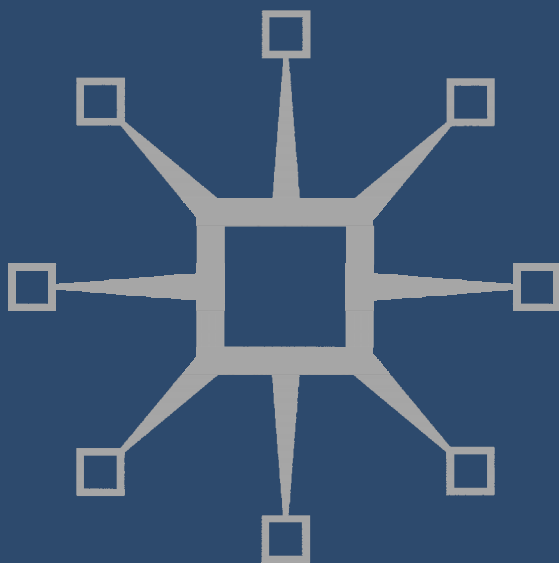


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Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America

A History

Johannes Dillinger



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Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America

A History

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

cf.	see also
HRG	A. Erler and E. Kaufmann (1971–1998) (eds) <i>Handwörterbuch zur deutschen Rechtsgeschichte</i> , 5 vols. (Berlin: Schmidt)
HDA	H. Bächtold-Stäubli and E. Hoffmann-Krayer (1987) (eds) <i>Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens</i> , 10 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter 1927–1942, reprinted Berlin: De Gruyter)
HHSTAW	Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Wiesbaden
HSTAD	Hessisches Staatsarchiv Darmstadt
HSTAST	Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart
GLAK	Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe
LASH	Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, Schleswig
LHAKO	Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz
TNA	The National Archives of London
STAA	Staatsarchiv Augsburg
STAW	Staatsarchiv Wertheim
TLAI	Tiroler Landesarchiv Innsbruck
n.d.	date of publication not given
n.p.	no page numbers
n.p.p.	place of publication not given
n.n.	name of publisher not given
p.	page
pp.	pages
vol.	volume

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Introduction: Treasures and Magic

If we pursue and bring to good passe this labour, it shall live upon our tombes (so that wee bury no treasure with us, and therefore be digg'd up againe).

(William Rowley: *A Search for Money*, 1609)

Treasures were magical. Until the nineteenth century, buried treasures were shrouded with intricate webs of narratives. Most of these narratives had magical elements. Vestiges of that treasure magic have survived. In the summer of 2009, while I worked on this book, the spectacular discovery of an Anglo-Saxon treasure in Staffordshire made headlines. Metal detector enthusiast Terry Herbert, who had searched for treasure troves in vain for years, unearthed about 1500 gold and silver objects dating back to the seventh century. In an interview, Herbert told the press:

I have this phrase that I say sometimes – ‘spirits of yesteryear take me where the coins appear’ – but on that day I changed coins to gold. [...] I don’t know why I said it that day, but I think somebody was listening and directed me to it. [...] I was going to bed and in my sleep I was seeing gold items.¹

Herbert’s half-joking remarks bear witness to old ideas of magical treasure hunting. It was common knowledge in Old European culture, that is, the culture of Britain and the Continent before the onset of the Industrial Revolution that spirits guarded treasures and sometimes gave their riches to men. Some treasure seekers had visions in their dreams that helped them to find what they were looking for. Others tried to divine

where treasures were buried. All these beliefs and practices belonged to the large and complex field of magical treasure hunting. It is the purpose of this book to examine and discuss the magic of treasure hunting in Britain, Europe and North America from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century.

Before we begin our discussion of the magic of treasure hunting, we need to define the terms 'treasure' and 'magic'.

The English word 'treasure' and its equivalents (Latin *thesaurus*, French *trésor*, German *Schatz*) have a variety of meanings or, rather, they have been used as metaphors so extensively that they no longer signify anything specific. 'Treasure' does not necessarily refer to a material object or an objective quality. 'Treasure' is a term of endearment as well as a word used for the financial resources of a country. It would be foolish to base bibliographical work on the use of the word 'treasure'. In book titles, 'treasure' and its equivalents from other languages may refer to a meditation or sermon (e.g. John White's 'The Gospel Treasure...'), historical documents (e.g. Ghislain Brunel's 'Trésor des Chartes des Rois de France'), philosophical maxims (e.g. William Pyke's *Conduct and Duty, a Treasure-Book...*), poems (e.g. Hugh MacDiarmid's *Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*) or entertaining and uplifting stories (e.g. Johann Peter Hebbel's *Schatzkästlein des rheinischen Hausfreundes* – 'Small Treasure Chest of the Good Friend from the Rhineland'). The Latin *thesaurus* is most often used in the titles of dictionaries. Anything – and even anyone – regarded as valuable or dear may be called a 'treasure'.

Definitions of treasure and treasure trove used in the early modern period might be more helpful to define treasure. Chambers' *Cyclopaedia*, published in 1728 and thus one of the oldest encyclopedias, defined treasure matter-of-factly as a 'store of money in reserve'. The *Cyclopaedia* distinguished treasure from treasure trove, which was 'any Money, Gold, Silver, Plate, or Bullion, ... found in any Place, and none knows to whom it belongs'. The *Cyclopaedia* gave a short survey of treasure trove in British and Continental European law.²

The *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert, a key work of the Enlightenment, seems to have echoed Chambers when it gave its definition of treasure as 'un amas de richesses mises en reserve'. The magic of treasure hunting played no role in the *Encyclopédie's* article on treasures, but it referred briefly to treasure hunting as just another form of ceremonial magic.³

A little more talkative was the encyclopedia published by the German Zedler between 1734 and 1751. Zedler's 64-volume *Universal-Lexicon* was

by far the biggest encyclopaedia of the eighteenth century. The work defined treasure as 'a store of money hidden in a secret place for so long that nobody knows anymore whom it used to belong to [...] or a deposit of money which is so old that it does not have an owner anymore'. Zedler's encyclopedia defined treasure hunting as an 'effort to seek and unearth money which is hidden in some place. If one searches for treasure with the help of the devil, this is a kind of magic.' Zedler was a supporter of the Enlightenment. His lexicon opposed witch-hunts. However, it was prepared to admit that magic could work – a surprisingly conservative stance, which it nevertheless shared with the *Cyclopaedia* and the *Encyclopédie*. Zedler's text had suggested that treasure hunting was not necessarily a magical activity. The alternative was, however, not attractive either: treasure hunters were 'those frauds who make simple minds believe that great treasures are buried in the earth in various places and claim that they could protect people from the spirits who guard the treasures [...]. However, if somebody believes them, they usually demand a lot of money to cover the costs and flee secretly as soon as they have the money.'⁴ Evidently, treasure hunting could be both, magic and fraud.

Even though the definitions are all too short and rather vague in some respects, it is safe to say that all of them agreed that there was nothing natural about treasure. Treasure was an artefact or consisted of artefacts. It was clearly no natural resource akin to the gold found in a mine. The French and the German definition of treasure even emphasized that treasure was a deposit. It had been stored or hidden, or at the very least it had been lost. Chambers and Zedler agreed that treasure trove had no legal owner. However, it would be difficult to include this element in our definition of treasure.

The question of the legal ownership of treasure troves was a highly controversial issue in early modern Europe. In some countries, the government claimed ownership of all treasure. Thus, hidden valuables without a legal owner could not exist – at least according to the juridical norms.⁵ It might be better to exclude legal problems from our definition of treasure. We will therefore suggest a short and comprehensive definition of treasure that elaborates a little on the essentials of the definitions given by the eighteenth-century encyclopaedists: a treasure is a lost or hidden cache of valuable artefacts.

Treasure is valuable, but lost or hidden. It is hard to find. One might stumble over a treasure trove, but a deliberate and active search is a very difficult venture; if this were not the case, treasure would be unearthed immediately.

What could a deliberate search for a treasure, an object that is by definition lost, be like? Here we have the basic problem of the treasure hunt with its strong and direct influence on treasure law. A deliberate search for treasure was a magical operation.

Thus, a treasure hunt in Old Europe was no profane venture. As magic was not simply a substitute for technology, the magic employed by treasure hunters was not just a substitute for a metal detector. To be sure, treasure hunters' magic included divination, which would help to find the treasure site, and it included rituals designed to protect the diggers from harm. However, treasure magic was more than an instrument. It was part and parcel of the Old European worldview. There was no magic-free sphere in early modern culture.⁶ The mere fact that treasure hunting was no profane activity did not really set it apart from many other elements of life in pre-modern Europe.

How shall we define 'magic'? Anthropologists have suggested a number of definitions of this most ambiguous term. Most of them do not help to decode Old European culture since they work with categories that distort the image of the early modern period. We have to take into account that Old European culture was by and large a Christian culture. The differentiation between religion and magic was as crucial for early modern Europe as it was difficult. Any anthropological argument that suggests identifying religion with magic must necessarily eclipse important ideas held by the people of early modern Europe.⁷ Thus, it can hardly be used in order to reconstruct the cultural landscape of Old Europe.

The best and most practical way to distinguish between magic and religion is the one suggested by Durkheim and Mauss.⁸ It is particularly attractive because it is implicitly historical. According to Durkheim, the difference between religion and magic is simply that religions create institutions, whereas magic does not. There are religious organizations with a certain structure and certain norms. These institutions help to sustain the religions. Magic has no institutions or organizations. There is, as Durkheim once suggested, no magical church. The only rules that magic knows are very simple. They are more or less on the level of the 'rules' or 'norms' that we might find in a recipe. They are descriptive in character, not normative. As magic does not have any organizations, institutions or binding laws other than purely technical instructions, it does not exist in the plural. It would not make any sense to talk about various different 'magics' as we talk about various different religions. To be sure, we could differentiate between folk magic and so-called High Magic or learned magic. But this differentiation would be

on the same level as a differentiation between the customs of popular Christianity and the learned theology of the Christian churches, not on the level of the differentiation between, say, Christianity and Hinduism.

Religious organizations are always public. They are usually well-known. Unless they suffer the most brutal suppression, they do what they do very openly. As a rule, the state supports religion (at least one religion) or is willing to cooperate with it. Magic is secretive. It does not try actively to win a mass audience. As magic lacks organization, it has no real membership patterns. If magicians think at all about themselves as a group, they tend to see themselves as adepts, as members of a small and secretive elitist group. The state is – at best – indifferent towards magic; in Old Europe it was, of course, openly hostile to it.

We might thus define magic as any system of ideas and practices not supported by institutions and abstract rules that is designed to establish contact between the visible world of everyday life and the realm of spirits and occult forces in order to achieve a certain aim in the visible world.

What sources can we use to learn about treasure magic? There are some secondary sources. Hill's legal history of treasure troves and Beard's book on treasure hunting are indispensable, even though both accounts are seriously outdated and neither author focused on the magic of treasure hunting.⁹ Bercé concentrated on legal history and 'real' treasures but discussed magical treasure hunts briefly.¹⁰ Works on the history of magic mentioned treasure hunters but did not look at them in any detail.¹¹ A host of old regional and local studies generally summarized primary sources, giving little interpretation.¹² What kinds of primary sources will tell us about buried treasures and treasure magic? First, we will discuss the laws that regulated treasure hunts and forbade treasure magic. More or less based on these laws, there were thousands of trials against treasure seekers in early modern Europe. Thus, the records of these trials form the second and the most important basis of this study. Any attempt to give exact figures concerning the actual number of trials against treasure hunters in early modern Europe or in any sizeable region would be foolish at the present time. I have tried to include a number of references to trials of treasure hunters, many taken from the archives. However, I know that there is still a vast mass of unread materials available. I hope that this book will generate new interest in these trials. There is a huge treasure of source materials yet to be unearthed that could help us to understand Old Europe better. Thirdly, there were press reports. Major treasure hunts – or spectacular frauds connected with them – were always news. In a number of instances,

we find treasure hunts mentioned in the early press. Fourthly, we will use the contributions to the learned juridical and theological debate about treasure hunting. Fifthly, there were, of course, magical writings. We find these in libraries but also in the archives when the court saw fit to include single sheets or even booklets with magical formulae taken from the treasure hunters in the trial records.

Sixthly, there is what one might call folkloristic literature. The times when any folk tale was supposed to give a true account of customs and beliefs of the ancient past and to present scholars with true insight into the minds of the common people, entirely free from the influence of elite and print culture, are safely over. We know today that popular culture, and especially narratives circulating in popular culture, are highly complex and highly changeable products stemming from a variety of influences. Stories taken from the book market of elite culture were transmitted orally, wandered back into books, reappeared in sermons and were talked about among aristocrats, townspeople and peasants. They were changed and adapted to suit any new situation. Such narratives, popular tales, legends or folk tales are an important part of everyday or popular culture not because they come from secluded villages and did not change for a thousand years; they are an important part of popular culture because they may come from the big cities and from the countryside alike and because they can change over time. As folk legends abound with stories about hidden treasures, it would be irresponsible not to use them as sources. Of course, folk tales cannot be used as evidence for events that took place at a certain time and in a certain place. Folk tales are not about 'facts': they are about collective imaginations and mentalities. Popular narratives tell us what the contemporaries found believable. The credibility of these narratives was based not only on their plot but also on the message they conveyed. This message was more often than not an ethical one. Folk tales did entertain, but, like most popular entertainment narratives, they confirmed the moral and behavioural standards that dominated the society in which they were told. Their status as primary sources cannot be disputed.¹³ As folk tales are sources for mentalities and folk belief, it is not important that we cannot date them precisely. Whenever possible, I used the earliest printed forms of these stories, that is, theologians' polemics against superstition, broadsheets or entertaining books of popular tales from the early modern period. When I compared the narratives in these sources with the versions of folk tales in the collections of folklorists from the early nineteenth century, I found essentially the same tales with little or no differences. What is more: The magical imagery of early

modern trials against treasure hunters is in large parts identical with that conveyed in collections of popular stories in the early nineteenth century. Of course, that is not supposed to mean that exactly the same story has been told in the same place for centuries or even that the folk tales of the nineteenth century were based on actual trials against treasure hunters from the early modern period. It simply means that the pool of motifs seems to have remained largely stable. This is also the impression that the great surveys of folkloristic motifs convey.¹⁴ Thus, I felt encouraged to quote also from nineteenth-century collections of folk tales, especially as most of them are easily available to any readers who might want to look them up themselves. These references to materials published in the nineteenth century primarily serve illustrative purposes. The stories about treasures were so well-known that there were even anti-legends that played with their motifs. The harsh realism and materialism of these anti-legends made fun of the belief in magic. Their 'programme' was that of the Enlightenment; Voltaire might have found them amusing. Whether these stories were really products of the popularization of Enlightenment thought or whether they were older and thus should be seen as an example of the well-documented scepticism concerning magical motifs in Old Europe is next to impossible to say. At any rate, these anti-legends formed a part of the popular imagery of treasure hunting, too, and will therefore be used as sources. With this variety of material, we should be able to reconstruct the complex and multi-faceted treasure lore of Old Europe.

Some disclaimers may be needed. This book is about the magical treasure hunt: it is not about 'real' treasures – caches of valuables that were actually found. We will only mention the development of archeology and excavation techniques most briefly.

This book will not deal with treasure as a metaphor. The Bible and Christian theology abound with metaphorical references to treasures. In the New Testament, the treasure in Heaven is the redemption of the soul. In the well-known parable of the treasure in the field (Matthew 13:44), the treasure stands for nothing less than the Kingdom of God itself. A close examination of these metaphors in the history of theology would be most interesting but it cannot form the subject of this book.¹⁵ It goes almost without saying that the theologians' use of the treasure metaphor did not mean that they appreciated the gathering of real treasures in any way. As a matter of fact, most of these metaphors worked only because they implied a rejection of worldly wealth. The accumulation of riches was an obvious and odious sign of avarice – one of the Seven Deadly Sins. It was even worse to hoard money: hidden

caches of cash served no practical purpose. They were mammon for mammon's sake. When the Commercial Revolution of the fourteenth century brought about a shortage of silver, the Church's old critical attitude towards hoarding money was reinvigorated.¹⁶

All of the secondary sources suggest that most treasure hunts took place in the early modern period. My own research proved this suggestion essentially true. Therefore, the focus of this book will be on the early modern period, that is, the period roughly between 1450 and 1800. However, we will investigate treasure hunts in the Middle Ages and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well. The first chapter deals briefly with treasure trove and treasure hunting in the legal history of Old Europe. In the second chapter, we take a quick glance at the treasures of the Middle Ages. Chapters 3–6 discuss treasure hunting in the early modern period. They focus on the spirit beings who supposedly guarded treasures, on the magic that the treasure hunters used, on the authorities' attitude towards treasure hunting and on the social background of the treasure seekers. In Chapter 7, we deal with the magic of treasure hunting after 1800. In Chapter 8, I interpret the findings and suggest an explanation for the prevalence of treasure hunting in the early modern period. The conclusion very briefly summarizes the discussion.

1

The Treasure in Law and Early Archaeology

I greatly fear, my money is not safe.

(William Shakespeare: *Comedy of Errors*, 1589)

Law

The problem of who should be the rightful owner of a discovered treasure, and its distribution between the finder, the owner of the land on which the treasure was found and the fisc, is as ancient as it is difficult. The parable of the treasure hidden in a field (Matthew 13:44) hinted at that problem: the man who had found the treasure in the field buried it again and bought the field. Evidently, the Bible assumed that only the owner of the land where the treasure was buried had any claim to it. Some historians of law suggested a rather simple pattern that focused on two huge legal traditions. The Roman legal tradition had ruled the ancient empire. After the end of the Middle Ages, many parts of the Continent rediscovered and adopted Roman laws. Some legal historians claimed that according to this tradition a treasure belonged to the finder, or to the finder and the owner of the land on which the treasure had been discovered. The Germanic legal tradition dominated the Germanic lands of the Middle Ages, among them the Frankish Empire, as well as medieval and early modern England, where the Roman laws had little impact. Some jurists claimed that in this legal tradition all treasure troves went to the fisc. Hugo Grotius was probably the first jurist to describe this rather clear-cut dichotomy between the Roman and the Germanic legal tradition concerning treasure. He explained that in his own time, England, the German states, France, Spain and Denmark still followed the Germanic tradition.¹ A number of authors accepted Grotius' view almost until the present day.² However, if we

take a closer look at Roman and Germanic law, the matter becomes a lot more complicated.

The earliest Roman law mentioning treasure troves dates back to Hadrian. According to this, the finder and the landowner should each get half of the find. Only if a treasure had been deliberately searched for on land belonging to the empire was it to be confiscated, no doubt because such a search implied that the treasure seekers had planned to cheat the state. However, the Roman legal tradition was not homogeneous. In 315, Constantine the Great enacted a law that gave half of every treasure to the fisc no matter where the find had been made. If the finder failed to alert the authorities about the treasure trove, all of it was confiscated without further ado. In Emperor Valentinian's laws, we find a completely new point of view: the landowner was entitled to one quarter of the find, while the rest went to the finder – the authorities got nothing at all. In 474, Zeno renewed the old rule that divided the treasure equally between the finder and the landowner. His law was incorporated into the great codification of Roman law, the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, which was to shape the legal debate for centuries to come. Quoting Hadrian's law, the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* stressed that nobody was allowed to search for treasure on someone else's land without explicit permission. If somebody violated that rule, he lost the treasure. However, if a person found a treasure trove on someone else's land by chance, they could keep half of the find while the other half went to the landowner. The *Codex Iustinianus* gave an example for such accidental finds by people other than the landowner: treasure might be found by a farmhand ploughing the land or doing some other kind of agricultural work.³

It would be wrong to assume that the German legal tradition always gave treasure troves to the fiscal authorities. To be sure, Theodoric the Great declared that all treasure belonged to the state. However, it is very questionable whether this regulation of the fifth-century Ostrogothic monarch mirrored the Germanic tradition. Not even the Gothic tradition was homogeneous: Theodoric's law contradicted other regulations that demanded the division of the treasure. There is no reliable record of a law demanding the confiscation of treasure in Frankish sources. The Constitution of Roncalli, enacted in 1158 by Emperor Frederick Redbeard, was already clearly influenced by Roman law: half of any treasure found on land owned by the empire or by the Church belonged to the Crown. If the treasure had been deliberately searched for, all of it went to the fisc. The *Sachsenspiegel*, a Saxon law book of the

thirteenth century, differentiated between mineral veins and treasure troves. Whereas the owner of a piece of land where metals had been found enjoyed certain rights, treasure belonged to the king without any exceptions. There is no clear connection between this law and that of Theodoric. Both cannot be attributed to a common – supposedly ancient Germanic – source. We should not see these laws as expressions of age-old legal traditions but rather as political measures designed to strengthen the monarch. The Constitutions of Melfi, enacted by Emperor Frederick II in 1231, included the same regulation. Here, however, the sources are clear: Frederick merely adopted a law of the Norman Empire in Sicily.⁴

The laws that had strengthened the rights of the Crown concerning treasure troves made hardly any impact. The *Schwabenspiegel*, a German law book of the late thirteenth century that was otherwise heavily influenced by the *Sachsenspiegel*, turned Valentinian's law on its head: three quarters of the find should go to the owner of the land, one quarter to the finder. The king was not entitled to any part of the treasure unless it had been found on a public highway, which was supposed to belong to the Crown. In that case, the king enjoyed the same rights as any private landowner. In the fifteenth century, most German cities and principalities accepted this rule. In the German lands, the laws about treasure troves mingled with more general regulations concerning lost property. In the early Middle Ages, found objects were simply presented to the public. If nobody claimed ownership, the finder could keep the find.⁵ From the thirteenth century onwards, the German princes tried to establish their right to all lost property. The variety of regional and local laws and bylaws that came into existence as part of this process did not help to simplify the legal situation.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the question of whom a treasure belonged to became the object of a heated and lengthy debate among jurists. As treasure was thought of as lost property or abandoned goods, it seemed perfectly justified that only the sovereign should have a right to them. The encyclopedia of law founded by the Württemberg jurist Christoph Besold postulated an unconditional and exclusive regal right of ownership to treasure troves. This attitude attracted severe criticism by – to name only two of the most prominent authors – Carpzov and Stryk, who defended the rights of the finder and the landowner. They advocated the idea that the finder and the landowner were entitled to half of the treasure each, and thus contradicted a variety of local and regional legal traditions that stressed the claims of either the

landowner or the finder. Carpzov's point of view helped to shape the Prussian *Allgemeines Landrecht* (General Law of the Country). Because the question of buried treasure was 'the object of the greatest legal debate', the eighteenth-century Bavarian jurist von Kreittmayr carefully avoided a decision of general principle and called upon the authorities of all German territories to find their own legislative solutions for the problem that he too considered urgent.⁶

Von Kreittmayr's advice simply justified the legal status quo. The early modern period witnessed the rise of the German territorial states. The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation consisted of approximately 350 principalities, among them relatively big countries like Austria and Brandenburg-Prussia, and dwarf territories of a couple of square miles. All of these states were entitled to their own legislation. The emperor was not the supreme law maker of the Empire but rather the guarantor of the semi-autonomy of the princely states and their respective legislators. Some of the smaller German states clung to the regulation in favour of the fisc, probably because they were often short of cash and did not want to miss any chance to make money. However, the most influential territories did not establish a sole right of ownership on behalf of the state.⁷ In the eighteenth century, the Austrian *Codex Theresianus* and the Bavarian *Codex Maximilianeus* assigned certain percentages of each treasure to the finder, the landowner and the state.⁸ The Prussian *Allgemeines Landrecht* of 1794 simply declared that the treasure should be divided equally between the person who had discovered it and the landowner.⁹

The earliest English law of treasure troves can be found in the legislation of Henry I, compiled around 1115. The law was simple and clear enough: all treasure troves belonged to the king. Edward the Confessor modified this rule somewhat: treasure found on Church property should be divided equally between the Crown and the Church if it consisted of silver, whereas all gold treasure still belonged to the king. Even though some historians suggested seeing the regality of treasure troves in England in the context of ancient Germanic laws, such an interpretation is highly questionable.¹⁰ First, the Germanic laws were not homogenous, as we have just seen. Secondly, Henry and Edward can hardly be viewed as the exponents of ancient Anglo-Saxon traditions. Rather, very like the German emperors did a little later, they tried to use treasure laws to strengthen their own finances. Unlike the emperor, the kings of England managed to tame the aristocracy and to maintain a very strong position in all political matters, including the right of treasure trove. The law books of the twelfth century confirmed the king's right to all treasure. In the thirteenth century, the English monarchs succeeded in claiming

flotsam, waif and lost property – including treasure – for themselves. Consequently, the concealment of treasure was regarded as fraud. From 1276 onwards, investigation into treasure troves was one of the standard duties of every coroner. The thirteenth-century jurist Henry of Bracton did not hesitate to describe such investigations as part of the coroners' usual practice. Everybody who found treasure but did not hand it over to the authorities was sent to jail until they had paid a fine at the king's discretion. It was forbidden to search for treasure actively.¹¹

Very generous interpretations of the royal prerogative concerning treasure were possible. In 1606, Parliament decided whether the king had a right to exploit resources of saltpetre on privately owned land. *En passant*, as if it was self-evident, Parliament declared that the king 'may dig in the land of the subject for treasure-trove for he hath property'.¹² Thus, the king was not only entitled to finds that others had made accidentally or after a deliberate search – according to this unguarded statement of Parliament, it would have been possible for him to order his officials to look for treasure literally anywhere he saw fit without any respect for his subjects' property.

When Blackstone wrote his commentaries on English law, he had little new to add. His book confirmed the regality of treasure troves. He tried to differentiate clearly between treasure troves proper and lost property. If a treasure had been buried in the earth, it belonged to the crown. If it had merely been left somewhere, it belonged to the finder. Blackstone gave a very succinct explanation for the different treatment of treasure found in or on the earth. If somebody simply left an object somewhere for anybody to find it, he was willingly parting with his possession. In a way, he was returning his property to the common stock. The object ceased to be anyone's property – it returned to the state of nature. Any person who might happen to find it could claim it for his own. Only if the first owner returned and explained that he did not leave the object behind voluntarily but lost it accidentally would he get it back. A buried treasure, Blackstone argued, was a totally different matter. Anybody who took the trouble to bury a treasure wanted to come back and reclaim it, otherwise there would be no point in hiding it. If the person failed to dig his treasure up again, one was to assume that he had died and had not told his heirs about it. Thus, the treasure became an object without a proper owner against the will of the person it had originally belonged to. The Crown took possession of the treasure in default of any other legal claims of ownership. Blackstone built on the views of Coke, the seventeenth-century lawyer, who had required a treasure to be hidden but not necessarily buried.¹³

A conflict about treasure seems to have played an important part in English and French medieval history. In 1198, a peasant found treasure on the land of his lord, Archard of Châlus-Chabrol. What the treasure consisted of is not entirely clear, but the story that it was nothing less than some life-size statues made of gold seems absurd. At any rate, Archard took the treasure for himself. Richard Coeur-de-Lion, the English king and Duke of Aquitaine, demanded the treasure for himself as he claimed the overlordship over Archard. When Archard's direct lord, Viscount Ademar V of Limoges, gave only a part of the treasure to Richard, the king felt betrayed. It might have seemed as if his power over his French lands was slipping, especially as Ademar had been bold enough to enter into an alliance with Philip Augustus. Richard laid siege on the fortress of Châlus where Archard and Ademar had withdrawn. The rest is history: Richard was killed during the siege and left his brother, John Lackland, a monarchy that was in serious financial difficulties.¹⁴ Whether the story of the treasure was based on fact is doubtful. In any case, the questionable solidarity of his liegeman Ademar was more important for Richard's attack on Châlus than the treasure. The story of Richard's death is about the Plantagenets' fight for power and authority in France; it tells us next to nothing about treasure troves in French legal history.

The French laws concerning treasure troves were heavily influenced by the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*. At least in theory, the French lawyers accepted this as binding. In the southern part of the country, the rules suggested by Zeno were obeyed. In the north, various sets of local and regional laws dominated the legal system. Here, we find a number of contradictory regulations. In Brittany, the treasure went to the fisc. According to the custom of Anjou, it belonged to the king if it consisted of gold and to the regional aristocracy if it consisted of silver. After 1508, the treasure was divided between the local *seigneur* and the finder. In Normandy, all treasure belonged to the duke. By the late sixteenth century, all treasure troves found in the king's domains were attributed to him; otherwise the *seigneur* of the fief where the find had been made could claim it. One should not make too much of these local, or even ad hoc, regulations. In the legal praxis of France in the early modern period, the division of the treasure between the finder, the landowner and the *haut-justicier* (the lord of the jurisdiction) seems to have been the rule. However, chance finders who tried to hide the treasure lost any claim to it.¹⁵

With the French Revolution, the old and complicated legal landscape to which the laws about treasure troves had belonged ceased to exist. According to a contemporary newspaper report, when Napoleon visited

the department of Oise in October 1800, the prefect showed him a treasure trove of antique coins that had recently been discovered. Some of the coins dated back to the Roman republic. The prefect mentioned that the finders of the treasure had been afraid of reporting the haul because, according to the law, all treasure belonged to the government. Napoleon answered that his government would not rob people of their good fortune. He ordered the prefect not to confiscate but to buy as many of the coins as possible. In truly Napoleonic fashion, he immediately gave some of the republican coins to a representative of the USA who happened to be with him, the coins from the Roman republic should become another pledge of the alliance between the French and the American republics.¹⁶ The Napoleonic Code Civil of 1804 stated that treasure should indeed belong to the person who had found it unless it was found on somebody else's land, in which case the landowner was entitled to half.¹⁷

Evidently, laws concerning treasure troves were not simply about confiscation on the one hand and the rights of the finder and the landowner on the other. The very act of finding was complicated in itself. Who had found the treasure? The owner of the land, one of his employees, somebody he had hired to look for treasure or some entirely unrelated third party? Who was the owner of the land? A private person, a community, the state or the Church? How was the treasure found? Quite by chance or after a deliberate search? Had the finder tried to conceal his discovery? What did the treasure consist of? Grotius' suggestion that there were only two legal traditions with very clear and simple rules concerning treasure troves seems to have been nothing more than a somewhat desperate attempt to cut through the Gordian Knot. The problem of treasure troves seems to have fascinated legislators and jurists alike. The huge variety of norms and the legal debate about them begs the question whether treasure troves were really a pressing problem in the early modern period. Were there that many of them? Was the economic significance of treasure very great? We will return to these questions later in this chapter.

First, we have to address the issue that is at the heart of this study. When we started our discussion of laws concerning treasure troves, we encountered already in Roman law the question of whether the treasure had been found accidentally or after a deliberate search. The latter – a treasure hunt – was in most cases a magical operation. The earliest ban on treasure magic was that in the Roman *Codex Iustinianus*. A law ascribed to the fifth-century emperors Zeno and Leo forbade treasure seekers to use 'criminal and punishable sacrifices or any other art which

is hateful to the laws'.¹⁸ Here, we have one of the essentials of treasure law that helped to shape the legal rules concerning treasure until the nineteenth century. Treasure hunting as such was not always unlawful; treasure magic was.

Zedler's encyclopedia stated correctly that the ban on magic was the lowest common denominator of all laws concerning treasure hunting.¹⁹ If it could be proved that a treasure seeker had used magic, he lost his claim to the treasure and could face additional punishments. As the communal laws of Nuremberg from 1479 had it, if the treasure had been found 'by a lucky chance and without any skill or art', the finder could claim a part of it; if it had been found 'by the forbidden art', it went completely to the fisc.²⁰ Other German law books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such as Tengler's *Layen Spiegel* of 1509, the Wormser Reformation of 1531, and the Prussian and Austrian laws of 1620 and 1692, had similar regulations.²¹ The great codes of law of the eighteenth century – the Bavarian *Codex Maximilianeus*, the Prussian *Allgemeines Landrecht* and the Austrian *Codex Theresianus* – insisted that treasure magic was unlawful. Prussian law stressed that the practice was punishable not as magic but as fraud. The enlightened legislator was unwilling to see anything else in magical operations other than confidence tricks.²²

The laws of the three bailiwicks of dukedom of Lorraine – that is Nancy, Vosges, Allemagne – in the borderlands between France and Germany, mentioned treasure magic explicitly in 1594. If a treasure had been deliberately sought and found by magic, it went completely to the *haut-justicier*. The judge could decide arbitrarily what fines the treasure hunter had to pay.²³ The French lawyers shared this point of view. At the very least, a treasure magician should not profit from his misdeed. All treasure troves found by magic went to the king and to the lord of the jurisdiction.²⁴ Louis XIV's 1682 law against magic was an extremely ambivalent piece of legislation. It essentially abolished witch trials. The law characterized magic as fraud, that is, it effectively rejected the idea that one could cause real harm with spells and magical objects. The law did not suggest that demons could in any way interfere with the visible world. The king wanted to reserve final judgment to himself in all cases of witchcraft. However, the act of 1682 made deliberate and active sacrilege committed 'under the pretence of magic' a capital offence. A simple abuse of the Bible or of a prayer was to be punished according to the discretion of the judge.²⁵ Whereas the imaginary crime of witches was thus *de facto* deleted from the French law books, the legislator cracked down vehemently on folk magic. Even though Louis' law

did not refer explicitly to treasure hunting, one can understand this regulation to include all of the questionable prayers and the invocations of saints, angels and demons that treasure hunters frequently used. Some French courts understood the law of 1682 exactly in that way, as we shall see in Chapter 5.

Treasure magic was forbidden, but as a rule it was not simply identified with witchcraft. Therefore, it was very unusual for laws against witchcraft to contain a clause about treasure hunting. The Bavarian law against witchcraft and superstition of 1612, otherwise known for its savagery, explained that treasure hunters did not make an explicit pact with the devil. No doubt they used 'superstitious arts' and even tried to invoke the devil, but they did not act in the devil's name; that is, in contrast to witches, proper treasure hunters were not Satan's disciples. According to this Bavarian law, they should be jailed or put to hard labour for a month, or they should go to the pillory or pay a fine. Second-time offenders faced double those punishments. Third-time offenders were tortured, because the law assumed that such hardened recidivists might have made a pact with the devil after all.²⁶

English law is the only prominent example of legislation that caters for witchcraft featuring directly together with treasure hunting. The English Witchcraft Acts spoke specifically about treasure hunting. In this respect, they were rather different from many Continental European laws against magic. Some historians have argued that the English laws were different because they emphasized the damage done by magic, not the pact with the devil. This sentiment is open to doubt: the English laws were full of references to demonism. German imperial law, for example, never acknowledged the idea that magic implied contact with demons. As a matter of fact, it was the English legislator's focus on demons that made treasure hunting so prominent in the laws against witchcraft. The law enacted by Henry VIII in 1542 was the harshest English law against magic. It referred expressly to

dyvers and sundrie persones [who] unlawfully have devised and practised Invocacons and conjuracons of Sprites, pretending by such meanes to understande and get Knowlege for their owne lucre in what place treasure of golde and Silver shulde or might be founde or had in the earthe or other secrete places.²⁷

Because these people were assumed to be in contact with demons, they were as guilty of felony as the other type of magician that the act explicitly referred to: those who used 'wichecraftes inchauntement and

sorceries' in order to kill or harm others. All of these people had to face capital punishment and the forfeiture of their belongings. The law went on to explain what magical methods these evildoers used:

For execucon of their saide falce devyses and practises [the magicians] have made or caused to be made dyvers Images and pictures of men women childrene Angelles or develles beastes or fowles, and also have made Crownes Septures Swordes rynges glasses and other things, and gyving faithe and credit to suche fantasticall practises have dygged up and pulled downe an infinite nombre of Crosses within this Realme, and taken upon them to declare and tell where thinges lost or stollen shulde be become.

The wording is admittedly unclear. The law did not say explicitly what kind of sorcery served what ends. However, we may safely say that the taking down of wayside crosses referred to treasure hunting. We will discuss cases of cross-digging in Chapter 3. The 'glasses' might be magical mirrors employed to divine treasure. Even the crowns, sceptres, swords and rings might be part of a treasure hunter's equipment. Magical images and manikins served a number of purposes. They could be used like voodoo dolls but they might also be representations of spirits used to force these beings into the service of a magician who searched for treasure.²⁸ Thus, the legislator took pains to outlaw all activities connected with treasure hunting and to make them capital offences.

The act gave the reason for this incredibly harsh treatment of magicians: their activities caused 'greate dishonor of God, Infamy and disquyetnes of the Realme'. The twin aim of defending the honour of God and the good order of the state was typical for early modern legislation. However, for the Tudors, this stance was arguably more important than for most other rulers of England. After the break with Rome and the Act of Supremacy, Henry VIII was keen to secure his newly acquired ecclesiastical power. At the same time, he had to silence all opposition against his Reformation. He changed the laws against treason much in the same vein. With the extremely severe Witchcraft Act of 1542, Henry presented himself as an uncompromising defender of the Christian faith. When the law made treasure magic a capital offence, it accepted implicitly the old demonological argument that all magic was the devil's work. There could be no ameliorating circumstances or pardonable 'lesser' magic. This is why the 1542 Witchcraft Act prescribed such harsh measures against treasure hunting. Nevertheless, it contained an implicit contradiction: if treasure hunting was a magical offence that called for capital punishment, why was it not subsumed under 'wichcraftes

inchauntement and sorceries'? The legislator differentiated between witchcraft proper, which was depicted as harmful magic designed to do damage, and treasure magic, even though this differentiation did not make much sense: both offences were seen as demonism and thus carried the death penalty. Evidently, the idea that treasure seekers should receive capital punishment was so novel – and presumably alien to the courts – that the Witchcraft Act had to explain at some length what it wanted done. It could not simply identify witchcraft and treasure hunting, even though in legal practice the law would have come down to that. An omission is very significant: the law referred to treasure hunting and witchcraft but it did not mention other forms of magic, such as divination or healing magic. If the legislator had taken his own demonology-oriented argument seriously, he would have included these forms of magic in the act. That he did not suggests that he did not feel completely at ease with the rigorous anti-magic stance that he had taken. If Henry VIII had tried to punish all kinds of magic rigorously – or even tried to make them capital offences – the legal system might have broken down or the judges might simply have ignored his laws. Wisely, the king picked two obvious and 'strong' types of magic and turned them into capital offences, thereby giving himself the air of the champion of Christianity while he avoided the odium of a rigorist demonological fanatic.

Even with these precautions, the law was apparently too harsh. The English courts did not enforce it. The law was repealed shortly after Henry's death.²⁹

In 1563, Elizabeth I enacted a new law against magic. It is likely that rumours about a Catholic plot to assassinate her, which allegedly included magic, provoked the queen to address the matter. This Witchcraft Act was much more lenient with regard to treasure hunting. Those who used magic in order to find treasure troves or lost and hidden items in general were to

suffer Imprysonement by the space of One whole yere without Bayle or Mayneprise, and once in every Quarter of the said Yere, shall in some Market towne, upon the Marcket Daye or at such tyme as any Fayer shalbee kepte there, stande openly upon the Pillorie by the Space of Syxe Houres, and there shall openly confesse his or her Erroure and Offence.³⁰

Whoever did not understand this rather severe warning and committed the same offence again was to receive a life sentence. The equivalent Scottish act of the same year did not even mention treasure hunting.³¹

The Witchcraft Act of 1604 made the invocation of demons ‘for any intent or purpose’ per se a capital offence. As treasure hunting often involved the conjuration of demons, the new law put additional stress on treasure magicians. However, the law referred directly to treasure hunting only to confirm the Elizabethan Witchcraft Act. The only significant change was that second offenders would now receive capital punishment instead of a lifelong prison sentence.³² With the act of 1736, witchcraft ceased to be a statutory offence. Magic was still punishable, but it was now interpreted as a form of fraud. The law mentioned that some magicians – that is, frauds – claimed to be able to find stolen or lost goods. This statement gave the courts sufficient basis to prosecute treasure magicians.³³

Beyond the generic influence of the Enlightenment, English law might have had a more direct influence on the legal reforms in eighteenth-century Russia. Semyon Efimovich Desnitskii, a student of Adam Smith and Russia’s first professor of jurisprudence, has been seen as the driving force behind the decriminalization of *koldovstvo*, that is, magic including demonic magic. The police statute that Tsaritsa Catherine the Great issued in 1782 declared magic, including divination and treasure hunting, fraud designed to exploit the uneducated.³⁴

Early archaeology

As we have seen, everybody who searched actively for treasure in pre-modern Europe faced a double dilemma. They could be accused as frauds or thieves who had searched without proper authorization on somebody’s else’s ground and/or had tried to conceal their find. They could also be accused of magic. Whoever admitted that they had actively searched for treasure courted disaster. It comes as no surprise that people who actually found a treasure trove usually claimed that they had made their find quite accidentally. Most of them probably told the truth. We might safely assume that the majority simply stumbled across their treasure.³⁵ Nevertheless, there were also planned, well-organized and occasionally even successful excavations in the early modern period. Treasure hunting was one of the earliest beginnings of archaeology.

The first more or less organized excavations in the ruins of antiquity took place because people were looking for treasure.³⁶ The hill-diggers of early modern England dug up burial mounds. Even though they were

interested in valuables more than in the history of the country, they undertook organized work on prehistoric sites from the seventeenth century onwards.³⁷ Scenes of treasure hunts complete with magical rituals of diverse kinds set in Roman ruins became a genre of their own in the fine arts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³⁸ Planned excavations in Pompeii and Herculaneum began in the early eighteenth century. The rationale behind these enterprises was mainly an economical one: there was a flourishing market not only for precious stones and metals but also for antiques. Occasional and accidental finds often provoked considerable interest from the emerging community of collectors as well as from lay people who hoped to make some money catering to the needs of these collectors. The accidental discovery of ancient coins in Southern Germany in 1513 triggered a veritable 'gold rush'. About 300 people flocked to the place where the treasure had been unearthed expecting to find riches. Fifteenth-century antiquarians acknowledged the value of ancient coins as sources.³⁹ Detailed descriptions of the finds and the location where they had been unearthed met the requirements of a growing discussion between scholars and collectors. Some of the latter came from the elites of small towns; even in the sixteenth century, antiquarianism was not exclusively the hobby of aristocrats, high-ranking clerics, professors and the most affluent townspeople.⁴⁰ These educated minorities seem to have taken a very dim view of magical treasure hunting. In a letter, the Ravensburg scholar Michael Hummelberg wrote to the renowned Augsburg humanist Konrad Peutinger in 1513, mocking the 'boorish tribe' of a Swabian village. The inhabitants had accepted the advice of a 'male witch and soothsayer' who had told them that treasure was buried in their village. They dug fiercely, and armed peasants guarded the supposed treasure site grimly during the night. Of course, so far, all of their pains had earned them was ridicule.⁴¹

Along with the private collectors and the tomb raiders came monument protection. The interest that many early modern nobles took in antiques was more or less on the level of the then fashionable and prestigious collections of curios. However, their enthusiasm for their collections and the supposedly glorious past of their countries provoked some princes to enact laws that we might regard as the nuclei of monument protection. As early as the fifteenth century, the papacy banned the illegal trade in antiques. It forbade taking ancient Roman sculptures out of the country. It is difficult to distinguish between personal engagement and official policy: the popes Paul II and Alexander VI collected ancient

works of art; the Vatican and the Italian aristocracy sponsored more or less systematic searches for ancient artefacts; and Raphael actively helped to preserve Roman sculptures.⁴² The English monarchs adopted a progressive stance, too. As early as the fourteenth century, they tried to prevent unauthorized digs in ruins and barrows. We will deal with that issue in detail in Chapter 5. At this early stage, the Crown was most interested in the material value of the finds. However, from the early sixteenth century onwards, the English Government took an interest in the listing and cataloguing of ancient sites. John Leland, since 1533 the King's Antiquary, toured the country recording prehistoric monuments. He paid some attention to local legends in order to find treasure sites. Leland was not above recording material like a traditional Somerset rhyme: 'If Dolebury dygged ware, of gold shuld be the share.' State-sponsored, serious antiquarian research began in Denmark and Sweden about 50 years later. With the patronage of their respective monarchs, the Swede Johan Bure and the Dane Ole Worm began to record ancient sites systematically in the first half of the seventeenth century. The kings' interest in antiquarianism was, of course, fuelled by the hope that the quasi-historic research of Bure and Worm would illuminate the great past of their countries and thus add to their crowns' prestige. Out of Worm's collection grew a museum of antiques that was opened to the public in 1680s. At the same time, Swedish proto-archaeologists developed a technique to trench Viking tombs and to draw vertical sections through the burial mounds. In Renaissance Germany, the rediscovery of Tacitus' *Germania* in 1451 made a big impression on the learned minority and fostered interest in the country's more remote past. In 1587, in Marzahna, Brandenburg, one of the earliest scientific excavations took place. The dig was supposed to answer the question of whether shards of pottery found in a burial mound were really artefacts or simply freaks of nature.⁴³ After well-organized, scholarly excavations had already taken place in the landgraviate of Hessen-Kassel in the 1760s, Count Friedrich of Hessen-Kassel enacted a law in 1780 concerning the protection of ancient monuments in his country. This demanded that all finds of old coins had to be brought to the attention of the authorities immediately and that the state could make the first bid whenever such finds went up for sale. Friedrich's law remained essentially in force until 1962.⁴⁴

Our quick glance at the history of archaeology proves that there were treasure troves in pre-industrial Europe and that these were sometimes found. As we have just seen, ancient finds, including coins and other valuables, were readily offered and bought on a market for collectors.

The hill-diggers did not dig entirely in vain even though most treasure was discovered quite by chance. It is not the purpose of this book to discuss treasure troves that were found, thus a very brief survey of some random examples will suffice here. In the Lucerne area, at least eight deposits of ancient coins were discovered between 1550 and 1681.⁴⁵ In the South German dukedom of Württemberg, there were two finds of treasure in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Martin Ott could prove that a whole series of such finds took place in the neighbouring dukedom of Bavaria in the sixteenth century. Leland wrote about a golden helmet and a pot full of silver found by a ploughman near Harlaxton, Lincolnshire, around 1530. Among the most prominent 'real' treasures of early modern Europe were the golden horns of ancient Germanic make discovered accidentally in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries near Gallehus in Denmark. In 1775, a labourer found more than 220 coins dating back to the fourteenth century when he pulled down an old stable at Fenwick Tower, Northumberland. A series of finds was made in Northumberland near Corbridge between 1730 and 1760.⁴⁶

Why was the early modern period so preoccupied with treasure? Why did treasure fascinate legislators and lawyers? Why did the treasure hunt spark such lengthy juridical debates? Before we look at the treasure hunts themselves in detail, we will try to offer some preliminary answers of a more general kind.

As interesting and as attractive all of the 'real' treasure unearthed in the early modern period might have been, it is difficult to see how it could have sparked the early modern fascination with treasure hunting. All in all, the troves discovered were mostly rather insignificant and of minor material value. They certainly drew the attention of collectors. Nevertheless, it is hard to imagine that the occasional find of some Roman coins would have galvanized well-off peasants and artisans from the countryside – who formed, as we will see, the majority of the treasure hunters – into searching actively for hidden riches. This is especially obvious if one keeps in mind that, as a rule, treasure hunts were not provoked by the actual (accidental) discovery of old jewellery or coins. Many people of the early modern period invested a great deal of time and effort into treasure hunts in places that had absolutely no record of previous discoveries. Sources do not even tell us whether these treasure hunters had ever heard about any 'real' discoveries of caches of valuables. One or more spectacular finds, which would have made it plain to a significant minority – including at least some people from the

lower strata of society – that treasure hunting could be very lucrative, simply did not occur. Simply put, it is hard to believe that the meagre finds of actual treasure troves germinated the rich cultural imagery of treasure.

However, maybe we should not see the interest in treasure hunting in the context of the treasure troves that were found; we might instead see it in the context of the expectation of finding treasure. Some historians have argued that the chances of finding ‘real’ treasure were never better than in the early modern period.

At least at first glance, it seems to be highly probable that two large-scale developments of the early modern period fostered treasure hunts: the increase in military conflicts and the Reformation.⁴⁷ In times of crisis, when the people of early modern Europe expected war and raids by enemy troops, they hid their valuables in the ground as a matter of course. In 1707, a cleric from the small Swabian town of Möckmühl wrote that he expected to find treasure in the basement of his house. During the last war, ‘when everybody had tried his best to hide his belongings’, the former owner of his house had buried his money in the cellar ‘just like everybody else had’.⁴⁸ A Dutch diplomat visiting Russia in 1610 wrote: ‘I do not believe that there was a single piece of money or article of jewellery in the town, for everything was hidden in the ground. For in moments of danger it is the general custom in Muscovy to bury one’s money and precious objects in the woods, cellars and other waste places.’⁴⁹ The higher frequency of wars since the middle of the sixteenth century caused more people to bury their valuables in the ground than ever before.

The dissolution of the monasteries in the course of the Reformation may have prompted the monks to hide some of their possessions. One of the most prominent examples is that of Glastonbury. When Henry VIII’s commissioners visited Glastonbury Abbey in 1539, the formerly rich monastery had no more plates and ornaments than a common parish church. As the commissioners soon discovered, the last abbot had tried to secrete the abbey’s treasure away, either for his own use or in the hope of a Catholic revival. He and two of his monks were hanged. Elias Ashmole wrote in 1652 that nothing less than the philosopher’s stone had been hidden in the ruins of Glastonbury, which had been found by John Dee, the Elizabethan mathematician and magician.⁵⁰ The suppression of the monasteries gave rise to persistent rumours about treasure hidden by representatives of the church of Rome. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, England was rife

with such stories. Goodwin Wharton, a petty noble who wrote a highly fanciful autobiography around 1700, fantasized that in London alone, four major treasure troves had been hidden by monks at the time of the Reformation.⁵¹

It goes almost without saying that the money and precious items that had been hidden in times of crises often stayed hidden. Obviously, the dissolution of the monasteries and wars went hand in hand with the death and displacement of numerous people. Some of those who had hidden their valuables were kept from taking them out of their hiding places again, and the spot where the treasure had been buried was forgotten. Pepys, the seventeenth-century London diarist, described in some detail an unsuccessful treasure hunt that he participated in. Rumour had it that John Barkstead, the former Governor of the Tower of London, had hidden no less than £50,000 somewhere in that building. He fled the country in 1659 when charges of extortion were brought against him. As Barkstead had committed regicide and been a prominent adherent to the Cromwell dictatorship, he could hardly return to London to retrieve his money after the Restoration of 1660. In 1662, Pepys and his associates searched the Tower in vain for Barkstead's riches. Only five years later, Pepys himself buried a considerable sum of money in his garden when he expected a Dutch invasion of England. Subsequently, he had difficulty in finding his money again.⁵²

The problems that beset the recovery of hidden valuables were not only of a logistical nature. In 1643, the court of Burgau, a small Habsburg town in what is today Northern Bavaria, had to decide on a complicated case. The abbot of Neresheim Monastery had asked the burgomaster of Burgau to bury a vessel full of gold coins for him. The Swedish army, which in the course of the Thirty Years' War devastated the south of the Empire, was marching upon Neresheim. The monks expected their monastery to be searched and pilfered thoroughly and did not even dare to hide their money on the premises. The plan seemed to succeed. The Swedes apparently found nothing. After they had left, the abbot demanded his money back. However, the buried vessel could not be found. The abbot suspected foul play and accused the burgomaster of embezzlement. The court rejected the charge as it thought it more likely that some third party had discovered the hidden money – maybe a raiding soldier who had failed to report his find to his commanding officer.⁵³

Marauding mercenaries not only stole and pilfered – they also hid their loot themselves. In 1597, the suspicion was voiced that Sir Francis

Drake had hidden a treasure in his house.⁵⁴ The idea that foreign soldiers or common robbers buried valuable items that they had stolen but had no direct use for is not a very common, but an interesting part of the folklore of treasure. In Russia, for example, buried treasure was often attributed to Polish bandits, Lithuanian invaders or the Chud – a half-legendary foreign tribe.⁵⁵ Cossack rebels had supposedly hidden treasure in parts of Russia, the seventeenth-century Cossack Razin in the Volga region, and the eighteenth-century Cossack Pugachev in the Ural area, and in the Simbirsk and Saratov provinces. In the black-earth province of Orel, treasure was said to have been hidden by the legendary brigand Kudeiar. In that region, the spirit guarding treasure was simply known as Kudeiar.⁵⁶ The many rumours about pirate treasure might help to emphasize this point, even though many of them date back only to the nineteenth century.

The chance of finding treasure was probably relatively great in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Nevertheless, this is no satisfactory explanation for the early modern fascination with treasure and treasure hunting. First, the practice of hiding valuables in the ground during a war did not die out at the end of the early modern period. Even during the Second World War, in rural Germany at least, it was quite customary to hide precious items in that way. During the evacuations caused by the Allied bombing raids, numerous Germans had to leave their homes and flee inland, sometimes to places hundreds of miles away. Before they went, many buried or hid their valuables rather than take them with them on the hazardous journey. There is even a particular word in some contemporary German dialects for the little hole or container where one hides their belongings in times of crisis: *Heloch*, probably a corruption of *heimlich* (clandestine) and *Loch* (hole).

Secondly, and more importantly, the fact that people hid things during the warring decades of the early modern period does not sufficiently account for the fact that treasure hunting was such a widespread activity that it gave rise to a rich folklore and that jurisprudence lavished so much attention on it. The wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries alone do not provide a sufficient material basis for the complex and widespread treasure beliefs. If the interest in treasure and treasure hunting simply mirrored the fact that many people hid their money in the ground, one would expect narratives about treasure hunts to mention that practice. Early modern texts that spoke about treasure, such as laws, trial records and magical formulae, hardly ever did so. Most of them did not refer to any identifiable individuals who hid, or supposedly hid, their valuables in the ground. As a rule, these texts gave no

such quasi-historical background. Mostly they were not about people who buried treasure when they felt that a major crisis was approaching. Thus, there is a certain narrative gap between treasure hunting and the practice of hiding valuables in the ground.

We will have to discuss the narratives of treasure hunting thoroughly before we can return to the question of why they played such a prominent part in the early modern period.

2

Medieval Treasure Lore

Nobody knows about the treasure anymore but God and me.
(*The Nibelungen Lied* – ‘Lay of the Nibelungs’)

Epics and myths

Treasure took a number of forms in the Middle Ages.¹ We will first deal with treasure troves in mythical and epic sources. Then we will look at the political and theological significance of medieval treasures.

The story of Sigurd, or Siegfried, and his treasure is probably the best known medieval treasure tale. However, there are some variations of the tale. The basic outline is simple enough. A youthful warrior of noble birth, named Sigurd, in later versions Siegfried, defeated a magical being and thus gained a huge treasure. Greed was not the primary motive for the young hero’s attack on the magical creature; rather, he acted out of a warrior-like spirit of adventure or in self-defence. All versions of the story underplay the material value of the treasure. The hoard was important because it had magical powers and/or because the wealth the hero gained by acquiring it enabled him to display the splendour considered appropriate for a prince and thus added to his social prestige. After the death of the hero, his enemies throw the treasure into the River Rhine.

The earliest versions of the tale take us back to Germanic mythology. In the *Elder Edda* and in the *Völsungasaga* (‘Saga of the Völsungs’), we learn about the origins of the hoard. The overlord of the gods, Odin, and the treacherous god of fire, Loki, killed an otter. The otter turned out to have been the shape-shifter Otr, the son of the magician Hreidmar. Hreidmar demanded *wergild* – a fine that would compensate Hreidmar’s loss – from the gods: he wanted enough gold to fill and cover the otter’s

skin completely. Loki captured the dwarf Andvari and forced him to hand over his treasure, including the magical ring, Andvarinaut. The *Skáldskaparmál* of the Younger Edda states explicitly that Andvarinaut was the ultimate treasure. The ring was a rough equivalent of the philosopher's stone or rather a Hecketaler (German: Growing coin, a magical coin that brings forth other coins): it produced gold magically. Furious about Loki's robbery, Andvari cursed the treasure and all its owners. Loki handed over the treasure and the ring to Hreidmar as *wergild*. The god explicitly warned Hreidmar about the curse and thus confirmed its magical power. Hreidmar soon quarrelled with his son Fafnir, who insisted that he, as a member of Otr's family, was entitled to a share of the *wergild*. The curse took its toll: Hreidmar was killed by his own son. Fafnir turned himself into a dragon and withdrew with the treasure to the Gnita Heath. Regin, Hreidmar's third son, wanted the treasure himself but did not dare to attack the dragon. He persuaded the youthful warrior Sigurd to slay Fafnir and provided him with a sword of unprecedented hardness and sharpness. Regin claimed that he was not interested in the treasure but wanted revenge for his father when he talked Sigurd into fighting Fafnir. Sigurd had recourse to a trick to kill the giant poisonous dragon. According to the saga of the *Völsungs*, Odin himself suggested this trick to him: Sigurd hid in a pit in the path that Fafnir used to get to his watering hole. When the dragon was directly above the pit, Sigurd rammed his sword into its heart. After killing the dragon, Sigurd got a bit of the beast's blood on his tongue, which enabled him to understand the language of the birds. Birds warned him against Regin, who planned to murder him to obtain the treasure. On hearing this, Sigurd killed Regin and took the hoard for himself. According to both Younger and Elder Edda, Sigurd bathed in the dragon's blood and thus became invulnerable. However, Andvari's curse was not overcome yet. The magical blood did not touch a bit of skin on Sigurd's shoulder. Later, a murderer's weapon would find that very spot. The *Völsungasaga* omits Sigurd's invulnerability. Sigurd discovered the treasure hidden in the ground in Fafnir's iron house. It was enough to fill two boxes, which burdened Sigurd's horse dangerously. After Sigurd's murder, king Gunnar and his right-hand man Högni (or, in the later versions of the epic, Hagen) took the treasure and hid it in the Rhine. Both of them were killed by King Atli but they refused to tell him where exactly the treasure was. In revenge, their sister Gudrun, Sigurd's widow and Atli's present wife, caused a dreadful slaughter that left Atli and his family dead. Andvari's treasure had indeed proved fatal, not only for all its owners but even for all who tried to get it.²

Medieval epics are, of course, a genre of their own. It would be a severe misunderstanding and an anachronism to interpret them on the same level as early modern trials against professional treasure magicians. Sigurd's, or rather Andvari's, hoard was part of a mythical world. The treasure was not, as in later narratives, a bridge into the otherworld, the magical beyond. The otherworld was the only world for the protagonists of the Sigurd epic. It would not make any sense to try to differentiate between the everyday world and the usually unseen realm of spirits. Sigurd seemed to be the first truly human owner of the treasure. However, both Younger and Elder Edda claimed divine ancestry even for him. Thus, Claude Lecouteux's interpretation is very problematic. He suggested seeing the objects that Sigurd won as tokens of dominance over the spirit world. The ultimate reason for the hero's ruin was that he claimed lordship over the sphere of spirits. However, the very concept of a differentiation between a non-magical here-and-now and a magical otherworld was alien to both Younger and Elder Edda and the *Völsungasaga*. As the old epics unquestioningly depicted the mythical realm as part and parcel of Sigurd's world, or rather as identical to his world, we can hardly see him as an invader or usurper of that realm. In addition to that, the epics do not suggest that Sigurd strove to exercise control over spirit beings.³

Nevertheless, Lecouteux was right to emphasize that the sword and the treasure were not only practical material items but also symbols of lordship. In the world of gods, dwarfs, shape-shifters and dragons, the treasure was not simply a commodity. Even though everyone tried to get it, nobody seemed interested in spending it. The *wergild* of the gods was valuable in itself. It was rather a symbol of power and prosperity than simply material wealth one could use as a means to an end. The treasure was not of economic but rather of social and political significance. Both Younger and Elder Edda often described the treasure as 'rings'. Rings could be given as gifts. As such, they were tokens of allegiance. A prince gave rings to other powerful people to bind them to his cause. Giving and accepting gifts like rings or (highly wrought) weapons served to forge and express partnerships between lords or chieftains. In the sphere of the family, engagement rings or wedding rings serve the same purpose.⁴ Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* was based on this idea. Tolkien merely oversimplified the pattern of loyalty between the princely ring-giver and his allies into a magical bond. The treasure did not belong in the context of the economy, let alone a market economy; it belonged in the sphere of politics and in that of magic. The common denominator of these spheres was power. The treasure was essentially a symbol and a

token of power. It was one of the characteristics of political power and kingship in the Middle Ages that they were closely connected to the realm of spirits governed by magic and religion.

It seems problematic to claim that Fafnir, the patricide-turned-dragon, played a positive role. However, he neutralized Andvari's curse. Fafnir, described as an aggressive but solitary misfit, withdrew with the treasure to the forlorn Gnita Heath. The *Skáldskaparmál* in the Younger Edda calls the treasure explicitly 'Fafnir's bed'. Fafnir, as well as Beowulf's dragon, was said to lie or rest on the treasure: the very picture of quiet passivity.⁵ Fafnir's main weapon was *Ögishjalm*, a magical tiara or helmet that filled with terror everyone who saw it. Even though Fafnir had taken this helmet from his murdered father, it emphasized his passivity: *Ögishjalm* was harmless unless somebody confronted the dragon actively.⁶ In the desolation of the wasteland, neither the cursed treasure nor the dragon constituted an immediate danger to anyone. Fafnir's fixation on the treasure that made him a murderer and drove him out of society was the realization of Andvari's curse. Fafnir, apparently not even willing to fight that fixation, accepted his fate. He transformed himself into a monster, not in order to attack but in order to passively protect the treasure that – given Andvari's revengeful magic – nobody should touch anyway. The treasure seemed to be well and truly lost to mankind and thus rendered harmless.

The story could end here. The true agent of chaos was not the dragon – supposedly a symbol of chaos – but Regin, with the help of Sigurd.⁷ Only because of their efforts was the treasure 'brought back into circulation'. Andvari's curse could find new victims. Fafnir even warned Sigurd with his last breath not to touch the hoard but to flee. Sigurd did not take Fafnir's advice but simply answered that all men had to die some day and until that day, all would covet riches. Högni did in a way the right thing: he threw the treasure away, into the River Rhine. The cursed treasure was now gone for good. Once again, with the dangerous wealth lost in the depths of the Rhine and thus as safe as in the wasteland of the Gnita Heath, the story could end. However, both Younger and Elder Edda and *Völsungasaga* did not accept this naive solution. Högni's sacrifice of the treasure was in vain. Even with the treasure virtually unobtainable, Atli's irrational greed for Andvari's accursed gold still triggered the final catastrophe.

