. This type of magic aims to cast a shadow upon the world, and overthrow the holy order. It is a pure and concentrated evil, that wishes to defile and destroy all that lies in its path. Witches in diabolism trials were soldiers in Satan's army, intent on obliterating God's rule in an apocalyptic war. They were the most dangerous witches of all, a threat to the entire community, not just the unpleasant neighbor. Due to the insidious and intentionally blasphemous nature of diabolic magic, legal proceedings also differed greatly from maleficia or non-harmful magic trials. A witch who has attended a sabbath— a trademark feature of diabolism trials —has committed countless blasphemies against God and nature, alongside her countless accomplices. This feature gave diabolism trials far more potential for destruction: once a Sabbath was established in the accused's confession, it was not uncommon for numerous other accomplices to be implicated in the trial, and as a result, an intense and sustained "panic" was far more likely an outcome.

With the basic outline of European witchcraft scholarship outlined, the focus can now be narrowed to that dwelling in the Swedish niche. In terms of scholarship on the Swedish witch hunts, the reading list remains considerable. Scholars such as Bengt Ankarloo, Per Sörlin, Per-Anders Östling, and Linda Oja, among others, have made large contributions to the study of the Swedish witch hunts during the early modern period. Many of these studies have an immense number of trial materials to back their work, spanning over much of the Swedish witch hunts, from the late sixteenth century, to the early nineteenth century. Some of these studies go even further, and relay the entirety of the history of Witchcraft in Sweden, and in some cases, Scandinavia. Many of these scholars write about the Blåkulla trials, and some of the sabbath narratives therein, however many lack a close, contemporary analysis of these sabbath narratives. Much of these analyses retain the earlier perspective of elites dictating witch-belief during the trials, with less focus on a folkloristic underlay. However, considering what Sörlin states in *Wicked Arts*, that the Blåkulla trials, from 1668-1676, were only an “episode” in the larger scope of the Swedish trials, it is understandable that the various minutiae of Sabbath narratives were not analyzed in detail, when this episode dictated more the end of the mass trials themselves as opposed to their development.⁹ It can be argued that they did not dictate the character of the Swedish hunts so much as they were a distinctive feature.

This study aims to come closer to closing the gap of work on the Sabbath narrative, through the framework of two key features of the Blåkulla sabbaths, which

⁹ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. vi

make it a distinctive feature of the Swedish hunt, and perhaps distinctive of the hunts across Europe. Firstly, the fact that these narratives were mainly constructed by children, an anomaly in witch trials, where children were often not even considered as viable witnesses.¹⁰ In the early modern European witch hunts, very few children's testimonies were even considered, and even fewer were considered in mass trials, where the majority of the accused came from child witnesses.¹¹ In the Blåkulla trials, though children were allowed to testify, they were not considered as an entire witness: only a fraction of one, depending on their age.¹² Thus, it was not uncommon for up to thirty or forty children to accuse the same person of witchcraft.¹³ The uniqueness of children playing an active role in accusations, and the huge number of children participating, made the Blåkulla episode in itself a notable piece of interest on the Sabbath narratives. Having court records of children in these trials provides a unique insight into the beliefs and popular culture of children during this period, something

¹⁰ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. 1999. p. 49

¹¹ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. 1999. p. 49

¹² Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. 1999. p. 49 "Sheer quantity was allowed to outweigh any qualitative shortcomings.", p. 49 Sörlin states that in order for a witch to be tried with full proof, one must have 2 witnesses with non-contradictory statements. See also, *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, edited by Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen. pp. 285-318, "Sweden: The Mass Burnings (1668-1676)", Bengt Ankarloo. p. 303, "The child witnesses were counted as fractions of adult, legitimate ones. A 5-year-old child may have been considered as one-tenth of a witness, a 14-year-old as at least half. By adding the fractions, the stipulated two whole witnesses were soon arrived at. It was not unusual for twenty, thirty, or forty children to give testimony against the same witch."

¹³ What is also important to note that is that these herds of children were also in charge of most of the accusations, *early modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, edited by Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen. pp. 285-318, "Sweden: The Mass Burnings (1668-1676)", Bengt Ankarloo. "Many of the most active children successively transferred their charges to new suspects as the trial proceeded. A relatively small, but busy, group of children were responsible for most of the accusations. The others only followed suit. In one parish the 20 per cent of the child witnesses who were most active were responsible for about half of all charges. These boys and girls were the leaders and organizers among their peers, and they decided what suggestive details were to be given in the followed day's proceedings ('we rode on a black cow', 'a brown horse', and so on). Those in favour of this procedure maintained that the innocent children were incapable of fraud and bad faith (*doli incapaces*)." p. 303

otherwise completely lost in the passage of time. Furthermore, the evolution of these narratives shows an evolution of popular belief and local folklore, unheard of outside of these circumstances. Folklore and popular culture were the ship, and these children were the captains.

Secondly, this study will focus on a particular feature of these Blåkulla sabbaths, being the role of inversion of society and ritual. Much of Blåkulla features an *uppochnervärld* or, an upside down world. Blåkulla acts as a kind of “mirror” world in some narratives, where not only the Christian sabbath is inverted in a kind of hellish parody, but rules of everyday life are violated as well.¹⁴ Other scholars have analyzed somewhat the role of inversion on Blåkulla, most notably Per-Anders Östling in his book *Blåkulla, Magi och Trolldomsprocesserna*, however his theory of inversion is analyzed primarily through the framework of Bakhtin's carnivalesque. It is plausible that aspects of popular humor, jokes, and the carnivalesque were incorporated in children's narratives, however they were not presented as humorous. Core motifs in popular humor were diabolized by the nature of the witches and their blasphemies, and the children utilized inversion as a means of diabolizing this humor. Unlike Östling, this study will incorporate more of the contextual factors in the narratives, with emphasis children and their diabolization of popular culture and folklore through the use of inversion.¹⁵

¹⁴ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. He writes extensively about this *uppochnervärld* and how it relates to carnival and social unrest. Though I do not agree with him, he is one of the few scholars that actually writes about this phenomena in detail.

¹⁵ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. “Section 4.9: Häxsabbaten i yngre och äldre tradition. En motivanalys.” pp. 150-206.

