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Old Thiess, a Livonian Werewolf: A Classic Case in Comparative Perspective by Carlo Ginzburg and Bruce Lincoln
(review)

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as a better representative of Catholicism than the pope's version. Yet Roman Catholics, now cast as rebels against godly society, might find themselves drawing on tropes of resistance that had first sustained Protestant heretics, when they sought to withstand the persecution unleashed on them by Elizabeth I and her successors.

Early modern English society became ever more obsessed with genealogy and pedigrees, which for Protestants meant some hard thinking to do about the salvation of unavoidably Catholic pre-Reformation ancestors but also brought worries about present-day relatives who held different religious convictions. Destruction of Catholic buildings and objects such as medieval tombs eventually produced antiquarian nostalgia and regret even among some Puritans who were supposed to hate what those signified. Walsham walks us decorously through this clamor of rival clichés and human confusion seeking to present itself as coherence. She never raises her voice, leaving Reformation noise to babble out from her quotations and judiciously chosen illustrations. Amid the portraits, contemplate the aged faces of Mary Honynood, who at her death, aged 93, looked out on 367 living descendants, or her contemporary “Old Parr,” who claimed to be 152 when he died in 1635. They had seen it all tumble past their eyes, but now Walsham can sort it all out for them.

—*Diarmaid MacCulloch*

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Carlo Ginzburg and Bruce Lincoln, *Old Thiess, a Livonian Werewolf: A Classic Case in Comparative Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 289 pp.

Social media have produced echo chambers. Today's public opinion is extraordinarily polarized, and most of us trade ideas only with like-minded people. With the end of this state of affairs nowhere in sight, the University of Chicago Press has published a book that puts on display the best kind of scholarly disagreement, showing that contrasting interpretations of well-studied sources need not lead to relativism but that, rather, they can foster creativity.

The authors, Ginzburg and Lincoln, scholars of great distinction, have both devoted considerable attention to the trial of an elderly peasant from Livonia (a region encompassing today's Latvia and Estonia) held before the High Court in Dorpat (modern-day Tartu) in 1691–92. They have reached different conclusions about its implications for the study of popular religion and for historical method more generally. The volume consists of two original introductions by each author, the English translation of the trial transcript (which can be downloaded for free

from the book's web page), the translation of a now discarded though once influential analysis of the trial put forth in 1934 by an Austrian philologist who soon after joined the Nazi SS, excerpts of Ginzburg's published studies from the 1970s and 1980s dissecting the trial and allied material, an unpublished lecture by each of the two authors engaging critically with the other's views, a private letter sent by Lincoln to Ginzburg in February 2017, and the transcript of a face-to-face conversation that the two had later in that year, as well as two useful appendixes.

During the trial, the Latvian peasant, nicknamed Old Thiess, "freely admitted that he had previously been a werewolf," explaining that from time to time he had worn a wolf pelt, run into the woods, and "seized whatever horses and livestock" he and his fellows could lay their hands on, "but no large animals, only lambs, kids, piglets, and the like." He rebutted strongly the judges' accusation that his behavior amounted to consorting with the devil, declaring instead that he "was God's hound and he stole from the devil that which the sources brought to him." The court would not hear of it and banished Old Thiess "from the land forever."

The crux of the disagreement between Lincoln and Ginzburg concerns the forms and possibilities of the comparative perspective featured in the book's subtitle. Ginzburg reiterates here the positions he outlined in his first monograph, *Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1966) and later developed in *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath* (1989). He reads the Livonian trial alongside those adjudicated more than a century earlier in Friuli (the northeastern area of the Italian peninsula) against *benandanti*, peasants charged and condemned by the Inquisition for being witches. Doing so, he argues, reveals the existence of ancient, pre-Christian popular beliefs that shared remarkably similar patterns across time and space, whether or not scholars are able to identify particular channels of transmission and adaptation of those beliefs. Morphology is the analytical tool that Ginzburg adopts to build a comparative approach on the basis of anomalous (though not unique) cases which are seemingly unconnected.

For Lincoln, however, "the results of such comparatism remain highly speculative"—and, he adds, "one of the great dangers when one tries to move from morphology to history is the tendency, even in the most scrupulous and learned scholars, to fill the gaps in our knowledge by imagining an originary state that not only connects and unites the *comparanda* but also reflects the scholar's deepest fears, desires, and/or ideals." (A similar position is articulated by Caroline Walker Bynum in her book *Dissimilar Similitudes* of 2020.) Following Lincoln, the Livonian trial is evidence of "the dynamics of oppression and resistance in a religious vein," and werewolves should be seen as "agents of restorative justice" in a moral economy with specific local traits. In his words:

The nobility owned livestock, ate livestock, and preyed on others who were weaker. The peasantry ate plants, obeyed the orders given to them

by the nobility, and tried to avoid becoming their prey. But if the peasants threatened to become predators—to take, kill, and eat livestock—they would have been acting like nobles, and the elite would have perceived and described this as “acting like wolves.”

The conversation between Ginzburg and Lincoln that closes the volume elucidates the empirical and speculative aspects of the two divergent interpretations. In the process, it roams widely to address the tension between case study and generalization, the tools with which we can tackle this tension, along with the necessity and the pitfalls of comparisons. Other classic issues, including the extent to which the voice of (illiterate) peasants is filtered through court records and the role of printed texts in disseminating and possibly distorting ordinary people’s ideas, are remarked on in passing. In the end, neither of the two authors changes his mind but each plays devil’s advocate with the other’s standpoint and, as a result, is forced to articulate a particularly crisp version of his own account and concede some of its weaknesses.

One way of approaching this book is to think of it as a vivisection of Ginzburg’s style of microhistory, particularly in light of recent debates on microanalysis and global history. But it is also much more. If assigned to a graduate seminar in the humanities, it will inspire energizing discussions.

—*Francesca Trivellato*

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Serena Auteiro and Matthew Adam Cobb, eds.,
Globalization and Transculturality from Antiquity to the Pre-modern World
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How do we use globalization and transculturality as tropes to understand processes across different times and spaces? One way is to understand locality, location, and locale, and then to look at the circulation of objects. Objects, as we know, have a life that continues long beyond their own times and spaces. And so we have movements being mapped in different times and different spaces throughout this book. Discussion of *bronzization* (a word I had not come across before) and of the ways in which bronze simply *is* the transculture of the Bronze Age, and of how the movement of bronze objects can be understood and analyzed through the model of globalization, takes us into early historic aspects of the *idea* of the global.

Another space extensively mapped here is the Indian Ocean, which has long been seen, of course, as a world in itself, with its own rhythms and requirements. But let us go beyond this truism and argue, along with Sunil Gupta, Matthew Cobb, and Laura Weinstein, that we need to locate the domains connected by