

## Engelbert Kaempfer, the Witch Hunt and Japan

著者名(英)	Beatrice M. Bodart-Bailey
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# Engelbert Kaempfer, the Witch Hunt and Japan<sup>1</sup>

Beatrice M. Bodart-Bailey

“The Japanese are not atheists, they have their own complex system of religion permitting various ardent forms of worship of the divine majesty. In the practice of virtue, in their devotion and purity of life, in their concern for their souls, atonement of sins and the desire for eternal bliss, the Japanese exceed the Christians” wrote Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716) in his *Amoenitates Exoticae* of 1712.<sup>2</sup> This is an amazing statement for the son of a protestant pastor born in the middle of the 17th century in a small provincial town of Westphalia, Germany. The statement, however, is characteristic of Kaempfer’s enlightened attitude towards non-Christian religions far beyond the norm of his age. This essay attempts to clarify the circumstances that made possible his enlightened attitude resulting in the above statement which even today does not find the support of all Christians.

Christian Wilhelm Dohm (1751-1820), the editor of Kaempfer’s 18th century German edition of his description of Japan, accused him of showing Japan in too positive a light.<sup>3</sup> Kaempfer’s positive approach towards that country was in many ways based on the fact that he saw in Japan a society profiting from conditions not enjoyed in Europe at the time. The most important of these was continued peace. In his introduction to his so-called *History of Japan*, he gives the continued threat of military disturbances at home as the reason for his long journey to the furthest end of the globe.<sup>4</sup>

Kaempfer’s native Westphalia had suffered greatly during the decades of fighting between Protestants and Catholics that became known as the Thirty Years War. The Peace of Westphalia had concluded fighting three years before he was born, but the country he grew up in was still marked by the ravages of war. “Has the war not devoured the most beautiful houses, palaces and castles? Has it not devoured villages and towns so that one hardly knows where they once stood? .... Has

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1 I would like to thank Dr. Michael Cooper for reading and commenting on an earlier version of this article.

2 Engelbert Kaempfer, *Amoenitatum exoticarum politico-physico-mediarum ...* (Lemgo, 1712), 490. (Hence cited as *Amoenitates*.)

3 Christian Wilhelm Dohm, “Nacherinnerungen des Herausgebers” in Engelbert Kaempfer, *Geschichte und Beschreibung von Japan*, Lemgo, 1777-1779, reprint F.A. Brockhaus, Stuttgart 1964.

4 *Kaempfer’s Japan: Tokugawa Culture Observed*, ann. & trans. B.M. Bodart-Bailey (Honolulu, 1999), 27.

it not devoured the whole land: ploughed fields, vineyards, pastures, forests and all cultivation?” asked a vicar, a contemporary of Engelbert’s father. “Where are our well-equipped schools? Where are our well-attended universities?” asked the same man and he spoke of churches turned into barns, or places of vice, or left as heaps of rubble and piles of ashes. The atrocities committed by invading and occupying armies have been graphically related in many accounts.<sup>5</sup> Yet the vicar does not only blame the invading armies for the state of the country. “Millions of Germans would not have sunk into the abyss of hell if they had not joined in lighting the fires of war, taking part in the destruction, and participated in the practice of gluttony, avarice, hypocrisy and idolatry.”<sup>6</sup> Not just the physical environment was destroyed; the psychological trauma of constant threat to life and possessions had affected the conduct of the population, raising the threshold of cruelty to unusual heights. In Lemgo there was a further legacy: that of the witch hut.

### **The Kemper Family**

Engelbert Kaempfer’s native town of Lemgo had not been spared the destruction of war. His father Johann Kemper (1610-1682) – only later did Engelbert and his brothers change the name to Kaempfer – was eight years old at the beginning of the Thirty Years War. At that time Lemgo had more than one thousand houses; at the end of the war thirty years later there were only 590. The population of the town decreased by one third in the last twenty years of the war, and the damage caused was estimated at over one million thalers.<sup>7</sup> Only two years before the conclusion of the war – Engelbert’s elder brother Joachim had just been born – the Swedish troops still ransacked and occupied Lemgo, an event of such tragic dimensions that it was to be engraved in the memories of the inhabitants for many years to come.<sup>8</sup>

The upheavals of wars favor social mobility and the Kemper family profited from this.<sup>9</sup>

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5 See for instance Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: the Rise and Downfall of Prussia 1600-1947* (Penguin Books, 2007), 32-36.

6 Hans Jessen, ed., *Der Dreißigjährige Krieg in Augenzeugenberichten* (dtv, 1971) 407-409. (All translations are my own unless otherwise stated).

7 Erich Kittel, *Geschichte des Landes Lippe* (Köln, 1957), 109. To illustrate the enormous loss to the town of Lemgo, it might be useful to note that the crown tax levied to pay for the coronation of 1701 of Frederick III of Brandenburg as King of Prussia over the whole kingdom of Prussia amounted to 500.000 thalers, and the total sum for this extremely lavish event is estimated at 6 million thalers. *Iron Kingdom*, 68.

