

The Trickster and the Witch

On the Romani Origins of “Captain Elin’s Idol”

Egil Asprem & Sebastian Casinge

Abstract

At the centre of this article stands a striking but poorly understood artefact held at the Nordic Museum in Stockholm (NM.0159389): A piece of bovine leg bone carved in the likeness of a human skull. Traditionally described as an “idol”, the artefact belongs to a bundle of “witchcraft tools” (trolltyg) that have been attributed to the legendary witch, “captain Elin”, loosely built on the historical person Elin Eriksdotter from Mofikerud, who was tried in a late witch trial in Näs, Värmland, in 1720. Scholars have long known that the attribution of the skull figure and most of the other items to Elin is false. In this article, we first describe how the association with “captain Elin” arose, shedding new light on the creation of the legend and its association with the “witchcraft tools”. Secondly, we present new archival evidence that suggests an entirely different context for the bone artefact, namely in the encounters between Romani people and the majority population at the end of the Swedish Great Power era. We discuss the significance of this new context for the cultural memory of magic and witchcraft in Sweden, and for our understanding of the Romani minority’s place in early-modern society.

Keywords: Captain Elin; witchcraft; Nordic Museum; Romani people; Göta Court of Appeal; Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius; Anna Maria Adamsdotter

Introduction:

Material Memories of Witchcraft in the Nordic Museum

On the third floor of the Nordic Museum in Stockholm sits a display case containing a collection of items meant to illustrate folklore about witchcraft and the Swedish witch trials. The items include a horn supposed to have contained flying ointment and a short oak rod with a piece of skin described as a “milk hare”,¹ but the most conspicuous item is an artefact made of bone and resembling a human skull (Figure 1). This small artefact measures 5 cm in length and 3.5 cm across; an osteological analysis has shown that it was carved from the joint or articular capsule of a bovine leg bone (Höök 2015).

The milk hare, ointment horn, and skull figure are part of a collection of six objects that have formed an important part of the material memory of witchcraft in Sweden. They are collectively known as “captain Elin’s



Item 0159389 in the Nordic museum catalogue. Photo: Ulf Berger.

witchcraft tools”, associated with a legendary figure loosely based on Elin in Mofikerud, who was tried in one of Sweden’s last witch trials, in Värmland in 1720 (Höök 2014; cf. Schön 1998; Skott 1999).² Captain Elin was a recurring character in nineteenth-century folklore about witches (Schön 1998:78–79); together with written accounts and oral traditions, these objects have been instrumental in shaping the legend and keeping it alive. But the objects are also used to construct memories of witchcraft in the present. Their place in the Nordic Museum’s permanent exhibition on “Traditions”, where they have been displayed since 1995, connect them in an associative manner to the witchcraft and witch trials of the olden days. The objects appear in a display case dominated by a life-size tableau portraying the torture of Elin Andersdotter,³ who together with her husband (absent from the exhibition materials) was executed for witchcraft in 1671 due to Elin’s rumoured ability to cure – and therefore also potentially cause – sickness by magical means (Schön 1991:11–20). The objects accompany the tableau without any contextualizing information, inviting visitors to associate them with the torture and execution of Elin Andersdotter who, by association with the objects themselves, is also cast as a practitioner of witchcraft. The display case is meant to provide a background to the modern tradition in which children dress up as “Easter hags” (*påskkärringar*) on Dowry Thursday, creating a sharp contrast between the cruelty and superstition of the past and the harmless fun of the present.⁴

Despite a long-standing fascination on the part of ethnologists, museums, and the wider public, the “witchcraft tools” and the legend of captain Elin itself have received surprisingly little attention in modern scholarship (see Schön 1998; Skott 1999). It is well known that the items once belonged to the archives of the Göta Court of Appeal (Göta hovrätt) in Jönköping, which at least from the mid-eighteenth century held a collection of objects used in

various crimes and that had been sent to the court in appeal processes.⁵ In 1864, the state antiquarian B. E. Hildebrand ordered the Göta court to transfer the witchcraft instruments, by then already associated with captain Elin, to the State Historical Museum in Stockholm, where they were to illustrate “mysticism and superstition” in Sweden (see Bringéus 1966:289–290). The Nordic Museum finally acquired the items in 1926. The museum’s annual report presented it as the most notable acquisition of the year, securing a “particularly rich” development of the museum’s section for folklore and ancient beliefs (*forntro*). To exemplify the exploits the report included a photograph of the skull figure, described as “Captain Elin’s so-called idol” (Fataburen 1927:28).

Scholars have known since the late 1990s that only one of the objects in the collection (the horn) matches an item described in the trial against Elin in Mofikerud (see Schön 1998, 90–91; Skott 1999); the others, we can be sure, have nothing to do with her. The circumstances of how the collection came to be associated with captain Elin, and whether a more exact provenance of the other striking objects can be established have not been probed. In the present article we address these issues in three separate movements, seeking to deepen the “social biography” (Gustafsson Reinius 2009) of the so-called witchcraft tools. Loosely inspired by Hayden White’s (1974) metahistorical approach, we show how the objects have been inscribed in competing narratives of “witchcraft”, “superstition”, and “idolatry”, and argue that the different plot structures that imbue the objects with meaning must be related to the socio-political positioning of the narrators.

In the first part, we consider both the origins of the captain Elin legend and the formation of “captain Elin’s witchcraft tools” as a collection of its own. We argue that the legend and the collection emerged in tandem, in a very specific context: in a socio-politically liberal milieu surrounding the Göta Court of Appeal in Jönköping in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. While the legend would eventually become a stock item of witchcraft folklore across the country, we show that its original impetus was as a triumphalist narrative of liberal progress, from a dark age of superstition to the light of reason and justice. In the second part, we turn to the first interpretations of the “witchcraft tools” on the part of academics, more specifically to the founder of Swedish ethnology Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius’ interpretation of the skull figure, which he saw as an “idol” and a “fetish”. Here the object is inscribed in a completely different narrative of witchcraft, replacing the liberal story of progress with a conservative and organicist story that links witchcraft to the idolatry of foreign tribes and the competition between races and cultures.

In the third and final part, we turn to the provenance of the so-called idol. Given that we first encounter the “witchcraft tools” in the Göta Court of Appeal’s archive of trial materials, it has been assumed that they derive not

from a single event, but rather from a number of different trials involving “magic” at local courts. Per Sörlin (1993) identified no less than 353 cases involving magic submitted to the Göta Court of Appeal between 1635 and 1754. We provide archival evidence from one of these local trials, which was held at Karlskrona in the winter of 1709 and tried by the Göta appeal court in spring, featuring an artefact made from bone, carved with eyes, teeth, and a nose, and at a size fitting in the palm of a hand.⁶ This evidence places the object in a completely new context. Rather than belonging to a rural woman accused of witchcraft by her fellow parishioners, we show that the skull figure was confiscated from a peripatetic Romani woman by the name of Anna Maria Adamsdotter, who by her own account used it to trick the majority settled population into believing that she possessed magical powers – including the ability to break curses and defend against witchcraft. The trial against this woman casts light on the socioeconomic conditions of the early Scandinavian Romani community, its survival strategies, and relationships with the majority population and the law. Moreover, we adduce comparative evidence suggesting that the practices described by Anna Maria, including how the skull figure was used, were part a broader tradition that survived in certain Romani contexts at least into the mid-twentieth century.

This new context makes for a radical departure from previous interpretations of captain Elin’s “idol”. The collection has historically served to prop up mnemohistorical narratives of witchcraft that were tightly connected with the construction of national identity, whether by contrasting it with the witchcraft of the unenlightened past (the liberal narrative) or the idolatry of foreign tribes (the conservative narrative). The trial of Anna Maria Adamsdotter presents us with a deeper narrative layer provided by a rare subaltern narrator position, which forces us to read the later re-narrations of the skull figure ironically. For its user, the object was in a certain sense related both to ethnic competition and to ridiculing superstitions: the use of the skull figure demonstrated the rational and enlightened nature of the Romani minority, who could skilfully reveal and exploit the “superstitious” witchcraft beliefs of the majority population.

The Magic Chamber: Origins of the Captain Elin Legend in Jönköping

For more than a century, the archive of the Göta Court of Appeal in Jönköping hosted a showroom of objects collected from trial materials sent to the court as part of appeal processes. Murder weapons, tools for illegal coining, and the belongings of infamous criminals were displayed to curious visitors. These trophies of the justice system also included numerous objects related to the practice of witchcraft, divination, and sorcery. Our earliest source for

the court's collection of magical objects is Carl von Linné's (1745) diary of his journey to Öland and Gotland, which took him through Småland and Jönköping in 1741:

Aug 19 [1741], Smoland. *Jönköpings Stad* ...

The Göta Court of Appeal was situated in the middle of the square, in which we witnessed a large collection of witchcraft instruments [*hexerie-instrumenter*], such as black books, which we read and found full of frivolity and vanity, of old and false recipes, of Idolatry, of superstitious prayers and prayers to devils ... Here was also seen other artistic pieces of tied knots of threads, silk, horsehair. We blew on the holy horn, without any devils appearing, and milked the milk staff, without getting milk. Here were seen magical hairballs, made neither by witches (*trollkåringar*) nor devils, but by the third stomach of a ruminant creature (Linné 1745:330–331).

Linné's sarcastic comments are representative of an Enlightenment attitude to magic that does not only display contempt for the follies of superstition, but also an obvious fascination; seeing these "witchcraft instruments" was the only thing he found worth reporting from his stay in Jönköping. It has been suggested that some of the items Linné described, at least the "milk staff", refer to items now in the Nordic Museum (e.g. Gadelius 1913, 286; Bringéus 1966, 289; Schön 1998, 91–92; Skott 1999, 111). The other items specifically mentioned were all common to early modern folk magic, and not necessarily connected with "witchcraft". Black books were well-known elements of Scandinavian (e.g. Wikman ed. 1957; af Klintberg 1965; Grambo 1979; Johannsen 2018) and wider North-European (e.g. Davies 2009) folk magic, and magic knots for healing, love, protection, and divination have been attested world-wide (Day 1967), including among Swedish cunning folk as late as the twentieth century (Hammarstedt 1920:49–51).

Except a short notice in Samuel Rogberg and Eric Ruda's *Historisk Beskrifning om Småland* (1770:514–515), we do not hear about the collection in Jönköping again until the early nineteenth century. By this time, the court's magical objects had apparently been assembled in a special section on the archival floor, which was regularly shown to visitors, apparently with a guide (Scheutz 1841; "Onkel Adam" [Wetterbergh] 1851). Moreover, it had now been explicitly connected with the legend of captain Elin.