The Nibelungen Lied, probably written in the late twelfth century at the court of Wolfer of Erla, bishop of Passau, tells a totally different story.⁸ The author meticulously eradicated all references to the pagan past and downplayed the magical elements of the narrative. When Siegfried

arrived at the court of the Kings of Burgundy, he made a great impression because he could afford to dress and equip his entourage in the greatest style.⁹ Hagen von Tronje, the most influential of the kings' followers, briefly informed the courtiers – and thereby the readers – about Siegfried's past achievements and the source of his wealth. The two sons of the late King Nibelung were unable to divide his huge treasure peacefully among themselves. They talked the reluctant Siegfried into acting as their arbiter and promised him their father's sword as a reward. The hoard consisted of gold and precious stones. Siegfried failed to divide the treasure in a way that would satisfy the young princes' greed. They attacked him. Siegfried killed both of them as well as their entourage with Nibelung's sword. Hagen made it plain that Siegfried acted in self-defence: the sons of Nibelung who went back on their promise to accept Siegfried's arbitration and thus revealed their disregard for honour and right brought their ruin upon themselves. After this fight, Siegfried was attacked by the dwarf Alberich. He was a servant of the sons of Nibelung and tried to avenge his masters. Even though the dwarf used a cloak of invisibility, Siegfried defeated him. His cloak did not belong to the treasure; Siegfried claimed the cloak of invisibility as his trophy but spared Alberich's life. He appointed the loyal dwarf as the guardian of the Nibelungen treasure.¹⁰ Even though *the Nibelungen Lied* is not a courtly romance of chivalry, in this passage it celebrates a knightly ideal: the author implied that the sons of Nibelung died because they had violated the courtly code of honour as they broke their agreement with Siegfried. In contrast with them, Alberich survived and continued to hold a position of some power because he did what a chivalrous audience might expect of a faithful vassal: he fought for his lords, even if only to avenge their deaths. Siegfried appeared as the ideal knight: he did not only accept the chivalrous code of honour for himself. As he confidently punished or rewarded others according to its standards, he defended and spread this set of rules. Even though he killed the owners of the treasure in anger, this anger was a justifiable reaction to the treatment that he had received earlier. Thus, Siegfried's triumph was complete. He won the fight against the sons of Nibelung and their retainers, he won the treasure, he won Alberich's cloak of invisibility and he won Alberich's services as a faithful treasurer.

In *the Nibelungen Lied*, the dragon had absolutely nothing to do with the treasure. Hagen mentioned briefly that Siegfried killed such a beast and bathed in its blood, thus becoming invulnerable. The author needed to include those details because the subsequent story of Siegfried's

murder would not make any sense without them. However, his dislike for magical adventures was obvious.

The Nibelungen epic did not speak about any evil magic connected with the treasure. It was not cursed. It did not have its own magical history like Sigurd's hoard, which a god had stolen from a dwarf to pay *wergild* for a shape-shifter to a magician. Hagen, who first told us about the hoard, did not mention any magical qualities of the treasure. However, we still detect several motifs in the depiction of the treasure that seem to hint at magical thought. Later on in the epic, the author briefly mentions that a golden rod was part of the treasure. This rod would enable a knowledgeable person to rule the world. *The Nibelungen Lied* calls this rod *wunsch*, which might mean 'fate' and 'good fortune' but also 'god'. However, we might also understand the rod (*rüetelîn*) that had the name 'wunsch' as a *wünschelrüetelîn*, that is, a divining rod. Such a rod that in the hands of an expert magician finds hidden treasures or ore might arguably make this person very powerful.¹¹ The rod was the equivalent of Andvarinaut. As Sigurd had never used Andvarinaut, so Siegfried ignored the divining rod. Both heroes did not even seem to know what treasures they really owned.¹² As we will see in the discussion of the divining rod below, until the present day, this instrument has not necessarily been considered magical. When the author of *the Nibelungen Lied* replaced the dwarf's ring with a divining rod, he did not simply substitute one magical implement for another; he deliberately underplayed the magical aspects of the narrative. The author did not even mention the golden rod when he stated that the treasure could buy the whole world and its worth would not diminish by a single mark. Thus, it is not quite clear whether this cryptic comment refers to magic at all; it might simply be a poetical way of saying that the treasure was immeasurable. Indeed, the very size of the hoard was prodigious: Hagen admitted that a hundred hay carts could not carry it. Later, Siegfried's widow, Kriemhild, needed twelve carts that drove back and forth three times a day for four days until she had retrieved the treasure from the place where Alberich had guarded it. Neither the sons of Nibelung nor Siegfried really hid the treasure; rather they deposited it 'in a hollow mountain'.¹³ This suggests the existence of a cave of equally prodigious dimensions. A further magic motif is, of course, that of the dwarf guardian. The text does not give any details about Nibelung and his quarrelsome sons. They owned a huge treasure and counted the powerful magical creature Alberich among their servants. This might suggest that they were spirit beings or wizards, even though *the Nibelungen Lied* did not explicitly characterize

them as such. Their names, which were taken from an earlier source, suggested that they were water sprites.¹⁴

Evidently, the author was hardly interested in magic. As he wrote for an educated audience including clerics, he was probably reluctant to treat his readers to tall tales about sorcery and monsters that might have been regarded as vulgar entertainment or superstition. He recounted the magical elements that were part of the traditional Sigurd/Siegfried story but he paid them no real attention. We might see Nibelung's sword, the golden rod and the treasure as symbols of kingship.¹⁵ Lecouteux suggested that Alberich cursed the cloak of invisibility, and that the treasure was ill-gotten and would thus eventually turn against Siegfried.¹⁶ The text does not support this view. On the contrary, the Nibelungen epic erased all traces of the curse that were so prevalent in the earlier versions of the story. The treasure and his (short) contact with the spirit being Alberich were certainly not Siegfried's downfall. Instead, it appears that the hero's entanglement with the cabals of the court ruined the person who might have been the ideal ruler.

The author emphasized his essentially non-magical concept of the treasure in the later parts of *the Nibelungen Lied* after Siegfried's murder. Only now, the treasure did not simply signify princely status: the protagonists began to treat it as a commodity, that is, they spent it to achieve certain ends. Kriemhild, the sister of the Kings of Burgundy and Siegfried's widow and heiress, put the treasure to rather practical use. The author mentioned that she gave huge sums for charitable purposes but he also stressed that she used the money to get political and military support. Hagen was nervous not because of any magical properties Siegfried's heirloom might have had but simply because of the political power the money could buy. Of course, this trait was not entirely new. As we saw above, the treasure – the 'rings' given to would-be retainers – always had a political aspect. However, Kriemhild now seemed to use her newly acquired wealth actively and explicitly to create her own entourage. She apparently had a political agenda that Siegfried – let alone Sigurd in the older versions of the tale – had never had. More than ever before, the treasure became a means to an end. In a way, Kriemhild turned the treasure from a hoard into capital. This was clearly the reason why Hagen stole the treasure. Of course, this problem had a gender aspect. In order to mask his very practical political motives, Hagen stressed that a woman should not control huge wealth. The Kings of Burgundy tolerated the theft from their sister Kriemhild but decided not to use the treasure themselves. Hagen, however, tricked all of them by throwing the treasure into the Rhine.¹⁷ Even though the

author implied that Hagen thought of using the treasure for himself, it was entirely unclear how, and if, he could have retrieved the treasure from the river. In any case, he never tried. Nevertheless, Hagen obviously understood Kriemhild's strategy. He saw that the treasure could buy political power. *The Nibelungen Lied* was in this respect a strangely modern text. The treasure was dangerous not because it was magical but because it was of material value in a world increasingly ruled by material, pre-capitalist standards. When Hagen threw the gold in the Rhine, he did so because he had grasped the meaning of wealth as capital and its potential dangers for the world of courtly chivalry. At the same time, his bold action followed the inner logic of *the Nibelungen Lied* and other medieval treasure tales. Hagen tried to turn the treasure into a hoard again. Lost in the Rhine, it was once more unobtainable, hidden from everybody, ultimately without owner or purpose, useless and therefore harmless. However, it still played an important role as a narrative device. The epic tale shifted to the story of Kriemhild's revenge. She wanted not only payback for her husband's death, she wanted Hagen to tell her the exact place where he had thrown the treasure – or rather her treasure – into the Rhine. Hagen refused to answer her as long as his lords, the Kings of Burgundy, were alive. Kriemhild had the last survivor of her dynasty beheaded and showed Hagen the dead king's head. When he still refused to answer her, she killed Hagen with her own hands.¹⁸

Here it was not some curse that made the treasure so dangerous: the treasure itself, that is, accumulated wealth, proved to be the ruin of all that came into contact with it. Whereas both Younger and Elder Edda had essentially told a magical story, *the Nibelungen Lied* emphasized its moral message.

With Hagen's death, the Nibelungen treasure was irretrievably lost. The version of the story given in the *Skáldskaparmál* of both Younger and Elder Edda emphasized that nobody could find the gold in the Rhine.¹⁹ However, some has been found. Among the various kernels of truth that the Sigurd/Siegfried epics certainly contain is that there is indeed gold in the Rhine. Patient prospectors do wash minute quantities of gold from the river sands. These bits of gold might have suggested that there was treasure hidden somewhere in the water. However, prospecting was never a profitable, let alone lucrative, business in the Rhineland. So, it has more to do with the Siegfried epic than with the real gold in the Rhine that the Rhinegold became world famous. Not only is *Rheingold* the title of one of the operas in Wagner's opera cycle *Ring des Nibelungen*, but it was the name of a luxury train that drove

through the Rhine Valley between Switzerland and the Netherlands as well as the brand name of a beer brewed in New York.²⁰

The medieval epics warned against the moral dangers of the treasure and explained very clearly that it was irretrievably lost. In addition, even the most casual reader should entertain serious doubts concerning the value of the Sigurd/Siegfried narratives as depictions of real events. Of course, this did not keep numerous treasure hunters from speculating where the Rhinegold – the legendary treasure of the Nibelungen – might be. Numerous people have looked for it, even to the present day. News about the Nibelungen treasure appear in German newspapers in the ‘silly season’. Most modern treasure hunters work on the assumption that the Nibelungen epic mirrors historical facts. They claim that some retainer of the Burgundian King Gundahar did hide a treasure at the time when the Huns attacked the Burgundians in the middle of the fifth century. *The Nibelungen Lied* gives the place where Hagen left the treasure as *loche*. That might simply mean ‘hole’, that is, a place where the Rhine is particularly deep. This should, per se, discourage any attempts to regain the treasure.

In the nineteenth century, the scholar Jacob Grimm reasoned that *loche* in the Nibelungen epic might refer to a particular place called ‘Loch’. Since that time, speculations about place names that are more often fanciful than scholarly are part and parcel of the hunt for the Rhinegold. In 2002, a former taxman – apparently experienced in finding hidden money – claimed that the treasure was not in the Rhine but rather in the village of Rheinbach, under a meadow locally called *Auf den Höhlen* (‘atop of the caves’). The clever investigator did not dig for the treasure himself. Rather, he filed a statement with a notary that proved that he was the first to find the ‘true’ place where the treasure is buried. In that way, he hopes to get a share of the treasure when somebody eventually takes the trouble to dig it up.²¹ In 2003, two treasure hunters from Mainz, a former mayor of that town and his son, claimed to have found the resting place of the treasure near the village of Eich at a place formerly known as Lochheim, and indeed near one of the deepest parts of the riverbed of the Rhine. The treasure is now supposedly on dry land owing to the river having changed course over the centuries. Even though the treasure hunters discovered some marble, which is not usually to be found in this area deep in the ground, the Nibelungen gold did, of course, not surface.²² In the same year, a hobby diver tried to sell antiques that he claimed to have found in the Rhine near Bingen as the treasure of the Nibelungen. Part of the river near this town is known as the ‘Binger Loch’.²³ Treasure troves that were accidentally

unearthed several miles away from the river could still be referred to as the Nibelungen gold.²⁴

Currently, a rather lengthy webpage by a Tyrolese 'investigator' claims to have found the place where the Nibelungen treasure is hidden.²⁵ It simply assumes that Siegfried's murder and Hagen's theft of the treasure symbolize the fights between Germanic tribes and the Huns in the fifth century. The treasure itself, however, is unquestioningly assumed to be real. A highly problematic etymology of the name Hagen von Tronje is supposed to 'prove' that the Huns hid the treasure that they took from the Rhineland Germans not in the Rhine but rather in today's Austria. The webpage finally narrows the place where the treasure is to be found down to an area of a couple of hundred square metres on the Schieferstein mountain in Upper Austria. The author proudly explains that in addition to etymology, he used a variant of 'remote viewing' to find the hiding place of Siegfried's long-lost heirloom. 'Remote viewing' is known in parapsychology as a method to locate hidden objects. The webpage praises it as a technique that will overcome all problems that 'established' science and historical scholarship have had in finding comparatively small objects in vast areas without any 'conventional' clues. The magic that even *the Nibelungen Lied* tried to play down is back in the story of the Rhinegold.

The hunt for the Rhinegold has become part of German pop culture. In 2008, a German private broadcasting station aired a feature film about a small group of treasure hunters who, aided by hints hidden by Charlemagne, look for the Nibelungen gold near Neuschwanstein Castle (a nineteenth-century building built by the mentally deranged King Ludwig II of Bavaria) and in the Alps.²⁶ Even though the protagonists seem to believe in the magical quality of some of the items belonging to the treasure (e.g. the cloak of invisibility), none of them work. The treasure even features in a volume from a series of German comic books that deal with the adventures of a winegrower in the Rhineland of the late eighteenth century.²⁷ Strangely enough, the comic presents a rather down-to-earth, and thus negative, view of the treasure: the hero does not even expect that the treasure has any magical qualities. He learns that the Nibelungen hoard might have existed but is now lost. He finally realizes that there is so little gold in the river sand that even prospecting in the Rhine Valley is unprofitable.

The only medieval epic to rival the complexity and lasting popularity of the Sigurd tradition is probably the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*. When the only extant manuscript came into existence and whether it reflects older oral traditions are much debated questions. It seems safe to assume that

the text was written in the eleventh century. It is clearly Christian, even though it might reflect pagan traditions.

Suffice it to give the bare outline of the story. Beowulf, a warrior prince, arrived at the court of the Danish King Hrothgar. He slew Grendel, a monster that had killed numerous people in the king's hall. When Grendel's equally monstrous mother came to the king's residence to avenge her son, Beowulf followed her into her hiding place in the wilderness.

In the underwater cave of Grendel's mother, Beowulf saw a lot of treasure.²⁸ However, he did not take it. The proud warrior only took Grendel's head and the hilt of the ancient sword with which he killed his mother – the blade melted after it had pierced the she-monster. These spoils of victory proved and symbolized Beowulf's triumph over the spirit beings, and so they were more important than the treasure in the cave. Indirectly, they helped Beowulf to gain another treasure: King Hrothgar showered the warrior with precious gifts for freeing his land from the monsters.²⁹ How Grendel's mother had accumulated all the treasure remains unknown. The treasure in the underwater cave serves no further function in the poem. This might suggest that for the author of *Beowulf* and his audience, the treasure was a standard feature of tales about magical beings.

The treasure that would be Beowulf's undoing appeared in a later part of the narrative after he had become the king of his country. There is no direct link to the Grendel episode. As the author informed the audience, this treasure was hidden 1000 years before Beowulf's time. The last survivor of a dying race that had been ruined by war hid it in a barrow. He did so simply to return to the earth what had originally belonged to it. Seven centuries after the treasure had been hidden, a dragon found it by chance. The narrator of *Beowulf* makes it perfectly clear that the dragon initially had nothing to do with that particular treasure. The epic gives details of the natural behaviour of dragons: they hunted out barrows in search of treasure. If they found a hoard, they stayed to guard it. The dragon was huge – 50 feet long – and capable of flying and breathing fire. However, at first it did not display any aggressive behaviour; it simply nested in the barrow. These curious details are quite extraordinary.³⁰ Even though the narrator knew the Sigurd epic and directly compared Beowulf to Sigurd, in contrast to Fafnir, the dragon in *Beowulf* was not a magically transformed human being. It did not speak. It was portrayed as a mere animal incapable of rational thought. It seemed to follow an instinct when it stayed with the hoard – it was 'driven' to guard treasures. The result was the same

as in the Sigurd epic: the dragon was content with passively watching the hoard. The treasure was well-hidden and safe. It was lastingly out of any man's grasp and thus harmless. As in the Edda narratives, it was foolish greed that brought about disaster. A thief – a servant who wanted to be brought back into favour with his master – took a valuable goblet from the hoard. Only now did the dragon become active. Enraged by the theft, it left the barrow and devastated the country. The narrative suggests that the dragon preferred to fly after nightfall. There might be several reasons for this. First, the imagery of a fire-breathing monster flying through the night sky is very powerful. Lecouteux suggested that the *Beowulf* narrative originally featured a ghost as the guardian of the treasure. The Christian author of the extant text replaced the ghost with a dragon as a belief in ghosts was a difficult subject for theology. This would explain the dragon's close affinity to the barrow. Thus the dragon became active at night simply because it was repeating the activities formerly attributed to a ghost.³¹ Even though it might be that in an older version of the story a ghost featured, the text as it is does not support Lecouteux's interpretation. *Beowulf* presents the dragon not only as a barrow-dweller but also as a flying creature. It would be difficult to explain flight as a characteristic of ghosts. It is possible that the night as the magical time of spirits might have seemed appropriate for the dragon even though the author, as we have just seen, described the beast very matter-of-factly. Indeed, it is tempting to take the idea that the author depicts the dragon essentially as an animal a little further: did he think nightly activity fitting for a cave-dwelling animal? The author stressed time and again the dragon's affinity to flight and to living in a cave. Did he borrow patterns of behaviour from the bat – a flying animal often found in caves – to describe the dragon and therefore present it as an animal most active at night? As dragons were often imagined to have batwings, this analogy does not seem too far fetched.

Beowulf attacked the dragon mainly to save his country from the monster, even though he was interested in taking the treasure for himself. The old king killed the dragon with the help of his only faithful retainer, Wiglaf. The beast wounded Beowulf mortally. Beowulf's last dying wish before he gave orders concerning his funeral was to see at least part of the treasure. The author makes it plain that Beowulf did not die in a paroxysm of greed: he wanted to see the treasure to convince himself that he would leave his people well-endowed. The treasure was thus reduced to a commodity that gave peace of mind to a dying leader, mindful of the material well-being of his followers.

The further treatment of the treasure seems to indicate that the Christian author of *Beowulf* struggled with non-Christian motifs. At first he claimed that only a person chosen by God could recover the treasure. A little later, he explained that the chieftains to whom the treasure had originally belonged had cursed it: ill would befall anyone who took it. Even *Beowulf*, who did not act selfishly, now seemed to be a victim of the curse. In contrast to *Beowulf's* last wish, the treasure was not used to the benefit of his kingdom: it was interred with his ashes in his barrow. The curse was thus neutralized. Once again safely buried in a barrow, the treasure could do no more harm.

When we compare *Beowulf* with the Sigurd tale of both Younger and Elder Edda and the *Völsungasaga* and the *Nibelungen* epic, we can distinguish between two concepts of treasure. For the older texts, *Beowulf*, both Younger and Elder Edda and *Völsungasaga*, which reflected pagan ideas, the treasure was dangerous because it was a cursed, magical object. For the younger text, *the Nibelungen Lied*, probably written by an assertive Christian author at the court of a bishop, the treasure was dangerous because of its material value and the power it could buy. Critical reflections on the economic and political realities began to replace the magic. In both cases, the message was plain: the treasure did not solve any problems – it caused them. The treasure was seductive, possibly evil; it was a curse, not a blessing.

An episode narrated by the historian Thomas Walsingham in the early fifteenth century echoed the idea of the dragon as the treasure guardian. In 1344, he wrote, a Saracen physician came to John de Warenne and asked him for permission to take a serpent, probably a dragon, out of a part of Wales owned by John. After he had captured the animal, the Saracen explained that near its lair there was a cave full of treasure. Men from Hereford learned about this. At the instigation of another foreigner, the Lombard money-lender Peter Pikard, they went to dig up the treasure. When Warenne heard about this, he had them arrested. Walsingham concluded the episode with the enigmatic statement that Warenne made a lot of money out of the affair. Whether that means that Warenne found the treasure or that he made the treasure seekers pay stiff fines is anybody's guess.³² The tale might be influenced by the epic of King Ortnit, in which a foreigner gave a king strange eggs as a gift. Instead of snakes with precious stones on their bodies that the foreigner had promised, dragons hatched out of the eggs – another example of the close affinity between dragons and treasure.³³

Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* parodied the medieval treasure tales of Siegfried and *Beowulf*. Tolkien took the motifs of the

epics over-seriously and drew the inevitable conclusion: if the treasure itself was dangerous and should be left alone, the best solution was to destroy it. This was the basic idea of *The Lord of the Rings*. It was not enough to hide the dangerous treasure – the treacherous ring – because too many dangerous protagonists coveted it. The treasure was to be taken out of circulation permanently: it had to be destroyed. The lava of the volcano Mount Doom became Tolkien's equivalent of Gniata Heath, the deep of the Rhine or Beowulf's barrow. The treasure was truly, irretrievably lost rather than simply being deposited in a desolate and hard to reach place. It was brought into an environment that was in itself so hostile that it was virtually lethal to all would-be treasure seekers – as Gollum had to learn right away – and that it terminated the existence of the treasure itself.³⁴

Treasure played no significant role in the Scandinavian sagas. These referred to treasures in burial mounds and those captured by Viking heroes. Even though in some cases the dead watched over treasure, treasure magic played hardly any role, not even in the saga of Egil Skallagrimsson a warrior with magical skills who gained a number of treasures as a Viking raider.³⁵

The Welsh *Mabinogion* referred to treasure only briefly. This was written down in the fourteenth century even though it drew from sources that may date back to the High Middle Ages at least. In *Peredur*, a romance that belongs to the tales about king Arthur and his men, the warrior Peredur killed a snake and took a golden ring from it. The episode is rather inconsequential: we learn nothing about any magical properties that the ring might have had or the use the hero made of it. Later, Peredur heard about a serpent that had a magical stone on its tail. Whoever held the stone in his hand, received all the gold he wished for. Understandably, knights camped in 300 tents next to the serpent's lair. They did not dare to attack the beast; they planned instead to wait till it died and then fight among themselves for the possession of the magical stone. Peredur defeated the men from the 300 tents and slew the serpent. He used the riches provided by the stone to give the knights the money they had spent waiting for the serpent's death and thus ensured their loyalty as his vassals. Directly after that, Peredur gave the stone to his faithful retainer, Etlym.³⁶ We do not learn anything about the origins of the stone or the uses Etlym made of it later. The question of whether the possession of this treasure-producing object had any negative consequences was of no concern for the author. He told the whole episode in a few meagre sentences, so the magical stone was apparently of little interest to him.

The author of *Peredur* borrowed heavily from Chrétien de Troyes' epic *Perceval*. The serpent watched by 300 knights in *Peredur* might be taken from an episode in *Perceval* in which the hero fought an evil magician with a dragon's head on his shield who besieged the Lady of the Circle of Gold. The lady had 310 knights at her disposal.³⁷ However, there was no equivalent for the magical stone in *Perceval*. The Circle of Gold itself was no treasure, so the element of the magical stone might have been taken from an older source. In any case, the author of *Peredur* disposed of the magical stone as quickly as possible. Very like the golden rod in *the Nibelungen Lied*, the magical item that promised unimaginable riches did not play any role in the narrative. It would probably have destroyed the plot to give the hero ready access to virtually limitless wealth. Nevertheless, *Peredur's* behaviour was entirely in keeping with courtly ideals: the prince rewarded a faithful follower with a truly princely gift.

Other Welsh and Irish traditions tell about quite different treasure. The thirteen treasures of Britain mentioned in the Welsh triads – lengthy poems that helped in the memorization of Welsh myth and history – and the four hallows of Ireland were purely magical objects. J.K. Rowling parodied the Irish hallows in one of her 'Harry Potter' novels. It would be difficult to attach any material value to these magical artefacts. We can hardly see them as treasures: they were not characterized as objects of significant economic importance that had been lost or hidden. The treasure bag of the Irish Fianna was of the same kind: it contained a number of magical items. These objects would appear in the bag at full tide and vanish at ebb tide, so they do not fit the definition of treasure used in this book.³⁸

Treasures in medieval politics and religion

The epics hinted at the political meaning of wealth and treasures in the Middle Ages. We must address this issue briefly. Medieval kings and princes were expected to display and dispense wealth. The king did not only control land and command his followers: he was supposed to own material wealth in the form of gold, silver or precious stones. Wealth was part and parcel of the thaumaturgic kingship. If the king or an important grandee travelled, they had to take some of their riches with them. An illuminated manuscript that depicts the journey to Rome undertaken in 1310 by King Henry VII of Germany and his followers shows a cart belonging to Archbishop Balduin the Great of Trier. It is laden with gold and silver.³⁹ Again, the true meaning of wealth escapes us if

we ask for its market value only. Archbishop Balduin did not intend to spend his cartload of gold and silver. The princes and kings needed wealth as a symbol of their power. They needed it for representative purposes. These were so important that the archbishop risked taking very valuable cargo across the Alps. Several years earlier, in 1284, the royal treasure of Emperor Frederick II had indeed been captured by the city of Parma.⁴⁰ In 1456, Philip of Burgundy presented several coffers full of money to the public. Everybody was allowed to try to lift the coffers from the ground.⁴¹ This was not simply a vulgar display of wealth akin to the diamond-studded mobile phone of a modern Russian oligarch's daughter: it was a public proclamation of political power and thus political reliability. The political significance that the open display of a prince's wealth had in a time of very widespread illiteracy and weak communication structures can hardly be overestimated.⁴² As these treasures served political purposes, they seem to have escaped the Church's criticism.

It is no coincidence that in various languages 'the Crown' is used metonymically for 'the sovereign' or even the 'state'. Certain valuables were so closely linked to monarchical power that their possession was equivalent to a claim to that power.⁴³ Emperor Otto III gave the first kings of Hungary and Poland their crowns as a gift. He thus demonstrated that he regarded them as little more than his vassals, at best as his junior partners.⁴⁴ King Otto IV of Germany had serious difficulties because he had not been crowned with the right crown.⁴⁵ The Iron Crown of Lombardy was a symbol of overlordship in Northern Italy. At least according to legend, it had been worn by rulers centuries before Emperor Henry VII was crowned with it in 1312. Napoleon took pains to receive this crown when he conquered Italy. The Iron Crown is a perfect example of the amalgamation of politics and religion in valuable symbolic objects. It is not only a symbol of Italian lordship but also supposed to be a relic. The iron ring that holds the gold plates of the crown together is said to have been forged out of a nail from Christ's cross.⁴⁶

Some facts seem to contradict the idea of a quasi-sacred quality of valuable symbols of kingship. In 1334, King Edward III of England pawned his crown and that of his queen to Archbishop Balduin the Great of Trier.⁴⁷ King John the Blind of Bohemia pawned the crown of holy Duke Wenzel. As King John came from Luxembourg, he might not have had any emotional or religious attachment to the crown.⁴⁸ Another crown that had in all likelihood originally belonged to the Luxembourg dynasty ended up in a treasure trove: A Jewish merchant hid this royal

treasure in Neumarkt in Silesia in the middle of the fourteenth century.⁴⁹ It thus became a real treasure. The late Middle Ages seem to have had less respect for the material symbols of kingship. In any case, the fact that a king gave up his crown undoubtedly tarnished his reputation. We should see these incidents as exceptions that are indicative of severely strained royal finances.

Evidently, it would be wrong to assume that precious metal objects were simply material commodities to the medieval mind. Nevertheless, there is – apart from the episode of the Luxembourg crown – no real connection between hidden treasure and the material symbols of kingship. Both were more than simply costly artefacts. However, the magical overtones of the traditions of kings' crowns have hardly anything to do with the hidden or lost treasures that nobody could claim ownership of that we are specifically interested in.

In one important particular, the treasures of kings as well as the treasures in the myths and epics were very different from the treasure of early modern and modern culture: nobody actively looked for them. A king might pawn his crown, but there seem to be no stories about quests for lost crowns. Only present-day treasure hunters try to find the Rhinegold. No version of the Sigurd/Siegfried epic talked about a treasure hunt – an active search for the treasure. Atli or Kriemhild tried to pressurize the Burgundian king and his follower Högni/Hagen into revealing where exactly the treasure had been thrown into the Rhine, but neither they nor Sigurd/Siegfried before them went really looking for the treasure. Neither Beowulf nor Peredur searched for the gold of the monsters they slew. The treasure was so much a part of a network of interacting people that the protagonists could either take it from somebody else – even though that somebody was not necessarily human – directly or they would try to make others tell them where treasure was to be found instead of searching for it. That the thirteen treasures of Britain and the four Irish hallows are simply out of reach seems to be have been taken for granted. It was only in the fourteenth century that some individuals began to search for worldly treasure troves actively. We will discuss this problem in detail in Chapter 5. The active search and its potential failure did not play any role in the epics, but they were a major topic in a totally different genre of medieval literature: hagiography, the biographies of saints.

We could not hope to understand medieval treasure lore if we missed its religious aspects. The treasure that was hidden in the ground, that was searched for, that was eventually found under extraordinary circumstances and that was finally displayed, distributed or sold did not

necessarily consist of gold, silver or precious stones. The greatest treasures of the Middle Ages were relics. We do not need to go into the details of the medieval cult of saints and relics; it is sufficient to explore the influence that the cult of saints had on treasure lore.

It was quite common for medieval theologians to draw a parallel between treasure troves of gold and silver and the relics of the saints. For example, Abbot Thiofred of Echternach, an eleventh-century authority on relics, compared the dead bodies of the saints to precious stones and in fact claimed that they were vastly superior to them. Relics were the true treasures. Medieval authors often called the relics treasures: the Latin term *thesaurus* often simply meant 'relic'.⁵⁰ Of course, reliquaries were lavishly decorated. Made from precious metals and precious stones, they were objects of great material value.⁵¹ But to the medieval mind, the relics themselves were truly valuable. As objects of spiritual power, they were considered unspeakably precious even though they usually consisted of base materials such as cloth, wood or, of course, bone. Relics were valued and valuable gifts that abbots, bishops and princes gave to highly esteemed followers or allies. Even though they were never simply saleable commodities, the cult of relics underwent a certain degree of commercialization during the Middle Ages. There was certainly a market for them and counterfeiting relics became a profitable business. Any church that housed an important relic was guaranteed a steady flux of pilgrims. Thus, the cities and church leaders who were eager to acquire relics and protect the ones they owned were not only religiously motivated. The differentiation between spiritual and material value did not make sense in the medieval cult of relics.

King John the Blind of Bohemia had to pawn a golden cross that supposedly contained a Jesus relic. His contemporaries were scandalized when they learned that the cross had come into the possession of a Jew.⁵² There was a 'black market' for relics: professional thieves stole them and then offered them to towns and bishops.⁵³ Churches and cities did their best to protect their relics. In 1393, the city of Cologne received an official statement from Pope Boniface IX that declared it unlawful to take any relics out of Cologne. Evidently, the city thought it needed to protect them from the Archbishop of Cologne himself.⁵⁴ Until this very day, in Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford, there is a curious wooden structure that is supposed to be a guard house for the guardians who watched over St Frideswide's relics.

But a treasure is not simply a precious object: it is hidden or lost. So what could relics have to do with treasure troves? Of course, if the whereabouts of a saint's body were known, it could not be regarded as

a treasure as we use the word. However, this was not always the case. Often, relics were hidden or lost, too. Either the burying place of the saint was unknown or – if the body was no longer in one piece – its parts had been scattered and lost. Thus a relic could turn into a treasure in the full sense of the word. The active search for the relic became part of the medieval relic lore.

It was quite common for the medieval and early modern Catholic Church to exhume the bodies of saints. These were taken from their original, often humble resting places and placed into new, elaborate graves, or shrines near (as a rule beneath or behind) church altars. The exhumation implied a search for the body. This search could be short and simple when the place where the corpse was to be found was reasonably well-known. However, the exact location of the relic was not always clear. If the resting place of the saint's body was only vaguely known or even totally forgotten, the search for a relic could become a rather difficult task. In some cases, the clerics and monks involved in the ceremonial exhumation of saints searched in vain. There is even archaeological evidence for such failed relic hunts; for example, in St Viktor in Xanten.⁵⁵ Einhard, the biographer of Charlemagne, described how he tried to find the relics of St Marcellinus, which he intended to take with him, in a Roman church. Even though Marcellinus' resting place was known, Einhard and his helpers were, according to his own report, relieved to find an inscription inside the grave that confirmed that they had indeed found Marcellinus.⁵⁶

The chance of failure loomed large over searches for relics. A relic hunt was not only difficult in technical terms but could also be highly embarrassing. What if the search failed completely; that is, nothing at all could be found? Would that not reflect negatively on the worthiness of the searcher or even on the reliability of the Church's account of the life of the saint? The dead bodies of saints were supposed to display the outward signs of holiness: a pleasant smell and aspect with no disgusting symptoms of decomposition. What if the newly unearthed relics looked and smelled unbearably offensive? Could they be genuine? These risks might be the reason why some alleged relics were searched for clandestinely. Such exhumations would take place without curious spectators, behind closed doors and possibly at night. In 1000, Emperor Otto III searched clandestinely for the mortal remains of Charlemagne in Aachen Cathedral. He apparently entertained plans to have Charlemagne canonized. (A century and a half later, emperor Frederick Redbeard would push the canonization of the

Frankish monarch through, if only with the blessing of an anti-pope.) Even though Otto's plans would eventually fail, he tried to establish a cult of Charlemagne. He needed the relics for this cult. If something should go wrong with the search for the dead emperor's body, Otto would certainly not have wanted anybody to know about it. He found the Frankish emperor in a hidden crypt sitting on a throne and hardly decomposed. He took the cross Charlemagne wore, one of his teeth and clippings of his fingernails with him, apparently as the relics of a would-be saint. Otto's exhumation of Charlemagne was a profoundly political act. In imitation of Caesar who had searched for the grave of Alexander the Great, of Octavian Augustus who had opened that grave and of Caligula who had taken part of Alexander's armour with him, Otto tried to establish a close connection between him and Charlemagne, who was already venerated as the ideal Christian ruler. Thus, the search for the lost body of Charlemagne was a highly sensitive matter in several respects.⁵⁷

In a twelfth-century version of the story, it was claimed that Otto had found the grave thanks to a divine vision. This was a typical element of narratives about the discovery of relics. In the hagiographical literature, we find numerous reports on so-called translations of relics, that is, the search for, the exhumation and the public and festive reburial of a saint's body. Among the *topoi* that shaped these translation narratives was the motif that God or a saint revealed the resting place of the relics in a miraculous way, often in a vision in a dream. Another *topos* was that the exhumation of the saint's body or its transport to the new burial place was accompanied by miracles.⁵⁸ The legend of St Odilia of Cologne provides a good example of this kind of narrative. In a vision, John Novelanus d'Eppe saw the secret resting place of the bodies of Odilia and her sisters Ida and Ima who had been among the 11,000 virgins of St Ursula's entourage martyred in Cologne. He travelled to Cologne and actually found the relics. In another vision, John learned that the relics should be buried in Huy. In a long festive procession, he and a great number of pious people brought the relics from Cologne to Huy. En route, numerous miracles took place. A number of pictures that told the story of the miraculous translation of St Odilia's relics were finally painted on the very reliquary where Odilia's remains were kept.⁵⁹ St Norbert found relics of the holy 11,000 virgins of Cologne too. One of the monks who had come to Cologne together with St Norbert saw in a vision one of the martyred virgins. She told the monk where exactly her relics could be found. St Norbert found her body, which was

miraculously well-preserved. He had come to Cologne with the express purpose of receiving relics in the city that was reputed to be full of them. The provost of St Gereon allowed Norbert to search for relics in his own church. After a night of prayer during which Norbert might have had a vision, he found a corpse buried in a place where nobody had ever suspected one. The clothing of the body was still intact and even the blood under him was still wet. As part of the corpse's head was missing, the provost concluded that this must be the relic of St Gereon himself, the very patron saint of the church who was known to have been killed by a blow to the head but whose resting place had so far remained unknown. After the provost had given St Norbert part of the relic, he reburied the saint in an elaborate ceremony attended by an enthusiastic crowd.⁶⁰

A spectacular treasure tale is that of Joan of Arc's sword. She had several. First was the sword that was given to St Joan by Robert de Baudricourt, the noble who trusted her enough to provide crucial support for her in the earliest days of her public life. There were several that she took as war booty from the English and that she later passed on to churches as votive offerings. There was, however, another sword the Maid of Orleans carried until her first defeat near St Denis. After she had received her standard and her set of armour from Charles VII in 1429, she sent an unknown person – probably an arms merchant – to the monastery of St Catherine of Fierbois. St Joan instructed the man to dig up a sword that was hidden behind the altar in the monastery's church. She claimed that her voices (i.e. saints and angels) had told her about it. To the utter surprise of the monks who had not heard about a sword hidden in their church, Joan's messenger found the weapon. It was rusty, but the rust simply fell off. On the blade of the sword there were five crosses. Her contemporaries did not explain them but they might have formed a Jerusalem Cross. (A Jerusalem Cross is a crusaders' symbol consisting of one big cross and four smaller crosses in the four angles.) Marshal Boucicaut, a relic collector, had paid for some buildings of St Catherine of Fierbois around 1400. He could have given a crusader's sword as a votive offering or a relic to the monastery. It is likely that the monks would have accepted the sword as a relic and buried it near the altar. It is not so likely that they forgot all about it in the course of about 30 years. St Joan might have visited the monastery on her way from Vaucouleurs to Chinon. Did she and the monks stage a little fraud to enhance the credibility of the peasant girl who was about to meet the king of France? If so, the monks of St Catherine put enormous trust in her even though she was quite unknown at that time. When

St Joan eventually sent for the sword, she no longer needed the minor miracle: by that time, she had already convinced Charles VII to support her. According to the sources available, there were no local legends or rumours about a sacred sword hidden in St Catherine of Fierbois before 1429. Thus the whole scheme made little sense. No matter who devised this episode, it eventually helped St Joan because the king accepted the miraculous find of the sword as a sign that he had made the right decision. Relic or no relic, the sword was clearly a miraculous object. It was found in a very strange way and it lost all traces of age and disuse with great ease. The sword of St Catherine of Fierbois was another miracle treasure. Even by the time of Joan of Arc's trial, the sword had already disappeared. It was not in the possession of the Maid of Orleans when she was eventually captured at Compiègne. Now the sword could turn into legend for good. After St Joan's execution, it was rumoured that the weapon had belonged to Charles Martel who had used it to battle the Muslims at Poitiers, or even that it originally came from Alexander the Great.⁶¹

The most precious relic imaginable was, of course, the Holy Grail. A variant of the story of the Holy Grail even tells of two miraculous discoveries of the same relic. According to the New Testament, a Roman soldier who had been present at the crucifixion had thrust his spear in the side of the dying Jesus and immediately converted to the Christian faith. According to medieval hagiography, this soldier, called Longinus, managed to keep a bit of the blood that had flown out of the wound in Christ's side. He went to Mantua in Italy. As he did not want the Jesus relic to fall into the hand of hostile pagans, he hid a vessel containing the holy blood in the ground. In 804, miraculous signs in the sky alerted the pope to the fact that a very precious relic was to be found at Mantua. At the explicit request of Charlemagne, the holy blood was unearthed. However, during the invasions of the Hungarians in the early tenth century, the relic was buried again. In 1048, the blind monk Adalbero learned about the holy blood in a vision. He informed the clergy. The news about the Jesus relic spread swiftly. When the holy blood was finally unearthed, a number of nobles and bishops, Pope Leo IX and Emperor Henry III were present. The holy blood was split up. A part of it is today on display in the high altar of Weingarten Monastery in Swabia, where it has become the centre of a multi-faceted cult, comparable to that of Mantua itself.⁶²

Evidently, there were significant parallels between the stories about relics in medieval hagiography and early modern treasure lore. The vision, usually the miraculous apparition of the saint, mirrored the

appearance of a ghost. Both – the saint and the ghost – were ‘special’ dead. Far from being ‘dead and gone’, they were still able to influence the world of the living and to communicate with them. The message of the apparition – be it a saint or a ghost – was essentially about a hidden treasure. In the case of the saints of hagiography, the treasure was the body of the saint. In the case of the ghost, the treasure simply consisted of valuables that the person who had become a ghost had hidden before his death. The saint as well as the ghost wanted the respective treasure to be found. Even after the relic or treasure had been discovered, the extraordinary events continued. The relic caused miracles during its translation. As we will see in the next chapter, the treasures of the early modern period were magical objects themselves and they were guarded by spirits. In a way, treasure of the early modern period very like relics of the Middle Ages created a magical sphere surrounding it; or rather, the relic and the treasure had lasting mystical or magical power.

There were even more telling parallels between medieval relics and (early) modern treasures. As we will see in the next chapter, it was one of the essentials of early modern treasure lore that flames or little bluish fires burned on the place where a treasure was buried. This idea was probably derived from the medieval theology of relics. There were supposedly little lights burning over the place where lost relics could be found. Thus, unknown resting places of the bodies of saints could be identified. As Abbot Thiofred of Echternach explained, ‘Non poterunt unquam tam profunde in terrae recondi visceribus, quin super terram per miraculorum effectus effulgeant ipso sole lucidius.’ (‘They (i.e. the saints) can never be buried so deep in the bowels of the earth that they shine not miraculously over the surface of the earth brighter than the sun itself.’) Thiofred elegantly and beautifully explained the miracle with a direct reference to the New Testament: as nobody would put a light under a bushel, God would not allow the bodies of the saints to be overlooked and thus the light of their faith to be unseen.⁶³ According to Gregory of Tours, the forgotten tomb of St Solleminis was found that way. People had observed a strange light on Sunday nights hovering over a certain part of St Martin’s Church in village near Tours where an old crypt was hidden.⁶⁴ The idea that little lights indicate the place where relics are hidden supposedly helped to give one of the most important Christian shrines its name: Santiago di Compostela. *Compostela* is probably derived from the Latin *campus stellarum* (‘field of stars’). According to legend, the relics of St James were scattered over a comparatively large open area. In the night, little lights appeared over all the small relics hidden in the ground as if stars shone in

the field.⁶⁵ Taken out of its proper theological context, the miraculous light over lost relics could be turned into the treasure flame that according to folk legends indicated the place where valuables were hidden.

At least one other theological metaphor was taken out of context and profaned. Relics were said to grow and flourish like plants.⁶⁶ Of course, the medieval authors did not want to say that the dead bodies of saints could expand in size. The metaphor was just a variation on the *sanguis martyrum semen Christianorum* ('the blood of martyrs is the semen of Christianity') motif. The theologians wanted to say that the sacrifice of the martyrs would win people over to the Christian faith. Even if the converts would eventually suffer martyrdom as well, they too would thereby help the Church to grow, to expand and to flourish. The metaphor of the growth of relics might well have contributed to the emergence of the idea of growing treasure. In folk legends and in early modern treasure lore, we often encounter stories about coins that magically multiply on their own account or about spirit beings who know how to work that magic. There is a direct connection to the idea that one could 'plant' money, and new and ever more money would grow out of it.⁶⁷ We will return to this motif later on. To be sure, the theological metaphor of growing treasure was not directly and simply misunderstood to mean material riches that become more and more by themselves. Rather, the theologians implanted an idea, a specific imagery in culture. This idea migrated into new contexts and changed its form. Of course, this interpretation must not be overstretched. The motif of relic lore went hand in hand with popular and apparently very old fantasies about the magical regeneration of used resources. The best-known example are narratives about animals that were slaughtered and eaten but could be resurrected out of their bones. Both imaginations helped to shape early modern treasure lore.

The hunt for relics went on after the end of the Middle Ages. In the early twentieth century, Canon Webling from Bury St Edmunds maintained that 'facts...purely...learned from psychic research' indicated the long-forgotten resting place of the saint King Edmund. At the same time, some people in Bury claimed they had seen the ghost of a Catholic priest who wanted to tell them where Edmund's relics were. The ghost had always wanted to do so but he was reluctant to disclose the secret to Anglicans. The clairvoyant Lily Thomas failed to contact this ghost. It stands to reason that she was a Protestant too, or even a Spiritualist.⁶⁸

Neither the treasure of the myths and epics nor that in the imagery of medieval kingship had direct connections to the treasure of the early modern and the modern periods. The stories told about relics in the Middle Ages seem to have been the blueprint for later treasure narratives. Folk culture took theological ideas and images out of context, rearranged them and integrated them into new magical narratives. This kind of bricolage was an essential part of medieval and early modern popular culture.⁶⁹ In the late Middle Ages, the imagery of the treasure hunt that would shape the treasure in early modern popular culture was in place.

3

The Magical Treasure and Its Guardians

Only the Leiprechán knows where it is.

(Sean O'Sullivan: *Folktales of Ireland*, 1966)

Magical times and places

On 17 June 1499, John and Agnes Clerk from Great Ashfield as well as their young daughter Marion had to answer charges before the consistory court of Norwich. The ecclesiastical court had learned that the girl worked as a healer and a soothsayer, and that she claimed she could locate buried treasures. Marion admitted everything immediately, even with an air of self-importance. She said that she got her abilities from God, the Virgin Mary and from the fairies. The ecclesiastical judge seems to have amused himself asking the girl about the details. The fairies, Marion explained, were little people who gave her information whenever she needed it. They did not believe in Jesus and the Holy Spirit but they did believe in the Almighty Father, rather like the Jews. The fairies nevertheless enabled her to speak to St Stephen and to the archangel Gabriel. Marion told the judge that she had been to Heaven, where she had seen God in a golden mantle. On a more secular note, she explained that a treasure was hidden in 'Moises Halle' in Bury St Edmunds. The Jews would guard it. Marion's mother, Agnes, confirmed everything she had said. She explained that she herself had been in contact with the fairies when she was younger, even to such an extent that at some point her head and neck had been twisted around backwards. A cunning man had cured her with a blessing. This man had also told her that she would have a daughter who would become a saint and a miracle worker. When Marion was two years old, she had suffered from the plague. A white

dove had flown into her room and had cured her miraculously. The toddler had called the dove the dove of St John. The girl had later received a stick of holly from the fairies for her to use to find treasure. At Marion's request, Agnes had taken the stick, apparently a divining rod, to the priest to have it blessed on Palm Sunday. They expected to find a silver cross, a chalice and a great quantity of gold. The court duly noted that Agnes was known to be very superstitious. In answer to a question from the judge, the mother of the child prodigy admitted that she took 2s. from the people who requested her daughter's services. John Clerk confirmed everything his wife and his daughter had said. Neither the girl nor her parents could see anything wrong in what she was doing. The judge, a Mr Vaughan, could: he warned the Clerk family of dire consequences if they did not repent their superstitious practices. All three quickly revoked their opinions. The Norwich consistory court sentenced them to a shaming punishment that was rather typical for ecclesiastical courts: they had to do public penance by walking before four major processions, clad only in shifts and each carrying a large candle.¹

The Clerks' tale exemplified a number of typical elements of treasure tales. The treasure was hidden in some special place, within a building or a ruin, in this case a place connected with the ever-suspicious Jews. The treasure hunt was a magical enterprise: an expert magician was needed. These experts were good at handling certain magical objects that would help to locate the treasure. They were in contact with the world of spirits – be it the fairies as in Marion Clerk's case or be it ghosts or demons. Of course, the magicians were not above offering their services for money. The treasure magic had religious overtones: Marion's divining rod would only work with the blessing of a priest. She claimed to have been singled out by God for great things and claimed to have seen Heaven. The ecclesiastical, as well as the secular, authorities did not accept treasure hunting as a godly activity: the Clerks apparently tried to trick a priest into blessing the divining rod when he blessed the branches for Palm Sunday. The consistory court sentenced them for superstition. However, even though at least on the Continent witch-hunts were already past their first climax in 1499, the court did not see treasure magic as witchcraft. This chapter will explore the magic of both the treasure and its guardians. In a way, we will muster the troops of the enemies – or, at times, the unreliable allies – that the treasure hunters had to deal with in order to get the treasure.

In the pre-modern world, time itself was magical. Certain days were considered lucky or unlucky for certain ventures. Spirits and magicians were especially powerful in the times between times, during the

borderlines of time so to speak: the midnight hour between two days as well as the midday between forenoon and afternoon were magical. The most prominent time for the apparition of spirits was the days and nights between two years, that is, the so-called Sacred Nights between Christmas and Epiphany. The days of saints and their eves were good times for all magical activities, including treasure hunting. Trials against treasure hunters from early modern southwest Germany mentioned New Year's Eve as well as St Martin's Eve as the best dates for treasure magic. However, the same sources claimed that the night between Sunday and Monday – another borderline of time between two weeks – was very suitable for treasure hunting too.² In 1679, a treasure hunter from Württemberg explained to the authorities that he needed their permission to dig up the treasure in the next couple of days, otherwise it would be too late. Even though the treasure hunter did not give any details, it is likely that he alluded to the concept of magical time. He failed to speed up the authorities' work, though.³

A more important set of ideas about treasure troves concerned the places where treasures were supposedly hidden. In theory, treasure could be found everywhere. In Continental European proverbs, mistletoe indicated a place where treasure was hidden – apparently another miraculous property of this magical plant for all purposes.⁴ In England, treasures were said to be hidden under wayside crosses. The term 'cross-digger' became a synonym for 'treasure hunter'. As treasure hunters used magic, John Bale, the sixteenth-century playwright and theologian, could list 'cross-digger' with other kinds of wizard. His contemporary Leland noted disgustedly that in parts of Northamptonshire, one-third of all stone crosses had been pulled down in recent years by treasure hunters. King Henry's witchcraft law had specifically referred to the idea that treasure hoards were hidden under wayside crosses; we will later review concrete trials against people who dug up crosses in order to find treasure.⁵ This element of treasure lore seems to have been largely unknown on the Continent. Other likely treasure spots were barrows. Men on the make, those who became suddenly rich in an inconceivable way, were contemptuously called 'hill-diggers' in seventeenth-century England, that is, treasure hunters searching barrows for treasures.⁶ As a rule, treasure hunters regarded old buildings, their ruins or the sites of former buildings as the best places to dig. In trials against treasure hunters, ruins of castles and monasteries featured prominently. The dissolution of the monasteries in Protestant countries gave rise to rumours about the monks having secreted away their riches before they had to leave. This belief lingered on: in Central Europe, probably every

ruined monastery or castle has its folk tale about a buried treasure in a secret subterranean passage.⁷ The most prominent spots in Britain ever haunted by treasure hunters are the Tower of London and Westminster Abbey. We mentioned the treasure of the Tower in Chapter 1. We will deal with the treasure hunt in Westminster Abbey conducted by the astrologer William Lilly in the 1630s shortly. The most prominent treasure site in Germany was the ruins of Trifels Castle near Landau. During the High Middle Ages, the German crown jewels, including the Imperial Crown and the Sacred Lance, were kept in Trifels fortress. Even though the whereabouts of the crown jewels were perfectly well-known, eighteenth-century treasure hunters still regarded the ruins of the former treasure house as a promising place for a dig, even more so as they were said to be haunted. The authorities of the principedom that claimed authority over Trifels Castle at that time shared their view. At any rate, they officially permitted a treasure hunt in the ruins in 1723.⁸ The former homes of supposedly rich private people were seen as likely treasure spots too. In 1597, the London magician Forman gave thought to searching for treasure in a house formerly owned by Francis Drake.⁹ Goodwin Wharton named a number of treasure sites that he and his associates had supposedly visited, among them a seemingly artificial knoll, a haunted house formerly owned by a rich man, the former residence of Cardinal Wolsey and the garden of Somerset House owned by the Crown.¹⁰ Even though he probably wrote his adventurous autobiography simply to amuse himself, his stories give a fair idea of seventeenth-century beliefs.

Occasionally, in folklore we find the idea that treasures are hidden under huge stones that can move on their own. In the Saar region of west Germany, people still tell a joke about the treasure allegedly hidden under the Kaltenstein Rocks on Hoxberg Mountain. If the rocks of Kaltenstein hear the bells of the church of Lebach ring on Good Friday, they will turn around on their own account, roll over and thus reveal the treasure. Of course, the church bells never ring on Good Friday. Saying that some particular event will take place on Good Friday when the church bells ring is like saying that it will never take place. In 1935, an adherent of the National Socialist ideology who had recently moved into the Hoxberg region misunderstood the joke. He published a completely distorted version of the tale in which he fantasized about pagan Germanic priests who had hidden their gold under the Kaltenstein Rocks.¹¹

Not all treasures were supposed to be buried in a ruin or under conspicuous rocks. The people of early modern Europe expected to find

them in the open country too. A prominent feature of treasure lore addressed the question how one might find treasure that had been hidden in some place without any landmarks, a common wood or a field. A blue flame was said to burn over a buried treasure during the night. In 1772, a treasure hunter from Hessen explained matter-of-factly that he knew there was treasure hidden in his stable because he had seen a mysterious light there.¹² We encounter the belief in the treasure flame all over Europe, from Britain to Russia.¹³ Some readers might be familiar with the idea of a blue flame burning over treasure because Bram Stoker used it to great effect in the first chapter of *Dracula*. It was indeed one of the few pieces of authentic folklore in that novel. The British folklorists suggested that the belief in the treasure flame still existed in Wales, Wiltshire and northern England in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ A Danish collector of folk tales claimed in 1895 that the belief in 'treasure-lights' was widespread in his country.¹⁵ We have already discussed the probable origin of the belief in the treasure flame in the relic lore of the Middle Ages. One of the earliest examples of the magical flame still combined the treasure and the tomb. The saga of Grettir, an Icelandic poet of great strength, was written in the first decades of the fourteenth century. In this narrative, Grettir came to Norway. In the night, he spotted a fire on a lonely headland. He told his Norwegian host Auðun that 'if that were seen in our land, people would think that the flame burned above hid treasure'. Auðun explained that the place marked by the flame was a burial mound. Grettir went there and found a huge treasure of gold and silver in the burial chamber.¹⁶ Grettir's remark indicates that in the fourteenth century the treasure flame was already a part of northern Germanic folklore. As Iceland had become Christian in the early eleventh century, this find does not contradict our assumption that the treasure flame is derived from Christian legends about hidden relics. Later on in the saga, Grettir encountered Glám, a magical being who cursed him with a kind of second sight. It is important to note that Grettir could see the treasure flame before that and that his companion Auðun could too. Thus, no magical skill was needed to see the tell-tale flame: everyone might expect to find treasure that way. As the treasure flame allegedly disappeared without leaving any ashes behind when the night ended, it was not an especially reliable help for would-be treasure seekers. Whenever one saw such a flame, one should throw something onto it both to mark the spot and to keep the treasure from sinking into the ground.¹⁷

In the folklore of the Kujawy region, in what is today northern central Poland, it was well-known that the treasure flame was a means of

magical cleansing. The treasure became dirty in the earth. Therefore, every seven years at the hour and minute when the treasure had originally been buried, it purified itself with fire that burned the dirt away. The height, size and colour of the flame indicated how deep the treasure was buried, its size and the metal it consisted of. At least one coin of the treasure remained at the surface after the cleansing fire. However, if somebody went too close to the burning treasure, a spirit threw fire at them.¹⁸

Whereas Johannes Prätorius in his collection of popular narratives denounced the treasure flame as a demonic glamour in 1666, so-called practical guides for farmers, which tried to spread the ideas of the Enlightenment in the countryside in the eighteenth century, attacked the idea of the treasure flame as such. Such flames were simply fires lit and left unattended by tramps, or methane escaping from swamps.¹⁹

The treasure as a magical object

The treasure itself was not some ordinary inanimate object;²⁰ it had, indeed, a life of its own. According to early modern sources, treasure could move on its own. It rose to the surface – it was said to enjoy the sun – and sank down into the earth again. In 1679, treasure hunters dug at a particular spot in a wood near Tübingen because an old woman claimed to have seen a treasure that had come out of the ground at this place in order to, ‘as they say, take a sun bath’. We encounter similar accounts in the eighteenth century. A treasure hunter from Tönningstedt in northern Germany worried in 1741 that he would not get his treasure after all because it had allegedly sunk 40 feet into the ground within a short period of time.²¹ Learned demonologists did not accept the idea that treasure could move on its own account, but they did not dismiss the belief in moving treasure out of hand. They argued that the devil moved treasure in order to fool treasure seekers.²²

As treasure could move, it could actively escape treasure hunters and foil their plans. Very like game, it had to be lured. Hunters used a tame or caught bird to attract other birds. Treasure hunters tried to attract a treasure with money. The treasure would come out of the ground if you put coins on the ground near the place where it was buried. The motif of the vanishing or wandering treasure could be used to explain the failure of a treasure hunt. Ludwig von Neipperg, a south German petty aristocrat, had suffered the presence of treasure hunters on his property in 1684. When they finally failed, he wrote not without humour: ‘I think that the treasure we thought so much of drove far into the earth

and is now buried so deep that neither I nor anybody else will ever see anything of it again.' In 1707, a treasure magician had tried in vain to unearth a treasure in the cellar of a house in the Swabian town of Möckmühl. He declared that the 'money had slipped out' of a hole in the cellar wall. It had to be 'drawn back and up again'. For that purpose, he suggested hanging a bag full of coins in the cellar.²³

Of course, time and again, tricksters abused the idea that money attracted treasure. In 1711, a professional treasure magician worked for a local official who hoped to find treasure in the ruins of Botenheim Castle in Swabia. The magician requested a certain sum of money, which he wanted to bury in the cellar of the ruin in order to 'draw' the treasure out of the ground. Nothing surfaced, but the money and the magician disappeared. When the magician was arrested a little later, he confessed that he had exploited the belief that you could lure treasure with money repeatedly.²⁴

If the treasure was finally in sight, it was best to throw something on it. This should keep it from vanishing again. Again, it was considered best to catch money with money, so treasure lore suggested throwing coins at the treasure.²⁵ Johann Georg Schmidt, a highly aggressive and outspoken advocate of the Enlightenment of the early eighteenth century, did not consider it beneath his dignity to refute this element of folk belief at some length. The material nature of the treasure itself, he argued, prevented it from simply disappearing, no matter whether one was able to throw something on it or not.²⁶

In addition to its alleged ability to move on its own, treasure could fool treasure seekers because it was able to turn into worthless materials. In a way, the treasure was a shape-shifter. It appeared as a bit of glowing charcoal, dirt or chunks of wood. The treasure hunters had to bring it back to its true and original form by magic. We find these motifs over and over again in early modern trials of treasure hunters. Folk tales collected in nineteenth-century folklore repeated these motifs. Russian folklore boasts the acme of the treasures' art of disguise: Here, treasures were said to be able to take on the form of human beings.²⁷

The physician and alchemist Paracelsus proves that the idea of shape-shifting treasure was common knowledge in the sixteenth century. He wrote that numerous examples had shown that treasures could turn into worthless or even disgusting materials. Paracelsus explained that certain spirit beings – we will discuss his spirit lore later in this chapter – controlled treasure. They transformed treasures into dirt in order to fool treasure seekers. However, as an alchemist, he knew a way out: the find should be cleansed by fire. Very like mineral ore, the treasure would

be discovered if tested with fire. Paracelsus backed his argument with Bible quotes: precious metals should be tested by fire (Psalms 66:10) and God would judge the world with fire (Isiah 66:16). Paracelsus also explained that some practical jokers buried pots full of 'spiteful and foolish' materials, such as egg shells, coal or bits of wood. The pranksters obviously wanted to play a trick on people who found these pots accidentally and assumed – in keeping with the belief in magical treasures – that the worthless materials were transfigured riches.²⁸ Evidently, the belief in treasures that could turn into dirt and rubbish when found was deeply rooted in popular culture in the early sixteenth century, otherwise Paracelsus' argument would not have made any sense. At the same time, the short passage quoted above proves that he was unfamiliar with the concept of historical finds: the pots full of egg shells, coal or particles of wood that people found accidentally are probably best understood as objects from the Middle Ages or antiquity that might later have aroused the interest of antiquarians and collectors of antiques.

The magical motifs that flames indicate the place where treasure is hidden and that a treasure might look like glowing embers were so popular that anti-legends could parody them. A treasure legend from Hoxberg Mountain in western Germany played with the expectations of the audience. A bricklayer who went to work early in the morning saw a small fire and glowing embers with nobody to guard them in the middle of nowhere in the Hoxberg woods. He remembered that buried treasures sometimes take on the appearance of embers and often flames can be seen over them. Hastily, he scraped the embers into his rucksack. He could hardly walk two steps before he had to throw the smoking rucksack down again – the embers were real enough. Instead of wealth, a severely burned back was all that the bricklayer got for his efforts.²⁹

Even after treasure had been found and taken, the treasure hunt was still dangerous. Kujawy folklore claimed that whoever shovelled the dirt back into the treasure pit would die soon – filling up the treasure hole was equivalent to filling up one's own grave.³⁰ In contrast, in nineteenth-century Bohemia, it was said that anyone who found a treasure would die within the year unless he filled up the treasure pit completely.³¹

The treasure thus defied the distinction between living creatures and inanimate objects. It was an object but it still had both a will and some intelligence. It was even superior to non-magical objects and creatures alike as it could transform its outer appearance radically. The treasure of pre-modern folk belief was at odds with the scholastic concepts of

the individual. It mocked the essentials of Descartes' philosophy and the emerging scientific rationality.

Demons

'Supernatural' appearances supposedly haunted the place where a treasure was buried. We have already addressed the idea that blue flames burned over treasures. The medieval notion that bright lights indicated the resting place of relics might have been the origin of this idea. Later folklore elaborated on and changed this connection between mysterious lights, the dead and things buried in the earth. In several cases, folklore interpreted the flames as wandering souls connected to a treasure.³²

Essential to the belief in hidden treasures was the notion that they were guarded by spirits, demons or ghosts.³³ We cannot understand early modern treasure hunts if we fail to see that treasure was closely associated with the spirit world. It is next to impossible to list all the magical beings that the folklore of Old Europe connected to treasures. In Russian folklore, there were even generic terms for spirits who guard a treasure. They were called *kladovik* or *klavovoi* from *klad* ('buried treasure'). The generic term covered ghosts as well as demons.³⁴

In the Annals of Worcester, a treasure hunt in the year 1288 is mentioned. In a place called Bilebury, presumably in or near Roman ruins, a wizard conjured up the devil. Even though the devil remained invisible to the wizard, a young boy – presumably some kind of 'medium' – could see the spirit. The boy even saw a lot more: the devil showed him 'vessels, a ship and a house with a lot of gold'.³⁵

The Bilebury episode is just one of many similar narratives. The idea that demons guarded treasures was one of the essentials of pre-modern treasure lore. In 1465, two treasure hunters had to face charges in Norfolk for calling up a demon that was supposed to show them the place where treasure was buried.³⁶ In the late sixteenth century, it was rumoured that demons watched the treasure buried under the ruins of Skenfirth Castle near Monmouth.³⁷ The treasure hunter or treasure magician found himself in the awkward position of the conjurer, which was different from that of the witch as well as that of the exorcist. The witch was supposed to serve the demons – she did not control them but was controlled by them. The exorcist used the power that the official Catholic Church had invested him with – or at least the power he claimed his bishop had given him – in order to drive away the spirits of hell. The magician or conjurer simply tried to harness the demons'

power for his own ends. He had to invoke them but he had also to control these most dangerous of helpers. It comes as no surprise that the most prominent conjurers of the Middle Ages had been priests: they supposedly abused their power as exorcists as they did not simply drive demons away but tried to make them their slaves. Ceremonial magic designed to control demons probably played a comparatively important role in the magical practices of the learned minorities of the late Middle Ages.³⁸ Early modern folk culture was fascinated by this playing with hell fire.