8 Fritz Verdenhalven, Hanns-Peter Fink, eds., *Das Diarium Lippiacum des Amtmanns Anton Henrich Küster* (Detmold 1998), 26; Nicolas Rügge, “Die Grafschaft Lippe und die Stadt Lemgo in der zweiten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts“ in *Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716) und die kulturelle Begegnung zwischen Europa und Asien*, Sabine Klocke-Daffa, Jürgen Scheffler, Gisela Wilbertz, eds. (Lemgo, 2003), 33.

Engelbert's grandfather and great-grandfather were bakers in Lemgo. Through marriage the grandfather inherited the position of administrator of a nobleman's domain, and he was also elected head of the local bakers' guild. During the years of war, the bakery apparently produced a good income permitting Engelbert's father, rather than be apprenticed to the trade, to first attend the Latin school in Lemgo and then that in Soest, and to continue his studies at the University of Rostock. An appointment as lecturer and cantor at the Latin school in Lemgo followed, but two years later he decided to return to the University of Rostock to obtain a Master's degree.<sup>10</sup>

In 1644 Johann Kemper married Christina Drepper, the daughter of the senior vicar of Lemgo's Lutheran Nicolai church, and inherited the position of his late father-in-law. The young vicar's request to the town for permission to invite guests to his wedding beyond the numbers stipulated for large festivities and on this occasion be freed from taxes for more than three thousand liters of beer, illustrates the eminence of the Kemper family in Lemgo at the time.<sup>11</sup>

Engelbert was born on September 16th, 1651 as either the second or third son of this marriage.<sup>12</sup> His mother died at the birth of a further child, and Engelbert was six when the father remarried soon after the death of his first wife. The new bride of the forty-seven-year-old vicar was a young woman from the city of Hertford twenty-seven years his junior, Adelheid Pöppelmann (1637-1714). Her two older sisters were already married in Lemgo, one to the junior vicar, Andreas Koch (1619-1666), and the other to the lecturer and cantor at the Lemgo Latin school, Bernhard Grabbe (1624-1667), two men who were to fall victim to the witch hunt.

The sober, puritan values the Lutheran vicar attempted to instill in his sons are reflected in three Latin verses the father later wrote into Engelbert's autograph book. The words of the first

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9 This social mobility is well illustrated in Sabine Mirbach, „Ein Soldatenleben im 17. Jahrhundert: Aufstiege und Fall des Oberst Johann Abschlag“, in Gisela Wilbertz, Jürgen Scheffler, eds., *Biographieforschung und Stadtgeschichte: Lemgo in der Spätphase der Hexenverfolgung* (Bielefeld, 2000), 137-149.

10 Friedrich Christoph Puhstkuchen, *Beyträge zu den Denkwürdigkeiten der Grafschaft Lippe* (Lemgo, 1769), 150; Gisela Wilbertz, „Handwerker, Hexen und Gelehrte: Studien zur Familie Kemper/Kaempfer in Lemgo“, in *Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716) und die kulturelle Begegnung zwischen Europa und Asien*, 50-54; Hans Hoppe, „Engelbert Kaempfers Stellung in der Gesellschaft seiner Zeit“, in *Engelbert Kaempfer zum 330. Geburtstag* (Lemgo, 1982), 134.

11 Wilbertz, „Handwerker, Hexen und Gelehrte“, 57-58, note 95. Karl Meier-Lemgo, *Die Geschichte der Stadt Lemgo*, (Lemgo, 1962), 135. The quantity of beer is expressed in Fuder which has been converted into liters in accordance with Fritz Rudolph, *Ronshausen: Dorfgeschichte im Zusammenhang der Landesgeschichte* (2000), 60.

12 Wilbertz („Handwerker, Hexen und Gelehrte“, 58-59) has argued on the basis of certain sources that Engelbert was the third and not the second son, as commonly believed. Her arguments, however, do not account for the fact that his step-brother Andreas referred to Engelbert as his second brother (*Andreas Kempfers Selbstbiographie* ..., Leipzig 1880, 15.) Further, if Engelbert were the third son it is surprising that only Engelbert's congratulations appear on the matriculation thesis of the oldest brother Joachim, as described below.

verse were those of a man known for his erudition, who had acquired his knowledge under the difficult conditions of war: “Study as if living forever; live as if dying today.” In the second verse the father encourages his son to bravely stand up for his own opinion, even though this might not be to his advantage: “Seek clear conscience rather than high reputation; reputation can be based on rumor, conscience never.” The third verse testifies to the difficult times, when hardship came to be sanctioned as a positive religious experience: “Christ wore a crown of thorns: thus seek not pleasure. Follow the way of Christ to earn your own crown.”<sup>13</sup>

Engelbert’s insatiable thirst for knowledge, which he claimed afflicted him like a disease impelling him to always continue his travels,<sup>14</sup> might well have been nurtured by his father who also showed an interest in distant countries. In 1656 Adam Olearius published his famous description of his travels to Persia via Russia, and only one year later Johann Kemper bought this expensive book jointly with his junior colleague Andreas Koch to donate it to the church library.<sup>15</sup> It was Engelbert’s fate to follow in Olearius’ steps over two decades later.