In fact, the captain Elin legend seems to have developed in Jönköping in the early 1800s, in close connection with the exhibition of magical items at the Göta Court of Appeal. The background for the legend was a late witchcraft trial involving a number of women and a handful of men in Södra Ny, Värmland, in 1720–1721. One of the women involved in the case, Elin Erikdotter, of Mofikerud torp, was accused of being the leader of the pack, and was for this called "captain". The trial and its eventual outcomes have been thoroughly covered by Fredrik Skott (1999), and need not concern us in detail here. Two points should nevertheless be mentioned: First, that

contrary to the legend material, none of the accused were sentenced to death. Elin Eriksdotter together with Lisbet Hansdotter were given the harshest sentences, namely a beating followed by church duty and banishment (Skott 1999:132). Second, that the case was effectively prevented from blowing up thanks to the higher instances in the justice system, notably the governor (*landshövding*) Conrad Ribbing and the Göta Court of Appeal, which handled the case with an active scepticism towards accusations of travels to Blåkulla and pacts with the devil.⁷

However, unofficial accounts of the first hearings in the case, before higher instances were involved, appear to have spread to a wider public early on. An account by Johan Råbock (1685–1752; also rendered as Jöns Råbeck), a county clerk who attended the first special court hearing in August 1720, described the events of the trial in his own words, sometimes in greater detail than the official protocol. Central to this early hearing was the witness of a young girl, Britta Persdotter, probably just ten at the time of the trial (see Skott 1999:116), who introduced all of the most fantastical elements of the story, including the nocturnal flight with the devil. Råbock's account of these proceedings seems to have circulated widely in the following years, since several copies of it have survived. One is kept in Värmlands arkiv, another was cited by Bengt Ankarloo (1977), and we have come into possession of a third copy, dated 1733.⁸

Seeing that the Råbock account included the fantastical elements of a nightly journey to Blåkulla, encounters with the devil, and Elin Eriksdotter as the “captain” of the witches, it is possible that oral traditions surrounding “captain Elin” began with its circulation and copying. It is, however, in Jönköping in the early 1800s that we first find evidence of a fully-fledged legend that is distributed more widely, through print media, and oral tradition with reference to material objects.

Previous research identifies a popular chapbook on captain Elin first published 1815 as the main source of the captain Elin legend. However, it appears that this booklet was an expanded and only slightly edited version of an earlier source: an article published on 9 April 1800, on Long Friday, in the short-lived newspaper *Jönköpings Allahanda*. Published weekly between January 1797 and December 1803, *Jönköpings Allahanda* was the nave in Jönköping's liberal public sphere until it was shut down by the state in 1803 due to an article that offended Gustav IV's censorious regime (cf. Lundstedt 1969 [1903]). The paper had close ties to the Göta court: its editor was the publicist, author, and painter Anders Johan Wetterbergh (1769–1840), who would later become a senior judge at the court. The article that concerns us here, published in the opening editorial column and probably penned by Wetterbergh himself, was intended to “amuse a large part of the public” (*roga en stor del af Allmänheten*) by letting them “read during Easter weekend a faithful account of the famous witch Captain Elin's supposed



The first page of *Jönköpings Allahanda*, April 9, 1800.

journeys to Blåkulla” (*den ryktbara Trollbackans Capten Elins förmenta resor til Blåkulla*). The text of the newspaper article contained an excerpt of trial records kept at the Göta Court of Appeal’s archives, published, as the editor stated, “under the assumption that each and every one clearly sees that this whole strange event did not happen for any other reason than the past’s ignorance and superstition”.⁹ The entire case was, the author reminds us, based on the sole witness of the child Britta Persdotter. Britta’s account from the special court hearing in August 1720, before the higher instances got involved in the case, was then cited in full.

That the newspaper refers to captain Elin as “famous” (*ryktbar*) may indicate that oral traditions were already well established in Jönköping in 1800. The assumption that debunking its superstitious foundations will amuse the public, along with the direct and self-explanatory reference to the archives of the city’s court, further testifies to a widely shared oral memory. That the story was told in the service of a liberal, enlightened narrative, ironizing over the ignorance of the past, is particularly noteworthy, not least because this previously unnoticed newspaper publication appears to be the opening salvo in the developing captain Elin legend.

Fifteen years later, the very same account would surface again in the chapbook entitled *Tillförlitlig Berättelse, om Den Ryktbara Trollpackan Kapten Elins förmenta Resa till Blåkulla, och Bekantskap med Djefwulen* (1815), this time reaching a much larger audience. Bror Gadelius (1913:278) observed that twelve editions of the chapbook had been published around the country by 1858; it was thus instrumental in spreading the legend of captain Elin on a national level. Later authors have repeated Gadelius’ assessment

(e.g. Skott 1999). The book had become significant enough that it was listed in Per Bäckström's *Svenska folkböcker* under the category "stories about magic" (*trolldomshistorier*) in 1848 (Bäckström 1848:116). While we still do not know who compiled it, nobody seems to have noticed the importance of the fact that the chapbook, too, was first printed in Jönköping, and seems to have emerged from popular lore about captain Elin taking root in that town.

The long title of the 1815 chapbook already demonstrates that the text relied on the publication in *Jönköpings Allahanda* fifteen years earlier, as it reproduces almost verbatim a sentence from the newspaper's introduction. The chapbook also reproduces the same court materials, though in a more complete version, with a slightly revamped opening and a new closing statement. The opening materials are again based on the article of Easter 1800, beginning with the same declaration that the story is published on the assumption that readers will find the explanation for the events in the superstitions and ignorance of the past.

The most notable addition is that the chapbook contained the court's final statement, disappointing though it was from a dramatic point of view: no sentences were passed, the court instead promising that further investigations were to take place. This anti-climax did not stop the compiler of the chapbook from inventing a dramatic ending of their own:

a special commission was thereafter appointed to, after further investigations, try this case, and following the sentence in accordance with the law, captain Elin and some of her other accomplices were executed and burned on the pyre (anon. 1815, 41).¹⁰

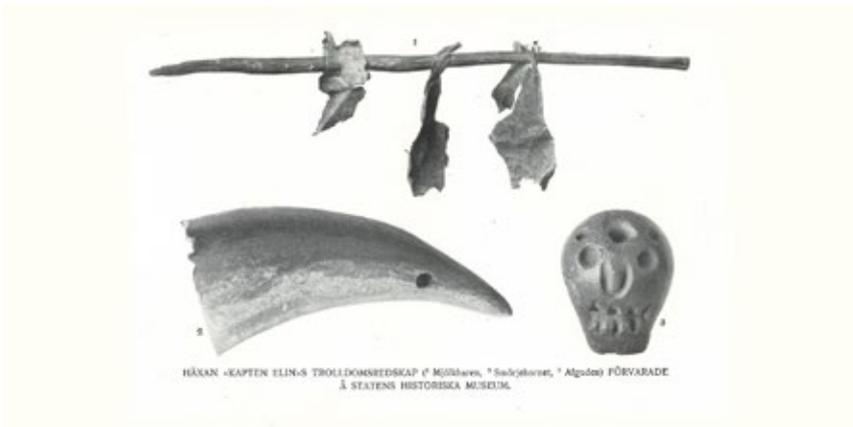
With the chapbook, a legend expressing the liberal cultural memory of witchcraft and witch-hunts had reached completion, with invented death sentences at the stake as the logical conclusion of the past's superstitions.

By describing the narrative as "liberal", we are not just highlighting its progressive assumptions, satirical emplotment and negational mode of framing the described events (cf. White 1974); we also point to the socioeconomic and political milieu in which it was narrated. The captain Elin legend was formed in a milieu of liberal, Enlightenment publicists in Jönköping with tight connections to emerging industry and the courthouse, with the intention of showcasing how far society had come on the path from the darkness of superstition to the light of reason. The chapbook did not only plagiarize the earlier account by the liberal publicist Wetterbergh, it was also printed by Johan Peter/Pehr Lundström (1783–1868), who in 1806 had bought the town's printing press, Marquardska tryckeriet, which had been shut down by the government in the censorship crackdown on *Jönköpings Allahanda* three years earlier (Klemming & Nordin 1883:490–491; Täckmark 1982–1984). Lundström, who was the father of Johan Edvard Lundström who

invented the mass-production of safety matches that became Jönköping's industrial backbone in the second half of the century, came to dominate the printing business in the region. His production sought to educate and enlighten the broader public, for example by printing cheap dime publications (*skillingtryck*) as well as a massive production of so-called *kistebrev*, cards with colourful images and an explanatory text, often with religious, historical, or humorous themes (Täckmark 1982–1984; Bringéus 1999:15–21).¹¹ As Hanna Enefalk (2013) has shown, these kinds of printed materials emerged together with the establishment of liberal newspapers across Sweden in the nineteenth century, often reproducing already existing materials (Enefalk 2013:75–80). Lundström's chapbook on captain Elin fits these patterns well; it continued the purpose of the *Jönköpings Allahanda's* editorial of amusing its reader while enlightening them.

We will now argue that another important component – and the reason why all of this happened in Jönköping – was that the legend had already been connected with the material objects displayed at the courthouse. Two sources point us in this direction. The first is a work of historical fiction – a serialized novel published in the newspaper *Aftonbladet* in 1841 – and centred on a location described as the “Magic Chamber” (*trollkammaren*) in the archives of the Göta courthouse. The second is a memoir published 1851 in *Dalslands nya tidning*. While the genres and time of publication indicate that the facticity of these sources can be questioned, they were both penned by people who had grown up in and around the same liberal publicist milieu in Jönköping that produced the chapbook. They thus provide hints of how the magic items were perceived, certainly at the time the accounts were penned, but likely much earlier than that.

The first evidence is a serialized novella published in *Aftonbladet* in five parts in 1841. Set in the first decade of Gustav III's government, the late 1770s, it is a mix of gothic romance, courtroom drama, and political satire. We follow the young notary Fabian Alfors who spends late nights by candlelight in the archives of the Göta Court of Appeal, crouching over old witchcraft protocols, while dreaming up cheap poetry to the girl he has dear. In an early scene, Fabian hears a noise from the big archive room, and rushes out to find a mysterious, barefooted girl by the “magic chamber”, where captain Elin's witchcraft tools are displayed. She takes the milk hare and cuts off some of its woollen threads with a scissor, puts them in a pocket, and, following a kerfuffle with Fabian as he tries to stop her, manages to escape. It later emerges that the girl is Fabian's secret love interest, the upper-class miss von Halders, and that she has followed instructions from a cunning woman to take the belongings of a witch – at night on the new moon, barefooted and without saying a word – so that its magic powers could be used to revive her sister who had fallen into a mysterious mesmeric sleep.



The “milk hare,” “ointment horn,” and “idol” while still in the State Historical Museum. Photograph published in Gadelius 1913: 288-289.

The memory of captain Elin plays an important role in the story, and is first evoked when the room with magical instruments is described:

The room was at that time generally known in the town under the name of the magic chamber, and comprised the inner and most holy of the court’s archival rooms, which covered that whole floor. It had gained its name because several witchcraft tools were stored there, among them a veritable ointment horn, a magical whistle pipe produced from an eagle’s claw, and a so called milk hare, which far from looking like a hare or other creature, was simply made from the warp beam of a loom with some dark red wool threads, but was said to have the beneficial property for its owner that she only needed to hang it over her milk staff in order to lure from its threads the milk of any cow in the whole world. These mysterious items belonged to an estate that the court had inherited from the, during Carl XI’s time,¹² famous “captain Elin”, the officer of her time’s travels to Blåkulla. When some stranger would explore the town’s notable sites and visit the courthouse, there was always a caretaker present to show him the magic chamber’s treasures ... (Scheutz 1841:1).¹³

As the story progresses, we learn that Fabian Alfors’ mission in the archive is to provide evidence of the cruelty and injustice caused by the irrational witchcraft trials of the past, in order to convince king and parliament to repeal the witchcraft legislation. This, of course, happened in 1779; in the story, Fabian is rewarded with a promotion at the court, and also wins his true love’s hand in marriage. In the final scene, the story turns into courtroom drama (or farce), when a zealot of a prosecutor who has not accepted the new legislation wants the cunning woman whom we met earlier executed for witchcraft. The prosecutor’s evidence features a pair of scissors found on the cunning woman, which the prosecutor claims had belonged to captain Elin who was executed “four hundred years ago”. The young

attorney Alfors turns the case by dismantling the captain Elin story, showing that the scissors were modern, and in fact engraved with the date 1777 and the initials of miss von Halders, Alfors' now wife, who had simply "misplaced" them (*Aftonbladet* no. 200, Aug. 21, 1841, p. 3).

