



***“Large wen” or “swelling”?
Exploring Myths and Misconceptions
about Nicholas Sander’s Description
of Anne Boleyn and Its Link to
Witchcraft***

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Abstract: Despite the recent surge in Anne Boleyn-themed books and articles, scholars still cannot agree on the subject of Anne and witchcraft. There are two polarising schools of thought: one is that Anne had “the physical characteristics of a witch,” based on the hostile account of Nicholas Sander, and the other that she was never “branded a witch in her own lifetime.”¹ This essay argues that neither of these two views is correct and that there is enough compelling evidence to refute them both. It is time to return to the original source material and re-evaluate this part of the narrative of Anne Boleyn’s life.

Keywords: Anne Boleyn; Nicholas Sander; Tudors; witchcraft; women; queenship

Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII’s second and certainly most famous wife, was executed on 19 May 1536 amid scandalous charges of adultery, incest, treason, and plotting the king’s death. Controversial in life, Anne was perceived by many as a woman who broke up the king’s marriage to Katharine of Aragon and opened the floodgates of heresy because Henry VIII severed ties with the Catholic Church to marry her when the pope refused to grant him an annulment. Disparaged as a whore and a heretic during her lifetime, she was praised as a zealous Protestant after her daughter, Elizabeth I, became queen in 1558.

One of the most enduring descriptions of Anne Boleyn comes from one of her ardent enemies. In 1585, Edward Rishton posthumously published the work of Nicholas Sander, Catholic propagandist in exile, entitled *De origine ac progressu schismatis anglicani*.² The book was translated in 1877 by David Lewis as *The Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism*.³ Published in Latin in Cologne, Sander’s book quickly became a bestseller. By the seventeenth century, Sander’s *De Origine* had been translated into French, German,

¹ Susan Doran, *Elizabeth I and Her Circle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 24; Roland Hui, “Anne of the Wicked Ways: Perceptions of Anne Boleyn as a Witch in History and in Popular Culture,” *Parergon*, vol 35, No 1, (2018): 97–118.

² Nicholas Sander, *De origine et progressu schismatis Anglicani* (Cologne, 1585), 17.

³ Nicholas Sander, *Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism*, trans. by David Lewis (London: Burns and Oates, 1877).

Italian, Portuguese, Polish, and Spanish. The book was not published in English until the nineteenth century, when the religious controversies related to the reign of Henry VIII had long cooled down. Nevertheless, the English people read Sander’s book in Latin with enthusiasm, and it was especially popular with exiled Catholics during the reign of Anne Boleyn’s daughter, Elizabeth I. Sander’s work laid the foundation for modern theories of portraying Anne Boleyn as a witch.

In 1989, Retha M. Warnicke proposed that Anne’s sudden downfall and execution were triggered by her miscarriage of a deformed male foetus in January 1536, which led to suspicions of witchcraft, adultery, and incest.⁴ This theory hinges on Nicholas Sander’s description of Anne’s physical appearance and on his assertion that she had miscarried a “shapeless mass of flesh” in 1536.⁵ Whereas the theory that Anne had given birth to a deformed foetus and this triggered her downfall has long been debunked by such historians as Eric Ives and Suzannah Lipscomb, the theory that Sander aimed at depicting Anne as a witch by describing her physical appearance is still credited in academia. Eamon Duffy in his 2017 *Reformation Divided Catholics, Protestants and the Conversion of England* repeats after Warnicke that “for Sander she [Anne Boleyn] was in fact a sort of witch, who enchanted the King, her seductive powers a triumph of artifice over nature.”⁶ Yet it will be argued in this essay that Sander was not aiming at depicting Anne as a witch.

“Monster legend”

Nicholas Sander’s description of Anne Boleyn’s appearance is undoubtedly the one that endured throughout the centuries and became the most popular description of her. Ives, Anne’s most eminent biographer, called Sander’s description of Anne a contributing factor to what he called a “monster legend.”⁷ Sander described Anne’s appearance as such:

Anne Boleyn was rather tall of stature, with black hair, and an oval face of a sallow complexion, as if troubled with jaundice. She had a projecting tooth under the upper lip, and on her right hand six fingers. There was a large wen under her chin,

⁴ Retha M. Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 241, 297.

⁵ Sander, *Rise and Growth*, 132.

⁶ Eamon Duffy, *Reformation Divided Catholics, Protestants and the Conversion of England* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 217.

⁷ Eric Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 39.

and therefore to hide its ugliness she wore a high dress covering her throat. In this, she was followed by the ladies of the court, who also wore high dresses, having before been in the habit of leaving their necks and the upper portion of their persons uncovered. She was handsome to look at, with a pretty mouth, amusing in her ways, playing well on the lute, and was a good dancer.⁸

Returning to the Original

Yet this is not a literal translation of what Sander wrote. In the original Latin, Sander stated that Anne had some sort of a swelling under her chin, but what it was exactly, Sander admitted, he did not know: “*In dextera manu sextus agnascebatur digitus, sub mento etiam succrescebat turgidum nescio quid.*”⁹ “On her right hand a sixth finger was growing, under her chin there was growing a swelling, but what it was, I do not know.”¹⁰

David Lewis, who in 1877 translated Sander’s book into English, turned the word *turgidum* (swelling) into a “large wen.” The word “large” in relation to the swelling under Anne’s chin manifestly does not appear in Sander’s original Latin text. Yet this error in translation has been perpetuated by Boleyn scholars ever since. Ives criticised Sander, writing that he was hardly “an expert on the vagaries of female attire in earlier generations—high necks came into fashion after Anne’s death.”¹¹ In his translation, Lewis wrote that Anne “wore a high dress covering her throat,” but a “high dress” is again a translator’s addition. In the original Latin text Sander did not mention high ruffs such as were worn during the Elizabethan period. In Latin, Sander wrote that to hide the swelling under her chin, Anne had her neck and chest covered (*ipsa colli, et pectoris superiora operiebat*), without mentioning that she did so by using ruffs or “high dress.”¹² During Anne’s tenure as queen, women often covered their décolletages with partlets, decorative coverings for the upper chest and neck. By the time Anne Boleyn became queen in 1533, the partlet usually had a standing collar, as was indicated in a letter from Leonard Smith, who as agent of the Lisle family in London was responsible for sending clothes to Lady Lisle and her daughters, on 22 November 1533: “I delivered the measurements of your neck for your partlet collar, which you shall have within ten days.”¹³

⁸ Sander, *The Rise and Growth*, 25.

⁹ Sander, *De origine et progressu*, 17.

¹⁰ My translation.

¹¹ Ives, *The Life and Death*, 39, 40.

¹² Sander, *De origine ac progressu*, 15.

¹³ As quoted in Maria Hayward, *Dress at the Court of King Henry VIII* (London: Routledge, 2007) 166.