Depending on the area, the witch hunts in Sweden spanned from the late fifteenth century, until into the eighteenth century. Generally speaking, the hunts in Sweden began as mainly maleficia trials. However, as the hunts intensified, diabolism and the Sabbath were introduced. And as panic ensued, Swedish law began to persecute the once legal non-harmful magic, as all forms of magic became associated with Satan, whether harmful or helpful.¹⁶ The intensity of these hunts also varied from region to region, and even from town to town.¹⁷ These hunts had their own character, which depended heavily on both public participation and belief, as well as judicial participation and traditions. There were certain townships that rejected testimonies of a witches' sabbath, and did not use that as a basis of mass accusation, thus had a lower conviction rate.¹⁸ In neighboring towns another judge may have been a staunch supporter of the imminent threat of Satan and the witches' sabbath, and therefore a proponent of mass accusations and executions.¹⁹ In the case of the mass trials in the fresh Danish acquisition of Bohuslän, witchcraft proceedings were altered dramatically due to the area's retention of Danish law.²⁰

¹⁶ *Magic, Body and the Self in Eighteenth-Century Sweden*, Jacqueline Van Gent, "Chapter 1: Honour and Social Control in Witchcraft Trials", pp. 17-58. An excellent source on the structure of Swedish courts during the witch hunts, and how persecution began to evolve in the face of ever increasing accusations.

¹⁷ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 46. Sörlin states that this was partly because of the techniques used in the courts, accusatorial vs. inquisitorial. Accusatorial trials meant that the judge took a more passive role, and it was the accusers that took the initiative. These were generally in a private setting, usually a matter of settling accounts with the defendants. Inquisitorial techniques meant that the courts took an "actively involved [role] in the search for the truth."

¹⁸ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. "Section 5.7: Lagstiftning och domslut" pp. 276-278.

¹⁹ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 49

²⁰ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 49, see also Monter, William. "Scandinavian Witchcraft in Anglo-American Perspective" pp. 425-434. Ankarloo, Bengt. Henningsen, Gustav. *Early Modern Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. 1990. p. 425.

The better known areas of high concentrations of Blåkulla testimonies were in Southern and Northern Sweden, most well known in the municipalities of Dalarna, Uppland, and Norrland. Because of these huge variations, this study will focus on only a number of areas that had heavier trials, had extensive records of trips to Blåkulla, and are within my ability to obtain the primary source material. This study in no way reflects the entirety of the Blåkulla trials, though considering the huge amount of variation in these trials and their narratives, it is perhaps impossible to pin them all to one character when studied in detail.

There are extensive limits to this study, mainly those of my own scholastic abilities. Because of the limits of my own scholarship, and that of this paper, this study does not even pale to the other publications concerning the Swedish witch hunts. The number of factors playing into phenomena such as witch hunts is nearly infinite, and one could easily write countless volumes simply detailing the Blåkulla narrative and its historical and socio-cultural context. Other scholars have gone through hundreds of transcripts, have knowledge of trials spanning all over Europe, and have analyzed these hunts in multiple perspectives as experts in their fields. I am limited in what portions of the manuscripts I am able to read, as all of the original materials are written in seventeenth-century script. However, I hope to make at least a small contribution to Scandinavian witchcraft scholarship, and uncover aspects of the Blåkulla journeys that perhaps have not previously been explored in detail.

A Very Short History of the Swedish Witch Trials

Historically, witchcraft has been in Swedish law since the thirteenth century, outlawing harmful magic against others, or maleficia.²¹ This type of magic was tried at a relatively stable pace, until the early modern period. Before the 16th century, people had fairly lax attitudes towards forms of magic in Sweden.²² Healing magic and non-harmful magic were not outlawed, and practiced fairly widely across Sweden prior to the hunts.²³ It was not until the end of the sixteenth century that people began to take a harder stance, and laws against witchcraft began to transfer to secular authorities.²⁴ The authorities were especially concerned with diabolic magic, and the war against Satan. By the late seventeenth century, mass trials swept across towns and villages, and witches flew to the sabbath daily.

The question of how the trials actually began, and how they developed is nearly impossible to answer. There are hugely varying theories on how they came to be, and how they grew so rapidly over such a short period of time. There are also many region-dependent factors that have played into these trials, that further alter the outcome of each trial. Sörlin brings an important point however. He states that one of the most vital conditions that spurred on the trials, was the transformation of witchcraft within the Swedish judicial system. During the reformation and its growing concern with

²¹ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 18, see also Ankarloo, Bengt. "Sweden: The Mass Burnings (1668-1676)". pp. 285-318. Ankarloo, Bengt. Henningsen, Gustav. *Early Modern Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. 1990. p. 286-237

²² Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 18

²³ Gent, Jacqueline Van. *Magic, Body, and the Self in Eighteenth-Century Sweden*. Brill. 2009. pp. 18-19

²⁴ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 18.

spirituality, the courts began to evolve, and secular courts and ecclesiastical courts began a shift in power. Instead of considering witchcraft a religious crime, and thus trying it through the church, witchcraft became a secular crime.

“The occurrence of the witch trials depended in part on the secularisation of essentially spiritual crimes, bringing them increasingly before non-ecclesiastical courts.”²⁵

This secularization of witchcraft crimes also made punishments for witchcraft much harsher. Much of the church’s punishments relied heavily on shame and reputation, a vital part of surviving in the community in early modern Europe. Their punishments consisted primarily of publicly punishing the person responsible for the crime, usually in front of the church, in what is referred to as *kyrkoplikt*.²⁶ Most of the offenders in ecclesiastical courts were not executed or tortured, though corporal punishment was often used, as opposed to the secular courts.²⁷ It is when the secular courts took over that witchcraft becomes more commonly, a capital offense²⁸.

As important as it is to acknowledge the context of history outside of these witch hunts, this study is primarily concerned with *what* happened within the hunts, especially during the Blåkulla trials. The Blåkulla trials themselves were unique in the scope of the witch hunts in Sweden. These trials are referred to as *de stora processerna*, indicating

²⁵ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 47

²⁶ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 65

²⁷ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. pp. 65-72

²⁸ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. “Chapter 2: Witchcraft and Magic in the Göta High Court”. pp. 18-39,

that this was the period of the largest number of executions.²⁹ There were many unique factors in these trials, part of these stemming from the fact that judicial protocols were essentially thrown to the wind.³⁰ The most distinguishing factor of the Blåkulla trials, however, was the number of children that were brought forth to testify.