Father and son might well have discussed how Engelbert would be best equipped to see the world, and hence decided on a medical career. For as he later explained, he was apprenticed already as a boy to a pharmacist (*pharmacopôla*) to prepare him for the study of medicine.<sup>16</sup>

The records of the Lemgo Latin school contain the first documented signature of Engelbert Kaempfer. As a fourteen-year-old he entered his name as “Engelbertus Kemper.”<sup>17</sup> It is, however, unlikely that this entry marked the beginning of his studies at the school, as has sometimes been suggested. The fact that the name of his older brother, who graduated from the school in that same year, does not appear in the records shows that signature was not synonymous with entry into the school. Moreover, Engelbert’s congratulations in Latin at the end of the thesis of his elder brother Joachim of the same year suggest that he had been educated in that language for some time.

### **„Kemper“, the man on the cattle camp, becomes „Kämpfer“, the fighter.**

With the congratulations printed at the end of the brother’s matriculation thesis the name

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13 Meier-Lemgo, „Das Stammbuch Engelbert Kaempfers“, *Lippische Mitteilungen*, Vol. 21, 156-157. (All English translations are my own).

14 „*Curiositas adactus morbus*“. Engelbert Kaempfer, *Briefe 1683-1715*, Detlef Haberland, Wolfgang Michel, Elisabeth Gössmann, eds. (München, 2001), 185, 187.

15 Adam Olearius, *Vermehrte Neue Beschreibung der Muscovitischen und Persischen Reyse* (Schleswig, 1656). Gisela Wilbertz, “Handwerker, Hexen und Gelehrte“, 78-80.

16 Letter to Andreas Cleyer, Bandar Abbas, 26th November 1687 in Engelbert Kaempfer, *Briefe 1683-1715*, 283. The Latin *puer* in this letter denotes a boy under 17.

17 Stadtarchiv Lemgo, Y109, 34.

“Kemper” – the man on the cattle camp –turns to “Kaempfer” – the fighter – apparently for the first time.<sup>18</sup> The thesis deals with philosophical arguments against atheism, but is not simply a condemnation of disbelievers. About to enter university to study theology, Joachim discusses the question of how the image of God as the source of all scientifically verifiable laws was to be understood.<sup>19</sup> With the discoveries of the laws of nature, the traditional image of God as wise father seated on his throne above the clouds was being questioned, and those who refused to accept this image, such as Descartes, were often accused of atheism.

It may appear odd that at the end of this thesis, congratulations invoke the blessings of the Grecian pantheon. Also young Engelbert’s entry: “If you continue in the way you have begun, then in future Phoebus [Apollo] will reward you for your labor.”<sup>20</sup> Knowledge of the gods of ancient Greece and Rome distinguished those with a classical education, and appealing to these gods for blessings was not considered a threat to Christian beliefs. As the guardian deities of scholars and artists, the ancient gods were permitted an existence in the otherwise intolerant Christian *Weltbild*. Perhaps it was this tolerance towards the gods of another culture acquired early in life that permitted Engelbert later to state that the Japanese were not atheists, but simply worshiped the Divine Majesty in a different fashion, and were often more ardent in their devotion than were the Christians.<sup>21</sup>

This tolerance towards gods of a different culture was, however, not generally accepted and stood in stark contrast to the beliefs of the less educated majority. Here the evil of heathen gods in the shape of the devil was considered a constant threat that had to be detected and eliminated before it could be passed on by witches like an infectious disease. The first entry at the end of Joachim’s thesis, that of the director of the school, exhorts the brother to fight, however to fight without spilling blood. It has been suggested that this refers to the fight against the witch hunt.<sup>22</sup> Also the other contributors refer to the ongoing fight, and in their exhortations the spelling of Kemper turns into Kaempfer, “the fighter.”

As Joachim was presenting his graduation thesis on September 23rd, 1665, the witch hunt, for which Lemgo was to become famous, had recommenced after a short lull in persecutions. Were the exhortations at the end of Joachim’s thesis an expression of the opposition of teachers and

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18 Wilbertz, „Handwerker, Hexen und Gelehrte“, 57.

19 *Theses Philosophicae Atheismo Oppositae* (Lemgo, 1665). According to his funeral speech (Lemgo, 1710, 37) Joachim first studied Theology in Rostock and later Law in Leiden.

20 „*Ut bene coepisti si sic perrexeris, olim/Sudoris Phoebus praemia grata dabit.*” *Theses Philosophicae Atheismo Oppositae* (Lemgo, 1665). Stadtarchiv Lemgo Y1121. See also Hoppe, 137.

21 *Amoenitates*, 490.

