

Witchcraft in Medieval Europe

The prosecution of witchcraft generally became more prominent throughout the late medieval and Renaissance era, perhaps driven partly by the upheavals of the era - the Black Death, Hundred Years War, and a gradual cooling of the climate which modern scientists call the Little Ice Age (between about the 15th and 19th centuries). Witches were sometimes blamed. Pope Innocent VIII, in his papal bull *Summis desiderantes affectibus* (5 December 1484), called for measures against magicians and witches in Germany. The grip of freezing weather, failing crops, rising crime, and mass starvation were blamed on witches.^{[22][23]}

"It has recently come to our ears, not without great pain to us, that in some parts of upper Germany, Mainz, Koin, Trier, Salzburg, and Bremen, many persons of both sexes, heedless of their own salvation and forsaking the catholic faith, give themselves over to devils male and female, and by their incantations, charms, and conjurings, and by other abominable superstitions and sortileges, offences, crimes, and misdeeds, ruin and cause to perish the offspring of women, the foal of animals, the products of the earth, the grapes of vines, and the fruits of trees, as well as men and women, cattle and flocks and herds and animals of every kind, vineyards also and orchards, meadows, pastures, harvests, grains and other fruits of the earth; that they afflict and torture with dire pains and anguish, both internal and external, these men, women, cattle, flocks, herds, and animals, and hinder men from begetting [...]"

A similar theme is found in the *Malleus Maleficarum* written in 1486, which stated that witchcraft was to blame for bad weather. These remarks are included in Part 2, Chapter XV, which is entitled: "How they Raise and Stir up Hailstorms and Tempests, and Cause Lightning to Blast both Men and Beasts"

"Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that, just as easily as they raise hailstorms, so can they cause lightning and storms at sea; and so no doubt at all remains on these points."

Although men as well as women could be open to this charge, the title of the book itself is feminine in gender and Kramer wrote in section I that: "all witchcraft comes from carnal lust which is in women insatiable". In 1490, shortly after the book's initial publication, the Catholic Church ruled that the "Malleus Maleficarum" was false and in 1538 the Spanish Inquisition cautioned against using it. Spreading from Tyrol, where it originated, to other Germanic States, it helped to fuel the witchhunts in Protestant countries in the seventeenth century as well.

Most of Medieval Western and Central Europe had long-standing Catholic standardisation mixed with some survivals of earlier non-Christian practices such as the use of charms or incantations, with intermittent localized occurrences of different ideas (such as Catharism or Platonism) and sometimes recurring anti-Semitic or anti-Judaic activity. These parochial beliefs and practices were commonly used as the basis for charges of witchcraft or heresy.

With the Protestant Reformation, Catholic authorities became much more ready to suspect heresy in any new ideas, including those of Renaissance humanism, previously strongly supported by many at the top of the Church hierarchy. The extirpation of heretics became a much broader and more complex enterprise, complicated by the politics of territorial Protestant powers, especially in northern Europe. The Catholic Church could no longer exercise direct influence in the politics and justice-systems of lands which officially adopted Protestantism. Thus war (the French Wars of Religion, the Thirty Years War), massacre (the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre) and the missional and propaganda work (by the Sacra congregatio de propaganda fide)¹ of the Counter-Reformation came to play larger roles in these circumstances, and the Roman law type of a "judicial" approach to heresy represented by the Inquisition became less important overall.

With thanks to Wikipedia.