As the trials expanded, so did the definition of outlawed magic. Previously legal forms of magic, such as healing and non-harmful magic such as *lövjeri*, became associated with being in league with the devil.³¹ Furthermore, the narrative surrounding witches also expanded, such as new highly sexually charged elements or infanticide. These included witches making pacts with the devil and diabolism. Per Sörlin notes that many of the power struggles of the sixteenth century came into play with the increasingly elaborate witchcraft narratives, with sabbaths and pacts with the devil. According to Sörlin, as the witch trials continued, “cases of diabolism began to be held entirely on ideological grounds.”³² Despite the change in this ideological climate, trials among the peasantry continued to pervade as maleficia trials, as the number of diabolism trials increased in parallel.

²⁹ “*De stora processerna*” literally translates to, “The big trials”, but really indicates they were the largest period of trials during the witch hunts in Sweden, spanning from 1668-1676. This period also sees the largest number of *Blåkulla* cases, as well as the highest number of child witnesses.

³⁰ Additionally, torture was used to obtain confession, which was actually illegal in Sweden during that time. *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, edited by Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen. pp. 285-318, “Sweden: The Mass Burnings (1668-1676)”, Bengt Ankarloo.

³¹ Gent, Jacqueline Van. *Magic, Body, and the Self in Eighteenth-Century Sweden*. Brill. 2009. p. 22. Gent, Jacqueline Van. *Magic, Body, and the Self in Eighteenth-Century Sweden*. Brill. 2009. “Chapter 1: Honour and Social Control in Witchcraft Trials”, pp. 17-58 See also Clark, Stuart. *Protestant Demonology: Sin, Superstition, and Society (c. 1520 -c. 1630)*. pp. 45-82. Ankarloo, Bengt. Henningsen, Gustav. *Early Modern Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. 1990. p. 73, It was common beliefs that it was better for a person to die pious, than to have been saved and contaminated by magical healers, who were known to be directly associated with the devil.

³² Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 41

“This is an important point: the possibility arises that one is dealing with two separate phenomena, trials inspired by the elite and trials inspired by *vox populi*, requiring completely different explanations.”³³

As the trials expanded, another important factor was put into place, solidifying the trials as an ensuing panic. By the seventeenth-century, people began to use inquisitorial practices in the trials, which greatly increased the number of accused.³⁴ These techniques fostered the idea that it was the court’s responsibility to seek out and destroy the threat of the witches. People could be tried based entirely off of rumor.³⁵ Additionally, other characteristics or practices that were previously unassociated with witchcraft, began to determine whether or not someone was a witch. This included things such as defects in appearance and criminality.³⁶ Many people who were being tried for ordinary crimes ended up tangled in witchcraft accusations, because the question of them being a witch only arose once they were in court.³⁷

And at this time, the children were called into court. Ordinarily, children were not seen as fit to testify. They were just children. However during the Blåkulla trials, children poured in, and their accusations carried much of the same weight as any adult, possibly more so. Though the quality of a child witness in traditional practices were not considered the highest quality of witness: their “sheer quantity was allowed to outweigh any qualitative shortcomings.”³⁸ The courts began to throw out other standard practices

³³ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 41

³⁴ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. pp. 46-47

³⁵ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 47

³⁶ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. pp. 56, 86.

³⁷ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 86.

³⁸ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 49

as well.³⁹ It was actually against Swedish law to use torture, however this rule was widely ignored.⁴⁰ Both the accusers and the accused were heavily coerced into following the inquisitor's line of questioning.⁴¹ According to Östling, in some cases, there were even lists the accused were required to follow, "*Alla dessa vittnen fick följa den ordning som angivits i frågelistan.*"⁴² For the community, these trials were not seen so much as stamping out the evil of Satan, though that was important in the trials, but more of one's duty to save others from Satan.⁴³ Neighbors accusing neighbors was not so much an execration, as was it seen as saving a neighbor that had been taken into Satan's evil clutches. It was one's responsibility to save one's neighbor.

As the trials continued, the higher courts became increasingly bogged down by the massive influx of accused witches. Often, when a case was sent to a lower court for approval from the higher courts, which was required before they could take any action, no answer would come back.⁴⁴ Without any answer, the lower courts acted on their own, and simply executed the accused.⁴⁵ After a number of years the overwhelming rates of execution began to die down, and into the eighteenth century cases of diabolism began

³⁹ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. pp. 49-50

⁴⁰ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 41

⁴¹ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 105.

⁴² Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 105. "All of these witnesses were to follow the procedure given in the list." Full quote: "Somliga vittnesmål var sannolikt influerade av förhørsledarens frågor, som kanske inte tillät vittnet att berätta sammanhängande. I några förhör kan vi finna exempel på detta. Under häxprocessen i Söderhamn 1673 förefaller valet av frågor ha baserats på en frågelista som innehöll 25 punkter. Alla dessa vittnen fick följa den ordning som angivits i frågelistan." ("Some witnesses were likely influenced by the interrogator's questions, which perhaps did not allow the witness to tell the story in context. In some interrogations we can find examples of this. During the witch hunts in Soderhamn in 1673 there appeared to be a choice of questions based on a question-list which contained 25 points. All of these witnesses were to follow the procedure given in the list.")

⁴³ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 50

⁴⁴ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 65

⁴⁵ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 86.

to disappear.⁴⁶ This was because the higher courts began to question the huge number of cases sent for approval, and made a greater effort to reign in the unruly lower courts. As the higher courts made further investigations, it was revealed that many of the children were not actually truthfully accusing witches, but in fact making up stories, whether by coercion or for fun, many having little to no awareness of the impact of their accusations.⁴⁷ Though there were a few more panics through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sabbath trials eventually disappeared altogether, and witchcraft became nothing more than superstition.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. pp. 39-42

⁴⁷ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 294. Östling states that children even testified to gain approval amongst their peers: "*Flera anklagelser var en konsekvens av att barnen berättade att de blev förda av sin mor eller någon närstående bara för att vara populära inom 'kompis-gänget'.*" (More of the accused were a consequence of children admitting that they were coerced by their mother or someone close to them, solely for the purpose of gaining popularity within their 'circle of friends').

⁴⁸ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. pp. 39-42.