In her book *Dress at the Court of King Henry VIII*, Maria Hayward wrote about Anne Boleyn possessing a spectacular “partlet containing a collar,” which formed part of the queen’s collection of jewels; it was heavily embellished with gold, various pearls, diamonds, rubies, and emeralds.¹⁴

Lewis’ erroneous translation may have been influenced by a contemporary record of Anne’s coronation. Reporting on the ceremony, the author of a hostile anonymous newsletter wrote:

The crown became her very ill, and a wart disfigured her very much. She wore a violet velvet mantle, with a high ruff of gold thread and pearls, which concealed a swelling she has, resembling goître.¹⁵

In the original French version, it says that Anne was scrofulous, “une escrouelle le rendoit monstreuse.”¹⁶ While Ives rejects this as “malevolent embroidery,” David Starkey and John Rowlands argue that there may be some truth to it.¹⁷ Starkey and Rowlands suggest that the sitter in Hans Holbein’s sketch inscribed as “Anna Bolleyn Queen,” currently housed in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle, is indeed Anne Boleyn. The sitter wears what appears to be a nightgown, an elaborate piece of clothing worn by women in private. She is also depicted with a double chin. Starkey and Rowland propose that: “In the drawing her double chin is so pronounced as to suggest such a swelling of the throat glands, which is indeed partly hidden by a high neckline.”¹⁸

Starkey and Rowlands convincingly argue that the hostile source mentioned above should not be dismissed only on the basis of its being hostile. Perhaps Anne did have a swelling under her chin, as indicated by that anonymous writer, as well as by Sander, who was repeating what was known about Anne’s appearance during his lifetime.

¹⁴ Hayward, *Dress*, 166, 167.

¹⁵ *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII* ed. J.S. Brewer, James Gairdner, and R. H. Brodie, 21 vols. (London: HMSO, 1862-1932), 6:585. Hereafter *LP*.

¹⁶ “Scrofula made her look monstrous.” Sydney Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 259.

¹⁷ Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 39.

¹⁸ John Rowlands and David Starkey, “An Old Tradition Reasserted: Holbein’s Portrait of Queen Anne Boleyn,” *The Burlington Magazine* 125, no. 959 (Winter 1983): 90–92.

Sander's Description and Indicators of Witchcraft

David Lewis' translation of Sander's original description of Anne Boleyn's appearance gave rise to Retha M. Warnicke's theory that Sander's description of Anne's appearance aimed to "give her the features of a witch."¹⁹ Warnicke proposed that:

Apparently adopting both a medieval custom and the Neoplatonic tradition that evil and wicked beings ought to be clothed in outward ugly features, Sander painted a monstrous portrait of Anne, whose bewitching ways, as he believed, had first destroyed a marriage and then created a schism in the Church. She was, he said, very tall (tall women were thought to be excessively lusty), sallow in complexion (perhaps a reference to their perceived habit of living in forests), with a wen under her chin (possibly an early reference to the witch's teat which could be found in various places including the pudenda); with a projecting tooth under the upper lip (gobber teeth were associated with witches) and six fingers on her right hand (fingers and fingernails played a prominent role in witchcraft).²⁰

Before answering the question of whether Sander truly meant to depict Anne as a witch, as suggested by Warnicke, it is necessary to consider what a witch looked like to Sander and his contemporaries. There are no indications in contemporary treatises that witches were either very tall or had sallow complexions. Peculiar physiognomy, such as ugly or deformed features, or illnesses, such as epilepsy or melancholy, often served as indicators of witchcraft. In the 1580s, Reginald Scot viewed women accused of witchcraft as "old, lame, bleary-eyed, pale, foul, and full of wrinkles."²¹ John Gaule in his 1646 treatise wrote that there was a tendency to accuse "every old woman with a wrinkled face, a furrowed brow, a hairy lip, a gobber tooth, a squint eye, a squeaking voice or scolding tongue."²² In his 1599 *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, Samuel Harsnett, Archbishop of York, declared that a typical witch was:

. . . an old weather-beaten crone, having her chin and knees meeting for age, walking like a bow, leaning on a staff, hollow-eyed, un-toothed, furrowed, having

¹⁹ Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 3.

²⁰ Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 245.

²¹ Gregory J. Durston, *Crimen Exceptum. The English Witch Prosecution in Context*, (Eastbourne: Waterside Press, 2019), 58.

²² Durston, *Crimen Exceptum*, 59.

her limbs trembling with palsy, going mumbling in the streets; one that hath forgotten her paternoster, yet had a shrewd tongue to call a drab a drab.²³

Jean Bodin in his highly influential 1580 treatise *The Demonomania of Witches* (*De la Demonomanie des Sorciers*) writes that “beauty can come only from God” and “no witch has ever been seen who could by charms, or otherwise, disguise her face to make herself more beautiful than she was. On the contrary, people commonly use the expression, ‘Ugly as a witch.’”²⁴ Paintings of the period strengthen the notion that witches were perceived as old and ugly. German artist Albrecht Dürer’s famous engraving *Witch Riding on a Goat*, c.1500/1501, shows an old naked woman with wrinkled body and long, flowing hair.

To Sander, however, Anne Boleyn was not ugly. After describing her appearance, he goes on to say that she “was handsome to look at, with a pretty mouth, amusing in her ways.”²⁵ It can be argued that rather than depicting Anne as a witch, Sander was elaborating on what he had heard about her appearance because most of what he wrote has a reflection in contemporary sources. Anne did indeed have an oval face, as attested by a still-surviving medal struck in 1534. Two eyewitnesses described her as having a swarthy/dark complexion, and most portraits copied after the lost original show her with dark hair. The word Sander used in Latin to describe Anne’s hand indicates that the sixth finger was rudimentary (*agnascebatur*). George Wyatt, Anne’s first biographer writing c.1606, suggested that she had a “little show of a nail” on one of her fingers; Sander embellished that to a sixth finger.²⁶ Finally, “the large wen under her chin” is a translator’s invention and does not appear in Sander’s Latin original, though it may well have been inspired by rumours from Anne’s coronation, according to which she had a swelling on her neck.²⁷ The only features from Sander’s description that are not corroborated by Anne’s contemporaries are her height—Sander depicts her as tall, whereas the Venetian ambassador who saw her in 1532 said she was of “middling stature”—the sixth finger, and the appearance of a protruding tooth.²⁸ It does seem as if Sander was embellishing Anne’s appearance, repeating what he had heard about it during his lifetime, rather than trying to endow her with the typical physical traits of a witch.

²³ Samuel Harsnett, *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (London: 1603), 136.

²⁴ Jean Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, trans. Randy A. Scott (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2001), 155.

²⁵ Sander, *The Rise and Growth*, 25.

²⁶ Ives, *The Life and Death*, 40.

²⁷ LP, 6:585.

²⁸ Ives, *The Life and Death*, 40.

