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Misconceptions About the Middle Ages

Edited by

Stephen J. Harris and Bryon L. Grigsby

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Preface

This collection arises out of an exchange some years ago between Julia Bolton Holloway and R. A. Ross on Med-Rel, an electronic discussion list dedicated to the study of medieval religion. List members articulated a pressing need to address some prevalent misconceptions about the Middle Ages before a more general audience. This book contributes to answering that need. We are grateful to George Ferzoco for his guidance and encouragement and to Taylor & Francis for their helpful advice and unflagging interest in the project.

Each contribution is brief, and all contributors recommend books for further reading. I am joined by my coeditor Bryon Grigsby in saying that it has been a privilege to compile this collection. We hope we have done the contributions justice, and apologize beforehand for any errors for which, of course, we are responsible. We would like to thank Carolyn Schriber, Laura Blanchard, and Kathryn Talarico at the On-Line Reference Book of Medieval Studies (ORB) for hosting *Misconceptions* for so long. We owe large debts of thanks. But there are so many people to thank that we can only ask leave to be grateful to all.

This book is gratefully dedicated to our grandfathers. May they rest in peace.

—*Stephen J. Harris*

—*Bryon L. Grigsby*

6 February 2007

26 Witches and the Myth of the Medieval Burning Times¹

Amita Obermeier

Witches as black-clad, broomstick-riding, ugly old hags dominate Western representations in movies, stories, and especially at Halloween. Popular misconceptions hold that systematic, massive European witch hunts, trials, and executions happened during the Middle Ages. Although medieval thinkers contributed intellectual and legal ideas that helped develop the concept of witchcraft, the large-scale witch hunts belong to the early-modern period, comprising both the Protestant Reformation and the humanist Renaissance. The sheer volume of scholarly work on the witch phenomenon in post-medieval periods attests to that. Numerous scholarly opinions abound as to the reasons for the witch hunts that developed sporadically from 1430 on and reached their apex between 1560 and 1650. This chapter addresses the mistaken attribution of the early-modern witch hunts to the Middle Ages, while simultaneously chronicling the development of the image of the witch from antiquity to the seventeenth century.

First, some definitions might be helpful. Magic is most often associated with witchcraft, and it is a concept with dichotomous subdivisions: popular magic versus intellectual magic, natural magic versus demonic magic.² A basic definition of magic is “all efforts to manipulate or compel supernatural forces without reference to a God or Gods or to matters of ultimate meaning” (Stark 2003: 8). Mechanical sorcery is the lowest form of magic, relying on spells and charms. Sorcery comprises most of popular magic. Witchcraft grew out of sorcery but was considered distinct from it during the time of the European witch hunts. The root of the word *sorcery* is the French *sors*, meaning spell. Anthropologists have defined sorcery as “harmful magic” executed by a professional sorcerer. This definition differs from that of a witch, usually a woman, who is “believed to be inherently evil, born with the power to commit evil against others, and filled with anger and envy” (Guiley 1999: 212–3, 314). The term *witch* derives from the Old English *wicca* and the Middle English *witche*, meaning to work sorcery, to bewitch. The idea of magic is not fixed in the Middle Ages but rather developed from 500–1500 with major changes in the conversion period, the twelfth-century Renaissance, as well as the late-fourteenth-century and early-fifteenth-century cusp (Jolly 2001: 13).

Earlier, in Greek and Roman times, both good and bad magic was imputed to witches, but Roman law only prosecuted damage to property or people. By the early third century, Roman critics of Christianity combined admonitions against sorcery with fear of “unnatural religious practices” and blamed Christians for deviating from Roman religious customs, denying Roman gods, and congregating at night to practice perverted sexual acts and cannibalism (Kors and Peters 2001: 42). Ironically, many later Christian writers use similar rhetoric to discredit and indict heretics and witches. The patristic writer most influential on later medieval thought, Augustine, treated demonology in several of his works. He argued that pagan deities were “demons in disguise,” considered pagan religions “superstitious abominations,” believed that “demons and humans entered agreements [pacts],” and distinguished between “demonic magic” and “legitimate miracles” (Kors and Peters 2001: 43).