The demons could supposedly ask for some remuneration for their help. During the 1465 treasure hunt just mentioned, the magicians agreed to give the demon the body of a Christian for its assistance in finding the treasure. However, according to their deposition before the court, the wizards fooled the evil spirit by offering him a cock that they had baptized in a mock ceremony. We should not take this story at face value: the defendants used a motif well-known in folklore all over Europe. Usually, the devil is cheated out of the soul or body promised to him for help in the erection of a very complicated building. The defendants cleverly integrated this motif into their deposition even though it certainly did not belong to the stock-in-trade of treasure narratives. The idea that treasure hunters gave ritual sacrifices to demons played hardly any role in trials against them.³⁹

Trials against treasure hunters prove that in the early modern period numerous peasants and townspeople, not just clerics, tried to invoke demons. Conjuring the devil became part and parcel of treasure hunting. Why should demons control treasures? Firstly, the subterranean realm was often seen as the realm of demons. As a Continental European saying had it, 'Everything that is deeper in the earth than three feet belongs to the devil.'⁴⁰ Secondly, in the Christian ethics of Old Europe, money and wealth were at best ambivalent. Even money acquired by perfectly legal and moral means could be a diabolic temptation. Demons allegedly appeared in places where money was stored. In the thirteenth century, a Kentish cleric told of a miser who saw a demon in the shape of a huge toad sitting on his hoard.⁴¹ It was entirely in keeping with this kind of thinking that demons would watch over treasures or distribute them. In a way, the spirits of hell were the champions of material wealth. Thirdly, the power of the demons over treasure troves was simply another element of their huge magical potency. They did not 'own' treasures but they knew where to find them and they could bring them to magicians.⁴² A group of treasure hunters who had looked in vain for treasure in East Anglia in 1520 ended up employing a wizard, who

was supposed to be able to conjure up a demon to show or bring them treasures.⁴³ In eighteenth-century Russia, a sorcerer was accused of having a demon named Herod at his command who did not only jam watermills but who brought treasure from rich and exotic countries like Sweden, Turkey and Greece.⁴⁴ The most prominent example of a demon bringing jewels is that of Mephisto. In Goethe's play, *Faust*, the wizard makes Mephisto bring him jewels with which to impress Gretchen. Mephisto's rant against the foolishness of love and faith when he learns that the pious girl gave the mysterious jewellery to her priest is one of the funniest scenes of the play. Goethe did not invent the demon that brings money and precious items – he merely played with older folk narratives. Strangely enough, saints and angels could be invoked in a similar way. As we will see below, they were supposed to bring treasures, too.

Given this close association between infernal spirits and subterranean treasures, it comes as no surprise that the medieval Church prescribed certain exorcist rites that had to be said over precious vessels accidentally found in the earth. Such vessels should not be put to use before they had been ritually cleansed of potential demonic influence.⁴⁵

In 1584, charges were brought against a Carmelite and an Augustinian monk who had participated in a treasure hunt in a village near Naples. As well as incessantly reading the psalms during the dig they had distributed bits of paper with magical symbols and holy names among the treasure hunters. All of that was explicitly designed to drive away the demons that guarded the treasure. The monks had given the bits of paper to the workers with the words, 'Take these in the name of God, cross yourselves and do not doubt.' When interrogated by the court, the monks said that they had not read magical incantations or unlawful exorcisms but simply their breviary. It would have been difficult to dispute the orthodoxy of this behaviour. They claimed that these measures had been absolutely necessary to protect the workers hired for the dig as they were very afraid of demons. The peasants in the next village lived in fear of the evil spirits, which had already attacked them with blows when they came too close to the treasure site.⁴⁶ One cannot help but suspect that the treasure seekers did their bit to make sure that the villagers stayed well clear of the dig. On another occasion at another treasure site near Naples, some of the lay treasure hunters who had accompanied the monks had allegedly brought blessed palms and burned incense in order to drive away demons. Even worse, they had done so on a Sunday and thus profaned the holy day. Again, the treasure seekers had their answer ready: they maintained that they had not burned incense but simply lit a fire to drive away the creatures that really haunted the place – bats.⁴⁷

The Inquisition court that looked into these matters was satisfied with these answers.

It was not always clear or could be a matter of dispute what kind of spirit guarded the treasure. During a major (if fruitless) investigation of the Naples Inquisition against an alleged magical murder in 1586, Giovanni Domenico de Cotiis came forward on his own account. He contributed a revealing testimony to a curious sideline of the trial. De Cotiis was a jurist but he admitted freely that he had engaged in treasure hunting. Two years earlier, he had met the 15-year-old daughter of a smith who had claimed to be in contact with seven female fairies. One of these fairies had often said prayers with the girl: the Ave Maria as well as the Pater Noster. She had been 'clothed very like a nun with a great number of golden rosaries and chains'. De Cotiis asked the girl to call the spirit. The child shuffled her feet strangely and seemed to press them into the ground, then she started talking to the fairy who remained invisible to the adults. The fairy had told the girl that a treasure was hidden in the garden of her house. A group of well-to-do people from Naples took the story seriously enough to start a treasure hunt. The father confessor of the girl, a Dominican monk, joined the treasure seekers, claiming to protect the interests of her and her family. A Mastro Antonio from Genua enlisted in the treasure hunting party too. He conjured the spirits who protected the treasure. To everybody's surprise, he said that he had spoken to 'wild beats and animals'. When the inquisitor asked what he meant by that, Mastro Antonio explained to him that the treasure was guarded by demons that he had undertaken to fight off. Neither the jurist de Cotiis nor the Dominican monk (the order traditionally had close ties to the Inquisition) saw the girl's spirits as demons. They seem to have been content to interpret them simply as an indication that treasure could be found. They apparently did not give too much thought to the question of what kind of spirit they had dealt with or whether they dealt with any spirits at all, or rather with the fertile imagination of a sensitive young girl, maybe sensitive enough to 'feel' a treasure. De Cotiis and the Dominican father confessor seem to have shrugged off the unclear nature of the spirit due to their financial interest in the case. The ecclesiastical court apparently shared their indifference. The Naples Inquisition did not take action against the girl and did not even seem to admonish de Cotiis or the monk. Even if we argue that the Inquisition simply tried to avoid a scandal because of the involvement of the girl's father confessor, we have to accept the fact that the scandal was more important than the rather fishy dealing with 'Catholic' fairies. The Italian Inquisition of the late sixteenth century

had a somewhat relaxed attitude towards magic, which was miles away from the persecutory zeal of the secular witch hunters north of the Alps. The treasure hunt apparently ended abruptly. It is still worth noting that not the Inquisition court's fight for Tridentine orthodoxy terminated the treasure hunt but the new interpretation of the nature of the spirits suggested by a conjurer.⁴⁸

Some spirits seemed to be exceedingly reluctant to part with their treasures. In the Tatra Mountains, especially in the region with the charming name *Satanský žleb* (i.e. devil's valley), falling rocks were allegedly caused by spirits who wanted to drive treasure hunters away. We find similar beliefs in Transylvanian folklore.⁴⁹

Here we have probably the most important role that demons played in treasure narratives. They were often said to frighten treasure seekers away. The spirits of hell showed themselves in horrible forms. They made strange noises and caused storms to drive the treasure seekers away. In many respects, this chase of demons resembled the Wild Hunt. As a rule, the spirits of hell did not attack the treasure seekers physically but they confronted them with a series of nightmarishly horrible apparitions. The treasure hunters had to muster the courage to stand a noisy and abhorrent parade of demons that appeared to them at the treasure site.⁵⁰ In the early sixteenth century, rumour had it that treasure was hidden near Halifax. A certain Leventhorp who died prior to 1510 had allegedly discovered the treasure. However, a demon appeared sitting on the treasure chest. When Leventhorp tried to drive the demon away with his sword, the spirit tore it apart in the middle. After this terrifying display of demonic strength, Leventhorp fled.⁵¹ A Northamptonshire treasure hunt ended abruptly in 1527 when a loud rumble frightened the diggers.⁵² In Somerset, it was said that a treasure hunter had discovered the fabled treasure of Ruborough Camp, otherwise known as Money Field. However, a horrific noise supposedly caused by demons burst forth from the earth and drove him away.⁵³ A variant of the demonic apparition was a violent storm allegedly caused by evil spirits to threaten the treasure hunters. The professional cunning man and treasure magician William Wycherley allegedly faced demons more than once. At one time, a terrifying black apparition chased him and his associates from the treasure site. During a treasure hunting expedition in the late 1530s in Sussex, their work was interrupted by a violent storm apparently caused by evil spirits. John Dee was said to have withstood such a demonic tempest when he unearthed a treasure in Brecknockshire.⁵⁴ When the magician Lilly set out to find buried treasure in Westminster Abbey in 1632/33, he claimed to have been

frightened away by an unbelievably strong wind that apparently blew within the building and seemed to threaten to tear the church and the cloister down.⁵⁵ Lilly's text suggested that the strange wind was a menacing manifestation of magical, probably demonic, powers. In 1784 in Austrian Feldkirch, treasure hunters were driven away by 'yelling, hissing and a tumult...as if everything was about to perish and a whole company of devils from hell had come'.⁵⁶ Vestiges of the idea that apparitions threatened treasure hunters survived into the early twentieth century in Britain.⁵⁷ The demons caused hallucinations. German and Tyrolese treasure lore had it that those who were about to unearth treasure thought they saw a huge stone suspended above their heads from a thread.⁵⁸ Another motif appeared in folk tales from Scotland and Denmark as well as from Transylvania: the treasure hunters saw a huge fire in the vicinity. When they ran from the treasure site to help extinguish the blaze, they found that they had been victims of a diabolic delusion. The treasure, however, had vanished.⁵⁹

Paracelsus was familiar with the idea that frightful apparitions drove treasure hunters away. He did not denounce them as figments of the imagination. Rather, he maintained that treasure hunters did indeed hear and see horrible things that had been caused by the spirits guarding the treasure. He implicitly admitted that he did not know how to avoid these molestations or how to stop them.⁶⁰

According to Neely, Afro-American treasure hunters in early twentieth-century Illinois expected a violent whirlwind when they were about to dig up a treasure hoard. This was a variant of the demonic apparitions known in older folklore. In an Illinois anti-legend, at the very moment when the treasure hunters were about to put their hands on the treasure, they did not encounter a horde of demons or hellhounds or a ghost in the shape of a dog but some very real and very formidable watch dogs. The owner of the piece of land where the treasure seekers had found the treasure did not believe that the finder was entitled to a least part of the find. When the treasure hunters returned in the morning after their hasty departure, they could no longer find the treasure. The story does not suggest that it had sunk into the earth but rather that it had been taken by the landowner.⁶¹

Fairies

As the story of the shepherd in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* suggests, the idea that that fairies could give treasure was popular.⁶² In 1635, the poet Heywood presented fairies not only as treasure guardians but also

as masters of mineral veins: 'These spirits likewise have the power to show/Treasure that have been buried long below/By God's permission, all the veins concealed/of gold and silver, are to them revealed.'⁶³ Fairies and household spirits were among the many magical agents of the premodern world. Folk magicians, so-called cunning people, claimed time and again that they had contact with the fairies, that the fairies helped them or that they had actually learned their skills from the fairies. Treasure magic could be among those skills.⁶⁴ Spell books provided incantations to invoke fairies who were to lead the magician to a treasure.⁶⁵

Even though fairies, very like witches, have become the stuff of children's entertainment and are currently exploited by a huge kitsch industry, genuine fairy beliefs were rather common until at least the eighteenth century. In spite of the fact that Irish nationalism and the tourist industry have tried to monopolize fairy beliefs as a distinctive trait of 'Irishness' in the twentieth century, all European and British people 'knew' the fairies. The fairies of folk belief took many forms. Some were supposed to be of dwarfish stature. However, the sweet, tiny winged beings fond of flowers and showering their surroundings with sparkly dust belong strictly to the stage and the modern nursery, not to the magical world of pre-industrial Britain and Europe.⁶⁶

We encounter fairy beliefs in some witch trials. There was no clear connection between treasure hunting and suspicions of witchcraft. It rather seems as if the defendants spoke about fairies and treasures – not of devils and malevolent magic – in order to convince the judges that they were not witches. However, the court regarded the fairies as familiars, that is, as devils who looked after individual witches following the demonological standard assumption that all spirits are demons. The 1604 Witchcraft Act strengthened this view. Thus, cunning folk who might have impressed their fellow villagers with the claim that they conversed with the fairies sometimes found themselves in front of a criminal court. In 1601, the Scot Walter Ronaldson admitted that a fairy had come to him twice a year for 27 years. This spirit, which looked a child with a bald head and clad in white, had shown him where treasure was to be found. However, when Ronaldson and three other men dug in that place, they did not find anything.⁶⁷ In English witch trials we find similar stories. Female treasure hunters claimed that the fairies revealed to them where they could find treasure.⁶⁸

A rather complicated case was that of Susan Swapper and Anne Taylor from Rye who faced charges of witchcraft in 1607. Swapper had fallen ill and consulted Taylor, a cunning woman who had married into the

gentry. Four spirits appeared to Swapper: two women and two men clad in white and green. They promised her that she would become healthy again if she dug in the garden with the help of Taylor. Swapper thus expected not just a miracle cure but also to find treasure in Taylor's garden. Indeed, the garden had a reputation as a treasure site: a previous tenant had already looked in vain for hidden riches. Swapper was indeed said to be 'troubled with treasure'. Even though the women did not find anything, Swapper regained her health immediately. Later, the spirits told her about another treasure hidden in a field just outside Rye. Again, her search was unsuccessful. She did, however, claim to have met the queen of the fairies who made her ill again. Swapper explained that she needed money to buy a gift for the queen of the fairies to be brought back into her favour. The idea that one needed money for some magical object or as some kind of gift for spirit beings was the stock-in-trade of fraudulent treasure magicians.⁶⁹ Taylor was very interested in treasure as her family had recently lost much of her wealth and political influence. Whatever the background of the witchcraft accusations against her might have been, it seems that at the core of the episode was Swapper's attempt to swindle Taylor, a woman apparently much concerned about her material well-being and her social status, out of some money. It is significant that Swapper dropped the narrative about her illness as soon as she had got into contact with Taylor, a healer, and provoked her interest in the treasure hunt. Later, she claimed to be sick again, probably as a further incentive for Taylor to give her money for the gift for the fairy queen. Swapper made up her own spirit narrative as she went along without too much thought for consistency. Her rather ill-defined spirits could be ghosts as well as fairies: it would make sense in the realm of early modern folk belief that ghosts caused trouble, maybe even illness, when they wanted to alert somebody to the presence of treasure. At any rate, Swapper's spirits were the talk of the town. They allegedly played poltergeist tricks. Taylor tended to sectarian millenarianism and expected the intervention of angels and prophets. She saw mysterious apparitions in glass windows that she apparently could not make any sense of herself. Even though she had a reputation as a magician herself, it seems that she regarded Swapper as powerful. Both of them were indicted under the 1604 Witchcraft Act, which had made contact with spirits a felony. Taylor, who had a bad reputation – not in spite of but because of her radical religiosity – was accused of malevolent magic, too. However, they both escaped the death penalty: Taylor was acquitted and Swapper, after she had been in prison for years, benefited from the general pardon of 1611.⁷⁰

Some brief examples shall suffice to illustrate the diverse forms the belief in fairies took in treasure lore. Of course, fairies very like demons could simply give treasure and thus save their protégés the trouble of digging. In the 1540s, the Welsh soothsayer Harry Lloyd claimed that he met fairies on Tuesdays and Thursdays and that they gave him gold.⁷¹

According to folkloristic accounts, as late as the second half of the nineteenth century, people from the Scottish borderlands who hid money in their houses bade the Brownie to watch over it.⁷²

In 1744, a professional treasure seeker from the Vyatka region – the Kirov Oblast of today's Russia – had to face the Synodal Court. He had invoked the *leshies* – the spirits of the woods. After the magician paid the *leshies* for their help by offering 45 red eggs and three pea puddings to them, they told him where he could find treasure, even though they remained invisible. However, the treasure hunt eventually failed.⁷³ The idea that fairies expected some kind of reimbursement for their help was, of course, a standard feature of European folklore. In this case, the magician envisaged an immediate material exchange: he established ad hoc a direct connection between the gift for the fairies and the treasure.

The folklore of the Hungarians contains a large variety of spirits connected with treasures. They were collectively known as the *kincs örök*, the treasure guardians. The most prominent ones were probably the giants. In Hungarian folklore, the giants played the role that the fairies had in Western Europe. They were portrayed as a dying race. Very like fairies, they were always supposed to have left the country or to be just about to do so. Treasure was hidden in the ruins of castles supposed to have been formerly owned by giants, especially in the cellars and the wells. In Castle Várhegy, a silver plough, a golden ox and a silver feeder full of gold were said to be hidden. In a cave under Castle Hereczvár, there were allegedly black barrels with the treasure of the *szerecsen-óriás*, the black giants. Dogs and black dwarfs watched over the gold left by the giants.⁷⁴ In Scandinavia, the trolls owned treasures, which they guarded jealously.⁷⁵

Paracelsus had – as always – his own very original ideas about treasure guardians. He said that there were two kinds of treasures. First there were those that consisted of man-made objects and had been hidden by humans. These could be found without too much difficulty. Secondly, there were treasures made and hidden by *sylphis* and *pygmaeis*. In Paracelsus' doctrine of spirits, there were spirits for the four elements: sylphs were the spirits of the air, pygmies (or gnomes) of the earth, salamanders of fire and nymphs (or undines) of water. In his

description of the sylphs and the pygmies, Paracelsus used motifs of folk tales about fairies and dwarfs. Fairies, as we have seen, were supposed to guard treasure. This might have led Paracelsus to write about sylphs, who buried treasure even though they were supposed to be creatures of the air, which had by definition no connection to the earth. The pygmies were much more likely guardians of buried treasure. Paracelsus wrote that they could move through the earth effortlessly like humans move through air. If these spirits of nature had hidden treasure, it was next to impossible to get it, Paracelsus stated. These spirits were not willing to part with their possession and would do anything to fool and mislead treasure hunters.⁷⁶ The best way to find treasure was not to look for it, Paracelsus explained absurdly. The spirits guarding the treasure could read the minds of humans. If they realized that somebody was coming with the intention of taking their treasure, they would do everything to foil his plans. If somebody had no such plans, that is, if his mind was blank as far as hidden treasures were concerned, he could surprise the spirits. If somebody just accidentally stumbled across treasure, the spirits had no time to take it away or to fool the finder with a glamour. Paracelsus evidently thought that he needed this somewhat tortuous argument in order to explain how – in spite of the guardians – accidental finds of treasure did happen whereas well-planned searches failed. Returning to his distinction between man-made treasure and the treasure of spirits, he might simply have claimed that all treasures that were ever found had been hidden by humans, that is, that they did not have a guardian spirit. Indeed, as he had already admitted that it was easy to find treasure hidden by humans, logic would have demanded this argument. Paracelsus' somewhat self-contradictory reasoning suggests that he thought about treasure mostly as riches hidden and controlled by spirits. The idea of human agency was apparently not strong enough in his own mind to influence his arguments significantly.

An eighteenth-century French version of the popular grimoire *Key of Salomon*, (*Véritables Clavicles de Salomon*) explained that 'gnomes' watched over treasure and occasionally killed treasure hunters. The gnomes, the grimoire said, were incapable of possessing anything and had no use for riches. They attacked treasure hunters because they disliked being disturbed in their subterranean realm and because they were enemies of all human passions, avarice being one of them. In a way, the gnomes were moral agents who fought treasure seekers in their own interest. Nevertheless, the grimoire described a somewhat questionable ritual involving the burning of human fat to placate the gnomes.⁷⁷

As late as the nineteenth century, fairies were still supposed to guard the treasure under prehistoric monuments in France. If anyone came too close to the dolmens northwest of the Massif Central, he was severely beaten or even thrown from his horse. A humorous tale from that region combined the fairy legend with that of turning stones. In order to protect the treasure, a dwarf made a treasure hunter dance and spin like a top. Only when the fairy creature directed his attention to a stone which it also made turn, could the would-be treasure seeker escape, giddy, disoriented and exhausted.⁷⁸

The dragons of the Middle Ages disappeared from early modern treasure lore. Occasionally, we encounter monstrous snakes as treasure guardians. One of Goodwin Wharton's friends, for example, allegedly found a place where treasure should be full of snakes.⁷⁹ In Dobie's book on Texas legends, we find the rather peculiar statement that in the early twentieth century some Texan Mexicans still believed in dragons guarding treasure. A dragon had supposedly killed a number of bandits in the San Caja country and had taken possession of their hidden loot. It had a spiked tail, two heads and it breathed fire. It became known as *el celador del tesoro*, (the treasure guardian).⁸⁰ Were the Mexicans simply pulling the 'gringo's' leg with this truly monstrous story? Should we really believe that medieval lore found its way into twentieth-century American everyday culture? It is likely that the folklorist Dobie misinterpreted a humorous treasure story as a bit of folklore that his Mexican contemporaries really believed in. It might also be that Dobie or his informers misunderstood a legend about the devil – often represented as a snake or a dragon – taking the bandits' souls. Nineteenth-century American folk tales about treasure hidden in caves that were infested with snakes are probably more authentic.⁸¹ However, the term 'dragon' draws our attention to a rather peculiar household spirit. Some German folk tales mention a mysterious being called *Drak* or *Drache* (dragon). This creature was very different from the dragons of the medieval epics. The seventeenth-century lawyer and demonologist Melchior Goldast was familiar with the belief in the *Drache*: 'The common man usually says that people who become rich swiftly and without any problems have a *Drache* or – as the Saxons say – a Kobold (brownie) that helps them to win honour and riches.' Goldast regarded dragons and brownies, of course, as demons.⁸² Evidently, the *Drache* helped to explain why some householders did a lot better than their neighbours: A *Drache* had brought money to its owner. The *Drache* often appeared in the form of a snake but might also be a bird, a cat or even resemble a human being. However, the *Drache* was usually seen as a stream of fire flying over the

night sky. It stole money (or grain) and flew it to the person in whose house it lived. Sources from the early eighteenth century quoted spells against this magical theft by the *Drache*. Very like brownies or other household spirits, it expected some kind of reward – usually food. If the owner of this most useful spirit failed to reward it, it could burn down the house thanks to its fiery nature. The connection between the *Drache* and the medieval dragon seems superficial at best. Its ability to fly and its affinity to fire might have suggested transferring the name of the medieval monster to this rather peculiar household spirit. The *Drache's* access to money was based on theft. In contrast to Beowulf's dragon or Fafnir it did not have a treasure of its own. In a way, the *Drache* was the embodiment of transfer magic: it took goods magically from their original owner and gave them to someone else.⁸³

Spirits very like the German *Drache* were known as *zmij* or *plon* in Poland and Lusatia, and as *aitvaras* in the Baltic.⁸⁴ Some aspects of the *lidérc*, an extremely complex creature of Hungarian folklore, resembled the *Drache*. It seems that *lidérc* was simply a name applied to a variety of spirit beings from fiery birds to demonic succubae. One kind of *lidérc* was a spirit that brought the people in whose house it lived whatever they desired. The Hungarian figure of speech *lidérc van* (he has a *lidérc*) was used to denounce parvenus who had become rich quickly. The *lidérc* was a shape-shifter. According to folk legend, it could take the form of a will-o'-the-wisp but usually it showed itself in the shape of an ugly, scrawny chick. It was accidentally found in the street and brought into the house. It did mischief, such as devouring huge quantities of food, but it also offered to bring its master gold. Hungarian witch trials of the seventeenth century interpreted the *lidérc* as a demon. In folk belief, this spirit was at best ambivalent: the owner of a *lidérc* was said to have to come back from the dead as a vampire. In a way, the transfer magic went on: as a living person, the magician used a *lidérc* spirit to steal the money or the crops of his neighbours by magic; after his death, he turned into a vampire to steal their live force by magic. The folklorist Heinrich von Wlislöcki quoted a source from 1823 that suggested that the belief in the *lidérc* had not yet died out at that time.⁸⁵

Ghosts

By far the most important treasure guardians were ghosts. Horatio in *Hamlet* was evidently aware of that when he addressed the phantom: 'Speak...if thou hast uphoarded in thy life/Extorted treasure in the womb of earth/(For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death).'⁸⁶

In most trials against treasure hunters, the apparitions of ghosts played a major role. In contrast to the demons or most other spirits, a ghost was supposedly interested in drawing attention to the treasure that it watched over and in promoting its discovery.

According to folk belief, the soul of a deceased person had to wander until a certain task he had failed to fulfil during his lifetime was completed or some guilt had been expiated. It did not matter much whether what had been left undone was due to the person's own free will or due to circumstances beyond his control. Early modern ghost beliefs were very rich and diversified, but the principle of 'unfinished business' was its fundamental rule. A peasant who had wronged his neighbours by manipulating boundary stones had to come back as a ghost and to beg for the boundary stones to be brought back to their original places. A dead mother came back to look after her little children. The soul of a criminal who had died without remorse could not leave the visible world until he had made atonement after his death. Ghosts demanded that the dead bodies they belonged to received an orderly Christian burial. They might also ask for masses to be said for their poor souls. However, a priest who had received money for masses but had neglected to say them before his death had to return as a ghost to finish even this most spiritual of businesses. Children who had perished unbaptized asked for baptism. The Protestant Church rejected all ghost beliefs, but folk culture seems to have remained largely Catholic in this respect. At times, people who had died very young or unexpectedly allegedly came back as ghosts simply until the time that they would 'normally' have had on earth was over.⁸⁷ The idea of the unfinished business was so strong that people of pre-modern Europe could even use it to refute the suggestion that certain people came back as ghosts. In a Swabian town in 1620, a local official explained that rumours about a dead former neighbour haunting the village were clearly unfounded: the person in question had always led a honest life, had not kept any secrets and had no unfinished business whatsoever, thus he could not possibly have become a ghost.⁸⁸

Someone who died after he had hidden treasure certainly had some very important unfinished business. Whoever hid treasure had some intent to come back, find it and put it to some use. When the treasure's proprietor died without telling anyone where his riches were hidden, he had failed to do something very important. When the original owner of the treasure was dead, he could not use it. Instead he had to find somebody who could put the money to some use for him. In addition, the owner of buried treasure was clearly guilty of the deadly sin of avarice. He had died in a state of sin as he had neglected to enlist his wealth in

a good cause in the first place. This was considered to be a particularly grave offence if the treasure had been gained by unlawful or immoral means. It was in the ghost's interest that the treasure was discovered, for it was a necessary condition for his redemption. A successful treasure hunt spelled the ghost's deliverance. The treasure hunter would fulfil the dead person's task for him. He would take the treasure and put it to some use, and ideally he would use at least a part of the money in a good cause. In addition, the ghost might ask for masses to be said for him that the treasure could pay for or for donations to be given to the Church.⁸⁹

The link between haunting and treasures was widely accepted. The scientist Jan Baptist van Helmont merely echoed the folklore of ghosts and added some icing of learning when he explained:

For if the Treasure be in Heaven, then the Heart, that is, the Spirit of the Internal Man is in God, who is the Paradise, who alone is Eternal Life. But if the treasure be fixed or laid up in frail or mortal things; then also, the Heart and Spirit of the more external Man is in Fading things... So also, that the Spirit of the Inward Man is locally in the kingdom of God in us, which is God himself; and that the Heart or Spirit of the animal or outward sensitive man is locally about its Treasure. What wonder is it, that the astral Spirits of carnal or animal men, should as yet after their funerals, shew themselves ..., wandering about their buried Treasure, whereunto the whole Necromancy (or art of Divination by the calling of the Spirits) of the Antients has enslaved itself?⁹⁰

Early modern everyday culture took the connection between ghosts and treasures for granted. In 1698, the Bailiff of Alpirsbach in Württemberg wrote to the government that a ghost haunted one of the houses of the village. Without any further explanation, as if this was self-evident, he said that '*therefore* we think that money is hidden in the house'.⁹¹ In 1758, a wizard at Swabian Nagold claimed that he had discovered a number of treasures and thereby redeemed forty-two wandering souls.⁹² The idea that a ghost guarded the treasure was so deeply rooted in folk belief that in southwest Germany in 1750, a magician who specialized in treasure hunts could simply be called *Geistman* (ghost man).⁹³ In 1711, people who observed that horses became nervous when they were brought to a stable in the ruins of a castle near Swabian Lauffen concluded immediately that treasure was hidden in the ruin without even referring explicitly to the horses feeling the presence of a ghost.⁹⁴

In 1620, people in Backnang near Stuttgart saw a ghost whose unfinished business was the partition of his heirlooms between the members of his family. Even though this ghost narrative would have made perfect sense – at least in the magical world of that period – a rumour about a treasure watched over by the ghost originated almost immediately.⁹⁵

In the Torún-Bydgoszcz region in northern Poland, it was said that the person who hid a treasure would always become a ghost. If he was a good person, he would try to alert treasure hunters to his hoard; if he was bad, he would try to keep it for all eternity.⁹⁶ At least in the folklore of the nineteenth century, the belief that someone hiding treasure put a spell on it was common in Russia.⁹⁷ Interestingly, a German source from the early eighteenth century mentioned that one could keep someone who had hidden treasure from coming back as a ghost: all one had to do was put a coin in the mouth of the dead body.⁹⁸ The idea that the dead will not return if something is put in their mouths was widespread, so there was probably no direct connection between the coin and the treasure. Rather, this custom implies that people expected everyone who had buried treasure to come back as ghost.

For learned theology, ghosts were a somewhat thorny subject. Most theologians would probably have agreed that the apparitions that the common people took for the spirits of the dead were really just demons in disguise. Satan was supposed to use the popular belief in ghosts for his own ends. Demons appeared in the shape of the departed in order to deceive and mislead the common people, who naively took them for the souls of dead. A good example of this theological interpretation of ghostly apparition is Hamlet's father. Even though Shakespeare did not explicitly say so, he hinted at the possibility that the spirit that Hamlet took for his father's ghost was really a demon: everything the apparition told Hamlet – who was apparently no longer interested in studying theology at Wittenberg – led eventually to a truly demonic spiral of disaster and ended in ultimate catastrophe. However, early modern theology did not completely deny the existence of ghosts.

The Catholic Church admitted at least the possibility that the dead could return to haunt the living. Nobody, the theologians explained, would come back from Heaven or from hell. Salvation and damnation were for ever, as the biblical story of Lazarus and Dives had taught. According to medieval theology, there was, however, a third place where the dead might go: purgatory. In contrast to Heaven or from hell, this was by definition not eternal. Thus, Catholic theologians speculated, it might be that the dead might return from purgatory into the realm of the living. Of course, they could not do so at will: they had to be sent

back by God himself. God could use the apparition of a ghost as an admonition to the living. The ghost could warn his relatives, friends and neighbours against sin and its dire consequences in the afterlife. The very existence of the ghost exhorted anyone who saw it to avoid the mistakes that the dead had made and to live a good life. The idea that wraiths seemed to burn reflected the idea of punishment – and cleansing – in fiery purgatory that a sinful life had made necessary. God, the official Catholic Church argued, made the dead present themselves as a final warning to wavering Christians. Of course, this rather lenient – not to say fuzzy – doctrine was open to interpretation. One could tweak the theologians' teaching till it more or less fitted any local ghost story. Or rather, theology had always had the ghost beliefs of the common people in mind. It explained them rather than it shaped or criticized them. Protestant theology took a completely different stance. According to Protestant teaching, purgatory did not exist: there was only Heaven or hell for the dead. Thus, ghosts could not possibly exist. Protestantism admitted that many people thought they saw wraiths. However, Protestant theologians explained that all of the spirits that appeared to be ghosts were really demons, sent to earth in order to deceive people. Evidently, official Protestant teaching did not have much of an impact at the popular level. Protestant countries were still full of stories about ghosts. The common people still believed that it was possible to come into contact with the dead and to see ghosts. In many cases, the secular authorities of these countries simply took the existence of the spirits of the dead for granted too.⁹⁹

Even though most people would accept the existence of ghosts, they could still worry about the true nature of the spirits that they thought they had encountered. As the case of de Cotiis has already demonstrated, the discernment of spirits could become a major problem for treasure hunters. They were aware of the danger that demons might try to fool them. Evidently, different kinds of magic were needed to deal with different kinds of spirit. Magicians who specialized in treasure hunting claimed that they were able to find out whether they really dealt with fairies or ghosts or rather with the spirits of hell. In 1758, treasure hunters in the Swabian town of Nagold thought that they were up against demons. A cunning man claimed that he had established contact with spirits after he had buried bits of paper with incantations on them and after he had said lengthy, litany-like prayers a number of times. He explained that the guardians of the treasure were not demons at all but rather the benevolent ghosts of two clerics and of the cook – and presumably the concubine – of a clergyman who had killed her child.¹⁰⁰ Robert Kirk who contributed a book on fairy lore to the debate

about the reality of magic in the late seventeenth century knew about a successful treasure hunt but was at a loss to explain it. In 1676, during a famine, two Scottish women dreamed about a treasure. It was supposedly hidden in Sithbhruaich, the Fairy Hill. Later on, they heard voices that talked about the treasure when they were fully awake. When they eventually went and dug up the hill, they did find a vessel full of ancient coins. Some of these coins, Kirk insisted, were still in the possession of the country people. 'But whither it was a good or bad Angell, one of the subterranean People [i.e. fairies] or the restless Soul of him who hid it' who alerted the women to the treasure, Kirk could not say.¹⁰¹ A local historian of Tiverton wrote in 1790 that in his lifetime, a treasure had been discovered after a most mysterious being – a talking white owl – had appeared in the ruins of a haunted chapel and told the treasure seekers where to look. Ghosts often showed themselves in animal form. Thus, the strange Tiverton narrative is probably best seen as a ghost story even though it certainly was not completely serious.¹⁰² Prätorius tried to do everybody justice when he explained that the treasures buried by misers were watched over by demons who posed as the spirits of the dead or as dwarfs, that is, subterranean fairies.¹⁰³

In the early sixteenth century, Paracelsus presented buried treasure as the only explanation for hauntings. According to him, ghostly apparitions in the night, mysterious noises, the things we might call poltergeist phenomena and acute and apparently unmotivated feelings of anxiety or fear ('if people get very frightened or if they are afraid in some other way so that they are drenched in cold sweat and their hair stand on end') were all caused by buried treasure. Paracelsus stressed that it was a severe mistake to assume that witches or the devil could cause such disturbances. The nightly noises did not indicate that someone who lived in the house had made a pact with the devil who was now clamouring for that person's soul. It was equally wrong to assume that the ghost of a murder victim or the restless spirit of a particularly bad person caused the haunting. If the haunting was especially troublesome, Paracelsus admitted, it might be a demon that had been driven out of a demoniac and had made a certain house his new residence. But it was most likely that a haunted house harboured treasure and that the treasure alone caused all of the noises and apparitions.¹⁰⁴ If the treasure could move on its own account, it could certainly make noise too. It seems strange that Paracelsus took such pains to contradict what he had presented as the most widely held interpretation of so-called haunting, that is, a ghost (that might guard a treasure) or demonic magic. Did he have a hidden agenda? It might be that Paracelsus understood

that ideas about restless ghosts could tarnish the reputation of a dead person and his relatives. That accusations of witchcraft were disruptive for the social peace was obvious. Did Paracelsus' rejection of the idea that ghosts guarded treasure mirror early Protestant beliefs? In post-reformation English sources, too, we find the idea that a treasure causes spirits to make noise in the night without these spirits being identified as ghosts.¹⁰⁵ However, it would be foolish to try to claim Paracelsus as a champion of the nascent Protestant orthodoxy. In the rest of his oeuvre, he did accept the existence of ghosts. As we have already seen, Paracelsus stressed that sylphs and gnomes – whom Protestant theologians would have renounced as demons – controlled treasure. Did he brush aside all alternative ideas concerning treasure guardians and nightly noises in order to strengthen that argument? Probably not, as he did not explicitly suggest that the sylves and gnomes caused the nightly molestations and noises. Rather it seems as if he really assumed that the treasure itself made them happen. He concluded that the point of treasure hunting was not to find hidden riches. but to bring peace to a house. If treasure was found, the haunting would stop and thus many houses and castles that were, Paracelsus claimed, now uninhabitable because of the haunting could be used again.¹⁰⁶

As treasure hunters helped ghosts to leave the visible world, treasure hunting could be presented as a godly deed and a Christian duty. The recovery of a treasure was an act of piety because it resulted in the redemption of a wandering soul. Some treasure hunters saw themselves, and were seen by others, first and foremost as good Christians who delivered ghosts. We cannot understand early modern treasure hunting if we ignore its double purpose: it was a means to make money, but it was also an act of Christian devotion that helped a poor soul to finally enter the hereafter. This spiritual motivation was essentially genuine, even though tricksters abused it again and again to mask their true intentions. In 1612, the Württemberg authorities investigated the petty noble Philipp Ruprecht von Remchingen who was suspected of magical treasure hunting. He did not really deny the allegations: he presented his own interpretation of what the local officials had regarded as magic and justified what he had done very assertively. Von Remchingen explained that 'he used neither wizardry nor diabolic incantations but fervent Christian prayer. [Treasure hunting] is a thing that every Christian is obliged to engage in out of charity towards his neighbour. Yes, your clergymen and pastors themselves should be a lot more obliged to do this than me or any other layman.'¹⁰⁷ Even if we do not take this outburst at face value, the mere fact that von Remchingen could make this little

speech demonstrates that the religious overtones of treasure hunting should not be dismissed as mere window dressing.

Only this set of beliefs provides the context in which we can fully understand the idea that demons tried to hinder treasure hunters and wanted to drive them from the treasure site. The devil was not simply envious and he certainly had no qualms about people satisfying their greed for worldly goods. However, Satan and his minions were clearly not interested in the deliverance of wandering souls. The precondition for the final redemption of a dead person was that he could leave the visible world for good. Thus, the devil wanted to keep the ghosts on earth in order to hinder the salvation of the dead. As demons strove to prevent every good deed, they were especially keen to prevent a successful treasure hunt, which would spell the deliverance of a ghost. This was why demons allegedly showed themselves in most horrible form to drive treasure hunters away. The horrific parade of demons that plays such an important part in folk tales about treasure hunting hints indirectly at the connection between ghosts and treasures and the religious significance of treasure hunts.

Thus, treasure hunters could see themselves as good Christians not despite the fact that they meddled with ghosts and sometimes demons but exactly because of that fact. The magical rationality of the pre-modern world followed its own relentless logic.

Legendary magicians

Not only the treasures and their guardians but also the treasure hunters turned into legends. Among the most curious legendary figures of popular treasure lore were the so-called Venetians. In many parts of Central Europe, the common people talked about foreigners speaking a Romance language who had come to search for hidden treasures or gold and silver mines. These people were sometimes known as the *Walen* (also *Wahlen* or *Walhen*), that is, the French-speakers or more often the Venetians.¹⁰⁸

The Venetians of the folk legends searched for treasures and mineral veins, which became virtually indistinguishable in many tales about these people. In contrast to most other characters of popular narratives about treasure, the Venetians were spectacularly successful. Their most important characteristic was that they could find gold and treasure where the locals could not. They were skilled magicians. Caves full of gold in the mountains that were usually invisible, or at least inaccessible, opened up for the Venetians. They knew how to keep the

monstrous treasure guardians at bay and they always found the treasure. After they filled their bags with riches, they disappeared as quickly and as clandestinely as they had come. It was said that they could make themselves invisible and even that they could fly magically back to their home country. The Venetians rewarded their local helpers and guides very handsomely. However, they were very secretive about their business. As a rule, they let none of the locals in on their secrets. Folk tales presented the Venetians as nondescript, small men of brownish aspect. In the place where they searched for treasure, they tried not to draw attention to themselves. Nevertheless, when any of their hosts or relations met them by chance in their hometown, the Venetians lived in palaces and wore the most expensive attire. The treasures they had taken out of other people's countries had made them very wealthy.¹⁰⁹

In the folk legends, the Venetians were the embodiment of learned magicians. As such, they were part of popular culture, characters of folk tales. They personified a specific concept of foreignness in popular culture: their foreignness spelled superiority and exclusiveness, not poverty and exclusion.

The Venetians were certainly not popular. As many contemporaries regarded them as real, polemics against them were published. These texts changed little between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. The authors stated bitterly that their respective home countries were robbed of their gold by foreigners who – in the words of the eighteenth-century scientist Friedrich Leonhardi – ‘know our country and the treasures therein better when we do ourselves’.¹¹⁰

The stories about the Venetians had a basis in the economic realities of the early modern period. Some groups of traders from Italy or France came to the eastern parts of Germany and the western Slavonic regions. Some of them might have been looking for gold or for the semi-precious stones that could be found in the region. However, in all likelihood, their real business was glass making. The Italian traders worked for the glass and mirror industry. They were looking for manganese, and perhaps also for cobalt and alum. Small quantities of these minerals were needed to produce totally clear glass – the basis of the world-famous Venetian mirrors – or blue stained glass. The traders had two good reasons to keep silent about their business: they did not want to draw attention to the secrets of Italian glass manufacturers. In addition to that, they did not want to have to deal with the authorities, which might have claimed that the foreigners violated the princely mining privileges.¹¹¹ In 1574, a high-ranking mining official of the Kingdom of Bohemia was very clear about this:

Many people say here in the German lands that various bits of earth are found in a number of territories...and strangers and vagabonds take them away...and one can turn them into gold. I personally do not believe this....The bits of earth those vagabonds take with them do not contain any gold and they cannot be turned into gold. Rather, the vagabonds take them to Italy and other places for money as these bits of earth are used as components in glass making and in the colouring of glass.¹¹²

Even when the traders' business declined at the end of the sixteenth century, the people in the regions they had visited remembered them and turned the secretive foreigners into the stuff of legends.¹¹³

Here we catch a glimpse of very real xenophobia. In seventeenth and eighteenth-century Slovakia, foreign peddlers from the neighbouring regions – Silesians, Poles and Bohemians – as well as Italians and Swiss who came to sell innocent household items, like mousetraps, were collectively under suspicion of being treasure magicians. They supposedly came just to rob the Slovak Tatra Mountains of their treasures.¹¹⁴ However, some people did travel some distance to search for treasure and some might have combined itinerant work as peddlers or craftsmen with the occasional dig to find treasure in the region they had come to. In 1775, a Protestant clergyman from Georgenberg in the Slovak Spiš (or Zips) region wrote about Moravian textile workers who ruined themselves looking for treasure in his country. A Prussian carpenter routinely searched for treasure during the summer and worked in his profession in a Slovak town during the winter. It seems as if some of the locals profited from the foreign treasure seekers in the Tatra: they were hired as guides.¹¹⁵

Until the early twentieth century, strange signs scratched into some stones in the Tatra Mountains, which might have been either of natural origin or mere childish doodles, were regarded as treasure hunters' symbols. Similar signs were also found in Saxony.¹¹⁶

Treasure hunters' manuals could depict so-called *Walen* or Venetian signs (see Figure 1) that supposedly informed the adepts what minerals could be found in a particular tract of land. The signs allegedly dated back to the sixteenth century. They looked suspiciously like the mysterious symbols that peasant rebels of the sixteenth century and later on organized rural criminals were supposed to have used. Whether these signs ever played any role outside sensational publications and arrest warrants issued by over-eager law enforcement agencies is highly questionable.¹¹⁷



Figure 1 A Venetian sign supposed to indicate a gold mine, probably sixteenth century.

Source: Zeno (2008) www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Gr%C3%A4sse,+Johann+Georg+Theodor/Sagen/Der+Sagenschatz+des+K%C3%B6nigreichs+Sachsen/Erster+Band/592.+Wahlenberichte+%C3%BCber+die+s%C3%A4chsische+Schweiz+etc, accessed 25 August 2008.

Among the reasons why the Venetians kept their hold on the people's imagination were the books that were supposedly written by them. These so-called *Walenbücher* (books of the Italian- or French-speakers) contained instructions on where to find mineral veins – as a rule, gold veins.¹¹⁸ They combined mining knowledge with magical elements, such as advice about the best times to go searching for gold. Mostly, these books described the route to mineral veins and other spots where mining would be profitable. The earliest examples of these books dated back to the fifteenth century. They were readily bought and sold in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Some were written as if they were the aide-mémoires of Venetians that had been lost by, or taken from, them. The people who were interested in these books apparently did not care why the French or Italian-speakers did not write their booklets in French or Italian and why anybody who got hold of such a book should care to sell it rather than look for the treasure himself. An excerpt from a *Walenbuch* published in Saxony in 1803 read:

If you go from the village of Stolpen to Tholenstein castle . . . go up the hill where the castle stands, go to the right on the way that leads to Rückersdorf village . . . You will go through a pine wood and through a deadfall there you can see right through the wood. And before long you will come to a stone with a Venetian sign on it, it is the sign of

a bishop, and if you are there, then go further to the right, to the South for the length of four fields. Then you will come to a small valley, there you will soon see deep in the valley a tree which looks like a man with one arm reaching out. Under this tree there is enough wealth buried to feed a thousand men.¹¹⁹

A description from Thuringia written in 1716 required the use of the divining rod: 'Between the towns of Greiz and Riechenbach near the horses' ford in the river in the vicinity of the arms' smithy upstream you find rich gold veins on the right. Search with the rod. The opening of the mine shaft will not be far away.'¹²⁰ One of the reasons why the Tatra seems to have attracted a number of treasure hunters was that it was mentioned in a number of such manuals between the late seventeenth and early twentieth centuries.¹²¹

The Venetians were just the most prominent example of a special type of legendary treasure seeker: the expert stranger. In a great variety of societies, from fifteenth-century Central Europe to nineteenth-century Illinois, we encounter folk tales about mysterious strangers looking for treasure. All of them displayed certain characteristics that have already been described in the discussion of the Venetians. The strangers were shadowy and shifty characters. Nobody seemed to know their names. They simply appeared on the scene. At times, they enquired about a certain tract of land or even hired guides. They managed to find the treasure that the locals had looked for in vain or had not even known about. The strangers vanished, taking the treasure with them. They sometimes tricked local people out of what they owed them. At any rate, the strangers proved to be annoyingly superior to the locals: they alone knew about the hoard and how to get it. They took the treasure that the people who lived in the vicinity might have felt entitled to. In a story from Illinois, strangers find a treasure and disappear with it, leaving only 'prints of a kettle' supposedly filled with gold in a recently dug pit. One of the locals expressed his frustration in what might have been a typical comment in this type of treasure narrative: 'This was one time I sat on a pot of gold and didn't know it.'¹²² A supposedly typical remark of the expert stranger in such a situation can be found in a number of German tales about the Venetians, even though we find it first in a tract on the natural resources of the Fichtelgebirge Mountains that was printed in 1542: 'The Germans often throw a stone at a cow which is more valuable than the cow.'¹²³ Or, as Illinois folklore has it, Indian treasure experts allegedly used to say: 'The white man has no judgment. If he

had he would be shoeing his horses with gold shoes.¹²⁴ The resentment against these strangers with superior knowledge was strong. Folk narratives even claimed that the treasure-hunting strangers had invented all the dreadful stories about supernatural treasure guardians to keep the locals from searching.¹²⁵

Angels and saints, demons, fairies, household spirits, wraiths: almost all spirit beings were connected with treasure in pre-modern folk culture. To be sure, ghosts played the most important role in treasure lore and in the trials against treasure hunters. It is easy enough to interpret this prevalence of ghosts in treasure narratives. Money and material riches belonged first and foremost to the world of human affairs. The ghost, the most human of all spirits, was therefore more closely associated with treasure than any other spirit. Thus, the most prominent treasure guardians were the spirits of the dead. However, pre-modern culture did not necessarily or exclusively connect treasure with the dead. Treasure was not connected to any specific kind of spirit. Nearly any magical being could be seen as a treasure guardian – the field was wide open. The characteristic of treasure guardians was their very heterogeneity. Any spirit being was a link to an otherworldly realm. Evidently, it was the treasure hunter's most important concern to come into contact with that realm. The fabulously successful treasure hunters, the Venetians, had apparently crossed over into the realm of spirits. Folk culture imagined them as magical beings. The treasure might be an accumulation of coins and jewels that were in themselves material enough. It might have been gained by very worldly means to begin with, and it could be used after it had been found very like any other item of material value. Nevertheless, in order to find the treasure, the treasure hunter had to deal with the spirit world. The treasure, that most magical of objects, which could move on its own account and had to be lured like game, belonged to that world.

4

Treasure Hunters' Magic

And if I only could, I'd make a deal with God.

(Kate Bush: 'Running up that Hill', 1985)

Incantations

In the preceding chapter, we dealt with the magical beings that a treasure hunter had to face, his enemies and unreliable helpers. In this chapter, we will take a look at the treasure hunter's arsenal. What kinds of magic did he use?

Treasure hunters had their own patron saint: St Christopher. Today, this saint is perhaps best known as the patron saint of travellers and motorists. In the early modern period, St Christopher enjoyed immense popularity. He was one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers. He protected the faithful against epidemics and sudden death. St Christopher was no theologians' saint: his legend does not seem to be based on any historical facts or people. However, St Christopher, the giant warrior, obviously struck a chord with the common people. Erasmus of Rotterdam made fun of the simple minds who worshipped St Christopher but he had to admit that their faith in their saint was honest and strong. Huge frescos of the saint adorned the outside of many churches, especially in the eastern Alpine region.¹ There was no obvious connection between St Christopher and treasures. A treasure hunter's book of spells written in Württemberg in 1748 tried to integrate the idea that St Christopher was the guardian of treasure into his legend. Christ, who in the shape of a little boy had been carried by St Christopher, told him after revealing his true identity, 'Ego te creo thesaurarium tibi que do potestatem in omens thesauros in terra abditos, ut inter eos, qui te in meo nomine invocant, illos divides, do etiam tibi potestatem super omnes spiritus

malos.' ('I create you as the treasurer and I give you the power over all the treasures hidden in the earth so that you divide them between those who invoke you in my name and I give you power over all evil spirits.')

² The most interesting point of this text is that it did not explain anything; it simply stated that it was God's will that St Christopher became the great guardian of all treasures. Obviously, even the contemporaries were at a loss when they tried to explain what the link between the holy giant and the buried treasures was. They simply claimed that it was God's will that St Christopher should watch over treasure troves. In addition to that, the source stressed that treasure seekers were perfectly entitled to ask the saint for help, that is, that all the obviously heterodox Christopher rituals they used were legitimate. St Christopher impressed by his sheer and simple bodily strength. This might be the reason why this champion of Christianity became the patron saint of treasure hunters. Treasure hunters had to face spirits of various descriptions, possibly even demons. They might have felt that they needed a very strong helper. St Christopher was said to have special power over demons. Whatever the reason, the association between the holy giant and treasure magic was very strong. A number of German dialects even had the verb *christoffeln* (to christopher), which meant to use magic in order to find a treasure.³

'Christopher Prayer' was the name for lengthy liturgy-like spells that treasure hunters used throughout the early modern period. When Theodor Vernaleken wrote about Austrian folklore in the middle of the nineteenth century, he claimed that the Christopher Prayer was still widely used.⁴ All Christopher Prayers followed the same pattern: they implored the saint in the name of God, the trinity, Jesus' sufferings and other saints to do their bidding. St Christopher was asked to protect the treasure hunters from any harm, to keep evil spirits away from them and to lead them safely to the treasure. A Christopher Prayer from Southern Germany, confiscated in 1741, filled 43 narrowly written pages. It consisted largely of ever-repeating formulae that called upon the saint. The prayer begged him, the 'treasurer', in the name of God to reveal the hidden treasure 'consisting of silver and gold in a good currency accepted in this country'. This was a standard feature of Christopher Prayers. As counterfeiting bedevilled the economy, the contemporaries evidently thought it best to ask the saint explicitly for valid coins. After saying the prayer, the treasure hunters could begin to dig. The text of the 1741 prayer went on to suggest what the treasure seekers should do in case they encountered a demon. The demon would ask them ritually for their wishes. They should simply tell the demon that they

wished nothing but 'God's mercy, life everlasting and money, 15,000 florins,' in the name of St Christopher.⁵ In the Rhineland, treasure seekers used a simple formula to call upon the saint 'St Christopher we gave you an undying treasure, our souls, now give us a treasure of money.'⁶

The prayer could address the saint directly and simply ask him to bring the treasure or a certain sum of money to the treasure hunters.⁷ An early eighteenth-century version of the Christopher Prayer said clearly that anyone who knew how to use it would no longer even have to dig for treasure. First, the text claimed that God himself had 'promised St Christopher that a pious creature with a penitent heart who asked him on Christmas Eve between 11 and 12 o'clock could get 200,000 florins'. Very distinct ideas about the absolute sum of money to be obtained obviously went hand in hand with a rather heterodox mysticism. The text claimed implicitly that God himself had justified, or even authorized, the use of the Christopher Prayer at the personal instigation of the saint. The text went on to explain the procedure. After going to confession and after receiving the Eucharist, the treasure hunter was to light two blessed candles at 11 o'clock and let them burn till midnight. At midnight, St Christopher in the shape of a bishop would appear together with 'two tall handsome men' who carried a golden box. When, the treasure seeker and St Christopher made a written pact, they both signed it, the latter with golden letters. The saint promised to bring the treasure seeker a certain sum of money every year. The treasure seeker in return had to give a large part of that money to the poor. If he should ever demand more money than they had agreed on in the contract, the saint would stop bringing him anything and would send evil spirits to torment him instead.⁸ The connection between this ritual and the witches' pact with the devil seems to be obvious, but written pacts between the faithful and saints were not unheard of. The dukes Maximilian I and Ferdinand Maria of Bavaria signed a pact with the Virgin Mary in their own blood in which they promised to dedicate their whole lives to her.⁹ This was certainly a rather outré display of Catholic piety. However, if we see it in the context of vows taken by penitents, pilgrims, nuns or monks, it makes some sense. The distant origin of these ideas was clearly the biblical covenant, which became such an important element of early modern Protestant and especially Puritan theology too.

Some prayers send St Christopher away ritually after he had helped the treasure seeker to find his prize.¹⁰ Such ritual dismissals were typical elements of magical formulae used to conjure up demons. The demon

was, of course, potentially very dangerous. It was of crucial importance to get rid of the evil spirit when he had done what the conjurer had wanted him to do. Therefore, the demon was ceremoniously sent away. The Christopher Prayers clearly drew a parallel between the saint and demons. A Protestant polemic against the Christopher Prayer from the middle of the eighteenth century stated that treasure seekers indiscriminately called upon St Christopher as well as upon the biblical demon Astaroth. It was certainly not far off the mark.¹¹

It goes almost without saying that the Catholic as well as the Protestant Church officially rejected the Christopher Prayer as superstitious.¹² A Tübingen legal dissertation from 1748 condemned the Christopher Prayer. The whole St Christopher legend that was still popular in Protestant Württemberg was rejected as a relic of papist superstition. The author considered the prayer blasphemous. In keeping with the hard line that Tübingen University had taken towards magic in the early eighteenth century, the author called upon the state to make use of the Christopher Prayer a capital offence.¹³ Fortunately, the Württemberg government ignored this advice.

Another patron saint of treasure seekers was St Corona. So-called Corona booklets contained spells and incantations used by treasure magicians.¹⁴ Very like St Christopher, St Corona could be asked to show the way to a treasure, or simply to bring money; in one remarkable text, she was asked to provide the exact sum of 99,000 florins.¹⁵ A Corona Prayer from Styria, the part of Austria close to Hungary, written in 1794, resembled – at least at first glance – the ‘official’ prayers of the Catholic Church more closely than many Christopher Prayers. The person saying the prayer asked the saint to intercede on his behalf. As St Corona had proven her love of Christ through her martyrdom, God would honour her intercession. All of that was, of course, in keeping with orthodox Catholic piety. However, the help expected from God at the intercession of St Corona was the very concrete alleviation of the financial situation of the person who said the prayer. God should send money through the saint. The text’s theology, as well as its syntax, was rather questionable.

Virgin and martyr Corona, I, a poor sinner, ask you to remember your great mercy and honour and your control over the treasures of the world and whoever asks you in the name of Jesus Christ your dear bridegroom, in his name you have power to give worldly goods to me, a poor and needy person, so I beg you with all of my humble heart, oh virgin and martyr Corona relief me from my needs and my

poverty by giving me 50000 florins of good gold for the salvation of my soul through the redemption of the needy body.

The prayer stressed that the money St Corona was supposed to bring would be used to the greater honour of God. Thus, it was in God's best interest to send the saint with the money. This rather grotesque magical formula ended, very like many Christopher Prayers, by ritually dismissing St Corona after she had brought the treasure.

Now go away in the peace of God, which shall be between you and me, go back to the place where you came from, the eternal peace of God shall be and shall stay forever between you and me, and you will come again, when I wish to see you. Now go away and be blessed, through God and his holy five wounds, and go away in the peace of God, and the blessing be between you and me and the mine. Amen.¹⁶

This rather elaborate dismissal illustrates a point just made about St Christopher: the magician considered the saints whom he conjured up dangerous. It was very important to make sure that they left again after they had brought the treasure. The reference to the peace of God between the magician and the saint makes this peace appear as a dividing wall rather than a uniting bond between the two. The saint was no less a threat than a demon called from hell. However, the magician said clearly that he expected St Corona to come back to him whenever he called her. Dangerous as she might be, she did bring treasure. Saints and demons were completely exchangeable in the conjuration of treasure hunters. Not only were they called by more or less the same formula but they were expected to behave in the same way.¹⁷

St Corona, also known as St Stephana, was the wife of St Victor. When she was 16 years old, she was martyred. She was tied to two palm trees that had been bound together. When the bonds were severed and the trees whipped back into their original positions, her body was torn apart. It is difficult to decide what exactly the second-century saint had to do with treasure. At least in the eastern Alpine region, St Corona was very popular: she was seen as a saint who simply brought good luck. However, this is hardly a satisfactory explanation for the role she played in treasure lore. Maybe it was merely her name that suggested that she might be a treasure saint.¹⁸ *Corona*, of course, means 'crown'. In various European countries, 'crown' was also the name of a common coin. The association of her name with a coin or a valuable object

was probably enough to make a patron saint of treasure hunters out of the early Christian martyr. Later on, St Corona became the patron saint of the lottery, too. The Corona Prayer just quoted belonged to a hand-written booklet that also contained a magical spell to divine the lottery numbers.¹⁹ We will deal with the close connection between treasure and the lottery later on.

St Gregory and St Gertrud, as well as St Veronica, seem to have played a certain role as patron saints of treasure hunters in the eighteenth century.²⁰ St Anna was another treasure saint. As she was the patron saint not only of miners and goldsmiths but also of all the people who searched for things they had lost, it made some sense to see her as a helper of treasure hunters. An eighteenth-century manuscript from Austria described a rather simple ritual involving a blessed candle and extensive prayers said over a number of weeks that would make St Anna appear. This saint was supposed to bring money directly to the magician, too.²¹

Angels could replace the saints: in 1742, a magician from Lyon tried to invoke the angel Uriel who was supposed to help him to find treasure.²²

Magical books addressed the spirits of the planets, often identified with angels as treasure guardians. The *Véritables Clavicles de Salomon* (*True Key of Solomon*), a very popular early modern grimoire that circulated in a number of versions, explained that the spirits of Saturn and especially Jupiter would reveal hidden treasures. The magician was supposed to draw a certain symbol in order to conjure these spirits:

This [symbol] is proper for acquiring glory, honours, dignities, riches, and all kinds of good, together with great tranquillity of mind; also to discover treasures and chase away the spirits who preside over them. It should be written upon virgin paper or parchment, with the pen of the swallow and the blood of the screech-owl.²³

Other magical formulae of treasure hunters openly addressed demons. Their incantations resembled medieval ceremonial magic.²⁴ The demons could present themselves in virtually every shape be it – as a French source from the 1740s had it – as a human being, a bat or a cloud. Some invocations ordered demons to present themselves in a pleasant form.²⁵ It goes without saying that the presence of demons was always highly dangerous. Treasure hunters drew magical circles in order to protect themselves.²⁶ It was said that they would be safe from physical attack by the spirits of hell as long as they stayed within the circle. In addition, the treasure conjurer might brandish symbolic weapons like swords.²⁷

Of course, the protective circle and a symbol of power (a staff or a sword) were typical elements of ceremonial magic. They became the stock in trade of early modern pictures of magicians.

A magical manuscript of the late seventeenth century listed a number of demons who spoke directly to the reader offering their services. Even though the demons called themselves discreetly 'spirits' in the manuscript, there could be no doubt concerning their true nature. One of them said very clearly 'diabolus sum' 'I am a devil'. The manuscript gave not only the names and powers of the demons but also their symbols – rather elaborate signs not unlike those used in astrology or in Urbain Grandier's pact with the devil. Several of these demons were explicitly linked with treasure hunting. 'Azriel a spirit of hidden treasures and goods which I [Azriel] hid as I liked and which I reveal and give to anyone I please and without me willing nothing is taken from me. Realize that I am here. I will give you what you want.' Another demon, who called himself Kloron, Floran or Theutas – a name probably borrowed from a Jewish rebel mentioned in the New Testament (Acts 5:36) – claimed to be able to move all treasures hidden in the earth from place to place. Without his help, he explained, nobody could therefore hope to find treasure. In addition, Kloron said that he knew how to transform all metals into gold, silver or precious stones. Rarschardt, the patron demon of cruel tyrants, said that he could teach the magician how to build a ship that could drive on land at the amazing speed of 800 miles an hour. This remarkable vessel should be able to reach 'secret mountains' where gold was hidden. In contrast to these apparently extremely powerful demons, another devil named Nrachel called himself 'a common spirit'. He was simply the Black Messenger that a magician could send from place to place. However, Nrachel claimed, he could also bring gold to any place a magician desired.