It is noteworthy that Sander never directly mentioned witchcraft in his story of Anne Boleyn's rise and fall. To him, Anne was not a witch but a heretic; her fault, in his view, was that "she embraced the heresy of Luther." Sander follows the narrative established by his predecessors, for example Reginald Pole in *Defense of the Unity of the Church*, attributing Henry VIII's infatuation with Anne to her refusal to become his mistress rather than to using witchcraft:

. . . the more the king sought her, the more she avoided him, sanctimoniously saying that nobody but her husband should find her alone; nevertheless she did not think there was any want of modesty in talking, playing, and even in dancing with the king. In this way she so fed the fires of the king's passion that he became more and more determined to put away Catherine his wife...²⁹

Sander's contemporary and near-contemporary critics made no link between his description of Anne Boleyn's appearance and witchcraft either. In the 1670s, Gilbert Burnet, a respected historian and bishop of Salisbury, wrote a refutation of Sander's aspersions regarding Anne Boleyn, her family, and her relationship with Henry VIII in his *History of the Reformation*. Burnet did not dwell too much on Sander's description of Anne's appearance and interpreted it as malicious embellishment. Anne served as Mary Tudor's maid of honour in France in 1514 and was retained in the household of Mary's successor, Claude of Valois. This, in Burnet's view, "shows she could have none of those deformities in her person, since such are not brought into the courts and families of queens."³⁰ Regardless of whether Anne had the characteristics Sander endowed her with in *De Origine*, Burnet did not interpret them as indicative of witchcraft.

In about 1606, George Wyatt wrote a first biography of Anne Boleyn "not without an intent to have opposed Saunders."³¹ Yet even Wyatt did not believe that Sander linked Anne with witchcraft. Wyatt's aim, in his own words, was to dispel the "black mists of malice and dark clouds of foul and hateful railings ... of those that taught and had their tongues instructed to cover and overshadow her glory, with their most venomous

²⁹ Sander, *The Rise and Growth*, 26.

³⁰ Gilbert Burnet, *The History of the Reformation of the Church of England*, Volume 1 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1816), 79.

³¹ George Wyatt, "Some Particularities of the Life of Queen Anne Boleigne," in *The Life of Cardinal Wolsey by George Cavendish*, ed. by S.W. Singer, 2nd edn (London: Printed by Thomas Davison for Harding and Lepard, 1827), 178.

untruths."³² Malice and venomous untruths were what Wyatt was defending Anne from, not accusations of witchcraft.

As was noted previously, Wyatt wrote about "some little show of a nail" on one of Anne's fingers and recorded that Anne's skin was "not so whitely as clear and fresh above all we may esteem." He also mentioned that "there were said to be upon some parts of her body certain small moles incident to the clearest complexions."³³ Indeed, during her lifetime Anne was described as "swarthy" by a Venetian ambassador who saw her at Calais in 1532 and "of a rather dark complexion" by Swiss theologian Simon Gryneaus a year earlier.³⁴

"Witch's teat"?

Because "large wen" under Anne's chin was a translator's invention, Warnicke's hypothesis that the said "large wen" was "possibly an early reference to the witch's teat which could be found in various places including the pudenda" cannot be substantiated.³⁵ However, the theory became very popular and has been repeated by many authors and historians since. Joanna Denny, for instance, echoed Warnicke's statement in her biography of Anne Boleyn, writing that Anne's "large wen" was "thought to be a witch's teat on which an incubus or demonic male spirit could suck."³⁶ Denny's understanding of a "witch's teat," however, was flawed: it was not a swelling or wen but a permanent mark or scar, hidden from view somewhere on the intimate parts of the woman's body.³⁷ Because the witch's teat was hidden, during the height of witch hunts women were often stripped of their clothes and their intimate parts were examined, as it was a common belief that the witch's teat was hidden on their intimate parts, such as the genital area, anus, or breasts.³⁸ Warnicke correctly pointed out that a witch's teat "could be found in various places including the pudenda," but incorrectly inferred that a "large wen"

³² David M. Loades, ed., "In Defence of Anne Boleyn," in *The Papers of George Wyatt Esquire of Boxley Abbey in the County of Kent, Son and Heir of Sir Thomas Wyatt the Younger*, Camden Fourth Series, Volume 5 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1968), 22.

³³ Wyatt, "In Defence", 22.

³⁴ *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, Volume 4, 1527–1533, ed. Rawdon Brown (London, 1867), 824; Philip W. Sergeant, *The Life of Anne Boleyn* (London: Kessinger Publishing, 2005), 180.

³⁵ Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 245.

³⁶ Joanna Denny, *Anne Boleyn: A New Life of England's Tragic Queen* (London: Piatkus, 2005), 16.

³⁷ Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 245.

³⁸ Willis, *Malevolent Nurture*, 245.

beneath Anne’s chin from Sander’s description was “possibly an early reference to the witch’s teat,” since a witch’s teat by definition was hidden from view on intimate parts of the body. Also, as “large wen” manifestly does not appear in Sander’s original Latin text, Warnicke’s theory about it being Sander’s reference to a witch’s teat disintegrates under closer scrutiny.

Sander’s description of some kind of swelling under Anne’s chin is not in itself an implication that he tried to give her the characteristics of a witch. However, each retelling of Anne’s story, whether scholarly or fictional, is built upon the mistranslated passage from Sander and perpetuates two myths. First is that Anne had a “large wen” under her chin while Sander’s Latin original does not mention this at all. The second myth is based on Warnicke’s interpretation of the mistranslated passage from Sander that the “large wen” was a witch’s teat.

Books by Joanna Denny and Susan Bordo are good examples of how this narrative is perpetuated in the Boleyn scholarship. In 2009, cultural historian Bordo argued that Sander depicting Anne’s hair as black aimed to “make Anne sound as witchlike as possible” and suggested that Anne’s hair colour may in fact have been red.³⁹ However, this interpretation stems from the misreading of the sixteenth century’s attitudes towards witchcraft. It was not black but red hair that was associated with witchcraft throughout history. As Wendy Cooper explained in *Hair*:

At the height of Europe’s witch hunts in the 16th and 17th centuries, many women suffered the shame and pain in being stripped, shaved, and 'pricked' by a witch hunter, endured torture, and were put to death, simply because they were redheads—and preferably, young and attractive.⁴⁰

Therefore, if Sander wanted to link Anne Boleyn with witchcraft, he would have certainly described her as a redhead rather than having black hair.

³⁹ Susan Bordo, *The Creation of Anne Boleyn: A New Look at England's Most Notorious Queen* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2014), 32.

⁴⁰ Wendy Cooper, *Hair: Sex, Society, Symbolism* (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1971), 75.

"Shapeless mass of flesh" Indicative of Witchcraft?