By the fifth century, ancient myths and legal customs, spreading Christianity, and Germanic paganism formed a new amalgam. The most persistent classical myths entering the early Middle Ages were those of the “night-flying, bloodsucking *striga*” and *lamia*, based on the Greek goddesses Hecate and Diana, that later blended with Nordic Valkyries (Russell 1972: 56, 79). *Lamiae* and *strigae* were differentiated from sorcerers (*maleficus* or *herbarius*), who were not linked with evil spirits. Throughout the early medieval conversion period, when Christian monotheism was establishing itself against existing magical pagan rituals, sorcerers were considered unwriting dupes of the devil and their practices “demonic illusion” (Jolly 2001: 16–8). For instance, during Charlemagne’s reign (ca. 800), false accusations of witchcraft were punishable, and in 1080, Pope Gregory VII admonished King Harold of Denmark not to impute natural calamities to innocent women (Russell 1972: 148). At that time, the church was not as interested in witchcraft as in heresy, condemning belief in night-flying creatures as superstitious and heretical in the tenth-century *Canon episcopi* (*Canon of the Bishop*; Kors and Peters 2001: 176). In contrast, the late fifteenth-century *Malleus maleficarum* (*The Hammer of Witches*) insists that disbelief in witches equals heresy (Kramer and Sprenger 1971: 1). In the eleventh century, when sorcery was a secular crime, ecclesiastical punishment for sorcery and heresy was preceded by numerous reprimands; nonetheless, the first official burning for heresy happened in 1022 in Orleans, another one in Monforte in 1028 (Russell 1972: 71). Little burning happened in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but in the thirteenth century, burning as punishment for “sorcerers and relapsed heretics” became standard; from the fifteenth century on, witches were burned upon “first conviction rather than upon relapse” (Russell 1972: 149–51).³

Two main theories try to explain the increasing interest in witchcraft in the Middle Ages: Jeffrey Burton Russell’s “reformist heresy” and Alan C. Kors’s and Edward Peters’s notion that scholastic writers codified the understanding and description of the witch through their treatises. Russell views

witchcraft as emanating from folklore and frames his notion in the larger contexts of various medieval groups' wishes to reform the church, often leading to dissent and repression as well as an increased fear of heretics. Cathars, Waldensians, and other heretical groups were frequently accused of being in league with the Devil. Stories about witches increased in the thirteenth century because "witchcraft, increasingly separated from simple magic and sorcery, began to be more and more closely bound to heresy, a process that would culminate in the fifteenth century" (Russell 1972: 99–100). Russell claims that the dualism of the Cathar heresy, in people's imagination, turned Satan from an abstract into a powerful figure that is literally haunting people's bodies and minds (1972: 101).

Kors and Peters demonstrate that the eleventh and twelfth centuries experienced a flurry of legal and theological writings expounding clerical and lay attitudes toward magic and sorcery. Before 1300, even ecclesiastical lawyers "lacked systematic categories of diabolism and occult powers" (Kors and Peters 2001: 59). Magical practices had been considered pagan, episodic, individual, and private attempts at personal gain. The most famous scholastic writer on demonology, Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), helped synthesize these "isolated cases of sorcery, 'witchcraft,' and possession" into a systematic theory of how Satan and his minions, later including witches, attacked humanity (Kors and Peters 2001: 112). According to Aquinas, who championed Aristotle's denial of the existence of natural magic, "magic must be either divine or demonic" (Guiley 1999: 367). Aquinas also contested the validity of the *Canon episcopi*, instead asserting that "witches copulated with demons, flew through the air, shape-shifted, raised storms and performed other *maleficia*," evil acts, through a pact with the Devil that violates God's supreme power and "constitutes apostasy from the true faith" (Guiley 1999: 367; Kors and Peters 2001: 89, 112).

Since Church teaching was by this time shifting magic and sorcery away from paganism and toward heresy, canon law and papal authority became involved. In 1230, the "office of inquisitor of heretical depravity" was founded. When in 1258 Pope Alexander IV was petitioned to include sorcery in the list of offenses the Inquisition could investigate, he repudiated the request but permitted prosecution of sorcerers and witches in cases in which there was strong evidence of heresy (Trevor-Roper 1969: 30). Law schools and inquisitors' handbooks made this connection between sorcery and heresy so systematically and effectively that, by the middle of the fourteenth century, diabolical sorcery—no longer just an illusion—had become an accepted fact among ecclesiastical elites and fixed in canon law.

