

Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition **By: Richard M. Golden, Editor**

Witch Hunts

Rita Voltmer

Witch hunts were an early modern phenomenon. Geographically, they occurred most often in some parts of the Holy Roman Empire that were extremely fragmented legally: Franconian ecclesiastical territories; the Saar and Mosel regions; the electorates of Trier and Cologne, including the duchy of Westphalia; the duchies of Luxembourg and Lorraine; the prince-bishopric of Münster; Schleswig-Holstein; and Mecklenburg. Elsewhere, they occurred on the peripheries of France (for example, Navarre and Languedoc), in the Swiss Confederation, the Spanish Netherlands, the Austrian Habsburg patrimonial lands, and western Poland. Witch hunting was generally less intense in both Mediterranean and northern Europe, with Catalonia from 1618 to 1620 as a notable exception in the former area and lowland Scotland, eastern England, in 1645, and northern Sweden from 1668 to 1674 as exceptions in the latter area. Even in areas affected by severe witch panics, trials occurred in unequal numbers everywhere. There was a great deal of regional variation in persecution; some areas experienced endemic, others epidemic, episodes of witch hunting. Witch hunts had many different causes: Current witchcraft scholarship acknowledges that no single factor explains all early modern witch hunts.

Learned Witchcraft and the Chronology of Persecution

Witch hunts were clearly not a medieval phenomenon, but ideas about witchcraft had roots in medieval belief systems. By 1400, it was generally accepted that individuals could work harm (but also effect cures) by means of magic. During the fifteenth century, a far more terrifying belief developed that a witch sect met secretly in order to plot harm to the rest of society. This new concept was an "invention" of the late medieval learned elites, created from several different sources, including confessions elicited by inquisitors from Cathar and Waldensian heretics, in which flight through the air, devil worship, and the sacrifice of children were already mentioned. Anti-Semitism also played a role, as the witches' gathering was called a "synagogue" (or Sabbat), where witches, like Jews, supposedly desecrated Christian rites and indulged in the ritual murder of infants. Human pacts with the Devil had been discussed since St. Augustine and renewed by St. Thomas Aquinas. Ancient beliefs about the efficacy of magical and demonic powers, harmful magic,

the evil eye, and the ability of certain people to change themselves into animals and to fly at night existed alongside these learned ideas.

These ideas converged in the 1430s. The Dominican Johannes Nider systematically summarized these ideas in his *Formicarius* (The Anthill), written in 1437 and 1438 after he attended the Council of Basel, the nexus from which the previously unknown crime of witchcraft spread to a sizable proportion of Europe's learned elite. The new medium of printing sped this process. Such demonological texts as the infamous *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer of Witches), first published in 1486 by Heinrich Kramer, found their way into Europe's universities, courtrooms, monastic libraries, and private households, wherever Latin was understood. Uneducated contemporaries learned about the new sect of witches through sermons.

The earliest recorded witch hunts—some with over a hundred executions—come primarily from lands near Lake Geneva around 1430: the duchy of Savoy, the Val d'Aosta, Dauphiné, and today's Swiss cantons of Valais and Vaud. Here, the belief in an alleged secret sect of witches and inquisitorial techniques (often applied by laymen) mutually reinforced one another to create chains of trials, in which confessions forced from suspects under torture confirmed the fantasies of court authorities. Moreover, confessions of weather magic and other harmful magic appeared to explain genuine crises (such as harvest failure or illness) afflicting contemporaries.

Witch hunts soon spread south into the Italian-speaking Alps and as far north as the Low Countries, as in the trials in Arras in 1459. They also moved northeast into German-speaking Switzerland, the regions bordering Lake Constance, and the upper Rhineland, where many people were executed for witchcraft before 1500. The activities of Inquisitor Kramer and the impact of his particularly misogynistic demonology, the *Malleus Malificarum*, promoted clusters of trials in Alsace, the city of Metz, and the area between the Rhine and Mosel Rivers. Witch hunts petered out temporarily in west-central Europe after 1520 or 1530, probably because of the impact of the Protestant Reformation, but they resumed again after 1560, often in conjunction with severe agrarian crises. They continued (with significant regional variations) until the second half of the eighteenth century, with the worst witch hunts occurring between 1580 and 1650.