22 Hoppe, 138.

their students to the traditional beliefs in witches which they could not accept? „*Lege, intellige, iudica*“ (Read, understand, judge) were the words on a textbook of dialectic published by the school one hundred years earlier.<sup>23</sup> Reflecting this spirit, a former teacher of the school, Hermann Neuwald, had published in 1584 a work in protest to one which recommended the trial by water used since the early phases of the witch hunt in Lemgo.<sup>24</sup> This time the opposition to the witch hunt was, however, not to remain a fight of the pen. The blood of a vicar and a teacher at the school, the blood of Engelbert's two uncles, was to be spilled. Especially the junior vicar Koch was attacked for publicly criticizing the witch hunt and openly stating that innocent people were condemned to death.<sup>25</sup> With the controversial public pronouncements condemning the witch hunt by the vicar and one of their teachers, the students of the school as well must have been confronted by the question whether the witch hunt was justified.

### **The Witch Hunt in Lemgo.**

On February 16th, 1719 Liselotte von der Pfalz, Duchess of Orleans and sister-in-law of Louis XIV, wrote from Paris about unusually violent storms, adding “If that had happened in the county of Lippe, they would have considered it to be the work of witches.”<sup>26</sup> Lemgo was the largest and most important town in the county of Lippe, and when the name of the town appears in history books, it is usually not as the birthplace of Engelbert Kaempfer, but as the town that sentenced to death the greatest number of witches in the shortest span of time.

Witch hunts in Europe are documented from 1430, with the height of the persecution taking place between 1560 and 1660.<sup>27</sup> In Lemgo the trial of witches began relatively late: fourteen people were condemned to death between 1583 and 1599. A second wave of witch trials took place in Lemgo between 1628 and 1637, in the middle of the Thirty Years War. This time the number of victims increased: 86 people were condemned to death, five of whom were men. But Lemgo's most

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23 Lothar Weiß, *Lies, versteh', urteile: Begleitschrift zur Kabinettausstellung Bernhard Copius und das Lemgoer Gymnasium* (Lemgo, 2009), 23.

24 Hermann Neuwald, *Exegesis purgationis sive examinis sagarum super aquam frigidam projectarum, in qua refuta opinione Guilhelmi Adolphi Scribonij, de huius purgationis et aliarum similiarum origine, natura et veritate agitur.* (1584). See also Weiß, 29-31.

25 Gisela Wilbertz, „... es ist kein Erretter da gewesen ...“ *Pfarrer Andreas Koch, als Hexenmeister hingerichtet am 2. Juni 1666* (Lemgo 1999), 31, 33.

26 *Die Briefe der Liselotte von der Pfalz, Herzogin von Orleans* (W. Langewiesche-Brandt, 1935), 223. Also cited in Wolfgang Behringer, *Hexen und Hexenprozesse in Deutschland* (dtv, 2006) 450.

27 Gisela Wilbertz, „Bekehrer“ oder „Mahner“? Die Rolle von Geistlichen in den Hexenprozessen des 17. Jahrhunderts am Beispiel der Stadt Lemgo“ in *Jahrbuch für Westfälische Kirchengeschichte*, Vol. 102, 2006, 52.

intense phase of the witch hunt began two years after Engelbert Kaempfer was born, in 1653. In three waves of persecution separated only by a few years, some 150 people fell victim to the trials. Noticeable is the high percentage of men, amounting to at least thirty-three.<sup>28</sup>

The role Engelbert's father played in the witch hunt has been the subject of debate among historians. It was the task of the four vicars of Lemgo – Johann Kemper and Andreas Koch from St. Nicolai church and Johann Justus Alberti and Daniel Ludovici from St. Marien church – to save the souls of those accused of being in league with the devil. To make that possible, the accused had to repent, and in order to repent, they had to confess. It was the duty of the vicar to listen to the confession and if the accused showed sufficient remorse, to promise redemption. The vicar also accompanied the condemned to the stake or place of execution to administer the last blessing.

Since the devil did his work cunningly behind the scenes, and the accused were generally not prepared to confess their dealings with him voluntarily, torture was considered a legitimate way to arrive at the truth required to exorcise the devil. To radically eliminate those in league with the devil, the accused were pressured to name as many people as possible whom they had seen taking part in the witches' dance.<sup>29</sup> Since saving the soul was considered more important than the welfare of the body, the servants of God on earth usually had no qualms to put strong psychological pressure on the accused after torture to name those others, and later not to withdraw their testimony.