Apart from Anne's appearance, Retha M. Warnicke also argued that Sander's description of Anne's miscarriage in January 1536 "formed part of his description of her as a witch"⁴¹ because he stated that Anne "brought forth only a shapeless mass of flesh."⁴² Warnicke hypothesised that Anne gave birth to a deformed foetus and that the king took it as a sign that their marriage was doomed in God's eyes.⁴³

Deformed births were interpreted in a variety of ways in the sixteenth century. Often attributed to sin, they could also be interpreted as a result of sexual relations with the devil or his demons. As Charlotte-Rose Millar explains:

Deformed births were often markers of sin in early modern England. Monstrous births and wonders could be viewed as signs from God, which warned mankind to mend their sinful ways. They could also be signs that the nation was in trouble, with deformities in newborns mirroring deformities in the body politic.⁴⁴

Indeed, in August 1533, shortly before the birth of Anne Boleyn's only daughter, Elizabeth, a rumour circulated on the Continent that "the said new queen is brought abed with a monster, or else that she bare is born dead."⁴⁵ This, however, did not suggest that Anne's pregnancy was a result of copulating with the devil and thus that she was a witch. Rather, it served to emphasise the widespread belief in Catholic Europe that Anne's marriage to Henry VIII was invalid because the king already had a wife when he married her, and thus their child would be either a monster or stillbirth because God would demonstrate his displeasure by punishing them by denying them healthy offspring.

Scholars, including Eric Ives and Suzannah Lipscomb, agree that there is no indication in contemporary records that the child Anne Boleyn miscarried in January 1536 was deformed or that this miscarriage led to the accusations of witchcraft and her downfall.⁴⁶ Eustace Chapuys stated that Anne miscarried a male child "about three

⁴¹ Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 296–297, n. 14.

⁴² Sander, *Rise and Growth*, 132.

⁴³ Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 246.

⁴⁴ Charlotte-Rose Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2017), 133.

⁴⁵ LP, 6:1065.

⁴⁶ Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 297; Suzannah Lipscomb, *1536: The Year that Changed Henry VIII* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2009), 69.

months and a half old."⁴⁷ Windsor herald Wriothesley stated that she "was brought a bedd and delivered of a man chield, as it was said, afore her tyme, for she said that she had reckoned herself at that tyme but fiftene weekes gonne with chield."⁴⁸ Chronicler Edward Hall echoed Wriothesley, writing that the queen was "brought a bed of a child before her time, which was born dead."⁴⁹ After hearing rumours at court, Chapuys concluded that "the general opinion is that the concubine's miscarriage was entirely owing to defective constitution and her utter inability to bear male children."⁵⁰

Yet not many scholars point out that the phrase "shapeless mass of flesh" used by Nicholas Sander was not unusual in sixteenth-century terminology for miscarriage. For example, when Margaret of Austria miscarried her child in 1497, one chronicler noted: "Instead of the desired offspring, she has aborted; instead of the longed for heir, we have been given an unformed mass of flesh worthy of pity."⁵¹ There was no suggestion that Margaret's child was deformed. Rather, the unformed or shapeless "mass of flesh" in both cases indicated that the pregnancy ended in its early stages and that pregnancy did not result in the birth of an heir.

Accusations of Witchcraft?

In stark contrast to the theories proposed by Retha M. Warnicke, the second school of thought about Anne Boleyn is that she was never linked to witchcraft during her lifetime. In a recent article, *Anne of the Wicked Ways: Perceptions of Anne Boleyn as a Witch in History and Popular Culture*, Roland Hui posits:

Despite the wealth of material tying Anne to witchcraft, no extant evidence indicates that she was ever branded a witch in her own lifetime. From the time she first drew attention as the king's mistress in 1526 to her death on the scaffold ten years later, disapproval of Anne was chiefly about her supposed sexual immorality.⁵²

⁴⁷ *Calendar of State Papers, Spain* (hereafter *CSP Spain*), ed. by G.A. Bergenroth, 13 vols, (London: Longman Green, Longman and Roberts, 1862-1954), v (ii), no. 21.

⁴⁸ Charles Wriothesley, *A Chronicle of England During the Reigns of the Tudors, from A.D. 1485 to 1559*, 2 vols. (London: Camden Society, 1875-77), 1:33.

⁴⁹ Edward Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, ed. Henry Ellis (London: J. Johnson, 1809), 818.

⁵⁰ *CSP Spain*, v (ii), no. 21.

⁵¹ Peggy K. Liss, *Isabel the Queen: Life and Times* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 367.

⁵² Roland Hui, "Anne of the Wicked Ways: Perceptions of Anne Boleyn as a Witch in History and in Popular Culture," *Parergon*, vol. 35, no. 1, (2018): 97-118.

Yet this view is incorrect, as there is evidence that Anne’s contemporaries tried to undermine her position at court by insinuating that she used witchcraft to seduce the king. During her ascendancy to power, Anne’s position was unprecedented and anomalous. She refused to become the king’s mistress in a carnal sense but was not yet his wife. To marry Anne, Henry VIII decided to end his twenty-year-old marriage to the Spanish Katharine of Aragon.⁵³ To repudiate his royal wife to marry her servant was unusual and scandalous. To achieve that end, Henry VIII resorted to cutting his ties with the Catholic Church. This added a religious dimension to the story.

“Unlawful love”

Anne had enemies among the queen’s loyal supporters. The Catholic families, such as the Poles and Courtenays, old nobility steadfastly loyal to Katharine of Aragon, sneered at Anne Boleyn’s rapid elevation. In 1538, the so called Exeter Conspiracy was detected, and members of the Pole-Courtenay circle were arrested and examined. Geoffrey Pole, brother of Cardinal Reginald Pole, confessed:

Item, he sayd that afor th[e ky]ngs my[nd] was set upon devorse off the good quene [and] not [ca]tched yn the snare off unlawfull love with the lady Ane, the kyng cowld byd well ynowghe the auctoryte off the pope thowgh he myslykyd hys abuses.⁵⁴

In other words, Pole insinuated that he and his circle believed that the king decided to divorce their “good queen Katharine” because he was bewitched by Anne.⁵⁵ The comment about “unlawful love” carried witchcraft connotations. Provoking someone to “unlawful love” was among the tricks imputed to women using witchcraft to entice their lovers into loving them. It was not punishable during Anne’s lifetime, but it would become a felony under the 1542 Witchcraft Act.⁵⁶ An air of scandal surrounded Anne's relationship with the king, and some foreign observers suggested that Henry VIII was “charmed by potions

⁵³ I use the “Katharine of Aragon,” rather than “Catherine of Aragon,” for several reasons. I have never seen Katharine signing her own English name with a “C;” the editors of the Letters & Papers spell it “Katharine.” Born in Spain, Katherine’s Spanish name was Catalina, but when she became Queen of England she used the anglicized version of her name. She signed her letters variously as “Katharine,” “Katherine,” “Katherina,” and “Katharina.” Here, I opt for “Katharine” which I believe to be closest to the original sources.

⁵⁴ *LP*, 13 (2): 800.

⁵⁵ *LP*, 13 (2): 800.