The Blåkulla Sabbat

*Now go North and down to Hell!*⁴⁹

The witches' sabbath was not a widespread belief until much later into the trials, and diabolism was certainly not as widespread until well into the seventeenth century.⁵⁰ Furthermore, accounts of the sabbath on Blåkulla were not even widely accepted at the beginning of the hunts.⁵¹ According to Östling, many of these Blåkulla stories were met with laughter, "*Hur uppfattade åhörarna dessa berättelser? Antagligen emottogs de med både chock, förfäran och avståndstagande-- men också av skratt.*"⁵² However, the transition for the Blåkulla narrative into popular culture was made smoother by its roots in late medieval culture, "The witches' sabbath was easily accepted in popular tradition, since it was perceived merely as an extension or elaboration of local beliefs... If anything, the elite tradition was slower to absorb new ideas."⁵³

According to Per-Anders Östling's text, *Blåkulla, Magi och Trolldomsprocesser*, there are two traditions of Blåkulla narratives. The older tradition and the younger tradition. The older tradition was characterized by less detail when it came to the

⁴⁹ Sörlin, Per. "The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality". Nordic Yearbook of Folklore, Volume 53, 1997. p. 132

⁵⁰ *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, edited by Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen. pp. 285-318, "Sweden: The Mass Burnings (1668-1676)", Bengt Ankarloo. p. 288

⁵¹ *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, edited by Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen. pp. 285-318, "Sweden: The Mass Burnings (1668-1676)", Bengt Ankarloo. p. 289

⁵² Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 180, "How did the listeners receive these stories? Either they took them with both shock, horror, and complete rejection-- but also with laughter."

⁵³ *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, edited by Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen. pp. 285-318, "Sweden: The Mass Burnings (1668-1676)", Bengt Ankarloo. p. 290

sabbath and other acts of diabolism, similar to the earlier nature of the witch hunts.⁵⁴

Those questioning the accused in the *Trolldomskommission*, according to Östling, had more knowledge of demonological literature, and therefore pressed this knowledge onto the accused. However, it is important to note that much of Östling's text follows a more elite-oriented perspective, where he emphasizes the role of elite knowledge in the shaping of the witchcraft narratives, even too much on the elite side. Though he does acknowledge the role of folk-belief in the shaping of these narratives, he does it to a lesser degree than later scholarship, and less than what this study implies. However, it is accurate to say that narratives of the younger tradition had more elements of the sabbath in detail. The narratives in the younger tradition also had a higher number of child testimonies: according to Östling, the older tradition had more freedom than the younger, in terms of the narrative structure, and the details that were required in these narratives.⁵⁵ According to Östling, the most important part to emphasize between the older and younger traditions, is how the motifs adapted to the religious climate in context, "*Den främsta skillnaden mellan äldre och yngre tradition är motiv som var relaterat till det religiösa klimatet.*"⁵⁶ Thus, narratives in the younger tradition contained more deliberate religious perversions than narratives in the older tradition.

⁵⁴ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. "4.9 Häxsabbaten i äldre och yngre verbal tradition. En motivanalys" pp. 150-206

⁵⁵ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 107.

⁵⁶ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 204, "The primary difference between the older and younger traditions are motifs that are related to the religious climate."

Östling states that many of the beliefs surrounding Blåkulla actually began with practices aiming to protect oneself against witches during Easter.⁵⁷ It was common practice to go outside on Easter night, and shoot witches out of the sky.⁵⁸ Although the origins of the Blåkulla myth remain hazy, Östling states with confidence, based off of studies on church murals across Sweden, that by the late medieval period, there were a number of constants within witch beliefs in Sweden:

“1) föreställningen om häxsabbaten existerade i Sverige under senmedeltiden, 2) att trollpackorna flög till ett djävulsmöte med hjälp av häxsalvan som de erhöll ur ett smörjhorn, vilket de i sin tur fått av djävulen, 3) föreställningen om djävulens gästbud existerade och 4) att föreställningen att trollpackorna hade sexuellt umgänge med djävulen med största sannolikhet existerade under senmedeltiden.”⁵⁹

By the time the Sabbath narrative had planted itself on solid ground, there were a number of general characteristics that retained themselves across many of the narratives. Every Blåkulla narrative contained at least a few of the constants:⁶⁰

1. Färden till Blåkulla
2. Bortförandet av passagerare
3. Häxornas ankomst till Blåkulla
4. Beskrivningen av djävulen och hans boning

⁵⁷ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 103

⁵⁸ Östling, Per-Anders. “Blåkulla Journeys in Swedish Folklore”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 2006, Volume 62. p. 83

⁵⁹ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 119, “[...we can conclude that] 1) the belief on the witches’ sabbath existed in Sweden during the late medieval period, 2) that witches flew to a devil’s gathering with aid of a witch-ointment which they carried in a horn for butter, which each witch received from the devil, 3) the belief about the devil’s banquet existed, and 4) the belief that the witches had sexual relations with the devil existed with the highest probability during the late medieval period.”

⁶⁰ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 152

5. Värningen av häxor, hädelser vardagen i Blåkulla och den uppochnedvända världen
6. Dansen, gästbudet och det sexuella umgänget med satan
7. De vita änglarna
8. Återfärden och hemkomsten⁶¹

Östling also makes note that there does not exist any narratives that contain all eight constants,⁶² however numbers one, four and six are the most important variations in the older tradition of Blåkulla narratives.⁶³

Within the frame of constants, the sabbath always began with the journey. When witches jumped on their cows and horses and brooms and unsuspecting men on a stroll, they more often than not, headed North, where evil was known to reside. North, to Blåkulla. Blåkulla itself was a hill or mountain that the witches would fly to meet for their Satanic escapades and general good time having. It was not always considered a real place, mostly a vague mountain or hill, dark and haunted. In certain traditions, it was thought of as Blå Jungfrun, an island off the coast of Sweden, in the Baltic Sea.⁶⁴ In other circles of thought, their meeting place was thought to be an abandoned church in the remote areas of northern Norway.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 152, "1. Journey to Blåkulla/ 2. Abduction of passengers/ 3. The witches' arrival to *Blåkulla*/ 4. Description of the devil and his dwelling/ 5. Proselytization of witches, parody of the everyday in *Blåkulla* and the upsidedown world/ 6. Dansen, gästbudet och det sexuella umgänget med satan/ 7. The white angels/ 8. Journey back and arrival home"

⁶² Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 152

⁶³ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 152

⁶⁴ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 120

⁶⁵ Östling, Per-Anders. "Blåkulla Journeys in Swedish Folklore" *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 2006, Volume 62. pp. 93-96.