While hardly a literary masterpiece, this short story is significant as our earliest known evidence of the captain Elin legend being connected directly to the collection in the Göta Court of Appeal. Like the earlier chapbook and newspaper article, the legend is used primarily as a way to ironize over the ignorance of those who believe in witchcraft. The courtroom scene makes this plainly evident; the prosecutor makes a fool of himself not only by associating just about anything with captain Elin, but also by hyperbolically and erroneously placing Elin four hundred years in the past. It should be noted that the frame story, too, had Elin misplaced, locating her in the reign of Carl XI in the 1660s-1690s, at the peak of the Swedish witch hunts (see e.g. Ankarloo 2010).

The story of Fabian Alfors and the magic chamber would have been of little historical relevance were it not for its author. It was written by Per Georg Scheutz (1785–1873), yet another liberal author with a strong connection to the Jönköping courthouse, working as a notary and inventor (Burius 2000–2002:533). Best known for having invented an early calculator, Scheutz had worked at the Göta Court of Appeal for five years between 1805 and 1809 – that is to say in the period between the first publication of record transcripts in *Jönköpings Allahanda* and the 1815 chapbook. His experiences at the court makes it tempting to read his descriptions of the magic chamber as carrying some factual force. It adds credence to the idea that the witchcraft items were proudly displayed to visitors from out of town, that a caretaker employed by the court would act as guide, and that the items were orally connected to captain Elin. If this was indeed the case before 1809, when Scheutz worked at the courthouse, a thicker picture of the chapbook starts to emerge. A local oral tradition is kept alive in the court building at the town's central square, used to amaze visitors but which townspeople knew not to take too seriously.

This picture is corroborated in a memoir by the author, physician, and graphic artist Carl Anton Wetterbergh, published under the signature "Onkel Adam" in *Dalslands nya tidning* in 1851 (see *Nordisk familjebok* [1921], vol. 32, 138–139; Lundberg 1943). Wetterbergh was the son of the previously mentioned Anders Johan Wetterbergh, the editor of *Jönköpings Allahanda* and later judge who is our most likely suspect for penning the article that was later expanded into the chapbook. Carl Anton thus grew up in the same progressive milieu around the Göta court that gave us the captain Elin story. Politically, too, the younger Wetterbergh was involved in liberal causes, including the failed 1848 uprising for democratic reform and abolition of the Riksdag of the Estates (Lundberg 1943:36–39).

Speaking of the Jönköping courthouse, and echoing both Linné and Scheutz, but in his own words and with further details added, Wetterbergh recalls that:

In a corner of these catacombs of justice there was a table which contained its very own collection. It was comprised of several artistic and natural items that had been used in the commitment of crimes. Big sticks with brass coating, picks, knives, scythes, vials with poison, rocks, false coin stamps, false keys, magic horns, ointment jars ... but the most curious was captain Elin's milk hare, a contraption put together by the warp beam of a loom (*wäfspån*) and some rags, and about which old caretaker Bogren told, how historically accurate I do not know, that it had been used by captain Elin, the well-known witch (*trollqwinnan*), to milk the cows of others¹⁴ (Onkel Adam 1851:1).

According to Wetterbergh, the rumour that the court's magical tools had belonged to captain Elin were regularly told by a named individual, caretaker Bogren. A search of the church books of Jönköping Kristina parish reveals that this individual was likely Peter Bogren (1762–1834), who appears there as “Hofrätts Vaktmästare” (caretaker of the appeal court).¹⁵ A “hofrättswaktmästare Bogren” is also frequently mentioned in local newspaper notices in Jönköping from 1812 to the 1830s, painting the picture of a central and well-known individual in Jönköping's everyday cultural and economic life – even though locals took his stories of captain Elin's witchcraft tools with a pinch of salt.

The argument so far can be summarized in the following three points. First, that the archival rooms of the Göta Court of Appeal functioned as a kind of legal history museum, perhaps as early as 1741 when Linné visited Jönköping, but certainly by the early nineteenth century. A collection of supposed witchcraft instruments was part of this exhibition; at least by the early nineteenth century, caretakers of the court, like Peter Bogren, would communicate a connection between these items and the captain Elin legend to visitors. Second, the legend of captain Elin was enshrined in written memory when a group of liberal publicists, jurists and industrialists with a connection to the court found parts of the original protocol at the Göta court and published it in 1800, later expanded in the 1815 chapbook. The purpose of these publications was to ridicule the belief in witchcraft and celebrate the advances of a rational and modern justice system. We do not know for sure whether the oral memory connecting Elin to the items kept at the courthouse predated the publication of the trial records, or the other way around. Written testimony from the trial of Elin in Mofikerud had circulated since the 1720s in manuscript form, which could have given rise to oral traditions to which the publications of 1800 and 1815 reacted. But it is equally plausible that the Elin legend became a frame story for the items at the court after the publications. At any rate, and this is our third point, the citizens of Jönköping appear not to have taken the connection between Elin and the items too seriously.

Tales of Trolls and Witches: The Idol in Early Ethnology

The interpretation of the witchcraft instruments at the Göta Court of Appeal was about to undergo a big shift, not just in terms of how they were interpreted, but by whom and in what context. In the middle of the nineteenth century the court's collection started to attract the attention of academics, and by the 1860s, two of the founding fathers of Swedish ethnology had published their own interpretations of some of the items: L. F. Rääf in 1856, and Gunnar Hyltén-Cavallius in 1864. As a result of this new attention, in print and with illustrations of some of the items, the Swedish state antiquary, pursuing a policy of centralization and state ownership of antiquities,¹⁶ would soon demand that the collection was moved from Jönköping to the State Historical Museum in Stockholm (cf. Bringéus 1966:289–290). The correspondence between the state antiquary B. E. Hildebrand and the Göta Court of Appeal in 1864 provides some further clues to how the collection was viewed in Jönköping. Regarding the attribution to captain Elin, the court pointed out that “most of it is only based in tradition and that to verify this tradition would require a much too time-consuming and also likely fruitless search in the Royal Court of Appeal's acts and protocols.”¹⁷

The result of this chain of events – the interest of ethnological experts and relocation to the capital – was a loss of the local oral memories surrounding these items, which had contained a stance of incredulity and scepticism regarding their attribution. The erasure of this local oral tradition created room for new interpretations, which would lead to the items being inscribed in a different narrative tradition with a strong conservative and nationalistic bent.

It was also in this chain of events that attention was for the first time drawn to the skull figure, which has been conspicuously absent from all the sources on the Jönköping collection we have considered so far. The paper trail produced by the relocation of the collection contains a hint to why the skull figure did not appear earlier. According to the Göta court's inventory list, the skull figure had been kept in a tin box together with the bird's claw and cranium piece “since time immemorial” (*från urminnes tider*), and they had no idea whether this box, too, had been ascribed to Elin.¹⁸ In fact, the court archivists did not seem too interested in the skull figure: misidentifying its material, the inventory describes it neutrally as “a piece of wood with carvings, picturing a face”. A later hand, probably by antiquarians in Stockholm, corrected the misidentification of the material by adding “of bone” in parenthesis. The Stockholm antiquarians were notably more excited about the item, describing it as “a bone *barbarically* carved as a human face”.¹⁹

The academic interest in the collection that eventually led to its relocation seems to have begun with Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius (1818–1889),

who first saw the items in 1834, while sheltering from a cholera epidemic at the home of the Göta court judge C. A. Björkman's home (see Bringéus 1966:289). He was apparently intrigued by the captain Elin legends he heard there; while travelling through Jönköping five years later, in 1839, he did some research on a "magic book" that was alleged to have been hers, finding that it was not a book of magic at all but rather the accounting books of a fifteenth-century estate (Bringéus 1966:344). Another four years later, in 1843, we find Hyltén-Cavallius writing to Leonhard Fredrik Rääf (1786–1872), the conservative nobleman and collector of folklore, tipping him that the Göta Court of Appeal holds captain Elin's milk hare in its collection.

Rääf was apparently researching the subject of "milk hares" for what would become the first volume of his *Samlingar och anteckningar till en beskrifning öfver Ydre härad i Östergötland*, published 1856. Contrary to tradition, however, Rääf described milk hares as a sort of magical creatures – an actual hare that the witch would summon to steal a cow's milk. Consequently, Rääf got the local traditions confused when he described captain Elin's milk hare: "The famous witch [*den ryktbara trollpackan*] from Wermland, Captain Elin's, milk hare," Rääf tells us, is "made of a bone joint, carved into the likeness of a hare's head," and "is kept at Göta Court of Appeal together with several of her tools" (Rääf 1856:83). What Rääf describes is of course not the milk hare, which everyone in Jönköping knew was a piece of wood with woollen threads; instead it is the first description of the skull figure in the folkloristic literature.²⁰

It would not be the last. Eight years later, Hyltén-Cavallius published a drawing of the object together with his own interpretation in the first volume of his *Wärend och Wirdarne* (1863). Often seen as the foundational work of Swedish ethnology, it is a fantastical reconstruction of an imagined Swedish prehistory through the local folklore of Wärend in Småland, in two thick volumes.²¹ As Bringéus (1966:152) aptly puts it, the work is premised on interpreting folk tales ethnologically rather than mythologically – in euhemeristic fashion, creatures such as "trolls" and "giants" appearing in folk tales are interpreted as referring to different "races" or "tribes" that had migrated to these lands at different times and largely supplanted each other. Obscure artefacts, structures, and folk traditions were interpreted in light of this grand narrative of the racial elements making up the Swedish "folk".

The euhemeristic use of trolls and giants as signifying different groups of peoples was far from original to Hyltén-Cavallius,²² but he was the first to turn this interpretive lens to the materials from the Göta Court of Appeal. While Hyltén-Cavallius retained the "traditional" attribution of the objects to the "witch" (*trollpackan*) captain Elin, he added a narrative layer borrowed wholesale from then popular Gothicist theories of how Sweden had been populated through consecutive waves of migrations of different

peoples. Magic, in the sense of *trolldom*, had a special place in this story. According to Hylltén-Cavallius,

the indigenous people of Wärend, and of the larger part of Göta kingdom, consisted of Trolls, which already from the earliest prehistory followed a wild nature life as hunters and fishermen in the land's ancient forests and waterways. On the intrusion of younger farming tribes this indigenous people was partially enslaved, partially also displaced (Hylltén-Cavallius 1863:82).

