



The Last Witch of Langenburg: Murder in a German Village

Thomas Robisheaux

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A young mother dies in agony. Was it a natural death, murder—or witchcraft?

On the night of the festive holiday of Shrove Tuesday in 1672 Anna Fessler died after eating one of her neighbor's buttery cakes. Could it have been poisoned? Drawing on vivid court documents, eyewitness accounts, and an early autopsy report, historian Thomas Robisheaux brings the story to life. Exploring one of Europe's last witch panics, he unravels why neighbors and the court magistrates became convinced that Fessler's neighbor Anna Schmiege was a witch—one of several in the area—ensnared by the devil. Once arrested, Schmiege, the wife of the local miller, and her daughter were caught up in a high-stakes drama that led to charges of sorcery and witchcraft against the entire family. Robisheaux shows how ordinary events became diabolical ones, leading magistrates to torture and turn a daughter against her mother. In so doing he portrays an entire world caught between superstition and modernity.

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