Of course, the demons could mislead treasure hunters. In a story documented in *De Sphera mundi*, a work on astronomy of the early sixteenth century, a demon deceived a treasure hunter. A wizard asked the demon called Floron – maybe the Kloron/Floran of the manuscript just quoted – whether it would be worth his while looking for treasure in a certain ruin. The demon told him to go and look for the treasure – he would find enough gold for the rest of his life. The wizard really did find four ounces of gold. In the same moment, the walls of the ruin came down and buried the treasure hunter underneath him. When his friends who had come with him dug out his dead body, he still clutched his meagre find: the treasure he had found had indeed lasted him for the rest of his life.²⁸

Books

Some treasure hunters relied on the use of books to lead them to treasure. These books were more or less the equivalent of elaborate maps. Very like the books supposedly left, or lost, by the Venetians that showed the way to a mine, treasure books described the way to a treasure using various, often hard-to-spot, landmarks. In the Bibliotheca Communale of Verona, there is a manuscript dating back to the late fifteenth century that describes the way to various treasures in several Italian towns. Roman ruins and their inscriptions were the pointers in these elaborate scavenger hunts. For example, there should be a golden head of Jupiter buried 6 feet under a stone with the inscription 'I-O-M-LOC-P-D-D-D' in Rome on the far side of the River Tiber. Other books of that kind explained how to find treasures in the Tyrol by using stones with mysterious markings – two snakes, five cats – as landmarks.²⁹

However, these 'guide books' were the exception rather than the rule. Treasure hunters used grimoires – magical books.³⁰ The magical texts referred to when we investigated treasure hunters' 'prayers' are good examples of the spellbooks that treasure hunters needed. We have already discussed the books supposedly written by the legendary expert treasure hunters, the Venetians. Whereas their books provided instructions on where to find a treasure or a mine rather than magical formulae, the books we encounter in trials against early modern treasure hunters contained just these spells. Even though not all treasure hunters used such books, many seem to have thought that it was impossible to find a treasure if you did not have a book with the right spells. This suggests that many treasure magicians were literate. Of course, there is the possibility that frauds posing as experts for magic just mumbled some mumbo-jumbo, pretending to read from a book or just from a couple of sheets of paper with some writing on them. At any rate, his real or alleged command of the written word and his possession of magical writings strengthened the role of the treasure magician. When a London sorcerer called Pole set out to find buried treasure in Yarmouth in 1538, he explained that he was sure of his success. He had friends who had 'books enough' for that kind of venture.³¹ In 1732, a vagrant trickster who claimed that he could find treasure made a great impression on the innkeeper of Bendern in western Austria and his guests because he had a book from which he read spells and incantations while waving a sword around.³² Kaspar Greißing, a notorious treasure magician who haunted the eastern shore of Lake Constance in the early 1770s, told the court indignantly that he did not own any 'Doctor books' and had no need

for them. God himself and the Virgin Mary had given him two books with golden letters written by the angels.³³ In 1773, a sceptical priest from Dornbirn in Austria foiled a treasure hunt by depriving the treasure seekers of their magical writings.³⁴ An otherwise notorious treasure hunter from the upper class of Naples defended himself by emphasizing that he did not own any magical books.³⁵

The hunt for treasure often implied the hunt for magical books. These could be regarded as so valuable that they became part of the treasure. In a pro-Swedish polemic of the Thirty Years War, presented as the work of Paracelsus, a treasure was mentioned that consisted of magical books, with some precious stones only mentioned as a bonus.³⁶ The true expert did not necessarily own the book or all the books needed for a treasure hunt. However, he did know which books were best and where to find them. A good magician knew the market for magical books. In many lengthy investigations into treasure hunters, the authorities dealt not so much with the actual search for treasure but more with the shady trade in magical books. Magical writings were readily bought and sold, loaned, borrowed and copied and undoubtedly abridged, embellished, falsified and at times simply made up.³⁷ It goes almost without saying that despite this practice, it was a salient feature of magical literature that it claimed to be old and that the text had remained unchanged for centuries.³⁸

The 'career' of William Stapleton, a runaway monk of the time of Henry VIII, which we will address later in detail, was shaped by his search for magical books. The so-called *Secreta secretorum* (*Secrets of the secrets*) and *Thesaurus spiritum* (*Treasure of the spirits*) he received from a Denys of Hoston while he was still in his monastery. Denys was merely a middleman: the books belonged to the Vicar of Wolton who made Stapleton pay two nobles as security. The books came together with other magical implements: a ring, a plate, a circle and a sword 'for the art of digging'. Stapleton seems to have thought that he needed these objects to find treasure: he left the monastery to embark on a lengthy treasure hunt only after he got them. He nevertheless tried to get his hands on more spell books immediately: he contacted other professional treasure hunters who were willing to bring him two or three other books as well as even more magical items, no doubt for pay. After some unsuccessful searches, Stapleton heard about a person named Leech who possessed a book in which the Priest of Lesingham had bound a spirit. Stapleton met Leech and his brother. They agreed to join forces with him and to bring him the book and the magical implements that he needed to work with it, providing he got them another book that was

supposed to explain how such magical implements were made. Later on, Stapleton received yet another book he coveted because he already had all the magic objects that would work with it.³⁹ Stapleton's long-winded and rather fruitless hunt for treasure books exemplifies three important aspects of treasure magic in general.

Firstly, the magicians needed or claimed to have access to rare and potentially precious objects of a magical quality. These objects were evidently not of an everyday sort. They had at least an air of learned magic, the medieval *magia naturalis* – a combination of science, philosophy, and theology – about them. Secondly, there were experts who handled the spell books and magical objects. It is not surprising that some of them were clerics: they were not only ordained to holy orders and thus apt for dealing with spirits, but they also had at least a modicum of learning, which helped them to read the magical books and possibly to evaluate them. Thirdly, magical objects were merchandize. They could be bought or borrowed for a fee. Stapleton's case offers a first glimpse at a market for magic. This 'black market' was a salient feature of treasure hunts. It was very difficult to understand the size and scope of this market because – at least until the witch-hunts ceased and the courts began to ignore magic – it had to be an underground market where buying and selling went on clandestinely. In addition, the 'black market' for magic was limited. Even though Stapleton managed to acquire a number of books on treasure magic, it was complicated as well as costly, and it required face-to-face contact with other experts.

Stapleton's quest for magical books was by no means exceptional. In 1784, treasure hunters from a village in Vorarlberg obtained a book of incantations from the faraway metropolis of Augsburg at some considerable cost. Others even claimed that this book had come from Ems in the Rhineland through a Prussian middleman. The treasure seekers arranged for a young weaver to make two copies of the book for them. Even though we do not now how long the book was, this was certainly a laborious and uncommon task for a village artisan. After the magical manual had been obtained with much trouble, the treasure seekers evidently wanted to make sure that they would have it at their disposal.⁴⁰ In 1778, the itinerant carpenter and farmhand Quirinus Mangard promised the smith Wiederin from Füssen in southern Bavaria that he would get him the magical book that Wiederin thought he needed in order to find a treasure. Mangard knew that a certain Goldner owned such a book. He travelled to Swabia where he obtained the book through a middleman who came originally from the Montafon Valley in western Austria. The author of the book was allegedly the renowned

medieval scholar and scientist Albertus Magnus, who had a reputation as an expert for High Magic. In keeping with the syncretism of popular magical writings, the book was said to contain 'Egyptian secrets'. A friend of Wiederin copied the book. Later on, the copy was confiscated and presumably destroyed by an indignant clergyman who maintained that it was on the 'index' – the Vatican's black list of forbidden writings. Mangard gave the original book again to his Montafon contact person, who allegedly send the book back to its first owner, who was now assumed to live in Mainz. The network of magicians engaging in this occult book trade spanned several hundred miles. The ease with which the book apparently travelled must not obscure the considerable effort that those involved were willing to invest in this venture. Numerous similar cases could be cited.⁴¹ In spite of these efforts, one must never take the contemporaries' assertions that some magical book was exceedingly rare and very old at face value. In 1784, an official from Coblenz confiscated a hand-written booklet that a treasure hunter place great store by. The official was disappointed: he had already read everything that the magical manuscript had to say in printed books that were readily available.⁴²

Instruments for divination: horoscopes, mirrors and divining rods

As we have already seen in Stapleton's case, books were just one part of a whole array of magical items. Stapleton was by no means an exception: treasure hunters used a variety of magical implements.

The sixteenth-century humanist Girolamo Cardano argued that it was enough to bring a candle made from human fat to a treasure site – it would hiss and finally go out when the treasure was near.⁴³

As divination was an integral part of treasure hunting, it comes as no surprise that some treasure hunters employed crystal gazers. In 1465, two treasure hunters from Norfolk were accused of invoking a demon that showed them where a treasure was hidden 'by the help of a certain crystal'.⁴⁴ Similar charges were brought against another group of treasure hunters in Norfolk in 1521.⁴⁵ William Wycherley, a professional sorcerer who was active in the 1530s and 1540s (whom we met in Chapter 3), used a crystal repeatedly to find out where treasure was hidden.⁴⁶ Stapleton claimed to know a crystal gazer and to have dabbled in that art himself.⁴⁷

Mirrors could replace crystals as instruments of divination in early modern Europe.⁴⁸ Some of them allegedly showed objects hidden in the

earth, be they mineral veins or buried treasures. We encounter such mirrors in trials against treasure hunters time and again.⁴⁹ A seventeenth-century handwritten booklet of spells and incantations from Hessen described various ways to produce a magical mirror. The most simple was as follows. In order to turn a regular mirror into a magical object, one had to write the characters 'ESQX' on it. The mirror had to be placed on the altar of a church. A mass had to be said over it on three Saturdays provided it was not a requiem. After each mass, the magician took the mirror and said: 'I call upon you, mirror, in the name of God and in the name of my maker and in the name of the holy patriarchs and prophets and the four evangelists. You shall show me the hidden treasure wherever it may be and you shall not deceive me but you shall show me the place and the spot and reveal them without any falsehood.' After that, the mirror was sprinkled with holy water and smoked with incense. Now, the mirror was ready: the treasure hunter could simply take it to a place where he thought treasure might be hidden. He turned the mirror towards the sun and said the incantation once more. The mirror would show the exact spot where the treasure could be found. In the same way, the mirror would reveal all things hidden or secret to the magician.⁵⁰

The same manuscript explained how one could obtain a magical mirror and a divining rod to find treasure with. The treasure seeker had to buy a new and unused mirror before dawn and silently, that is, without the usual haggling. The idea that an object bought without bargaining would have special powers was widespread. It was apparently that uncommon not to bargain that this in itself charged the object in question with magical power. A bit of lead had to be poured on the four corners of the mirror. After that, the mirror had to be put into a bowl with clean holy water. Two hazel twigs cut on St John the Baptist's day 'according to the custom of the art' – which probably meant before sunrise and silently – had to be placed over the bowl. The magician ritually addressed the mirror and the rods directly:

I implore you, rod and mirror, in the name of the holy trinity that you open up and show me the truth about this treasure which is lying here about the breath and the width of a common village road away and show and teach me where exactly it is hidden without any treachery of the evil spirits, Amen.

After that, the magician said a lengthy prayer – interspersed with the Paternoster, the Ave Maria and the Credo – in which he asked God for his help.⁵¹

An even simpler way of obtaining a magical tool for treasure hunting was this: the treasure seeker simply buried a black cat together with seven black beans. He later collected the bean sprouts and carried them with him as an amulet. The beans would lead him to every treasure. 'Probatum est.' (It has been tested.)⁵² Reginald Scot, the sixteenth-century sceptic, documented a number of magical practices in order to prove that they were unreliable or, indeed, nonsensical. He described an even more straightforward way of finding treasure that seemed to play on the tradition of the treasure flame: 'To know of treasure hidden in the earth: Write in paper these characters following (see Figure 2), on the saturdaye, in the houre of Ɔ, and laie it where thou thinkest treasure to be: if there be anie, the paper will burne, else not. And these be the characters:'⁵³

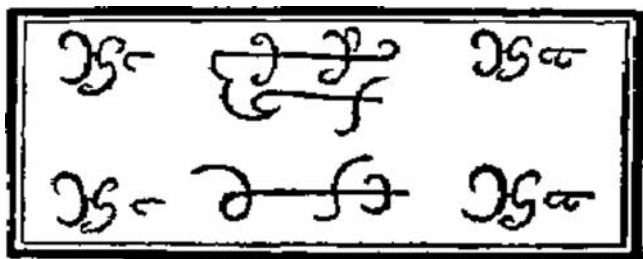


Figure 2 Magical characters used to find treasure troves from Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*.

In 1680, Richard Kitch of Bridgwater heard a rumour that treasure was hidden in the house of Jane Crapp in St Mary's Street. He went to a cunning man to find out how he might find the treasure. The village wizard told him that he should contact Anne Kingsbury of Taunton because she had 'inchaunted rods'. These rods supposedly bowed down when they were near the place where treasure was buried. Edward Morse, an associate of Kingsbury, confirmed that she knew how to use certain rods, about half an ell long, in order to find silver and gold. Nothing came of that treasure hunt.⁵⁴ The Bridgwater case was far from being unusual. Divining rods played a major role in treasure hunting. A history of the divining rod could easily fill a book two times the size of this one. We will therefore concentrate on the bare essentials. The divining or dowsing rod seems to be a special form of the magic staff or wand. Wands or staffs as symbols of power – political and religious as well as magical – seem to belong to the bedrock at least of Western culture. We find them in the Old Testament as well as in Greek and Roman

antiquity. Cicero referred to stories about the *virgula divina* (literally, divine rod, not divining rod), which would help its owner to every good he might desire.⁵⁵ The image of Moses beating his staff on the rock to bring forth the water that the Israelites in the desert needed desperately might have helped a belief in the dowsing rod to spread. Of course, the biblical story was not about water-witching. Moses' staff did not indicate the place where a well was hidden. Nevertheless, the episode in the Bible might have strengthened an old European imagery of a man using a miraculous staff in order to find things hidden in the earth. Of course, diviners claimed that the Mose episode proved the venerable age of their questionable craft. In seventeenth-century England, the divining rod was therefore also known as the 'Mosaical rod'.⁵⁶

It seems that the divining rod came into use in mining in the late fifteenth century. German authors of the early sixteenth century apparently assumed that their readers were familiar with the fact that miners employed the rod to find mineral veins.⁵⁷ Some authors referred to an elusive fourteenth-century manuscript that supposedly mentioned the use of the divining rod. This manuscript was almost certainly a fake of the late sixteenth/early seventeenth century.⁵⁸ So far, no records have been unearthed that could prove the use of the dowsing rod for water-witching prior to the early seventeenth century. The demonologist Delrio mentioned Spanish diviners called Zahuri (in modern Spanish, *zahori* means 'water-diviner') who could see objects hidden in the earth including treasures and water channels. However, these people did not use divining rods.⁵⁹ The Bavarian law against witchcraft and superstition of 1612 referred to superstitious practices associated with treasure hunting that were also commonly used by miners and by people who dug wells.⁶⁰ The law did not mention the divining rod but it would have been the only magical implement used by treasure hunters, miners and people searching for hidden springs alike. Apart from this indirect allusion to the rod in the Bavarian law, the earliest text we know of that mentioned the rod as the instrument of water-witching was a short French tract on mining published in 1632.⁶¹ At the end of the seventeenth century at the latest, the divining rod had become the universal detecting implement of the magical culture of Old Europe. It was used to find virtually anything.⁶² That it became that well-known as a tool to find treasure speaks of the prominence of treasure in early modern thought, not of a necessarily close link between the divining rod and the treasure.

Even when compared to the other magical tools of the multifaceted traditions of treasure hunting, the divining rod was a difficult

implement to fathom. To be sure, the divining rod was used for a variety of purposes, including treasure hunting. However, a number of early modern authors ridiculed or condemned divining. It was not clear whether it should be regarded as magic or not. Thus, a twin problem bedevilled the use of the divining rod. First, was the divining rod effective? Secondly, was its use allowed, that is, was the divining rod merely a technical or a magical tool? The early modern period could not answer these questions conclusively. Even today, a number of people would still consider them open.

One of the earliest treatises on the divining rod was attributed to a certain Basilius Valentinus, supposedly a German alchemist monk of the fifteenth century. Rather like Hermes Trismegistos, Basilius was a fictional person to whom magical writings produced in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were attributed.⁶³ The so-called works of Basilius Valentinus gained some considerable reputation in the seventeenth century. The text supposedly written by the expert magician was not about treasure hunting as such but what it had to say about dowsing for mineral veins and ore had some bearing on the subject. Basilius – as we will call the unknown author for simplicity's sake – claimed that the divining rod had fallen into disuse. At the same time, he repudiated those who ignored the natural laws of dowsing and tainted it with 'novelties'. Even though these statements contradicted each other indirectly, they suggested that Basilius wanted to present dowsing as a very old art.⁶⁴ He based his teachings on the assumption that metals breathe. Their breath can be detected even if the metal veins are deep in the ground. He thus formulated the basic idea that is at the heart of dowsing till the present day: some kind of emanation of minerals, metals, water – or treasure – rises out of the earth to the surface and somehow attracts the dowsing rod.⁶⁵ The nature of that emanation – fumes, rays, electrical currents, magnetic forces – is a matter of taste and changes from author to author. Especially the analogy with magnetism was a standard feature of the debate about the divining rod. In any case, the basic idea of an emanation – a 'breath' – of the minerals and ores has remained more or less the same. Basilius classified divining rods according to their reaction to the emanations of mineral. On the 'glowing rod', the diviner had affixed a bit of heat-sensitive material that would smother when the supposedly hot breath of metal hit it. If a piece of marcasite was put on the rod, it would move violently – thus it was called a 'leaping rod' – because the emanation of metal supposedly attracted the marcasite. What exactly Basilius meant by 'marcasite' is not quite clear – certainly not the iron sulphide mineral that is today known as marcasite.

Basilius' marcasite was a substance with purified and attracted metals. The marcasite of gold, he explained, was lapis lazuli and the marcasite of iron was the loadstone. He insisted that this had been tested in practice in the mines.⁶⁶

Basilius went on to explain the 'trembling rod', which consisted of various metals and glass. The instrument was supposed to be sensitive to movement caused by hot air escaping from the earth. The rod was stuck into the ground and trembled when the 'breath' of the mineral vein struck the air above the surface. The 'falling rod' detected the movement of the metal 'fumes' caused by the sun. The sun was supposed to attract the metals' emanations when its rays penetrated the earth's surface and purified the metals. When the fumes became too heavy and fell back into the earth, they attracted the rod. No text on *magia naturalis* would be complete without a reference to the occult qualities of the planets. According to Basilius, the 'breath' of the metals followed the movement of the planets. A very delicate rod, the 'superiour rod', with a small quantity of mercury 'the weight of three barley corns' in it, would react to the movement of this mineral 'breath'. Indeed, Basilius claimed, the minerals themselves moved in the earth in accordance with the planets.⁶⁷ As an alchemist Basilius was, of course, familiar with natural magic that described such sympathetic influences in great complexity.

The *furcilla* or 'striking rod' in Basilius' list resembled the divining rod of early modern popular culture most closely. It had to be cut from a tree in the name of God – which was, as he briefly remarked, 'the usual way'. The 'breath' of metal would draw the rod down because it attracted the sap of the wood. The best trees to cut 'striking rods' from were the hazel and the almond because trees that bore fruit that had a hard shell and a kernel were 'aeriell' that is, light, and 'fiery' in character and therefore apt to be attracted to the hot emanation from metals.⁶⁸

The fact that a number of miners used the divining rod was enough to convince some authors that divining was not only lawful but also that it worked.⁶⁹ Gabriel Plattes, an English author on mining, suggested a combination of what we might call science and magic to find mineral veins. He explained that any prospector should first check the springs for mineral residue. Next he should examine the vegetation for any anomalies that might hint at the composition of the soil. Then he needed to check carefully the stones visible at the surface. Only if all of these suggested that there might be a mineral vein, Plattes recommended the use of the divining rod to find the best place to dig. He claimed to have practical experience with the rod:

About Midsomer, in a calme morning, I cut up a rod of Hasell, of the same springs growth, almost a yard long, then I tyed it to my staffe, in the middle, with a strong thred, so that it did hang even, like a Beame of a Balance [i.e. a pair of scales]. Thus I carried it up and downe the Mountaines where Lead growed, and before Noone it guided mee to the Orifice of a Lead mine.... Within two houres we found a veine of Lead Oare within lesse than a foot of the Grasse.... The signes that it shethe is to bow down the root end towards the earth as though it would grow there, neare unto the Orifice of a Mine, when you see it doe so, you must carry it round about the place, to see that it turneth in the string still to the place on which site Soever you stand.

Plattes speculated that some form of magnetism caused the movement of the divining rod; he strongly rejected the idea that 'any coniuration' should be used. He recommended the use of the divining rod to find mines in the American colonies, which could 'yield more gaine in one yeare, than their (the colonists') Tobacco and such trifles would yield in their whole lives'. Maybe Plattes was no objective observer: as he claimed that he had "more experience of that kind than any man in England", the use of the divining rod might have meant an attractive business opportunity for him.⁷⁰ However, he did not hesitate to emphasize in a publication about agriculture that the real 'treasure... (is) the earth's fatnesse,' that is, the fertility of the soil.⁷¹

Probably the best-renowned diviner of the early modern period was Jacques Aymar, a 'riche Paysan' from the parish of St Marcellin in the Dauphiné. He was not only able to find water, mineral veins and hidden treasure with his divining rod – he could even detect criminals. If he had the chance to visit the scene of a crime to get 'son impression', his rod would lead him to the criminals. One might call Aymar an early psychic detective. In 1688, he was called after cloths had been stolen and the authorities had failed to identify the thief. Aymar's rod took him directly to the prison as if following an invisible track. The divining rod pointed to two people in a line of four prisoners and thus identified them as the thieves. In addition, with the use of the divining rod, Aymar found the stolen cloths hidden in a farmhouse near Grenoble. On 5 July 1692, a wine merchant and his wife were found murdered in the cellar of their shop in Lyon. There were no witnesses. A neighbour suggested calling Aymar. The Lieutenant Criminel and Monsieur Le Procureur du Roy allowed him to see the cellar at night. This might suggest that the authorities were less than convinced of his abilities and did not want to attract too much attention to their somewhat desperate

attempt to find the murderers. At any rate, Aymar's rod reacted. It led him out of the town to the River Rhone. He concluded that the criminals had escaped by boat. Together with the lieutenant's guards, Aymar followed them. Led by the divining rod, the crime fighters left their ship in every river port and went to the taverns where the murderers had slept. Aymar was able to point out not only the bed they had slept in but even the bottles they had drunk from. It became apparent that there had been three murderers. In Beaucaire, deep in the Languedoc, 45 French miles from the scene of the crime, Aymar finally found the first murderer. The rod led him to the prison and there it pointed out one man in a group of 14. The suspect, a certain Bossu, had only been arrested for petty theft an hour earlier. At first, he denied everything and even questioned the reliability of Aymar's rod ('*Sa baguette mentoit*'). However, witnesses identified Bossu. He broke down and admitted to having helped his missing accomplices to commit the double murder. Aymar returned with Bossu to Lyon. After that, he went back the same way – now of course with the great news of his success – to follow the two other murderers. This second trip down the Rhone must have been a triumph for the diviner. It is hard to imagine better publicity for him and his alleged abilities. The murderers had – or so the movements of Aymar's divining rod suggested – gone to Toulon and embarked on a ship to Genua. Even though Aymar followed them for a while, it became apparent that they had left the sphere of influence of the French authorities. Subsequently, however, Aymar failed the tests that the Duke of Condé had devised for him. LeBrun, a canon of Grenoble, suspected him of witchcraft.⁷²

Aymar owes much of his renown to LeLorrain de Vallemont, a priest and doctor of divinity who in 1693 published a lengthy treatise on dowsing in general and on Aymar in particular. Vallemont argued vehemently that certain particles rose from subterranean water, as well as from hidden treasure, that caused the movement of the divining rod. Vallemont explained that these particles were '*les atomes*' that had been described by the ancient Greek philosophers and more recently by Robert Boyle. The particles entered through the pores into human bodies. Contagious diseases spread in the same way, Vallemont wrote. The atoms that emanated from certain people quasi left a trail in the air. Thus, Aymar could follow the criminals from the scene of the crime. Sensitive persons like him – could feel the particles' influence. The divining rod only helped them to concentrate. Aymar was therefore right when he said that it did not matter from what wood or at what time he cut his rod. Aymar's body was said to react quite violently to the influence

of particle emanation: when he used the divining rod, he seemed to suffer from a fever and soon complained that his heart hurt. Of course, Vallemont stressed, it was easy to unbalance sensitive people, thus even the best diviners failed when they were under stress, in fear or in an emotional crisis. In that way, Vallemont tried to explain away Aymar's blunders. Needless to say, the Vallemont as a theologian was at pains to stress that divining had nothing to do with demonism. The opposition between Vallemont and LeBrun suggests very clearly that the Catholic Church (indeed all churches) was rather ambivalent about the use of the divining rod.⁷³ In 1700, Johann Gottfried Zeidler published a polemic against divining that could boast a foreword written by his mentor, Christian Thomasius, the great opponent of the witch trials and early champion of the German Enlightenment. Zeidler examined the variety of divining rods in use. He concluded that neither the form nor the material of the rod mattered and therefore there could be no connection between the rod and the sought object. Rather, the somewhat awkward way in which the diviner was supposed to hold the rod caused the muscles in the arm to tremble involuntarily. Thus, the movement of the rod had a simple anatomical reason. You might as well use a sausage as a divining rod: 'If you hold a Knackwurst [Frankfurter] the right way it makes a perfect divining rod and moves so strongly in your hand that it might break.'⁷⁴ In this case, the diviner could celebrate his lucky find with a snack provided that he had some bread and mustard with him. Zeidler ridiculed the discussion of the divining rod as an instrument, but he still believed ardently in dowsing. Rejecting Vallemont's atomistic explanation, he claimed that dowsers were people with a special talent that brought them into contact with an all-encompassing world spirit, which in turn enabled them to sense hidden objects. Alexander von Humboldt, the great naturalist and explorer, declared that the divining rod did not work in his hands. 'Maybe I belong to the kind of people who are by nature so inferior that precious metals cannot excite them,' he joked poking fun at the notion of a magical 'talent' that successful diviners needed.⁷⁵

In the early eighteenth century, an anonymous German author who claimed to be a mining expert glorified dowsing as a fire-proof shortcut to successful prospecting. It was not even necessary to go out into the field to search for mineral veins anymore: the diviner should simply hold the rod over a map and it would indicate the best spot to dig. Indeed, the divining rod would answer any questions concerning the depth and direction of the mineral vein or its profitability if one held it over the piece of paper with numbers, a compass and the words 'yes',

‘moderate’ or ‘no’ on it.⁷⁶ Here, the divining rod began to turn into an all-purpose instrument of divination. Later, spiritualism would use the pendulum or the planchette on the ouija board in a similar way.

Other authors rejected divining outright. Georg Agricola, arguably the father of scientific mining, knew that the divining rod was widely used. He was well-informed, almost certainly from first-hand experience. His detailed description of divining written in the early 1560s is a valuable sketch of the dowsing practices that are in use to this very day. The rod could be made from a variety of materials: hazel rods would find silver, pine rods lead and iron rods gold. The rod had to be forked. The diviner held it loosely in his hand in order to allow it to move on its own account as soon as he stood over a mineral vein. Many people maintained that not everybody was qualified as a diviner: some individuals seemed to block the force of the ore that was supposed to draw the rod down. This force might be something like magnetism. However, Agricola certainly did not recommend the use of the divining rod. First, it was not reliable. Mines dug after a divining expedition proved invariably unprofitable. Secondly, Agricola said very clearly that divining did not belong to the ‘*modis naturaliter venae possunt inveniri*’ (‘natural ways in which you can find a mineral vein’), that is, divining was magic. Agricola had even heard certain incantations used by diviners even though he could not – and would not – remember the exact words. Given the fact that the wizards of Pharaoh and the sorcerers of Ancient Greece and Rome had used magical rods, Agricola regarded the divining rod as coming *ex incantatorum impuris fontibus* (‘out of the impure wells of conjurers’). Thus, divining was simply beneath the dignity of a miner.⁷⁷

Agricola’s statement combined points made earlier by two other German authors, Paracelsus and Luther. The former had simply brushed the divining rod aside as unreliable and too sensitive. It found, he claimed, lost pennies.⁷⁸ Luther rejected the use of the divining rod as magic. However, only a few hardliners condemned dowsing explicitly as witchcraft.⁷⁹

Evidently, divining was often not taken seriously. In 1676, an anonymous English author even included the use of the divining rod in his collection of tricks and games ‘for the recreation of Youth, especially School-boys’. He presented his work under the quasi-enlightened motto ‘There’s no Hogoblin here for to affright ye, but innocence and mirth that will delight ye.’⁸⁰

In the actual practice of treasure hunters, the divining rod appears so often that some random examples may suffice to prove the point.

A Franciscan friar from Santa Maria la Nova in Naples used a somewhat unusual divining rod in 1586 in Naples. He held two sticks of olive wood straight in front of him. If the ends of the sticks moved towards the sun, he knew that he was near treasure.⁸¹ In 1692, another Franciscan friar read incantations all night long on a lonely mountain top near Bludenz at a spot where people thought they had discovered silver with the divining rod. As no spirit appeared, the friar doubted that any treasure might be found no matter what the divining rod indicated.⁸² A dowser led a group of treasure hunters on a dangerous expedition into the unsafe ruins of Trifels Castle in 1723.⁸³ In 1772, a dowser was arrested in Hessen for treasure hunting. He claimed to have learned to dowse when he was a pitman.⁸⁴ Divining rods appeared time and again in treasure hunts from Württemberg.⁸⁵

It comes as no surprise that early modern treasure hunters consulted astrologers.⁸⁶ Paracelsus stated that one should only dig for treasure if the stars were right.⁸⁷ The horoscopes attributed to Cornelius Agrippa, arguably the best-known magician of the sixteenth century, indicated whether a man would be a capable treasure seeker or not.⁸⁸ A good astrologer as well as offering advice as to whether there was any treasure could also tell whether the treasure could be recovered easily – ‘the further the signifiers are in the signs, the deeper the treasure is in the Earth’, Middleton’s manual for astrologers claimed in 1679. The astrologer knew how much the find would be worth and what material it would chiefly consist of, predictably by reading the planets as symbols for metals according to the rules of High Magic. The seventeenth-century astrologer John Gadbury was willing enough to give advice to treasure hunters. However, he at least pretended to be annoyed by people who required his magical aid simply because they had mislaid things: ‘For the Artist (i.e. the magician) to respond to every trifle or endeavour to satisfy the curiosity of every Beef-brain’d Questionist is every whit as dishonourable as for an intelligent Lawyer to Moot with a Bear.’⁸⁹

Magical plants and puppets

One of the magical all-purpose tools of early modern Europe was fern seed.⁹⁰ Fern, of course, has no blossoms and thus no seed. However, there were stories about the magical properties of the miraculous fern seed and the rituals needed to get it all over Europe at least from the High Middle Ages onwards.⁹¹ Shakespeare and Ben Jonson referred to the belief that a person carrying fern seed would be invisible.⁹² Otto

Brunfels, a sixteenth-century botanist, condemned the belief in the magic of fern as superstition. However, his colleague and contemporary Hieronymus Bock, the author of one of the most popular books on herbs, admitted that he had once tried in vain to obtain fern seed.⁹³ The idea that fern seed would somehow help its owner to find buried treasure seems to have been most prevalent in the Czech and German lands.⁹⁴ However, in the late sixteenth century, the learned elite of Naples were not above using a substance that was supposed to be fern seed. The miraculous seed was known to help its owner to find treasure, to seduce women and to protect him against any harm provided it had been collected during Midsummer Night and was wrapped in white paper with magic symbols on it. That the term used for fern seed, *semente de felice*, allowed the association to *felicità* (happiness) helped its popularity in Italy. The Synod of Ferrara found it necessary to forbid the gathering of fern seed on Midsummer Night in 1612.⁹⁵ In the same year, the Bavarian law against witchcraft and superstition mentioned treasure hunters and people who tried to get fern seed in the same breath, and denounced them as wizards and conjurers.⁹⁶ In a Transylvanian spell book of the seventeenth century, a plant, probably common chicory, was mentioned that was supposed to keep the treasure from moving under ground.⁹⁷

Some forms of economic magic were not exactly about buried treasures, but they might be worth our while because they could be seen as alternatives to treasure magic and because people who tried to find treasure employed these practices too. Some trials against treasure hunters in southern Germany mentioned the *Springwurz* (originally *Sprengwurz*; that is, burst-open root). A Latin term used for the miraculous plant was *radix effractoria vel apertoria* (breaking or opening root). This magical root was said to help its owner find treasure and to open all doors and locks for him. If touched with the *Springwurz*, even the secret vaults where treasure was supposedly hidden opened immediately. The English equivalent was the moonwort. In the sixteenth century, the plant was notorious for making horseshoes come off if a horse happened to step on it.⁹⁸ However, British treasure hunters do not seem to have tried to use the plant like their Continental counterparts. These plants were just variants of an international magical motif. It might go back to a note in Pliny's *Natural History* about a magical root that woodpeckers allegedly used to open blocked holes in tree trunks. In the fourteenth century, the belief in the root was firmly established. One could allegedly manipulate birds to bring the root. In Transylvanian folklore it could be obtained from toads.⁹⁹ In Russia, the miraculous plant was known as *Razriv-Trava*, which could be identified as flowering fern.¹⁰⁰

The *Hecketaler* or the *Geldmännchen* were well-known in German folklore. They were magical items, usually some kind of doll, that were said to house a spirit. This spirit produced money magically. It was enough to keep the *Geldmännchen* in the money chest: the spirit would see to it that the money would multiply miraculously. The *Geldmännchen* could be identified with the mandrake, or rather roots that were supposed to be mandrakes and had been carved and clothed to give them the appearance of dolls were presented as *Geldmännchen*.¹⁰¹ In 1711, a group of treasure hunters from Göppingen in Württemberg had to face charges as they had tried to buy such a plant from a wizard working as a herdsman in a neighbouring town and also from some shady character in far away Nuremberg. The *Geldmännchen* was supposed to help them to find treasure. The herdsman finally tricked the treasure hunters into spending the very considerable sum of 50 florins on a *Geldmännchen* that was in reality a large bug 'dressed' in colourful rags.¹⁰²

The quest for a *Geldmännchen* took a much more serious turn in Rottenburg, a Swabian town under Habsburg control in 1650.¹⁰³ Michael Pusper, the administrator of the hospital there, suggested to the winegrower Johann Widmeyer that he could 'teach him something that would allow him to work less'. Pusper explained that he knew how to make a *Geldmännchen*. He said that he needed Widmeyer's sperm. He would bury the sperm and a *Geldmännchen* would grow out of it. They would then have to bathe it in sperm once a month. If placed in a drawer together with some coins, the coins would multiply. Widmeyer rejected this suggestion as sinful. Pusper gave the same advice to at least two other men. His magic played with a motif of the mandrake, which was said to grow out of the sperm shed by criminals when they were hanged at the gallows. Nevertheless, we might safely assume that Pusper's ritual had a homosexual background. He admitted later on that he had had homosexual relations. One other person admitted that he tried to get fern seed with the help of the complicated ritual that Pusper had told him about. There were rumours about Pusper owning fern seed himself. When the authorities learned about the whole seedy affair, Pusper was arrested. Rottenburg had a long history of severe witch-hunting. Pusper explained that people spread rumours about his using fern seed and *Geldmännchen* simply because they were envious of his economic success, which had earned him a good position in the town, even though he was of humble origin. When he was subjected to torture, he broke down and confessed that he had indeed tried repeatedly – though vainly – to obtain fern seed and *Geldmännchen*. However, he still maintained that all of that 'had nothing to do with the devil and did not do any harm to

anyone'. With prolonged torture the court managed to make the culprit confess that he was fully guilty of witchcraft. Pusper was burned at the stake in September 1650.

The British Folklore Society alerted me to the fact that a modern variety of *Geldmännchen*, so-called Money Poppets, are available for sale on the internet.¹⁰⁴

Silence

Arguably the most difficult, but at the same time the most essential, element of treasure magic was self-control. Discipline was a basic requirement for all treasure hunters. The actual dig had to be carried out in strict silence. One word or, even worse, laughter would make the treasure vanish for good.¹⁰⁵ A magician admonished a group of treasure hunters from the southern Black Forest in 1750: 'They shall not speak a single word, otherwise the treasure will vanish right away.'¹⁰⁶ In a folk tale from Hertfordshire, a treasure hunter dug up a treasure chest. Unfortunately, he was stupid enough to call out to his companion, 'Dang it, Jack, here it is,' on which the sides of the pit they had dug fell in and they barely escaped with their lives. Of course, the treasure disappeared for good.¹⁰⁷ During a treasure hunt in Western Austria in 1732, a magician insisted that all other treasure hunters had to keep strict silence while he read an incantation.¹⁰⁸ In 1763, treasure hunters from a village near Heilbronn wanted to give up because one of them had spoken: the treasure was clearly lost.¹⁰⁹

We have already discussed the horrifying apparitions of demons that were supposed to drive treasure hunters away. If the treasure hunters did not run from the parade of devils, the demons at least wanted to provoke them to speak, to utter a cry of dismay, to curse or even to pray. Any word spoken would make the treasure disappear. In folklore, the worst trick that the demons could play on treasure hunters was to make them laugh. The demonic apparitions were mostly terrifying. However, at times they were funny. The treasure hunters would see a carriage drawn by white mice or geese. A coach would rush past the treasure hunters at an enormous speed. A funny looking person riding in a wooden bucket would follow it crawling along and ask the flabbergasted treasure hunters if he could still overtake the coach. The treasure hunters could not help laughing and so the treasure vanished.¹¹⁰

Ritual silence played a key role in magic in general.¹¹¹ It might be that the silence exercised at certain times of the day by monks, or the reverential silence to be observed by churchgoers during service

influenced this idea. If we focus on treasure magic, the parallel with religious rites is even more obvious. Treasure hunting had, as we have seen, strong religious overtones. The success or failure of a dig might decide whether a wandering soul was redeemed or condemned to stay on earth. Thus, ceremonial silence was certainly appropriate. However, it is probably best to ask what the ritual silence meant for everyday magic. Bronislaw Malinowski and John Beattie – otherwise two quite different anthropologists – agreed that any investigation into the efficacy of magical acts is essentially alien to magical thought. The success of any magical act was secondary. Beattie argued that magic should above all express the wishes and needs of the magicians. If we follow his line, we might see the silence of treasure hunters as an expression of the closeness of their group and their will to cooperate. The ‘treasure hunting party’ and all its members had to maintain the silence together. They exercised rigorous discipline and thus collectively demonstrated their determination. However, the ceremonial silence might have had a very special appeal for treasure hunters. Malinowski explained magic as essentially a substitute for technology. He emphasized that magical thought provided explanations for any failure of magical acts. Three elements had to come together for magical acts to be effective: the correct words, the correct behaviour and the correct attitude.¹¹² If anything was amiss with any of these elements, then the magical act would fail. The magician would almost always find some detail that had gone wrong. Thus, magical thought could always explain the failure of magical acts without ever questioning the validity of magic itself. The magical system of thought was in a way self-referential and self-assertive. Given the strict ban on speaking and laughing, the magical act of treasure hunting could easily go wrong. Had not somebody laughed just a little, or uttered a word under his breath? The treasure hunters needed the utmost self-control to keep themselves from talking or laughing. One can make many people laugh simply by telling them that they have to keep a straight face. The most delicate magical silence of treasure hunting could easily be broken. Thus, within the magical system, it was wholly unproblematic to explain why treasure hunts failed again and again without ever questioning treasure magic itself. This does not mean that the failure of treasure hunts was always attributed to the fact that somebody had talked or laughed. However, this explanation helps us to see why a magical rule that placed the treasure hunters under some severe stress could become one of the essentials of treasure hunting. The explanations following Malinowski’s and Beattie’s explanations are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, in the final analysis, they

complement each other. The treasure hunters played against almost impossibly high odds. It was certainly honourable and brave to face the risks of a treasure hunt when – given a rule like that of magical silence – failure always loomed large above the whole venture. If the treasure hunters did not succeed, one could hardly blame them. If trifles like the utterance of a single word or laughter spelled disaster, who could ever claim to be sure to succeed?

Paracelsus rejected treasure magic in general and magical silence in particular. He was familiar with the bans on talking and laughing and knew that treasure hunters were obsessed with them, but he thought that they were of no use. On the contrary, he recommended that treasure hunters should talk with each other, sing and be merry. Otherwise, he said, they might have hallucinations born out of fear – no doubt another reference to the demonic apparitions that threatened treasure seekers.¹¹³

The Enlightenment poked fun at the grim silence of treasure hunters. Johann Georg Schmidt wrote in his polemic against folk belief: 'It is well-known that all buried treasures belong to the fiscal authorities. Thus, if it should happen that some private person accidentally finds in his house or elsewhere vessels full of money he keeps mum about that as he would about the most secret of activities.'¹¹⁴

In treasure hunts, the people involved could use a variety of the spells and the magical items just reviewed together. In 1510, a number of well-to-do men, including the former Lord Mayor of York and several priests, faced charges before the court of the Archbishop of York. They had planned to go on a treasure hunt near Halifax. The treasure hunters had not only mustered the help of a canon from Drax Abbey to get magical books but also had magical circles made from virgin parchment – that is, parchment made from the hide of the first calf of a cow. The circles were no less than 30 feet wide and had characters written on them. The treasure seekers had supposedly tried to get the help of the demon Oberion. They had carved his symbol or his likeness, together with the names of four other demons, in lead lamina. The use of lead tablets was widespread in the magic of Ancient Greece and Rome. The priests of the Halifax group might have known about that.¹¹⁵ The treasure hunters admitted that they had had the lead tablet made as well as other magical objects. They declared that they had knelt down and said prayers over these magical implements. However, all of them steadfastly denied that they had actually called any demons or had made any sacrifices to the spirits of hell. James Richardson, one of priests, confessed that they had planned to misuse the Eucharist for magical

purposes. They abstained from that plan not because they thought any better of committing sacrilege but simply because they suspected that the use of the holy bread would be counterproductive. They had wanted to have a consecrated wafer 'to be put upon theyme in tyme of conjuration to defende theyme from the spirite [but two of the priests] shewed that might not be, for as the sacrament were there, the sprete [spirit] wold not appere'. Evidently, the treasure hunters needed some nerve: they courted disaster not only because – according to early modern beliefs – conjuring a demon was a very dangerous business but also because they would have to face charges of sacrilege or witchcraft if the authorities got wind of their venture. All things considered, the treasure hunt represented a major enterprise and it was costly as well as risky.¹¹⁶

To be sure, the Halifax affair was a very elaborate treasure hunt. However, even low-key ventures of that kind could be complicated enough. In 1679, there was a treasure hunt in the forest near Böblingen in Swabia. All the treasure hunters wore amulets to protect themselves against evil spirits. The magician who led the group had a lead tablet with magical signs on it – possibly rather like the lead items used in Halifax. He discovered the treasure site with a divining rod over which he had spoken a secret spell. When the place where the treasure was buried had been located, the wizard drew a magical circle with some symbols in it on the ground with a sword. He put birch twigs on the edge of the circle – apparently an original new addition to the magical routine that was meant to strengthen the circle. After that, he said a lengthy conjuration in a foreign language that he read from a bit of paper – apparently an excerpt from a spell book. Only after this ceremony were the other treasure hunters allowed to start digging in strictest silence.¹¹⁷

We should emphasize again that all these miraculous or mysterious objects could be bought and sold on a 'black market' for magic. Magic as merchandize is by no means an invention of the big business of modern esotericism. In 1466, the wizard Robert Barker of Babraham owned 'a book, and a roll of black art containing characters, circles, exorcisms and conjurations, a hexagonal sheet with strange figures, six metal plates with divers characters engraved, a chart with hexagonal and pentagonal figures and characters and a gilded wand'. He had bought this magical arsenal from a certain John Hope for the not inconsiderable sum of £2. 6s. 8d. Hope had promised him that with these items he could invoke spirits who would show him 'gold and silver in abundance'.¹¹⁸

In conclusion, it might be useful to point out two striking characteristics of the magic used by treasure hunters. Treasure magic was to some

degree commercialized. Even though it was not strictly necessary, treasure hunters apparently had a tendency to use the market for magic. They searched for specific magical items, and they bought or borrowed them for a certain fee. Thus, the work of a treasure hunters' group was integrated into a wider context of cooperation and commerce. Treasure hunters participated in a semi-clandestine market for magic. It would be an exaggeration to talk about a magical counter-culture or subculture. However, there was clearly a magical underground. Cunning men – village virtuosos for magic – provided access to it.

The second characteristic of treasure magic was that it was, in the literal sense of these words, harmless and otherworldly. Malinowski and other anthropologists maintained that magic was above all a substitute for technology. Even though it is clearly a lot more complicated than that, there is something in Malinowski's assumption. Most magic was about concrete wants or wishes. It catered to specific, clearly defined and almost always material needs. One would use magic to cure an illness, to guarantee the success of the harvest or to drive away pests. Malevolent magic was supposed to cause concrete harm: witches were said to conjure up hailstorms that damaged the crops, and they allegedly killed and maimed people and livestock. At first glance, treasure magic seems to be the most 'material' kind of magic. Evidently, it was about getting treasure. However, if we take a closer look at the findings of this chapter, treasure magic was not about conjuring up money or jewels out of thin air. It was never about getting treasure directly. It was, first, about finding the place where a treasure might be hidden, and, secondly, about coming into contact with the treasure's spirit guardian. The magic supposed to help to find the treasure was simply mantic. The point of the mirrors and the divining rods was to find the spot where the treasure was allegedly hidden. However, finding was only one of the first steps that treasure hunters had to take to achieve their goal. The rest of treasure magic was about the magical guardian who had to be coaxed, bullied or 'bribed' (a ghost would want the treasure seekers to finish his unfinished business for him) into helping the treasure hunters. If the treasure hunt did not include an actual dig and the spirit was supposed to bring the money directly, the treasure hunters did not need any mantic. Summing up, we might call all treasure magic non-materialistic and otherworldly. It was not supposed to bring about any effect in the material world, at least not directly. The treasure hunters' magic was supposed to give them knowledge and power. Even that power was power over parts of the spirit world; it did not include any tangible advantages in the everyday world. Thus, the treasure hunters' magic did not provide

them directly with anything material. Therefore, treasure magic was at odds with most other kinds of folk magic and with the imaginary magic of witchcraft, which were supposed to bring about some change in the visible world directly. As treasure magic did not have any immediate and concrete material effects, it could certainly do no harm to anyone. Treasure magic could not possibly threaten or endanger anyone who was not actively involved in the treasure hunt himself. To be sure, the treasure hunters who had to face spirits took certain risks. Their contact with spirits might have provoked witchcraft suspicions. However, the treasure hunt per se did not threaten or harm outsiders. The *Drache* and its variants, such as the *lidérc*, seem to be an exception to this rule. The *Drache* brought money to its owner that it had stolen from somebody elsewhere. However, the set of *Drache* imaginations did not belong to the magic of treasure hunting proper. According to the logic of magic, if you had such a spirit being under your control, you would no longer need to search for treasure. The *Drache/lidérc* beliefs belonged to the many variants of transfer magic. As transfer magic was supposed to be nothing other than magical theft, it was condemned and could be associated with diabolism or with a belief in vampires. Treasure magicians did not use any transfer magic. In contrast to transfer magic, treasure hunting was not about magical theft. The treasure might belong to a spirit or spirits might guard it, but it did not belong to any living human being. If you took a treasure, you did no harm to your neighbours. Treasure magic was strictly non-aggressive. It did not even have the potential to do harm to anyone.

5

The Authorities' Attitude Towards Treasure Hunting

We command you to let them dig where they want to ... but watch them closely.

(Order of the Duke of Württemberg to a bailiff
concerning treasure hunters, 1711,
Staatsarchiv Wertheim, F-Rep. 148a_33)

Confiscations and permits

Shortly after the fall of the Bastille, a London newspaper was scandalized that people had been imprisoned there for mere trifles. Among the prisoners listed was a certain Girard, allegedly a treasure seeker.¹ Was treasure seeking indeed merely a trifling offence? What had the courts and law enforcement agencies of premodern Britain and Europe to say about it? As we have seen in Chapter 1, treasure hunting as such was hardly ever illegal. It was, however, riddled with legal difficulties. What percentage of his find would the treasure hunter actually get? What would the fisc demand for the prince's coffers? In addition to these juridical problems, an important part of pre-modern treasure hunting – magic – was never lawful. However, pre-modern treasure lore was so deeply steeped in magic that it is difficult to imagine treasure hunters not using the forbidden art. In this chapter, we will examine how the authorities dealt with treasure seekers in practice.

English legal practice did not favour any activity connected with treasure. Hiding money was enough to get the attention of the Crown's representatives. In the background of the celebrated case of Alice Kyteler, who was accused of witchcraft in Kilkenny in 1324, was such a shady treasure affair. Her husband had secreted away some of his money and

that of one of his associates. When the sheriff learned about this, he forced the man into revealing the place where the money was buried and confiscated it.² In 1397, Robert atte Mulle of Guildford petitioned the Commons for help. He had treasure trove buried in his house to the value of £600. The king claimed the treasure for himself. Atte Mulle had paid 500 marks and thus, he declared, exhausted his economical means. He asked the Commons to intervene on his behalf as the king's demands would ruin him entirely.³

People rumoured to have found a treasure had to face charges. The investigation of treasure troves was among the standard duties of every coroner. Edward I had treasure hunters put on trial in 1292, but, as the court could not prove that they had found – and thus embezzled – anything, he pardoned them. In 1312, a certain private person who had allegedly made away with a treasure found in Dene, Bedfordshire, was arrested. One Robert atte Lee fled in 1384 after he had found a treasure in Hounslow, which was immediately claimed by the Crown.⁴ There are similar cases from the early modern period that could be quoted.⁵

In Britain as well as on the Continent, many would-be treasure hunters obtained legal permits for their ventures in order to avoid difficulties with the authorities. In England, with its powerful monarchic centre and its strong regalist tradition concerning treasure, permits for treasure hunters were of crucial importance. As early as 1324, Sir Robert Beaupel, a Devon knight, asked King Edward II for official permission to search for treasure in six barrows in Devonshire. A writ issued by the sheriff granted the request but we do not know whether Beaupel managed to find anything. When the Lords of the Privy Council learned about treasure hunts in Buckinghamshire in 1550, they did not outlaw them. Rather, they instructed the local Justices of the Peace to issue permits to treasure hunters. Of course, the permit holders carried the risk of their venture. If they failed and thus disappointed the people who had joined in their treasure hunts and had invested some money in them, they would be sent to the pillory. John Dee, the highly reputed magician, applied to William Cecil the Lord High Treasurer for a treasure-hunting permit in 1574. His application might have been a publicity stunt. The magician tried to impress the court with his self-confidence. He explained that he would find a gold or silver mine for the queen if she granted him the right of ownership over all buried treasures of the realm. He even offered to share his profits with Cecil. Nevertheless, the Lord High Treasurer rejected the magician's outrageous application. In 1587, Thomas Edwardes applied to the Privy Council for permission to seek treasure in Sussex and Kent. Apparently, his

application was taken sufficiently seriously to dispatch a representative of the Crown to supervise the treasure hunt. The request of a captive in the Tower of London who offered to drive away the demons in Skenfirth Castle and to unearth the treasure they guarded in return for his liberty was turned down two years later.⁶

The idea that monks had hidden their alleged riches in their monasteries at the time of the Reformation spawned treasure hunts in the ruins of priories and abbeys. Mary Midlemore, one of the maids of honour of Queen Anne, exploited her good standing at the court to get a permit to search for treasure in 1617. James I issued a licence under the Privy Seal, which allowed Midlemore and her 'Executors, Administrator, Deputies, Servants, Workmen or Agents' to dig for treasure in the abbeys of Bury St Edmunds, Ramsey, St Alban's and Glastonbury. The grantee would receive two-thirds of all finds, including books, and the remaining third would go to the Crown. As Midlemore died within a few months of receiving her grant, the treasure hunt probably never took place. In 1665, one Colonel Broughton requested a permit to hunt for treasure in Middlesex, Hampshire and Somerset. He got a grant for Middlesex. In 1669, Sir Richard Oakley received a royal privilege that granted him all treasures found in Middlesex between 1660 and 1669 plus a share in all treasures found there between 1669 and 1670. He had apparently already made some finds and wanted to make sure that nobody disputed his claim of ownership. In 1682, Richard Robins learned about 'a parcel of money hidden underground' in Edmonton, Middlesex, and promptly received authorization from the Treasury to search for it. However, there is no record of his success.⁷

Davey Ramsey, the clockmaker of James I, applied for permission to dig up treasures repeatedly. In 1628, he received a grant to search for treasure in the ruins of Skenfirth Castle. The rumours about the treasure buried there had obviously persisted. The Crown reserved to itself one sixth of the profit. The treasure hunt failed. In 1635, Ramsey received another permit to search this location. This time, the king reserved to himself a mere tenth of the benefits. Ramsey was the driving force behind the treasure hunt in Westminster Abbey in 1633 that we mentioned in Chapter 3. For this venture, he requested and received the permission of the abbey's dean, John Williams, later to become Archbishop of York. Williams allowed the clockmaker to search the abbey provided that he received a share of the expected find. It might well be that Williams, who was in a somewhat difficult position at that time because of a dispute with Archbishop Laud, was personally interested in or even in dire need of an additional income.⁸

Even Prince Rupert, the adventurous nephew of Charles I, acquired permission to search for treasure in 1680. He received the exclusive privilege to exploit all the treasure troves that could be found in Cocklom Hill in Staffordshire for three years. As the permit referred to treasure trove, it cannot be interpreted as a mining privilege even though the time limit, which one might expect in the grant of a colonial company, seems strangely out of place.⁹

Permits for treasure hunters were never unproblematic, even in cases where they might have been genuine. In 1519, Robert Tales from Stamford had to face charges at the court of the Bishop of Lincoln. He and his associates had removed a number of wayside crosses. The defendant insisted that he did not intend any blasphemy or heresy: he was looking for treasure and stone crosses were supposedly promising treasure sites. Tales claimed to have a royal permit for his treasure hunt. Nevertheless, the bishop's court banned him from meddling with any other wayside crosses.¹⁰

The permits for treasure hunters spawned a new type of crime. In 1521, Robert Curzon claimed that he had obtained a licence from King Henry VII that allowed him to look for treasure in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk. He delegated his licence to one of his servants and a certain William Smith, a yeoman from Suffolk. Together with various associates, they searched a number of locations in East Anglia. However, the most lucrative part of their business was apparently blackmail. Any unlicensed treasure hunt or even accidental finds, Smith and his accomplices argued, violated the monopoly on treasure troves that the king had allegedly granted them. They extorted money for sub licences. Eventually, the tricksters fell victim to another shady accusation: they were arrested for political libel.¹¹

The regalism of the English laws concerning treasure gave the monarchs not only the opportunity to issue grants to treasure hunters and to confiscate finds but also to order treasure hunts actively. King John Lackland had Roman ruins near Hexham, Northumberland, searched in 1201. The king's men did find marked stones and traces of metal – probably Roman artefacts – but nothing that the contemporaries regarded as a treasure. King John's interest was all too fleeting: later, some Roman hoards were discovered at the site in question. As early as 1237, Henry III gave orders to his brother Richard of Cornwall to seize the treasures reputedly found on the Isle of Wight and to dig up the barrows in Cornwall. Everything of value that was found in that way was to be handed over to the Crown. This royal order was at least a welcome pretext for Richard to join the uprising against Henry.¹²

On the Continent, government decisions concerning treasure trove varied greatly. The legal situation was often unclear and the authorities decided on an ad hoc basis whether they would allow treasure hunts and, if so, what percentage of the treasure they would take. The Cammeria della Sommaria, the royal court of Naples, allowed a treasure hunt in 1685. The permit required that the treasure seekers should carry the risk alone. They would get one third of the expected find. Another third would go to the owner of the land where the treasure was supposedly hidden. The fisc demanded the last third. Permission had been requested by people from the city's upper class. Otherwise, the court might have turned the applicants down. The court obviously wanted to keep the venture quiet. It did not inform the Inquisition.¹³ In 1789, a short and thus rather cryptic newspaper article mentioned that two Jesuits had offered to discover a treasure worth 5 million Scudi in Rome for the pope provided that they got 20 percent of the find. This might refer to an application for a permit to hunt for treasure.¹⁴ Similar arrangements were apparently made by the Vatican in 1826, although this time with a French treasure hunter.¹⁵ Rome would, of course, be a very likely spot to find hidden valuable antiques. However, given the anti-Catholic sentiment in large parts of the press in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and given the fact that treasure hunting was at best a questionable enterprise, we should treat news about treasure hunters with papal permits with caution.

The situation in the German lands was essentially not unlike that in England but it was rather more complicated. The emperor, the official sovereign of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, could and did grant treasure hunts in territories that were under the direct and exclusive control of his government, that is, Habsburg lands. In 1555, for example, the imperial government granted the right to search for treasure to a certain Wilhelm Rezer, reserving only 10 percent of the expected find for the emperor's notoriously empty coffers. Rezer had obtained the tiny principality of Neidlingen, which had previously been under the direct control of the emperor, but he evidently still felt that he needed the emperor's approval before he set out on his treasure hunt.¹⁶ A treasure hunter, probably a resourceful fraud, surprised the officials of Bludenz in 1690, when he showed them an official permit issued by the emperor that allowed him to search for treasure all over the West Habsburg territories.¹⁷ In *Faust*, Goethe parodied the permits for treasure seekers brilliantly: the emperor managed to save the Empire from bankruptcy. He introduced a new paper currency backed by buried treasure. The bearer of a bank note was not entitled to the

equivalent amount of gold bullion kept in some state bank but to one of the treasures hidden all over the Empire.

Given the decentralized or rather particularist character of the Empire, treasure hunters who wanted to apply for a permit in the German speaking lands contacted not the emperor but the government of the independent town or principality in whose territory the treasure happened to be buried. Generally speaking, as the German states did not have the strong regalist legal tradition of England and most of them did not have an effective administration, the governments did not try to confiscate treasures but were quite willing to cooperate with treasure hunters.¹⁸

What percentage of the find the authorities received varied greatly not only from principality to principality but from case to case. The Margraviate of Baden-Durlach had a rather sophisticated regulation. After 1716, permission to search for treasure was given provided that the treasure seekers gave 75 percent of their find to the fisc. Only small troves considered worth less than 10 florins should go to the finder who was, however, obliged to give one quarter to the poor box.¹⁹ In 1755, a private individual asked permission to dig up a treasure in the ruins of a castle in the landgraviate of Hessen-Kassel. The government argued that all treasure troves had to go to the fisc. However, it still allowed the treasure hunt and offered to pay all expenses that the applicant might incur. Thus, the government turned the private enterprise into an official assignment. The treasure hunt did not fulfil the government's expectations. When another treasure hunter asked permission to search the ruins again almost 50 years later, he was turned down. In 1769, the fisc of Hessen-Kassel demanded two thirds of an expected treasure before it allowed a dig. Two years later, a treasure hunter applying for a permit offered them half of the hoard he hoped to find.²⁰

At times, the authorities of German principalities did not include in the permits any regulation about the division of treasure. On the one hand, this could mean that the officials were simply not interested – they did not have faith in the success of the treasure hunt. On the other hand, if they did not say anything about the share that the fisc would claim, they could demand everything if the treasure hunter got lucky. In the eleven permits for treasure hunters from Württemberg, we find only one case that gave any specifics concerning the government's claim to the treasure. Significantly, the government demanded all of it from the start while the treasure hunter was to be rewarded at the prince's discretion.²¹ Let us take a closer look at the duchy of Württemberg with its particularly well-preserved source materials. In 11

out of 24 Württemberg cases, the treasure seekers tried to obtain the permission of the administration for their searches. Permission was asked for excavations on both private and fiscal land. The three cases in which it was withheld all concerned treasure that was supposedly hidden on private land. In 1717, permission was sought to continue excavating in a place where a hoard of ancient jewellery had been discovered accidentally some years before, because the site still seemed to be haunted by a ghost. The ducal government did not comply with the request, since the pieces that had been found there had proved to be worthless. The apparition was dismissed as a mere pretext in order to be allowed another search.²² In 1744, no permission was given because an exceptionally detailed description of both an apparition and of the expected treasure seemed too dubious.²³ In 1758, another petition was refused by the Protestant government as 'nonsensical': the petitioner had explicitly asked for permission to invite Franciscan friars into his house because they alone would be capable of delivering the ghosts that were supposedly guarding the treasure.²⁴

The duke's officials would have been hard pressed to explain on what legal basis the permits rested. Laws passed in 1597 and 1598 affirmed that the duke was the owner of all resources of the soil.²⁵ Obviously, the legislator had coal and ores in mind, but still these regulations might have served as a legal foundation for the prosecution of treasure hunting without ducal permission. Surprisingly enough, this never happened: treasure seeking was never regarded as a violation of the duke's right of ownership over everything hidden in the ground. Regalist rules concerning mining did not necessarily mean that the prince claimed regalist privileges concerning buried treasure. In 1711, when a treasure hunter at Göppingen declared that he did not know what kind of legal claim the state of Württemberg had to treasure trove, both the local authorities and the government accepted the statement without any comment.²⁶ During a trial against treasure seekers in the same year, the government explicitly stated that searching for treasure was by no means illegal.²⁷

It is sometimes difficult to tell whether the authorities merely licensed treasure hunts or whether they ordered them actively. Württemberg's dukes often played an active role in treasure hunting. Duke Friedrich's promotion of mining went hand in hand with his keen interest in alchemy and treasure seeking.²⁸ In 1606, Thomas Mayer, the former Bailiff of Eningen, offered not only to find buried treasure for the duke but also to pay for all the expenses of that enterprise.²⁹ Duke Friedrich gave him an official commission to search for treasure all over

Württemberg. Mayer started his treasure hunt at Achalm Castle near Reutlingen. The castellan was instructed to pay for the maintenance of Mayer and his assistants in advance. In the end, the costs amounted to a substantial 328 florins. The treasure hunters found a huge skull, thought to be that of a giant, which aroused a momentary interest at court, but no treasure. After three months of unsuccessful searching, Friedrich began to put Mayer under pressure. Finally, the treasure hunter committed suicide at Achalm Castle in October 1607. Only after several complaints was the duke prepared to pay back some of the money that the castellan had advanced for the excavation. In 1608, two of Mayer's former assistants were taken into custody after an attempt to break into the ducal castle at Neidlingen to steal a treasure allegedly buried here. The duke ordered the local authorities to refrain from an accusation in order to be able to drop the case without any fuss and to search the castle for treasure themselves. The interest in treasure seeking was by no means an idiosyncrasy of Duke Friedrich alone. When asked for permission by a private individual in 1683, Duke Friedrich Carl allowed secret treasure hunting expeditions in three different places. In 1711, an expert in treasure hunting tried to commend himself to his potential clients by claiming that he had already worked in the employ of the Duke of Württemberg.³⁰

Whereas the regalist tradition was strong in England, it was weak in most of the German lands. A number of jurists argued that all permits for treasure hunters were null and void for the simple reason that the princes did not have any legal claim to treasure troves. They could hardly give permission to take treasures if anybody was perfectly entitled to take them anyway.³¹

The Swiss confederation was officially part of the Empire until 1648. Nevertheless, the Swiss cantons were fiercely independent of the Empire – and of each other. The particularist structure allowed for ad hoc regulations concerning treasure hunts. In 1512, the city council of Basel answered burghers who had ask permission to dig up a treasure

because they search for this good and treasure at their own expense and their own risk and because the person on whose property and in whose house this treasure is buried has given his good will to it, our burghers shall well search this treasure and if they find it, they shall give one fourth to the authorities.