From contemporary folktales about trolls he concluded that this ancient people "had been viewed as a foreign tribe, which was not counted as 'people', 'Christian people', and which ethnic name, Troll, did not even have a grammatical gender. We must from this reach the conclusion that the trolls were of a different nationality than our ancestors, with foreign appearances, language, ways of life and customs" (Hylltén-Cavallius 1863:84). To this story of racial domination, segregation, and eventual displacement of the trolls is added a racialized explanation of magic and sorcery. The Swedish word "trolldom" (sorcery, witchcraft, magic) was, according to Hylltén-Cavallius, originally a word used for the religion of the trolls:

their religious practice and ideas ... were seen by the new tribes with the utmost disgust and in language summarized under the name *Trolldom* – a word which have been coined from the ethnonym Troll, and in accordance with its origins denotes this people's customs, practices and being in general. ... Sorcery [*Trolldomen*], such as it is encountered in witch trials [*trollransakningar*] and in the older and younger folklore, is therefore to our mind a continuous tradition from the ancient people, the trolls (Hylltén-Cavallius 1863:84–85).

Sorcery is a survival of the religious practices of a foreign race, now mostly but not entirely supplanted. Some trolls have survived in remote areas, and it is clear that Hylltén-Cavallius thinks of the Sami and the Forest-Finns, whose relation to the ancient tribe of trolls, as he would have it, explains their associations with magic.²³ By contrast, sorcery is alien to the majority population of Hylltén-Cavallius' Sweden. Ordinary Swedes, he insisted, are descended not from trolls but from the interbreeding of giants with later gothic tribes.

This racially disenchanting fairytale determines Hylltén-Cavallius' interpretation of the skull figure, which to him was a material witness of the ancient "fetishism" of the trolls:

There are even traces of the fetish worship of the Trolls. Among magical tools from the witch trials, a fetish is still preserved at Göta hofrätt, made from the leg bone joint of some larger animal, and formed in the likeness of a grotesque head in accordance with the adjoining drawing. This gross fetish shall, according to legends, have been worshipped by one among the younger witches as an idol, and it is likely that she, in this as in other superstition, simply followed those practices which once were common among her ancestors, of the old south-Swedish troll people (Hylltén-Cavallius 1863:93).



Drawing of the “idol” published by Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius.

Hyltén-Cavallius’ work is characteristic for inscribing the memory of magic in the folklore-inspired nationalistic narratives that dominated Swedish ethnology and folklore well into the twentieth century. Similar to the historical imagination of Enlightenment liberals, magic is a negative but fascinating other, which the majority of the population has long since discarded. But there are two main differences, both of which are tied to what early folklorists and ethnologists tried to achieve, not just in Sweden but internationally.

The first is the notion that folk traditions are windows to a people’s soul: elements of “magic” attested in modern folklore and various ritualistic customs in the countryside are survivals from the deep past, and hold insights about early society that can be decoded by the ethnologist possessing the right hermeneutic key. The second is that this interpretive key lies in a historiographic mode that narrates history as made by the competition of various races or “tribes” with different essential characteristics in culture as well as biology. Magic, Hyltén-Cavallius insists, is really the degenerated religion of the trolls, a race of primitive hunter-gatherers who were enslaved and displaced by more advanced farming tribes. In line with strong diffusionist notions of language, culture, and people popular at the time, he could not avoid imagining that modern practitioners of witchcraft or sorcery were the biological descendants of trolls. To Hyltén-Cavallius, the witchcraft tools of captain Elin bore witness to the continued presence of alien racial elements in Swedish society. This conclusion, of course, was derived solely from his own narrative ambitions, showing no interest whatsoever in what was known, even in his own time, about the historical Elin of Mofikerud or the witchcraft trials more broadly. He had created an entirely new cultural memory – in writing, and in the service of Sweden’s newfound, post-imperial nationalism – supplanting the older oral memories that had emerged in Jönköping.

A New Context: The Entrepreneurial Magic of Early-Modern Roma

Despite his careless mode of interpreting culture, Hyltén-Cavallius was accidentally right about one thing: that the skull figure had belonged to a member of one of Sweden's ethnic minorities. Rather than the Sami or the Finns, however, it appears to have belonged to the Romani woman Anna Maria Adamsdotter, who was part of a network of Roma families that started establishing themselves in Scandinavia around 1700 and whose descendants include the Swedish and Norwegian Travelers, or *resandefolket*, and probably also the related Finnish *kaale* Roma.²⁴

We know quite a bit about Anna Maria Adamsdotter, since she appears in a number of trial records all over Sweden and Finland in the period 1702 to 1731.²⁵ In all trials in which she appears she is described as a “Gypsy” (“*zigenare*”, “*tartarska*”), an ascription that she sometimes appears to approve and confirm with pride.²⁶ She was probably born around 1680 on the Continent, perhaps in Frankfurt am Main,²⁷ and appears in the sources speaking Swedish,²⁸ French, German, and “her own language” or “the language of her ancestors”, sometimes described as “Gypsy” (“*Tartarsk*”). Five sentences and one free-standing word in this language were transcribed in the same 1709 court records in which the skull figure is described, and have been identified as a dialect of Romani.²⁹ This is currently the earliest known sample of written Romani in the Nordic countries.³⁰

We frequently find Anna Maria Adamsdotter associating with well-known ancestors of contemporary Swedish Travelers (*resande*), demonstrating that she was part of the network of Romani extended families that had ties to the Continent and which established themselves in the Nordic countries during the 1600–1700s (see e.g. Etzler 1944; Minken 2007; now also Lindqvist 2022). From her many trials we learn that she had at least three romantic partners, one born in Germany, one in Denmark, and one in Finland; like most “Gypsy” men in Sweden during this period, they all worked for some time in the military.³¹ We also find evidence in this material that the early-modern Roma could trade with the Sami, selling tin and buying handicrafts that could then be sold elsewhere. In one trial, Anna Maria's family got into trouble when travelling with a Sami girl (*lappiga*); Anna Maria's son had apparently warned against bringing the Sami along, because “she is white and we are black”.³²

Anna Maria's run-ins with the law were rewarded with no less than three death sentences: in 1709, 1711, and 1724.³³ As was common in the period, these sentences were all overturned by a higher court. Like many of her associates Anna Maria also experienced being deported from Sweden, first to Norway from where she soon returned, and then to Russia to which she never arrived, settling in Finland with her family before reaching the

border. All these connections, events, and complicated relationships with the majority population and with the state places Anna Maria Adamsdotter at the heart of Swedish Romani culture at the waning of the Great Power era. It is in this context, and particularly in the interactions between Roma and the majority society, that we locate the skull figure.

The new evidence of the skull figure's context contradicts most of the things that have been said about it. It was not an "idol", it was not used for witchcraft, and, crucially, it does not attest to the "superstitions" of a foreign people to be contrasted with the good common sense of the majority Swedish population. The owner's explanations of how the skull figure was used instead point us to the pragmatic and economic dimensions of "folk magic", and the skilful monetization of the majority population's own prejudices and demand for magic.

*From Sock Thief to Gypsy Sorceress:
The Trial of Anna Maria Adamsdotter*

On Christmas Eve 1708, at the onset of an exceptionally cold winter that would later be known as the "Great Frost", the merchant and councilman Christopher Diderik Österman in the southern Swedish town of Karlskrona noticed that seven pairs of socks had gone missing from his stall. He must soon have singled out the "gypsy woman" Anna Maria Adamsdotter, who stayed in the town with her two daughters and her companion, Bartolomeus Ludwig, who served as a military drummer in the local regiment, for on January 11, 1709, the court met to try her for theft. In her initial testimony, Anna Maria confirmed that she had been in possession of the socks, but explained that she had been given them as payment from "a girl in a blue sweater", who had come up to her on Christmas Eve asking to have her fortunes told and get some help with finding a husband. Asked by the court how she could help the girl find a man, Anna Maria answered that she had given her a piece of a root, which should be tied into a cloth. By hitting a man over the back with the cloth he would be so kindled with love for her that he could not get any rest whether day or night. Anna Maria was careful to add that she did not mean to imply any superstition on her own part: it was just a trick that she did to make a living, and she said that she had been doing this and other forms of trickery all over Sweden and Denmark since her teens, as her mother had taught her.

Anna Maria Adamsdotter's explanation did not placate the court, which eventually found her guilty of theft and sentenced her to pay a fine worth three times the value of the seven socks. In addition, the testimony triggered the court to initiate a separate investigation into Anna Maria's "fortune telling, sorcery and fraudulent arts" (*spådom, signeri och bedrägeliga konster*). Eventually, the Karlskrona court would pass a death sentence, finding support for this in the 1662 royal placard that ordered "gypsies" (*tartare och*

zigeuner) to be deported from the country or, if they had committed a crime, executed without trial. This is the first occasion we know of in which the explicitly anti-Gypsy legislation was used to issue a death sentence. As was customary for capital punishment, however, the sentence was passed on to the Göta Court of Appeal which, on May 15, overturned and replaced it with a milder sentence of corporal punishment and Christian education.

Secrets of the Trade

During the twelve days in court that the two trials took, we learn a considerable bit about what services Anna Maria offered, her intentions in practicing them, how she performed them, for whom, and with what materials. Besides fortune-telling and love magic, she listed six other specific tricks, describing them in some detail and insisting that they were all based on illusions and trickery rather than “the devil’s work” (*diewullskonst*). Whether the task was to break curses, find a thief, or drive away rodents (a trick she claimed to use mostly on “rich farmers and priests”), she claimed no wrongdoing: anyone “stands free to let himself be fooled, who believes in it” (“*står den fritt att låta nara sig, som sätter troo dertill*”).

A number of material objects were described as Anna Maria sought to convince the court that her tricks were designed to create the illusion of powerful magic and thereby establish credibility with her “simple-minded” (*enfaldiga*) customers. It is clear from the record that some of these items, like the previously mentioned root and a doll she referred to as “Little Satan”, were physically present and displayed in the courtroom. The root is described by the court as dried, diced, and strung on a thread. When pressed to identify it, Anna Maria says that it is called *Candajas* “in the language of her ancestors”, which the court identifies as “Gypsy” (*Tartarsk*).³⁴ As for “Little Satan”, the court described it as made from an old dark grey sock, with a piece of darkened wood as head, lead for eyes, bird’s claws for horns, and hen’s claws for hands. Later in the trial (25 Feb. 1709) she would explain that the doll had nothing to do with her magic; it belonged to her husband, the military drummer Bartolomeus Ludwig, who would use it to perform all sorts of jugglery and comedy puppet plays (“*allehanda giörckelwärk och pollicinell spehl*”) in order to make some money on his travels.³⁵ Anna Maria showed them many other objects, the court noted, but none of “such cruel and horrible shape” as Little Satan.