The witches would fly to the Sabbath, generally on some sort of household appliance, such as a broom, or riding backwards on a borrowed animal.⁶⁶ Other times, they were believed to have ridden on a hapless victim of some sort, in human form, or the said human enchanted into another form.⁶⁷ Children were kidnapped on these rides to the Sabbath, or coerced into riding with the witch to the Sabbath, being led to believe that they were attending a banquet or some sort of party.⁶⁸ Witches would often entice these children with gifts, and promises of even more gifts at their final destination.⁶⁹ In the trials, the children made it clear that they were unaware of the witch's intentions and where they were actually headed.⁷⁰

On their way to the Sabbath, the witch party would gather at a church. Urination was often involved, sometimes on the church, and sometimes on the altar.⁷¹ They would then bite off pieces of bronze from the church bells, and spit them in a nearby lake, or use them as materials for their potent ointments.⁷² It was said that the sound of a church

⁶⁶ Östling, Per-Anders. "Blåkulla Journeys in Swedish Folklore". Nordic Yearbook of Folklore, 2006, Volume 62. pp. 93-96. Witches were also thought to have smeared ointment on these objects in order to make them operable as a vehicle of transportation. This ointment often contained the bronze scraped off of a church bell. "The witch ointment has an impressive lifting force. If one drop was to hit an animal or object it would immediately fly up into the air. One boy tells during the witch trials in *Dalecarlia* 1757-1761 that Anna Mattsdotter's husband had 'taken lubricant from her ointment horn for his cart and that the cart had then jumped up into the air' (SR, *Civila besvär* 1762). In the most common motif, ointment is put on the axle joint of a wagon which then runs away, not stopping until it is stuck in a bog or a lake. Sometimes it went straight up into the air instead." p. 96

⁶⁷ Östling, Per-Anders. "Blåkulla Journeys in Swedish Folklore". Nordic Yearbook of Folklore, 2006, Volume 62. p. 94

⁶⁸ Östling, Per-Anders. "Blåkulla Journeys in Swedish Folklore". Nordic Yearbook of Folklore, 2006, Volume 62. pp. 98-99, 104-105. See also Sörlin, Per. "The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality" Nordic Yearbook of Folklore, Volume 53, 1997. pp. 145-146.

⁶⁹ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 152

⁷⁰ Östling, Per-Anders. "Blåkulla Journeys in Swedish Folklore". Nordic Yearbook of Folklore, 2006, Volume 62. pp. 145-146.

⁷¹ *Magic, Body and the Self in Eighteenth-Century Sweden*, Jacqueline Van Gent, "Chapter 1: Honour and Social Control in Witchcraft Trials", pp. 174-5

⁷² Sörlin, Per. "The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality". Nordic Yearbook of Folklore, Volume 53, 1997. p. 133

bell could knock a witch out of the sky.⁷³ After they were satisfied and fully relieved, they moved on to their final destination.

Witches were thought to have gathered on Blåkulla and have celebrations of all kinds. In earlier traditions they were thought to have met only on days of certain significance, such as Midsummer and Easter.⁷⁴ However, as the witch trials continued, the days of sabbaths began to increase, where it came to the point that people reported being transported nightly to the sabbath, some even reported being taken to the sabbath while they testified in court.⁷⁵ It was even reported that witches would travel to and from the Sabbath multiple times in the night, with additional children brought to the torments of Blåkulla. If children were asked how they could have been sleeping in their bed and taken to the sabbath, they explained that the witches would create a sort of changeling child, made out of sticks or other objects. Even if they slept with the parents or were in an all-night prayer vigil, tied to the bed, with the horse the witches would use in the room with them, they could still be taken away to the sabbath without anyone suspecting.⁷⁶

The sabbath itself was where the true torments lied. The children's initial testimonies often lacked graphic details that one might imagine. Much of the time, it was

⁷³ Sjöberg, R L. "False allegations of satanic abuse: case studies from the witch panic in Rättvik 1670-71". European child & adolescent psychiatry, 12/1997, Volume 6, Issue 4. p. 220 Östling, Per-Anders.

"Blåkulla Journeys in Swedish Folklore" Nordic Yearbook of Folklore, 2006, Volume 62. p. 98

⁷⁴ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 153

⁷⁵ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 153

⁷⁶ On changeling children see: Sjöberg, R L. "False allegations of satanic abuse: case studies from the witch panic in Rättvik 1670-71". European child & adolescent psychiatry, 12/1997, Volume 6, Issue 4. p. 220. On all night vigils see: Sörlin, Per. "Child Witches and the Construction of the Witches' Sabbath: The Swedish Blåkulla Story" Ed. Klaniczay, Gábor and Éva Pócs. Witchcraft Mythologies and Persecutions. Budapest and New York CEU Press. 2008. pp. 102-103

simply an account of their abduction and time at the sabbath. However, after the first report of a child's Blåkulla journey, each sabbath grew increasingly horrific.⁷⁷

The witches' perverted sabbath generally began with a banquet, where the witches gathered to feast, and sometimes there were guest appearances, usually Satan, but sometimes his wife.⁷⁸ The witches would devour the beautiful food, in some cases backwards, through their necks.⁷⁹ The witches would wear fine clothing, and appear to be eating the finest of foods.⁸⁰ The whole affair could seem quite amiable; however, to the children, they were trapped in a house of horrors.⁸¹ While the witches feasted, the children were beaten if they did so much as utter a word.⁸² To the children, the food at banquet was nothing but snakes, toads, and other horrible creatures.⁸³ Though the witches encouraged the children to eat the food, angels would appear to protect the children from eating it; once they ate from the banquet, they would surely fall into the witches' grasp, never to return.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ Sörlin, Per. "The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality". Nordic Yearbook of Folklore, Volume 53, 1997. p. 136

⁷⁸ *Magic, Body and the Self in Eighteenth-Century Sweden*, Jacqueline Van Gent, "Chapter 1: Honour and Social Control in Witchcraft Trials", p. 175

⁷⁹ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 122

⁸⁰ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 175

⁸¹ Sjöberg, R L. "False allegations of satanic abuse: case studies from the witch panic in Rättvik 1670-71". European child & adolescent psychiatry, 12/1997, Volume 6, Issue 4. p. 222

⁸² Sörlin, Per. "The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality". Nordic Yearbook of Folklore, Volume 53, 1997. p. 136

⁸³ Sörlin, Per. "The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality". Nordic Yearbook of Folklore, Volume 53, 1997. p. 135

⁸⁴ Sjöberg, R L. "False allegations of satanic abuse: case studies from the witch panic in Rättvik 1670-71". European child & adolescent psychiatry, 12/1997, Volume 6, Issue 4. p. 221. An interesting part to note, is that the children also reported at time that these angels had hairy legs, something not characteristic of an angel, implying that these "angels" were actually devil in disguise.