Michael D. Bailey nuances these theories with his argument that common and clerical concepts of sorcery were conflated and produced the later concept of witchcraft. In the early fourteenth century, Pope John XXII condemned all forms of necromancy practiced by the male Latin elite with paraphernalia such as "rings, mirrors, and phials" (Bailey 2001: 966–7, 984). A century later, the prevalent usage of "common spells, charms, blessings, potions,

powders, and talismans" had morphed into the conviction, as demonstrated by Pope Eugenius IV's statement, that illiterate people of both sexes "could perform terrible demonic sorcery 'by a single word, touch, or sign'" (Bailey 2001: 965, 984). This belief conjures up "an organized demonic sect of sorcery, witchcraft, and necromancy" that needs to be declared criminal and heretical and stamped out (Jolly 2001: 22). Although the fourteenth-century Dominicans Bernard Gui,⁴ Nicholas Eymeric, and Johannes Nider and their learned treatises did not invent the concept of witchcraft, they propelled this conflation of common and elite magic, paving the road for fears such as Pope Eugenius IV's. Therefore, it is difficult to disagree with the enlightening comment by the early seventeenth-century inquisitor Salazar: "'There were neither witches nor bewitched until they were talked and written about'" (qtd. in Levaack 2006: 178). Thus, the unfelicitous conflation of common and elite forms of magic and sorcery eventually melded with heresy to lay the groundwork for a full-blown image of witchcraft later.

From 1300 to 1330, the first secular court cases focused on political sorcerers, initially in France and later in England, mostly alleging treasonous plots against royalty or prominent officials. This element of treason also characterized the most famous political sorcery trials of the Order of Knights Templar, which was a concerted effort by Philip IV, Edward II, and Clement V to rid themselves of a politically influential and wealthy group (Behringer 2004: 57; Russell 1972: 195). Renunciation of Christianity, Devil worship, and sodomy were the gravest charges laid upon the Templars; the structure of their trials was later used in the witch persecutions (Stark 2003: 235; Russell 1972: 195, 198). The years 1330 to 1375 featured sorcery cases without diabolism charges, while the period of 1375 to 1435 saw an increase both in trials and in diabolism charges, especially in southeastern France, southwestern Germany, northwestern Italy, central and western Switzerland—the original and traditional Cathar and Waldensian strongholds (Levaack 2006: 42, 90, 205).⁵ Rodney Stark, extrapolating from Richard Kieckhefer's data on sorcery trials between 1300 and 1499, argues that only 935 people had on sorcery trials the majority of them from 1450 to 1499 (2003: 240–4). Nevertheless, by 1500, medieval ideas about diabolical sorcery and heresy had coalesced into the witchcraft concept that served as a model for the persecutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

What exactly was this view of the witch that prevailed for the next two centuries? From 1500 on, witches were considered agents of the Devil, who commit *maleficia* against other humans as well as animals. They made pacts with the Devil and congregated in covens, kept familiars, and flew to witches' sabbats on brooms or beasts to meet their master. Once there, they engaged in gross banquets, naked dancing, cannibalistic infanticide, ritual intercourse with the Devil, and, above all, Devil worship (Levaack 2006: 41).⁶ The famous mark of the Devil was an addition by early sixteenth-century Protestant hunters and inquisitors of witches (Levaack 2006: 52).⁷ Many witches were accused by political rivals, economic competitors, neighbors,

and even family because people feared they could cause these evils: illness, impotence, frigidity, sterility, death, severe weather changes, crop failures, livestock problems, and demonic possessions.

Scholars disagree on the reasons for the late-fifteenth-century outbreak of sorcery and witch trials. Some claim that the many misfortunes that beset Europe from 1300 to 1500, such as famines, plagues, economic woes, repeated wars, and papal schism, cannot be directly connected to these early witch-hunt outbreaks, as they are not contained to the geographic areas with the heaviest persecutions. Still others pinpoint the church's anxiety surrounding the growing need for ecclesiastical and devotional reform as well as the fear of a collaborative counterculture ruled by the Devil out to destroy Christian society through diabolical sorcerers and assemblies of witches. Stark denies validity to the following eight often touted reasons for the European witch hunts: witches were indeed real, mental illness, sexism, social change, group solidarity, greed, fanatical clergy, and mass psychosis (2004: 208–25). Instead, he argues, three other factors in collusion resulted in the witch hunts between 1500 and 1750: continued practice of magic, weak governance, and religious conflict (Stark 2004: 244–55).