It is among these other objects described in the trial records that we find an item matching the skull figure that would later wind up in the Göta Court’s collection and eventually the Nordic Museum. When the court had asked what other arts she knew, Anna Maria said that she “takes a bone, which she carves with eyes, teeth and nose, as well as fastens hair onto it with pitch.”³⁶ Unlike “Little Satan”, this object was used as a prop in at least three different magic services that Anna Maria went on to describe in some detail: one for

lifting curses, one for divining misfortune, and one for compelling a thief to return with stolen goods. In the first trick, she would go to a stable or a barn when nobody was watching and burry the skull figure by the entrance. Playing on widespread beliefs about witchcraft, she would then approach the farmer to warn that he had been cursed by his neighbours, and that his livestock was in danger. After agreeing a price for lifting the witch's curse, she would take the farmer in broad daylight to the place where the skull figure had been buried. When they had dug it up and seen it for themselves they would, as she put it, be "strengthened in their belief" (*styrckta i sin troo*).

In a second trick, the bone appears as part of a service promising the recovery of lost property. In the opening act, Anna Maria says that she can conjure the shape of the thief from a bedsheet, in which she will have secretly hidden the skull figure beforehand. When the figure falls out during the procedure that follows, and the grim face of the thief is revealed, she offers for considerable payment to use similarly powerful arts to compel the thief to return with the stolen goods.

Finally, the skull figure is used in a ritual to divine whether misfortune is ahead. The procedure, which involved some deft sleight of hand, also gives us an idea of the object's size. Anna Maria would first ask the farmer or his wife to hold an egg in the palm of their hand and tell them that if there is misfortune, there will be "a devil in the egg". She would place the skull figure under her own left thumb, hold her hand over the egg, say a few words "in her language" over it, and then smash the egg, revealing the skull-shaped figure. The revelation of the devil in the egg would create a demand for further occult services.

The devil in the egg trick is of particular significance because of its explicit Romani connections. First there is the "reading". When the court asked Anna Maria what this reading consisted in, she explained that it contained nothing blasphemous, just some "vain and indecent words in her language, which are without meaning" and only used to create a "reputation" or "prestige" (*anseende*) for herself and her arts in the eyes of the "simple-minded".³⁷ She initially refused to recite and translate the words because it would embarrass the court, but eventually gave in. As a result, five sentences in Romani have been preserved in the record. The notary, however, chose to omit the translation: it had "such an indecent and foul meaning, that for the sake of modesty and decency one will not cite it here."³⁸ For the time being we will continue to spare readers from the details; it suffices to say that Anna Maria opened with insults of a sexually explicit nature.³⁹

Moreover, there is comparative evidence suggesting that the egg trick was part of a wider tradition among early-modern Roma which has in fact survived into modern times. In 1863, Richard Liebich, a judge in Gera, Thuringia, published a collection of "observations" he had made from encounters and conversations with "gypsies" in Germany during his thirty years in the justice system. In one passage about how "gypsies" trick "naïve

farmers” by feigning magic powers, he describes a procedure that is astonishingly similar to Anna Maria’s egg trick. The “gypsies” would do all sorts of tricks to demonstrate their capacity for magic, Liebich wrote, “for example, that the gypsy removes an egg from under the wings of a brooding hen, opens it, and with sleight of hand pulls out a skull-shaped [*tottenkopfähnliches*] or other strange figure” (Liebich 1863:67).⁴⁰ Another striking account is found as late as the mid-twentieth century in Poland in the ethnographic account by author and poet Jerzy Ficowski.⁴¹ Ficowski explains that the *Polska Roma* that he lived with while hiding from the secret police in the late 1940s and 1950s would produce “small figurines and objects known as ‘little devils’, ‘little corpses’, ‘cubes’ and ‘hairy crosses’, which are made of wax, or are compositions from bones, hair etc.” (Ficowski 1989:97–98). Romani women would use these to make money from “the skilful exploitation of the superstitious beliefs of the non-Gypsy population,” Ficowski noted, adding that the “little devils”, called *bengoro* in Romani, were “not images of any Gypsy demons,” but purely intended for “external consumption” (Ficowski 1989:97–98). Among the uses for these little devils he listed “finding” the objects under the threshold of a house or in bedsheets, but he also described a version of the egg trick:

if she [the Romani woman] has an impression that something is going wrong at some farm or another (illness, fowl pest, crop failure), she will ask the peasant woman for a hen’s egg, and wrap it in her shawl, placing it alongside the “little devil” which had been hidden there while the peasant woman was not looking. She asks her client to break the egg, and then unwinds the shawl and takes out of the shell the malevolent little figure. The Gypsy woman will then explain the seriousness of the danger – there is a devil living in the egg (Ficowski 1989:98).

Reading these nineteenth- and twentieth-century accounts in parallel with Anna Maria Adamsdotter’s testimony of 1709 suggests that we are dealing with a specific slight-of-hand trick passed on among some Roma in Northern and Central Europe for centuries. The Polish evidence is particularly striking, as it preserves almost verbatim the same language that Anna Maria used 250 years earlier in Sweden (“little Satan”/*bengoro*,⁴² there is a “devil in the egg”), and lists variations (hiding the object under a threshold or in a bedsheet) that fit the practices she described. If the *bengoro* really was part of a resilient tradition, more examples might emerge from European archives, or from previously misinterpreted objects in collections on magic and witchcraft. To our knowledge, the Nordic Museum’s skull figure is currently the oldest identifiable *bengoro* to have survived.

How certain can we be that Anna Maria’s item is identical with the one now in the Nordic Museum? The description of the skull figure in the trial record focuses on how Anna Maria *produces* the artefact; it is written in the present tense (“she takes a bone and carves it”), indicating that making them

was a recurring practice. The record is not explicit that an example of the skull figure was among the many objects shown to the court, but the fact that the court returned to it several times over, and at separate occasions, may indicate that it was physically present. One detail in the description of Anna Maria's artefact strengthens the identification, namely that she would attach hair on its head with pitch. This might explain the cavities on the top of the artefact in the Nordic Museum, which could have functioned as artificial "hair sacks", making the pitch and hairs stay on top of the head. It also fits the later Polish evidence that a *bengoro* could be composed from bone and hair.

If a specimen was present in the court in 1709, it would have been part of the trial materials passed on to the Göta Court of Appeal when they tried and overruled the local court's death sentence. In other words, we have a clear trajectory of how it would have ended up in the Jönköping collection. Since we have seen that the Göta court archives had "since time immemorial" kept the skull figure in a tin box together with another piece of bone and what they identified as a bird's foot – an item that does explicitly show up in the records in connection with the "little Satan" doll – it is tempting to speculate that the box itself and all its contents derived from the case against Anna Maria. Whatever the case may be, as long as we know of no other descriptions of a similar object Anna Maria Adamsdotter is the most plausible person to have produced, owned, and used the skull figure now preserved in the Nordic Museum. If this interpretation is correct, the skull figure is to our knowledge the earliest known artefact, not just in Sweden but anywhere in the world, that can be connected to a named Romani individual performing and explaining a known cultural practice among North European Roma – that of producing and using *bengoro* to trick "superstitious" peasants. That it appears together with the first known occurrence of recorded Romani in the Nordic countries makes it an object of considerable significance to cultural history.

Conclusion: Anna Maria's Final Trick

What does this new context mean for the artefact's position in narratives about magic in Sweden, and what does it tell us about the position of the Roma? Most strikingly, it represents a radical departure from interpretations casting the artefact as evidence of a practiced witchcraft (the captain Elin legend) or the "idolatrous" ways of a minority population (Hyltén-Cavallius). It is worth mentioning that while the Roma had been associated with "magic" in western Europe since the very first mentions in the early fifteenth century,⁴³ they were never particularly associated with the category of witchcraft or harmful magic (*maleficium*) and they do not figure among the victims of the European witch trials. Instead, it was with the categories of fortune-telling (*sortilegium*) and divination (*divinatio*), as

well as healing, love magic, improvement of riches, and *protection against* harmful magic, that they were most associated (Asprem 2022; cf. Davies 1999:258–265). Their occult niche overlapped with that of village cunning folk (cf. Davies 2003); however, authorities frequently suspected that these practices were fraudulent rather than diabolical.⁴⁴

The role that the skull figure plays in Anna Maria Adamsdotter’s testimony is entirely in line with this broader picture. In all of the “magical” procedures where the skull figure appears, it is used with deception and ingenuity as a credibility-enhancing device. Building on the majority population’s widespread fear of witchcraft – and expectations that “gypsies” could foretell the future and ward off evil – the skull figure was deployed in order to strengthen the customer’s perception that Anna Maria possessed magical powers that could help them.⁴⁵ We have no evidence that the figure had any other internal uses in her community, or that it was connected to an indigenous ritual practice that insiders held to be efficacious. The point was rather to play on the widespread “superstitions” of the majority-population Swedes, whom Anna Maria mockingly described as credulous and “simple-minded”. By speaking a verse in Romani during the operations she also exploited stereotypes about “enchanted gypsies;” as Anna Maria herself put it, the “vain” and “indecent” words spoken in Romani were yet another way to play on the locals’ expectations on the exotic other.⁴⁶

While one could suspect this framing of being a legal strategy for avoiding a sorcery charge, the lengths to which Anna Maria goes to describe exactly how she creates the illusion of magical power through dexterity, deception, sleight-of-hand, and both cold and hot reading, combined with her gleeful stories of how farmers and priests fall for her tricks, all suggest sincerity. As K. Rob. W. Wikman (1946:31) noted with reference to Johan J. Törner’s eighteenth-century collection of “superstitions”, the sorts of beliefs, expectations, and practices that were officially derided and even criminalized as being superstitious were rife in eighteenth-century Sweden, and they existed in all layers of society, from the peasantry to the priesthood to the nobility. The skull figure and its associated ritualizations helped Anna Maria monetize on these widespread expectations.

While we have no evidence to suggest that Anna Maria or her community considered the practices efficacious, they were still clearly part of a tradition. As we have noted, the specific art of producing a skull-shaped bone figure or *bengoro* from an egg appears to have been a widespread tradition surviving at least in German and Polish lands as late as the mid-twentieth century. These traditions are also clearly related to women. Anna Maria claimed to have learned all her tricks from her mother, and in the 1709 trial record we see that her oldest daughter, Dorothea, had already learned some of them, notably to “tell fortunes in hands” and to “read planets” – although Dorothea, too, insisted that she only really assessed the person’s character

and made vague guesses that were likely to impress the client. In an earlier trial, in Karlshamn in 1702, Anna Maria said that her paternal grandmother had owned a “book wherein was nothing but mutilated bodies, of all figures”; given that this obscure statement is made in the context of magic, it could refer to a book on chiromancy or physiognomy rather than anatomy (on “gypsies” and physiognomy, see especially Porter 2005:120–171).

We are aware of several other eighteenth-century Swedish cases where women with a Romani connection provide similar services and explain them in similar ways. These practices form a tradition that, we suggest, must be interpreted from a wider socioeconomic perspective. To Anna Maria and other Romani women, magical services were one among a number of different ways to survive and make a living in a precarious environment. Helped by the expectations that the majority population had on “gypsies” as carriers of magic powers, offering “magical” services could add to other sources of income, such as from trade in handicrafts and horses, or the men’s military salaries. The tradition may also have had a cultural function: not as an “exotic” indigenous form of “efficacious rituals” that could be shared with outsiders, but as small acts of resistance and resilience, demonstrating the ingroup’s shrewdness and the outgroup’s gullibility. In this way, the early-modern Swedish Roma adopted a similar attitude against “superstitious others” as the learned elite was starting to take in the eighteenth century (cf. Oja 2000:292–295). We get a sense of confidence and pride from Anna Maria’s triumphal exposés of her exploits.