Engelbert Kaempfer's father was known for the zeal with which he attempted to save the souls of the accused. One local nineteenth century author has described him as "this zealous tool of the witch hunt" based on documents recording complaints about the heavy psychological pressure he put on the accused to produce comprehensive confessions.<sup>30</sup> An incident of 1666, when the vicar protested against the execution of a man who withdrew his confession, and subsequently refused to give him the last blessing, is therefore considered to have been not a condemnation of the witch hunt, but rather a protest against the execution of a person whose soul had not yet been redeemed.<sup>31</sup>

The existence of the devil and witches in league with him was not questioned by any good Christian. But some doubted that those accused as witches were indeed witches. Already in 1563 the physician Johann Weyer (1515-1588) had argued in his work *De praestigiis daemonum* that witchcraft was, as the title of his work stated, no more than a deception by demons, and that women

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28 The three waves of persecution took place in the years 1653-1656, 1665-1669, 1675-1676, with the last two trials taking place in 1681. Wilbertz, „Bekehrer“ oder „Mahner“?, 59.

29 Wilbertz, „... es ist kein Erretter da gewesen ...“, 35.

30 Christian Antze, „Johann Abschlag, eine Criminalgeschichte aus den Zeiten des Hexenprocesses“ in *Lippisches Magazin für vaterländische Kultur und Gemeindewohl*, Nr. 27 dated 5.10.1836, 426; Nr. 29 dated 19.10.1836, 458.

31 Gisela Wilbertz, „... es ist kein Erretter da gewesen ...“, 35.



who voluntarily admitted to being witches, and in their wake produced new waves of persecutions, simply suffered from delusion.<sup>32</sup> It is likely that at least the anonymous work *Cautio Criminalis*, published in 1631 by the university of nearby Rinteln, would have been known in Lemgo. In this work the question was posed how anybody could prove their innocence when torture was invariably continued until a confession of being in league with the devil was obtained. In order to show the absurdity of this process, the anonymous author, the Jesuit Friedrich von Spee (1591- 1635), wrote: “Go ahead! Take Capuchin Friars, Jesuits or religious of any other order and torture them. They will confess.”<sup>33</sup>

This sarcastic suggestion became reality in Lemgo, except that here not a catholic brother, but a protestant pastor was tortured until he confessed. At dawn of June 2nd, 1666 the junior vicar Andreas Koch was executed for being in league with the devil. This is not the place to describe in detail the extended process of how the brother-in-law and nine years younger colleague of Engelbert’s father started doubting whether the accused were guilty on hearing their confessions, how he voiced his doubts and after much torture finally confessed to being in league with the devil.<sup>34</sup>

In his criticism of the witch hunt, Koch based himself on the 1635 work of Johann Matthäus Meyfarth (1590-1642) *Christliche Erinnerung an Gewaltige Regenten ...* in which the author, as also Spee, held rulers and judges responsible for the death of innocent victims. Differing from Spee, Meyfarth published his accusations not in Latin and under a pseudonym, but in German accessible to all, and under his own name.<sup>35</sup> Koch bravely followed Meyfarth’s example, confronting those he held responsible without hiding his identity. Meyfarth managed to escape the wrath of the local rulers and judges by fleeing to Erfurt, a German town under Swedish rule at the time. The Swedish crown had outlawed the witch hunt.<sup>36</sup>

Thirty years later Andreas Koch believed that as pastor and son of one of Lemgo’s old-established families, he could get away with openly stating the truth. Yet in Lemgo opposition to the witch hunt and criticism of the judges was taken as indisputable evidence that the vicar was in

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32 Wolfgang Behringer, *Hexen und Hexenprozesse in Deutschland*, (dtv 2006), 319. Christina Vanja, „Waren die Hexen gemütskrank? Psychisch kranke Frauen im hessischen Hospital Merxhausen” in Ingrid Ahrendt-Schulte, ed., *Geschlecht, Magie und Hexenverfolgung* ( 2002), 175.

33 Friedrich von Spee, *Cautio Criminalis oder Rechtliches Bedenken wegen der Hexenprozesse*, ann. & trans., Joachim-Friedrich Ritter (dtv, 2007), X, 96.

34 For details see Gisela Wilbertz, „... es ist kein Erretter da gewesen ...“ and „Bekehrer“ oder „Mahner“?“.

35 Wilbertz, „... es ist kein Erretter da gewesen ...“, 33; Behringer, *Hexen und Hexenprozesse in Deutschland*, 329.

36 Walter Rummel, Rita Voltmer, *Hexen und Hexenverfolgung in der Frühen Neuzeit*, (Darmstadt), 2008, 69.

league with the devil. Neither an appeal to the ruler, the count at Detmold, nor the pleading of the count's widowed stepmother and of other supporters and friends could save his life. Engelbert's father too believed his brother-in-law to be guilty and a month before Koch's execution penned a letter expressing his deep distress at the great dangers his parishioners were facing "with a wolf as shepherd of the flock".<sup>37</sup>

Even before the death sentence of Andreas Koch was carried out, Engelbert's second uncle, Bernhard Grabbe, was also accused of practicing witchcraft. Like Koch, he came from an old-established family in Lemgo, and in 1651 had been appointed lecturer and cantor at the Latin school. However, a long-time feud existed between the Grabbe family and that of Hermann Cothmann (1629-1683), who became responsible for the witch trials in January of 1666, and was promoted to major of the town in the following year. Grabbe's friendship with his brother-in-law Koch was used to accuse him of similarly being in league with devil. He tried to save his life by fleeing Lemgo, but was caught and returned to the town. Grabbe's death sentence was pronounced in December 1666 and took place in March of the following year.<sup>38</sup>