⁵⁶ Owen Davies, *Popular Magic: Cunning-folk in English History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 173.

or otherwise," so the conservatives at court were not alone in spreading gossip linking Anne with witchcraft.⁵⁷

The Holy Roman Emperor's ambassador at Henry VIII's court, Eustace Chapuys, certainly believed that Henry's obsession with Anne bordered on unnatural, writing in December 1533 that "this accursed lady [*ceste mauldite femme*] has so enchanted and bewitched him [*la enchante et ensourcele*] that he will not dare say or do anything against her will and commands."⁵⁸ Chapuys disparaged Anne in his despatches in various ways. He never referred to her as queen, even though she was crowned with St Edward's crown; to him she was always the detested concubine and her daughter, Elizabeth, was a bastard. She was not only "accursed" but also "that diabolical concubine [*cette diablesse de concubine*]."⁵⁹ Chapuys portrayed Anne as the driving force behind the king's annulment and policies while depicting Henry VIII as unable to resist her persuasions. This, of course, is a simplistic and misogynistic view, blaming a woman for a man's infatuation. Chapuys' main objective against Anne, however, was not that she used witchcraft but that she practised "heretical doctrines."⁶⁰ He scoffed that Anne, who favoured the evangelical movement, "was more Lutheran than Luther himself."⁶¹

Anne Boleyn was not the only person in Henry VIII's life who was said to have used witchcraft to keep him interested in her person and advice. In 1516, when Cardinal Wolsey and Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, were flying high in the king's favour, people murmured in taverns that:

it is a wonder to see the king how he is ordered nowadays; for the cardinal and the Duke of Suffolk, which the king hath brought up of nought, do rule him in all things even as they list; whether it be by necromancy, witchcraft, or policy, no man knoweth.⁶²

⁵⁷ LP, 5:1114.

⁵⁸ CSP Spain, 4(2): 1161.

⁵⁹ LP, 9: 777.

⁶⁰ CSP Spain, 5(2): 43, 47.

⁶¹ LP, 5: 148.

⁶² LP, 2: 2733.

By 1515, Wolsey had become one of the most powerful men in England, styled *alter rex* (the other king) or even *ipse rex* (the king himself) by foreign ambassadors.⁶³ Some attributed Wolsey's meteoric rise and his influence over the King to dabbling in witchcraft. Sir William Neville believed that Wolsey was in a possession of a magic ring and wanted "to have a ring made that should bring a man in favour with his prince; seeing my lord cardinal had such a ring, that whatsoever he asked of the king's grace, that he had."⁶⁴ William Tyndale, on the other hand, said:

I heard it spoken divers times, he made by craft of necromancy graven imagery to bear upon him; wherewith he bewitched the king's mind, and made the king to dote upon him more than ever he did on any lady or gentlewoman; so that now the king's grace followed him, as he before followed the king.⁶⁵

Anne was also not the first royal mistress accused of using love magic to seduce a king. In the fourteenth century, Edward III's mistress Alice Perrers was said to have done the same thing. According to one chronicler, Alice:

... kept in her company a man who was a brother in the Order of Preachers who displayed the appearance of a physician, and professed that skill; but he was an evil magician, dedicated to evildoing, and it was by his magical devices that Alice had enticed the king into an illicit love affair with her ... It was said furthermore, that this brother had made wax effigies of the king and Alice, and that ... he used these with the juices of magical herbs and his words of incantation to enable Alice to get whatever she wanted from the king. He had also devised rings that caused forgetfulness or remembrance, just as Moses had once done, so that as long as the king wore them he would never forget this harlot.⁶⁶

The suggestion of using witchcraft stemmed largely from the fact that Alice was a royal mistress some thirty years younger than Edward III. The king was already an old man by the standards of his epoch (he turned sixty-four in 1376), and many believed his

⁶³ *Calendar of State Papers Relating To English Affairs in the Archives of Venice (hereafter CSP Venice)*, ed. by Rawdon Brown and others, 38 vols (London: Longman, Green, Reader, and Dyer, HMSO, 1864-1947), 2, no. 671. See also *CSP Venice* iii, n. 509.

⁶⁴ G.L. Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 63.

⁶⁵ William Tyndale, *Expositions and Notes on Sundry Portions of the Holy Scriptures*, ed. for Parker Society (London: Cambridge, 1849), 308.

⁶⁶ Thomas Walsingham, *The St Albans Chronicle: The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham, 1376-1394*, trans. by John Taylor, Wendy R. Childs, and Leslie Watkiss, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 1: 47.

indulgence of Alice proceeded from his dotage. The accusation of witchcraft also allowed Alice's enemies to remove her from his side without casting direct slander on the king. Yet despite the allegation that she used witchcraft to ensnare the king, Alice Perrers was not formally charged and was allowed to walk free.⁶⁷

Women in sixteenth-century European courts were not immune to insinuations of using witchcraft either. Christian II of Denmark was swayed by the opinions of his long-term mistress Dyveke Sigbritsdatter, and after her death in 1517, he was then influenced by her mother, Sigbrit Willoms. In January 1523, English ambassador Sir Robert Wingfield wrote that the Danish king was "more ruled by his witch than ever he was."⁶⁸ Dauphin Henri was also influenced by his much-older mistress, Diane de Poitiers. In 1542, the English ambassador mused: "I think Madame la Grande Seneschalle [Diane] hath witched him, for he loveth the emperor exceedingly."⁶⁹

Chronicler Edward Hall wrote that in 1529, at the height of the annulment case, "the queen's ladies, gentlewomen, and servants largely spoke and said that she so enticed the king, and brought him in such amours, that only for her sake and occasion, he would be divorced from his queen."⁷⁰ It was the beginning of Anne's unpopularity at court and abroad.

It appears that Anne was aware of gossip linking her with witchcraft and was heard saying "that it is foretold in ancient prophecies that at this time a queen shall be burnt".⁷¹ Burning at the stake was a traditional form of execution for men and women found guilty of witchcraft on the Continent and in Scotland; in England, witchcraft was punished by hanging.⁷² The fact that Anne referred to burning and feared she would be the queen from the prophecy can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, Anne was aware of the vicious rumours spread about her at court. Perhaps she believed that she might be burned for witchcraft since she spent her formative years in France, where witches were usually burned, and it was said of her that "no one would ever have taken her to be English by her manners, but a native-born Frenchwoman."⁷³ Secondly, in England,

⁶⁷ Laura Tompkins, "The Uncrowned Queen: Alice Perrers, Edward III and Political Crisis in Fourteenth-century England, 1360-1377" (PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, 2013), 126.

⁶⁸ *LP*, 3: 2798.

⁶⁹ *LP*, 7: 400.

⁷⁰ Edward Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, 759.

⁷¹ *CSP Spain*, 4(1): 373.

⁷² Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 113.