Although witchcraft became a secular, rather than an ecclesiastical, crime again in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the persecutions increased in severity under secular control, their uneven geographical distribution in the Germanophone borderlands along the Rhine River valley nevertheless suggests a continued connection between witch-hunting and religious conflict. While witch hunting cannot be blamed on the Reformation per se, it cannot be denied that, because of heightened religious sensitivities, both the Reformation and Counter-Reformation intensified witch persecutions and their dissemination. For instance, the *Malleus maleficarum* was sanctioned by the papacy, and both Calvin and Luther endorsed witch trials. Interestingly, Protestant witch hunters did not acquire their own distinct demonology but espoused the existing late-medieval view with minor alterations. Elaine Breslaw posits that “in Lutheran Germany the witch-hunt became a way of disposing of political opposition and consolidating the powers of the new local authorities. The Catholics may have created the modern stereotype of the witch, but the Protestants made more zealous use of it” (Breslaw 2000: 8). Furthermore, Protestants were more intent on purging society of immoral behavior, gave more prominence to the Devil in their theology, and attacked both “low” magic in the form of charms and spells and Catholic “ecclesiastical” magic in the form of holy water and making the sign of the cross (Levack 2006: 118).

The Reformation alone, however, was not the culprit. After the limited witchhunts of the late fifteenth century, the early sixteenth century experienced a lull in prosecutions, attributed to the initial shock of the Reformation and the political demands of warfare (Levack 2006: 206–7). Changes in the secular legal system helped gear up for the individual trials and small hunts between 1550 and 1570. Secular courts had adopted the church's inquisitorial

structure, and torture was allowed after 1480 in witchcraft trials (Harris 1974: 213). The large witch hunts peaked from 1580 to 1650, well into the humanist Renaissance; those peak witch-hunting years roughly correspond to the worst hundred-year period (1550–1650) Europe had ever seen: it endured inflation, transition to commercial agriculture, famines, depression in trade, revolts, civil and religious wars, national revolutions, and plague outbreaks.⁸ Additional factors fostered intense persecutions. After 1570, old treatises, such as the *Malleus*, were reprinted and witch hunting resumed. The printing press, unfortunately, facilitated the spreading of witch-hunting propaganda, including the biblical injunction found in Exodus 22.18, which Reformers translated as “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,” even though the Hebrew word does not have that connotation.⁹

Briefly examining the situation in individual European countries throws a surprising light on certain modern misconceptions about witch hunts. In Spain, Portugal, and Italy, where the Inquisition held sway over most witch trials, the numbers were rather low. The Spanish Inquisition, for instance, hesitated to define magic and sorcery as diabolical and gave more credence to the stories of the accused than to stock answers and expectations from witch-hunting manuals. Between 1540 and 1700, the Spanish Inquisition tried 44,701 people for various heretical offenses, as well as bigamy, blasphemy, sexual transgressions, superstition, and witchcraft; out of those, only 826 people (or 1.8%) were executed (Stark 2003: 256–9). In fact, the Spanish Inquisition in the early seventeenth century boasted the most indulgent measures, where out of 1,900 persons tried, only 11 were executed (Levack 2006: 95). In contrast, in unchecked local witch persecutions by secular authorities, satanic explanations were hyped and led to almost half of the executions in Spain (Stark 2003: 260). Portugal mirrored Spain in this aspect and had almost no witch trials. The Italian Inquisition was even more lenient. Over the two-hundred-year period of 1540–1740 in Rome, 97 died. Many Italian witch trials ended in not-guilty verdicts, a fact that may have been influenced by Italy's geographic distance from the religious wars (Stark 2003: 261–2).

In Scandinavia, 1,500 to 1,800 people were executed, although things are not evenly distributed across the individual countries. In Sweden, a country with intense magical and sorcerer activity, the arrival of satanism coincides with the influx of Protestant clergy educated in Germany; the worst Swedish witch hunts are imputed to the power vacuum of the 1660 and early 1670s, as they were in the Finnish province (Stark 2003: 268–70, 273). In Denmark, as in its dependencies Iceland and Norway, militant Lutheran theologians controlled the persecutions, but because the courts disallowed torture and hearsay, the hunts petered out (Stark 2003: 270–2). Similarly, England neither permitted torture nor incorporated the inquisitorial structure and thus had fewer witchcraft trials than Spain and Italy (Russell 1972: 229; Levack 2006: 78–9).¹⁰ In both England and Scotland, Reformation circumstances prompted persecutions.