### **Engelbert Kaempfer leaves Lemgo**

In 1666, the year in which Koch was executed and Grabbe's death sentence was pronounced, the witch hunt in Lemgo reached its peak, with thirty-seven people being put to death.<sup>39</sup> The following year, the year in which his second uncle was also put to death, Engelbert Kaempfer left Lemgo and was never to settle in that town again. He first spent a year with relatives studying at the Latin school of Hameln some forty kilometers away from home, but then steadily moved to schools further east, until he finally wrote his graduation thesis at Danzig (Gdansk, Poland), over 900 kilometers from Lemgo.<sup>40</sup>

Some historians have argued that Engelbert's departure was not due to the witch hunt, but simply because changing schools was frequently the norm at that time. As evidence they point out that two thirds of the students at the Lemgo Latin school came from outside Lemgo.<sup>41</sup> Yet his two

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37 Letter Johann Kenper of 20. Mai 1666 to Maria Magdalena von Waldeck, cited in Wilbertz, „Handwerker, Hexen und Gelehrte“, 75.

38 Regina Fritsch, „Grabbe, Bernhard“. in *Lexikon zur Geschichte der Hexenverfolgung*, Gudrun Gersmann, Katrin Moeller & Jürgen-Michael Schmidt, eds., historicum.net, URL: [http://www.historicum.net/no\\_cache/persistent/artikel/1604/](http://www.historicum.net/no_cache/persistent/artikel/1604/) (consulted 30.3.2010); Karl Meier-Lemgo, *Hexen, Henker und Tyrannen: Die letzte blutige Hexenverfolgung in Lemgo 1665-1681* (Lemgo, 1949), 17-23, 35-36.

39 Karl Meier-Lemgo, *Die Geschichte der Stadt Lemgo* (Lemgo, 1962), 175.

40 Karl Meier-Lemgo, *Engelbert Kaempfer erforscht das seltsame Asien*, (Hamburg, 1960), 12.

41 Hoppe, 137-138. Detlef Haberland, *Engelbert Kaempfer 1651-1716, A Biography*, Peter Hogg, trans. (London, 1966) p. 7.

brothers whose school attendance is documented, did not change schools.<sup>42</sup>

No material exists to describe Engelbert's feelings and thoughts at the time, but the reaction of the sixteen-year-old can well be imagined. Koch and Grabbe, together with their families, were relatives in whose proximity Engelbert had grown up. As his teachers and as pastor, the two men served as role models and seat of authority. Grabbe was accused of having taught students in his house, permitted them to play in his barn and excused them from classes.<sup>43</sup> Such behavior, condemned by the judges, no doubt endeared him to his students. Moreover, it could not go unnoticed that the women and men accused of witchcraft happened to be enemies of those in authority. Even Engelbert's father realized this eventually. In a funeral speech of a former mayor who had been stripped of his post because of differences concerning the witch hunt, he mentioned "the underserved persecution" of the deceased. In another case he wrote a favorable testimony for a man who had come under suspicion.<sup>44</sup> The fears and concerns of the adults about who might be taken next into the torture chamber could not have gone unnoticed by Engelbert and his friends.

Engelbert Kaempfer was turning sixteen in the year he left Lemgo. He was no longer a child, but a young man, most likely already speaking with the deep voice of an adult. He was at an age when young people critically examine the conduct and opinions of their parents and feel the need to oppose established customs. Would this young man, who became famous for his powers of observation, have shared the opinion of his father that his two uncles were in league with the devil and deserved torture and death?

The father, on the other hand, having lost two relatives to the witch hunt, might well have watched the development of his precocious son with increasing concern, for it was popularly believed that witchcraft was infectious among relatives. Already earlier members of the Kemper family had been condemned as witches, and in 1666 a younger stepbrother of Johann Kemper had also come under suspicion.<sup>45</sup> If Engelbert had voiced any criticism of the witch hunt, then the father would have considered it a matter of urgency to remove his son from Lemgo.

It has been claimed that Engelbert Kaempfer never condemned the witch hunt.<sup>46</sup> It is true he never published a book or article solely in criticism of it, yet when reporting about foreign customs he veers off the subject to condemn the witch hunt strongly in both of his major works.

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42 For Joachim, see above. For the step-brother Andreas, *Andreas Kempffers Selbstbiographie*, 14.

43 Fritsch.: „Grabbe, Bernhard“ in *Lexikon zur Geschichte der Hexenverfolgung*, in: [historicum.net](http://historicum.net) (consulted 30.3.2010).