⁷³ Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 45.

burning was a punishment for heresy, and Anne had supported numerous writers and clerics who were labelled as heretics.⁷⁴

Shortly after Anne’s coronation in 1533, a certain Mistress Amadas made a series of prophecies concerning the king, Anne, and Katharine of Aragon. One of the prophecies said that Mrs Amadas:

rejoiced when the Tower was made white, for she said shortly after my lady Anne should be burned, for she is a harlot; that Master Norris [groom of the stool] was bawd between the king and her; that the king had kept [as mistresses] both the mother and the daughter, and that my lord of Wiltshire was bawd both to his wife and his two daughters.”⁷⁵

“If the Queen be not burnt within this half year,” Amadas’ prophecies about Anne concluded, “she will be burnt herself.”⁷⁶ In 1535 a famous prophecy said, “When the Tower is white and another place green, then shall be burned two or three bishops and a queen.”⁷⁷ In an age when religion mixed with superstition and magic, belief in prophecy was widespread. According to Ambassador Chapuys, Anne once said that she would kill the king’s elder daughter, Mary, “either by hunger or otherwise.” When Anne’s brother pointed out that “this would anger the king,” Anne retorted that she did not care even if she were “burned alive for it after.”⁷⁸ Burning was clearly often on Anne’s mind.

Henry VIII was not oblivious to the rumours linking Anne with witchcraft and decided to capitalise on them when annulling their marriage. On 29 January 1536, Eustace Chapuys informed Charles V that Henry VIII wanted to annul his marriage to Anne Boleyn and take another wife. There are two translations of Chapuys’ despatch, one in the *Letters and Papers* and another in the *Spanish Calendar of State Papers*. The version in the *Letters and Papers* reads:

This morning I have heard from the lady mentioned in my letters of the 5th November and from her husband [Gertrude and Henry Courtenay, Marchioness and Marquis of Exeter], that they were informed by one of the principal persons at court that this king had said to someone in great confidence, and as it were in confession,

⁷⁴ Maria Dowling, “Anne Boleyn and Reform,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 35, no. 1, (1984), 30–46.

⁷⁵ LP, 6: 923.

⁷⁶ LP, 6: 923.

⁷⁷ LP, 6: 10 (Appendix).

⁷⁸ LP, 7: 871.

that he had made this marriage, seduced by witchcraft, and for this reason he considered it null; and that this was evident because God did not permit them to have any male issue, and that he believed that he might take another wife, which he gave to understand that he had some wish to do. The thing is very difficult for me to believe, although it comes from a good source. I will watch to see if there are any indications of its probability.⁷⁹

The version in *Calendar of State Papers* says that the king told his confidant:

that he had been seduced and forced into this second marriage by means of sortileges and charms, and that, owing to that, he held it as null. God (he said) had well shown his displeasure at it by denying him male children. He, therefore, considered that he could take a third wife, which he said he wished much to do.⁸⁰

Chapuis hailed from Savoy, and his native language was French. In the original despatch, the word that was rendered into English as “witchcraft” and “sortileges and charms” is “sortileges”.⁸¹ This word derived from the Latin word *sortilegius* meaning “sorcerer” or “diviner.”⁸² Eric Ives argued that since the primary English meaning of the word “sortilege” is “divination” that Henry VIII might have been referring to premarital predictions that his marriage to Anne Boleyn would produce male heirs.⁸³ Yet in his original despatch Chapuis used the word “sortileges.” The word “sortilege” in French is closely linked with witchcraft and sorcery. It is true that Chapuis was writing in French, and so it is open to debate what word Henry VIII used exactly in English, but Chapuis’ despatch clearly hints that Henry VIII believed himself to have been “*seduict et contrainct de sortileges*,” or “seduced and forced by bewitchment.”⁸⁴

Chapuis found the entire notion of Henry’s wish to annul his marriage to Anne implausible at that point because Anne was still pregnant—Chapuis did not report about her miscarriage for another ten days. If Anne miscarried her son on 29 January, as Chapuis recorded, then Henry VIII’s remark that he wanted to take another wife

⁷⁹ LP, 10: 199.

⁸⁰ CSP Spain, 5(2): 13.

⁸¹ Paul Friedmann, *Anne Boleyn: A Chapter of English History, 1527-1536* (London: Macmillan, 1884), 2: 203.

⁸² Abel Boyer, *Dictionnaire Français-Anglais et Anglais-Français* (Lausanne: University of Lausanne, 1816), 1: 495.

⁸³ Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 298.

⁸⁴ Friedmann, *Anne Boleyn: A Chapter of English History, 1527-1536*, 2: 203, n.1.

because God denied him and Anne male children gains credibility.⁸⁵ But what exactly does Henry VIII's remark mean? In his mid-forties and still without a male heir, he had no time for another lengthy annulment case. He wanted to remarry quickly and father sons with his next wife as soon as possible. But how would he explain to the whole world that he had been wrong to raise Anne to queenship? It appears that in this early stage of distancing himself from Anne, Henry laid the foundations for the accusation of witchcraft.

If proven, allegations of witchcraft could result in the dissolution of a marriage. It was not unusual in England or on the Continent to accuse women of using love magic. We will consider some examples from Europe and England. When Polish King Vladislas II Jagiello married his third wife, Elisabeth of Pilica, in 1417, rumours abounded that he was bewitched. People tried to explain why Elisabeth, widowed and ailing from tuberculosis, was chosen as his wife.⁸⁶ In England, two high-profile noblewomen were accused of using witchcraft to lure powerful men into marriage: Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester, in 1441 and Elizabeth Woodville, Queen of England, in 1483.

Eleanor was the wife of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, King Henry VI's uncle and heir apparent. Eleanor was accused of using potions supplied by the famous Witch of Eye, Margery Jourdemayne, to make Gloucester fall in love and marry her. Eleanor was also accused of casting the king's horoscope to discover if her husband would succeed him; she obtained help from Margery Jourdemayne, Roger Bolingbroke, and Thomas Southwell. Other charges against Eleanor Cobham were that she wanted to procure the king's death by melting a wax image, but Eleanor claimed that the image represented the child she wanted to conceive.⁸⁷ In the end, Eleanor's marriage was dissolved "on the premise that, by using witchcraft, she had interfered with Duke Humphrey's freedom of choice."⁸⁸ Margarey Jourdemayne was sentenced to death by burning at Smithfield, Thomas Southwell died in prison, and Roger Bolingbroke was hanged, drawn, and quartered. Eleanor had to do a public penance in London and was condemned to life imprisonment on the Isle of Man.

⁸⁵ Windsor Herald Charles Wriothesley noted that Anne's miscarriage occurred three days before the feast of Candlemas, so on 30 January 1536 (Wriothesley, *A Chronicle of England*, Volume 2, 33). Chronicler Edward Hall recorded that Anne miscarried "in February." (Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, 818).

⁸⁶ Anna Klubówna, *Cztery królowe Jagiellońskie* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Spółdzielcze, 1983), 143.

⁸⁷ David Baldwin, *Elizabeth Woodville: Mother of the Princes in the Tower* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2002), 151.