At the table, or under it, the witches participated in a bout of group fornication.⁸⁵ The witches focused their appetites on Satan himself, leaving the children to minor demons. It was at this time they were also threatened and beaten into swearing themselves off to Satan as a witch.⁸⁶ After the subsequent rape and forced enlistment of these children, there were cases of them being forced to marry demons, objects, among other things.⁸⁷ This marriage often followed an “abbreviated” pregnancy, the offspring of which witches would boil down for their flying ointments.⁸⁸ In one report, a boy explained how he was forced to marry a broom, and produced offspring along the lines of wooden sticks.⁸⁹ After the banquet and orgy, children were forced to “run the gauntlet”, as well as play a game of being executed.⁹⁰ After these children were killed, Satan restored them with full health, so they could be executed again.⁹¹ Children were also forced to look at the horrors of hell.⁹² There were many accounts where children reported listening to the horrific screams of the tormented souls in hell, and be forced to watch the boiling fires in the deepest pits of hell.⁹³ In some reports, children said they

⁸⁵ Sörlin, Per. “The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, Volume 53, 1997. p. 135

⁸⁶ Sjöberg, R. L. “False allegations of satanic abuse: case studies from the witch panic in Rättvik 1670-71”. *European child & adolescent psychiatry*, 12/1997, Volume 6, Issue 4. p. 221

⁸⁷ Sörlin, Per. “The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, Volume 53, 1997. p. 135

⁸⁸ Sörlin, Per. “The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, Volume 53, 1997. p. 135

⁸⁹ Sörlin, Per. “The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, Volume 53, 1997. p. 136

⁹⁰ Sörlin, Per. “The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, Volume 53, 1997. p. 136

⁹¹ Sörlin, Per. “The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, Volume 53, 1997. p. 136

⁹² Sörlin, Per. “The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, Volume 53, 1997. p. 136

⁹³ Sörlin, Per. “The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, Volume 53, 1997. p. 136

saw a fiery pit or a gate that was thought to be the entrance to Hell.⁹⁴ The angels again appear at the post-banquet festivities, where in some cases they would carry the children away, and back home.⁹⁵ Other times, children were rescued and taken to the “angel room”, where they would meet Jesus or dead relatives.⁹⁶ However, there were cases where these angels were not as they seemed, because beneath their holy visage, were hairy legs like demons.⁹⁷

There were also reports of attending a type of inverted sabbath, with inverted prayers and hymns, satan preaching at the altar, and children subjected to a kind of inverted baptism.⁹⁸ This sabbath took place in either the church the witches invaded to destroy the bells, or in a chapel on the Blåkulla estate. Satan, leading the sabbath, would recite the lord’s prayer backwards, and witches would kiss his left hand or his left buttock.⁹⁹ In addition to these inverted embraces, there were instances of witches participating in backwards dances and walking primarily backwards, similar to the dwellers of the world of death.¹⁰⁰

After all of the torments were over, the witches and the children would fly back home. They were threatened with beating if they were to tell anyone at all about the

⁹⁴ Sörlin, Per. “The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, Volume 53, 1997. p. 132

⁹⁵ Sjöberg, R L. “False allegations of satanic abuse: case studies from the witch panic in Rättvik 1670-71”. *European child & adolescent psychiatry*, 12/1997, Volume 6, Issue 4. p. 221

⁹⁶ Sörlin, Per. “The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, Volume 53, 1997. p. 131

⁹⁷ Östling, Per-Anders. “Blåkulla Journeys in Swedish Folklore”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 2006, Volume 62. p. 122

⁹⁸ Östling, Per-Anders. “Blåkulla Journeys in Swedish Folklore”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 2006, Volume 62. p. 122. See also Sörlin, Per. “The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, Volume 53, 1997.

⁹⁹ Östling, Per-Anders. “Blåkulla Journeys in Swedish Folklore”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 2006, Volume 62. pp. 170-171

¹⁰⁰ Östling, Per-Anders. “Blåkulla Journeys in Swedish Folklore”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 2006, Volume 62. p. 90

sabbath.¹⁰¹ Upon their arrival, the gifts the children received transformed to nothing more than sticks, mud, and terrible scaly, slimy creatures.¹⁰² Late into the witch hunts, witches were thought to have flown to Blåkulla multiple times per night, the process repeating itself each time.¹⁰³ Again and again, North they went, and down to Blåkulla.

¹⁰¹ Sjöberg, R L. "False allegations of satanic abuse: case studies from the witch panic in Rättvik 1670-71". *European child & adolescent psychiatry*, 12/1997, Volume 6, Issue 4. p. 221

¹⁰² Sörlin, Per. "The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality". *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, Volume 53, 1997. p. 135

¹⁰³ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 124-125

Theories on the Narratives

“Children were the picklock used to open the door to the world of witches.”¹⁰⁴

By the peak of the trials, children were dominating the courtroom scene, accusing countless witches, naming accomplices, and generally, wreaking havoc and panic throughout the community. It was the children that brought the peak of the witches' sabbath narrative. It was also during this period that there was the highest recorded number of diabolic witchcraft cases and accounts of children being abducted and subject to the torments of the witches' sabbath at Blåkulla.

At its peak, the various details of the sabbath narrative were woven into a complex web of the inquisitor's impressions, demonological literature, popular culture, folk-beliefs, and the desperate witch's twist to her own story. Outside of the established constants of this period, it is impossible to pinpoint any sort of origin story and exact structure of these narratives. And the fact that many of these narratives were eventually commandeered by the malleable minds of children, this only acted to further decrease the stability of the narrative.

As stated, large groups of children were questioned, often to persecute only one witch. Many of the children testifying were close with one another, and it has been evident that their stories influenced one another: there are records indicating that when these groups were allowed contact, there were fewer variations in their narratives than

¹⁰⁴ Sörlin, Per. *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden 1635-1754*. Brill. p. 49

when they were not questioned in close contact.¹⁰⁵ But when one attempts to look closer than Östling's sabbath constants, the details become hugely varying and often contradictory.