The skull figure was designed to evoke an aura of magic in the eyes of the *buro*. In this, Anna Maria Adamsdotter was certainly successful: not only did her clients fall for her tricks, but nineteenth- and twentieth-century folklorists would as well. Just as the skull figure had triggered eighteenth-century farmers’ imaginations into believing that they had been bewitched, scholarly prejudices about witchcraft, primitive religion, and fetishism were projected onto the object as soon as it surfaced from the Göta court archives. These imaginings remain in force. Through the skull figure’s continued association with witchcraft and the captain Elin legend in the Nordic Museum, Anna Maria’s trick still works its magic on Swedish perceptions of a bewitched past.

Egil Asprem

Professor of History of Religions

Department of Ethnology, History of Religions, and Gender Studies

Stockholm University

Universitetsvägen 10-E, Stockholms universitet

SE-106 91 Stockholm

Sweden

egil.asprem@rel.su.se

Sebastian Casinge
casinge@gmail.com

Egil Asprem's research for this article was funded by Vetenskapsrådet (project number 31002950).

References

Archival and Unpublished Sources

- Gävle rådhusrätt, 1724. Landsarkivet Härnösand. AII:49.
Gävleborgs landskansli, 1727–28. Landsarkivet Härnösand. AIIIb:31–32.
Gävleborgs landskansli, 1727–28. Landsarkivet Härnösand. DIIIa:18.
Göta hovrätt, advokatfiskalens arkiv, städernas renoverade domböcker, Karlshamn
KR och RR, 1702. Riksarkivet Vadstena. EVIIBAA:702.
Göta hovrätt, advokatfiskalens arkiv, städernas renoverade domböcker, Karlskrona
KR, 1709. Riksarkivet Vadstena. EVIIBAA:974–75.
Göteborgs rådhusrätt, 1711. Göteborgs landsarkiv. A1a:48.
Göteborgs rådhusrätt, 1712. Göteborgs landsarkiv. E1b:1
Jämtlands domsagas häradsrätt, 1724. Landsarkivet Östersund. A1:45a.
Jönköpings Kristina kyrkoarkiv, Husförhörlängd, A1:19.
Nylands och Tavastehus landskansli, 1731. Landsarkivet Tavastehus. Ea:12.
Råbock, Johan. [Jöns Råbeck?] 1733. Berättelse om trullwäsendet uti Wärmeland.
Private collection.
Statens historiska museer, inventarienummer 3240, del A.
Statens historiska museer, inventarienummer 3240, del B.
Svea hovrätt, renoverade domböcker, Gävleborgs län, Segerstad och Hanebo härads-
rätter, 1723. Riksarkivet Stockholm. EXIIe:3217.
Svea hovrätt, renoverade domböcker, Gävleborgs län, Segerstad häradsrätt, 1724.
Riksarkivet Stockholm. EXIIe:3219.
Svea hovrätt, renoverade domböcker, Kopparbergs län, Falu kämnärsrätt, 1722.
Riksarkivet Stockholm. EXIe:2804.

References and Printed Sources

- Ankarloo, Bengt 1977: Häxprocesser på Värmlandsnäs. *Värmland förr och nu. Värmlands museums årsbok*, 65–68.
Ankarloo, Bengt 2010: *Satans raseri. En sannfärdig berättelse om det stora häx-
oväsendet i Sverige och omgivande länder*. Stockholm: Ordfront.
Anon 1800: *Jönköpings Allahanda* 9 April 1800, pp. 1–3. <https://tidningar.kb.se/2743691/1800-04-09/edition/153705/part/1/page/1/?q=capten%20elin&from=1800-01-01&to=1800-12-31>.
Anon 1903: En häxprocess i Värmland för 180 år sedan. *Karlstads-tidningen*, 6 May 1903, p. 3.
Anon 1815: *Tillförlitlig Berättelse, om Den Ryktbara Trollpackan Kapten Elins för-
menta Resa till Blåkulla, och Bekantskap med Djefwulen*. Jönköping.
Asprem, Egil 2022: The Problems of Romani Magic: Critical Prolegomena to
Historical Research. Paper presented at the Critical Romani Studies Conference,

- Södertörn University, Stockholm, 17–19 May 2022.
- Bäckström, Per Olof 1848: *Svenska folkböcker. Sagor, legender och äventyr efter äldre upplagor och andra källor utgifne, jemte öfversigt af svensk folkläsnings från äldre till närvarande tid*. Stockholm: A. Bohlins förlag.
- Baetke, Walter 1950: *Die Götterlehre der Snorre-Edda*. Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-historische Klasse, 97.3. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.
- Bakker, Peter, Sebastian Casinge, & Jon Pettersson 2017: Anna Maria Adamsdotter: Her Life and Her Language. Paper presented at Baltic Sea Conference on Romani Studies, 19–21 April, Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden.
- Bakker, Peter 2020: Para-Romani Varieties. In Yaron Matras and Anton Tenser (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Romani Language and Linguistics*. Springer.
- Bringéus, Nils-Arvid 1966: *Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius som etnolog. En studie kring Wärend och Wirdarne*. Stockholm: Nordiska museet.
- Bringéus, Nils-Arvid 1999: *Kistebrev tryckta i Jönköping*. Jönköping: Jönköpings läns museum.
- Burius, Anders 2000–2002: P. Georg Scheutz. *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, vol. 31, p. 533. urn:sbl:6378, url: <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/Presentation.aspx?id=6378> [accessed 2 June 2022].
- Carling, Gerd, Lenny Lindell, and Gilbert Ambrazaitis 2014: *Scandoromani: Remnants of a Mixed Language*. Leiden: Brill.
- Casinge, Sebastian 2020a: Det äldsta föremålet i Europa med en romsk koppling? *Drabbrikan* 15, pp. 9–15.
- Casinge, Sebastian 2020b: De resandes kulturarv. Bidrag till dokumentationen av en minoritets historia. Report produced by Frantzwagner Sällskapet with support by Riksantikvarieembetet. Online: https://www.frantzwagner.org/_files/ugd/994e00_d5c2e2f806214e7c9eb5d2410462dc2b.pdf.
- Davies, Owen 1999: *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736–1951*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Davies, Owen 2003: *Popular Magic: Cunning-folk in English History*. London: Hambledon Continuum.
- Davies, Owen 2009: *Grimoires: A History of Magic Books*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Day, Cyrus Lawrence 1967: *Quipus and Witches' Knots: The Role of the Knot in Primitive and Ancient Cultures*. Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press.
- Enefalk, Hanna 2013: *Skillingtryck! Historien om 1800-talets försvunna massmedium*. Uppsala: Swedish Science Press.
- Etzler, Alan 1944: *Zigenarna och deras avkomlingar i Sverige. Historia och språk*. Stockholm: Geber.
- Ficowski, Jerzy 1989: *The Gypsies in Poland: History and Customs*. N.p. (Yugoslavia): Interpress Publishers.
- Fraser, Angus 1992: *The Gypsies*. Malden, MA / Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Gilsenbach, Reimar 1997: *Weltchronik der Zigeuner: 2000 Ereignisse aus der Geschichte der Roma und Sinti, der Gypsies und Gitanos und aller anderen Minderheiten, die "Zigeuner" genannt werden. Teil 1: Von den Anfängen bis 1599*. Second corrected edition. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

- Grambo, Ronald 1979: *Norske trollformler og magiske ritualer*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Grandien, Bo 1987: *Rönndruvans glöd. Nygöticistiskt i tanke, konst och miljö under 1800-talet*. Nordiska museets handlingar 107. Stockholm.
- Gustafsson Reinius, Lotten 2009: Etnologins upppackade ryggsäck. *RIG – Kulturhistorisk tidskrift* 92(1), pp. 4–11.
- Hagberg, Johnny (ed.) 2016: “...Dessa synnerligen otacksamma främlingar...” *Romer-nas historia i två svenska 1700-tals avhandlingar*. Skara: Skara stiftshistoriska sällskap.
- Hammarstedt, N. E. 1920: *Svensk forntro och folksed i bild och ord*. Stockholm: Nordiska museet.
- Henderson, Lizanne, & Edward J. Cowan 2001: *Scottish Fairy Belief: A History*. Trowbridge: The Cromwell Press.
- Höök, Lena Kättström 2015: Trolltyg. <https://digitaltmuseum.se/011023663853/trolltyg>
- Hyltén-Cavallius, Gunnar Olof 1863: *Wärend och Wirdarne. Ett försök i svensk ethnologi*. Volume 1. Stockholm: Nordstedt & söner
- Johannsen, Dirk 2018: The Prophet and the Sorcerer: Becoming a Cunning-Man in Nineteenth-Century Norway. *Folklore* 129(1), pp. 39–57.
- Johansson, Roger 1977: *Svensk rommani. Med etymologiska och grammatiska kommentarer av Gösta Bergman och Erik Ljungberg samt förord av Adam Heymowski*. Acta Academiae Regiae Gustavi Adolphi LV. Uppsala.
- Klemming, Gustaf Edvard & Johan Gabriel Nordin 1883: *Svensk boktryckeri-historia 1483–1883 med inledande allmän öfversigt af G. E. Klemming och J. G. Nordin*. Stockholm: Norstedt.
- Klintberg, Bengt af 1965: *Svenska trollformler*. Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand.
- Liebich, Richard 1863: *Die Zigeuner in ihrem Wesen und in ihrer Sprache. Nach eigenen Beobachtungen dargestellt*. Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus.
- Lindqvist, Urban 2022: *Han kan ju icke med hustru och barn krypa under jorden. Resandeliv i 1700-talets Sverige*. Stockholm: Books on Demand.
- Linné, Carl von 1745: *Öländska och Gothländska resa på riksens högloflige ständers befallning förrättad åhr 1741*. Stockholm & Uppsala: Gottfried Kiesewetter.
- Lundberg, Hilding 1943: *C. A. Wetterberghs sociala författarskap*. Dissertation, Stockholms högskola.
- Lundstedt, Bernhard 1969 [1903]: Jönköpings Allahanda. In: *Sveriges periodiska litteratur 1645–1899: bibliografi*. Stockholm: Rediviva. Facsimile edition digitalized by Kungliga Biblioteket, url: http://www.kb.se/sverigesperiodiskalitteratur/1/1_338.htm [accessed 2 June 2022].
- Minken, Anne 2007: *Tatere i Norden før 1850. Sosio-økonomiske og etniske fortolkningsmodeller*. Doctoral dissertation, History and Religious Studies, University of Tromsø, Norway.
- Nordisk familjebok, konversationslexikon och realencyklopedi*. Ed. Th. Westrin. Stockholm: Nordisk familjeboks tryckeri, 1921.
- Nordiska museet 2006: *Traditioner. Studiehandledning till utställningen Traditioner för lärare och studerande inom Sfi*. Stockholm: Nordiska museet.
- Oja, Linda 1999: *Varken Gud eller natur. Synen på magi i 1600- och 1700-talets Sverige*. Doctoral dissertation, Department of History, Uppsala University.
- Onkel Adam [C. A. Wetterbergh] 1851: De tre notarierna. *Dalslands Nya Tidning*,