⁸⁸ Baldwin, *Elizabeth Woodville*, 151.

Love magic was a typically feminine form of witchcraft, which seems to have been very frequently practised in early modern England. The most recent example in living memory was the accusation of witchcraft with special emphasis on love magic levelled against Henry VIII's grandmother Elizabeth Grey, née Woodville. When Edward IV married the widowed Lady Grey in 1464, many men marvelled because Elizabeth was older than the king and had only a knight as a father, although her mother had been a duchess before she remarried beneath her rank.

The clandestine nature of Edward IV's marriage led Richard III's Parliament to claim in 1483 that the wedding was procured "by sorcery and witchcraft, committed by the said Elizabeth and her mother, Jacquetta, Duchess of Bedford."⁸⁹ According to the Act, witchcraft committed by Elizabeth and Jacquetta was "the common opinion of the people and the public voice, and the fame is through all this land."⁹⁰ In 1469, during Warwick's rebellion, Jacquetta was accused by her political enemies of witchcraft. Her accusers claimed that a parish clerk from Northampton, John Daunger, could testify that Jacquetta had fashioned two wax images, one representing Edward IV and the other representing the queen, her own daughter. It was never explained what purpose these images served, although the implication was that Jacquetta used love magic to bring Edward IV and her daughter together, as was rumoured after their marriage. She was cleared of the charge when Edward IV regained his throne in 1470, but in 1483, Richard III's Parliament revived the claims that Jacquetta helped her daughter using witchcraft.

In 1483, Jacquetta was long dead. According to Sir Thomas More in *History of Richard III*, the king implicated Elizabeth "Jane" Shore, Edward IV's mistress, as Elizabeth Woodville's accomplice. After eating some strawberries, Richard "plucked up the sleeve of his doublet to his elbow, and showed his left arm withered and small." This, in Richard's view, was evidence that "that sorceress [Elizabeth Woodville], and the other witch of her counsel, Shore's wife, have by their sorcery and witchcraft wasted my body."⁹¹ In the end, Elizabeth Woodville's marriage to Edward IV was annulled because Richard III presented evidence that his brother was pre-contracted to another woman before he married Elizabeth.

⁸⁹ The accusation against Elizabeth Woodville and her mother is contained in Richard III's *Titulus Regius*: Caroline A. Halsted, *Richard III as Duke of Gloucester and King of England*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Brown, Greene, and Longmans, 1844) 2, Appendix Y, 542.

⁹⁰ Halsted, *Richard III*, 542.

⁹¹ Thomas More, ed. by William Joseph Walter, *Sir Thomas More: A Selection from His Works, as Well in Prose as in Verse, Forming a Sequel to "Life and Times of Sir Thomas More."* (London: Fielding Lucas, 1841), 178.

When Henry VIII made a comment about Anne bewitching him, he was laying the foundation for the annulment and capitalising on rumours that she had bewitched him. However, it appears he wanted Anne permanently gone and not merely their marriage annulled. Accusation of provoking him to “unlawful love,” as seems to have been the King’s intention in January 1536, could result in dissolution of a marriage but would not send Anne to her death because the “unlawful love” charge was not punishable by death until 1542.

It is often stated as fact that Anne was never charged with witchcraft during her trial on 15 May 1536, yet the transcript of her trial is no longer extant, and therefore such a sweeping statement cannot be made.⁹² However, there is a curious hint in the indictment against Anne Boleyn that during the preparation of the charges against her, Henry VIII was still pondering accusing her of witchcraft. The *Baga de Secretis* (“Bag of Secrets”), containing files of indictments made in sessions of commissioners of oyer and terminer against Anne Boleyn and her brother, George, still survives in the National Archives.⁹³ This lengthy document spread over twenty-one membranes concentrates on the lurid charges of adultery and incest allegedly committed by Anne and five men, including her own brother, who were accused and executed as her lovers. Interestingly, the document states that following the discovery of Anne’s “abominable crimes and treasons against himself,” Henry “took such inward displeasure and heaviness, especially from his said queen’s malice and adultery [*malicia et adulteri*], that certain harms and perils have befallen his royal body.”⁹⁴ Was this a reference to witchcraft performed by Anne? Richard III accused Elizabeth Woodville of using witchcraft to “waste” his body; was Henry implying Anne did the same thing to him? Indeed, this is what may be inferred from the document.

During his trial, George Boleyn was handed a piece of paper with information that Anne had confided in his wife that Henry VIII “was not skilful in copulating with a woman and had neither skill nor potency.”⁹⁵ This implied that the king was impotent or suffered bouts of erectile dysfunction. The king would admit to having had erectile problems during the annulment of his fourth marriage to Anne of Cleves in 1540; Anne Boleyn’s

⁹² William Thomas, ed. by J. A. Froude, *The Pilgrim: a Dialogue on the Life and Actions of King Henry the Eighth*, (London: Parker, Son & Bourn, 1861), 9.

⁹³ Wriothesley, *A Chronicle of England During the Reigns of the Tudors*, 1: 189–226. See also *The National Archives* KB 8/9–11.

⁹⁴ Wriothesley, *A Chronicle of England*, Volume 1, 195.

⁹⁵ *LP*, 10: 908.

comment thus appears to have been rooted in her frustration in the difficulty of becoming pregnant following her miscarriage or stillbirth in the summer of 1534. Magically induced impotence was not uncommon in annulment cases, albeit rarely used in England.⁹⁶ By insinuating that “certain harms and perils have befallen his royal body,” Henry appears to have been protecting himself from rumours of impotence that he suspected would stem from the trial proceedings, considering the private nature of the provided evidence.⁹⁷

“Mauldicte et veneficque putain”

Writing about Anne Boleyn’s trial, Eustace Chapuys asserted that in addition to adultery, incest and plotting the King’s death with one of her alleged lovers, Anne was accused of poisoning Katharine of Aragon and intending to do the same to Lady Mary.⁹⁸ Indeed, following Katharine’s death in January 1536, rumours that she had been poisoned abounded in England and abroad.

Chapuys wrote that many at Henry VIII’s court believed Katharine was poisoned and that the poison “came from Italy.”⁹⁹ In a letter to Nicholas Perrenot, seigneur de Granvelle, Chapuys elaborated more, writing that it was rumoured the poison came from Henry’s ambassador in Rome, Gregorio di Casale, via his English agent Gurone Bertano.¹⁰⁰ Writing from the imperial court on 30 January 1536, the English ambassador Philip Hoby stated that “there is great talk here that my lady Dowager [Katharine of Aragon] is dead, and that she was poisoned by the King’s procurement.”¹⁰¹ Pedro Ortiz, Katharine of Aragon’s former proctor in Rome, wrote to Charles V’s wife, Empress Isabella, that certain:

persons in England, to whom we have written to inquire into this most strange event [Anne’s execution], assert that during the inquiry instituted to prove Anne’s guilt, it was found that she had tried to poison Her Highness, Queen Katharine of England.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Sarah F. Matthews-Grieco, ed., *Cuckoldry, Impotence, and Adultery in Europe (15th-17th century)*, (London: Routledge, 2017), 4.