Secular and Ecclesiastical Courts

In the early phase of the witch hunts before 1500, secular courts rather than inquisitors were already taking the leading role in persecuting alleged witches. In countries where the prosecution of witches remained entirely or largely

in the hands of the Inquisition (Spain, Portugal, and Italy), witch hunts were largely prevented, and accusations of witchcraft made against an alleged "accomplice" by a confessing witch did not constitute valid evidence. Death sentences for witchcraft were very infrequent; in Portugal, the Inquisition ordered only perhaps ten such executions. Between 1610 and 1614, the Spanish inquisitor Alonso de Salazar Frías brought the witch hunts in Spanish Basque lands to an end, after secular judges had executed many French Basque witches. In areas influenced by the Roman Inquisition, witchcraft trials were also pursued with moderation. In Poland, witch hunting was relatively restrained, while the crime remained under ecclesiastical jurisdiction but gradually increased in the sixteenth century when secular courts, which allowed burning at the stake, took control of witchcraft persecution.

Numbers Executed and Centers of Persecution

The idea that 9 million people were executed during the early modern witch hunts has long since been refuted (Behringer 1998). Estimates now put the total number of executions in Europe between 30,000 and 60,000. The attempt to arrive at exact statistics for particular regions almost invariably fails because of the incomplete survival of sources. Moreover, in order to calculate the intensity of persecution in a particular area, one must compare the number of executions with the overall (adult) population. And when counting "victims" of the witch hunts, we must be careful to include not just those who were executed. Suspected witches who were released after refusing to confess were often physically and psychologically severely damaged by their ordeal and subsequently led a precarious existence on the margins of society. Some areas with low "execution rates" experienced many lynchings and unofficial executions of reputed witches or released witch suspects: Hundreds of people were murdered in this way in the French Ardennes in the seventeenth century. Our statistics on the total number of executions given previously must therefore be adjusted upward to include other kinds of victims of witch hunts.

Territories that we can categorize as centers of the most extreme witch hunts include all three of Germany's Catholic archbishop-electoralates: Trier (with at least 1,000 trials), Mainz (with around 2,000 trials), and Cologne (with over 2,000 trials). The witch hunts in Franconia's Catholic ecclesiastical territories were equally intense: Around 900 witches were executed in the prince-bishopric of Bamberg, while around 1,200 met this fate in the prince-bishopric of Würzburg. More than 4,000 trials occurred in Lutheran Mecklenburg. Overall, Germany probably saw nearly 25,000 executions for witchcraft. On its western edges, persecution of witches was very severe in the Catholic duchies of Lorraine and Luxembourg (both with around 3,000 trials). But the Protestant Pays de Vaud, in French Switzerland, had perhaps the highest known per capita execution rate of

any region, with over 50,000 people (at least 1,700 deaths, over 20 per thousand) during the early modern period.

Territories on the periphery of Europe experienced a more restrained pattern of witch hunting. There were around 2,000 executions for witchcraft in all of Scandinavia (half of them in Denmark), although the region was much less densely populated than west-central or southern Europe. There were not more than 500 executions—and perhaps even significantly fewer—in England; Scotland, by contrast, was less than one-fourth as populous but executed 1,000 witches. In France, the *parlements*, or sovereign judicial courts, provided a strongly centralized administrative structure that exercised control over local courts: Here, fewer than 500 people out of a population of 16 to 20 million royal subjects were legally executed as witches. Eastern Europe also experienced some witch hunts, though later than in the west. Poland's witch hunts occurred mostly between the mid-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries, but exact statistics are impossible, and no more than seven witches are ever known to have been executed in one place in one year.

The Role of Religion

The religion of the authorities in any particular territory played only a subordinate role in determining the willingness to hunt witches. In Germany, Calvinist authorities in the Palatine electorate systematically quashed every attempt to instigate or pursue witch hunts (Schmidt 2000), while the rulers of such Lutheran imperial free cities as Nuremberg also demonstrated a marked reluctance to persecute witches. However, other German Protestant areas (such as Mecklenburg or Lemgo) experienced extremely severe episodes of witch hunting. Not the religion but the degree of political and judicial fragmentation of an area had the greatest influence in shaping the severity of witch persecution. Such small ecclesiastical territories as the imperial abbey of St. Maximin or the Mergentheim Chapter of the Teutonic Knights, with only a few thousand subjects, experienced truly devastating witch hunts. Similar developments affected some small secular lordships, especially where the right to exercise criminal jurisdiction was in dispute, particularly along some western edges of the German Empire such as Luxembourg or the Saarland—or in Silesia, near its eastern edge, after 1650. Larger, less fragmented territories, where local courts were answerable to central courts staffed by professional jurists, as in France or the duchy of Bavaria, usually avoided witch hunts.