In 1544, the city council of Lucerne waived all the rights it might have had concerning treasure trove in an almost exasperated tone: the

applicant 'shall have the power to dig for treasure and if he finds anything it shall be his'.³²

It goes almost without saying that no permit for treasure hunters ever allowed magic. Some of them even excluded the use of magic explicitly.³³ Nevertheless, when the authorities became interested in the treasure, they could turn a blind eye to highly suspicious ventures. Again, Württemberg sources provide a good example. In 1712, Duke Eberhard Ludwig not only granted the request of an innkeeper to search for a treasure in a supposedly haunted ruin owned by the innkeeper. He also took a keen personal interest in the proceedings and accepted the landlord's offer to hand half of the treasure over to the fisc as soon as it had been discovered. Against the grain of Württemberg law and against the advice of the government, the duke allowed a professional treasure hunter who was known to use magic to be employed. This person was supposed to redeem a ghost.³⁴

Princes could compete for the services of treasure hunters. In 1530, Prince Elector Ludwig of the Palatinate asked the Count of Henneberg to send an expert treasure hunter to him who had already served his father. Ludwig wanted the affair to be kept secret. When the count answered that the treasure expert could not be found, Ludwig insisted that the count should recommend a suitable replacement.³⁵

Treasure hunters as conjurers and sacrilegists

What happened if the authorities learned about treasure hunts that had not been licensed and/or were based on magic? As we have seen, magic was part and parcel of treasure hunting. What punishments did treasure magicians and their associates face? Obviously, the penalty depended on the court's interpretation of treasure hunting and treasure magic in each case. Essentially, three different interpretations prevailed. The judges could see treasure magic as simple 'superstition', punishable, but essentially harmless. However, there was the second possibility that they would think that treasure magic was demonic and thus akin to witchcraft. Finally, the courts could treat treasure hunting as fraud.

A number of English cases provide good examples of treasure hunting being punished as folk magic. We have already mentioned some cases in chapters 3 and 4.³⁶ The Halifax treasure hunt failed because mist prevented the treasure seekers from getting to the place where the treasure was supposed to be hidden. Nevertheless, in preparation for the hunt, the group – especially the priests – had allegedly engaged in magic. The court charged them with conjuring demons. The culprits

did not try to defend themselves by claiming that they intended to deal with spirits other than demons. They did not even hint at the possibility that Oberion might be a fairy rather than a spirit of hell. The judges and the culprits belonged to the learned urban elite – many of the treasure hunters were priests. They knew that this defence would not be convincing as the Church tended to identify all spirits as demons. Maybe they even shared this view. Thus, the only defence they had was simply that they had not actually conjured the demons, even if they had evidently and admittedly planned to do just that. That the ecclesiastical court let the treasure hunters off with a comparatively mild punishment was for various reasons. Even though the demonological concept of witchcraft already existed in 1510, it had apparently little influence on York's ecclesiastical court. In addition, the treasure seekers had botched their adventure completely. The ruthless, even sacrilegious, determination to find the treasure was in marked contrast to the practical shortcomings of the group. When they finally went on the treasure hunt, they lost their way in the fog. The group split up and regrouped again, and some of the magical objects were lost in the confusion. They finally gave up before they even reached the place where the treasure was supposed to be. The utter ineptitude of the treasure seekers that prevented them from using all their magical equipment certainly helped them when they had to face court.³⁷

Rather moderate forms of punishment were common practice in southwest Germany throughout the early modern period. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, treasure hunting was punished in Lucerne with house arrest, exile, fines, or the pillory. At time, it was not punished at all.³⁸ A vagrant treasure magician who was arrested in the Habsburg town of Stockach near Lake Constance was simply expelled. The magic writings and drawings he carried with him were confiscated.³⁹ An apparently archaic form of punishment was imposed on some treasure seekers at Günzburg, a Habsburg town near Augsburg, in 1773. The delinquents had to kneel twice a day for an hour in the market place on three successive days. The group's leader had to hold up the magic implements that had been found on him; that is, magic writings, among them a prayer to St Christopher. He was also jailed for three days.⁴⁰

To return to the well-documented example of Württemberg, treasure hunting was never positively punished in the duchy before 1683. If the search had been started without official approval or if magic had been used, the treasure hunt was broken off and its participants were forced to pay the cost of the legal proceedings. Magical treasure hunting was regarded as benevolent magic without any pact with the devil.⁴¹ Later

on, people who were regarded as mere ‘fellow travellers’ or as mentally deficient got away with an exhortation. In other cases, the punishment actually meted out by the courts consisted of infamy, a fine of less than 50 florins, a prison sentence of up to a month or a period of forced labour. Only in exceptionally severe cases the culprits had to go to jail for 9 to 11 months. Vagrants engaging in magic were exiled from Württemberg. All magical items had to be destroyed.⁴² Corporal punishment was not imposed on treasure seekers.

One of the best-documented cases of treasure hunting in Germany became known as the Jena Christmas Eve tragedy. The case reveals some uncertainty concerning the offence. The episode also illustrates the conflicts that the authorities experienced when they were confronted simultaneously with a traditional belief in magic, demonology and the first stirrings of the Enlightenment. It became difficult to decide what had happened and how the state should react. However, the authorities absolutely had to take a stance. In 1715, a treasure hunt near Jena had led to the deaths of three men. A public discussion ensued that would eventually help to discredit magical treasure hunts. A first account of the happenings was published in the first weeks of 1716, an official statement by the government followed in March, and a little later the University of Leipzig published its expert opinion. However, the discussion continued.⁴³ As far as I know, no extensive account of this important treasure hunt has been published in recent years. A detailed narrative might be worthwhile.

The 24-year old student Johann Gotthard Weber had met the tailor Georg Heichler in Jena. Heichler told Weber that treasure was supposedly hidden in a vineyard that he owned. A peasant, Hans Friedrich Geßner, claimed he could unearth the treasure if he could get a magical book supposedly written by the great magician Dr Faust. Weber immediately told Heichler that he had just the book that was needed. The sources do not tell us whether Weber received any money, but he might have been a fraud who hoped to swindle Geßner. As we will see in detail in chapter 6, people with a modicum of education including literacy and a smattering of Latin, like country priests and students, worked occasionally as treasure magicians or rather treasure frauds. If that was the case, Weber might have been disappointed: Geßner turned out to be a treasure magician, too. There seems to have been a certain competition between the two. However, Geßner did not own a magical book, so he needed Weber – another example of the crucial importance of magical writings in treasure hunting. With Heichler and a certain

Anna Margaretha Nitzschkin as go-betweens, Weber met Geßner and his associate, the peasant Hans Zenner.

On the fourth Sunday of Advent, 1715, the decisive meeting of the trio took place in a pub near Jena. They discussed the respective benefits of magical roots that supposedly helped to find treasure and grimoires that might be employed for the same purpose. Geßner expressed his satisfaction that in Weber he had finally found someone who was capable of working with magical books. The student owned a handwritten book of spells, which could be secured with two locks and various pieces of lead with alchemistical signs on them. The treasure seekers discussed rumours about a spirit in the shape of a white woman who haunted Heichler's vineyard near Gallows Hill. Several people had seen the ghost and concluded that a treasure dating back to the Thirty Years War was hidden in the vineyard. Geßner proved to be extremely knowledgeable about the treasure: he had already been in contact with the spirit that guarded it. The spirit had allowed him to take a couple of coins he had fished out of a hidden barred vault with a bit of glue on a stick but it had warned him that it would kill him if he ever returned. Thus, the peasant needed Weber's expertise to placate the treasure's guardian. Geßner showed his associates the coins: they had five coats of arms on one side, each depicting an elephant, and on the other side there was an image of the whore of Babylon riding the beast of the Apocalypse with three crowned men in front of her and the numeral 7 indicating the seventh chapter of the Apocalypse where these portents of the antichrist were mentioned. One cannot help but wonder just how big these coins must have been to have such elaborate pictures on them. It is even more puzzling to envisage what potentate would ever adorn his coins with such thoroughly negative, even satanic, images. This account is based on statements Weber made later. It might be that he tried to minimize his own guilt by implying that Geßner had been in contact with demonic forces. It could also be that Geßner did own some old coins and the treasure hunters merely arrived at a very fanciful interpretation of their perhaps severely damage surfaces in a way that one might imagine pictures in the clouds. Geßner demanded proof of Weber's abilities as a treasure magician. The student obliged by claiming that he could identify a spirit in the shape of a young woman whom Heichler had allegedly seen: it was Nathael, a spirit subordinate to Och, the prince of the spirits in the sun. We would neither consider this very convincing proof nor accept the questionable identification of the spirits, which did not really explain whether they were demons, angels or spirits of nature.

Nevertheless, during this meeting, the three seem to have made up their minds to go hunting for treasure on Christmas Eve.

On that day, the treasure hunters discussed the conjuring of demons. Maybe they had second thoughts about abusing Christmas Eve for magical activities. However, sacred times were always magical times, too, and Christmas Eve was the first night of the Sacred Nights or twelve-tide, that is, the nights between Christmas and Epiphany, arguably the most magical period of the year. Weber and the two peasants even thought that they might get a Hecketaler, that is, a magically multiplying coin, in the process. Heichler had invited the trio into his house so that the incantation of the spirit could take place there. Geßner rejected this idea as he claimed that he needed an empty, isolated house, otherwise the spirit could fool them by assuming the outer appearance of one of the inhabitants who was not directly involved in the treasure hunt. Where exactly the conjuration took place was apparently not important: it did not have to be near the treasure. That the treasure hunters finally decided to call the spirits in a tiny hut in the vineyard of less than five square meters, owned by Heichler, had more to do with their desire for privacy, or rather secrecy, than with the fact that it was close to the treasure site.

At about 9 o'clock in the evening, on 24 December 1715, Weber and the two peasants went to the hut near Gallows Hill. The night was extremely cold. Heichler had had charcoal brought up to the hut but no oven as he did not want to draw any more attention to the treasure hunt. Weber and the two peasants decided to burn the charcoal in an old flower pot and opened the windows to keep the smoke out of the hut's single room. The student wrote the word *Tetragrammaton*, an equivalent of the name of God, on the door. They said a Paternoster, drew with a sword a magical circle around them and began with the ritual invocation of Och, who should send them Nathael in human form. Geßner and Weber said incantations, with the latter reading from his *Dr Faust* book. Later, the student claimed that at some point he could not read on. He became unconscious. When Heichler came to the hut in the vineyard almost 12 hours later, at 6 o'clock on Christmas Morning, he found Weber senseless and 'looking dreadful'. Both peasants were dead, their faces contorted. With the help of Anna Margaretha Nitzschkin, Heichler reached a friend of Weber's. With him, he went back to the vineyard. They found Weber conscious but numbed. Only then, accompanied by his lawyer, did Heichler inform the authorities. They had Weber brought into town into the Yellow Angel pub, where the landlord was supposed to look after him. Weber's friend took the magical book and gave it to his vicar.

As it grew dark quickly, three watchmen, Hans Georg Beyer, Christian Krempe and Nicol Schumann, were ordered to guard the dead bodies in the hut during the night. For the first couple of hours, the night-watchman Hans Wolf Starcke and the court's guard, a certain Strauß, had joined them, but they left at 1 o'clock. Beyer soon thought that he heard someone trying to get into the hut. Even fortified with schnapps, tobacco and a charcoal fire ignited with sulphur, the watchmen were very afraid of ghosts and demons. They even thought they saw a shadowy figure, about the size of a seven-year-old child, who opened the door, briefly saying: 'I do not have a stake in this anymore.' Otherwise, the guards kept the door shut and did not venture outside. However, they opened a window to let the smoke out. Someone who came to check on the watchmen very early in the morning found them very afraid. A few hours later, when others sent by the authorities came from Jena to relieve them of their duty, they found the three guards unconscious. Beyer died. The others could be woken but they were suffering from severely irritated skin.

The official doctor employed by the authorities, Dr Slevogt, and the Jena town physician, Dr Wedel, could not give a cause of death after a post mortem of the three dead bodies from the hut. They had only superficial injuries, like scratches on the chest and on the neck, and rather strange spots on their skin. Weber had some chilblains. The doctors explained that the charcoal sample that they had received was ordinary enough but they admitted that it might be not entirely pure and therefore might produce dangerous fumes. Even though the doctors demanded more time for a thorough examination, the prince decided against it: the dead peasants were quickly interred by the hangman on Gallows Hill as they had died while engaging in magical practices. Rumours about spirits haunting the corpses even in Jena's hospital might have hastened the prince's decision. The watchman received a Christian burial. Weber was interrogated by a number of clergymen.⁴⁴

The Jena tragedy provoked a scientific and scholarly debate. The public took a keen interest in the mysterious deaths and the treasure hunt. What exactly killed the two unfortunate treasure hunters and the guard? In folklore, invoking the devil was so dangerous because he could kill the hapless conjurer if he made the slightest mistake; for example, if he did not close the magic circle he drew on the ground. The Jena treasure hunt might have suggested that the folk tales that the educated elite derided as old wives tales were true after all.

On 2 March 1716, the government of Jena's prince, Duke Johann Wilhelm of Saxony-Eisenach, had an official report on the treasure affair

printed. The government explained that it took this rather unusual step in order to stop rumours and unfounded speculations about the Christmas Eve tragedy. Some people thought that the devil had killed the treasure hunters, some claimed that they had died of natural causes and still others speculated that the devil might have manipulated nature in order to kill the three hapless men. Radical rumours, the government declared, tended either towards 'atheism' on the one side or towards 'superstition' on the other, both of which were unacceptable. The government seemed to have made up its mind about the case: the two dead treasure hunters had lost not only their lives but also their souls. All treasure hunters should learn the lesson that the devil watched over treasures very like the dragon had watched over the golden fleece of Greek mythology.⁴⁵

The government published this rather clear statement four days before the theologians, the lawyers and the doctors of the University of Leipzig in Electoral Saxony gave their verdicts. Maybe Duke Johann Wilhelm did not want to be seen as being dependent on the advice of a university in a neighbouring principality. In the statement that the lecturers from Leipzig published together, they arrived at somewhat conflicting conclusions. According to the Leipzig Protestant theologians, the occurrences at Jena were further proof that the devil could influence the physical world: the marks on the bodies of the treasure hunters had been caused by the devil. The strange figure that the watchmen saw on the night after Christmas had indeed been a demon. Thus, the orthodox Protestants of the Leipzig Department of Theology concluded that the Jena treasure hunt was another warning from God addressed to all those who negated the existence of the devil. The expert opinion of the theologians refrained from openly calling for a witch trial but it did go so far as to imply that Heichler and Weber deserved capital punishment.

The lawyers were much more lenient: they suggested sending Weber into exile for life and Heichler for 10 years because of the pair's superstitious practices. Nitzschkin should simply pay the costs of her trial as she had not participated actively in the treasure hunt. The lawyers admitted that the three persons in the hut had been killed by the smoke of the coal fire but they were prepared to interpret these deaths as divine punishment for superstition. The doctors explained that the lethal mistake of the treasure hunters had been to burn coal in an insufficiently ventilated small room. The watchmen repeated that mistake. Their fear of spirits sealed their fate as they were too afraid to leave the hut and closed the door against any intruders. Another factor that had contributed to the horrible outcome of the treasure hunt was alcohol: the

three men could have saved themselves, the doctors claimed, had they not been drunk. The ghostly apparitions were mere dreams. The treasure hunters had provoked the wrath of God and the magicians had got their just deserts, but there was nothing supernatural about the deaths. Even though all three expert opinions agreed that the Jena treasure hunt had provoked God's wrath, the theologians' interpretation was at odds with those of the jurists and lawyers. It would be wrong to assume that there was already a significant gap between faith-based theology and other academic pursuits in Leipzig in 1716. The Protestant theologians took the opportunity to fight the radical standpoints of Christian Thomasius and Balthazar Bekker, who were opponents of the witch trials and had rejected the idea that demons could interfere with the material world. The Leipzig theologians quoted Bekker directly and claimed that his views had been discredited. Thomasius still taught at Halle University in Prussia, not too far away from Jena and Leipzig. He had originally worked in Leipzig but had been forced to leave the university there because of his unorthodox views. The Theology Department did not mention him in the expert opinion concerning the treasure hunt but evidently welcomed the opportunity to 'prove' him wrong. It would not allow for his radical scepticism concerning the power of demons, misreading this as atheism.

One author writing under the name Franciscus de Cordua used the Jena treasure hunt as the starting point for sweeping and aggressive polemics against popular religion, demonology, all kinds of magic and especially treasure lore.⁴⁶ Rational thought should teach anybody that there could be no huge treasures. No private person and no prince could afford simply to hide a large sum of money: it would not make economical sense. This was especially true in Germany, a poor country where virtually nobody could accumulate riches. People about to die would make some kind of will; they would certainly not simply bury their valuables.⁴⁷ All the magical implements and magical books that treasure hunters used had no effect. The existence of non-human treasure guardians was highly questionable: only uneducated people took them seriously. Elementals did not exist. The Bible did not clearly imply the existence of demons, and indeed their existence would be incompatible with the grace of God. Even if we might assume the existence of spirit beings, it was unclear how they could ever come into contact with humans as this would imply that the fundamental gap between two planes of existence could be bridged. De Cordua quoted Thomasius directly. As the author came perilously close to denying not only the power but also the very existence of the devil, he was probably

well-advised not to write under his real name. Thus, he concluded, the dead of Jena had simply suffocated in the coal and sulphur fumes when they were drunk. However, even this radical sceptic did in a way believe in the existence of ghosts. He explained that if someone was fixed upon a certain aspect of his life, that person's soul could stay on earth after death. It would remain in the vicinity of the object of his fixation. Thus, the soul of a soldier might haunt a battlefield, the soul of a miser a treasure site, and so on.⁴⁸

Even though the government responsible for handling the Jena affair had indirectly condemned the treasure hunt as demonic magic, it did not accuse the survivor of witchcraft. The great and very critical publicity that the case had received made such a harsh reaction difficult. The government felt that the case had received more than enough publicity. It did not want to provoke a public outcry with an execution for witchcraft or for sacrilege. The Leipzig lawyers had been content to condemn the treasure hunt as an extreme case of superstition, but superstition was no capital offence.

Another example speaks of a very different way of dealing with superstition. If a legal system focused on sacrilege, treasure hunters who often used ceremonial magic involving prayer-like invocations could face severe penalties. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Louis XIV of France had made sacrilege a capital crime in 1682.

A remarkable series of trials against treasure hunters took place in Dijon and Lyon between 1742 and 1745. Practically all we know so far about these investigations is based on a study by Henri Beaune, a lawyer and legal historian from Lyon who published extracts of the trial records together with his rather confused and fanciful interpretation in 1868. According to him, a huge investigation in which secular and ecclesiastical authorities cooperated unearthed a conspiracy of equally impressive proportions. At the centre of this conspiracy was, if we accept Beaune's suggestions, in effect a Black Mass. Unfortunately, Henry Lea included a very short and somewhat misleading reference to Beaune in his lucky bag of snippets from early witchcraft research, which was published as *Materials toward a History of Witchcraft*. Lea's text became rather influential and most of the later accounts of the Lyon trials seem to be based on it.⁴⁹ Lea concentrated on the execution of the priest Bertrand Guillaudot for sacrilege in 1743. He obscured the fact that Guillaudot's trial can only be understood if it is seen in the wider context of investigations that started a year earlier with the arrest of a rogue altar boy. Benoît Michalet, at the time of his arrest 19 years old, was a student and a chorister at St Paul's in Lyon where he studied Latin and philosophy in preparation

for joining a school of divinity. Contrary to the expectations of his family, Michalet did not take holy orders. The youth used his education to earn a living as an itinerant magician. He promised a group of people to invoke an angel or a demon. He and his *compagnon de bouteille* Claude-François Charbonnier, a former physician from Orléans who worked as a tradesman, explained their permanent failure to come into contact with spirit beings by the fact that only a priest could perform the necessary rituals. Michalet, who now probably regretted that he had cut his ecclesiastical career short, tried at first unsuccessfully to recruit a priest. He ended up having to flee Lyon because the clergyman went to the police. Michalet claimed that he later managed to find priests willing to cooperate. Nevertheless, he was alone and trying to perform an incantation when the authorities, who had heard about strange rituals on a crossroads in the countryside, had him arrested. Michalet seems to have turned informer willingly. Without torture, he named the members of his gang of treasure hunters. The authorities investigated them as sacrilegists.

The outcome of these investigations was surprising. In December 1742, those whom Michalet had denounced were acquitted. Instead, a bailiff of Lyon was arrested. The court decided to interrogate Michalet again, this time using torture. Beaune thought that the tribunal did not take the case seriously enough and had failed to punish the guilty. He went so far as to absurdly speculate about the beneficial effects a less scrupulous use of torture might have had. The available information allows a totally different interpretation. In the history of the witch trials, we find children and adolescents as accusers time and again. With a childish disregard for others, they started large witch-hunts with mindless lies. Overeager law enforcement agencies believed these young people readily or even pressurized them to name ever more witches. The Salem witch-hunt is only the best-known example of that pattern; children or adolescents as accusers were behind hundreds of witch trials across Europe.⁵⁰ Of course, Michalet was not some babbling child but a young would-be magician or trickster. However, we should not accept his accusations too readily at face value. The decision of the court could mean that there was insufficient hard evidence against those denounced by Michalet. Maybe the arrested bailiff had to face charges of miscarriages of justice in this context. The fact that even with court officials present Michalet was hysterically afraid of confrontations with his would-be accomplices and that later on in jail he wrote a lengthy confession with his own blood does nothing to enhance his credibility.

The investigations against treasure hunters in Lyon seemed to have come to an end. The arrest of the priest of the village of Gergy near Chalon-sur-Saône, Guillaudot, changed the situation completely. Guillaudot had earlier been suspended from holy orders and banished from France for an unknown offence. After he had returned to his home region under a false (aristocratic) name, he acquired a number of magical books. On what accusation or on what evidence Guillaudot was arrested is unclear – Michalet had not mentioned him during the first investigations against his group of treasure seekers. An ecclesiastical court found the priest guilty of falsifying documents, using a false name, celebrating the mass without proper authority, theft of liturgical vestments from a church, and the production and possession of magical writings. There were apparently rumours that he had invoked demons in order to find treasure. However, the verdict did not mention this explicitly, probably because Guillaudot did not confess and the court considered the evidence insufficient. The court of the Archbishop of Lyon sentenced Guillaudot to lifelong imprisonment. The secular tribunal of the *baillage* of Chalon came to the conclusion that he was doubtlessly and unconditionally guilty of forgery, theft and sortilege. It sentenced him to death. The Court of Appeals, the *Parlement* of Burgundy, confirmed the verdict. Guillaudot was burned alive in Dijon in April 1743.

The legality of this exceedingly harsh punishment is questionable. In France, Louis XIV's law against magic and sacrilege of 1682 had provided a new and firm legal basis for trials against sacrilegists. As the law had made the sacrilegious abuse of sacred objects and prayers a capital crime, many magicians, especially treasure hunters lived dangerously. In 1690, a priest who had been paid to say unorthodox prayers in order to find treasure was sent into exile for 15 years by the court of Artois. Eleven years later, the *parlement* of Paris dealt with a priest who had worked as a treasure magician and his accomplices. The priest had allegedly made a pact with the devil: he tried to invoke a demon in a cave in order to make him bring a huge sum each month. The priest was burned alive at the stake and the other treasure hunters were sent to the galleys.⁵¹ Thus, Guillaudot's execution was not without parallel. Nevertheless, the 1682 act had reserved the ultimate decision in such cases to the monarch. Therefore, the *Parlement* of Burgundy, which had apparently not informed Louis XV, was arguably not competent to give a final verdict.

Immediately before his death, Guillaudot confessed that he had tried to invoke a demon and that he had belonged to an organization of treasure seekers. He informed on all his accomplices. He claimed that

individuals belonged to his group who had already been arrested – and acquitted – during the investigations against Michalet. It seemed that the accusations by Michalet who was still in prison had been proven correct in the most spectacular way. The authorities began to take him seriously again. A major manhunt started that would last 15 months. Some 120 witnesses were interviewed. Charges were brought against 6 women and 23 men, including the 9 persons who had been acquitted after the Michalet trial in 1742. Torture was used. Defence attorneys or appeals were not admitted. Promptly, a horrific story about a huge conspiracy emerged. One cannot help but think about the Michalet/Guillaudot investigations as a late witch-hunt.

Guillaudot had supposedly agreed to conjure demons for a group of treasure hunters organized by the silk worker Jannin and the potter Feroussat. According to the testimony of the defendants, the priest immediately claimed leadership of the group for himself. The other treasure hunters not only paid him some money in advance but also accepted that he would divide the treasure among the group's members. Maybe the suspects thought it best to present a person who had already suffered capital punishment as their leader. Guillaudot allegedly performed secretly a number of rituals for the treasure hunters in private homes, in various places in the countryside, in a ruined castle near Lyon and even in the famous chapel of Notre-Dame de Limon. In order to help the treasure hunt, a veritable industry of magic supposedly came into existence. Ever more people joined the treasure seekers and contributed whatever they could to help the group effort: a number of priests assisted Guillaudot directly, affluent individuals bought magical objects for him, others opened their houses to meetings of treasure hunters, still others gathered magical plants, a merchant gave rare herbs used for fumigation, the poor widow of a tenant farmer gave her last chicken – a magical black one – and those who could afford nothing else gave their blood as it was needed for strange concoctions and for writing contracts with demons. There were even rumours about an unborn child being dedicated to the devil. In the course of his rituals, Guillaudot not only stole liturgical vestments from a church but also consecrated a host to ward off demons and suspicious authorities.

If we accept these accounts more or less as reality, we can easily interpret them as extensive but essentially rather typical treasure hunters' magic. Beaune's rendering of this account is extremely misleading. He understood the ritual invocation of demons that we are familiar with from earlier trials against treasure seekers all too readily as a Black Mass.

With the Marquis de Sade and Charles Beaudelaire, and the obscure *Affaire des Poisons* in the background, he was probably willing to see as a Satanic cult what might have simply been a blatant abuse of liturgy, that is, sacrilege. However, it is rather questionable whether the outcome of the investigations was compatible with reality at all. Given the obvious structural similarities of the trial proceedings to witch trials, we cannot – on the basis of the sources available so far – be sure. It seems to be most likely that some kind of treasure hunt at least involving Michalet and probably Guillaudot did take place and that the later developments, including the hysterical confession of the latter, blew the affair out of all proportion, threatening the reputations and indeed the physical existence of innocent people. The affair was a trial against treasure hunters with all the structural elements of a witch-hunt.

The trials ended in February 1745. The priest Louis Debaraz, said to have been an associate of Guillaudot, was sentenced to be burned alive. Jannin and Feroussat, who had supposedly hired Guillaudot, the priest Carat and a certain Lambert were to be hanged and their dead bodies burned. The court mitigated the sentence for the clerics and Lambert to be burned in effigy. Michalet and Charbonnier were branded, they had to pay fines, and were sent to the galleys for 9 years. One of their alleged accomplices had to go to the galley for 9 years too, and two others for life. Two women were exiled. Several other culprits received shaming punishments and/or had to pay very stiff fines. Among them was the bailiff, but the sources do not reveal what exactly he had been accused of. Finally, 11 suspects were acquitted. The verdicts were severe but they were measured, and in some cases they were not as severe as they could have been. Again, we get the impression that the court did not feel too confident about its own proceedings.

The Michalet/Guillaudot trials had elements of witch-trials: the authorities investigated against an organized group that resembled a sect, the court relied on a highly questionable witness, the suspects were tortured and the possibilities of the defence were strictly limited. Other French treasure seekers of roughly the same time were treated more leniently.⁵² However, in strictly legal terms the Michalet/Guillaudot case was no witch trial. The sentences were based on the 1682 law that punished sacrilege, not witchcraft. Central elements of witchcraft did not play any role in the investigations: the pact and the Witches' Sabbath were at best hinted at; the magical flight, the sexual intercourse with demons and – what is most important – magic that caused harm were not even mentioned. In spite of the structural similarities, the Lyon trials were strictly speaking no witch trials.

Treasure hunters as witches?

Only very few treasure hunters were ever executed for witchcraft. A certain Thomas Heather, a yeoman from Hoddeson, Hertfordshire, was accused of witchcraft because he had tried to invoke spirits that were supposed to help him find treasure. He was pardoned but failed to learn his lesson: two years later, in 1575, he was charged with the same crime. He was sentenced to death but escaped. Robert Wallys from Essex accused at the same time was found not guilty. Charges of demonism and treasure hunting were brought against one William Bate in 1591 but he was pardoned.⁵³ At times, treasure hunts did spark witchcraft investigations, on the Continent, too. The supreme court of France confirmed death sentences against ten alleged witches who had engaged in treasure hunting in the first ten of the seventeenth century. However, until the middle of the eighteenth century, very few French treasure hunters received the death penalty.⁵⁴ In 1677, five treasure hunters were executed for invoking demons in Bavarian Neustadt.⁵⁵ We have already discussed some British witch trials that referred to fairies as treasure guardians. If the court regarded the fairies as demons, contact with them could easily be seen as the witches' pact with the devil. The treasure hunters who claimed that they could talk to the fairies had to face charges. Given the emphasis that especially the Witchcraft Act of 1604 had put on contact with demons, traditional treasure narratives came perilously close to witchcraft. The more interested a criminal court was in dealing with spirit beings, the more likely the treasure hunters were to end up as defendants in a witch trial. However, even authors who accepted the demonological doctrine of witchcraft tried to differentiate here. Johannes Prätorius, a rather uncritical 'journalistic' author of the seventeenth century who dabbled in demonology, explained that all spirits that guarded treasure were demons. However, they were a kind of demon that did not make pacts with witches.⁵⁶ The treasure hunt as such did not raise suspicions of witchcraft. The victims of witch trials had usually engaged in lengthy conflicts with their fellow villagers before any suspicion arose and charges were brought. Rumours about contact with spirit beings could trigger a witch trial against someone who had lost the trust of the community long before.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, suspected witches from western Austria attempted to defend themselves by telling the judge that they used the Corona Prayer, that is, that they had engaged in treasure hunting. Here, the treasure hunt did not generate suspicions of witchcraft but was supposed to help to dispel them.⁵⁷ During the

witch trial against Michael Pusper, which we discussed at length in Chapter 4, the culprit admitted that he had tried to get a *Geldmännchen* but insisted that this was no witchcraft.⁵⁸ Had the defendants known or expected the judges to regard treasure magic as witchcraft, their arguments would have made no sense.

We need to elaborate on that most curious point. Why did most courts fail to punish treasure hunters as witches even though they obviously used magic and even tried to invoke demons? It is very peculiar that not only in trials against treasure hunters but also in the narratives about treasures in European folklore, witches are conspicuously absent. All kinds of spirits and a huge arsenal of magical items figure in the trial records of treasure hunters as well as in treasure lore, but witches and witchcraft play next to no role. Was treasure magic truly popular magic and the belief in witchcraft only a pale invention of an elite of theologians and lawyers with no roots in everyday culture? It would be wrong to argue that the witches were not part of popular culture. It is true that learned theologians and jurists described witchcraft in detail, 'proved' the existence of witches using a variety of learned texts and trial records, and created norms for witch trials. However, the witchcraft concept drew from a number of older ideas that had been well-known on a popular level. In addition, sermons as well as the persecutions themselves saw to it that the populace of large parts of Europe were very familiar with the concept of witchcraft. So why did witch lore, certainly the most tangible manifestation of a belief in magic in early modern Europe, play hardly any role in treasure narratives? There were two reasons for this: one was to do with learned demonology and the other with the popular witchcraft imagination in the time of the persecutions.

Treasure hunting, very like other forms of folk magic, such as simple charms against common ailments or the host of practices supposed to protect crops and livestock, was never seen as a typical activity of witches. Learned demonology was not really interested in the treasure hunt, even though it was clearly a magical activity. Of course, demonological hardliners condemned all kinds of magic as demonic – to them there was no real difference between for example, common soothsaying and fully fledged malevolent magic that gangs of witches supposedly used in order to destroy the crops of a whole region. In theory, all magic was based on an explicit or an implicit pact with the devil. Demonological hardliners argued that the mere attempts to use magic instituted per se an implicit pact. However, only a small minority of Europe's legislators and judges adopted this point of view – it always remained alien to the populace at large.

Even theologians who identified magic with demonism were reluctant to clamour for the persecution and rigorous punishment – in the fashion of a full-blown witch-hunt – of all those who had ever used magic. Martin Luther helped to set the tone of that debate by addressing treasure magic directly. He explained that treasure hunters violated the First Commandment of the Decalogue. However, he saw treasure seeking on the same level as simple divination and the use of protective amulets. These were forms of magic that a great number of people practised in the early modern period. They were sinful and punishable, but Luther did not explicitly identify them with witchcraft.⁵⁹ This was more or less the line that most other early modern theologians and demonologists took when they deigned to discuss treasure lore.⁶⁰ Even authors who condemned all magic as demonic admitted that treasure hunters had not learned their craft from the devil – as the witches supposedly had – and that they were not in immediate contact with him.⁶¹

A striking episode might illustrate the point. Pierre LeBrun, a canon of Grenoble in the late seventeenth century, was the father confessor of the virgin Olliva, a renowned female dowser who used the divining rod to find holy relics among other human remains. When LeBrun explained that the divining rod was an instrument of the devil, Olliva was very upset. He suggested a test: Olliva should ask God that the rod should never move again in her hands if dowsing was demonic magic. LeBrun gave her the sacrament after that. And indeed, an experiment staged on 23 August 1689 proved LeBrun right: Olliva was unable to find hidden pieces of metal in a building and in a garden – her rod did not move anymore. LeBrun, who documented this uplifting and instructive story, was no witch-hunting hardliner. He declared that Olliva had not sinned because she had not known that dowsing was the devil's work. He believed that she was pure in faith. Olliva's prayer, which had given ample testimony of her good intentions, had driven the devil away, even if God had not directly intervened during the experiment.⁶² LeBrun's argument was prudent and cautious. He did not claim a direct divine intervention, which might have smacked of a called-for miracle similar to an ordeal that would have been highly questionable in theological terms. He certainly got his message across that treasure hunting with the divining rod was demonic and should be forbidden, but he did not accuse anyone of witchcraft.

It comes as no surprise that in the witchcraft doctrine proper, treasure featured only very rarely. Demonologists developed hardly any interest in treasure magic. Jean Bodin and Martin Delrio, two prominent demonologists, dealt briefly with treasure hunting. According to

Bodin, the devil knew all hidden treasures. One of the basic principles of demonology that also helped to shape the witchcraft doctrine was that the devil was far from being free. For everything he wanted to do, he needed God's permission. God did not allow the devil to use hidden treasures to reward his disciples, the witches, by giving them riches. Thus, the devil would lure misguided individuals into treasure hunting and treasure magic but he would see to the treasure seekers ultimate failure. Paulo Grillando, a fifteenth-century Florentine jurist and arguably the most underestimated author of the witchcraft doctrine, had already made that point.⁶³ Bodin narrated no fewer than six treasure tales to bolster his argument. He claimed to know three unsuccessful treasure seekers personally.⁶⁴ Delrio largely agreed with Bodin. He confirmed that Satan knew where to find treasure. Indeed, the devil used the promise of wealth to lure people into his snares. However, the devil's promises were, of course, empty. As the devil's hatred of all creation included his own followers, he was not really interested in helping witches to obtain money and a comfortable life. Delrio explicitly based his argument on his practical experience of witch trials: as a rule, the culprits were poor.⁶⁵

Many demonologists shared Delrio's views on the social position of the victims of witch trials.⁶⁶ These rather general remarks about witches' alleged poverty were strangely at odds with the fact that demonologists kept providing examples of rich and influential witches, some of whom were male. The *norma normans non normata* (the norm of norms that cannot be normed), the fundamental and most authoritative source that demonologists based their writings on, was neither the Bible nor the works of the Church Fathers – it was the persecution itself. The trial records and reports on the witch-hunts – the information they gathered from judges and accusers – was the most important source for demonologists. They used their theological expert knowledge to make sense of the 'facts' they had learned from the persecutions. All major demonologists wrote their works during or shortly after a local or regional wave of witch trials. They commented upon them; they did not start them. Of course, the demonological doctrine helped to foster witch hunts because it spread ideas about witchcraft and justified the persecutions. However, the demonologists accepted the practical persecutions and the 'evidence' gathered by the courts as their most important guidelines. This is why the demonologists' arguments often seem rather strange and tortuous. They had to make sense of the 'facts' of the persecution, and they freely selected and adopted the legal and theological traditions to suit these 'facts'. The demonologists' arguments were essentially inductive, not deductive.

In the trials, the demonologists did indeed encounter mostly people from the lower and lower middle classes as defendants. The persecutions suggested that witches were not rich. However, there were exceptions. These exceptions figured prominently in demonological writings. We do find rich witches in the trial documents and thus in the demonological treatises, too. The demonologists accepted the rule as well as the exception from the rule as they encountered them in the records of witch trials. Most witches were poor (and female), but some were affluent and powerful (and male). Demonology was not only never critical of the witch hunts in general, it was even uncritical of the details of the witch trials. It accepted not only the general ideas about witchcraft and the verdicts, but also the selection of suspects and the reasons for suspicion.

Treasure hunters played hardly any role in witch hunts. So-called witches, as a rule, did not engage in treasure seeking. On the local level, the alleged magical crimes of witchcraft and the magical crime of treasure hunting did not overlap. This is why the demonologists, who based their arguments on their experience of persecutions, had almost nothing to say about treasure.

Why did the courts distinguish between witchcraft and treasure hunting? Why do we find in a number of regions that the populace had a marked interest in eradicating so-called witches but no enthusiasm for the persecution of treasure hunters? Why did the peasants, townspeople and judges of the local courts of rural early modern Europe not identify treasure hunting – the obvious magic – with witchcraft? At first glance, the answer to this problem seems to be obvious. Witches supposedly killed and maimed, they made people ill, they damaged the harvest and they threatened livestock. Treasure hunters did nothing of that kind. As we have already said in chapter 4, theirs was a harmless magic. On the popular level, the people of early modern Europe distinguished between witchcraft and other kinds of magic. The magic of treasure hunters could hardly be seen as witchcraft. Treasure hunters threatened or hurt nobody. They were not the servants of demons but tried to control them if they dealt with the spirits of hell at all. Of course, a demonologist would have claimed that any contact with demons implied an implicit pact with the devil, but demonologists did not run the courts of Europe. Witches were not after riches. To be sure, contrary to the demonological stereotype of the witch as a poor woman, some affluent men were accused of witchcraft. However, they were no treasure hunters. Their wealth was not explained by the discovery of treasure. The source of their affluence was all too obvious: rich (male) witches were people who had made a fortune by aggressive economic behaviour,

often in connection with a political career. They were not said to be witches because they were rich but because they were combative.⁶⁷

However, this explanation does not really solve the problem. We have to bear in mind that the victims of the witch trials did not really use magic, or at least not the destructive demonic magic that they were accused of. Thus, the fact that witchcraft was quite different from treasure magic does not answer the question of why treasure hunters were as a rule not suspected as witches. Why did the magic – the conjuration of spirit beings that treasure seekers were clearly guilty of – not suggest to contemporaries that treasure magicians could be witches? To solve this problem, we must look at the genesis of witchcraft suspicions and concrete witch trials. Demonology was never enough to start a witch trial. The agents of the persecutions on the village or small town level, most of them common peasants or townspeople and unlearned judges, needed clues when they looked for witches: These disciples of the devil were certainly not the people whom the community regarded as friendly and reliable. They were misfits of some, indeed of any kind. During intensive persecutions, everyone who displayed behaviour that was regarded as antisocial, overtly aggressive or in any way hostile could be accused of witchcraft. The – real or perceived – aggressiveness of witchcraft suspects mattered, whether it took the form of a lengthy family quarrel, a bitter conflict between neighbours, ruthless careerism or even outright criminal behaviour. Whether or not somebody dabbled in magic played hardly any role. A host of folk magicians who were not accused of witchcraft in early modern Europe proves this. As a matter of fact, some courts even admitted soothsayers as witnesses of the prosecution as they could identify witches by magical means. Those few village magicians who did end up as the defendants in a witch trial had often alienated the community in some way that was only indirectly related to the fact that they used magic.⁶⁸

The sources do not suggest that treasure hunters were, or were regarded as, overtly aggressive. We do not see the long history of bitter conflict in their biographies that was so typical of the victims of witch trials. Most importantly, treasure hunting was a largely conflict-free way to make money. Treasure hunters did not compete with their fellow villagers for money. In contrast to peasants who might quarrel over pieces of land or access to the market or to rival merchants or artisans who ignored guild rules against competition treasure hunters did not threaten the livelihood of their neighbours. The treasure hunter's quest for wealth had per se no influence on the household economies of his fellow villagers. The very fact that the treasure hunter tried to

obtain money from outside the community – from the realm of spirits – demonstrated clearly that he did not want to engage in competition, let alone to harm his neighbours. In this respect, treasure hunters were the very opposite of witches – they were magicians who tried to avoid conflict.

The decline of witch-hunts in the second half of the seventeenth century weakened demonology considerably. Bekker's and Thomasius' enlightened denunciation of the devil as a pure spirit without power over the visible world and of magic as just as ineffective served to open the door for new arguments. In 1718, the scientist and apothecary Johann Georg Schmidt published his *Gestriegelte Rockenphilosophie* ('The Philosophy of the Skirt (i.e. Women) Beaten'), in which he reviewed folk belief in an almost encyclopaedic form only to submit it to severe criticism based on the so-called Enlightenment. Schmidt's self-serving polemics were not critical of treasure seeking per se. Rather, he accepted it as a potentially profitable venture. Of course, Schmidt rejected every form of treasure magic. He knew about the legal difficulties with treasure troves. However, he stressed that the real danger of treasure lurked somewhere else: the treasure was demonic not because it was haunted by demons but because it was devilish temptation. The treasure was mammon in its worst form. Whether it had been actively searched for or whether it had been found accidentally, it tempted men into succumbing to the deathly sin of avarice.⁶⁹ The devil had been reduced from a powerful magical agent with a host of murderous disciples to the voice of temptation whispering in one's own head. Only in this form could he still 'use' the treasure as an instrument of seduction.

Treasure hunters as frauds

In addition to superstition and witchcraft, fraud was the third category that the authorities used to punish treasure hunting. Treasure seeking and especially treasure magic could be seen as a confidence trick. Generally speaking, all three interpretations of treasure magic could exist side by side.

Among the Halifax treasure hunters who had to face court in 1510 was John Steward. He was a cleric, a teacher and an expert magician who led the treasure hunt. When he had to answer the charges brought against him, he coolly admitted that he was a fraud. He explained that he did not take treasure seriously. Steward told the judge that a precious magical book he supposedly owned was in reality a book on astronomy. He used it to fool his less educated customers.⁷⁰ An English female treasure

magician punished for fraud did not fare too well. The Quarter Session at Devizes in Wiltshire dealt with the case of Elizabeth Powell in March 1692. Powell was a vagrant. She had offered her services as a fortune-teller and treasure hunter. The court sentence had her 'corrected' by putting her to hard labour.⁷¹ It did not have recourse to the Elizabethan law against magic so it seems to have regarded Powell as a fraud.

We have already mentioned the numerous conmen who, having claimed that they needed money to lure a treasure out of the ground or to pay magical objects, fled with the money. Arguably, one of the most successful fraudulent treasure magicians of that kind was Franz Peter Hagspiel who haunted the shores of Lake Constance. At least between 1789 and 1796, he made his living as a professional treasure fraud. Mostly in the company of his accomplice, a (genuine) priest, Hagspiel wandered from village to village and offered his services as a wizard.⁷² He always tried to gather a group of people interested in a treasure. He staged a convincing 'séance' and claimed to need money to fulfil the demands of the ghost, such as giving a sizeable sum to the poor. Of course, the tricksters fled with the money. Hagspiel was soon wanted for fraud in a number of principalities.

Whenever the Württemberg authorities had reason to believe that an individual pretending to be an expert in treasure seeking took part in excavations only to swindle the other participants out of their money, they tried him for fraud. At times, indictment for fraud was the easy way out for the authorities. In 1770, for example, the officials of the duchy had to deal with a group of treasure hunters who claimed to be in constant contact with ghosts. Over the course of some months, an elaborate narrative about haunting and hidden treasures developed that was heavily charged with religious overtones. We will deal with this case in Chapter 6 in detail. Suffice it to say here that the 1770 treasure hunters could have been charged with embezzlement and libel, but also with superstition, witchcraft, apostasy, heresy and blasphemy. When the government finally decided to step in, it cut through the tangle of offences and imaginations by simply accusing the ringleaders of fraud.⁷³

Treasure hunting as a confidence trick fascinated the early modern audience almost as much as 'real' treasure hunting. It became itself the stuff of popular narratives and legends or, rather, of anti-legends.

Both Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610) and Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1602) drew on sensational news about confidence games that had involved a belief in treasures and fairies: a news-sheet printed in 1595 in London told about the exploits of the fraud Judith Philips. Philips came from the West Country. She had tramped to

Upsborne near Winchester, where she married a poor man named Pope. Philips claimed she could see a certain sign on the forehead of an affluent man and his wife who lived in a village in the vicinity. This sign, she explained to them, meant that they were very fortunate. They would find a treasure hidden under a hollow holly tree in their garden. When the husband undertook a 'test dig', he unearthed a couple of coins that Philips had hidden there. The fraud claimed to be a soothsayer. She explained to the awed couple that they had to go through a series of pseudo-magical rituals in order to call upon the queen of the fairies who had the power to give them the treasure. The trickster even presented herself disguised as the queen of the fairies 'in a fair white smock... with a thing on her head all white and a stick in her hand... using some dalliances, as old wives say, spirits with night spellles do'. Philips' made-up rituals subjected the couple to some embarrassment – they had to stay out in the cold to wait for the fairies to come – and gave her the chance to escape not only with a considerable honorarium of £14 but with even more money and a mass of costly linen that she stole from the house. Later on in London, Philips and two male vagabond accomplices tried to cheat the rich widow of a tripe seller out of her money. The accomplices made noise in the widow's house during the night. Philips approached her and explained: 'your husband in his life hid about your house great store of treasure for which cause there are sprites now that haunt your house'. The trickster made the widow put a number of jewels in a bag, which she quickly took. The idea was probably that the jewels could help to 'attract' the treasure. Philips claimed that she would try to establish contact with the queen of the fairies. Both injured parties refrained from immediately creating a hue and cry. They were less concerned about their possessions than about losing face in their community when it became known that they had been fooled. Nevertheless, Philips was caught and confessed. The court took her not for a magician but purely and simply for a fraud. They condemned the woman for 'cosonage' that is, a confidence game, and had her whipped through the city in February 1595.⁷⁴

We learn about a similar but even more elaborate scam in 1613. A couple of frauds, Alice and John West, 'falsely called the King and Queene of Fayries', supposedly swindled a Thomas Moore and his wife out of the very high sum of £40. Moore at least got a marvellous show for his money: he was led into a vault, and there people presented themselves in fanciful attire as the king and queen of the fairies together with their court of elves and goblins. They showed him a great number of bags labelled 'This is for Thomas Moore' and 'This is for his wife'.

This treasure reputedly totalled to the fantastic sum of 'seventeen hundred thousand pound'. The Moores, who already thought themselves rich, even bought a number of empty vessels to store all their money. The news story about West resembled that about Philips in many ways, with similar tricks in both accounts. The author of the later news-sheet referred to Philips' exploits directly. However, in contrast to the news story about Philips, that about Alice West suggested that she was not simply a con artist but a witch: some of her victims had believed her because she had put a spell on them.⁷⁵

It would be difficult, and probably fruitless, to try to decide what Philips and West really did and what was fanciful fiction designed to entertain the audience.⁷⁶ The stories did claim credibility. We might assume that the Elizabethan audience accepted the main features of these narratives as true or at least credible, but did not take the more colourful details of Philips' and West's tricks at face value. The stories were meant to entertain rather than to warn against conmen. On a more abstract level, these sources do not even reveal whether or not the audience believed in fairies. They did not criticize fairy beliefs in general but rather ridiculed people who were too confident about their chances to come into contact with these spirits. In any case, it should be obvious that the author expected his audience to see through the frauds' schemes and to be sceptical concerning hidden treasures and communications from fairies.

Stories about fraudulent treasure magicians appealed to the worldview of the Enlightenment. In 1788, Rudolph Zacharias Becker, a German teacher, publisher and member of the secret order of the Illuminati, wrote an immensely successful book for peasants that was supposed to spread the Enlightenment among the rural population. Here he told a parody of a treasure tale, as follows. Two brothers wished to go treasure hunting. A foreign huntsman told them that treasure was buried in their own backyard. He offered to help them dig it up provided that they gave him offerings to placate the spirit who guarded the hoard: 7 florins, 7 talers, 7 groschens (the taler and groschen were German coins), 7 pence, 7 eggs and a black cock. Black cocks were probably in short supply, so the magician could not ask for seven of them. After some lengthy mumbo-jumbo, they did find a chest buried in the garden. The magician asked the brothers to put the offerings on the chest and to stay there if they had a clear conscience, otherwise they should leave because the spirit would kill them. Of course, the brothers left. When they returned, the magician had fled with the money and the supposed treasure chest was found to contain nothing but stones. In true

Enlightenment fashion, the author's persona, Wilhelm Denker (literal translation 'Wilhelm Thinker'), explained that the peasant's treasure was hidden in the field, the best offering was manure and the art of finding treasure was good agriculture.⁷⁷ Aside from this rather unimaginative metaphor, the tale exploited and twisted older treasure tales adroitly. That the magician was said to be a hunter might play on the traditional imagery of the demonic huntsman or the devil as a hunter. Whatever his masquerade, the magician in this tale was clearly a fraud. He used the magical number seven simply to cheat some money out of the would-be treasure hunters. The old notion of the treasure seeker as a true Christian who had confidence in his faith was twisted into a clever cautionary tale along the lines of 'The Emperor's New Clothes' that would frighten the brothers away and thus enable the fraud to escape with his prize.

This appeal of stories about treasure tricksters for agents of the Enlightenment does not mean that such yarns were alien to early modern folk culture. On the contrary, the extravagant tales about West and Philips catered to the needs of a mass audience. Narratives about treasure tricksters even belong to the stock-in-trade of European folklore. One example from Hoxberg Mountain in western Germany, that small locale rich in legends that we have already quoted several times, will suffice. Sometime in the early nineteenth century, a gypsy told a peasant who lived at the foot of Hoxberg Mountain that treasure was buried on his farm. She asked the man and his wife to hide under an upturned cauldron while she worked some secret and dangerous magic to retrieve the hoard. While the peasant couple waited patiently under the cauldron, the gypsy pilfered their house and fled. When the gypsies were eventually caught in Hoxberg woods, they no longer had the loot. They probably hid it on the mountain and thus turned it into another buried treasure.⁷⁸

To sum up: The authorities' handling of treasure hunting and treasure magic defied simplistic notions of progress, Enlightenment and modernity. It is certainly true that the legislators of the eighteenth century saw treasure hunting predominantly as fraud, whereas those of earlier centuries had viewed it largely as magic, be it mere superstition or witchcraft. However, on the local level in the court proceedings, this distinctive chronology and the rather clear-cut distinction between magic and fraud tend to get lost. There was no simple transition from the interpretation of treasure magic as sorcery to the understanding of treasure magic as fraud: both existed at the same time. Of course, both activities were punishable and punishments were meted out. The penalties that treasure hunters had to face were sometimes severe, and in a

few exceptional cases they were condemned to death. However, as a rule, they got away with comparatively mild sentences. The occasional interest that a prince might take in a treasure venture and the official permits given to treasure hunters helped to make treasure seeking seem more excusable.

Even though many treasure seekers were tried for fraud or magic, some princes were not discouraged from supporting treasure hunts. They were willing to take chances, very much like they did when they financed the work of an alchemist. The chances the princes took with treasure hunters were that they might be incompetent or conmen. It must have been rather obvious to princes and governments that the treasure seekers would use magic. That was part of their business, very much like alchemy was arguably a special branch of High Magic. The princes accepted it. If magic was sinful, it was the magician's sin, not that of the prince. The ferocity with which some French tribunals of the eighteenth century cracked down on ceremonial magic as a form of sacrilege remained alien to most other courts. Even this harsh intervention of the state was aimed at what was seen as blasphemous outrage, not at treasure hunting as such. Treasure hunting never provoked any reaction remotely akin to the near-hysterical fight against the imaginary magic of witches that united the authorities and the common people. Hans Sebald has suggested viewing the often exaggerated reactions to rumours about sexual child abuse as the modern equivalent of witch-hunts.⁷⁹ If we accept this, we might say that the modern attitude towards adult prostitution resembles that of the pre-modern world to treasure hunting: Many people and most authorities would see it as a public nuisance, an immoral scandal or even petty crime but hardly anyone would think of it as a felony.

6

The Social Background of Treasure Hunters

Those who know how can even dig up a spell-bound treasure.

(Russian proverb)

Organizers

We have already referred to the treasure hunt in Westminster Abbey. The organizer and initiator of this venture was Davey Ramsey, the clock-maker of King James I and his successor. Some of his works are now in the British Museum. Ramsey had some financial difficulties but he was well-connected at court. We mentioned in Chapter 6 that he managed to receive royal permits to search for treasure in 1628 and in 1635. Nothing seems to have come of these enterprises. In the winter of 1632/33, he received a permit from the Dean of Westminster to search for treasure in the cloister of the abbey. Ramsey did not undertake the hunt alone. He mustered the support of William Lilly, the renowned London astrologer and magician. Ramsey also employed a certain John Scott, who was supposed to have some experience in handling a divining rod. Scott had lodgings in Pudding Lane. He was said to have once been a pageboy to an aristocrat but he seemed to have lost all connections to the upper strata of society. The party that actually met to search for treasure in the cloisters was considerably larger: Ramsey, Lilly and Scott had brought several labourers to do the digging for them but they had also been joined by a number of courtiers who had come out of curiosity. Finally, more than 30 men belonged to the group of treasure hunters that entered Westminster Abbey on the appointed night. In the Western Cloisters, Scott's divining rod moved violently. Several feet under ground, the labourers dug up a coffin that was considered too light to contain treasure. Then the party entered the church itself. Suddenly, a high wind

arose that nearly extinguished their torches and candles. The wind was so strong that, according to Lilly's narrative, they began to fear it would tear down the abbey and thus threaten their lives. In his report of the venture, Lilly remarked contemptuously that Scott was terrified and did not know what to do. Lilly said an incantation that was supposed to drive demons away and the storm ceased immediately. After this, the treasure hunters gave up. It was well before midnight when they left Westminster Abbey empty-handed.¹

It is easy to recognize several familiar features of treasure tales in this account: the old building associated with aristocratic or ecclesiastical wealth as a likely place to find treasure, the late hour of the treasure hunt, the idea that spirits guard the hoard and the unnatural storm that frightened the treasure hunters away. And, of course, the treasure hunt failed. However, the Westminster Abbey narrative was typical in another aspect, too: treasure hunters usually worked in groups, bringing together people from rather different walks of life. It is difficult to imagine under what other circumstances a bourgeois artisan (the clockmaker Ramsey), a learned magician (the astrologer Lilly), a folk magician or cunning man (the diviner Scott), common labourers and presumably aristocratic courtiers would have found common cause. Here, they joined in a venture that was not only dubious but also potentially hazardous. The group led by Ramsey was typical because it was heterogeneous: the individuals who had come together to search for treasure in Westminster Abbey were representative of the kinds of people who formed treasure hunting parties in general.

In a great number of documents referring to investigations into treasure hunts, we find three, occasionally even four, types of treasure hunter. First there is a leading figure, usually a comparatively well-to-do peasant or a moneyed person from a bourgeois background. We will call this type of treasure hunter the 'organizer'. In the Westminster Abbey example, this was Ramsey. Secondly there is an expert magician. This was usually someone with insufficient means or highly unreliable sources of income – often a vagrant. Such people often turned out to be conmen. The diviner Scott, whom Lilly haughtily referred to as 'one John Scott' and who later – again according to Lilly – was simply useless might be a representative of that type. We will return to Lilly himself later in this chapter. Thirdly, there were supporters – people who were willing to invest concrete effort, often their bodily labour, into the venture. The leading person who had initiated the treasure hunt was socially superior to the labourers. However, in many cases, the treasure hunt and the dig would have been impossible without their support.

In our example, the labourers whom Ramsey hired would belong to this third group. In some cases, there was even a fourth group: curious onlookers. It does not always make sense to try to distinguish them from the labourers. Some of those supposed to support the hunt might have come along for the thrill rather than taking the enterprise too seriously. The courtiers in our example, who would belong to this fourth group, apparently made fun of Ramsey and his magicians.

Let us look at these kinds of treasure hunters and the groups they formed in more detail. It goes without saying that groups of such heterogeneity were prone to conflict unless they formed very strong internal structures.

Who organized treasure hunts? The organizers were often the owners of land on which a treasure was supposedly hidden. Although they became dependent on the treasure magicians, they were the social superiors of these experts who came from the margins of society.

Usually, the organizers were well-to-do artisans or peasants. Let us have a look at our exemplary region, the Duchy of Württemberg. In the Württemberg sources, we encounter a variety of people who employed treasure magicians: two members of the lesser nobility of other territories, one aristocratic officer in Württemberg service, a landlord, three craftsmen, one steward, one bailiff, three Protestant clergymen and – the only woman – the mistress of a hospital.² In seventeenth-century Bavaria, people from the local upper class, even members of the town councils, organized treasure hunts.³ In Sleswick-Holsatia, treasure hunts were mostly organized by well-do-to artisans. This seems to have been typical for other rural areas, too.⁴

In a more urban setting, we find treasure hunters of the organizer type from the ranks of the educated professionals. In his study of magic in late sixteenth-century Naples, Jean-Michel Sallmann discovered that people from the upper middle class were heavily involved in treasure hunting. One party was led by an official and two attorneys. Another one boasted as members the same official and one of the attorneys, plus no fewer than two other jurists, a person of independent means without an occupation, a tailor, a furrier and a schoolmaster.⁵ Both groups were joined by experts for magic and labourers, but their core members were clearly well-established and probably well-respected citizens.

Thomas Wood, a gentleman from the entourage of William Neville, who was arrested for sorcery and treason in 1532, explained that 'foolish fellows of the country' had approached him time and again and offered him their services as treasure experts.⁶ In an English case from 1418, the organizer was a woman. Jonet Cook of Eastcheap paid the

sawyer and soothsayer Thomas Forde of Canterbury 40 s. for his board as well as for 'the sotell instrumentes that longen to his craft'. She also agreed to marry Forde if he could find a coffer with more than £200 in it that her late husband had hidden.⁷ It goes almost without saying that we must treat all narratives about duped women, and especially widows eager to remarry, with some caution. We encountered the clichés of female stupidity in the narratives about con artists in Chapter 5. However, widows were likely to find themselves in strained circumstances, so they could easily fall prey to some fraud who promised them help with their finances and their social position. Nevertheless, even though Cook was temporarily embarrassed, she was clearly the social superior of Forde.

It will be worthwhile looking at a complicated case of treasure hunting from Württemberg. In this hunt, the relationship between the organizer and the magician he employed was of crucial importance. It implied a fundamental change of social roles. A person from a very dubious background – a stranger and seemingly a foreigner – managed to become the confidant, educator and spiritual leader of an aristocratic officer.

In 1743, a secretary from Stuttgart, the capital of the dukedom of Württemberg, met someone who gave his name as Paul Benoît de la Rivière and claimed to be a French army officer on leave. The secretary bragged that 'the dukedom of Württemberg can be proud because in it the greatest treasure in Europe can be found'. He explained that Paracelsus, the sixteenth-century doctor and alchemist, had discovered the philosopher's stone, which could cure every disease and turn base metals into gold. Paracelsus had hidden the philosopher's stone in Hohenheim, a small town near Stuttgart. What greater treasure could there be than the philosopher's stone, which transformed all metals into gold and thus in a way produced treasure? John Dee had reportedly set out to find this magical object hidden in the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey.⁸ The secretary claimed to have read about Paracelsus' treasure in a printed book. This story is another example of the intermingling of oral and written culture, learned traditions and folk belief. Paracelsus had indeed been an alchemist and his family had come from Hohenheim – his full name was Philipus Theophrastus Aureolus Bombastus von Hohenheim, though he had probably never visited the place. Now a fantastic treasure story about Paracelsus actually discovering and hiding the philosopher's stone was in print, but it was being spread further orally. The secretary's rendition of the story triggered a series of peculiar events. De la Rivière claimed at once to be an

experienced treasure hunter and to be willing to find Paracelsus' treasure without any pay. The secretary established contact between de la Rivière and Captain von Dehl, who lived in Hohenheim Castle where the treasure was supposedly hidden. Von Dehl was very interested in the treasure hunt. He allowed de la Rivière and a woman who accompanied him to stay in the castle as his guests. As one might expect, the hunt dragged on for months. De la Rivière established contact with the ghost of Paracelsus within a couple of hours. The ghost confirmed that the philosopher's stone, together with numerous jewels and a number of gold bars, could be found in the castle. However, an evil spirit wanted to keep the treasure hunters from finding the hoard. In addition, the ghost of Paracelsus began to wonder whether von Dehl was the right person to get his treasure. He began to dictate de la Rivière lengthy letters to the captain. These letters, all of which were written in rather clumsy Latin, urged von Dehl to become a better person. If he would not truly repent and lead from now on a good Christian life of prayer and moral rectitude, he would not get the greatest treasure in Europe. The treasure, the ghost letters stressed, belonged neither to Paracelsus nor to von Dehl: it belonged to God. Von Dehl was merely about to become God's administrator and was to use the treasure according to God's will. He was to distribute great parts of the immeasurable wealth that the philosopher's stone promised to the needy. The point of the letters was to give von Dehl the moral and religious instruction he needed to live up to this great responsibility. When the captain began to have second thoughts about the treasure magician and the ghost, the letters became more urgent and more authoritarian, but also even more promising: 'This is not about me [Paracelsus], this is about God. If God commands you to do something why do you not do his will? God forsakes the sinner. . . . Fulfill your promises . . . and God will be with you for eternity. And you will receive your crown in Heaven.' The tone of the letters suggested that it was not Paracelsus but rather God himself who spoke. Following the instructions given in the letters and de la Rivière's advice, von Dehl began to say Latin prayers daily and fasted. Even though it might appear at first glance that de la Rivière tried to convert von Dehl to Catholicism, this was clearly not the case. Both distanced themselves decidedly from the Catholic Church. De la Rivière claimed that even though he had been a Catholic, he had at least for a time adhered to Calvinism. Denominations and church doctrines apparently did not matter anymore for the treasure hunters who had established such a close personal relationship with the beyond.