Finally, the examples of France and Germany illustrate the importance of centralized government. France was chronically plagued by the kind of religious strife that could easily lead to witch hunting. In central France, *Parlement*, the high court of Paris, insisted on “reasonable standards of evidence and procedure” as well as reconciliation with the church, not execution; Parliament also had to review the verdicts of lower courts, and in the case of witch trials, it overturned 75 percent of them (Stark 2003: 262–3).¹¹ Monter claims that altogether until 1650, the kingdom of France legally sentenced to death at most 500 people (2002: 14). While witch hunts were both a rural and urban phenomenon, the type of court played a major role in execution rates: the more centralized the court, the greater an accused witch’s chance of survival. This holds true in France, where in some French border regions with less direct control as many as 90 percent of the accused were killed (Levack 2006: 23). It is assumed that local courts were fiercer because of judges’ personal knowledge of and possible vendettas against the accused. This assumption might explain the harshness of witch persecutions in France and Germany’s decentralized court system in the borderlands.

Even though published figures differ, the most accepted numbers between 1500 and 1700 seem to be 90,000 witch trials overall with 45,000 executions, or an execution rate of about 50 percent; William Monter cautions that Levack’s numbers should be downgraded even further (Levack 2006: 24; Monter 2002: 13).¹² The truly astonishing fact is that the bulk of witch trials happened in the Germanophone borderlands, clustering in western Germany, Switzerland, and eastern France along the Rhine; to put it in William Monter’s words: “Three of every four witches executed in Europe between 1560 and 1660 spoke some dialect of German, while six of every seven lived—and died—within the boundaries of the pre-1648 Holy Roman Empire, a region holding about 20 per cent of Europe’s population” (2002: 16). Before 1560, there was no notable witch persecution in the loosely organized empire that contained 300 hundred different entities. Between 1520 and 1560, witch hunts originated in Switzerland and the Low Countries (Monter 2002: 19–20). After 1560, Germany’s superhunts at the height of persecutions (1586–1639) can be charged to the three Rhineland archbishop-electors of Trier, Mainz, and Cologne, three Counter-Reformation prelates reigning in areas of “notoriously loose government control” (Monter 2002: 16–7, 22).¹³ Although these hunts were sponsored by Catholic bishops, religion is not the primary causal factor, as the largest secular Catholic state in Germany, the duchy of Bavaria, effectively withstood the panics being incited in other German territories and had very low trial numbers (Monter 2002: 29–31).

Most witch trials showed a certain similar anatomy: first, a single arrest led to laddering and accusations of other persons, often on the next higher social tier; second, 80 percent of the involved were older rustic women; third, most hunts started from below; fourth, accusations did not always lead to arrests, and arrests did not always lead to death sentences; fifth, the accused could question their accusers’ motives; sixth, if a more centralized authority

was involved, first verdicts would often be overturned (Monter 2002: 7). Still, even if things ended badly, most witches were not burned alive. Burning at the stake replaced trial by fire and was initially advocated by Augustine to prevent bodily resurrection (Russell 1972: 149–50; Stark 2003: 204). In France, Germany, Switzerland, and Scotland, they were first strangled and then their corpses burned. In some German or Scandinavian towns, the condemned were drowned or executed by sword and then burned at the stake; English and North American witches were hanged (Levack 2006: 94).¹⁴

Gender has been a vexing factor in the witch persecutions. Prevalent medieval and early modern clerical misogyny emphasized women’s higher propensity for weakness, corruptibility, and therefore higher susceptibility to witchcraft. This gender bias culminated in the *Malleus maleficarum*, whose Latin title coded a witch as female, a prescriptive rather than a descriptive bias (Broedel 2004: 167).¹⁵ Statistics of witch persecutions correspond to this codification. Between 1300 and 1399, 50 percent of defendants were female, 32 percent male; between 1400 and 1499, 66 percent were female, and 24 percent male (Stark 2003: 243).¹⁶ After 1500, 75 percent of the executed were female, except in Normandy, Russia, Estonia, and Iceland, where more men than women were indicted (Levack 2006: 141).¹⁷ Village healers and midwives were often suspected due to their professions,¹⁸ but not all of the women were old hags, as popular opinion as well as Halloween customs and costumes still purport. Lynald Roper claims that concerns of fertility, sterility, childbirth, and infant mortality were at the root of the witch phenomenon, with many blamed women providing prenatal, birthing, and postpartum care to their accusers (2004: 127–59). Furthermore, women probably appeared more suspicious because they generally outlived men and may have survived the plague better (Russell 1972: 202).