There have been numerous studies into the psychology and reasoning behind children's accusations in the sabbath, with great variations in theory. In Lyndal Roper's article "Evil Imaginings and Fantasies': Child-Witches and the End of the Witch Craze", she analyzes children entangled in the witches' narratives through their use of play and games.¹⁰⁶ She takes a heavily Freudian framework, and states that children acted out their inherent fantasies about sex and violence into their games, which caught the attention of caregivers, and later, the courtroom. In another study by R.L. Sjöberg on the witch hunts in Rättvik, the entirety of this panic is attributed to Satanic imaginings and embedded memories.¹⁰⁷ Though it does seem in some cases that the child may have testified as though it was a game, or with no awareness of the accusations they were making, this does not cover the full context of children in the courtroom. There were records of children undergoing torture, coercion, corporal punishment— some were even found guilty of being a witch, their confession thought of as merely a product of demonic possession.¹⁰⁸ What is certain is that these children were terrified, and their

¹⁰⁵ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 105

¹⁰⁶ Roper, Lyndal. "Evil Imaginings and Fantasies': Child-Witches and the End of the Witch Craze" *Past & Present* No. 167 (May, 2000), pp. 107-139.

¹⁰⁷ Sjöberg, R L. "False allegations of satanic abuse: case studies from the witch panic in Rättvik 1670-71" *European child & adolescent psychiatry*, 12/1997, Volume 6, Issue 4.

¹⁰⁸ Sörlin, Per. "The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality" *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, Volume 53, 1997. p. 144

stories were constructed in a way that minimized the possibility of being accused of witchcraft themselves.

“The children must be seen as victims in the end, at the same time as they receive their well-deserved punishment. In this way, the court could be sure that the children has seen through Satan’s deceit and that the necessary preconditions existed for saving the children’s souls.”¹⁰⁹

These children were continually modifying their sabbath narrative in order to meet “particular circumstances during the trials”¹¹⁰

Despite the pressures that the children were under but interrogators and their demonological knowledge, there is evidence that these children were still drawing from aspects of folklore and popular belief. As children became more involved in the *Blåkulla* narratives, the stories began to take a turn: from the nebulous narrative of the lone, nondescript, maleficent witch (often derivative of demonological literature), to richly constructed narratives of the mass celebration of evil, many of which were derivative of folktales and popular culture. The incorporation of the power of church bells against evil spirits, the idea that a malevolent creature could not cry, that eating the food presented by otherworldly creatures can enchant the consumer or even transform them irreversibly, walking backwards, dancing backwards, the complete interweaving of the “*mundus inversus*”— these were all well known motifs in folktales.¹¹¹ Even the character

¹⁰⁹ Sörlin, Per. “The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, Volume 53, 1997. p. 146

¹¹⁰ Sörlin, Per. “The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, Volume 53, 1997. p. 149

¹¹¹ Östling, Per-Anders. “Blåkulla Journeys in Swedish Folklore”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 2006, Volume 62. pp. 88-122. See also: Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 195. “Den som ätit av den har accepterat gåvan och kan därför

of the devil was altered, where in the older tradition took on more of the character of Luther's devil filled with pure malevolence, in the younger tradition he became closer to the trickster role portrayed in folklore.¹¹²

Per Sörlin also brings about an important point in the children's narratives during the trials. The pressure these children were under was immense, and not only were they incorporating aspects of folklore into their narratives, but twisting the world into an antithesis of popular culture and everyday life:

“Blåkulla, as described by the children, is a reflection of the surrounding reality. It is built up with the aid of bits and pieces from the everyday life of the village. Most of the features are not only reflection, they are truly mirror images, dichotomous transformations.”¹¹³

These children were creating a world of inverses, the *mundus inversus*. While the early modern period was constantly struggling with the imminent threat of Satan, these children constructed a narrative that presented Satan winning this struggle. Satan was the “king” of Blåkulla, replacing God on the hierarchy of being. Under Satan was the

aldrig återvänd, utom egenskap av häxa eller trollkarl.” (“Those who ate [from the banquet] had accepted the gift, and could therefore never turn back, outside of characteristics of a witch or warlock.”). Folklore motifs from the “S. Thompson. Motif-index of folk-literature : a classification of narrative elements in folktales, ballads, myths, fables, medieval romances, exempla, fabliaux, jest-books, and local legends”. Revised and enlarged. edition. Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1955-1958. Examples: D472.1. D472.1. Transformation: food to muck. As punishment.; D476.1. D476.1. Inedible substance transformed into edible.; D2141.1.1. †D2141.1.1. Church bell rung as protection against storm. To thwart devil.; D1531.5. †D1531.5. Witch flies with aid of magic cap or hood. (In the case of Brita Persdotter, she reported she was taken Easter Night 1720, to a banquet, where she flew with the aid of a hat rubbed in ointment. *Magic, Body and the Self in Eighteenth-Century Sweden*, Jacqueline Van Gent, pp. 174-145). ; D1531.6. †D1531.6. Witch flies with aid of magic stick.; D1531.7. †D1531.7. Witch flies with aid of magic juice.; D1531.8. †D1531.8. Witch flies with aid of word charm. (in some cases the charm was so powerful they flew vertically in the air); D1721.1. †D1721.1. Magic power from devil., to name a few.

¹¹² Östling, Per-Anders. “Blåkulla Journeys in Swedish Folklore”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 2006, Volume 62. pp. 81-122.

¹¹³ Sörlin, Per. “The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, Volume 53, 1997. p. 314

witch, and in some cases, the witch was equal to, or even exceeded Satan in her capacity for evil.¹¹⁴ For the witch attending her sabbath on Blåkulla, “everyday social order was no longer valid”.¹¹⁵ Her reversed actions presented her as an outsider, outside of the Christian world.¹¹⁶

In order to construct a believable world of evil, children created this inverted world as a means of expressing the sabbath as an “anti-world.” As Stuart Clark claims, the “back-to-front manner and its unnatural features followed a connection in which inversion was the only valid means of expression...”¹¹⁷ This inverted and absurd world was the only way in which children could construct a believable world of complete evil, thus removing themselves of guilt and further driving the dichotomy of the witch to their own innocence.¹¹⁸ And by creating religiously charged elements, they christianized this evil, and further drove their christian purity, “The Swedish children were drawn into a

¹¹⁴ Östling, Per-Anders. “Blåkulla Journeys in Swedish Folklore”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 2006, Volume 62. p. 115. “Church painting from Kumla, vastmantand. made in the 15th century. The legend of Sko Ella and the Devil. At one occasion the devil tried to separate a happily married couple but failed. Unfortunately a witch named Sko Ella offers her assistance in exchange of a pair of shoes and she successfully managed to divide the couple. Impressed and at the same time fearful of the witch the devil says, “You are worse than me”, and hands with the help of a stake over the shoes to Sko Ella, since he is too afraid to come near her. (Photo: H. Cornell. © Riksantikvarieambetet, Stockholm)”

¹¹⁵ Östling, Per-Anders. “Blåkulla Journeys in Swedish Folklore”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 2006, Volume 62. p. 87. See also Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. “Sammantaget kan vi sluta oss till att Blåkulla låg långt borta från människors vardagliga angivning. Detta kan ses som ett uttryck för att häxorna inte ansågs höra hemma inom de kristnas värld.” p. 123

¹¹⁶ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 123

¹¹⁷ Sörlin, Per. “The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, Volume 53, 1997. pp. 143-144. This is Sörlin quoting Stuart Clark. “We have seen with Clark that his back-to-front manner and its unnatural features followed a connection in which inversion was the only valid means of expression.”