The ghost of Paracelsus had enjoined the treasure hunters from talking to the authorities. However, the secretary who had fallen out with de la Rivière when he began his lengthy dealings with the ghost threatened to inform on them. Von Dehl paid him the very considerable sum of 100 florins for his silence. However, the Württemberg authorities finally got wind of the questionable affair. They ordered de la Rivière out of the country. Von Dehl tried in vain to get an official permit to search for treasure. He began to fantasize about certain advisors of the duchess whom he suspected of harbouring a personal grudge against him. De la Rivière went to the Imperial Free City of Esslingen, a tiny enclave in the middle of Württemberg's territory but out of reach of its authorities. The conjurer kept exchanging letters with von Dehl – and with the ghost. De la Rivière had von Dehl watched by a servant. He could thus keep abreast with developments in Württemberg and spice his ghost messages with seemingly miraculous knowledge. Von Dehl kept paying de la Rivière's bills as he claimed that he had refused an attractive military commission from the French in order to help to obtain the treasure. Von Dehl later claimed that he had paid 1500 florins to the treasure magician. De la Rivière explained that he had a suitcase full of money hidden somewhere in Bavaria that he would soon get and use to compensate von Dehl for his expenses. In a way, he promised a new treasure. After about a year of entirely fruitless treasure hunting, a servant of von Dehl's brought charges against de la Rivière. Only after the Esslingen authorities had extradited the self-styled magician to the Württemberg authorities, von Dehl reluctantly brought charges himself and accused de la Rivière of fraud. During a first interrogation, de la Rivière said that he had lived in faraway Düsseldorf for some years. The Württemberg authorities inquired in Düsseldorf about a French officer called Paul Benoît de la Rivière. Düsseldorf answered that such a person was unknown in the town. However, some years earlier, a French teacher who was heavily in debt had left his wife and his children in utter poverty and fled, presumably following the French army. His name was Paul Benedikt Bach: *Rivière* was a rough French translation of the German *Bach*.

De la Rivière admitted only that he had committed adultery with the woman he had brought to Hohenheim. With a dramatic show of remorse, he quoted the Bible: 'The wages of sin are death' (Romans 6:23). Otherwise, he considered himself totally innocent. Everything, he claimed, had been an elaborate scheme to bring von Dehl back to a Christian life. De la Rivière explained that the treasure of Paracelsus consisted of charity towards the poor, its gold was patience, its jewels piety

and the philosopher's stone was the transformation of vice into virtue. Thus, the treasure hunt had been a complete success: von Dehl was now a new man: 'Ten Jesuits would not have achieved Herr Dehl's conversion. But now he is an angel.' The court did not accept this explanation of the treasure hunt as one huge metaphor. The fraud was exiled for life from Württemberg. The duke, who seems to have been amused by the treasure hunt, personally saw to it that von Dehl and the secretary were let off with an official reprimand.

Evidently, the relationship between von Dehl and de la Rivière was not simply that of employer and employee. When he apparently waived all payment at the beginning of the treasure hunt, de la Rivière had put their relationship on a different footing. He quickly became von Dehl's confidant and counsellor. His role resembled that of the often influential confessors of early modern princes. Even though de la Rivière depended completely on von Dehl's money and patronage, his role as a spiritual advisor and religious teacher enabled him to exercise considerable power over the captain.

Magicians

In the course of an investigation into a case of conjuring for treasure in 1679, the Vogt of Böblingen concluded that the majority of treasure hunters 'had no knowledge whatsoever... they just dug with shovels and pick-axes on the spot where the treasure was supposed to be hidden'.⁹ In order to find a place where treasure was hidden and to recover it, magic had to be used. Therefore, treasure hunters needed the assistance of an expert magician. No treasure-hunting party was complete without such an expert. The magicians sometimes acted on their own initiative without being instructed or employed by anyone else.¹⁰

Who could be a treasure magician? In folklore, virgins were supposed to have magical powers. Children of both sexes were said to be able to divine the place where treasure was hidden.¹¹ We discussed the case of Marion Clerk and the 15-year-old girl from Naples who were both supposed to be in contact with the fairies and thus able to find treasure. An English manual for magicians and treasure hunters stressed that children were most adept at seeing hidden things in a crystal ball.¹² When Simon Forman, a magician from Elizabethan London, needed divining rods, he asked a virgin girl to cut them for him.¹³ However, as strong as the trust in the magical powers of virgins might have been in folk belief, in actual treasure hunts we rarely find children.

Evidently, the people who dealt professionally with spirit beings and had some command over them were particularly well-suited as treasure magicians. In the records of trials against treasure hunters, we find priests and monks time and again. For laypeople, the priest was a powerful person directly connected to the supernatural. Evidently, a number of clerics shared this idea about their own power and tried to use it to their personal advantage. Christopher Threder from Oxford, for example, a Dominican and thus a member of the order traditionally connected with the Inquisition, was apprehended in 1536. He was in the possession of magical books and offered his services as a diviner who could find lost or stolen goods as well as buried treasure. Threder was a notorious cross-digger whom his clerical office evidently did not keep from taking down wayside crosses.¹⁴

Of course, neither the Catholic nor the Protestant Church allowed the abuse of the cleric's office for magical ventures. Within the Catholic Church, treasure hunting became a bone of contention in the post-Tridentine controversy between priests and monks willing to cater to the popular needs for ecclesiastical magic and the higher strata of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, which castigated this type of magic as but another form of the 'superstitious' abuse of sacramentals. However, on the village level, the admonitions of the bishops and learned theologians went unheeded. The priest who had to cater to the needs of his parishioners often accepted the role of a cunning man, whether he liked that part or not. Given the fact that many village parsons had to face economic hardship, they might have welcomed the chance to receive additional income, even if it was for rather unorthodox services.

The religious-magical rites offered by popular Catholicism were always in great demand in Protestant areas, too.¹⁵ In Protestant territories, people granted that Catholic priests, or even simple Catholic laymen, were powerful conjurers. In 1683, in Protestant Bönningheim, 'exorcisms' had been read in order to get treasure. In Lutheran Hohenheim in 1744, a Protestant treasure hunter paid a Catholic to say a Latin exorcist prayer that the Jesuits in Rome allegedly taught their followers.¹⁶ In one case, two Capuchins and a priest led a group of Protestant treasure seekers. An excavation in Lutheran Göppingen in 1710 was conducted by two priests and two Capuchins.¹⁷ The petition asking to have Franciscan friars deliver a ghost guarding a treasure, which was not granted by the Stuttgart administration, was mentioned above. Two Capuchins who had been hired by a Protestant to dig for treasure in Swabian Möckmühl in 1701 had to conceal this from their superiors because 'in the monastery they pretended to visit the sick and

if anyone found that they dealt with the craft (of treasure hunting), they would have to face severe punishment'.¹⁸

As we have seen in Chapter 5, priests had played a key role in the spectacular series of trials against treasure hunters that took place in Burgundy between 1742 and 1745. In this respect, the cases from Lyon were rather typical. The Halifax treasure hunt of 1510 was to a large degree a priests' venture.¹⁹ It would be tempting to see this affair as a typical example of medieval learned magic. The learned magicians of the Middle Ages were men, mostly clerics. They used elaborate rituals together with (often costly) books and tools. The Halifax group seemed to belong to this system. However, as we have seen in Chapter 3, early modern magicians used books and magical implements, too, which were often hard to come by and, at times, expensive. Magical knowledge and magic objects were evidently disseminated. The Halifax group was atypical for early modern treasure hunters only because it was extremely well-connected and because it assembled a great deal of magical expert knowledge as well as spiritual power. Almost all of its members could have played the role of the expert magician.

William Stapleton was among the treasure-hunting clergy. We have already mentioned that he tried, with some success, to obtain a number of magical books and implements throughout his career as a treasure hunter. He was a monk in St Benet Abbey in Holm, Norfolk. In 1527, he applied for permission to leave the monastery as the monastic duties did not agree with him. The abbot allowed Stapleton to leave the abbey for six months. During this time, he had to earn the money he needed to pay for the dispensation to leave the monastery and to live as a hermit permanently. He embarked on a series of treasure hunts. Stapleton never worked alone. Very typical of a treasure magician, he always looked for people who were willing to employ him or at least to share the risk with him. At first, he joined with two men who at least claimed to have a 'placard' – a royal permission for treasure hunting. As they started to look for treasure on the grounds of Sir Terry Robsart's widow in Sidestrand, Norfolk, they were chased away. It appears that they took the royal letter as a permit to dig up treasure on privately owned ground. Stapleton stayed in Norfolk for a month, now apparently alone. Then he met a certain Godfrey, who went with him to Felmingham in order to look for treasure in the barrows of Stow Heath. Godfrey was accompanied by a boy who did 'scry' (saw things psychically) for him; he also had a 'shower' a spirit called Anthony Fular. Stapleton later explained that 'said spirit I had after myself'. As they had no success with the barrows, they went to Norwich, where they tried in vain to

conjure a spirit that was supposed to guard another treasure. Stapleton received the considerable sum of 46s. 8d. from a third party, probably for some magical service he did not care to talk about. This was enough money to get a dispensation from Cardinal Wolsey's court in London to become a hermit. However, the monk had apparently changed his plans: he immediately bought new magical implements. Among other things, he obtained a book that other treasure hunters had allegedly used to call up the spirits Andrew Malchus, Inchubus and Oberion. Andrew Malchus seems to refer to the servant of the high priest in the New Testament who helped with the arrest of Jesus. Inchubus was evidently an incubus – a male sexual demon known in the demonological witchcraft doctrine. The name Oberion that we have already encountered in the account of the Halifax treasure hunt (used later as 'Oberon' for the king of the fairies by Shakespeare) was a variant of Alberich and had been employed for spirit beings since the Middle Ages. The elfish spirit Oberion was interpreted as just another guise of the devil, in keeping with the ecclesiastical notion that all spirits were either demons or angels. There was no direct connection between these demons and buried treasure. However, as we have seen, any demon might simply bring treasure. Stapleton returned to Norwich. Lord Leonard Grey, who seems to have been in debt and was rumoured to be interested in magic as a means to make money, contacted him there. Stapleton apparently had a reputation at that time, otherwise Grey would not have known about him. Grey promised to help Stapleton to become a secular priest and to give him a prebend as his personal chaplain. In a test, the magician found money hidden by Grey's men in a garden. There were, however, no further successes. As a helper of two clerics with an interest in magic – Sir John Shepe and Sir Robert Porter – Stapleton went to Creak Abbey to search for treasure. As they met with no success, Stapleton went to London where he rejoined Grey. He seems to have quickly left for Norfolk again, this time to find a treasure for a certain Cook of Caldecot Hall. He tried to get other treasure experts – Richard Tynney, William Rapkyn, Sir John Leiston and the priest of Lesingham – to join him. Leiston agreed but never went. A treasure hunt with the parson of Gorleston as a helper failed. When Stapleton returned to London, Grey had him arrested because he had left the lord's service without permission. Stapleton was eventually pardoned. He received an invitation from Thomas Howard, the Duke of Norfolk, who thought himself bewitched by Thomas Cromwell. Stapleton later claimed that he had wanted to tell the duke right away that he could not drive evil spirits away and was incapable of curing magical ailments. However, one of

the duke's servants allegedly made him 'feign something' in order to curry favour with Howard. When the duke eventually became better, he ordered Stapleton to find out whether Cardinal Wolsey had a demon at his command. Earlier in his career, Stapleton had claimed that he was unable to communicate with Oberion because this spirit answered only to the Lord Cardinal. Now he was apparently afraid to cooperate with Howard in an obviously political cabal. The duke had Stapleton examined by a certain Dr Wilson, apparently a rival magician, made him write down his lengthy confession and finally sent the treasure hunter into Cromwell's custody. His magical objects were confiscated and came under the control of Sir Thomas More.²⁰

Stapleton was not active for more than a few months, but he was almost frantically busy. As we do not know what he received the 46s. 8d. for – treasure hunting or some other service – we cannot say how lucrative his treasure enterprises were. It is, however, obvious that he enjoyed a certain reputation and that his art was in demand. He had apparently no problems finding people who wanted to cooperate with him or to employ him. Judging from Stapleton's behaviour after departing St Benet's, it appears that he had left the monastery in order to become a professional treasure hunter. By way of preparation, he acquired his first magical books before he left the monastery. Neither the chance to become a hermit nor the position as Grey's chaplain kept Stapleton from going on yet another treasure hunt.

When Sallmann described the groups of treasure hunters that were active in Naples in the 1580s, he came to the conclusion that they came from 'la petite intelligentsia locale.' Monks of various religious orders formed at least a sizeable minority among the treasure seekers. A Carmelite monk claimed in 1584 that a treasure site had been revealed to him in a dream very much as the saints of medieval hagiography had learned about hidden relics in dream visions.²¹ At any rate, in Naples, no group of treasure seekers was complete without a monk as expert helper. At least some of the monks meddled with magic or rituals of questionable orthodoxy in order to ensure the success of the treasure hunt. They recited psalms to drive away demons, and they prepared and distributed among their fellow treasure hunters bits of paper with magical signs. One of the monks, a Franciscan friar, had used the divining rod. The one group that could not count a clergyman among their members seems to have been desperate to cope with that disadvantage: they contacted a humble weaver who, strangely enough, claimed to have access to the philosopher's stone. They further enlisted the services of a Ferrante de Granada, a shadowy figure, who allegedly

came from Spain and claimed to be the grandson of the last King of Grenada, probably an itinerant trickster-magician. Finally, the group had recourse to a *Madamma Lucia* from Castelnuovo, an old soothsayer of evil repute. The woman claimed that she could find out whether treasure was hidden in a certain location simply by looking at earth taken from the place in question.²² Evidently, the Naples treasure hunters felt that they needed the support of an expert in the spirit world. They seemed to have preferred monks who were, of course, easily available in a city like Naples. If monks refused to cooperate – we know about the Naples treasure hunters because the Inquisition was (however superficially) interested in them – other persons considered experts in magic were employed.

The notion that Catholic priests were adept treasure magicians was so deeply rooted in the popular mind that concrete information was twisted and misinterpreted until it fitted the pattern. In 1719, a Catholic priest, Nikolaus Beck, who was Canon of Obermarchtal, led a treasure hunt in Grabenstetten. This is the only Württemberg case we know of in which a planned treasure hunt was successful. Beck can be identified as an early archeologist: he was capable of choosing a likely excavation site and was able to recognize traces of earlier diggings that had taken place at the same spot. He could also give approximate dates for the finds – some metal items of Roman origin. Apart from a divining rod, which was in this case regarded as a non-magical implement by the Württemberg authorities, he did not use any questionable devices. Nevertheless, the mere fact that a priest was involved in the treasure hunt aroused the suspicion of the Protestant clergy. Faced with the local ministers' accusation of being guilty of diabolical magic, Beck hurriedly left Grabenstetten.²³ The new quasi-archaeological approach was not accepted as such but rather equated with the old magical one.

Clerics and monks were not the only experts in the spirit world; numerous magicians offered their services more or less openly on the pre-modern market for magic. They ranged from the learned adepts of High Magic to the village sorcerers and down to the itinerant cunning men.

In 1538, the Oxford scholar Richard Jones, who enjoyed a reputation as a magician, at least claimed that treasure seekers often sought his assistance.²⁴ In the case of the Westminster Abbey treasure hunt, two people played the role of the wizard. This seemingly strange and rather unique doubling of the wizard figure was nevertheless in keeping with the general practice of treasure hunting. It revealed – even personified – two aspects of treasure magic. As we have seen, treasure magic was often a mixture of different elements. Some were clearly connected with

the realm of learned High Magic, even if they had been vulgarized; for example, some of the more sophisticated concepts of the divining rod or conjuration of demons with the help of elaborate symbols. Others belonged to simple everyday magic and magical beliefs, such as the belief in ghosts.²⁵ William Lilly, the renowned astrologer, and John Scott, the humble diviner, might be seen as representatives of these two different strands of treasure magic. The fact that Lilly and Scott worked together exemplifies this interlacement of different kinds of magic in treasure hunting. On the village level, clergymen, students or vagrants pretending to be students played the role of the learned magician.²⁶

The services of a treasure magician did not necessarily come cheap. In 1527, John Curson, a cross-digger active in Lincolnshire, explained that he paid a cunning man no less than twenty nobles. The wizard had told him where he could find buried treasure. As the soothsayer had convinced Curson that he could expect to find £3000, he probably viewed the investment as profitable.²⁷

If we have a look at the cunning men and rural wizards who worked as treasure magicians – or treasure frauds – we encounter a large number of itinerants. In the well-documented example of the Duchy of Württemberg, at least 11 out of 15 treasure magicians were vagrants.²⁸ The Venetians or *Walen*, the itinerant treasure magicians of legend, preferred to work alone. Even though they might choose to employ local guides or servants, their contact with the local population was superficial at best. That was why they were considered dangerous and were condemned as thieves who stole the treasures of the country. In the reality of the trials against treasure hunters, we find a very different kind of itinerant treasure magician. These experts were, as a rule, vagabonds, often little more than street beggars. Far from avoiding mixing with the locals, they tried to establish contact with them. Far from letting some of the locals work for them, the magicians wanted to force their services onto local customers. The idea that poor, homeless people were experts in treasure seems very strange to the modern mind – knowledge and skill in treasure hunting and obvious poverty seem to contradict each other. We will address this problem in detail in Chapter 8.

Among the Württemberg itinerant treasure experts, we find four soldiers,²⁹ or rather itinerant mercenaries, who belonged to the huge group of vagrants. Their relationship with the peasants and townspeople was strained to say the very least.³⁰ Money and valuables were often hidden or buried to keep pilfering soldiers from getting them. Thus, it comes as no surprise that these men developed techniques of their own – which could, of course, be magical – to find such hidden objects.

Generally speaking, soldiers were known for their healing powers and their magical cunning. In spite, or rather because, of the bad reputation of mercenaries, the people of the villages and cities tried to secure their services as treasure magicians.³¹

In 1711, a group of treasure hunters employed a herdsman as their magic 'guide'. Herdsmen and shepherds, too, were traditionally associated with magic. As they were often semi-itinerant, they had to face the same suspicions as vagrants. They also owed their reputation as cunning men to their expert knowledge of magical folk medicine with which they cured animals.³²

Among the itinerant treasure magicians arrested by the Württemberg authorities was the former ropemaker Johannes Knödler. When he was apprehended in 1712, he explained that he had given up his former profession. He presented himself as a treasure magician in the making, just about to embark on a new career. Knödler declared that he had endeavoured to learn the art of treasure hunting from experts. He had acquired magic writings and now searched actively for places where treasure was supposed to be hidden. In addition, he boasted of recent success as a healer.³³

It is rather likely that Knödler described as a voluntary choice a situation that was in fact a reaction to dire need. Two of the treasure magicians in the sources from Württemberg were explicitly reported to have severed all ties with their families and left their wives and children. They were deeply in debt.³⁴ The same applied to Thomas Mayer, who had offered his services to Duke Friedrich in 1606: he lived in permanent conflict with his family and was ridiculed as a 'prodigal husband' who had wasted all of his money.³⁵ Another treasure wizard was a cooper who could no longer practise his trade.³⁶ Homeless people offered their services as treasure hunters because this was one of the very few lucrative ways to make a living that was open to them.

The parallels with treasure hunters from other territories were obvious. In 1604, the Bailiff of Rottenburg, a Habsburg town near Tübingen, was reproached for repeatedly employing vagabonds to search for buried treasure.³⁷ A treasure seeker who was arrested at Stockach in the Swabian foothills of the Alps in 1741 was an itinerant discharged soldier separated from his wife. He offered his services both as a treasure magician and as a healer.³⁸ The circumstances of treasure hunters in Lucerne and in western Austria were similar.³⁹ Almost all treasure hunters active in the region of Zurich were poor foreigners.⁴⁰ Treasure hunting – whether involving people who took it seriously or those who intended to swindle others out of their money – seems to have been conceived of as

a way out of a situation that was otherwise socially and economically hopeless.

It became part of the imagery of the treasure magician that he was a stranger and even a foreigner. Some tramps working as treasure experts understood this and turned it to their advantage. They stressed and exaggerated their foreignness and claimed to come from very far away. This helped them to convince their employers of their unique quality – it might have seemed like a once-in-a-lifetime chance to secure the services of these allegedly exotic experts. The sixteenth-century lawyer Christoph Besold mentioned a Saracen prisoner of war who had supposedly helped to find a treasure in Italy.⁴¹ This was an extreme but by no means exceptional case. In the first years of the seventeenth century, a vagabond working as a treasure hunter in Rottenburg reportedly even came from Turkey. In Württemberg, a treasure magician maintained that he was from Prague. In 1741, a self-styled treasure expert was arrested in the Swabian uplands who claimed to be from the Balkans.⁴² In the late sixteenth century, the treasure fraud from the West Country, Judith Philips, had allegedly sworn to her clients whom she was about to cheat that she came directly from the pope. As the surname of her husband was Pope, this was technically no perjury.⁴³ We have already mentioned in this chapter the German trickster who maintained that the Jesuits in Rome had taught him how to ban the spirits that guarded treasure troves. These frauds combined exoticism with the notion that the Catholic clergy were very adept at treasure hunting. A journey to Rome, the mysterious and faraway capital of a denomination that many Protestants saw as powerful but shadowy and threatening, must have looked good on the ‘résumé’ of a magician.

As the research into witch trials has demonstrated, men and women were assigned specific magical abilities and practices.⁴⁴ Whereas harmful magic was considered to be a female domain, all kinds of magic aiming at increasing one’s property and improving one’s social situation were assigned to the male sphere. Treasure hunting was part of the magic specifically attributed to men. Around 1652, Anne Bodenham offered a charm to find £1000 that had allegedly been hidden in Wilton Garden by the late Earl of Pembroke, but she did not go treasure hunting herself.⁴⁵ In 1710, an old miller’s wife, who wanted to search her house at Swabian Oßweil for buried treasure, maintained that although she had some knowledge of conjuring and necromancy, only a man was capable of using a divining rod.⁴⁶ The use of the divining rod was indeed a predominately male activity. There were, of course, exceptions to this rule. One of them was

Judith Noel, Lord Byron's mother-in-law, who made a hobby out of dowsing.⁴⁷

At the village level, female treasure hunters had to overcome the traditional association of magic for material gain with male magicians. In the Bridgwater treasure hunt of 1680, already mentioned in Chapter 3, Anne Kingsbury played a major role by claiming that she could find treasure with a divining rod. She claimed that William Lilly had taught her how to use the 'dewesing rods':⁴⁸ she apparently felt that she needed some kind of explanation for her mastering a predominately 'male' skill.

In the charge brought against Margaretha Schütterin, the wife of a stonemason from Schwaikheim, we find a rare extant example of the term a *Schatzgräberin* (treasure huntress), the female form of *Schatzgräber* (treasure hunter). Schütterin was the only woman in Württemberg to take a leading role in a treasure-seeking expedition. She developed an elaborate narrative in order to emphasize her claim of being a skilful treasure seeker. She stated that she had seen a ghost in December 1704, which asked her to deliver 16 wandering souls who had been haunting for 240 years.⁴⁹ These 16 had been monks who had hidden treasure in the house in which Schütterin now lived in order to save it from pillaging mercenaries. Shortly afterwards, they were killed by marauding soldiers. The monks had to walk as ghosts because their premature death had kept them from fulfilling certain pious works that they had vowed to do. If Schütterin completed these tasks for them, the treasure would become hers. One of the ghosts explained to her that she was the only person capable of retrieving the treasure because he had chosen her for this special task hundreds of years before her birth. Furthermore, she had the same horoscope as Christ. Here, a motif from folk legends (an unfulfilled task causing the ghosts to wander about) merged with two biblical ones (the annunciation clearly served as a model for the story, and the parallel with Christ stressed Schütterin's role as the ghosts' 'redeemer').

The ghosts demanded that Margaretha Schütterin donated candles, had masses read for them, made donations to churches and clothed a statue of the Virgin Mary. The fact that a Protestant was asked to perform the traditional rites of the Catholic cult for the dead was not discussed by the contemporaries. The reason for this was not denominational indifference but ghost belief: the pious works were never intended as active intercession for the dead in the Catholic sense; they were simply tasks that had been left unfulfilled by the ghosts during their lifetime. They just happened to be 'good works' according to Catholic teaching. The minister and the bailiff in Strümpfelbach, as well as the sheriff and the dean in Schorndorf, who were engaged in this case, had very different

ideas about the alleged ghosts. For once, Protestant teachings had considerable influence on the local level. According to Protestant theology, they suspected the apparition to be a demon. The 'fact' that Schütterin had been in contact with the spirit was regarded as a violation of the entire first table of the decalogue and bordering on witchcraft.

In order to carry out the tasks set her by the ghosts, Schütterin asked her friends and family to lend her money. She claimed that the ghosts had promised that 'whoever gave the least thing would be rewarded not only in this life but hereafter, too'. One should note that also in this atypical case the combination of material gain and good deed, which was a key feature of treasure hunting, was established. In this way, Schütterin managed to swindle 912 florins out of the baker David Fischer, a friend of her family. She wormed herself into his confidence by telling him that even several aristocrats had taken an interest in the treasure hunt. When he called her assertions into question, she got him to believe that there was a competition between potential creditors. Schütterin managed to establish a sort of 'investment trust' of treasure hunters by promising them profits of up to 100,000 florins. The use she allegedly made of the money, that is, *ad pias causas* (for pious works) in Catholic churches, could not easily be checked by the creditors. She finally left her husband, whom she probably managed to deceive with her ghost story, too, and fled with the money. Fischer brought charges against Schütterin after her flight. This did him no good: he was sentenced to a fine of 14 florins. The court decided that he was guilty of unlicensed treasure hunting, although he maintained that Schütterin had assured him that the treasure hunt had been permitted by the duke.

Supporters and onlookers

The magician and his employer were hardly ever the only people involved in a treasure hunt. Considering the technical problems, it is clear that treasure-seeking expeditions could not be carried out by only one or two individuals. Treasure hunters nearly always worked in groups. These either employed an expert-magician collectively or gathered around the organizer, who would employ such a specialist.⁵⁰ In many cases, a rumour about hidden treasure was enough to provoke a group of people to join together in order to search for it. The organizer found supporters.

At first glance, it is surprising how few professional pitmen we find among the treasure seekers.⁵¹ In the team of Thomas Mayer, the treasure seeker engaged by Duke Friedrich, there was the miner Hans

Rauw, the only professionally trained miner present at a treasure site in Württemberg of whom there is any documentary evidence.⁵² We do not even know whether Rauw played the role of an engineer or that of a diviner. As we have seen, many miners were not above using the divining rod in order to find mineral veins. Of course, treasure hunters did not engage in elaborate underground mining and did not need the technology of a colliery. Nevertheless, treasure seekers of the organizer type were often well-advised to include some specialist labourers or craftsmen in their groups. Digging for treasure was often not only very hard but also rather dangerous. If the dig took place within a building or a ruin, the treasure hunters had to take care not to destabilize the walls and vaults in, or next to, which they worked. Jean Bodin mentioned a case from Magdeburg: ten treasure hunters had perished when the tower collapsed in the basement of which they had dug carelessly.⁵³ In a humorous variant of that motif from the middle of the seventeenth century, which the author nevertheless presented as a serious warning against incompetently planned excavations, an English officer started digging even though a magician had warned him not to. Promptly, the officer was 'for all his pains appayd with the breaking in of a Jakes upon him'.⁵⁴ In 1599/1600, several members of the town council of Rottenburg am Neckar near Stuttgart dug clandestinely for treasure in the cellar of the bell tower of the town's church. As a somewhat embarrassed report to the government put it,

because the honourable members of the council worked so efficiently, the watchman [who was on guard on top of the tower] shouted down what the sacristan was doing with the bell tower and whether he wanted to tear it down. He had not known that the honourable members of the council were at work.⁵⁵

That miners played no significant role in treasure hunting might have to do with the fact that they were sought-after and comparatively well-paid experts. At least prior to the onset of industrialization, entrepreneurs and nobles often competed for their services. The organizers of village treasure hunts could simply not afford to employ professional pitmen.

Thus, the organizer of a treasure hunt had recourse to the local workforce. Those of the Naples treasure hunt of 1586 had hired a group of diggers. These labourers turned out to be a liability rather than an asset in more than one sense. Because they were afraid of the evil spirits that supposedly haunted the treasure site, they refused to work until they had been provided with bits of paper on which the names Eloim, Jesus

and Mary had been written – a magical strike. When the treasure failed to materialize, the treasure hunters began to quarrel among themselves about who should pay the workers.⁵⁶

In the Lyon case, Guillaume Jannin, a silk worker, and Jean Feroussat, a potter, both of whom had found themselves in financial difficulties, belonged to a group of treasure hunters. Even though they figure prominently in the sources, they seem to have been labourers rather than organizers, given the dominant role of the priests in this hunt.⁵⁷ In Württemberg, the more humble supporter-type of treasure hunter came from a middle-class background. We may see them as mere labourers. There were a large number of craftsmen⁵⁸ as well as members of the lower ranks of the local administrations.⁵⁹ There were also a shepherd⁶⁰ and two – possibly poor – inmates of a hospital.⁶¹ Three schoolteachers – a notoriously ill-paid profession – were also involved.⁶²

Members of the local upper class joined treasure-hunting fellowships, too. They were no mere labourers, rather, they invested money in the enterprise. They helped the organizer of the treasure hunt to pay for the expenses. These included the fee for the magician, the money he needed to 'lure' a treasure or to buy magical objects and pay for the labourers. In the source material from Württemberg, a miller,⁶³ a publican,⁶⁴ a few rich citizens without further specification concerning their profession,⁶⁵ four aldermen⁶⁶ and three local magistrates⁶⁷ were mentioned.

The people involved in a treasure hunt were prepared to invest their physical strength in the dig or to give money in order to pay the treasure magician's fee or to purchase magical devices. These investments demanded that the group created some kind of binding rules that would help to reimburse the participants after the treasure had been found. We have already discussed the case of Margaretha Schütterin in this context. In 1768, a north German treasure hunt bogged down because of internal quarrels over fees and payments for magical books. The organizers of the venture expected every new member of the group to pay a certain sum of money as an 'admission fee'. How much each had to pay depended on his financial means. However, all members of the group were told that they could expect huge profits of between 9000 and 10,000 talers. As the expenses kept growing, the supporters of the treasure hunt had to keep paying. The treasure hunters had even agreed on a meeting place where they would come together to discuss their investments and the shares that they were entitled to. When the authorities stepped in, a dozen supporters of the treasure hunt had invested at least 100 talers.⁶⁸ Even more formalized and organized in the manner of an 'investment trust' was an excavation at Nagold in

1758. The magician involved, Georg Bernhard Walter, drew up a list of all the participants and the sums they were to expect after the successful search. Two thousand florins were to be dedicated *ad pias causas*, Walter would get 3800 florins for his services, half of the remaining money was to go to the landowner and the other half would be divided among eight treasure hunters. A second list recorded the names of 33 treasure seekers who were to receive shares varying from 50 to 400 florins out of a total of 2430 florins. At the end of the list it was written that only 150 florins should be given to 3 orphans. The lists gave no dates, so it is difficult to put them in any logical order. Possibly, Walter simply put them down more or less spontaneously when new 'investors' joined the group in order to mask his fraudulent intentions. He appropriately termed the group of treasure hunters a 'company'.⁶⁹ We find such lists of treasure hunters time and again. They were quasi-contracts that bound the treasure seekers together and stated what share of the expected find those involved were entitled to. The Halifax treasure seekers felt that they needed to base their venture on a contract-like document and set up a list of the people taking part in the enterprise.⁷⁰ The organizer of a north German treasure hunt that took place in 1744 demanded from all participants that they signed a paper where they acknowledged that they had to be loyal to him.⁷¹ These agreements often mentioned a fixed sum the magician should receive as a honorarium.⁷²

We should not underestimate the thrill and adventure that treasure hunting offered. Two Württemberg treasure hunters explained their participation in the enterprise as being due to mere curiosity, which is by no means unworthy of belief.⁷³ In 1702, the foreign nobleman Philipp Marquart Tänzel, Baron Tratzberg, Sheriff of Lauingen joined a group of treasure hunters in Württemberg. The baron waived all claims he might have had to part of the treasure from the beginning. He explained that he was merely interested in the redemption of the ghost.⁷⁴ The combination of curiosity and piety plainly contributed to the attractiveness of treasure hunting. In this case, it was even combined with a show of aristocratic largesse.

The religious dimension of treasure hunters' groups

The von Dehl/de la Rivière affaire with its religious overtones had strictly been a *folie à deux*. De la Rivière had become the spiritual adviser of the nobleman but he had not tried to influence others in the same way. For him, the founding of a quasi-religious group was not on the agenda; for other treasure hunters, it clearly was. The more emphasis was placed on

the motif of the redemption of a ghost, the more important pious works safeguarding the treasure seekers against demons and the lures of the devil became. The participation in these devotions could be regarded as an obligation of the whole group and a necessary prerequisite for their success. Early in the sixteenth century, a treasure hunt at Islington caused some scandal. Two frauds had convinced three men that a treasure had been hidden by someone whose soul had gone to purgatory. In order to allow the dead man to go to Heaven, the treasure hunters had to fast, pray and give offerings to the saints on his behalf. Only when the soul had been freed would the demon that guarded the treasure leave. This was, of course, the typical treasure narrative that we are by now familiar with. The sharpers promised their victims that each of them would get £200 from this pious treasure hunt and thus managed to swindle them out of 40s.⁷⁵ The Swabian magician Walter observed during the search in 1758 that 'if one wanted to find a treasure and deliver a ghost one had to be very pious before'. He not only knelt down to pray at the site of the dig but he fixed regular hours for prayer that everyone interested in the venture had to observe. For 12 days they prayed and sang hymns at night, and in the morning and afternoon. The treasure hunters almost became a sort of congregation in the manner of family worship. In this form, the group became accessible to women. Walter's company consisted of nine men and four women.⁷⁶ The treasure magician – the authoritative mediator between his followers and the spirit world – came to resemble a priest or a religious leader.

A case from Hessen presents an utterly grotesque variant of a quasi-religious relationship between the treasure magician and the rank and file of the treasure hunters' group. In 1810, Katharina Becker, a disfigured woman working as a soothsayer, had promised to find treasure in the house of Wilhelm Lemler in Limburg. She lodged in the house for weeks. Becker made Lemler's family pray for hours on end. At the same time, she threatened them with the spirits that she allegedly had under her control. In that way, she even forced Lemler's young son to have sex with her. She claimed that the spirits would not allow the treasure to be discovered before she was with child. She apparently wanted to become pregnant in order to blackmail the rather affluent Lemler into marrying her.⁷⁷

To be sure, a treasure magician usually demanded nothing of his supporters that contradicted the religious practices of their denomination. However, he often required that they took their religious duties a lot more seriously than normal and that they sacrificed much more time and effort to them. This exaggerated religiosity was, of course, frowned

upon by church officials, who realized that this extreme piety was supposed to help with a treasure hunt. This conflict over the piety of treasure seekers under the influence of a magician as a spiritual leader was a problem for both the Catholic and the Protestant Church. Even though the treasure seekers often adopted Catholic rituals, the official Church condemned this unequivocally as superstitious abuse. A random example will suffice, as follows. In 1753, the Catholic Bishop of Speyer felt obliged to castigate not only the use of magic circles, certain prayers to St Christopher and exorcisms in treasure hunting, but also the abuse of otherwise pious practices, such as going to confession, attending mass or having masses said.⁷⁸

If the influence of the treasure magician was strong enough, a treasure hunt could even overcome denominational tensions. During a hunt in Lörrach in the south of the Black Forest in 1750, Protestants and Catholics prayed together. The former recited the psalm of repentance while the Catholics prayed the rosary, but they did so together in the same room. And, of course, they did so for the same end: the discovery of a treasure. This is very remarkable as neither Church allowed such interdenominational communities.⁷⁹

In the 1770s, the town of Weilheim in Württemberg witnessed a treasure hunt that virtually turned into the foundation of a new Christian community. Under the influence of a female magician as a spiritual leader who had created a particularly powerful narrative to justify claims to authority, the traditional ecclesiastical as well as the social structure began to break down. The Weilheim treasure hunt took place in an era that had witnessed earlier religious revival movements. Pietism was an integral element of Württemberg Protestantism. During the first decades of the eighteenth century, Württemberg's authorities had suspiciously kept an eye on the so-called Separatist Pietists who formed local conventicles and engaged in household and family worship. In 1743, the duke officially legalized them and at the same time established Church and state control over these groups. After that, the Pietists' formerly outspoken critics of the state became reclusive and quietist. They did not regain their zeal until the 1780s, when lay preachers inspired a new wave of religious enthusiasm.⁸⁰

In 1770, Anna Maria Freyin, the maidservant of Georg Buck, a butcher in the Württemberg small town of Weilheim an der Teck, claimed to have met two spirits of deceased individuals. The nature of these spirits was ill-defined: although Freyin maintained that they had gone to Heaven, they nevertheless haunted her master's house.⁸¹ The maidservant claimed that she had encountered a ghost that she described as dark

and terrifying. Somehow – she never elaborated how – she managed to redeem the ghost so that he could go to Heaven. The phantom changed its appearance, becoming bright white and beautiful. Freyin maintained that after his deliverance, the ghost kept coming to Buck's house by night and day. He was even joined by a second white spirit. According to folk belief, the redemption of a ghost meant that its ties with the visible world were dissolved. The ghost showed itself – in white symbolizing his redemption – one last time and then disappeared forever. However, the ghost that Freyin had freed remained visible to her and to others: the white figures that Freyin, her master Buck and numerous other people saw in the house at Weilheim were not ghosts that existed between the world of the living and the hereafter of Heaven, Hell and – according to Catholic teaching – Purgatory. They had been delivered: that is to say, they had already reached the hereafter. The apparitions were therefore part of a heavenly sphere. Consequently, their utterances were regarded as divine revelation. The motif of the redemption of a ghost so well-established in Christian folklore was used by Freyin contrary to folk tradition and theology alike in order to create a new religious narrative of a direct contact with Heaven.

These spirits or ghosts were seen and heard by Freyin, Buck and a fast-growing number of curious visitors. The ghosts that in a peculiar way belonged to Heaven rather than to earth conducted religious services with those present. They quoted passages from the Bible, prayed, sang religious songs and urged people to live morally impeccable lives according to Christian ethics. Within weeks, random gatherings at Buck's house to see the ghosts and to worship with them developed into regular meetings. Buck, whom the Protestant minister had excluded from the Lord's Supper for his drinking and idling, became the spokesman of these meetings. The role of the Weilheim-ghosts was that of saints, prophets or, rather, of angels. They revealed the will of God to the faithful.

According to Protestant tradition, the Church suspected the ghosts to be demons in reality and complained to the authorities. Christoph von Bühler, the head of the regional administration (*Oberamtmann*) promptly exiled Freyin from Württemberg.

Nevertheless, the ghosts kept coming to Buck's house and the meetings continued. Buck, who was heavily in debt, borrowed money from some of the ghosts' adherents. He promised to pay them back as soon as the spirits had told him where treasure could be found or how he could win a fortune in the lottery. However, there was more to the movement than financial motives: those who met regularly at Buck's

came to regard the spirits' utterances not only as divine revelation but indeed as a new gospel. It was claimed that the ghosts were capable of working miracles greater than those that had occurred at the birth of Christ. Buck's followers stated publicly that they received far better instruction in the scriptures from the spirits than from their minister. The religious songs that the spirits sang were said to be of unearthly beauty and in themselves proof of the divine nature of the apparitions. Freyin was adored like a saint: she was called 'redeemer of souls... right holy warrior, spiritual mother... worker of miracles'. The ghost worshippers celebrated the anniversary of her decisive meeting with the spirits on Epiphany, which had in German the somewhat ambivalent name of *Fest der Erscheinung* – 'feast of Jesus' coming into the world' or 'feast of the apparition'. Thus, the church holiday was reinterpreted and its name was understood as an allusion to the apparition of the spirits.

In addition to their claim to being in contact with delivered ghosts, the sect entertained ideas concerning the hereafter other than those of the established Protestant Church. The surviving records provide preciously little detail. According to Buck, the apparitions proved against the teaching of Protestantism that there was 'a third place in which the ghosts of the deceased stayed'. Even if this brought the Catholic notion of purgatory to the minds of Württemberg's Protestant ministers, Buck was probably thinking of something else: the souls in purgatory did not interfere with the visible world and were hardly capable of giving religious instructions. The Catholic neighbourhood of Württemberg did not take to Buck's party. On the contrary, it greeted the scandal with 'laughter and scorn ... it was said that if anything like that would happen on their territory the fantasts would be punished severely on life and limb'. The 'third place' was probably the realm of ghosts between earth and the Christian hereafter. It seems likely, even though there is no clear evidence for it, that Freyin and Buck were influenced by a particular strand of Pietism. Following the ideas that Minister Oetinger had published in 1765, some Württemberg Pietists believed in the existence of the 'empire in between' where the souls of the deceased awaited their ascent to heaven. On the other hand, of course, Pietists never entertained the idea that spirits could give religious instructions. On the contrary, prominent Pietist preachers were said to give sermons of consolation for the dead in the 'empire in between'.⁸²

Buck adopted a six-year-old boy whom he kept from attending Protestant service and catechism. The child was considered to be on particularly good terms with the ghosts. According to Weilheim's Protestant

minister, the boy offered the spirits veneration solely due to God: he had reportedly been taught to kneel down and adore them. In all likelihood, he was being prepared for the role of a priest. The Freyin-Buck group can be regarded as a religious sect. In the form of regular gatherings, a holiday and the gestures of adoration performed at least by the boy, a new cult had been established. The ghost worshippers actively tried to convince other people to join their group and openly rejected the authority of the established Church. Freyin supposedly began to write down the sayings of the ghosts, their prayers and hymns that were considered as immediate divine revelation by the sect. Thus we are confronted with the genesis of a holy book.

The followers of Freyin and Buck cultivated the aggressive self-confidence of an elitist group. They 'alone had bright, open eyes whereas the other people were blind, perverse and pitiable'. They claimed to have received a special grace from God, arguing that 'the matter about the ghosts was something divine and those who were not chosen could not comprehend it'.

The central administration of the Württemberg Protestant Church decreed early in 1771 that the meetings at Buck's house were to be discontinued immediately. The prohibition was ignored. One month later, the *Oberrat*, Württemberg's state government, ordered Bühler to search for the exiled Freyin. The authorities hoped that if she could be convicted as fraud, the activities of the ghost worshippers would come to an end. However, Bühler was not only unable to find Freyin but a raid on Buck's house ordered by the duke failed because Bühler's plans had been leaked to the ghost worshippers. The leaders of the ghost sect revelled in 'prophecies' reinterpreting harassment and impending failures as the road to martyrdom and a prerequisite of their final triumph. They insisted with even more zeal on the truth of their revelations and attacked the established ecclesiastical and secular institutions. Buck publicly denounced the minister of Weilheim as a 'preacher of lies' and the town clerk as a 'writer of lies'. He thus denied the representatives of Church and state the moral integrity on which those institutions were based. He also rejected both officeholders as frauds and opponents of the divine order. In doing so, Buck denounced Church and state as corrupt. The Weilheim minister was right when he warned Bühler that the polemics of the ghost sect could be detrimental to public order and to society itself.

Thanks to Bühler, who wrote report after report about the ghosts, we are well-informed about Buck's followers. All of his early adherents suffered from deficiencies in their social lives, but these were of

various kinds. People with a bad reputation found their way to Buck's gatherings. The respectable poor and those without family support joined the sect. The Amtmann of Weilheim, the head of the local administration, became an ardent follower of Freyin. As the representative of territorial authority, he was powerful but still an outsider in the town, subject to constant critical surveillance by the townspeople. Within the group, social differences did not matter: on the contrary, the ghost worshippers were criticized for consciously ignoring them. When Bühler learned that the Weilheim Amtmann had joined Freyin's sect, he was outraged not because his subordinate had accepted the religious authority of a woman but because he had accepted the authority of a maidservant whom he treated as if she was his equal or even his better. Within two years, the background of the ghost worshippers became completely heterogeneous. An alderman and a number of craftsmen who seem to have been perfectly integrated into local society had joined the movement. When a noblewoman became interested in Buck's sect, her family intervened, claiming that she was feeble-minded and needed to be put under guardianship.

At Weilheim, the consequences of Buck's breach with the traditional order began to show. The Amtmann who had joined the sect was despised by Buck's opponents and disrespected by Buck's followers as a representative of the established order. Religious doubts were voiced, and some of the parishioners complained that 'they were no longer sure what to believe ... (and) wondered whether they should throw their bibles out of the window'.

The ghost sect emerged at a time when Württemberg's old religious minority, the formerly critical conventicles of Separatist Pietists, seemed to have been silenced for good. Facing what they considered to be another threat of 'revolution', the authorities finally resorted to harsh measures. After they had refused to confess as frauds, Buck and another leader of the ghost sect were sent to Ludwigsburg Prison for two years. Without their spokesman, the group slowly dissolved. In 1773, Bühler managed to arrest Freyin. Under massive pressure, she confessed that she had been hiding in Buck's house, all the time staging the alleged apparitions of the spirits. Some days later, she escaped from prison in the traditional way – using a rope made from bedclothes. This time she disappeared for good. The last person who spoke out in favour of the ghost sect even after imprisonment and flogging was pronounced insane by the Württemberg authorities in 1774.

The ghost sect had not managed to transcend denominational boundaries. The Catholics in the vicinity of Weilheim ridiculed the new

religious community. However, with more time, Buck and Freyin might have gathered followers even from the Catholic villages. At any rate, the sect was about to reshape local society and clearly threatened the local Protestant Church. A new Christian community with a special revelation, a holy book and at least a nascent priesthood was about to emerge. Typical of young religious movements dependent on a charismatic leader, social differences between the members of the sect lost a lot of their significance. The authorities had to step in so as to re-establish the traditional structure of the society and of the Church. The massive pressure and the violence that the government employed to stop the new religious discourse ended in a Foucaultian manner: the last adherent of the ghosts was declared mad. The enforcement of discipline and conformity ended with the medicalization of the problem.

The social composition of treasure-hunting groups apparently did not change much over time. Texan treasure lore was in some respects similar to that of pre-industrial Europe. Here, too, we find the stereotype of the socially marginalized treasure magician and the organizer from the upper strata of society. Some of the magicians were clearly vagrants. For example, in the late 1850s, a well-to-do gentleman from Port Neches, Texas, who had obtained a treasure chart from an old Mexican woman employed someone 'who had roughed it for years' to locate the treasure.⁸³ Vagrants were often regarded as the best treasure magicians. In America, these stereotypes clearly had an ethnic aspect. The settlers from Britain and other European countries north of the Alps who came after the Spaniards thought that the Mexicans of Spanish and/or Indian lineage were most capable of leading them to treasures.⁸⁴ Both groups, the Indians and the Mexicans, were about to be pushed to the margins of society or had already become an underclass. In Illinois, blacks were said to be very interested in treasure hunts. However, in contrast to the Indians, they were not credited with any special powers.⁸⁵ This suggests that at least in America, it was important for the treasure magician to have some connection with the past of the territory. The natives or the descendants of the first colonists who had become relative outsiders were credited with occult or at least superior secret knowledge.

A brief summary may be helpful: Most of the time, treasure-hunting parties were widely heterogeneous in social terms. They bridged social gaps insofar as they brought together people from very different strata of society. If the religious element of the treasure hunt became the dominant one, the social differences within the groups ceased to matter. Otherwise, the treasure hunt questioned the social classes only insofar

as it demanded the cooperation of individuals from the different classes. Nevertheless, treasure hunting implied the experience of mutual dependence of social classes. This fundamental willingness to cooperate was undercut but not destroyed by deliberate fraud on one side and economical superiority on the other. Treasure hunters' groups combined elements of economical and religious communities. They resembled business enterprises akin to stockholding companies or sects. In some cases, they were both at the same time.

7

Treasure Hunts in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Depositum custodi!

(Montague Rhodes James: *The Treasure of Abbot Thomas*, 1894)

Religion

The religious dimension of the treasure hunt declined as the nineteenth century progressed. The belief in ghosts lost ground or transformed into spiritualism and an interest in the more or less vulgarized forms of what would become known as 'parapsychology'.¹ Without the ghosts who needed to be redeemed, the religious overtones of treasure hunting disappeared. Even news about treasure in an ecclesiastical context was void of spiritual meaning.

A newspaper report published in *The Times* in December 1903 highlights the political rather than the religious significance of treasure tales. According to some Italian newspapers, 2 high-ranking clerics had presented themselves at the Vatican to give the newly elected Pope Pius X the sum of 40 million lire entrusted to them by his late predecessor Leo XIII. According to the same sources, after Leo's death, 2 bags full of gold worth more than 9 million lire had been found in his private rooms hidden behind bookcases. As the correspondent of *The Times* pointed out correctly, only some liberal Italian newspapers of marked anti-clerical disposition had run the story about the hidden riches of the papacy. There was no corroborative evidence. *The Times* suggested that the anti-Catholic press spread rumours about money that Leo XIII had supposedly hidden away in order to prevent Catholics from giving money to the Church as many used to do at Christmas. It was indeed suspicious that the newspapers had launched their campaign in December. *The Times* reporter explained that all available evidence

suggested that the finances of the Vatican were far from being robust and the Pope was in no position simply to hide a couple of million lire behind a bookcase.² The story about fantastic riches secretly hidden was obviously meant to damage the reputation of the Church and its leading personnel, and to keep the public from giving financial aid. The treasure of Pope Leo XIII in the newspaper stories was a treasure hidden from the public. The message the Italian newspapers wanted to spread was in essence that the Church did not deserve any support as it was already rolling in money and did not use its alleged riches wisely. Some essentials of the old treasure story featured. However, the newspapers did not say anything about any magical practices. In this context, the treasure was essentially political news. A mere hint at the magical potential of treasure lore would have destroyed that message.

All that remained of the old idea that treasure seeking might not only fill your wallet but also be 'good' for you on a personal level was the notion that treasure hunting could have some educational value. The comedy *Lot 79* by the American playwright Rida Johnson Young conveyed this message in its arguably most primitive form. Treasure hunters from New York City went to Cape Cod to find treasure. All they finally discovered was a box with a piece of paper in it, congratulating them on the good exercise they got digging it up. The reward of the urban treasure seeker was an outdoor work out in the comparatively healthy environment of a seaside resort. The play ran with moderate success in London's West End in 1918.³

There was, however, one notable exception from the general trend to a more secular, non-magical and non-religious understanding of treasure. Significantly, it was not a European but an American phenomenon. It used and adapted the old motifs in order to create a new religious narrative, and indeed a new Christian church: Mormonism. In 1838, Joseph Smith, the founder of the new denomination, described how he had found the Book of Mormon in some detail. An angel named Moroni came to Smith three times in the same night. He always had the same message: he told Smith where he could find 'a book... written upon gold plates giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent (North America) and the source from whence they sprang'. Together with the book, Smith would find two stones in silver bows. The stones were the Urim and Thummim. 'The use of these stones was what constituted Seers in ancient... times.' They would enable Smith to translate the golden book. It is significant that according to Smith's own account, the angel had to explicitly forbid him to use the golden book 'for the purpose of getting rich'. Smith found the book hidden under a

heap of stones in a stone box near the village in New York State where he lived. According to his account, this happened in 1823. Following the advice of the angel, Smith supposedly did not take the book out of its secret deposit for another four years. Only then did he take it into his house and began to translate it. Attempts to steal the precious book from him failed. Smith said that he returned the gold plates that he had translated directly to Moroni, who took them away with him. Smith claimed that a New York expert in old languages, a Professor Anthon, to whom some of the characters on the plates had been shown, confirmed that they were indeed Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyrian and Arabic and that his translation was correct.⁴

There is no denying the fact that this is a treasure narrative. The topic of the story is obviously a supernatural find of an old object of very high material value that was hidden in the ground and that nobody could claim ownership of. Even in a narrative written several years after the event, Smith admitted quite openly that the golden book was attractive simply because of its value: the angel had to keep him from selling it. In an interesting aside, Smith acknowledged the fact that many contemporaries saw him merely as a treasure hunter. He explained that between the discovery of the book and his work on the translation, Joseph Smith had worked for a prospector digging for silver in Pennsylvania: 'Hence arose the very prevalent story of my having been a money digger.' To rid himself of the odium of treasure hunting, Smith even claimed that he convinced his employer to give up prospecting.⁵ That an angel revealed the whereabouts of the hidden valuable object seems to have been a rather original element in Smith's narrative: the angel replaced the ghost. However, saints and angels as treasure guardians were not unheard of, as we saw in Chapters 2 and 3. Smith later corrected himself, bringing his story even closer to the traditional treasure narrative. He explained that Moroni was a heavenly being but not an angel: he was the soul of a long-dead prophet's son. Thus, the story was largely in keeping with traditional treasure tales.

His contemporaries were very critical about Smith's autobiographical statements. His adversaries claimed that he had long been known as a treasure hunter and published detailed accounts of his early life to prove just that. As a schoolboy, Joseph Smith had been known as 'Peepstone Joe'. He had claimed to be an expert in 'foretelling futurity' and finding lost or hidden objects, especially treasure. Peepstone Joe had carried two stones he called 'peep stones' in his hat. When he put the hat with the stones in it over his face, he could allegedly see things that were hidden and unknown. Young Smith was not simply a schoolboy

horsing around – he seems to have expected payment for his magical services.⁶ It is of no importance whether this qualifies as fraud or as a rather absurd prank. In any case, Smith certainly enjoyed presenting himself as a treasure magician from an early age.

According to early Mormon authors, Smith still used the ‘Peepstone Technique’ when translating the book of Mormon:

Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph (Smith) would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear.⁷

Today, many Mormons admit freely that Smith had a rather dubious early life as a treasure hunter or fraud. They point out that according to Christian tradition, God often chooses very weak people as his messengers so that the power of the message itself becomes clearer.

Smith resacralized the treasure. His treasure story was evidently religious in character. He brought the treasure motif back to its roots in the medieval stories about saints and their relics. However, the sacred object in his narrative was no longer about *memoria*, the sacred memory of a saint. In a strangely ‘enlightened’ fashion, the treasure was now about a doctrine. In a way, the treasure – the golden Book of Mormon – was the doctrine.

When the first Mormon missionaries arrived in Continental Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century, they encountered a number of difficulties. Not least among these was the obvious parallel between Smith’s story and traditional treasure tales, which at that time were even better known than they are today. Orson Hyde, one of the first Mormons to preach in Germany, published his account of the discovery of the Book of Mormon in 1842. He told a story that significantly differed from Smith’s account. According to Hyde, Smith had indeed found old documents but these had only looked like gold. Hyde did not even mention any material value they might have had. A little like the treasures of folk belief had been able to turn into worthless materials, the golden

plates had turned into yellowing parchment. In Hyde's account, Smith resembled an antiquarian or an archaeologist rather than a treasure hunter. Evidently, the missionary did his best to obscure the obvious similarities between the story of the Book of Mormon and treasure tales. However, Hyde also integrated a new element that he had found in European treasure legends into the Mormon narrative. He wrote that when Smith unearthed the book, a horde of demons of horrible aspect passed him by. The idea that the devil tries to frighten treasure hunters with awful visions so that they run away or make some crucial mistake in the last moments of the dig was, of course, well-known in traditional treasure lore. Smith never wrote anything like that. Hyde apparently found the folkloristic motif useful: the demons had not frightened Smith away and they had evidently no power to hurt him. Within the logic of the old treasure tale, this proved that Smith really was a man of God and Moroni, his guardian, was neither a ghost nor a demon but really God's messenger.⁸

Magic and crime

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, sensational news about a horrible kind of treasure magic made the headlines. The newspapers reported a number of cases of murder in connection with treasure hunts. In the Balkans, Russia and Italy, some people had allegedly been murdered by magicians who thought that they could find treasure if they sacrificed human blood. The most prominent case was probably that of the Russian Serski from Belczy in the Mohilev district in present-day eastern Belarus. A number of children had disappeared in the Belczy region in 1905. A pogrom threatened as the population suspected the 'ritual murder' of children by Jews. However, the police caught an elderly peasant called Serski red-handed. He had apparently killed nine children aged between four and seven. When apprehended, he admitted calmly that he had planned to kill no fewer than 50. He had seen a ghost that had told him that he could find any treasure if he trenched the earth with the blood of 50 innocent children.⁹ Whether the media reports about Serski's murders and similar killings were true is of secondary importance. We should, however, note that the stories still used at least certain elements of the early modern imagery of treasure hunts: reports about murderers/magicians claimed that they had seen an apparition of some kind that alerted them to the treasure. Meeting a spirit was evidently still an integral part of treasure lore. Even the idea

that virgins or innocent children were particularly likely to find treasure obviously played a role in the murder narratives, even if it was a sickeningly distorted one. The murders appear to be the only unusual element: homicide of any kind did not play a significant role in early modern treasure narratives. Nevertheless, Nikolai Gogol mentioned the idea that the sacrifice of a child would ensure the success of a treasure hunt in his story 'St John's Eve', published in 1831. Whether this story and the Belczy episode drew from the same older tradition or Gogol's story influenced treasure beliefs is open to debate. Even though ritual sacrifices had apparently played no role in the records of trials against early modern treasure hunters, we do find the motif in folkloristic accounts of the nineteenth century. The folklorist William Henderson maintained that the slaughter of an animal was still part of the ritual hiding – not the discovery – of a treasure in Scotland in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁰ Irish folk tales recorded in the 1890s might at least hint at the idea that the sacrifice of a human being could be necessary to obtain treasure.¹¹

Owen Davies suggested that treasure magic declined in Britain earlier than on the Continent. We must treat such statements with extreme caution as long as we do not have reliable statistics about trials against treasure hunters. Nevertheless, it seems obvious that treasure magic did decline after the eighteenth century. By and large, it was indeed an early modern phenomenon¹².

Magical books continued to play an important part in treasure hunting. A list of magical literature compiled in the 1840s contained more than 30 books on treasure magic.¹³ In 1894/95, the graves of two children were unlawfully opened in villages near Ravensburg in southwestern Germany. The authorities suspected that these crimes had an occult background. They searched the house of one Joseph Wetzel from Knollengraben (today part of Eschach near Ravensburg), a well-known cunning man from a long line of village magicians. The police discovered no clues that linked him to the unlawful exhumations but they did find a remarkable magical library. The folk magician owned more than 120 magic books, some printed and some manuscript copies of others. Even though magical books notoriously give false dates and places of publication, and fictive publishers, it seems safe to say that Wetzel's library dated back to the seventeenth century. No fewer than 28 of his books dealt mostly or exclusively with treasure hunting.¹⁴ Even though we do not know whether he used them, his case illustrates that treasure magic continued to be a field that expert sorcerers needed to know about.

The treasure map seems to have been very serious competition for the magical book in the nineteenth century. The non-magical, purely technical map or chart was not just an integral part of stories of the *Treasure Island* pattern that dealt with the hidden gold of criminals. Lost or secret mines could also be found with the help of charts drawn by their finders whom death had kept from exploiting the mines themselves. Texan folklore knows a great number of stories about such maps. These maps resembled the Venetians' books more than the strictly magical books of Old Europe but they eclipsed both of them. Very like their older predecessors, treasure maps were allegedly of immense value, much sought after and hard to come by. Nevertheless, like magical books, they were bought and sold. There was commerce in treasure maps in nineteenth-century Texas. One of these maps, which was said to have belonged to the Texan revolutionary hero James Bowie, supposedly fetched a price of \$500 early in the twentieth century. The maps were said to have belonged to people who had given them up because they had fallen seriously ill or because they were hard pressed to get some money quickly.¹⁵ The treasure maps in nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction were innumerable. Not all of them led to treasure trove in the strict sense. Alex Garland used the map as a narrative device in his novel *The Beach*, where a chart, which was acquired under mysterious circumstances, showed the way to a secret and precious place.

The divining rod seemed to lose nothing of its appeal in the nineteenth century. Friedrich Christian Benedict Avé-Lallemont, a police administrator and author of detective stories, was one of the most prominent criminologists of the nineteenth century. According to him, water-witchers made a pretty penny in mid-nineteenth-century Germany. Near Avé-Lallemont's hometown of Lübeck, a professional water-witcher who used the usual Y-shaped rod cut from an apple or plum tree openly offered his services for 5 to 10 talers.¹⁶ Catholic monks retained at least some of their questionable renown as expert diviners. In the late nineteenth century, the abbot of a monastery in the Swiss canton of Lucerne was said to have found a number of metallic veins with the dowsing rod.¹⁷

The discussion about dowsing kept flaring up throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the German Empire, the Verband zur Klärung der Wünschelrutenfrage (Association for the Clarification of the Divining Rod Question) that had its own periodical flourished before the First World War. This organization cooperated with the Reich Colonial Office and had diviners look for wells in one of the German colonies in Africa. During the Great War, the Verband claimed as its major task

the finding of 'hidden stores of coins'. As a lack of resources, especially metal, hampered Germany's armament effort, the government confiscated all kinds of metal objects.¹⁸

Just as the divining rod had been used in protoindustrial mining during the early modern period, it became part of business ventures in the nineteenth century. Water-witching was apparently a lucrative business. The firm of John Mullins & Sons specialized in water-dowsing as a commercial enterprise. Mullins, a Wiltshire man who had originally worked as a builder, became a dowsing entrepreneur and well-digger. He published a long list of his patrons, among them three dukes, numerous lords and several companies, including a number of breweries. The firm claimed to have found more than 5000 springs. Mullins & Sons explained that they relied entirely on the divining rod to find water. However, the business was not only about water: they also asserted that they had discovered veins of metallic ore in Cornwall and California, as well as mineral oil.¹⁹ Mullins died in 1894. In a publication of 1917, his children claimed that several of his sons and one of his daughters had inherited the 'natural gift' of dowsing.²⁰ This implied that the Mullins' family business was not based on science. Apparently, one needed to have a special talent to use the divining rod – the proximity to ideas about magical power is obvious. It is especially striking that the premodern concept of the use of the divining rod as a predominantly male activity still prevailed.