- 30 December, 1851, pp. 1–2.
- Opfermann, Ulrich Friedrich 2007: “*Seye kein Ziegeuner, sondern kayserlicher Cornet*”. *Sinti im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert. Eine Untersuchung anhand archivalischer Quellen*. Berlin: Metropol.
- Porter, Martin H. 2005: *Windows of the Soul: Physiognomy in European Culture, 1470–1780*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Pym, Richard J. 2007: *The Gypsies of Early Modern Spain, 1425–1783*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rääf, Leonard Fredrik 1856: *Samlingar och anteckningar till en beskrifning öfver Ydre härad i Östergöthland*. Del 1. Linköping.
- Rogberg, Samuel, and Eric Ruda 1770: *Historisk Beskrifning om Småland i gemen*, [etc]. Carlscrona.
- Scheutz, P. Georg 1841: Trollkammaren [Part 1]. *Aftonbladet*, 25 August, 1841, pp. 1–3.
- Schön, Ebbe 1998: Kaptén Elins trolltyg. *Känn dig själv. Nordiska museets och Skansens årsbok Fataburen 1998*, pp. 76–92.
- Skott, Fredrik 1999: Trolldomsprocessen i Södra Ny. *Svenska landsmål och svenskt folkliv*, pp. 111–142. Uppsala.
- Sörlin, Per 1993: *Trolldoms- och vidskepelseprocesserna i Göta hovrätt 1635–1754*. Doctoral Dissertation, Department of History, University of Umeå.
- Sundt, Eilert 1850: *Beretning om Fante- eller Landstrygerfolket i Norge. Bidrag til Kundskab om de laveste Samfundsforholde*. Christiania: Wulfsbergske bogtrykkeri.
- Täckmark, Sven Erik 1982–1984: J. Peter Lundström. In *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, vol. 24 (1982–1984), p. 399. Digitized by Riksarkivet: <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/9909> [accessed 2 June 2022].
- White, Hayden 1974: *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Wickström, Johan 2008: *Våra förfäder var hedningar. Nordisk forntid som myt i den svenska folkskolans pedagogiska texter fram till år 1919*. PhD diss., history of religions, Faculty of Theology, Uppsala University.
- Wikman, K. Rob. W. (ed.) 1957: *Svenska skrock och signerier, samlade av Leonard Frederik Rääf*. Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademiens Handlingar, Filologisk-filosofiska serien, 4. Stockholm.

¹ Swedish “mjölkhare”; believed to have been used by witches to steal milk from cows at a distance.

² For the collective listing of the items in the digital catalogue, see https://digitaltmuseum.se/021016536877/kaptén-elins-trolltyg-som-bestar-av-en-mjolkhare-ett-kohorn-en-honklo-en?fbclid=IwAR2gnp3WHpqqSAghNCOnl6ywXUVVWPD_NoXx2JqiUcdtHmTndwEbb-6Cp-ko.

³ Not to be confused with Elin of Mofikerud, or the legendary captain Elin.

⁴ A guidebook to the exhibition written for teachers of Swedish for immigrants reinforces this sharp contrast, with an emphasis on modern, secular identity: “Nobody believes in witches in Sweden today, right?” (Nordiska museet 2006:27).

⁵ Until 1820, it was the appeal court of the entire southern and western parts of Sweden.

⁶ The identification was first made by Sebastian Casinge. See Casinge 2020a; 2020b: 11–12.

⁷ The trial began with rumours that led to formal accusations at a local parish council (*sockenstämma*) on 25 July 1720, which became the grounds for a special court hearing (*extraordinarie ting*) held on 19–23 August. Transcripts from this court hearing, which included the ten-year-old girl Britta Persdotter's lengthy and detailed witness of diabolical communion, formed the basis of later legends (see below). The governor, baron Conrad Ribbing, received the prisoners after the court hearing, was appalled by the process and tried to limit the damage by having the Göta Court of Appeal and the Judiciary inspection (*Justitierevisionen*) compose a special appeal court (Kommissorialrätt) to try the case. As Skott has shown, the proceedings at the different levels of the judiciary show that the courts were still uncertain whether to see fantastical stories of witchcraft as illusions (whether diabolic or natural) or as real events.

⁸ Based on Ankarloo's partial reproduction of the manuscript he cited, we can establish intertextual differences that show these are three separate copies, probably relating to a common source which has not been located. The copy in Värmland, which Skott consulted, was also published in *Karlstadtidningen* on May 6, 1903.

⁹ ”under förmodan, at hwar och en tydeligen inser, at hela denna förunderliga händelse icke ägd t annan grund, än i forntidens okunnighet och widskeppelse.” *Jönköpings Allahanda*, 9 April 1800, p. 1.

¹⁰ ”En serskild commission blef derefter förordnad att efter närmare undersökning pröfwa detta Mål, och i följe af i Laga ordning fastställd Dom, blefwo kapten Elin samt någre af hennes medbrottslige aflifwade och å bål brände.”

¹¹ According to Bringéus (1998:1), no less than one million *kistebrev* were produced in Jönköping between the early 1800s and 1860; they could be found in just about every Swedish home, having a massive impact on popular culture. Based on preserved materials in the Uppsala University Library, historian Hanna Enefalk has estimated that Lundström's in Jönköping was among the top five printers of this kind of material up until 1875 (Enefalk 2013:72–73).

¹² Carl XI was king in the 1660s–1690s, at the height of the witch hunts in Sweden. As we have seen, the historical Elin was tried several decades after the hunts had ceased, in 1720.

¹³ ”Rummet war nemligen på den tiden allmänt bekant i orten under namn af trollkammarn, och utgjorde den innersta och aldraheligaste af hofrättens arkifsalar, hvilka intogo hela den vänningen. Den hade fått sitt namn deraf, att der förvarades åtskilliga hexredskap, bland annat ett veritabelt smörjhorn, en magisk hvisselpipa, förfärdigad af en örnklo, och en så kallad mjölkhare, som långt ifrån att likna en hare eller annan skapad varelse, blott bestod af ett väfsof med några mörkröda ylletrådar, men påstods hafva haft den förmånliga egenskapen för solfvets egarinna, att hon endast behöfde hänga det öfver sin mjölkstäfva, för att deri ur trådarne locka mjölken från hvilken ko som heldst i hela verlden. Dessa mystiska småsaker tillhörde en qvarlåtenskap, som hofrätten hade fått i arf efter den, på Carl XI:s tid, ryktbara ”kapten Elin”, anförarinnan för sin tids blåkullafärder. När någon främling tog stadens märkvärdigheter i ögonsigte och tillika besökte hofrättshuset, stod alltid en vaktmästare tillreds att visa honom dessa trollkammarens dyrbarheter ...”

¹⁴ ”I en vrå af dessa rättwisans katakomber befann sig ett bord, som innehöll en alldeles egen samling. Den bestod nemligen af åtskilliga konst- och naturföremål, som warit begagnade wid brottsbegående. Stora käppar med messingsbeslag, hackor, knifwar, yror, liar, droppflaskor med gift uti, stenar, falska myntstämplar, falska nycklar, trollhorn, smörjburkar ... men det allra kuriösaste war kapten Elins mjölkhare, en anstalt hopsatt af wässpån och några trasor, och om hwilken gamle waktmästaren Bogren berättade, huru historiskt wist känner jag icke, att den blifwit nyttjad af kapten Elin, den namnkunniga trollqwinnan, för att mjölka andras kor.”

¹⁵ Husförhörslängd, Jönköpings Kristina AI:19, p. 289, row 1.

¹⁶ On the attitudes of state antiquaries Bror Emil Hildebrand and Hans Hildebrand (father and son), in office 1837–1879 and 1879–1907 respectively, see Grandien 1987:65–66. As Grandien has shown, the centralization policy was met with resistance from several researchers active in

the districts, including Hyltén-Cavallius.

¹⁷ “...det mesta enda grunda sig på tradition [och] att för denna traditions beriktigande skola erfordras en alltför tidsödande och dessutom antagligen fruktlös efterforskning i Kongl Hofrättens akter och protokollböcker.” SHM inv.nr. 3240, del B.

¹⁸ SHM inv.nr. 3240, del B.

¹⁹ SHM inv.nr. 3240, del A. Italics added.

²⁰ Rääf’s misidentification indicates that he probably never visited the collection first hand, but rather relied on descriptions provided him by others.

²¹ The second volume was published in 1868.

²² Euhemerism had been a standard interpretive method since the Middle Ages; Snorri’s notion that the Æsir of Old Norse mythology were really an Asian people who had fought in the Trojan war is a classic example (e.g. Baetke 1950). Euhemeristic readings of folklore and mythology as evidencing the migration of different peoples to Sweden was popular in the Gothicism movement of the early nineteenth century, and ethnic readings of “trolls”, “dwarves”, and “giants” were even taught in textbooks used in the folk schools at the time (see Wickström 2008:294). The specific schema that Hyltén-Cavallius followed was heavily indebted to the archaeologist Sven Nilsson, who had attempted to reconstruct migrations to Scandinavia in part by measuring and comparing the skulls of human remains, and used a schema of dwarfs/trolls, giants, goths, and Æsir to name the main groups and identify their traces in Swedish culture (cf. Grandien 1986:67–70). The resulting ethnological-folkloristic model that we find in Hyltén-Cavallius also has parallels elsewhere, notably in the “fairy euhemerism” of British folklore, exemplified by Scottish scholars John Francis Campbell (1821–1885) and David MacRitchie (1851–1925), who saw notions of fairies as having evolved from memories of the Picts. As historians Henderson and Cowan noted with reference to this interpretive tradition in Britain, “[o]ver-enthusiastic antiquaries were capable of the wildest fantasies beside which the supposed ignorant superstitions of the folk pale into insignificance” (Henderson & Cowan 2001:22).

²³ Precisely the “trolldom” or magic of the “trolls” led Hyltén-Cavallius to suggest that the ancient trolls must have been related to “Chudic tribes” (*tshudiska stammer*), by which he meant something like “Ural-Altaiic” and “Finno-Ugric”. His reasoning is worth quoting in full: “Om vi nu ingå i en undersökning, Hos hvilken historiskt känd folkstam återfinnas den grundstämning, de karakters-egenskaper och de egendomliga magiska bruk, som vi funnit för det gamla sydsvenska trollfolket utmärkande, så hänvisar oss etnologien på det allra bestämdaste till de i östra och norra Europa af ålder bosatta folken av Tshudisk härkomst. Alla dessa folk karakteriseras nemligen genom ett grundlygne, som träder i skarpaste motsatts till den gotiskskandinaviska stammens, genom sin djupt melankoliska och inåtgående riktning. Hos dessa folk har således handlings-kraften icke varit skattad såsom människans högsta, utan den makt som ligger i visdomen, i det högre vetandet, i sången och siareförmågan. ... Hos tshudiska stammar, mer än hos andra kända folk, hafva derföre af ålder uppträdt Schamaner, Tadiber, sångsmeder, visa, siare och spåmän, hvilka genom runor eller sånger, utsagda under en stark sinneshäfnig, eller genom en viljekraftens högsta spänning medan kroppen ligger i en slags spontant-magnetisk hvila, och eljest genom iakttagande af vissa hemlighetsfulla bruk, trott sig kunna befalla öfver vindarne, elden, hafvet, leda naturens makter och andar, likasom människornas håg och djurens böjelser, låta sin själ färdas till långt aflägsna ställen och se hvad der tilldrager sig, genom en inre klarsyn förutse och förutsäga framtidens hemligheter, och framför allt dräpa eller förgöra sina egna och sitt folks fiender. De tshudiska stammarnes uråldriga magiska bruk, sådana de än i dag förekomma hos Lappar, Finnar och andra nordliga folk, äro således i allo likartade med dem, som under namn af trolldom en gång öfvades af de gamla trollen i Wärend och Göta rike.” Hyltén-Cavallius 1863: I, 89–90).