The Gender and Social Status of Accused Witches

A large majority of those who fell victim to witch hunts were women, even if in a few regions, such

as Finland or Normandy in France, more men than women were executed. Kramer focused solely on women as susceptible to the temptations of the Devil in his misogynistic *Malleus Maleficarum*, and in many places, popular opinion supported him. Generally speaking, confessionalism affected witch hunting only marginally in comparison with juridico-political issues. In much of Protestant northern Europe (Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, England, and Scotland), women constituted 80 to 90 percent of those executed, a notably higher rate than in most parts of Catholic Germany (Schulte 2001). But in fervently Catholic Poland, 96 percent of all executed witches—the highest rate known in Europe—were women, while in Calvinist Vaud, almost 600 men—more than anywhere in Catholic Germany—were executed as witches; moreover, Iceland, where more than 90 percent of witches were men, was Lutheran.

The stereotype of the witch as a poor, old, widowed woman was emphasized in the writings of both Protestant and Catholic demonologists and by such opponents of witch hunting as Johann Weyer and Friedrich Spee. However, this stereotype consistently broke down, both in the earliest witch hunts and especially in the large-scale witch hunts of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Young, married women; children and teenagers; and men (including some holding political or religious office) became increasingly caught up in chain trials during major hunts. Midwives were not singled out for persecution as witches, even though this idea is still emphasized occasionally.

Factors Influencing the Outbreak of Witch Hunts

Despite the many reasons behind the witch hunts that struck different parts of Europe at different times, certain common factors increased the likelihood for multiplying witchcraft trials. Not all these factors needed to be present at the same time and with the same intensity in any particular region to trigger witch hunts.

The Acceptance of the Cumulative Concept of Witchcraft

Nearly all cultures believe in the efficacy of harmful magic and the existence of individuals who practice it: These beliefs constitute anthropological constants. But belief in blasphemous witches, who carry out evil deeds with the Devil's help, was specific to Latin Europe and the Americas. The five components of the so-called cumulative concept of witchcraft (the pact with the Devil, sex with the Devil, flight, attendance at Sabbats, and the performance of harmful magic) were not, however, accepted with equal enthusiasm and speed. Throughout northern Europe and Scandinavia, the cumulative concept of witchcraft was adopted very slowly and imperfectly; most witches were tried

for the traditional crime of harmful magic, and only far in the seventeenth century did attendance at Sabbats feature in charges leveled at suspected witches. Wherever belief in the Sabbat remained weak, mass persecution was almost impossible because there was no reason to force the names of supposed accomplices from alleged witches under interrogation.

The Context of Crisis

From 1400 to 1700, various radical changes and crises affected many different aspects of life. Climatic deterioration—which earned for the period the name Little Ice Age—caused long-term inflation in the prices of essential foodstuffs, and in many regions, intensive witch hunts coincided with periods of bad weather, harvest failure, and rapid inflation. This “crisis scenario,” emphasized by Wolfgang Behringer (1995), was often made worse by epidemics and warfare. In addition, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation caused acute uncertainty among early modern Europeans; religious change also encouraged territorial lords and churches to try to impose ever-stricter codes of discipline on their subjects. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century demonologists repeatedly evoked apocalyptic images of the imminent end of the world in a final battle between good and evil, with the Devil and the witches on the side of evil. Ordinary people shared this vision as well; as a result, as Behringer has argued, a general “darkening” of people’s worldview occurred.

Discourses and Dissemination of Demonological “Ideology”

The general shortage of material resources, the struggle for survival, and religious uncertainty provided fruitful ground in which belief in and fear of the secret powers of a large-scale witches’ sect could grow. However, no simple causal connection existed between crisis phenomena and witch hunts. Rather, crises helped create a climate of fear, envy, resentment, greed, and anxiety about daily survival, a context in which witchcraft trials were likely to occur. In order for the new beliefs about witchcraft to take root, channels of communication—the most important of which were sermons and printed literature—were necessary. In late sixteenth-century Trier, for example, popular pressure for witch hunts was repeatedly aroused through sermons preached by Jesuits.