In America, rumours had it that the always resourceful Indians and the Mexicans had found ways to hoodwink diviners: the rod did not react if buried treasure had been covered with coal, ashes or isinglass.²¹

Dowsing for treasure enjoyed a short-lived revival during the National Socialist dictatorship. The SS had its own department for history and folklore, the so-called Ahnenerbe (Ancestors' Heritage) unit. A number of authors have pointed out that various adherents of the National Socialist ideology were very open to esotericism. The alternative modernity that National Socialism envisaged and was about to create apparently needed an alternative epistemology and a new definition of 'science'. Part and parcel of this quest for alternative knowledge was a new interest in occultism and fringe science. Heinrich Himmler, the Reichsführer SS (Reich leader that is supreme commander of the SS) wasted a lot of time and money on occultism and pseudoscience. Among other things, he financed not research on the use of the divining rod but actual training units for its use as if its worth was beyond doubt. The physicist Dr Josef Wimmer, a member of the Ahnenerbe organization, was responsible for the training. Sessions that were intended to school a

number of SS men as dowsers took place in the herb garden of Dachau concentration camp between 1942 and 1943. Himmler planned to use dowsers both to find water in the Balkans and to locate explosives. Every team of SS geologists was to have its own dowser. The commander of the SS envisaged a major search for iron mines that was to be led by diviners. Most importantly, he hoped to find major deposits of gold ore in Germany. Himmler's plan was inspired by a throwaway remark by Hitler, who had briefly wondered where the gold in the Rhine might come from. This rather ridiculous eagerness to do what the dictator might want was part and parcel of the competition for Hitler's favour among his followers. The Reichsführer SS even gave some thought to a classical treasure hunt. He had heard rumours of a huge treasure that was supposedly hidden in Mount Hohenhöwen, a basalt mountain in the foothills of the Alps. He hoped that SS diviners would discover this treasure.²²

Treasure fraud continued to be a problem in the nineteenth century. Avé-Lallemont's renown was based not only on his works on police organization and law enforcement but also on a four-volume study of organized crime in Germany. His writings were alarmist: he was obsessed with the idea that a huge and centuries-old subculture of criminals threatened both state and society. The criminologist described this subculture in fantastic detail, paying special attention to the secretive systems of communication allegedly used by organized beggars, petty criminals, tricksters and fences. He was convinced that Jews and Gypsies played major roles in the criminal underworld. Right-wing radicals – who are ironically considered organized criminals themselves today – keep quoting Avé-Lallemont, the ardent advocate of the well-ordered police state, as a major authority on supposedly Jewish Mafiosi.²³ Among the various types of criminals and criminal behaviour Avé-Lallemont described with Linnaean fervour, fraudulent treasure hunters played a minor but significant role. He suggested that in the middle of the nineteenth century, treasure hunting was still a major source of income for petty criminals. In the language of the organized underworld that he claimed to have unveiled, the word for fraudulent treasure hunting was *Sefelgraben*. As a matter of fact, the term had already been used in that sense in the sixteenth century. Whereas *graben* simply means 'digging', Avé-Lallemont offered two alternative explanations for *Sefel*. In keeping with his *idée fixe* that the subculture of organized crime had Jewish roots, his etymologies suggested a strong Jewish influence. *Sefel* was derived either from a term used in the Talmud for 'excrement' and 'dirt' or from a Yiddish word for 'simpleton'. Grimm's German dictionary (*Deutsches Wörterbuch*) accepted the first suggestion and emphasized the affinity

to the Yiddish *besefeln* (literally 'to smear somebody with excrement', meaning 'to cheat'). In any case, *sefelgraben* was clearly an abusive term that made fun of the victims of treasure tricksters.²⁴ Avé-Lallemont's interpretation was in keeping with the common anti-Semitism of the nineteenth century: it could not build on early modern narratives that had not suggested a significant connection between Jews and treasure hunting.²⁵

For Avé-Lallemont, the 'enlightened' bourgeois of the nineteenth century, the mere survival of treasure hunting proved that barbaric atavisms still influenced society. Tricksters still found people who were willing to buy *Geldmännchen*. Small reptiles, toads or big bugs 'dressed' in red rags, pasted up with glittering materials and 'housed' in fantastically coloured boxes, were offered as magical creatures that would bring money by clever chapmen. Avé-Lallemont made it plain that even though the crudest forms of treasure magic existed only in the countryside, supposedly well-educated and affluent townspeople believed in magical riches, too. According to the criminologist, the treasure magicians of his time used new tricks to achieve the same old effects. Instead of a bit of ventriloquism and white nightshirts, they now used distorting mirrors and the *laterna magica*, that is, a primitive kind of slideshow to make their urban clients believe that they could conjure up ghosts. He even claimed that there were still some self-styled alchemists around who cheated the credulous.²⁶

Avé-Lallemont's alarmism and his tendency towards sensationalism probably allowed him to exaggerate the problem of treasure fraud in the nineteenth century. Among the 839 vagabonds who were registered in a list of criminals drawn up by the Sheriff of Sulz in Württemberg in 1801, only two were accused of treasure hunting involving fraud.²⁷ In 1906, the criminologist Albert Hellwig compiled a short list of authentic cases of treasure hunting in the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century. He explicitly characterized them as not uncommon but he failed to give any concrete recent examples from Western or Central Europe.²⁸ Nevertheless, frauds continued to exploit the cultural imagery of the treasure and abused the belief in treasure magic in order to cheat people. We encounter such tricksters in urban and rural areas, in Paris as well as in the Alsace countryside.²⁹

In 1832, gypsies committed a series of frauds in London. They swindled maidservants out of their money by claiming that they could find them treasure provided that they could pay an astrologer to obtain a horoscope.³⁰

There was some excitement about treasure frauds known by the Spanish name *entierros* (burials or tombs – this might suggest that treasure hunting was seen as tomb raiding)³¹ in the German Reich in the 1890s. These organized groups of fraudulent treasure hunters were supposedly a great threat to the livelihood of the rural population. The authorities took pains to warn against them. The comen sent letters randomly to private individuals. They told them that they were required most urgently to come to Barcelona or Madrid in order to claim a huge inheritance or obtain a buried treasure. If they could not come to Spain in person they should give power of attorney to the sender and send him money. In another version of the fraudulent letter, a certain Juan Garcés stated that he had been arrested and needed 6000 francs in order to be released on bail. He claimed to have hidden a suitcase with £30,000 in it, allegedly the property of a bankrupt businessman who had died while fleeing from Buenos Aires to Barcelona.³² The authorities apparently believed that the frauds really were in Spain. It is likely that some remnants of the old notion of the treasure trickster as a foreigner lingered on. In the early twentieth century, a very similar scheme involving letters apparently sent from Madrid was used to swindle Americans out of their money.³³ Modern varieties of this scheme plague the internet.

A new narrative

From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards – some even claim from the late eighteenth century – numerous people tried to find the treasure of the Money Pit on Oak Island. Today, Oak Island, one of the islands of Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia, is probably honeycombed with a system of shafts and holes resembling a mine. It is rumoured that the efforts of the treasure seekers caused the original treasure pit to cave in so that the treasure chests were displaced and are now even harder to find.³⁴ Thus, an essential assumption of modern treasure seeking – that the treasure is stationary – does not apply in this case. Should we see this as a modern version of the old idea of the wandering treasure? The Money Pit treasure hunt, which has – with interruptions – been going on for about 150 years, has itself become a topic of legend. It is said that the treasure will not be found as long as oak trees grow on the island.³⁵ This is a joke rather than a magical idea. Saying that the treasure will be found when there are no more oak trees on Oak Island is tantamount to saying that it will never be found.

Treasure magic did not fully disappear during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, it thinned out. In American and Australian folklore, a new type of treasure tale emerged.

In North America, the old idea that treasure might be hidden in abandoned buildings took new form. The ruins of castles and monasteries that had had some significance in European treasure lore were replaced by the relics of older colonial ventures, which became very important in American treasure narratives. We will concentrate on one example. White Americans with a Northern European background believed in an abundance of treasure in Texas.³⁶ In a way, Texas was an abandoned country. The Spaniards had left it comparatively late. The settlers – many of whom had come to the territory in Stephen Austin's group only a few years before and many of them Northern European – managed to gain independence from Mexico in 1836. However, they must have felt as if they had entered a country that already had its own heritage of European culture. The marks that the Spaniards had left on the land were plainly visible. In contrast to the Native Americans whom Anglo-Saxon settlers drove out of other parts of North America, the Spaniards had a certain reputation for material wealth in the form of precious metals. Evidently, the new settlers expected to find some of the alleged wealth of the old settlers. The Spanish-speaking, Mexican part of the Texas population became the link between the new settlers and the supposedly old hidden riches. These were not always treasure in the narrow sense of the word: Texan folklore was full of narratives about 'forgotten' mines that had originally been discovered in the Spanish era.³⁷ Very similar stories about forgotten mines originally exploited by the Spaniards were known in Oklahoma. In both states, the ruins of Spanish forts were regarded as likely places to find treasure. The Native Americans were sometimes said to know where gold mines were. In other tales, the natives simply played the role of a negative *deus ex machina*: their attacks on the Spaniards explained why the Spanish had lost their mines or their treasures.³⁸

Spanish treasures even played a significant role in the treasure lore of Australia. The Spanish were said to have hidden treasure trove somewhere on the Australian mainland before Cook arrived. In addition, there were, of course, tales about Spanish ships full of riches that went down just off the Australian coast. The prodigious wealth of the Spanish seems to have been an *idée fixe* of Anglo-Saxon folklore. However, the Dutch or the French replaced the Spaniards in Australian treasure tales occasionally. These folk tales were essentially about some catastrophe by which the foreign colonists lost their treasures. They

suffered shipwreck and/or were massacred by supposedly aggressive Native Australians when they stepped ashore. The natives were rarely portrayed as the original owners of the treasure. Genuinely ancient Australian treasure had only religious significance for the indigenous people, who were generally said to have no notion of the material value of the treasure or the pearls that they happened to find. The narrative function of the Native Australians, even more than that of the Native Americans, was to provide an explanation for the fact that the treasure had been abandoned or its original owners had disappeared. On the Australian mainland, the alleged savagery of the aborigines was the equivalent of a storm on the sea that caused a shipwreck. They were characterized as a 'force of nature'. 'New' Australian treasures were caches of money secreted away by criminal bushrangers and bankrobbers.³⁹

Many folk tales about pirate gold belonged to this new type of treasure narrative. These stories contain pseudo-historical narratives that explain why certain pirates hid their loot at a certain place, at a certain time and in a certain way.⁴⁰

The real topic of this new type of treasure folk tale was the loss of money or costly items. The narratives essentially answered the questions 'How did the treasure come into existence?' and 'Why (and roughly where and when) did somebody lose or hide valuables?' Some narratives were not about treasure hunting, or even about accidental finds. All they said was that a treasure was buried somewhere. Some folk tales explained that somebody found a treasure by mere chance – or rather dumb luck. If someone did search actively for treasure, he used some kind of description left by the people the treasure had originally belonged to; for example, a historic narrative or some simple map. Treasure hunting in this new type of treasure narrative was about finding and reading clues. Thus, for this type of treasure tale, the past was very important. The treasure tale was essentially about the past as an objective set of events and developments. It goes without saying that this very crude concept of the past has nothing to do with scholarly historiography. However, it mirrors simple and popular ideas about history.

We have already seen that in American treasure lore, treasure magicians had a link to the past of the country, mostly because they belonged to an ethnic group that had arrived before the Northern European settlers. Now we fully understand this notion: as the new type of treasure tale that the American narratives belonged to was mainly about the past, it made perfect sense to attribute the extraordinary skills needed to find the treasure to people who were in a special way connected to that past.

As we have seen in Chapter 6, a little magic was left in the treasure narratives of the new type. Americans of north European lineage granted itinerants, especially persons of Indian or Spanish descent, with special powers. This was not just a leftover of the old European idea that some itinerants are skilful magicians: the imagery of the treasure magician from the underclass of strangers and foreigners was reinforced by the new historicity of the treasure.

In the Introduction, we briefly looked at the incantation-like phrase that modern-day treasure hunter Terry Herbert used to repeat: 'Spirits of yesteryear take me where the coins appear.'⁴¹ Even in this half-joke that played with the old imagery of spirits guarding treasures we find the new, quasi-historical concept of treasure: the spirits connected with treasure trove are not characterized as ghosts, fairies, saints or demons but are simply the spirits of the past – the spirits of yesteryear.

Probably the most significant change in the popular culture of the treasure hunt that happened in the twentieth century emphasized the entertainment value of treasure seeking. More than ever before, secular, non-magical treasure hunting became an entertainment and a hobby.

In a way, the discourse about hidden treasure hit rock bottom with the book *Treasure Hunting. Profitable Fun for the Family*, sold in Britain in the 1970s. The author described treasure hunting with a metal detector as a useful way to spend the weekend. In a rather crude machismo fashion, he offered 'clever' tips on how the eager treasure hunting husband could convince his supposedly sluggish children and his bored and disinterested wife to join him on weekend trips into the countryside to search illegally for lost antiques and hidden riches. Of course, this allegedly family-friendly, capitalist, *Antiques Roadshow* way of dealing with treasure was totally void of all magical or religious overtones.⁴² At the same time, the magazine *Treasure Hunting* offered advice to ambitious owners of metal detectors.

In the 1980s, a weekly comic that always came with a toy was rather popular with French and German children. In one of its issues, it offered a metal divining rod to find hidden treasure.⁴³ However, it took the post-modern esotericism to bring back treasure magic in earnest. Today, so-called treasure hunter's manuals are readily available on the book market. Some of them recommend the use of the divining rod to find treasure. Dowsing, presented as an 'ancient free technology', is said to guarantee the discovery of metal objects provided that the would-be treasure hunter follows the instructions in the manual. The market that caters to the needs of modern-day treasure hunters even found a

completely new answer to the thorny problem of locating the treasure. An author suggests that cameras – the old Polaroid variety as well as digital cameras – could photograph the otherwise invisible ‘auras’ of buried treasures. Thus, with some minor adjustments described by another manual for treasure hunters, digital cameras can supposedly be turned into divining instruments.⁴⁴ The digital camera has replaced the magical mirror, but the treasure hunt continues.

8

The Significance of Treasure Hunting: Past and Present

People think you have more money than you ought to have.

(A Sussex farmhand to a neighbour who recently became affluent, 1863, TNA, ASSI 36/10)

Treasure narratives

It is certainly insufficient to explain treasure hunting as a reaction to poverty or a form of greed and avarice.¹ Avarice has been seen as a part of the human condition and thus as a non-historical, that is, a quasi-anthropological constant. Anthropological constants hardly ever help to explain the behaviour of historical people. In our case, an alleged human tendency to accumulate material wealth does not explain why some people engaged in treasure hunting whereas others did not. Why did people look for treasure? Why did they talk about treasure? Why were they willing to suffer the repeated failure of treasure hunts and continue to look for hidden riches?

What was the meaning – the cultural significance – of all the treasures in the narratives from trials, laws, popular literature and folk tales that we have examined? This chapter suggests some conclusions that might help to see treasure hunting on a more abstract level as a cultural phenomenon that witnessed some changes in its societal significance. The chapter has two focal points: the past and the present, that is specific concepts of history prevalent in treasure narratives and the contemporary social and economic context of treasure narratives. First, we will examine the concept of the past conveyed by treasure narratives. We will ask what the past and history meant to treasure seekers who necessarily dealt with artefacts of a bygone era that had been lost for some time. This section will concentrate on the treasure narratives. Second, we will

discuss the meaning of treasure hunts for the time they took place in. What did they have to say about their own present? Why did they make sense to the contemporaries? Why did they fascinate the people of Old Europe? What was their meaning in the wider cultural context of their time?

We have encountered essentially two types of treasure narrative. For simplicity's sake, we will begin our review with the second one – the modern treasure narrative. This was essentially non-magical. As we saw when we discussed American and Australian folk tales about treasures from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, their focus was on the events that had led to the loss of the treasure in the first place. They were about abandoned mines, money left behind in old Spanish forts, pirate gold, shipwrecks and the like. These narratives explained how, when, where and by whom the treasure had first been lost. In addition, they sometimes told how one might have a chance of finding the treasure by reading historical clues. In a way, the new treasure narrative was the dark twin of archaeology: it concentrated on things that had happened a long time ago and on the traces that had been left for investigators to find in the present. The treasure tale and the treasure itself were bridges into the more or less remote past. The treasure was part of an objective past.

We find nothing like that in the other type of treasure narrative – the early modern one. This usually had strong magical elements. Some of these tales hinted that the treasure had been buried during a war or because of the dissolution of the monasteries during the Reformation, or that it had been hidden by a miser or criminal. In rare instances, they even gave the name of some half-legendary crook who was said to have secreted his loot away. However, neither the popular narratives about treasures nor the records of the trials against treasure hunters focused on the background of the treasure – it was of virtually no importance what kind of past the treasure might have. In many cases, the treasure was simply a gift from the spirit world that was supposed to materialize out of thin air when demons or saints brought it. The treasure tale and the treasure itself were bridges into the past only if a ghost was part of the treasure narrative. The treasure site was simply the place where one could see the ghost even if it was in the unlikely form of a blue flame. The ghost narrative was essentially not about the treasure and the questions of how and why the treasure had been hidden – it was about the unfinished business that bound the ghost to the visible world. The treasure was of crucial importance because it was at least one part of that unfinished business. The history of the treasure was really the history of

the ghost. This history was not simply a report about the past: it implied a task for the present. The treasure hunter had to help the ghost to leave the world of the living, he often had to finish the ghost's business for him. This unfinished business was a part of the past that still mattered because it effectively reached into the present. For this early modern type of treasure tale, the past as such was dead. It mattered only if it implied a moral or social obligation on the present. If you unearthed the treasure, you buried the past and laid the ghost. Finding the treasure was not about historical clues; it was mostly about coming into contact with the ghost. The treasure was part of a subjective past.

Thus, the two types of treasure tale implied different concepts of the past. The early modern treasure narratives were part of a personal and moral concept of the past with religious overtones, while the modern treasure narratives were part of an objective quasi-historiographical concept of the past.

Gain without conflict

Since the middle of the 1960s, anthropology has taken an interest in the popular belief in hidden treasures. George Foster's concept of the 'limited good' broke new ground.² Based on a field study carried out from 1958 until 1963 in a Mexican village, Foster set out to describe the mental make-up to which the social and economical life of a peasant society was geared. In doing so, he explicitly referred to the societies of pre-industrial European. According to Foster, the members of a peasant society tend to act as if all goods – material ones such as soil, money, fertility and health, as well as immaterial ones such as power, friendship and honour – were only available in finite quantities that cannot be augmented. Thus, all goods are limited. This means that the economy is a zero-sum game. Peasants regarded society as a closed system, in which the gain of one individual was at the expense of all others. If all goods are limited, everyone who wants to have more must necessarily diminish the share of somebody else, and in the long run he will harm everybody else. Hence not only the pursuit of profit but also any deviation from the traditional norm was strongly discouraged. Social differences were part of the status quo that the limited good mentality tried to preserve. The social stratification was not conceived of as dynamic but as God-given and therefore static. It is important to bear in mind that the image of limited good is a model. People from traditional, agriculture-based societies tended to behave as if they believed in the limitation of all goods, but this does not mean that all people in traditional societies believed actively and consciously in limited good in the same way they

believed in live after death or the revolution of the sun around the earth. The image of limited good was a cognitive orientation rather than a positive conviction like religious faith.³

Historians are familiar with this mentality from pre-industrial societies. Some random examples will suffice, as follows. The medieval and early modern polemics against the emerging trade capitalism of the cities stressed time and again that anyone who sought to augment his income did so at the expense of everybody else. An increase in personal profit was incompatible with the common good.⁴ It is worth noting that the opposite assumption is the basis of capitalism. It was the point of the guilds to restrict competition and to enforce conformity among artisans and traders. The mercantilist and physiocrat ideologies of the eighteenth century clearly showed the influence of the idea of limited good. It was not before Adam Smith that this influence began to fade significantly. The exclusion of strangers often implied that the contemporaries saw the mere presence of newcomers as a threat to their material well-being. Even though the image of limited good was essentially a rural, pre-industrial mentality, vestiges of that type of thinking still linger on.

Within the framework of the limited good mentality, significant material gain was only acceptable when it came from outside the rural society that was understood as an economic unit. According to Foster, wealth from outside could come in essentially two forms: as remuneration for work in an alien and faraway place – be it an urban centre or even a foreign country – or as a treasure obtained from the spirit world. The tales about treasure that were used in Foster's research area to justify newly acquired wealth corresponded in nearly all of their particulars with the source materials from the early modern period. The treasure was found in a place that could be exactly identified, it was guarded by a devil or a ghost, and the finding of the treasure could be described as a dangerous adventure. Mexican tales about buried treasure were usually set in the surroundings of the narrator's hometown and in a not-too-distant past. Often someone who was still alive was introduced as the treasure hunter.⁵ The motifs of the treasure and the riches gained abroad could intermingle. In the late 1960s, the anthropologists Eva Blum and Richard Blum interviewed a woman from the Greek countryside. She considered herself extremely lucky. She explained that she owed her good fortune to the fact that she had been hired by wealthy and generous Greeks who had come back from the United States. The migrants had become rich 'by a miracle; in America they had found a pot of gold coins. But that would not have happened unless God had enlightened them.'⁶ Apparently, work in the United States was no longer a sufficient

explanation for great riches. Indirectly, the woman claimed that her own good luck had nothing to do with her: she had simply become part of a chain of fortunate events ultimately sponsored by God. Thus, within the framework of the 'image of limited good', she was unlikely to become the object of envy or criticism. The message that the examples from Mexico and Greece conveyed was essentially the same: the money had come from outside. Nothing had been taken out of the supposedly closed economic system that the protagonists and those who heard their stories lived in. By referring to the actual circumstances in which the narrator and his audience lived, these tales achieved their aim: they gave a socially acceptable interpretation of newly acquired wealth.

The debate that was triggered by Foster's theory cannot be traced here.⁷ Keith Thomas – without further discussion – confirmed the validity of the concept of limited good for the interpretation of the belief in treasure in early modern Europe. As we have seen, 'hill-digger' (i.e., treasure hunter) had indeed been a term for *parvenu* in seventeenth-century England.⁸

When we attempt to interpret our source materials about concrete trials of treasure hunters in the light of Foster's theory, we have to be aware of the fact that – given that twentieth-century peasant societies are comparable to those of the early modern period – Foster's and our sources talked about two fundamentally different issues. The anthropological study was not about actual treasure hunts but dealt with popular fiction about treasure that provided an explanation for economic success. The narrative motifs that Foster learned about during his field studies are almost the same as those in the early modern sources. However, our usual Old European treasure narrative was not about a successful treasure hunt; it was about spirits and magic that was mostly used in vain to obtain treasure. There were some exceptions. A treasure hunter who had to face a criminal trial could try to defend himself by pointing out that he was poor, that is, he suggested that his poverty proved that he could not know anything about hidden treasure.⁹ In a folk tale from Oxfordshire, a man discovered a hidden small room, probably an old 'priest hole', in his house. Shortly after, he started buying property as if he had come into a great deal of money. It was rumoured that he had found a pot of gold in the hidden room.¹⁰ Nevertheless, whereas anthropological research demonstrates that material wealth could be interpreted as a discovered treasure, historical evidence suggests that treasure hunting was rather a practical pursuit of profit. Foster's observations and the testimony of the sources from the early modern period

can be regarded as two sides of the same coin, but there is nothing that seems to relate them to each another. Foster's image of limited good obviously offers only a partial explanation of the pre-modern interest in treasure hunts.

Foster speculatively elaborated his concept in an offshoot of his main argument. In order to be socially acceptable, the individual pursuit of profit could take two forms in a limited good society: taking part in a lottery or searching actively for treasure.¹¹ In this way, one was no longer forced to practise self-denial by defensively accepting the status quo, and at the same time one avoided violating the norms of the limited good society. Treasure hunting was a form of economic initiative within the narrow confines of the limited good mentality. The treasure hunters of the organizer type were craftsmen or people from the upper strata of local society. They did not – at least not exclusively – work in agriculture. Their entrepreneurial initiative and profit-seeking had already taken them at least some way from the static agricultural society based on the concept of limited good. They took part neither in early modern large-scale financial transactions nor in international trade, nor do we have any indication that they rejected the moral economy that was so characteristic of the early modern city, with its guilds and limitations imposed on production. Profit-seeking did not inspire the wish to transcend the social and moral boundaries; it rather became a motivation for treasure hunting. The very behaviour that Foster had expected of people who were adapted to the concept of limited good on the one hand but who sought to improve their financial situation on the other is exactly what we find here. This behaviour was characteristic of a minority who still lived in an agrarian economy and shared its mentality but who began to emancipate themselves through their business methods and their pursuit of profit. This group can be identified as the exponent of the great transformation that characterized the early modern period: the slow transition from an agricultural to a bourgeois society dominated by a newly emerging market economy. Treasure hunting did not play a significant role during the Middle Ages, nor in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was instead a typical product of the early modern period of socio-economic transition.

Another argument in support of an interpretation of treasure hunting as a typical phenomenon of the early modern period following Foster's concept of limited good may be cited. According to him, the lottery was, like treasure hunting, an acceptable way in the limited good society to increase one's wealth.¹² This hypothesis, derived from his anthropological studies, is borne out by our historical data. After they had been

introduced in the late Middle Ages, lotteries started to attract a large part of the population in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The lottery generated its own brand of magic: people tried to divine the winning numbers.¹³ It is interesting to note that in Foster's as well as in our historical sources, lottery prizes and treasure troves became interchangeable. One of Foster's informants said that people were talking less about treasure than in the past, for now there was the lottery instead.¹⁴ Georg Buck, the leader of the ghost sect of Weilheim, not only promised his partners a treasure; for some time he also spoke of an enormous win on the lottery with the same confidence. Both would be given to him by God and by ghosts.¹⁵ In a memorable case from East Sleswick-Holsatia in 1768, a peasant who won a small sum in the lottery interpreted this as an incentive to dig for treasure.¹⁶ Rudolf Zacharias Becker, the eighteenth-century educator, in his book of advice for peasants, compared the lottery directly with treasure hunting. He rejected both on the basis that each would eventually lead to material or moral ruin. A big lottery win would make those unfortunate enough to get it merely lazy. Others waited for the lottery result and neglected their work in the meantime. He argued that the suspense of the lottery had driven people insane or made them murderers. In addition, lottery officials cheated.¹⁷ The lottery did not lose its fascination at the end of the eighteenth century to the same extent as treasure hunting did because it could operate without magic. The fact that it is still popular today is rather due to the element of thrill inherent in it than to the endurance of the limited good mentality.

It is not sufficient to attribute the increased treasure hunting of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the growing interest in private property and individual comfort far beyond the level of subsistence.¹⁸ The significance of treasure hunting lies in the way in which it articulated this interest as well as in its promise to fulfil it in a manner that did not conflict with the existing social and mental framework of the period. As a form of profit-seeking initiative, treasure hunting was in accordance with the norms of the Protestant work ethic.¹⁹ The problem posed by the use of magic was apparently accepted. This may have been facilitated by the fact that magical treasure hunting was never equated with witchcraft. Furthermore, the treasure seekers of the 'organizer' and the 'labourer/supporter' type could soothe their consciences with the thought that only the treasure magician was responsible for the use of occult forces. The motif of redeeming a ghost as a pious work still added to the attractiveness of treasure hunting.

The fact that most treasure magicians were priests or belonged to the underclass of vagrants does not contradict our findings. Most of them

did not act on their own initiative: they did not start excavations themselves but were employed by the organizers of treasure hunts, that is, people from the middle or even upper social class.

The limited good mentality even helps to explain the tendency to address clerics and vagabonds as experts in treasure hunting. If newly acquired wealth had to be accounted for as a treasure trove coming from outside the society, it was plausible to seek the expert knowledge necessary to discover it from outside or from the margins of the society, too. The very existence of such expert knowledge within the limited good society would have disturbed its delicate equilibrium. It is characteristic of the limited good way of thinking to attribute extraordinary wisdom and exceptional (magical) abilities to individuals from outside the 'closed' agrarian society. Priests and vagrants were such outsiders. They were never fully integrated into the village society. The clergyman had to stand out. It was part of his social role to be different from the peasants and artisans. The vagrants were the 'significant others' of the villagers. Whereas the ownership of land or workshops was all-important for one's standing in a village community, the homeless could not boast any such possessions. It was not only that priests and vagabonds had a reputation as magicians and were therefore seen as treasure experts; with them, magical knowledge was 'safe'. As these magicians did not belong to the village society and its limited good structure, they did not upset this structure.²⁰

Only now can we understand the great oddity of traditional treasure lore. Vagabonds, that is, mostly very poor people, were regarded as experts in treasure. To a modern mind, this is exceedingly strange: if these vagrants knew so much about treasure and could deal with the treasure guardians, why did they not take the treasure for themselves? How could you be desperately poor and homeless while you had access to fabulous wealth? The inherent cultural necessities of the treasure narrative bridged that logical gap. The vagrant had to be the treasure magician because he was an outsider. This made cultural sense within the framework of the limited good mentality of the traditional economy. This cultural coherence of the treasure narrative eclipsed the contradiction between the expert knowledge of the itinerant treasure magician and his poverty.

The treasure magicians were essentially 'outsiders' who could help to get the treasure from the magical realm of spirits outside the society. This explains why there was hardly any competition between treasure magicians and between treasure-hunting groups. As we have seen in the previous chapters, cooperation not competition was the rule among

treasure seekers. Of course, if treasure hunts were a means to avoid economic competition in the first place, we should not be surprised to find little competition among treasure hunters. However, there was more to it. There was no incentive for competition among treasure magicians and treasure seekers in general because it was the point of the hunt to obtain material wealth from the realm beyond society, the magical 'outside'. This outside had no limits. The treasure – the wealth from outside the limited Good system – was itself unlimited good. It was not unlimited good because it was usually not discovered, as Mullen has suggested;²¹ it was unlimited because it came from beyond the society dominated by the limited good.

Even in some of the 'secularized' treasure narratives of the modern type current in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we find this reasoning. As we discussed in Chapter 6, people who were connected to the past of the country, such as Native Americans or people with a Spanish background, were often regarded as adept treasure experts by Anglo-Americans. James Bowie, the Texan frontier hero, wanted to find the treasure of the Lipan Indians. In order to do so, he joined the tribe. He lived with the Lipans and he apparently even married a Lipan woman. When Bowie had learned where the treasure was hidden, he left. However, he failed to take the treasure from the Indians later on.²² The Bowie narrative was not simply about 'espionage'. The frontier hero crossed the frontier. He turned – at least for some time – his back on his own culture. Only when he became part of the 'other' system, the 'outside' beyond the pale of normalcy, could he find the treasure. In order to gain access to wealth from outside his society, Bowie had to become an outsider himself, very like the early modern vagrant treasure magicians had been outsiders. The only thing truly new about Bowie's tale was the element of voluntary choice: the hero could decide to 'go native' and join the 'outsiders' in a way that had not been open to the heroes of Old European treasure narratives.

If we accept that treasure hunting was both a salient feature and an expression of the great social developments of the early modern period, it becomes obvious why it was such an important motif in folklore. It is also easier to understand why jurisprudence and the emerging territorial state took so great an interest in it.

As far as the tales about treasure troves are concerned, Foster found that they were very popular, although their entertainment value seems to be quite unsatisfactory. He explained the extraordinary interest in this fiction about treasures by considering their affirmative social function: they accounted for phenomena that would otherwise have given rise to

conflict within the limited good society or cast doubt on the validity of the image of limited good.²³ Foster's functionalist analysis cannot be applied without modification to the interpretation of our sources. The main argument, however, seems to be of considerable heuristic value. The interest in the treasure motif was derived from the social significance of the economic issue that it mirrored. The more pressing this issue became, the more intensive the preoccupation with the treasure motif, be it in folklore or in law. It is obvious that this preoccupation was completely independent of what and how many treasures were actually discovered. The main problem was not to find a solution for a legal problem but to find a way of coming to terms with a process of economic transformation affecting society as a whole. This applies to the societies of the 'developing countries' analyzed by Foster as well as to Western and Central Europe in the period of socio-economic transition between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.

We need to address one more of the social aspects of treasure hunting. Aside from the punishments that the state authority could mete out, the worst sanction that treasure hunters had to face was ridicule. In 1750, the last understanding that a group of luckless treasure hunters from the Black Forest could reach after their total failure and some internal quarrels was that they would never talk to anybody about their adventure. However, the treasure hunt and an alleged apparition of a ghost connected with it became public. The landlord of the 'The Swan' pub who had organized the venture had to suffer public humiliation when his neighbours suggested renaming his house 'The Wraith'.²⁴ According to a Texan story of the nineteenth century, a man dreamed that a treasure was hidden in his garden. He stopped digging when he found a big stone that was hard to remove. His brother-in-law offered a very high price for the garden, bought it and soon after seemed to have come into a great deal of money. The original owner of the garden ignored the development as he was 'the kind of man who would miss a chance at wealth rather than incur the ridicule of neighbours'.²⁵ Of course, this narrative had a clear message concerning one's work ethic, too. Nevertheless, the real punchline was that treasure hunters needed courage because they might become the laughing stock of the village. Treasure hunting was a way to make money without risking serious conflict with the community. However, it was not completely free from any risk of social consequences, otherwise even more people might have engaged in the practice. The threat of ridicule loomed large over treasure hunters. As scorn and mockery damaged a person's – especially a man's – reputation, the contemporaries took this threat seriously. The

secretiveness of the nightly treasure hunts carried out in strict silence had ritualistic significance, but these magical rites also seem to have driven home the need to keep a treasure hunt as secret as possible. Ideally, nobody who was not directly involved should know about it – not only to avoid difficulties with the authorities but also to escape the scorn of the always watchful community. Again, treasure hunting seems to have been designed to avoid any kind of conflict and tension. It was better to forsake the treasure and to give up hope of material gain than to become conspicuous. Few people seem to have considered treasure hunting that could not be done secretly, or at least discreetly, worth doing. We hear about onlookers who joined the search out of curiosity but not about treasure hunts that were deliberately designed as public entertainments before the early twentieth century. We do learn about pre-modern treasure hunters who had obtained official permits but not about anyone who openly advertised these permits in public. The only exception is the East Anglian treasure hunt of 1521, which we referred to in Chapter 5. Significantly, these supposed permit holders were criminals who tried to blackmail people who had searched for treasure clandestinely.

Seemingly marginal episodes from the early twentieth century confronted modern economic competition and the treasure hunt directly. Around 1900, the media used treasure in advertising campaigns. At first, English newspapers had small receptacles with gold coins hidden in the ground. In 1903, the London tabloid *Tit-Bits* published a fictional story in a number of instalments. Each contained a clue that pointed to the place where the newspaper had hidden no less than £500: 'The story will be fiction – the sovereigns will be real,' *Tit-Bits* trumpeted. 'Those of ordinary intelligence' would be able to find the treasure somewhere in a public place if they were willing to invest 'care, and thought, and vigilance'.²⁶ In January 1904, newspapers hid small discs all over London and in the surrounding areas. These were 'treasures': everyone who found them and brought them to the newspapers office received a reward of £50. The newspapers published rather vague clues that were supposed to help to locate the 'treasures'. Of course, this gimmick helped first and foremost to increase the sales of the paper. Crowds stood on the streets awaiting the arrival of the newspapers with the latest clues. Numerous people began digging for these treasures in any place they considered promising, including other people's private property and the public highways. The treasure hunters caused considerable mayhem. Charges were brought against some of them for damaging roads and ornamental trees. In south-east London, even railway tracks were

damaged. The campaigns had to be discontinued on the request of the authorities, which began to see treasure hunting as a menace to public safety.²⁷ For many people, the treasure hunt was probably just an excuse for some horseplay. Others took it very seriously and claimed when challenged about the effort that they were investing in the hunt that they needed the money – by the standards of the time, a considerable sum – desperately. *The Times* mused that the frantic treasure hunts

reveal some curious facts about certain strata of society. It is evident that there are among us thousands of idlers who can be roused into spasms of activity, if there is the chance of getting something which is not to be earned by regular labour or skill... [and] if the outcome depends upon luck.... What a revelation is given by the craze... of the multitude of persons who are to all intents and purposes unemployed.²⁸

The treasure was apparently not only the way to make money that did not cause social unrest as it had been in agrarian societies. It was now also a means of earning money in a socio-economic system that denied a regular income to a significant number of people. The demands of the fully fledged market economy of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were more than some people could cope with. Capitalism seemed to demand levels of energy, maybe assertiveness or even aggressiveness, that the 'idlers' would not, or could not, muster. Again, the treasure was the easy way out. In the early modern period, it had helped people who wanted to better themselves but still tried to avoid conflict. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the treasure promised help to people who were unable or unwilling to adjust to the market economy, which was inherently aggressive, and which demanded constantly a certain level of assertive activity and energetic self-interest. The treasure was no longer an excuse for proactive economic behaviour; rather, it was an excuse for the absence of such behaviour. But did the modern treasure hunters not provoke considerable conflict? Does the fact that some of these latter-day treasure seekers had to face charges not contradict our suggestion that treasure hunting was a way to make money that helped to avoid controversy? Firstly, the treasure seekers did not engage wilfully in conflict. Some seem to have thought that digging in public places was perfectly lawful. They did not expect to get into trouble. Secondly, it was one thing to face a short, quasi punctiform quarrel about an unlawful dig but it was quite another to engage in long-term competition. The treasure hunters might have been willing to have a short

argument or even risk a legal suit for treasure hunting, but that does not mean that they were ready to adapt to the structural competition of Capitalism or the way of life that it demanded. Thus, we can safely say that the big narrative of the treasure remained intact. The treasure was the surplus from the outside that equalized the balance between real and imagined property as well as between real and desired economic behaviour.

Was there any interrelation between the limited good mentality and concepts of the past conveyed in treasure narratives? There was clearly a connection between the rise of the new treasure narrative and the decline of the limited good mentality. One might say that they were siblings, even though the decay of the image of limited good was clearly the older and bigger sibling who helped to strengthen the younger one. The new treasure narrative and the waning of limited good thinking were products and consequences of the same historical development. Both would be unthinkable without the bourgeois Enlightenment of the eighteenth century.²⁹ To be sure, the Enlightenment did not destroy magic. It would be foolish to assume that it simply obliterated the traditional culture of Old Europe. However, it did influence that culture significantly and managed – together with the Capitalist economy that it advocated – to marginalize various elements of Old European culture. Essentials of the Enlightenment doctrine had been the inviolability of private property and education designed to free the individual from the constraints of the traditional religious system. Evidently, both items were diametrically opposed to the limited good mentality. If private property was inviolable and under the total and exclusive control of an individual, it was hard to see how constraints on economic activity could be justified, especially those imposed by guilds or rural communities. To be sure, individuals had always managed to ignore such economic obligations: the Enlightenment did not invent Capitalism or the pursuit of economic success. However, it helped to justify them and suggested that opposition to this individualistic pursuit of economic success – often labelled ‘happiness’ – was an attack on the most fundamental rights of any human being. The Enlightenment campaign against traditional folk religion and superstition helped to marginalize the moral village economy, which had been at the heart of the limited good system. The rationalism of the new philosophy did not recognize the emotional and moral bonds that linked the present to the past. The ghost, the embodiment of these bonds, became the aim of the Enlightenment’s ridicule and turned from a moral agent into a mere bogeyman. The notion that the past only mattered when it implied an obligation

for the present that had been at the heart of the old treasure narrative was absolutely incompatible with Enlightenment rationality. The Enlightenment suggested seeing the past in objective and rational terms and to learn about it by reading the clues left in source materials. This reified past was the basis of the present and could be an example for future actions, but it certainly did not imply obligations fraught with everyday morality and religious sentiment as the past of the old treasure narratives had. The Enlightenment helped to pave the way for the new treasure narrative. The limited success of the Enlightenment allowed the survival of vestiges of the limited good mentality and treasure magic until the present day.

Conclusion

I have writ my letters, casketed my treasure.

(William Shakespeare: *All's Well that Ends Well*, 1602/03)

To date, several treasure hunters have succeeded in unearthing hoards of coins, jewellery or other valuables. Thus, they contributed indirectly but significantly to the emergence of scholarly archaeology. However, the importance of the treasure in law and popular culture is strangely out of proportion to the number and value of the treasure troves that have been found. Treasure received the greatest attention in early modern Europe and Britain.

Jurists discussed treasure troves indefatigably. The ownership of a discovered treasure was hotly disputed. Did it belong to the owner of the land on which the treasure was found, to the finder or to the fiscal authorities? A host of laws concerning treasure trove emerged in early modern Europe. In the Middle Ages and the early modern period, Britain's laws concerning treasure emphasized the rights of the Crown. On the Continent, we find a variety of regional and even local rules. From the fifteenth century onwards, considerations of monument protection began to play a role in the juridical debates. All pre-modern laws agreed that magical treasure hunting was forbidden. However, treasure magic was, as a rule, not identified with witchcraft.

The epics of the Middle Ages used the treasure as a plot device. Even when a treasure was not characterized as being cursed, it represented money in its most dangerous form. Either the hero stayed wisely away from it or it was his downfall. In medieval ideas about kingship, treasure played an important role because it signified the king's power. However, the treasure hunt, the active search for a lost or hidden cache of valuables, remained largely alien to the Middle Ages. The blueprint for

the early modern treasure hunt was the search for relics. Hagiography abounded with narratives about lost relics that were miraculously found again after an often adventurous search involving visions and apparitions. We should view the idea of spirits watching over treasure at least in part as a vulgarization of motifs of hagiographical tales about relics.

The guardians of treasures were of supreme importance in early modern treasure beliefs. The dragons of the Middle Ages played hardly any role, even though there were rumours about monsters and magical snakes watching over hoards. The belief in various fairies as the guardians or, in fact, as the owners of treasures was far more significant. Treasure hunters invoked saints as well as demons who were supposed to help them find a treasure or simply bring them money. St Christopher became the patron saint of treasure hunters. Most treasures, it was believed, were watched over by ghosts. The idea of a wraith guarding a treasure belonged to a whole set of beliefs about the spirits of the dead doing penance or trying to fulfil certain tasks. Ghosts had to walk until a task that they had left unfulfilled in their lifetime was completed or until some guilt was expiated. The treasure's owner was guilty of the deadly sin of avarice. He might also have failed to give the treasure to a good cause or – in the case where it had been gained by unlawful means – to return it to its rightful owner. Thus, he had to come back as a ghost. The discovery of the treasure was in the ghost's own interest because this was a precondition for its redemption. As treasure hunters helped the ghost to leave the visible world, treasure hunting could be presented as a godly deed and a Christian duty. The idea that the recovery of a treasure was an act of piety because it resulted in the redemption of a wandering soul was a genuine part of the motivation of many treasure hunters. Even though learned Protestantism negated the existence of ghosts unconditionally, this attitude seems not to have had any effect at the popular level. Demons who wanted to hinder the deliverance of the ghost were supposed to show themselves to frighten treasure seekers away. The treasure belonged to the realm of spirits rather than to the visible world of everyday life. It could supposedly move on its own and change its outer form in order to deceive treasure hunters. Thus, guarded by spirits and defying the distinction between objects and living beings, treasure was highly magical.

In order to secure the treasure and to ban hostile spirits, treasure seekers had to take recourse to a range of magical rituals and implements. The most important was the divining rod. The magic of treasure hunters was a kind of bricolage: it comprehensively used elements of High Magic, ecclesiastical liturgy, and unsophisticated and unspecific

charms. Treasure hunters bought and sold spell books and magical items on the "black market" for magic. Treasure magic was not supposed to have any concrete influence on the visible world. It was essentially about divination and contact with the spirits that guarded the treasure. At least at the popular level, where witchcraft was mainly seen as malevolent magic doing harm to people and livestock, the magic of treasure hunters did not provoke suspicions of witchcraft.

Thus, the courts could deal rather leniently with treasure hunters. As a rule, treasure magicians did not receive capital punishment; rather, they were sentenced to forced labour, the pillory or fees. Treasure hunters were seen as either frauds or magicians. Even though the attention of the legislators shifted from magic to fraud in the eighteenth century, in legal practice, both interpretations of treasure hunting coexisted throughout the early modern period. What interpretation the court chose depended on the details of the individual case. Magical treasure hunts appear to have been phenomena of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Apart from very few exceptions, treasure hunters were male. Magic was gendered: all kinds of sorcery that had to do with buying and selling, with material gain in the emerging market economy, were a male domain. Thus, treasure hunting was male magic *par excellence*. Treasure hunters worked in groups. Many of these consisted of four types of treasure seeker. In treasure hunters' groups, people from different strata of society – who would hardly have been willing to cooperate under other circumstances – came together. First, there were those from the upper middle class: well-off peasants and artisans who organized the treasure hunts. These organizers employed a wizard. Treasure magicians, the second type of treasure hunter, were either clerics or so-called cunning men, rural diviners or folk healers. Among the latter were numerous vagrants. For a certain fee, the magicians offered their knowledge and their ability to find treasure and to deal with spirits. Among the itinerant treasure magicians we find a number of tricksters. A genuine belief in magic and the practice of fraud did not necessarily exclude each other. Thirdly, there were people who supported the treasure hunt. Some of them simply worked as labourers in the pay of the organizer and helped with the digging. Others supported the organizer financially. These individuals pooled their money to pay for the magician and the excavation. There was a hard-to-define fourth type of treasure hunter: those who just joined out of curiosity. The group made arrangements for the distribution of the expected find. At times, treasure hunting parties resembled stockholding companies. The more emphasis was placed

on the redemption of the ghost as a godly deed, the more important it became to prepare for this religious task through prayer and devotion. At times, the treasure-hunting group acquired characteristics of a religious community, with the magician as its spiritual leader. In this role, he could wield considerable power over people who were his social superiors. Within such groups, the social and denominational differences between members lost some of their importance. The treasure-hunting parties had characteristics of business enterprises as well as of religious congregations.

Why were there more treasure hunts in the early modern period than in the Middle Ages or in the nineteenth century? Why did treasure hunting attract so much attention from theologians and jurists even though the treasure troves that were found were few and mostly insignificant? Treasure hunting has been explained simply as a form of avarice or as a reaction to the poor economic conditions that the majority of Europe's population suffered. This explanation is not satisfactory because it fails to explain the obvious conjuncture of treasure hunts in the early modern period. It has been suggested that such ventures were indirectly caused by the Reformation and by the wars that occurred between 1500 and 1800, increasingly involving the civilian population. The monks of the dissolved monasteries as well as the villagers, the townspeople and the aristocrats who feared pilfering soldiers hid their valuables in the ground. Thus, the chances of finding treasure were never as good as in the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. This theory seems too abstract and too simplistic, and it is not borne out by reports about actual finds. Following the anthropological discussion about the "image of limited good", it is suggested that treasure hunts are phenomena typical of times that witness economic and social transition. As the Capitalist economy emerged, it slowly began to change pre-modern economic mentalities. Part and parcel of these was the "image of limited good": people in traditional societies behaved as if all goods were only available in fixed quantities that could never be increased. Thus, one person's gain was necessarily the loss of anybody else. Therefore, extraordinary economic activity and open profit-seeking were strongly discouraged. Material gain was only acceptable socially if it came from outside the society, such as treasure. This belonged to the magical sphere of spirits; it was a gift from demons or saints, fairies or ghosts. Thus, people who actively searched for personal gain but still shrank from violating society's norms were likely to engage in treasure hunting. The hunters violated laws and used magic, but they did adhere to the norms and values of traditional society. This is one of the essential reasons why

the contemporaries hesitated to identify treasure hunting with antisocial witchcraft. Treasure hunting was an integral part of the economic magic of pre-industrial Europe.

Treasure hunting in general, and especially treasure magic, declined after the eighteenth century. However, they did not disappear. In the nineteenth century, a new and modern treasure narrative arose that now governs the discourse about treasure. According to the traditional, magical treasure narrative, the treasure was related to the past only if it was an integral part of a ghost story. The ghost, a survival from the past, demanded something from the present. The link that the ghost story provided between past and present was about morals and personal obligation. The new treasure narrative is about history crudely understood as a series of facts. The treasure seeker has to gather and interpret historical clues to unearth the treasure trove. The treasure hunt deals with the past in a non-personal, objective and reified sense. The treasure trove itself comes out of that past and is thus part of a historical discourse. Treasures have become history.

Notes

Introduction: Treasures and Magic

1. Daily Mail Online (2009), <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1215723/Staffordshire-hoard-Amateur-treasure-hunter-finds-Britains-biggest-haul-Anglo-Saxon-gold.html> (accessed 27 September 2007).
2. Anonymous (1728) 'Treasure' in E. Chambers (ed.) *Cyclopaedia*, 2 vols. (London: Chambers) vol. 2, p. 239.
3. Anonymous (1751–1772) 'Trésor' in D. Diderot and J. Le Rond d'Alembert (eds.) *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 17 vols. (Paris: Diderot and Le Rond d'Alembert) vol. 16, p. 597; Anonymous (1751–1772) 'Magie' in D. Diderot and J. Le Rond d'Alembert (eds.) *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 17 vols. (Paris: Diderot and Le Rond d'Alembert), vol. 9, pp. 852–854, here 853.
4. Anonymous (1731–1754) 'Schatz' in J.H. Zedler (ed.), *Universal-Lexicon*, 64 vols. (Halle and Leipzig: Zedler), vol. 34, pp. 980–985; Anonymous (1731–1754) 'Schatz-Graben/Schatz-Gräber' in J.H. Zedler (1731–1754), *Universal-Lexicon*, 64 vols. (Halle and Leipzig: Zedler), vol. 34, p. 985.
5. See chapter 1.
6. S. Wilson (2000) *The Magical Universe* (London: Hambledon & London); J. Dillinger (2002) 'Das magische Gericht', in H. Eiden (ed.) *Hexenprozesse und Gerichtspraxis* (Trier: Spee), pp. 545–593.
7. J. Dillinger (2007) *Hexen und Magie* (Frankfurt: Campus) 13–18.
8. E. Durkheim (1992) *The Rules of Sociological Method* (Paris 1895; Basingstoke: Macmillan 1992); M. Mauss (2001) *A General Theory of Magic*, 3rd edn (London: Routledge 2001).
9. C. Beard (1933) *The Romance of Treasure Trove* (London: Sampson Low); G. Hill (1936) *Treasure Trove in Law and Practice from the Earliest Time to the Present Day* (Oxford: Clarendon).
10. Y.-M. Bercé (2004) *A la Découverte des trésors cachés du XVI^e siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Perrin).
11. E.g. K. Thomas (1991) *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 4th edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin); D. Purkiss (2000) *Troublesome Things* (Harmondsworth: Penguin); J.M. Sallmann (1986) *Chercheurs de trésors et jeteuse de sorts* (Paris: Aubier); G. Kittredge (1958) *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (New York: Russell & Russell).
12. An example of exceptional quality: M. Tschaikner (2006), *Schatzgräberei in Vorarlberg und Liechtenstein* (Bludenz: Geschichtsverein).
13. K. Graf (2001) 'Erzählmotive in frühneuzeitlichen Kriminalquellen', in J. Beyer and R. Hiimäe (eds.) *Folklore als Tatsachenbericht* (Tartu: AS Voru Täht), pp. 21–36; J. Brückner (ed.) (1974) *Volkserzählung und Reformation* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt); cf. also H. Glassie (1982) *Irish Folk History* (Dublin: O'Brien).

14. S. Thompson (1955–58) *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, 6 vols. (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bagger).
15. H. Hundsichler (2007) 'Religiös orientierte Schatz-Auffassungen des Spätmittelalters', in E. Vavra (ed.) *Vom Umgang mit Schätzen* (Vienna: ÖAW), pp. 55–80; J. Crossan (1979) *Finding is the First Act: Trove Folk tales and Jesus' Treasure Parable* (Philadelphia: Fortress); I. Waltner-Kallfelz (1993) *Die Schatzsuche als religiöses Motiv* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz).
16. P. Spufford (1988) *Money and its Use in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP), especially 109–131, 240; G. Jaritz (2007) 'Das schlechte Gebet zu den Schätzen der Welt', in E. Vavra (ed.) *Vom Umgang mit Schätzen* (Vienna: ÖAW), pp. 81–98.

1 The Treasure in Law and Early Archaeology

1. Hill, *Treasure*, pp. 49, 167; T. Mayer-Maly (1971–1998), "Schatz", in HRG, vol. 4, pp. 1360–1364.
2. E. Eckstein (1910) "Das Schatz- und Fundregal und seine Entwicklung in den deutschen Rechten" *Mitteilungen des österreichischen Instituts für Geschichtsforschung*, XXXI, pp. 193–244, especially pp. 209–210, 227–228; Mayer-Maly, "Schatz", pp. 1360–1361; G. Steinwascher (1983) "Schatzglauben und Schatzgräber in Hessen-Kassel im 18. Jahrhundert" *Hessisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte*, XXXIII, pp. 257–291, here p. 288.
3. J. Dillinger (2003) "Das Ewige Leben und fünfzehntausend Gulden. Schatzgräberei in Württemberg 1606–1770", in J. Dillinger (ed.) *Zauberer – Selbstmörder – Schatzsucher* (Trier: Kliemedialia), pp. 221–297, here pp. 222–223; M. Ott (2002) *Die Entdeckung des Altertums* (Kallmünz: Lassleben), pp. 53–54.
4. Eckstein, "Schatzregal", pp. 193–204; Mayer-Maly, "Schatz", pp. 1361–1362; Dillinger, "Ewige", pp. 222–226.
5. Eckstein, "Schatzregal", pp. 204–205, 211–213, 228–229.
6. J. J. Schoepffer (1705) *De iure principis circa adespota* (Rostock: Schwiegerau), pp. 31–34; C. Besold, C. L. Dietherr and J. J. Speidel (1666) *Thesaurus practicus* (Nuremberg: Endterus), p. 866; B. Carpzov (1656) *Iurisprudentia forensis Romano-Saxonica* (Leipzig: Ritzschius), pp. 876–880; S. Stryk (1685) *De iure principis subterraneo* (Frankfurt/Oder: Coepsel), pp. 18–19; W. von Kreittmayr (1844) *Anmerkungen über den Codicem Maximilianeum Bavaricum civilem*, 5 vols. (Munich: Vötter 1759, reprinted Munich: Vötter), vol. 2, p. 307; cf. Eckstein, "Schatzregal". pp. 231–232, 238–241.
7. Mayer-Maly, "Schatz", p. 1362.
8. Kreittmayr, *Anmerkungen*, vol. 2, p. 308; Dillinger, "Ewige", p. 227.
9. Dillinger, "Ewige" p. 227; Mayer-Maly, "Schatz", p. 1362.
10. Hill, *Treasure*, pp. 185–188; Eckstein, "Schatzregal", pp. 209–210, 227–228.
11. Hill, *Treasure*, pp. 190–193.
12. E. Coke (1793) *The Reports of Sir Edward Coke, Knight*, 7 vols (Dublin: Moore), vol. 7, p. 13.
13. Hill, *Treasure*, pp. 199–206.
14. Bercé, *Découverte*, pp. 149–153; J. Gillingham (1978) *Richard the Lionheart* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson), pp. 9–20.

15. A. Thomas-Latour (1852) "De l'Invention des Trésors Cachés et du Droit aux Trésors Trouvés" *Revue de Législation et de Jurisprudence*, XVIII, pp. 40–60; Hill, *Treasure*, pp. 127–158.
16. Anonymous (1800) "Paris, Oct. 11", *Courier and Evening Gazette*, October 17, n.p.
17. Hill, *Treasure*, p. 158.
18. Ott, *Entdeckung*, pp. 52–53; Dillinger, "Ewige", pp. 228–230.
19. Zedler, "Schatz", p. 983.
20. Ott, *Entdeckung*, p. 53.
21. U. Tengler (1509) *Layen Spiegel* (Augsburg; Rynmann) n.p.; Mayer-Maly, "Schatz", p. 1363; Eckstein, "Schatzregal", pp. 230–232; Bercé, *Découverte*, pp. 138–139.
22. Dillinger, "Ewige", pp. 230–231.
23. Hill, *Treasure*, p. 143.
24. Thomas-Latour, "Invention", pp. 58–59; Bercé, *Découverte*, pp. 140–144.
25. Thomas-Latour, "Invention", pp. 59–60; Dillinger, *Hexen*, pp. 146–149.
26. W. Behringer (1988) *Mit dem Feuer vom Leben zum Tod. Hexengesetzgebung in Bayern* (Munich: Hugendubel), pp. 172, 178–179, 188–190.
27. Hulford (2006) www.hulford.co.uk/act1542.html, accessed 21 February 2006.
28. See Chapter 3.
29. J. Sharpe (2001) *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Harlow: Longman), pp. 15–16; Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 292, 306.
30. Hulford (2006) <http://www.hulford.co.uk/act1563.html>, accessed 21 February 2006. For the background see N. Jones (1998) "Defining Superstitions: Treasonous Catholics and the Act against Witchcraft of 1563", in C. Charlton (ed.) *States, Sovereigns and Society in Early Modern England* (New York: St. Martin's), pp. 187–203.
31. C. Innes (1814–44) *The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland A.D. MCXXIV – A.D. MDCCVII* (Edinburgh: Records Commission), vol. 2, p. 539.
32. <http://www.hulford.co.uk/act.html>, 21 February 2006.
33. Sharpe, *Witchcraft*, p. 87.
34. W.F. Ryan (1999) *The Bathhouse at Midnight. Magic in Russia* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press), pp. 425–426.
35. Ott, *Entdeckung*, p. 71.
36. F. Behn (1961) *Ausgrabungen und Ausgräber*, 2nd edn (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer), pp. 9–13, 16–19; B. Trigger (2006) *A History of Archaeological Thought*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge UP), pp. 80–81.
37. Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 279–280.
38. Cf. H. Klinkhammer (1992), *Schatzgräber, Weisheitssucher und Dämonenbeschwörer. Die motivische und thematische Rezeption des Topos der Schatzsuche in der Kunst vom 15. bis 18. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Mann), Illustrations Nr. 50, 52, 54–55, 64–66, 69, 71–73, 82.
39. Trigger, *History*, pp. 55–61; Ott, *Entdeckung*, pp. 63–64; Besold, *Thesaurus*, p. 866.
40. Ott, *Entdeckung*, pp. 39–49.
41. Ott, *Entdeckung*, pp. 67–70.
42. Trigger, *History*, pp. 54–58; Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, p. 144.

43. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, p. 204; Trigger, *History*, pp. 86–90; Dillinger, “Ewige”, pp. 227–228.
44. Steinwascher, “Schatzglauben”, pp. 278–280, 288–289.
45. S. Jäggi (1993) “Alraunenhändler, Schatzgräber und Schatzbeter im alten Staat Luzern des 16–18. Jahrhunderts” *Der Geschichtsfreund*, CXLVI, pp. 37–113, here p. 41.
46. H.Nielsen (2002) *Guldhornsindskriftten fra Gallehus* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag); Beard, *Romance*, pp. 5, 117, 124–125; Ott, *Entdeckung*; Dillinger, “Ewige”, pp. 228–229.
47. C. Kiesewetter (1978) *Faust in der Geschichte und Tradition* (Leipzig 1893: Spohr, reprinted Hildesheim: Olms), p. 70.
48. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1623.
49. Ryan, *Bathhouse*, p. 188.
50. Beard, *Romance*, pp. 230–235. Rumours about the golden gates of a shrine being buried in Glastonbury survived into the twentieth century. A similar pair of golden gates taken from a church at the time of the Reformation is supposed to lie on the ground of Gate Pond near Coltishall, Norfolk; Beard, *Romance*, p. 233.
51. Beard, *Romance*, pp. 229–240; Clark, Goodwin, pp. 157–158.
52. Beard, *Romance*, pp. 282–301.
53. STAA, VÖ Lit p. 656.
54. Thomas, *Religion*, p. 377.
55. Ryan, *Bathhouse*, p. 188; L. Ivanits (1992) *Russian Folk Belief*, 3rd edn (Armonk: Sharpe), p. 44.
56. Ivanits, *Russian*, pp. 44–45.

2 Medieval Treasure Lore

1. E. Tyler (2000) (ed.) *Treasure in the Medieval West* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press).
2. K. Simrock (1986) (ed.) *Die Edda* (Stuttgart: Cotta 1851, reprinted Stuttgart: Phaidon), pp. 167–242.
3. C. Lecouteux (1993) “Der Nibelungenhort. Überlegungen zum mythischen Hintergrund” *Euphorion*, LXXXVII, pp. 172–186, here, pp. 176–177, 185. It goes without saying that Lecouteux’s interpretation is even less convincing as far as the *Nibelungen Lied* is concerned.
4. M. Hardt (2004) *Gold und Herrschaft. Die Schätze europäischer Könige und Fürsten im ersten Jahrtausend* (Berlin: Akademie), pp. 235–254.
5. Simrock, *Edda*, p. 331. In a comic song from the Alpine region, written by Joseph Victor von Scheffel in the late nineteenth century, a dragon (“Tatzelwurm”) bemoans the good old days when everybody was mortally afraid of it and it could afford to sleep on gold, <http://www.markuskappeler.ch/taz/frataz.html>, accessed 4 October 2009. Cf. also the record “Der Tanz des Tatzelwurms” by the neofolk band Sturmpercht. Tolkien later parodied the close mutual affinity between dragon and treasure. In Tolkien’s novel *The Hobbit*, the dragon Smaug had slept on the treasure for so long that bits and pieces of jewellery literally grew into its underbelly. The dragon in a way became the treasure. Appropriately, it was nicknamed “the Golden”.

6. Simrock, *Edda*, p. 330.
7. W. McConnell (1999) "Mythos Drache", in U. Müller (ed.) *Mittelalter Mythen*, vol. 2, pp. 171–183, here p. 177.
8. H. de Boor and K. Bartsch (1988) (eds.) *Das Nibelungenlied*, 22nd edn. (Mannheim: Brockhaus).
9. J.-D. Müller (1998) "Öffentlichkeit und Heimlichkeit im Nibelungenlied", in G. Melville and P. von Moos (eds.) *Das Öffentliche und das Private in der Vormoderne* (Cologne: Böhlau), pp. 239–259.
10. Questionable Lecouteux, "Nibelungenhort", p. 176.
11. Lecouteux, "Nibelungenhort", pp. 175–176.
12. De Boor and Bartsch, *Nibelungenlied*, p. 184.
13. Nibelungen A 90, 1062–1063.
14. Lecouteux, "Nibelungenhort", p. 172.
15. Lecouteux, "Nibelungenhort", pp. 176–177; Dumézil: *Mythe et Épopée*, Paris 1968, Bd. 1, pp. 446–448.
16. Lecouteux, "Nibelungenhort", pp. 176–179.
17. Nibelungen A 1065–1079.
18. Nibelungen A 2304–2310.
19. Simrock, *Edda*, p. 332.
20. W. Storch (1992) "Rheingold", in R. Gassen and B. Holeczek (eds.) *Mythos Rhein* (Ludwigshafen: Braus), pp. 243–262. See also J. Dillinger (2010) "Rheingold. Schätze und Schatzsucher im heutigen Rheinland-Pfalz von den Nibelungen bis zur Gegenwart", *Jahrbuch für westdeutsche Landesgeschichte*, XXXVI, pp. 53–84.
21. <http://www.abendblatt.de/daten/2002/05/10/22027.html>, accessed 26 October 2008.
22. CMS (2008) http://cms.main-rheiner.de/sixcms/media.php/85/20041126_WO930302.pdf, accessed 26 October 2008.
23. TAZ (2008) <http://www.taz.de/index.php?id=archivseite&dig=2003/07/17/a0155>, accessed 26 October 2008.
24. A. Becker (2007) *Die Pfalz und die Pfälzer*, 7th edn. (Annweiler), p. 67.
25. Psilog (2008) <http://www.psilog.info/Nibelungenschatz.html>, accessed 23 November 2008.
26. *Die Jagd nach dem Schatz der Nibelungen*, directed by Ralph Huettner, 2008.
27. M. Apitz (1996) *Karl. Das Gold der Nibelungen* (Wiesbaden: Apitz-Galerie).
28. The idea that treasure might not be buried but hidden under water seems to have been common in Germanic culture. As we have seen above, the sons of Nibelung might have been water spirits. Siegfried's hoard disappears in the Rhine. The saga of Egil and the saga of Grettir both suggest hiding treasure underwater, Crossan, *Finding*, p. 26.
29. *Beowulf* (1999) translated by S. Heaney (London: Norton), pp. 52, 68.
30. Lecouteux, "Nibelungenhort", p. 181.
31. Lecouteux, "Nibelungenhort", pp. 181–182.
32. T. Walsingham (1864) *Historia Anglicana*, H.T. Riley (ed.), 2 vols. (London: Longman), vol. 1, p. 264.
33. J.W. Thomas (1986) (ed.) *Ortnit and Wolfdietrich: Two Medieval Romances* (Columbia SC: Camden House).