²⁴ Our use of the terms “Roma” and “*resande*” deserves a brief explanation. Since the late twentieth century, “Roma” denotes (1) a juridical concept used to organize parts of the minority politics of the European Union and its various member states, and (2) an ethnic self-designation.

nation of some but far from all of the groups covered by those policies. The Swedish state currently recognizes the Roma as one of its five national minorities, and includes *resande* and Finnish *kaale* as two of the subgroups of Roma. The rationale for introducing the term Roma was a desire to get rid of derogatory labels in various European languages, such as “gypsy”, “Zigeuner”, and “tattare”, which have historically been used for these different groups that share a common migration to Europe in the late Middle Ages with roots stretching back to India (see Fraser 1992). In Sweden, the terms “zigenare” and “tattare” were used interchangeably to refer to some of the ancestors of *resande*, who were the targets of the country’s anti-gypsy legislation. The nomenclature goes back to the first Roma presence recorded in Sweden, in 1512. While it is often assumed that these first arrivals (who had been expelled from Scotland by way of Denmark) are the earliest Roma ancestors of Swedish *resande*, it is also clear that new Romani families kept immigrating from the Continent over the centuries. Genealogical research has so far only been able to trace *resande* ancestors to the late seventeenth-century “gypsy” families that concern us here. Finally, it is worth noting that the two terms “zigenare” and “tattare” became differentiated in Swedish in the 1870s: the older Romani population of *resande* were now referred to as “tattare”, while the term “zigenare” was reserved for the more exotic-looking Kalderasha group of Roma, which started arriving in Sweden at this time. Through the combined evidence of linguistics, genealogy, history, and more recently DNA studies, we know with a degree of certainty that these *resande* ancestors belonged to the wider Romani speaking minorities of early-modern Europe.

²⁵ See e.g. Göta hovrätt, advokatfiskalens arkiv, Karlshamns kämnärsrätt (den 20–21 juni) 1702, EVIIBAA:702; Göta hovrätt, advokatfiskalens arkiv, Karlskrona rådhusrätt 1709, EVIIBAA:974–75; Göteborgs rådhusrätt, dombok (den 12 sept) 1711, Ala:48; Svea hovrätt, advokatfiskalens arkiv, Falu kämnärsrätt 1722, EXIe:2804. Svea hovrätt, advokatfiskalens arkiv, Segerstads häradsrätt (den 9 sept) and Hanebo häradsrätt 1723, EXIIe:3217; Jämtlands domsaga, Sunne häradsrätt och Ovikens häradsrätt 1724, AI:45; Svea hovrätt, advokatfiskalens arkiv, Segerstads tingslag (den 27 aug) 1724, EXIIe:3219; Gävle rådhusrätt, (dombok den 15 juli, 4 nov) 1724, AII:49; Gävleborgs landskansli, brev 1727–28, AIIIb:31–32; Gävleborgs landskansli, landshövdingsskrivelser 1728, DIIIa:18; Kungliga Maj:t, kollegiers mfl skrivelser, överståthållarens skrivelser 1728, vol 23; Nylands och Tavastehus landskansli, ankonna brev (den 20 nov) 1731, Ea12, fol. 648 among others.

²⁶ This is especially clear in a series of trials in 1723–1724, in which the court probes the unconventional sexual relationships among Anna Maria’s group of companions. Characteristic of these trials is that Anna Maria refers to “us Tartare”, and defends a liberal view on taking new partners outside the institution of marriage by saying that “we tartare” live “like a free people”.

²⁷ Anna Maria names Frankfurt as her place of birth on two separate occasions, in 1709 and 1722. See Göta hovrätt, advokatfiskalens arkiv, städernas renoverade domböcker, Karlskrona KR, 1709; Svea hovrätt, renoverade domböcker, Kopparbergs län, Falu kämnärsrätt, 1722. On one occasion, in 1724, she claims to have been born “in France”, but the other details she presents about her background in that trial (e.g. that her mother was a “Madamme Brussela” from Brussels) suggest she was making it up. See Jämtlands domsagas häradsrätt, 1724. Several other Roma that we encounter in sources from this time, and with whom Adamsdotter was associated, also claimed at various occasions to have been born in Frankfurt am Main.

²⁸ It can be noted that in the many records in which she appears we never see the court commenting on her Swedish having an accent. Such comments were otherwise common; one associate, for example, was said to speak “Norwegian with an accent of German”. Anna Maria’s apparent fluency may indicate that she had older connections to Sweden than the evidence can currently verify.

²⁹ Bakker, Casinge, & Pettersson 2017; cf. Bakker 2020.

³⁰ Previously, the oldest known evidence of Romani in Scandinavia was the short glossary included in Samuel P. Björckman’s *Dissertatio academica de Cingaris*, defended in Uppsala in 1730. The sample was collected from the former soldier and then prisoner, Jakob Helsing,

arrested with his family after the women had been accused of tricking a rich widow in Uppsala with “superstitions”. Helsing, who would later be deported to Pomerania, has also been shown to be an ancestor of Swedish *resande*. Björckman’s list was created by asking Helsing for the “gypsy” translation of 47 words that can be found in the early (1597) glossary provided by the Dutch philologist Vulcanius. Björckman’s dissertation also noted that “today’s gypsies” know a number of European languages, such as Swedish, French, and German (see Hagberg ed. 2016:41–42). The earliest recorded sentence in Romani until now appeared three decades later, in the trial of a group of “tartare” in Rönneberga in 1764. One of the accused in that trial, Kristian Lind, may have been a half-brother of Anna Maria Adamsdotter’s companion in 1709, Bartolomeus Ludwig. See also Bakker, Casinge, & Pettersson 2017.

³¹ Etzler 1944; Minken 2007. Several of these men seem to have started their military careers for other powers on the continent. For German Sinti/Roma in military service in the seventeenth- and eighteenth centuries, see Opferman 2007:223–248.

³² Svea hovrätt, advokatfiskalens arkiv, Falu kämnärsrätt 1722.

³³ Göta hovrätt, Advokatfiskalen Blekinge län, Karlskrona rådhusrätt 1709; Göteborgs rådhusrätt 1712; Gävle rådhusrätt 1724.

³⁴ Possibly from Romani *khand*, “to stink”, which goes back to Sanskrit, *gandha*, “smell, odour”. The word *kåndra*, *kånja*, “to ooze, smell bad”, is among the old Romani words that have survived in the para-Romani dialect of Swedish and Norwegian Travelers. See Carling, Lindell, and Ambrazaitis 2014. That Anna Maria Adamsdotter associated with the ancestors of Swedish Travelers, who must have passed the word down to be recorded in more recent word lists (e.g. Sundt 1850; Etzler 1944; Johansson 1977), supports this interpretation. The linguist Peter Bakker has suggested to us that the particles *aj* + *as* might indicate the third person past tense; thus, Anna Maria is not naming the root as much as describing it: “it stank.”

³⁵ Anna Maria’s reference to the Neapolitan comedy character Policinella should here be taken as a reference to comedic puppet play, in which the character had by this time become a recurring character. In Swedish the term “policinelleater” came to signify marionette theatre in general. See SAOB, “Polichinell”.

³⁶ ”hon tager ett ben, det gräfwer hon ut med ögon, tänder och näsa, jämbwäll hår der på de hon fäster med bäck”.

³⁷ ”Det är intet som ohelgar Guds namn utan allenast några fåfånga och ohöfwiska ord uti dess språk, som äro utan grund eller mening, dhe hon allenast bruker hoos dhe enfadliga giöra sig och dess konster anseende med.”

³⁸ “...hwilka ord hon förswänskade och en så ohöflig och fuul betydning hafwa, att för modes-tie och höfligheet skulld man samma här ej anföra will.”

³⁹ A full discussion of the language sample is being prepared by linguist Peter Bakker; we do not want to anticipate his results by publishing our own interpretation here. Interpreting the verse is complicated by the phonetic mediation of the eighteenth-century Swedish notary, including the partitioning of words, as well as by the question of the inflection patterns of Anna Maria’s Romani. Many of the words are easily recognizable as old Romani words that have survived in some form in later Scandoromani (e.g. *dakri* = mom; *dad* = father; *mins* = vulva; *ka* = eat; *ful* = excrement, dirt; *nikli* = down, away). Others can possibly be inferred as attempts to render Romani words in eighteenth-century Swedish (e.g. “tiawa” = *tjåvo* = boy). Cf. Carling, Lindell and Ambrazaitis 2014.

⁴⁰ “... z. B. dadurch, daß der Zigeuner ein Ei unter den Flügeln der brütenden Henne hinwegnimmt, es öffnet und mit Taschenspielergewandtheit ein todenkopfähnliches oder ein anderes fremdartiges Gebilde aus demselben hervorzieht ...”.

⁴¹ We are grateful to Professor Lech Trzcionkowski for guiding us to this source, and for checking the English translation against the Polish original.

⁴² Ficowski’s account suggests that a *bengoro* could be made in many different ways, including stitched dolls with hen’s claws and chicken eyes, not unlike the doll that Anna Maria explicitly called “little Satan”. As in other dialects of Romani, the word *beng* (prob. from Sanskrit *vṛāṇ-*

ga, “deformed”, “monstrous”) is preserved in Scandoromani with the core meaning of “devil” or “Satan”, with the adjective *béngalo* taking on a wider range of meanings, from “devilish” and “ungodly” to “mad” and “crazy”.

⁴³ The very first note on Romani women practicing fortune-telling appears to be in a city chronicle in Colmar, France, on August 10, 1418. This is less than a year after the large-scale immigration to north-western Europe. See Gilsenbach 1997:54.

⁴⁴ This was the case with the Spanish inquisition, which in the seventeenth- and eighteenth centuries brought a number of “gypsies” in front of the tribunals accused of sorcery. In these cases, as Richard Pym has shown, the inquisitors were well aware that the practices in question were designed “to exploit the gullibility or wishful thinking of those sufficiently naïve or desperate to allow themselves to be duped.” An eighteenth-century instruction for inquisitors even ordered that the practices of “gypsy women” were generally to be regarded as fraudulent rather than demonic. Pym moreover notes that the sentences given to gypsies in the inquisition tribunals were generally milder than what they could have expected in secular courts of law. Pym 2007:108, 111.

⁴⁵ For the persistence of beliefs in witchcraft and the demand for magical interventions in early-modern Sweden, see Oja 1999.

⁴⁶ “... några fåfänga och ohöfwiska ord uti dess språk, som äro utan grund eller mening, dhe hon allenast bruker hoos dhe enfadliga giöra sig och dess konster anseende med.”