Once a personal misfortune or devastating hailstorm (both of which could be blamed on witchcraft) had triggered the first witchcraft trials in a region, beliefs about witchcraft were disseminated and strengthened as the judges, commissioners, local committees, and witnesses involved in the trials traveled to various courts, spreading fears as they went. It often happened that witchcraft trials in one area stimulated a desire for witch persecution in a neighboring territory that had experienced no particular misfortunes or crises.

Density of population played an important role here: Beliefs about witches spread much more slowly throughout the thinly populated parts of northern Europe than they did in west-central Europe. For example, it was probably not until the 1640s that soldiers returning from the Thirty Years' War took beliefs about the witches' Sabbath and witches as devil worshippers back to Sweden with them. The large-scale Swedish witch persecution between 1668 and 1676 (which affected its very thinly populated northern provinces) in turn spread to Finland, where severe witchcraft trials affected the Swedish-speaking population. Finland, where the cumulative concept of witchcraft surfaced for the first time only in the 1660s, was the last Scandinavian land to be affected by witchcraft trials. The man largely responsible for disseminating it, the judge Nils Psilander, had come into contact with German-influenced ideas about the crime of witchcraft while studying at the new University of Turku.

As this example illustrates, the role of universities in influencing the dynamics of witch hunts should also not be underestimated. In these institutions, generations of jurists and lawyers who became judges and assessors in witchcraft trials or provided legal advice in witchcraft cases received their training. These witchcraft trial legal specialists could offer their services in several territories or regions, thereby playing a significant role in stimulating the beginning, escalation, or end of such trials.

Persecution "from Beneath"

Witchcraft trials usually began after pressure was exerted by a populace suffering from one or more of the aforementioned crisis scenarios and influenced by antiwitch propaganda. Witch hunts were rarely initiated by authorities against the wishes and without the cooperation of their subjects, because witchcraft trials needed evidence from those supposedly affected by harmful magic, supported by testimony from witnesses about the allegedly bad reputation and suspicious behavior of the accused. This desire to hunt witches "from below" varied in intensity. In many western parts of the Holy Roman Empire and the duchy of Luxembourg, witch-hunting committees (*Hexenausschüsse*) were organized. These committees were groups of men appointed by the local community to gather evidence against suspected witches in order to bring formal charges against them. In other parts of Germany and the Spanish Netherlands, this type of popular initiative took the form of surprisingly unified demands for witchcraft trials from entire villages. No witch-hunting committees existed in most parts of Europe. Here, however, the lower orders could demand that the authorities take action against witches who had allegedly caused bad weather, disease, and

harvest failure in forms ranging from peaceful petitions to almost open revolt. Before the desire to hunt witches from below could translate into an episode of mass persecution, however, at least one other factor was necessary.

Elite Willingness to Hunt Witches and the Use of Torture

Witch hunts could occur only when the authorities were willing to make the full apparatus of the criminal law available for the pursuit of witchcraft trials. Territorial lords seeking greater centralization and unity by developing more efficient bureaucracies usually demonstrated little interest in hunting witches. The exceptionally severe witch hunts that took place in the ecclesiastical territories of the German region of Franconia in the early seventeenth century constitute rare examples of witch persecutions instigated, fostered, and condoned by the authorities. Where a territorial government consistently suppressed popular desires for witch hunts, for example, in the Palatine electorate, no witchcraft trials took place. By contrast, one finds enthusiastic promoters of witch hunts among minor secular and ecclesiastical lords holding rights to exercise criminal jurisdiction at local courts.

With few exceptions, the crime of witchcraft was tried before secular courts. However, northern Europe, including the British Isles, never adopted inquisitorial legal procedure—which was based on Roman law and which allowed the use of torture—in criminal cases. In these countries, chains of trials linked by denunciations of so-called accomplices extracted by torture were impossible, and true witch hunts were accordingly extremely rare.

As the example of common-law Europe shows, the use of torture played a decisive role in predicting whether witchcraft trials escalated into large-scale witch hunts. Criminal legal procedure based on Roman law accepted torture as a legitimate part of the process for obtaining a confession, which was necessary in order to convict the accused. The Carolina, the 1532 code of criminal-law procedure for the Holy Roman Empire, left decisions about the frequency and severity with which torture was to be applied to the discretion of the presiding judge. Almost every area that experienced massive witch persecution classified witchcraft as an “excepted crime” (*crimen exceptum*), whereby the restraints of normal legal procedure could be ignored, and proceeded to inflict tortures of the most horrifying and gruesome type on suspected witches.