44 Wilbertz, „Handwerker, Hexen und Gelehrte“, 77-78.

45 Wilbertz, „Handwerker, Hexen und Gelehrte“, 50-55.

46 Hoppe, 139.

### Engelbert Kaempfer's Condemnation of the Witch Hunt

In his work on Japan, Kaempfer describes the large number of Japanese smugglers annually caught and punished severely at Nagasaki. He explains: "Nowadays delinquents confess immediately because Settsu no Kami has invented a new instrument of torture where the naked body is pulled over short spikes and sharp needles, resembling the so-called witches' chair of Lemgo, where even the innocent confess immediately."<sup>47</sup> Although this remark does little to explain the situation in Japan, the author chose to inform his broad readership about the innocence of those who met their death as witches in Lemgo.

Already in his earlier work, his *Amoenitates Exoticae* of 1712, he wrote in much greater detail and with much more pathos about the witch hunt. He does not mention Lemgo, but that was hardly necessary when even in Paris his native county of Lippe was famous for its witch hunt. It would also have been unwise, since when publishing this work he was in the service of the son of the count who not only failed to prevent the witch hunt, but also profited handsomely by the money acquired by the count to mercifully commute death by fire to death by the sword. In this Latin *Amoenitates Exoticae*, the title of which is often translated as "Exotic Pleasures" or "Exotic Tidbits", Kaempfer twice inserts long passages about the evil of the witch hunt when discussing foreign customs.

He does this once under the title "The Custom of Establishing Innocence by the Use of Crocodiles and Fire among the Disbelievers of the Orient,"<sup>48</sup> Yet the first four and a half pages of this chapter describe in detail "the ancient paganism of the West" where guilt and innocence are established by fire, water and even fighting; practices, he points out, that are solely based on popular imagination and lacking any justification. He traces the history of such superstitions, citing examples ranging from the vestal virgins of ancient Rome to the trial of wives of mediaeval emperors, carefully noting his sources. Just as the sowing of good seed often encourages the strong growth of weeds, he notes, so the heathen superstitions sprouted with new force on the spread of Christianity. Even the most sacred symbols of Christianity, the savior's cross and the body and blood of Christ, were used in justification. These practices were forbidden by the Council of Trent, but, he states, they were so deeply rooted that they could only be cut down, but not eliminated.

Kaempfer then turns to the trial by submersion in water which, he points out, was forbidden by the laws of the Holy Roman Empire, but nevertheless still used to establish guilt or innocence.

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47 *Kaempfer's Japan: Tokugawa Culture Observed*, 435.

48 „Investigatio Innocentiae per Crocodilos & Ignem, apud Gentiles Orientes hodie usitata" in *Amoenitates Exoticae*, Book 2, chapter 12. For a somewhat free translation into German see Karl Meier-Lemgo, *Seltsames Asien* (Lemgo, 1933), 131-137.

The practice was also in use during the witch hunt of Kaempfer's youth, even though, as mentioned above, it had already been condemned by a former teacher of Lemgo's Latin school more than a century earlier.<sup>49</sup> First Kaempfer discusses in scientific terms the ability of the human body to float until he bursts out emotionally: "I would like to ask, does human society really harbor so many sorcerers in its midst that the longer the trials continue the more are discovered, until finally not the lack of accused but rather their growing number imposes limits on the inquisition and torture, by sworn experts of witches, called Commissioners of the Inquisition (frequently uneducated, blinded by prejudice, if not rapacious, cruel and vicious).<sup>50</sup> In that case I would like to know why among the thousands who drown in shipwrecks there is never someone who escapes death by sorcery, mocking the waves with the lightness of his body. For it is unlikely that there are no such people [among the shipwrecked]. It is much more likely that especially those decide on the lucrative profession of the sea who know that a shipwreck would not pose any danger to them.<sup>51</sup> However, I am straying from the topic."<sup>52</sup>

Kaempfer's vehement accusation of the Commissioners of the Inquisition echoes those of Meyfahrt and those his uncle Andreas Koch made much earlier. Yet this lengthy discussion of the evils of Western superstitions and especially the witch hunt is curiously out of place in a scholarly dissertation about the "Disbelievers of the Orient." Kaempfer admits that he is deviating from his topic, but is not prepared to omit this passage before the manuscript goes into print. Only after this vehement condemnation of the belief in and trial of witches, does he proceed to discuss the subject of the title.<sup>53</sup>

In a further chapter titled "Magic Spells of the Makassars, or Inhabitants of Celebes", Kaempfer discusses magic spells for sexual virility, a subject he suggests "less than suitable for chaste ears" but nevertheless "not unworthy of contemplation." Again he starts off not with the Makassars, but with a section titled "Superstitious and Inane Spells of Various Nations." He traces the magic spells back to Vergil and then notes that even later when "enlightened by a purer religion"

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49 For Lemgo see the report of trial by water of Abschlag in 1665 in Antze, *Lippisches Magazin*, 1837, 694.

50 In the cited text round brackets are those of the original, while square brackets contain material added by the present author as explanation.