34. Tolkien "quoted" the *Nibelungen Lied* insofar as he explained that the ring had been harmless for centuries when it lay on the bottom of the river Anduin – an obvious allusion to the Nibelungen gold safely hidden in the Rhine.
35. H. Mäkeler (2007) "Zum Wandel des Schatzmotivs in der Sagalliteratur", in E. Vavra (ed.) *Vom Umgang mit Schätzen* (Vienna: ÖAW), pp. 153–166, here p.165.
36. Wikisource (2007) http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Mabinogion/Peredur_The_Son_of_Evrawc, accessed 10 November 2007.
37. The stone is clearly no equivalent of the Holy Grail. Even though Perceval has to fight serpents/dragons in the continuation of the narrative by Gerbert of Montreuil, these monsters do not guard a treasure, Chrétien de Troyes (1982) *Perceval*, translated by N. Bryant (Cambridge: Brewer), pp. 221–222, 269–270.
38. R. Bromwich (2006) (ed.), *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, 3rd edn. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press); P. Ellis (1987) *A Dictionary of Irish Mythology* (London: Constable), p. 223.
39. W. Schmid (2001) "Die Jagd nach dem verborgenen Schatz", in D. Ebeling (ed.) *Landesgeschichte als multidisziplinäre Wissenschaft* (Trier: Porta Alba), pp. 347–400, here pp. 374–376.
40. Schmid, "Jagd", 375.
41. J.M. Fritz (1982) *Goldschmiedekunst der Gotik in Mitteleuropa* (Munich: Beck) p. 109.
42. Hardt, *Gold*, pp. 235–254. Of course, we find evidence for this kind of thinking about wealth in medieval epics, too. Apart from the Siegfried narrative and others, we find this use of riches in the Welsh Mabinogion. When Matholwch, the King of Ireland, threatened to leave King Bendigeidfran of England in anger because he had been insulted, Bendigeidfran reconciled him with princely gifts: he gave him a huge staff made from silver, a golden plate and a magical cauldron that could bring a dead warrior back to life, Mabinogion (2008) <http://www.mabinogi.net/branwen.htm>, accessed 27 October 2008. As none of these gifts was ever hidden or lost, we cannot regard them as treasure.
43. P.E. Schramm (1954–1978) *Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Hiersemann).
44. K. Görich (1993) *Otto III* (Sigmaringen: Thorbeke), pp. 48–51, 209.
45. B.U. Hucker (1990) *Otto IV* (Hanover: Hahn), pp. 21, 267.
46. G. Buccellatin and H. Snapp, Holly (1995) (eds.) *The Iron Crown and Imperial Europe*, 3 vols. (Milan: Mandadori).
47. Schmid, "Jagd", p. 378. The author would like to thank Dr Monika Storm, Mainz, for drawing his attention to this episode in the life of Archbishop Balduin the Great.
48. Schmid, "Jagd", p. 378.
49. Schmid, "Jagd", p. 378.
50. Thiofridus (1854) "Sermones duo", in J.-P. Migne (ed.) *Goffridi Abbatis Vindocensis opera omnia...accedunt Thiofridi Abbatis...scripta* (Paris: Migne), pp. 405–410, here pp. 406–407; A. Angenendt (2007) *Heilige und Reliquien*, 2nd edn. (Hamburg: Nikol), p. 180; Schmid, "Jagd", p. 353; M. Mayr (2007) "Reliquien – kostbarer als Edelsteine und wertvoller als Gold", in E. Vavra (ed.) *Vom Umgang mit Schätzen* (Vienna: ÖAW), pp. 99–114.

51. Schmid, "Jagd", pp. 373–374.
52. Schmid, "Jagd", p. 378.
53. Schmid, "Jagd", pp. 371–373.
54. Schmid, "Jagd", p. 371.
55. Angenendt, *Heilige*, p. 175.
56. Angenendt, *Heilige*, p. 163.
57. K. Görich (1998) "Otto III öffnet das Karlsgrab in Aachen", in G. Althoff and E. Schubert (eds.), *Herrschaftsrepräsentation im ottonischen Sachsen* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke), pp. 381–430.
58. Anton Legner (1995) *Reliquien in Kunst und Kult* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft), p. 15; M. Heinzelmann (1979) *Translationsberichte und andere Quellen des Reliquienkultes* (Turnhout: Brepols).
59. Lenger, *Reliquien*, p. 31.
60. Premontre (2008) http://www.premontre.org/subpages/vitae/vita_b/vb_21-30.htm, accessed 21 October 2008; Premontre (2008) and http://www.premontre.org/subpages/vitae/vita_a/vita-A%20Sancti%20Norberti.htm, accessed 21 October 2008; Lenger, *Reliquien*, p. 18.
61. R. Olivier (1995) "La Lance, l'Épée et la Hache", *Les Amis de Jeanne d'Arc*, XLII, pp. 14–21; K. deVries (1999) *Joan of Arc. A Military Leader* (Stroud: Sutton), pp. 50–53.
62. N. Kruse, Norbert and H.U. Rudolf (1994) (eds.) *900 Jahre Heilig-Blut-Verehrung in Weingarten*, 3 vols. (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke).
63. Thiofridus, "Sermones", p. 405.
64. Angenendt, *Heilige*, pp. 118–119.
65. Angenendt, *Heilige*, p. 119.
66. E.g. Thiofridus, "Sermones", p. 407.
67. Carlo Collodi used this motif in *Pinocchio*. The fox and the cat convinced Pinocchio that he could grow a money tree if he planted some money in the garden. Of course, the two rascals stole the money.
68. C. Quarrell (1955) *Buried Treasure* (London: Macdonald & Evans), p. 96.
69. D. Sabean (1984) *Power in the Blood* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP), pp. 90–91; W. Behringer (1998) *Shaman of Oberstdorf* (Charlottesville: Virginia UP), pp. 148–149.

3 The Magical Treasure and Its Guardians

1. E. Harper-Bill (1987–2000) (ed.) *The Register of John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury 1486–1500*, 3 vols. (Leeds –Woodbridge: Canterbury and York Soc.), vol. 3, pp. 215–216.
2. S. Hirschberg (1987), "Schatz", in HDA, vol. 7, pp. 1002–1015, here pp. 1006–1007.
3. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 609; Bü 1623; Bü 480a.
4. H. Marzell (1964) *Zauberpflanzen, Hexentränke* (Stuttgart: Kosmos), pp. 26–27.
5. Thomas, *Religion*, p. 280; M. Bowker (1967) *An Episcopal Court Book for the Diocese of Lincoln 1514–1520* (Lincoln: Lincoln Rec. Soc.), pp. 111–112; Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, pp. 205, 209.
6. Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 279–280, 644.

7. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, 132; L. Winter (1925) *Die deutsche Schatzsage* (Cologne: Busch), pp. 23–27; for examples from Wales, see W. Sikes (1880) *British Goblins* (London: Sampson Low), pp. 390–391, for France Bercé, *Découverte*, 124–125.
8. A. Pfeiffer (1914) “Schatzgräberei in der Pfalz”, *Der Pfälzerwald* XV, pp. 28–34, here p. 32–34; Steinwascher, “Schatzglauben”, p. 271.
9. Thomas, *Religion*, p. 377.
10. J.K. Clark (1984) *Goodwin Wharton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 49–50, 75, 157.
11. J. Dillinger (2006) “Eine erfundene Tradition. Zum Kaltenstein auf dem Hoxberg”, *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Saargegend*, LIV, pp. 23–34.
12. HHSTAW, 132/553.
13. Steinwascher, “Schatzglauben”, p. 273; Hirschberg, “Schatz”, p. 1003, Ryan, *Bathhouse*, p. 190.
14. Sikes, *British*, pp. 386–388; J. Powell (1901) “Folklore Notes from South-West Wiltshire”, *Folklore*, XII, pp. 71–83; W. Henderson (1879) *Notes on the Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties of England and the Borders* (London: Satchell), pp. 271–272.
15. H.F. Feilberg (1895) “Ghostly Lights”, *Folklore*, VI, pp. 288–300, 298–299, see also B. Thorpe (1851–52) *Northern Mythology*, 2 vols. (London: Lumley), vol. 2, pp. 263–265.
16. Saga (2009) http://www.sagadb.org/grettis_saga.en, accessed 12 August 2009; Mäkelä, “Wandel”, pp. 161–162.
17. O. Knoop (1906) “Sagen aus Kujawien”, *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*, XVI, pp. 96–100.
18. Knoop, “Sagen”, p. 99.
19. J. Prätorius (1666) *Anthropodemus plutonicus* (Magdeburg: Lüderwald), pp. 302–303; H.L. Fischer (1790) *Das Buch vom Aberglauben* (Leipzig: Schwickert), pp. 180–181.
20. Hirschberg, “Schatz”, p. 1003–1004; Steinwascher, “Schatzglauben”, p. 274; C. Daxelmüller (1996) *Aberglaube, Hexenzauber, Höllenängste. Eine Geschichte der Magie* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag), p. 303.
21. HSTAST, A 309 Bü 3; LASH, 111/551.
22. Prätorius, *Anthropodemus*, p. 93.
23. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 480a; Bü 833; Bü 1623; Tschakner, *Schatzgräberei*, pp. 34–35.
24. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1451.
25. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1451.
26. J.G. Schmidt (1988), *Die gestriegelte Rocken-Philosophie*, 2 vols. (Chemnitz: Stößeln 1718–1722, reprinted Leipzig: Acta Humaniora), vol. 1, pp. 104–106.
27. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1621; Klinkhammer, *Schatzgräber*, pp. 21–22; Winter, *Deutsche*, pp. 33–35; Ryan, *Bathhouse*, p. 188.
28. Paracelsus, Theophrastus (1933) “De occulta philosophia”, in *Theophrast von Hohenheim genannt Paracelsus: Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K. Sudhoff, 14 vols. (Munich: Oldenbourg), vol. 14, pp. 513–542, 530–531. Paracelsus probably confused Psalms 66:10 with Zechariah 13:9.
29. Local tradition, found documented by the author on an untitled leaflet at a tourist information point on the Hoxberg Mountain, 2007.

30. Knoop, "Sagen", 99.
31. J.V. Grohmann (1864) *Aberglauben und Gebräuche aus Böhmen und Mähren* (Prague: Calve), p. 214.
32. Steinwascher, "Schatzglauben", p. 273; Hirschberg, "Schatz", p. 1003.
33. Hirschberg, "Schatz", p. 1004; Daxelmüller, *Aberglaube*, p. 301; Steinwascher, "Schatzglauben", p. 273.
34. L. Ivanits (1992) *Russian Folk Belief*, 3rd edn (Armonk: Sharpe), pp. 44–45.
35. Beard, *Romance*, pp. 22–24.
36. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, p. 206.
37. Beard, *Romance*, p. 57.
38. P. Zambelli (2007) *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance* (Leiden), pp. 115–254.
39. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, p. 206.
40. Hirschberg, "Schatz", p. 1004.
41. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, p. 204.
42. Tschaikner, *Schatzgräberei*, pp. 53, 60.
43. Beard, *Romance*, p. 45.
44. Ryan, *Bathhouse*, p. 250.
45. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, p. 205.
46. Sallmann, *Chercheurs*, pp. 19, 22.
47. Sallmann, *Chercheurs*, pp. 18, 34, 41.
48. Sallmann, *Chercheurs*, pp. 18, 20.
49. J. Lipták (1938) *Alchimisten, Gottsucher und Schatzgräber in der Zips* (Kesmark: Sauter), pp. 45–47; Hirschberg, "Schatz", pp. 1010–1011.
50. Hirschberg, "Schatz", pp. 1010–1011; Winter, *Deutsche*, pp. 87–89.
51. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, p. 207.
52. Beard, *Romance*, pp. 40–41. Beard suggested a handy "rational" explanation for the noise. It might be better to see a magical activity like treasure hunting in the appropriate context of magic beliefs.
53. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, p. 204.
54. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, pp. 158–159, 211.
55. W. Lilly (1974) *The Last of the Astrologers: Mr William Lilly's History of His Life and Times*, ed. K. Briggs (London: Roberts 2nd edn 1715, Ilkley: Folklore Soc.), pp. 32, 36.
56. Tschaikner, *Schatzgräberei*, pp. 64–65.
57. Hirschberg, "Schatz", p. 1012.
58. Hirschberg, "Schatz", pp. 1010–1011; A. Birlinger (1861–62) *Volksthümliches aus Schwaben*, 2 vols. (Freiburg: Herder), vol. 1, pp. 84–86.
59. D. Rorie (1914) "Stray Notes on the Folklore of Aberdeenshire and the North-East of Scotland", *Folklore*, XXV, pp. 342–363, here pp. 342–343; Hirschberg, "Schatz", 1010–1011; Thrope, *Northern*, vol. 2, p. 263.
60. Paracelsus, "Occulta", pp. 530–531.
61. C. Neely (1998) *Tales and Songs from Southern Illinois* (Menasha: Banta 1938, reprinted Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press), pp. 112–113, 120.
62. *Winter's Tale*, 3, 3.
63. T. Heywood (1635) *The Hierarchie of the Blessed Angels* (London: Islip), p. 570.
64. Dillinger, *Hexen*, pp. 38–40; Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 726–727.

65. E.g. manuscript Sloane MS 3824 from 1649, now edited as D. Rankine (2009) *The Book of Treasure Spirits* (London), pp. 84–114.
66. Bercé, *Découverte*, pp. 1213–127. My first encounter with a treasure narrative was when I was told as a child that dwarfs guarded a treasure in the wood of Hoxberg Mountain near my parents' house.
67. Purkiss, *Troublesome*, pp. 114–115.
68. Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 281–282, 317; Purkiss, *Troublesome*, pp. 117–118, 125–126.
69. See Chapter 5.
70. A. Gregory (1991) "Witchcraft, Politics, and 'Good Neighbourhood', in Early Seventeenth-Century Rye", *Past and Present*, CXXXIII, pp. 31–66; somewhat fanciful Purkiss, *Troublesome*, pp. 116–123.
71. Purkiss, *Troublesome*, p. 125.
72. Henderson, *Notes*, p. 209.
73. Ryan, *Bathhouse*, p. 190.
74. H. von Wlislocki (1893) *Volks Glaube und religiöser Brauch der Volks Glaube* (Münster: Aschendorff), pp. 26, 31–32.
75. Thorpe, *Northern*, vol. 2, p. 264.
76. Paracelsus, "Occulta", p. 530.
77. Esotericarchives (2009) <http://www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/11203.htm#chap29>, accessed 4 October 2009.
78. G. Sand (1975) *Légendes Rustiques* (Paris: Calman Lévy 1877, reprinted Verviers: Marabout), pp. 90–91.
79. Clark, *Goodwin*, p. 159; Winter, *Deutsche*, pp. 61–63; actual dragons in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century in Tschaiakner, *Schatzgräberei*, 45; Davies, Owen (2003), *Cunning-Folk. Popular Magic in English History* (London: Hambledon & London), pp. 174–175.
80. F. Dobie (1964) *Legends of Texas* (Austin: Folklore Soc. 1924, reprinted Hatboro: Folklore Assoc.), p. 35.
81. Dobie, *Legends*, p. 36; Neely, *Tales*, p. 112.
82. M. Goldast von Haiminsfeld (1661) *Rechtliches Bedenken von Confiscation der Zauberer und Hexen-Güter* (Bremen: Köhler), p. 70; Schmidt, *Rockenphilosophie*, vol. 1, pp. 26–27, 177–180. For the *Drache* and similar legendary beings, see Y. Luven (2001) *Der Kult der Hausschlange* (Cologne: Böhlau).
83. For transfer magic, see É. Pócs (1999) *Between the Living and the Dead. A Perspective on Witches and Seers in the Early Modern Age* (Budapest: Central European University Press), pp. 67–69.
84. P. Nedo (1966) *Grundriss der sorbischen Volksdichtung* (Bautzen), pp. 132–134; L. Mackensen, "Drache", in HDA 2, pp. 391–404; Luven, *Kult*, pp. 148–153. For the Russian variant of the motif, see Ryan, *Bathhouse*, p. 192.
85. Pocs, *Between*, pp. 48–49; Wlislocki, *Volks Glaube*, p. 120. I would like to thank Dr. Benedek Láng, Budapest University of Technology and Economics, for explaining elements of Hungarian folk belief to me.
86. *Hamlet*, 1, 1, <http://www.online-literature.com/shakespeare/hamlet/>, accessed 25 August 2008.
87. Cf. the motif index I. Müller/L. Röhrich (1967) "Der Tod und die Toten" *Deutsches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde*, XIII, pp. 346–397, 359–360, 372–376.
88. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 78.

89. Müller/Röhrich, "Tod", pp. 369, 374.
90. J.B. van Helmont (1664) *Van Helmont's Works Containing his most Excellent Philosophy...* (London: Lloyd), pp. 80–81.
91. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 14, my italics.
92. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1670.
93. GLAK, 212/459.
94. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1451.
95. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 78, cf. Müller/Röhrich, "Tod", pp. 360, 365.
96. Knoop, "Sagen", p. 99.
97. Ryan, *Bathhouse*, pp. 166, 191, 212.
98. Schmidt, *Rockenphilosophie*, vol. 1, pp. 62–64.
99. J. Delumeau (1985) *Angst im Abendland*, 2 vols. (Hamburg: Rowohlt), vol. 1, pp. 48–64, 112–121.
100. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1670; Bü 1621.
101. R. Kirk (2008) *Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns, and Fairies* (London: Kirk 1691, reprinted Mineola: Dover), p. 57.
102. M. Dunsford (1790) *Historical Memoirs of the Town and Parish of Tiverton* (Exeter: Brice), p. 285, cf. Winter, *Deutsche*, p. 69.
103. Prätorius, *Anthropodemos*, p. 93.
104. Paracelsus, "Occulta", pp. 529–530.
105. Anonymous (1595) *The Brideling, Sadling and Ryding of a Rich Churle...* (London: Creede).
106. Paracelsus, "Occulta", p. 532.
107. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1700a.
108. W.-E. Peuckert (1929) "Walen und Venediger", *Mitteilungen der schlesischen Gesellschaft für Volkskunde*, XXX (1929), pp. 205–247.
109. Cf. the collection of folk tales about Venetians R. Schramm (1985) (ed.) *Venetianersagen von geheimnisvollen Schatzsuchern* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Grundstoffindustrie).
110. F.G. Leonhardi (1788) *Erdbeschreibung der kurfürstlichen und herzoglichen sächsischen Lande* (Halle: Haug), quoted in R. Schramm and H. Wilsdorf "Fundweisungen aus Walenbüchern", in R. Schramm (1985) (ed.) *Venetianersagen von geheimnisvollen Schatzsuchern* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Grundstoffindustrie), pp. 257–281, here p. 257–258.
111. H. Wilsdorf (1985) "Einführung in die Bergbausagen, Von den Venedigern", in Schramm, Rudolf (ed.) *Venetianersagen von geheimnisvollen Schatzsuchern* (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Grundstoffindustrie), pp. 217–241.
112. L. Ercker von Schreckenfels (1574) *Beschreibung aller fürnehmsten Ertz- und Bergwerckarten* (Prague: Schwartz), quoted in Wilsdorf, "Einführung", p. 224.
113. Wilsdorf, "Einführung", 226–227.
114. Lipták, "Alchimisten", 38–39.
115. Lipták, "Alchimisten", pp. 38–39.
116. Lipták, "Alchimisten", pp. 40–47; Schamm/Wilsdorf, "Fundweisungen", pp. 266, 268–269.
117. Schramm/Wilsdorf, "Fundweisungen", pp. 275–278, cf. Zeno (2008) www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Gr%C3%A4sse,+Johann+Georg+Theodor/Sagen/Der+Sagenschatz+des+K%C3%B6nigreichs+Sachsen/Erster+Band/592.+Wahlenberichte+%C3%BCber+die+s%C3%A4chsische+Schweiz+etc,

- accessed 25 August 2008; see also J. Dillinger (2006) "Organized Arson as a Political Crime", *Crime, History and Societies*, X, pp. 101–121, here pp. 106–107.
118. Schramm/Wilsdorf, "Fundweisungen"; E. Boehlich (1938) *Das älteste schlesische Walenbuch* (Breslau: Maruschke & Berendt); R. Altmüller (1971) (ed.) *Ein steirisches Walenbüchlein* (Vienna: Montan).
 119. A. Meiche (1903) *Sagenbuch des Königreichs Sachsen* (Leipzig: Schönfeld), pp. 895–896, cf. Zeno(2008) <http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Gr%C3%A4sse,+Johann+Georg+-+Theodor/Sagen/Der+Sagenschatz+des+K%C3%B6nigreichs+Sachsen/Erster+Band/592.+Wahlenberichte+%C3%BCber+die+s%C3%A4chsische+Schweiz+etc>, accessed 16 August 2008.
 120. J.C. von Pachelbel-Gehag (1716) *Ausführliche Beschreibung des Fichtel-Berges* (Leipzig: Martini), quoted in Schramm/Wilsdorf, "Fundweisungen", p. 263.
 121. G. Eis (1979) *Kleine Schriften zur altdeutschen weltlichen Dichtung* (Amsterdam: Rodopi), p. 438; Lipták, "Alchimisten", p. 43.
 122. Neely, *Tales*, 111, 116–119.
 123. C. Bruschi (1542) *Des Vichtelbergs gründliche Beschreibung* (Nuremberg: Petreus), pp. 14–15, Wilsdorf, "Einführung", p. 228.
 124. Neely, *Tales*, p. 114.
 125. Neely, *Tales*, p. 119.

4 Treasure Hunters' Magic

1. Cf. C. Daxelmüller (1980–1984) 'Bibliographie barocker Dissertationen zu Aberglaube und Brauch' *Jahrbuch für Volkskunde*, NF 3, 1980, pp. 194–238, NF 4, 1981, pp. 225–243, NF 5, 1982, pp. 213–244, NF 6, 1983, pp. 230–244, NF 7, 1984, pp. 195–240, p. 221. For St Christopher in folklore, see G. Benker (1975) *Christophorus – Patron der Schiffer, Fuhrleute und Kraftfahrer. Legende, Verehrung, Symbol* (Munich: Callwey); F. Merzbacher (1952) 'Schatzgräberei und Christophelgebet' *Archiv für mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte*, IV, pp. 352–365; E. Labouvie (1992) *Verbotene Künste. Volksmagie und ländlicher Aberglaube in den Dorfgemeinden des Saarraumes (16.-19. Jahrhundert)* (St. Ingbert: Röhrig), pp. 120–122; A. Wrede (1987) "Christophorus", in HDA, vol. 2, pp. 65–72.
2. C.M. Pfaff (1748) *De invocatione p. Christophori ad largiendos nummos* (Tübingen: Löffler), p. 18; Benker, *Christophorus*, p. 129, A. Jakoby (1987) "Christophorusbuch", HDA, vol. 2, pp. 72–75, 74.
3. Pfaff, *Invocatione*, p. 20, suggested without further explanations that elements of the legend of St Nicholas had been attributed to the story of St Christopher.
4. T. Vernaleken (1859) *Mythen und Bräuche des Volkes in Oesterreich* (Vienna: Braumüller), p. 263.
5. GLAK, 118/329.
6. N. Kyll (1949) "Das Christophgebet" *Jahrbuch für Geschichte und Kultur des Mittelrheins und seiner Nachbargebiete*, I, pp. 71–77, 75.
7. Pfaff, *Invocatione*, p. 19. E.g. GLAK, 118/329; HHStAW 144a/36 Bd. I and II. For an eighteenth-century French example that was supposedly derived from a German text of the fifteenth century, see H. Beaune (1866–67) "Les

- Sorciers de Lyon" *Memoirs de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences, Arts et Belles-Lettres de Dijon*, pp. 69–154, 137–138.
8. HHStAW 144a/36 Bd. II.
 9. Dillinger, "Magische", p. 577.
 10. Pfaff, *Invocatione*, p. 19; e.g. GLAK 118/329; HHStAW 144a/36 Bd. I and II.
 11. Pfaff, *Invocatione*, p. 3.
 12. Benker, *Christophorus*, pp. 130–131.
 13. Pfaff, *Invocatione*.
 14. HHStAW, 144a/36 Bd. I.
 15. Vernaleken, *Mythen*, p. 264.
 16. K. Reiterer (1905) "Beschwörung der heiligen Corona", *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*, XV, pp. 424–427.
 17. Tschaikner, *Schatzgräberei*, pp. 18–19.
 18. Tschaikner, *Schatzgräberei*, pp. 18–19; H. Günter (1910) *Die christliche Legende des Abendlandes* (Heidelberg: Winter), p. 122; P. Beck (1905) "Die Bibliothek eines Hexenmeisters", *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*, XV, pp. 412–424, 423.
 19. Reiterer, "Beschwörung", p. 424.
 20. Tschaikner, *Schatzgräberei*, p. 27; Kiesewetter, *Faust*, pp. 84–86.
 21. Reiterer, "Beschwörung", p. 424.
 22. Beaune, "Sorciers", pp. 85–86, 103, 116; see also Tschaikner, *Schatzgräberei*, p. 45.
 23. Esotericarchives (2008) <http://www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/ksol.htm>, accessed 25 May 2008.
 24. Zambelli, *White*, pp. 13–72.
 25. E.g. Beaune, "Sorciers", p. 90; Rankine, *Book*, pp. 132, 136.
 26. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 480a; Bü 1623. The Bavarian law against witchcraft and superstition mentioned people who drew magical circles on crossroads in order to conjure up demons and persons who "bury things or dig them up" in the same breath. Both were to be regarded as sorcerers even though they did not worship the devil, Behringer, *Feuer*, p. 172.
 27. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 480a; Bü 1623.
 28. J. de Sacro Bosco (1518) *De Sphaera mundi* (Venice: De Giunta), p. 17.
 29. Ott, *Entdeckung*, 60–62.
 30. A good example would be Rankine, *Book*.
 31. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, p. 211.
 32. Tschaikner, *Schatzgräberei*, pp. 28–29.
 33. Tschaikner, *Schatzgräberei*, pp. 49–50.
 34. Tschaikner, *Schatzgräberei*, p. 43.
 35. Sallmann, *Chercheurs*, p. 37.
 36. (Ascribed to) Paracelsus, Theophrastus (1933) "Extract einer Prophecei", in: Theophrast von Hohenheim genannt Paracelsus: Sämtliche Werke, ed. K. Sudhoff, 14 vols. (Munich: Oldenbourg 1933), vol. 14, pp. 513–542, pp. 545–546.
 37. Tschaikner, *Schatzgräberei*, pp. 59–62; Davies, Owen (2009) *Grimoires* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
 38. See e.g. Beaune, "Sorciers", p. 86.
 39. D. Turner (1847) "On Treasure-Trove and the Invocation of Spirits", *Norfolk Archaeology*, I, pp. 46–64, 58–61.

40. Tschaikner, *Schatzgräberei*, pp. 63–64.
41. Tschaikner, *Schatzgräberei*, pp. 56–58; HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1811; H. Commenda (1960) “Gesellschaft der Schatzgräber, Teufelsbeschwörer und Geisterbanner, Linz 1792”, *Historisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Linz*, pp. 171–195; Klinkhammer, *Schatzgräber*, pp. 34–56.
42. LHAKE, 48/2221.
43. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, 144. According to Kittredge, the same motif was known in India. See also Ryan, *Bathhouse*, p. 191.
44. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, p. 206.
45. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, p. 209.
46. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, p. 211.
47. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, p. 210.
48. Sallmann, *Chercheurs*, pp. 25–26. The magical mirror of Snow White’s evil stepmother is arguably the best-known reflection of this old tradition. Her mirror was clearly a tool for divination as it could answer the apparently unanswerable question about the “fairest one” and it knew that Snow White was still alive after the hunter had feigned the girl’s death.
49. E.g. STAW, R-Rep. 16a_40; HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1451; Bü 1811; Tschaikner, *Schatzgräberei*, pp. 32, 41.
50. HHSTAW 144a/36 Bd. I.
51. HHStAW 144a/36 Bd. I.
52. HHStAW 144a/36 Bd. I.
53. R. Scot (1989), *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London: Brome 1584, reprinted New York: Dover), p. 236.
54. E.E. Trotman (1961) “Seventeenth Century Treasure-Seeking at Bridgwater”, *Notes and Queries for Somerset and Dorset*, XXVII, pp. 220–221, 220.
55. Cicero, *De officiis*, 1, 158.
56. Trotman, “Seventeenth”, p. 221.
57. See below in this chapter.
58. D.G. Morhof (1747) *Polyhistor literarius, philosophicus et practicus*, 3vols. (Lübeck: Böckmann), vol. 2, p. 403; uncritical W. Barrett and T. Besterman (1926) *The Divining Rod* (London: Methuen), p. 7.
59. M. Delrio (2000) *Investigations into Magic*, ed. P.G. Maxwell-Stuart (Louvain 1599: Rivii, Manchester: Manchester University Press), pp. 48–49.
60. Behringer, *Feuer*, pp. 178–179.
61. M. Berterau, Baronne de Beau-Soleil (1632) *Véritable Déclaration faite au Roy* (n.p.p.S.I.).
62. H. Sökeland (1903) “Die Wünschelrute”, *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*, XIII, pp. 202–212, here pp. 280–287, 205–207. The German poet Eichendorff understood this phenomenon and took it as the basis for his Romantic poem “Wünschelrute” (Divining rod): *Schläft ein Lied in allen Dingen,/die da träumen fort und fort./Und die Welt hebt an zu singen,/triffst du nur das Zauberwort.* (“A song sleeps in all things/which lie dreaming for ever and ever/And the world will start to sing/if you find the magic word.”).
63. C. Priesner (1986) “Johann Thoele und die Schriften des Basilius Valentinus”, in C. Meckel (ed.) *Die Alchemie in der europäischen Kultur- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz), pp. 107–118.
64. Basilius Valentinus (1658) *His Last Will and Testament* (London: Davis), pp. 46–47.

65. Of course, regional folklore could give its very own interpretation of the divining rod. Cornish miners seem to have attributed the success of the divining rod in finding minerals to some affinity between the rod and the pixies, A. Ellis (1917) *The Divining Rod. A History of Water Witching* (Washington: Gov. Print. Off.), p. 14.
66. Basilius, *Last*, pp. 48–49.
67. Basilius, *Last*, pp. 52–55.
68. Basilius, *Last*, pp. 50–51.
69. E.g. Kreittmayr, *Anmerkungen*, vol. 2, p. 307; and Zedler, “Schatz”, pp. 983–984.
70. G. Plattes (1639) *A Discovery of Subterraneall Treasure* (London: Emery), pp. 9–14.
71. G. Plattes (1974) *A Discovery of Infinite Treasure Hidden since the World's Beginning* (London: Legat 1639 reprinted Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum), epistle dedicatory, no p.n.
72. Le Lorraine de Vallemont, P. (1693) *La Physique Occulte ou Traité de la Baguette Divinatoire* (Amsterdam: Braakman), pp. 28–40; J. F. Young and R. Robertson, Robert (1894) *The Divining Rod. Its History – with Full Instructions for Finding Subterranean Springs, and other Useful Information* (Clifton: Baker), p. 5; Coates, *Romance*, p. 65; Ellis, *Divining*, pp. 16–17; Sökeland, “Wünschelrute”, p. 285.
73. Vallemont, *Physique*, especially pp. 248–345, 401–420.
74. J.G. Zeidler (1700) *Pantomysterium oder das Neue vom Jahre in der Wündschelruthe* (Halle: Renger), pp. 40–48. Of course, it was still possible that the diviner moved the rod voluntarily, pp. 354–356. Equally sceptical was C.L. Dietherr (1740) *Orbis novus literatorum praeprimis jurisconsultorum detectus* (Stadtamhof (today's Regensburg): Gastel), pp. 310–311.
75. A. von Humboldt (1797) *Versuche über die gereizte Muskel- und Nervenfasern* (Pörschen: Decker), quoted in Sökeland, “Wünschelrute”, p. 283.
76. Anonymous (1705) *Eines Bergverständigen ungenannten Autoris neuer bisher ungedruckter Unterricht vom rechten Gebrauch der Wünschelrute in Bergwerken* (Leipzig/Frankfurt: Renger).
77. G. Agricola (2003) *De re metallica*, ed. P. Macini/E. Mesini (Basel: Froben 1556, Bologna: Clueb), pp. 26–28.
78. Paracelsus, “Occulta”, p. 530.
79. Cf. for example J. Sperling (1668) *An virgula mercurialis agat ex occulta qualitate* (Wittenberg: Röhner) no p.n.
80. Anonymous (J.M.) (1676) *Sports and Pastimes: or, Sport for the City, and Pastime for the Country, with a Touch of Hocus Pocus, or Leger-Demain* (London: Clark), pp. 3, 19–20.
81. Sallmann, *Chercheurs*, 35.
82. Tschaikner, *Schatzgräberei*, pp. 23–26.
83. Pfeiffer, “Schatzgräberei”, p. 33.
84. HHSTAW, 132/553.
85. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 480a; Bü 609; Bü 1176; Bü 1451; Bü 1621; Bü 1623; Bü 1713; Bü 1811.
86. Thomas, *Religion*, p. 377; Bercé, *Découverte*, pp. 128–133.
87. Paracelsus, “Occulta”, pp. 530–531.
88. C. Agrippa (1555) *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy* (London), pp. 18, 30.

89. E.g. J. Middleton (1679) *Practical Astrology* (London: L'Estrange), pp. 157–161; H. Coley (1676) *Clavis astrologiae elimata*, 2nd edn. (London: Tooke & Sawbridge), pp. 170–171; J. Gadbury (1658) *Genethialogia, or the Doctrine of Nativities* (London: Calvert), pp. 260–263.
90. H. Marzell (1987) “Farn”, in: HDA, vol. 2, pp. 1215–1229, here pp. 1216–1227.
91. Marzell, “Farn”, p. 1223.
92. *Henry IV*, 2, 1; New Inn, 1, 1.
93. Marzell, *Zauberpflanzen*, pp. 38–42.
94. Marzell, “Farn”, pp. 1224–1225.
95. Sallmann, *Chercheurs*, pp. 22–23.
96. Behringer, *Feuer*, p. 172.
97. F. Seraphin (1904) “Schatzbeschwörung”, *Korrespondenzblatt des Vereins für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, XXVII, p. 114.
98. Opie and M. Tatem (1989) *A Dictionary of Superstitions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 266. I would like to thank Dr Caroline Oates from the Folklore Society for alerting me to this source.
99. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1451; Bü 1670. Cf. H. Marzell (1987) “Springwurzel”, in HDA, vol. 8, pp. 314–320; Jäggi, “Alraunenhändler”, pp. 59–65.
100. Ryan, *Bathhouse*, p. 189; for fern and treasure in Russia, see Ivantis, *Russian*, pp. 11, 168.
101. Thorpe, *Northern*, vol. 3, pp. 76–78; T. Siebs (1987) “Geldmännlein”, in HDA, vol. 3, pp. 625–626; Jäggi, “Alraunenhändler”, pp. 43–85.
102. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 961.
103. J. Dillinger (1998) “Hexenverfolgungen in der Grafschaft Hohenberg”, in J. Dillinger, T. Fritz and W. Mährle (eds.) *Zum Feuer verdammt* (Stuttgart: Steiner), pp. 1–161, here pp. 130–133.
104. Witchesgalore (2009) http://www.witchesgalore.com/voodoo_dolls/mama_voodoo/poppets.html, accessed 4 October 2009 and Witchesgalore (2009) http://www.witchesgalore.com/voodoo_dolls/mama_peso_bien_voodoo_doll.html, accessed 4 October 2009. I would like to thank the Folklore Society, especially Dr Caroline Oates, for their kind help.
105. Hirschberg, “Schatz”, p. 1009.
106. GLAK, 212/459.
107. Rorie, “Stray”, pp. 342–343.
108. Tschaikner, *Schatzgräberei*, p. 29.
109. Staatsarchiv Wertheim, R-Rep. 16a_40.
110. Numerous examples in Hirschberg, “Schatz”, p. 1011; for examples from Denmark, see Thorpe, *Northern*, vol. 2, p. 263.
111. G. Mensching (1926) *Das heilige Schweigen* (Gießen: Töpelmann); C. Kunz (1996) *Schweigen und Geist* (Freiburg: Herder). According to Silesian folklore of the late nineteenth century, if you did not speak during the meal on Christmas Eve, you could continue stealing wood without the authorities catching you, P. Drechsler (1903) *Sitte, Brauch und Volksglaube in Schlesien*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner), vol 1, p. 30.
112. B. Malinowski (1925) “Magic, Science and Religion”, in J. Needham (ed.) *Science, Religion and Reality* (London: Souvenir), pp. 19–84, here pp. 70–79; J. Beattie (1992) *Other Cultures* (London: Routledge), pp. 202–241, especially pp. 202–205, 215–217.

113. Paracelsus, "Occulta", 530–531.
114. Schmidt, *Rockenphilosophie*, vol. 1, p. 82.
115. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, pp. 132–133.
116. J. Raine (1859) "Proceedings Connected with a Remarkable Charge of Sorcery" *The Archaeological Journal*, XVI, pp. 71–81.
117. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 480a.
118. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, p. 207.

5 The Authorities' Attitude towards Treasure Hunting

1. Anonymous (1789) "Bastile" [sic], *Oracle Bell's New World*, 9 September, n.p.
2. Beard, *Romance*, pp. 30–31.
3. TNA, SC 8/22/1071.
4. Beard, *Romance*, pp. 26, 211, 267.
5. E.g. R. B. Smith (1970) *Land and Politics in the England of Henry VIII* (Oxford: Clarendon), pp. 129, 300.
6. Beard, *Romance*, pp. 25–26, 54–58.
7. Beard, *Romance*, pp. 232–233, 272.
8. It is not entirely clear whether the royal permit of 1635 really referred to Skenfirth or to some location in Kent, see Beard, *Romance*, pp. 61–62.
9. Beard, *Romance*, p. 65.
10. Bowker, *Episcopal*, pp. 111–112.
11. Beard, *Romance*, 44–46.
12. Beard, *Romance*, pp. 101, 109.
13. Sallmann, *Chercheurs*, 17.
14. Anonymous (1789) "Two Jesuits" ... *World*, 10 August, n.p.
15. Anonymous (1826) "A Frenchman" *The Morning Chronicle*, 19 July, n.p.
16. Eckstein, "Schatzregal", p. 231.
17. Tschakner, *Schatzgräberei*, pp. 22–23.
18. Eckstein, "Schatzregal", pp. 231–232.
19. T. Adam (2001) "Viel tausend gulden lägeten am selbigen orth. Schatzgräberei und Geisterbeschwörung in Südwestdeutschland vom 16. bis 19. Jahrhundert", *Historische Anthropologie*, IX, pp. 358–383, here pp. 376–377.
20. Steinwascher, "Schatzglauben", pp. 262; Dillinger, "Ewige", pp. 226.
21. Dillinger, "Ewige", pp. 226–228, 242–250.
22. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 967.
23. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 833.
24. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 957.
25. Dillinger, "Ewige", pp. 241–242.
26. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 961.
27. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1451.
28. E. Gönner and G. Haselier (1975) *Baden-Württemberg* (Würzburg: Ploetz), p. 41.
29. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1982.
30. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 961; A 309 Bü 3.
31. Dillinger, "Ewige", pp. 226–227.
32. Dillinger, "Ewige", p. 226; Jäggi, "Alraunenhändler", p. 42.
33. Dillinger, "Ewige", pp. 242–250.

34. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1451.
35. STAW, G-Rep. 52–80.
36. See also Davies, *Cunning*, pp. 10–11, 20–21, 94–96, 120–121.
37. Raine, “Proceedings”, pp. 71–75.
38. Tschalkner, *Schatzgräberei*, p. 132; Jäggi, “Alraunenhändler”, pp. 66–74.
39. GLAK, 118/329.
40. Dillinger, “Ewige”, p. 251.
41. Dillinger, “Ewige”, pp. 250–251.
42. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1421; Dillinger, “Ewige”, pp. 250–251.
43. Anonymous (1716) *Wahrhaftige Relation dessen, was in der Heiligen Christ-Nacht zwischen dem 24. und 25. December 1715 allhier bey der Stadt Jena ... sich zugetragen hat* (Jena: Werther); Anonymous (1854–57) “Wahre Eröffnung der Jenaischen Christnachts-Tragödie ... auf hohen Landes-fürstlichen Special-Befehl zu jedermanns Nutzen publiciret” (Jena 1716: Pohlen), in J. Scheible (ed.) *Das Kloster. Weltlich und geistlich*, 6 vols. (Stuttgart: Henne), vol. 5, pp. 1030–1058; Leipzig University (1716) *Deren drey Hohen Facultäten zu Leipzig Bedencken* (Leipzig); E.F. Andreae (1716) *Gründlicher Gegensatz...* (Jena: Werther); Anonymous (1716) *Eines berühmten Medici...* (Halle: Renger). See also W. Hollenbach (1885) *Bilder aus Thüringen 1: Tragikomische Geisterbeschwörung auf dem Galgenberge bei Jena in der Christnacht des Jahre 1715* (Jena: Mauke).
44. Anonymous, *Wahrhaftige*.
45. Anonymous, *Wahre*.
46. F. de Cordua (1716) *Schrift- und Vernunftmäßige Gedancken vom Schatz-graben und Beschwerung der Geister* (Hamburg: Schotke). An anonymous person who presented himself as the translator of the Latin original of the work claimed that the author was French but used a *nom de plume*, which suggested a relation to a Spanish noble family, pp. 3–4. A printed Latin version of the text does not seem to exist. As the Jena tragedy happened in the last days of 1715, it is rather unlikely that a complete translation of the lengthy text would have been in print by 1716. We might assume that the anonymous “translator” was the true author of the book.
47. Cordua, *Schrift*, pp. 113, 118.
48. Cordua, *Schrift*, especially pp. 53–65, 90–94, 107–110, 114–116, 123–140.
49. The following account according to Beaune, “Sorcières”. H.C. Lea (1986), *Materials toward a History of Witchcraft*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1939, reprinted New York: Yoseloff), vol. 3, p. 1305 (to do justice to Lea, his notes went to press after his death; he never meant to publish them); J. McManners (1985) *Death and the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 549; W. Behringer (2004) *Witches and Witch-Hunts* (Cambridge: Polity), p. 188; more detailed I. Bostridge (1997) *Witchcraft and Its Transformations* (Oxford: Clarendon), pp. 227–228. Bostridge was surprised to find people from a bourgeois background among the defendants. We may safely say that in trials against treasure hunters, this was the rule rather than the exception, see also the next chapter. Strangely enough, Bercé, *Découverte*, did not even mention this case.
50. W. Behringer (1989) “Kinderhexenprozesse” *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung*, XVI, pp. 31–47; J. Dillinger (2009) *Evil People. A Comparative Study of Witch Hunts in Swabian Austria and the Electorate of Trier* (Charlottesville/

- London, Virginia University Press), pp. 104–106, 121, 160–161, 166, 170, 173; problematic H. Sebald (1995) *Witch-Children: From Salem Witch-Hunts to Modern Courtrooms* (Amherst: Prometheus).
51. Thomas-Latour, "Invention", pp. 58–59.
 52. Davies, *Cunning*, p. 174.
 53. Davies, *Cunning*, pp. 10–11.
 54. Bercé, *Découverte*, pp. 140–143.
 55. W. Behringer (1997) *Hexenverfolgung in Bayern*, 3rd edn (Munich: Oldenbourg), pp. 348–350.
 56. Prätorius, *Anthropodemus*, p. 93.
 57. Tschaikner, *Schatzgräberei*, pp. 18–19.
 58. Dillinger, "Hexenverfolgungen", pp. 130–133.
 59. J. Haustein (1990) *Martin Luthers Stellung zum Zauber- und Hexenwesen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer), pp. 91–94, 98–100.
 60. Dillinger, "Ewige", pp. 230–231.
 61. See, for example, Goldast, *Rechtliches*, p. 45.
 62. Sökeland, "Wünschelrute", p. 285.
 63. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, pp. 212–213.
 64. J. Bodin (1973) *Vom außgelasnen wütigen Teuffelsheer* (Paris: DuPuy 1580, translated Strasbourg: Jobin 1591, reprinted Graz: Akademische Druck), pp. 165–166.
 65. Delrio, *Investigations*, pp. 73–77, 86. The editor abridged Delrio's text considerably, cf. Dillinger, "Ewige", p. 230.
 66. See, for example, P. de Lancre (2006) *On the Inconstancy of Witches* (Paris: Berjon 1612, translated Turnhout: Brepols 2006), pp. 377–379. Dillinger, *Hexen*, pp. 128–136.
 67. Dillinger, *Evil*, pp. 79–98.
 68. Davies, *Cunning*, pp. 20–21.
 69. Schmidt, *Rockenphilosophie*, vol. 1, pp. 82, 92–95.
 70. Raine, "Proceedings", pp. 74–75.
 71. H. Cunningham (1932) (ed.) *Records of the County of Wiltshire being Extracts from the Quarter Sessions Great Rolls of the Seventeenth Century* (Devizes: Simpson), p. 278.
 72. Tschaikner, *Schatzgräberei*, pp. 79–117.
 73. E.g. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1421.
 74. Anonymous, *Brideling*; Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 732–733; R. Buccola (2006) *Fairies, Fractious Women, and the Old Faith. Fairy Lore in Early Modern British Drama and Culture* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press), pp. 110–112.
 75. W. Hazlitt and J. Ritson (1875) (eds.) *Fairy Tales, Legends and Romances Illustrating Shakespeare and Other Early English Writers* (London: Kerslake), pp. 223–238, Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 733–734; Buccola, *Fairies*, pp. 109–110.
 76. For other publications about Philips and the motifs of her story, see also G.B. Harrison (1930) "Keep the Widow Waiting", *The Library*, S4-IX, pp. 97–101.
 77. R.Z. Becker (1838) *Das Noth- und Hülf-Buechlein für Bauersleute oder lehrreiche Freuden- und Trauer-Geschichte des Dorfes Mildheim* (Gotha: Göschen 1788, reprinted Gotha: Becker), pp. 241–242.
 78. K. Rug (1980) *Das Köllertal erzählt* (Püttlingen: SZ), p. 37.
 79. Sebald, *Witch-Children*.

6 The Social Background of Treasure Hunters

1. Lilly, *Last*, pp. 32, 36; Beard, *Romance*, pp. 60–64.
2. Dillinger, “Ewige”, pp. 256–257.
3. Behringer, *Hexenverfolgung*, pp. 348–350.
4. F. Gies (1995) *Schatzgräberei in den Herzogtümern Schleswig und Holstein* (Kiel unpublished manuscript in the library of Kiel University), pp. 37–44; Dillinger, “Ewige”, pp. 251–257; cf. the case studies Tschakner, *Schatzgräberei*, pp. 17–130.
5. Sallmann, *Chercheurs*, pp. 17, 19.
6. G. Elton (1972) *Police and Policy: The Enforcement of the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 49–55; Beard, *Romance*, pp. 102–103.
7. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, p. 195.
8. Beard, *Romance*, pp. 233–234.
9. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 480a.
10. E.g. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 480a.
11. Jäggi, “Alraunenhändler”, p. 75.
12. Elton, *Policy*, p. 48.
13. A.L. Rowse (1974) *Simon Forman. Sex and Society in Shakespeare's Age* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson), p.87.
14. Elton, *Policy*, p. 48; G. Baskerville (1937) *English Monks and the Suppression of the Monasteries* (London: Cape), p. 232.
15. Labouvie, *Verbotene*, pp. 226–228, 235–243; Hirschberg, “Schatz”, pp. 1005–1006; Thomas, *Religion*, p. 327; Steinwascher, “Schatzglauben”, pp. 267–269.
16. HStA St A 209 Bü 833; A 309 Bü 3.
17. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 957; Bü 1623; Bü 1713.
18. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1623.
19. Raine, “Proceedings”, pp. 71–77.
20. Turner, *Treasure-Trove*, pp. 58–64; Beard, *Romance*, pp. 46–53.
21. Sallmann, *Chercheurs*, pp. 18–19.
22. Sallmann, *Chercheurs*, pp. 17–20, 35.
23. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1713.
24. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, p. 211.
25. Sallmann, *Chercheurs*, pp. 155–191.
26. E.g. LASH, 111/551.
27. Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, p. 209.
28. Dillinger, “Ewige”, pp. 251–257.
29. Dillinger, “Ewige”, pp. 251–255.
30. B. Roeck (1993) *Außenseiter, Randgruppen, Minderheiten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht), pp. 107, 111–115.
31. E.g. HStA St A 209 Bü 833; Bü 1621; Bü 1623; Bü 1713. The lawyer Besold described treasure magic as an integral part of soldiers' skills, Besold, *Thesaurus*, p. 866. Cf. LASH, 111/551.
32. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 961. G. Jungwirth (1987) “Hirte” in HDA, vol. 4, pp. 124–139, 128–130.
33. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1811.
34. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 833, Bü 1811.

35. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1982.
36. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1451.
37. TLAI, Hs. 2402, p. 444.
38. GLAK, 118/329.
39. Jäggi, "Alraunenhändler", p. 68; Tschaikner, *Schatzgräberei*, p. 60.
40. E. Stauber (1916) "Die Schatzgräberei im Kanton Zürich" *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde*, XX, pp. 420–440.
41. Besold, *Thesaurus*, p. 866.
42. TLAI, Hs. 2402, p. 444; HStA St A 209 Bü 1451; GLAK, 118/329.
43. Anonymous, *Brideling*, n.p.
44. Dillinger, *Hexen*, p. 119–128.
45. Thomas, *Religion*, p. 281.
46. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1811.
47. Young, /Robertson, *Divining*, p. 4.
48. Trotman, "Seventeenth", p. 220.
49. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1808.
50. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 957; Bü 961.
51. R. Schömer (1987) "Bergwerk" HDA, vol. 1, pp. 1084–1087, here pp. 1084–1085.
52. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1700a; Bü 1982.
53. Bodin, *Teuffelsheer*, p. 166.
54. Gadbury, *Genethialogia*, p. 261.
55. TLAI, Hs. 2402, pp. 528–530. These treasure hunters did not have to face any charges.
56. Sallmann, *Chercheurs*, pp. 17–19, 41.
57. Beaune, "Sorcières", 58–59.
58. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 480a; Bü 609; Bü 1811; Bü 1451; Bü 1670; A 309 Bü 3.
59. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 480a Bü 609; Bü 1451; Bü 1670, A 309 Bü 3.
60. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 609.
61. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1700a.
62. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 609; Bü 1982, A 309 Bü 3.
63. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 609.
64. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1176.
65. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 961.
66. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 480a; Bü 609; Bü 1421.
67. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1421; 1670.
68. LASH, 276/1138.
69. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1670.
70. Raine, "Proceedings", p. 73.
71. LASH, 111/551.
72. E.g. LASH, 276/1138; GLAK, 212/459.
73. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1670; Bü 1176.
74. HStA St A 209 Bü 1176.
75. Elton, *Policy*, p. 48.
76. HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1670.
77. HHSTAW, 295/63.
78. Quoted in A. Becker (1925) *Pfälzer Volkskunde* (Bonn: Schroeder), p. 138.
79. GLAK, 212/459.

80. M. Fulbrook (1983) *Piety and Politics: Religion and the Rise of Absolutism in England, Württemberg, and Prussia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 137–152.
81. The following account according to HSTAST, A 209 Bü 1421, cf. also J. Dillinger (2001) “American Spiritualism and German Sectarianism. A Comparative Study of the Societal Construction of Ghost Beliefs” *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute, Washington DC*, XXVIII, pp. 55–73; Dillinger, “Ewige”, pp. 263–271.
82. R. Haug (1981) *Reich Gottes im Schwabenland. Linien im württembergischen Pietismus* (Metzingen: Franz), pp. 160–162. Oetinger was influenced by Swedenborg, E. F. Stoeffler (1973) *German Pietism during the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill), pp. 117–118. It is possible that the much older legends of the *Nobiskrug* or the *Kalte Herberge* (Cold Inn) as shelters of the dead played some role in Oetinger’s concepts.
83. Dobie, *Legends*, pp. 182–185.
84. Dobie, *Legends*, pp. 9–11.
85. Neely, *Tales*, pp. 111–114, 120.

7 Treasure Hunts in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

1. Dillinger, “American”.
2. Anonymous (1903) “A Vatican Treasure Story”, *The Times*, 21 December, p. 5.
3. Anonymous (1918) “Buried Treasure Farce”, *The Times*, 22 April, p. 11.
4. J. Smith (1882) *The Pearl of Great Price. Extracts from the History of Joseph Smith* (Liverpool: Carrington), pp. 62–68. This publication was based on a text that Smith published in 1838.
5. Smith, *Pearl*, p. 64.
6. L.B. Cake (1899) *Peepstone Joe and the Peck Manuscript* (New York: Cake).
7. D. Whitmer (1887) *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond: Whitmer), p. 12.
8. O. Hyde (1842) *Ein Ruf aus der Wüste* (Frankfort: Hyde), pp. 13–27.
9. A. Hellwig (1971) “Ein neunfacher Kindesmord zum Zwecke des Schätzehebens”, *Archiv für Kriminal-Anthropologie und Kriminalistik*, XXIV (1906, reprinted Nendeln), pp. 125–130, here pp. 125–126.
10. Henderson, *Notes*, p. 209.
11. B. Jones (1904) “Stories from Leitrim and Cavan”, *Folklore*, XV, pp. 336–341, here pp. 340–341. Of course, we have to be very careful here. Nineteenth-century folklore research was rather keen on finding vestiges of supposedly age-old religious practices, including sacrifices, in local legends.
12. Davies, *Cunning*, pp. 174–175.
13. J.G.T. Graesse (1960) *Bibliotheca magica et pneumatica* (Leipzig: Engelmann 1843, reprinted Hildesheim: Olms), pp. 37–38, 64, 87.
14. Beck, “Bibliothek”.
15. J.W. Hunter (1923) “The Hunt for the Bowie Mine in Menard” *Frontier Times*, October, pp. 24–26; Dobie, *Legends*, pp. 10, 14, 18–19, 29, 36, 183–184.
16. F.C.B. Avé-Lallemont (1858–62) *Das deutsche Gaunerthum*, 4 vols (Leipzig: Brockhaus), vol. 2, p. 269.

17. Young/Robertson, *Divining*, p. 3.
18. E. Aigner (1916) "Vorwort", *Schriften des Verbands zur Klärung der Wünschelrutenfrage*, VII, pp. 3–7; G. Franzius (1916) *Schriftwechsel des Verbandes mit dem Reichs-Kolonialamt, Schriften des Verbands zur Klärung der Wünschelrutenfrage*, VII, pp. 11–123.
19. J. Mullins & Sons (1894) *The Divining Rod. Its History, Truthfulness, and Practical Utility* (Colerne: Mullilns).
20. J. Mullins & Sons (1914) *The Divining Rod. Its History, Truthfulness, and Practical Utility* (Bath: Mullins), p. II.
21. Dobie, *Legends*, pp. 100–101.
22. Himmler even tried to pressurize a so-called alchemist into making gold, M. Kater (2006) *Das Ahnenerbe der SS 1934–1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg), pp. 220–223.
23. Stormfront (2008) www.stormfront.org/forum/showthread.php/jews-and-sicilian-mafia-228393p2.html, accessed 16 July 2008.
24. Avé-Lallemont, *Deutsche*, vol. 2, pp. 266–267; Germazope (2008) <http://germazope.uni-trier.de/>, accessed 16 July 2008.
25. An exception was the Trifels treasure hunt of 1723, where it was at least rumoured that a rabbi and a number of other Jews would join the treasure hunt, Pfeiffer, "Schatzgräberei", pp. 32–34.
26. Avé-Lallemont, *Deutsche*, vol. 2, pp. 267–268.
27. G.J. Schäffer (1801) *Beschreibung derjenigen Jauner, Zigeuner, Straßen-Räuber...* (Tübingen: Schramm), pp. 77, 80.
28. A. Hellwig (1906) "Die Beziehung zwischen Aberglauben und Strafrecht", *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde*, X, pp. 22–44.
29. J. Devlin (1987) *The Superstitious Mind. French Peasants and the Supernatural* (New Haven: Yale UP), pp. 176–177.
30. Anonymous (1832) "Marylebone", *The Examiner*, 6 May, n.p.
31. I would like to thank my colleague Dr Yolanda Eraso for explaining this term to me.
32. HSTAD, G15 Nr 69.
33. Dobie, *Legends*, p. 35.
34. R. Furneaux (1954) *Fact, Fake, or Fable?* (London: Cassell), pp. 1–12.
35. Furneaux, *Fact*, p. 10.
36. Dobie, *Legends*, especially pp. 3–26.
37. Dobie, *Legends*, especially pp. 12–28.
38. S. Wilson (1976) *Oklahoma Treasures and Treasure Tales* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), pp. 39–40, 46–47, 113–127.
39. B. Beatty (1960) *A Treasury of Australian Folk Tales and Traditions* (London: Edmund Ward), pp. 57–76.
40. E.g. Beatty, *Treasury*, pp. 58–67; Dobie, *Legends*, pp. 115–140.
41. Cf. the Introduction.
42. E. Fletcher (1973) *Treasure Hunting. Profitable Fun for the Family* (London: Blanford).
43. *Yps* (1984) Nr. 144.
44. D. Villanueva (2005) *The Successful Treasure Hunter's Essential Dowsing Manual: How to Develop your Latent Skills to Find Treasure in Abundance* (Whitstable: True Treasure); D. Villanueva (2009) *The Successful Treasure Hunter's Secret Manual: Discovering Treasure Auras in the Digital Age* (Whitstable: True

Treasure); see also Metaldetectingworld (2009) <http://www.metaldetectingworld.blogspot.com/16.6.09>; <http://truetreasure.co.uk>, accessed 4 October 2009.

8 The Significance of Treasure Hunting: Past and Present

1. Kiesewetter, *Faust*, p. 70; Adam, "Viel", pp. 358–361; Labouvie, *Künste*, p. 124.
2. G.M. Foster (1965) "Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good" *American Anthropologist*, LXVII (1965), pp. 293–315 (The text was reprinted in J. Potter (1967) (ed.) *Peasant Society* (Boston: Little Brown), pp. 307–321). Foster summarized his concept in G.M. Foster (1976) "Reply to Frans J. Schryer" *Current Anthropology*, XVII, pp. 710–712. Cf. J. MacLaughlin (1975) "Treasure, Envy and Witchcraft", in R. Dorson (ed.) *Folk tales Told Around the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 517–527.
3. Foster, "Peasant", pp. 293–297. Gregory's criticism was partly based on a misunderstanding of that concept, J. Gregory (1975) "Image of Limited Good, or Expectation of Reciprocity?" *Current Anthropology*, XVI, pp. 73–84.
4. Cf. e.g. Hundsichler, "Religiös", pp. 66–72.
5. Foster, "Peasant", pp. 306–307, more specific G.M. Foster (1964) "Treasure Tales and the Image of the Static Economy in a Mexican Peasant Community" *Journal of American Folklore*, LXXVII, pp. 39–44. The ethnolinguist study by Briggs pointed out similarities between treasure narratives from Central America and from Europe, C. Briggs (1985) "Treasure Tales and Pedagogical Discourse in Mexicana, New Mexico" *Journal of American Folklore*, XCVIII, pp. 287–314.
6. E. Blum and R. Bloom (1970) *The Dangerous Hour. The Lore of Crisis and Mystery in Rural Greece* (London: Chatto & Windus), p. 44.
7. J. Lindow (1982) "Swedish Legends of Buried Treasure" *Journal of American Folklore*, XCV, pp. 257–279. Lindow's own interpretation of treasure lore is most interesting but too overdone to be convincing. He stressed that treasure in Swedish folk tales is depicted as a corrupting gift of the devil. According to Lindow, swiftly acquired wealth disturbed the social order of static agrarian societies. Therefore, the treasure was presented as dangerous: a menace not only to the one who found it but to society as a whole. Lindow interpreted the magical rituals during the digging (e.g. the strict silence) as metaphors for the treasure hunter's turning away from society, pp. 273–275.
8. Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 279–280, 644.
9. HSTAST, A 209 Büschel 961.
10. Crossan, *Finding*, p. 18.
11. Foster, "Peasant", pp. 308–309; Foster, "Treasure", pp. 41–44.
12. Foster, "Peasant", p. 309.
13. Commenda, "Gesellschaft", p. 192; M. Bönisch (1994) *Opium der Armen* (Tübingen: Silberburg).
14. Foster, "Peasant", p. 308.
15. HHSTAST, A 209 Büschel 1421.
16. LASH, 276/1138, cf. Gies, *Schatzgräberei*, pp. 24–25.
17. Becker, *Noth*, pp. 240–241.

18. Labouvie, *Verbotene*, p. 124.
19. Foster, "Peasant", p. 308, problematic P. Mullen (1978) "The Folk Idea of Unlimited Good in American Buried Treasure Legends" *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, XXV, pp. 209–220; critical Lindow, "Swedish", pp. 269–270.
20. There is a curious parallel between early modern treasure magicians and narrators of folk tales in modern societies dominated by agriculture. Schryer demonstrated that the narrators of the tales about treasure troves analyzed by Foster often came from the lower class. The heroes of their stories were wealthy people whom they frequently claimed to have known personally, F.J. Schryer (1976) "A Reinterpretation of Treasure Tales and the Image of Limited Good" *Current Anthropology*, XVII, pp. 708–710. The parallel between them and the treasure magicians of our sources is obvious: both provided and interpreted traditional knowledge. Priests and vagrant cunning men were only able to play active, even leading, roles in treasure hunting enterprises because they were the interpreters of older traditions offering expert knowledge about the early modern market for magical services.
21. Mullen, "Folk".
22. Dobie, *Legends*, pp. 16–18.
23. Foster, "Treasure", p. 40.
24. GLAK, 212/459.
25. Dobie, *Legends*, pp. 89–91.
26. Anonymous (1903) "A Prize of Hidden Treasure", *Tit-Bits*, 20 June, n.p.
27. Quarrell, *Buried*, pp. 151–152; Anonymous (1904) "The Police Courts" *The Times*, 21 January, p. 4.
28. Anonymous (1904) "Seeking for Hidden Treasure" *The Times*, 21 January, p. 12; Anonymous (1904) "The Treasure Hunter", *The Times*, 25 January, p. 7.
29. Adam suggested viewing treasure hunting as one of the consequences of the decriminalization of magic in the eighteenth century, Adam, "Viel". This is hardly convincing. There is no evidence for a marked increase in treasure hunts in the eighteenth century. In addition, the legislation of the eighteenth century punished treasure hunting as fraud or sacrilege, thus it was far from decriminalizing it.

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STATST, A 209 Bù 14, Bù 78, Bù 480a, Bù 609, Bù 833, Bù 957, Bù 961, Bù 967, Bù 1176, Bù 1421, Bù 1451, Bù 1621, Bù 1623, Bù 1670, Bù 1700a, Bù 1713, Bù 1811, Bù 1982; A 309 Bù 3;

LASH, 111/551; 276/1138.

STAA, VÖ Lit 656

STAW, F-Rep. 148a_33; G-Rep. 52_80; R-Rep. 16a_40

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