Witch Hunters

Witchcraft trials required input from a large number of “specialists”: jurists, judges, court scribes and notaries, beadles, and executioners. All large-scale European witch persecutions included, among these specialists, prominent men who sought to promote witchcraft trials and manipulate

them for personal advantage. In this way, the witch hunts in Franche-Comté are linked to the judge and demonologist

1212

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Henri Boguet, the French Basque witchcraft trials with Pierre de Lancre (also a judge and demonologist), and the endemic persecutions in the duchy of Lorraine with *procureur-général* (public prosecutor) Nicolas Rémy (and his son, who inherited his position). The witch hunts that began in the English region of East Anglia in 1645 were driven by the ambitious “Witch-Finder General” Matthew Hopkins (who died in 1647), while trials in Iceland after 1650 were directed by Sheriff Þorleifur Kortsson.

The number of executions in the prince-bishopric of Bamberg would certainly have been lower without the fatal influence on proceedings of its suffragan bishop and demonologist Friedrich Förner; they abated after his death in 1630. Other men who exerted a fateful personal influence on large-scale German trial episodes were Witch Commissioner Berend Nobis in Schleswig in 1626, his colleague Heinrich von Schultheiss in electoral Cologne, “witches’ judge” Balthasar Nuss or Ross (hanged in 1618) in the prince-abbey of Fulda, and jurist Daniel Hauff in Esslingen. All these men claimed to be crusading against a sect of witches that deserved extermination, and they showed their victims no mercy. They were also driven by a desire for self-promotion and disseminated their witch-hunting experiences in published form, thereby retrospectively legitimating their actions. Rémy, for example, published his essay on the persecutions in the duchy of Lorraine, *Daemonolatriae* (Demonolatry), in 1595; Lancre published a demonological work, *Tableau de l’inconstance des mauvais anges et démons* (Description of the Inconstancy of Evil Angels and Demons) in 1612. In the 1620s, Förner published a collection of sermons against witchcraft, with one for every day of the year, while in 1634, von Schultheiss published a handbook on conducting witchcraft trials correctly. Other jurists, commissioners, and court personnel often obtained significant promotions through their involvement in witch hunts, which sometimes also brought financial advantages—although increasing social capital was at least as important to such men as making an economic profit.

The Pursuit of Witch Hunts in Private and Political Interests

Fears of witchcraft occasionally led to genuinely panic-stricken persecutions of alleged witches in rural areas and sometimes also in small towns. Contemporaries were, however, aware that accusations of witchcraft were not always leveled at “real” witches but knew that innocent people

could inadvertently find themselves dragged into witchcraft trials. Early modern people, deeply ensnared in contemporary witchcraft beliefs, also used witchcraft accusations and witchcraft trials in their own interests. Such “instrumentalization” of witchcraft accusations and trials can be seen at every level of the persecution process and in every group who participated in it. Neighbors used suspicions and accusations of witchcraft to resolve social conflicts, while local court officials obtained social and financial advantages from witch hunting.

Minor lords with the right to exercise high criminal justice used witchcraft trials to exert and affirm this right, which helps explain why severe witchcraft trials usually occurred in small and middle-sized territories where a climate of persecution, hermetically sealed against external interference, could develop. Such minor but independent rulers clung ever more tenaciously to their “old” legal right to try serious crimes the more this right—and thereby their autonomy—was challenged by major territorial lords; as part of the early modern state-building process, they sought to wrest control of high criminal justice from local courts and centralize it in their own hands. Witchcraft trials acquired a significant political role against the background of such judicial conflicts: They were used and sometimes even deliberately staged by the lords involved in such conflicts. For example, the fifteenth-century Swiss witchcraft trials that occurred around Lucerne, Basel, and Fribourg, in the Val Leventina, and in the Pays de Vaud served political purposes, demonstrating claims to political authority. Around 1600, similar political motivations underlay many witchcraft trials in parts of Silesia, Mecklenburg, Schleswig-Holstein, and the prince-bishopric of Münster. In particular, the territory between the Meuse and Rhine Rivers was characterized by a patchwork of territorial rulers holding different political and legal rights, a situation that frequently produced witchcraft trials resulting from deliberate attempts by local lords to assert their power and authority (Vltmer 2002).