⁹⁷ *The National Archives* KB 8/9-11.

⁹⁸ *CSP Spain*, v (ii), no. 55.

⁹⁹ *CSP Spain*, v (ii), no. 9.

¹⁰⁰ *LP*, 10: 200.

¹⁰¹ *LP*, 10: 208.

¹⁰² *CSP Spain*, v (ii), no. 58.

Three years later Duchess Christina of Milan abhorred the offer of becoming Henry’s fourth wife, saying that she suspected that Katharine, her great aunt, had been poisoned.¹⁰³

On 19 May 1536, Chapuys stated that on the day of Anne’s arrest the King told his illegitimate son Henry FitzRoy that he and his half-sister Lady Mary “were greatly bound to God for having escaped the hands of that accursed and poisonous whore [*dicelle maudicte et veneficque putain*], who had determined to poison them.”¹⁰⁴ The accusation of poisoning Katharine is not among the charges in the *Baga de Secretis*. However, it is not impossible that a suggestion was made during the trials, as reported by Chapuys, that Anne poisoned Katharine of Aragon. Anne did indeed brag about poisoning her enemies on several occasions during the preceding three years but there is no evidence that she acted upon her words. However, Anne was famous for such utterings, as evidenced by rumours recorded in the Windsor herald’s chronicle that when Henry FitzRoy died two months after Anne’s execution, it was widely believed that he died as a result of being poisoned by Anne and her brother.¹⁰⁵

In his landmark study of witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England, Alan Macfarlane asserted that two crimes were considered particularly feminine during the early modern period: witchcraft and poisoning.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, these two charges were often very closely linked together.¹⁰⁷ The Latin term *veneficium* was used to accuse both witches and poisoners.¹⁰⁸ In his despatch, Chapuys reported that Henry called Anne that “*veneficque putain*.” It is not impossible that during Anne’s trial it was suggested that she may have poisoned Katharine of Aragon; such suggestions would serve Henry’s purpose of blaming Anne for causing Katharine’s sudden death while directing any accusations of negligence away from his royal person. It would further serve the purpose of depicting Anne as not only an adulteress but a murderess and possibly a witch.

¹⁰³ LP, 14 (2): 400.

¹⁰⁴ LP, 10: 908.

¹⁰⁵ *Wriothesley's Chronicle*, 53-54.

¹⁰⁶ Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 1999), 16.

¹⁰⁷ Vanessa McMahon, *Murder in Shakespeare's England* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), 111.

¹⁰⁸ Sylvia A. Pamboukian, *Agatha Christie and the Guilty Pleasure of Poison* (Springer International Publishing, 2022), 128.

Anne in the Tower

During her imprisonment in the Tower of London, Anne told her gaoler, Sir William Kingston, that if she died “you shall see the greatest punishment for me within these seven years that ever came to England.”¹⁰⁹ On another occasion, she said that “we should have no rain till she waere [delivered out] of the Tower.”¹¹⁰ Anne’s ramblings proved her undoing: her reminisces about exchanges with courtiers such as Henry Norris and Francis Weston saw them arrested, and her talk about punishment for her death and no rain until her release served as inspiration for generations of future writers to link her to witchcraft. Witches were believed to have the power to control weather, and in 1921 Margaret Murray interpreted Anne’s utterance as that Anne “believed that she possessed certain magical powers.”¹¹¹ What Anne meant by these remarks remains unclear; perhaps she was simply referring to the fact that she was innocent.

When Anne Boleyn’s daughter became queen in 1558, those who attacked her legitimacy and right to rule did so by attacking her mother. Anne was disparaged as an adulteress and heretic rather than a witch. If it was Henry’s goal to accuse Anne to provoke him to “unlawful love,” using potions or spells to make him love her, he did not proceed with this accusation. What Henry did was far more devastating to Anne’s posthumous reputation: she would be remembered as an adulteress for generations to come. Valiant efforts were made during Elizabeth I’s reign to disassociate Anne from the scandalous charges upon which she was executed and to remind everyone that she was an evangelical dedicated to spreading the word of God.

Conclusion

By returning to Nicholas Sander’s original Latin text, the notion that he wrote about a “large wen” under Anne’s chin is disproved because neither the word “large” nor “wen” appears in the original Latin text. As a result, theories built upon this notion cannot be substantiated. The swelling under Anne Boleyn’s chin from Sander’s description cannot be interpreted as a witch’s teat, as suggested by Retha M. Warnicke, because the witch’s teat was usually understood to have been a mark hidden on the private parts of woman’s body rather than a visible swelling, hence why women were often stripped naked to be examined during witch trials. In his *De Origine*, Sander never directly linked Anne Boleyn

¹⁰⁹ LP, 10:797.

¹¹⁰ LP, 10:798.

¹¹¹ Margaret Murray, *The God of the Witches* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), 154.

with witchcraft, instead concentrating on depicting her as a follower of the Lutheran heresy. The notion that his description of Anne's physical appearance was written with the purpose of depicting her as a witch cannot be substantiated; witches were generally described as ugly, whereas Sander concluded his description of Anne with the words that she "was handsome to look at, with a pretty mouth, amusing in her ways."

This paper has suggested, utilising often-overlooked evidence, that during Anne's lifetime, her name was linked with witchcraft on at least three occasions. Edward Hall wrote that some members of Katharine of Aragon's household spoke about Anne "enticing" the king to love her; others asserted Henry VIII was fed potions, while some murmured that he was caught "yn the snare off unlawfull love with the lady Ane." The "unlawful love" comment carried witchcraft connotations. Henry's comment in early 1536 hints that he sought to accuse Anne of interfering with his free will by provoking him to "unlawful love"; this, he likely hoped, would serve as the basis of annulling his marriage to her. However, in 1536 Anne would not have been sentenced to death if she was found guilty of this charge because to "provoke any person to unlawful love" became a capital offense in 1542, six years after Anne's death on the scaffold.¹¹² Henry VIII was looking for a way to end his marriage to Anne not by simply annulling it, but by killing her. From the charges against Anne in the indictment, only one, conspiring to murder the King, carried the death penalty under the 1534 Treasons Act. The aghast imperial ambassador Chapuys aptly recorded that "the executioner's sword and her own death were virtually to separate and divorce man and wife."¹¹³

This paper highlights how important it is to return to the original historical texts instead of relying on their nineteenth-century translations. Such translations, as demonstrated here, are often flawed. By re-translating passages from Sander's description of Anne's appearance, the legendary "large wen" is proven to be a translator's invention. It never existed and should thus be replaced in newly published scholarship with re-translation that better reflects Sander's original meaning and penchant for humor.

¹¹² Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Penguin, 2003), 442.

¹¹³ *CSP Spain*, v (ii), no. 72.

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