¹¹⁸ Sörlin, Per. “The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality”. *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, Volume 53, 1997. p. 144. “To this we may now also add that the elements which were accessible to direct verification necessarily-- paradoxically though it may seem-- had to be absurd for the stereotype as a whole to retain its validity in confrontation with reality.”

situation in which they too were to unmask witches and they wanted to do it by order of God..."¹¹⁹

Though it is possible to argue that much of these inversion narratives were a product of demonological literature, where the "success of demonological literature as a whole was dependent on each individual element in the Sabbath being inverted in comparison with normal, accepted behavior.", it can also be presupposed that these children were relying on their own bank of knowledge— that of ritual, society's hierarchy, and that of folk magic of folklore.¹²⁰ There are many folktales, songs, jokes, and other aspects of popular culture that already present an inverted world, that is not in any way diabolical. Considering that the children were building Blåkulla narratives under horrific circumstances, their best plan escape was then, synthesizing their pre-existing knowledge of society, ritual, folklore, and storytelling in order to craft an evil, outlandish narrative, for the interrogator to believe. Thus, the product of this synthesis, this "composite of learned and popular motifs...", is the children's best attempt at constructing the most threatening and believable "anti-world" as possible: the witches' sabbath is cultivated into the Blåkulla sabbath.¹²¹

Furthermore, the sabbath was, in many ways but not all, an inversion of popular humor in the early modern period.¹²² Though I do not agree with Östling that the

¹¹⁹ Sörlin, Per. "The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality". Nordic Yearbook of Folklore, Volume 53, 1997. p. 147.

¹²⁰ Sörlin, Per. "The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality". Nordic Yearbook of Folklore, Volume 53, 1997. p. 138.

¹²¹ Sörlin, Per. "The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality". Nordic Yearbook of Folklore, Volume 53, 1997. p. 147.

¹²² Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002.

narrative shifted completely to a "*lekfull komedi*", I do believe that without intending to be humorous, these children drew on aspects of popular humor from the early modern period, as a means of constructing these narratives.¹²³ I believe it was more a matter of children utilizing their bank of knowledge in order to create a cohesive narrative of something completely otherworldly, as was a witches' sabbath. Perhaps the closest idea these children had to the witch and her behavior was the outlandish aspects of popular humor and the carnivalesque. Where it was common knowledge that the witch represented the inverse of structured society, these children framed their narratives the best they could. They drew upon humor, their knowledge of social and religious order and ritual, folktales and folk beliefs, and even popular culture and everyday life. Though this knowledge is, at its base, not at all diabolical, these children crafted these things into such. They drew upon their entire bank of knowledge in order to construct the perfect sabbath narrative, that would balance implication with innocence, that would name the accused, that would paint a picture witches' trickery and malevolence, and that would be believable enough that they were not accused of lying or of being a witch themselves.¹²⁴ As Sörlin states, the sabbath, "Seen in this way... does not appear as irrational, but as the logical product of conceptualizing reality."¹²⁵

An additional observation one can make is the evolution of the folklore of witches through the seventeenth century. Where it was completely preposterous for witches to

¹²³ Östling, Per-Anders. *Blåkulla, magi, och trolldomsprocesser*. Entolore 25. Uppsala Universitet. 2002. p. 192

¹²⁴ Sörlin, Per. "The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality". Nordic Yearbook of Folklore, Volume 53, 1997. p. 314

¹²⁵ Sörlin, Per. "The Blåkulla Story Absurdity and Rationality". Nordic Yearbook of Folklore, Volume 53, 1997. p. 138

travel to the sabbath and participate in the festivities described at *Blåkulla*, by the later part of the century, it was common belief plaguing the country and bringing about numerous executions. This rapid change presents an unique circumstance in popular culture: widespread common belief, altering to its root, in the context of a wide-spread perceived threat. What makes this phenomena even more extraordinary is that it was primarily children controlling the evolution of these narratives. In this case, beliefs that brought about people's *deaths* was controlled entirely by children, and within the span of a century, saw a complete reversal. This aspect of the trials deserves to be studied in further detail: both within the context of children's ideas of popular culture and folk belief, as well as the phenomena of rapid change in popular culture in folk belief. These children were potents agent of change, and left a lasting legacy— witch belief remained largely unchanged from this period, into the nineteenth century.¹²⁶

Under this lens one can stipulate that the Blåkulla narrative constructed by children reflected popular belief and regional folklore in many respects. However, it is important to acknowledge the significant degree in which interrogators coerced these children, and the level at which these interrogators drew from demonological literature as opposed to regional folklore. Furthermore, it is always important to acknowledge the source material, and its level of accuracy. The majority of this data came from trial transcripts, and the loyalty these records had to actual events is dubious at best. However, many of the motifs that these children drew from have been extant in any number of folklore beliefs for millennia, allowing both parties room for influence.

¹²⁶ Östling, Per-Anders. "Blåkulla Journeys in Swedish Folklore". *Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 2006, Volume 62.

Though there are a countless number of influences on these children's construction of the Blåkulla narrative, these stories can still reveal a part of their world. Whether it was simply a game, an accusation forcibly recited from parents, or an accusation coerced from the interrogators, these narratives were still ultimately driven by these children. Each of these narratives had its own individual character, carefully placed by the storyteller. Their use of popular culture and folklore open a rare portal to the early modern child's experience. These Blåkulla narratives have the potential to reveal the world of a child during the early modern period, and a child's ability to drive change in popular belief. The world of witches, and their journey to Blåkulla, was in many ways, the world of the child, and their journey through early modern Sweden.

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