51 Contrary to earlier trials by water where it was believed that the innocent would float, during the witch hunt it was believed that witches were lighter than other humans and would therefore not sink. James IV of Scotland (later James I of England) claimed in his *Daemonologie* of 1597 that water was so pure that it "shall refuse to receive them [the witches] in her bosom" (spelling modernized). *Daemonologie In Forme of a Dialogie*, printed by Robert Waldegrave, 1597, 63.

52 *Amoenitates*, 457-458.

53 *Ibid.*, 454-458

“slavish credulity and baseless superstition” continued. He is appalled that even in his times, when scholars are publishing scientific articles of great erudition, these same men are credulously following ancient beliefs regarding magic spells, even men famous for their medical research, such as Hennigus Arnisaeus (1580-1636), the German physician of the King of Denmark, and the Portuguese Estevam Rodrigues de Castro (1559-1638).

What concerns Kaempfer are obviously not the practices of far-off countries which he excuses as harmless and based on natural methods, but those of his own native environment. He complains that even though the well known professor of medicine Daniel Sennert (1572-1637) had shown that no living creature can act beyond the attributes of its species, even Francis Bacon (1561-1626) believed in magic spells.<sup>54</sup>

Kaempfer chose to include this criticism of European superstitions in his Latin maiden work intended to introduce fellow scholars to some of his learned research overseas. The fact that he did not cut these passages before the manuscript went into print shows that the witch hunt had left a deep imprint on his psyche, generating the urge to bring the subject up for discussion, even though in academic terms it was out of place. Repeatedly he mentions famous men who believed in these superstitions, as if plagued by the question of how his own father, a pastor and man of higher education, could have believed in such absurdities. The answer seems always the same: since ancient times even educated men have believed in these superstitions, and his own times were no exception.

Some scholars have asserted that the cruelties of the witch hunt were so commonplace in the seventeenth century that those who witnessed them were not unduly disturbed by them. Based on the mistaken claim that Engelbert Kaempfer never referred in his writings to the witch hunt of his hometown, it has been concluded that hence these events could have had little or no impact on his life.<sup>55</sup> Yet the highly emotional material published by the otherwise matter-of-fact scholar indicates the opposite. So does the progression of his life where on changing schools and then universities he came to live further and further away from home until he set off for a decade of travel which would take him to the furthest part of the globe. Although he remained a pious Christian till the end of his life, the experience of the witch hunt sanctioned by his own church did not permit him to share the belief of his contemporaries in the superiority of his own Christian church and culture.

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54 “Ligaturae Magicae Macassarorum, sive incolarum Insulae Celebes” *Amoenitates*, Book 3, Chapter 16, 653-658. For an English translation see Robert W. Carruba, trans., *Engelbert Kaempfer, Exotic Pleasures, Fascicle III, Curious Scientific and Medical Observations*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1996, 199-204.

55 Hoppe, 139.

### **Engelbert Kaempfer and his Description of Japan.**

Kaempfer was not uncritical of Japan. Peace had its price. Describing the complex system of police control that existed in Japan, he concludes: “With these precise arrangements and manifold laws, the citizens are bound with unbelievably hard and stringent discipline to servile obedience and heavy physical duties.” Yet also here he attempts to remain even-handed and adds: “However, they do not suffer under a wide variety of unbearable taxes like the people of Europe.”<sup>56</sup> At another time he notes that with the system of mutual responsibility where family members, innocent bystanders and even all inhabitants of the same administrative unit of *machi*, or street, are punished for the crime of an individual, “nobody can live assured that he will be spared.”<sup>57</sup> The punishment of death was incurred for even the smallest transgression against orders. The governor of Nagasaki, Yamaoka Tsushima no Kami was a most generous man, distributing part of his salary to the poor. Yet he executed “the servants of his mansion without much ado for the slightest act of dishonesty” Kaempfer notes in his description of Japan.<sup>58</sup> Such conduct was considered so absurd in Europe that it later came to be parodied in the comic opera *The Mikado* by Gilbert and Sullivan. The swift taking of life for small offences was unacceptable in Kaempfer’s eyes, but even here he feels compelled to note that in Japan the judges “have fewer deaths to account for and less blood on their hands than those in our Christian countries.”<sup>59</sup> The large number of deaths in Europe mentioned here, seems again to refer to the great numbers that were put to death during the witch hunt.

Disillusioned by the conduct of his fellow Christians early in life, Kaempfer did not suffer from the prejudices that tended to blind the eyes of the missionaries and often marred their otherwise acute observations. He was thus able to provide the world with a description of Japan that not only made a major impact at the time of its publication, but also outlasted the test of time. The objectivity of Kaempfer’s account made it also acceptable in Japan. Describing subjects which no Japanese at the time considered worthwhile recording – ranging from the shape of the toilets to the instruments of musicians at the wayside – it has become an important source not just for Western but also Japanese historians of the period.

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56 *Kaempfer’s Japan: Tokugawa Culture Observed*, 160.

57 *Ibid*, 160.

58 *Ibid*, 149.

59 *Ibid*, 258.