Opposition to and End of Witch Hunts

Early modern opinion about witchcraft trials was by no means unanimous. Some regions (for example, Ireland) experienced almost no witchcraft trials, while others experienced mass persecutions. Meanwhile, critical voices—from all major religions and from various social groups—were raised against belief in witchcraft and the persecution of witches throughout the entire witch-hunting period. Legal records from the highest courts of appeal show that the individual elements comprising the cumulative concept of witchcraft were rarely accepted without opposition. Moreover, as the example of Ireland shows, people who believed in witches did not necessarily become hard-line advocates of persecution. In the supplications and suits brought before various appellate courts, such as the *Grand Conseil* (Great Council) in Malines, the *Reichskammergericht* (imperial

chamber court) and *Reichshofrat* (imperial aulic court) in the Holy Roman Empire, and the *parlements* in France, we find many

1213

1214

individuals who believed themselves innocent of the witchcraft accusations brought against them and who described in detail the cruel, often fanatical, and sometimes cynical behavior of witch hunters pursuing their private social, economic, and political interests. Familiarity with such legal records led some contemporaries to deny the belief in witches completely (although almost never saying so in public); others called for moderation in—or even stopping entirely—the persecution of witches, using arguments resembling the criticisms by such opponents of witchcraft trials as Johann Weyer, Reginald Scot, Cornelius Loos, and Friedrich Spee.

However, because of official censorship, advocates of witchcraft trials held a quasimonopoly on publications during the early modern period. Therefore, most surviving printed sources (pamphlets recording trials, demonological tracts, and sermons) reflected the conventional line favoring witch hunting, supported alike by official political power, by faceless public opinion, by those who supported witchcraft trials from self-interest, and by those too frightened to dare criticize witch hunting. The rare examples of people willing to risk making more or less open criticism of witch hunts are thus all the more valuable, showing that there were always alternatives to zealous persecution, that fear of witches was never present with the same degree of intensity throughout Europe, and that some contemporaries understood and loathed the terrible legal mechanisms fostering witch hunts.

Large-scale outbreaks of witch hunting always required several interrelated factors. Attempts to explain why witchcraft trials became fewer and fewer in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and why they eventually ceased altogether are equally complex. Mass witch hunts not only confirmed the plausibility of belief in witchcraft; they also provoked the interest of critics who doubted their legality and suspected that innocent people were being unjustly executed as witches. Mass trials also produced all manner of scandals and illegal procedures, causing some people to rethink their support for witch hunting. Skeptical attitudes became more common in the wake of the Enlightenment and increasing religious tolerance. Even though witchcraft remained a crime in some countries into the nineteenth century, trials declined alongside the gradual abandonment of judicial torture, the increasing subordination of local courts to centralized systems of justice, and the implementation of territorial decrees prohibiting witchcraft trials. In electoral Trier, for example,

witchcraft trials were unofficially prohibited in 1652; in France, Louis XIV abolished them officially in 1682; in the Habsburg lands, Maria Theresa effectively prohibited them after 1750.

However, although many critical voices were raised among Europe's learned and ruling elites, belief in witchcraft remained very much alive among the lower orders, although there were some opponents of persecution even at this social level and despite the fact that courts no longer satisfied popular desire for trials. Witchcraft trials did, in fact, continue far into the eighteenth century; the last legal execution for witchcraft in Europe occurred in the Swiss canton of Glarus in 1782. In the long term, improving economic, political, and social conditions, together with better levels of education, medical provision, and state poor relief, contributed to the gradual cessation of witchcraft trials. The belief in the ability of certain individuals to work either harmful or helpful magic has nonetheless remained until today.

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See also:

[agrarian crises](#); [apocalypse](#); [chronology of witchcraft trials](#); [communal persecution](#); [courts, ecclesiastical](#); [courts, secular](#); [*crimen exceptum*](#); [decline of the witch hunts](#); [ecclesiastical territories \(holy roman empire\)](#); [fear](#); [female witches](#); [gender](#); [geography of the witch hunts](#); [germany](#); [little ice age](#); [lynching](#); [*malleus maleficarum*](#); [number of witches](#); [origins of the witch hunts](#); [panics](#); [popular persecution](#); [skepticism](#); [social and economic status of witches](#); [torture](#); [universities](#); [witch craze](#).

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Golden, Richard M. "Witch Hunts." *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006. *ABC-CLIO eBook Collection*. Web. 12 Aug 2014.

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