It is difficult to miss the sexual element in the witch persecution in the image of the sexually insatiable witch who has repeated intercourse with the Devil, so prevalent in the witch theorists’ manuals; therefore, unmarried or widowed older women who were outspoken about sex might have inspired the “depiction of the old, sexually voracious hag [exacerbating] a deep male fear of the sexually experienced, sexually independent woman” (Levack 2006: 152). A great number of the accused female witches were from the lower economic stratum, probably cantankerous and quarrelsome beggar women and “village scolds,” possibly senile or mentally ill, and often accused of “non-attendance at church, Sabbath-breaking, cursing, fornication, prostitution, abortion, and even adultery” (Levack 2006: 160–1).

When the major outbreaks had come to an end, they had come late to some eastern areas and had been surprisingly light in Austria, Hungary, Ireland, New England, Poland, and Transylvania.¹⁹ From 1675 to 1750, witch-hunting slowed to a few individual trials and finally ceased. Scholarly opinions on the reasons for this decline are also varied. All along, contemporary writers had spoken out against the witch hunts—for instance, Johan Weyer in 1563 (*De Praestigiis daemnonum*), Reginald Scot in 1584 (*The Discoverie of Witchcraft*),

and Friedrich Spee in 1631 (*Cautio criminalis*)—but were not heeded.²⁰ Brian Levack sums up the main arguments as follows: changes in the legal system, as courts became more regulated, judges more cautious, procedures changed; torture became restricted or prohibited, and new standards for evidence were introduced; modifications of philosophy and worldview in the form of skepticism towards authority, the introduction of mechanical philosophy, and the belief that supernatural occurrences can be explained by natural causes; a waning of religious enthusiasm, an increase in biblical scholarship and the sovereignty of God, who can trump the Devil, and lastly, social factors, such as decriminalization, as witchcraft laws were abolished and courts stopped prosecuting witches for lack of legal proof (2006: 253–81). R. W. Thurston suggests that a revised image of women contributed as well (2001: 158–60). Although the witch hunts ceased, both the sixteenth-century witch stereotype and the erroneous belief in the Middle Ages as the witch “burning times” remain strong in modern times and lore.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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NOTES

1. *Burning Times* is a term “used by contemporary Witches and Pagans to refer to the period in Western history of intense witch hunting and executions,” from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries (Guiley 1999: 39).
2. For detailed definitions of these ideas, see Stuart Clark (2002: 97–169).
3. For instance, the trial records of Joan of Arc (1431) show that the judges were trying to implicate Joan as a witch first, even insisting she possessed and used a mandrake, a plant that had started to be associated with witchcraft. Eventually,

- Joan was burned as a relapsed heretic, when she dressed herself again in man's clothing and reaffirmed her voices (Hobbs 2005: 127, 196–203).
4. Between 1321 and 1324, Bernard Gui compiled the first inquisitorial manual in his *Practica inquisitionis heretice pravitatis* and tried over a thousand heretics but no sorcerers; this attests to the relative lack of interest in sorcery at that time (Bailey 2001: 968).
 5. Russell shows that between 1427 and 1486, the hundred witch trials conducted were still more concerned with sorcery than witchcraft. Also, Scandinavia, southern Italy, and Spain had few Cathars or witches (1972: 244, 126).
 6. The witches' sabbat increased in importance at the height of persecutions, around 1580–1590, while one hundred years earlier in the time of the *Malleus* it was hardly known (Monter 2002: 8–9). Wolfgang Behringer continues the debate about the reality of witchcraft by arguing that in specific areas the witches' sabbat may have been rooted in Waldensian spiritual practices (2005).
 7. It was believed that all witches had a mark signaling their allegiance to the Devil. This mark was considered the ultimate sign of a witch. People's natural blemishes were often taken for the Devil's mark (Levack 2006: 52). Furthermore, black masses did not exist in the Middle Ages (Breslaw 2000: 1).
 8. A factor only recently examined that could be responsible for some of the calamities above is the so-called Little Ice Age that gradually started around 1400 and peaked between 1560 and 1580; because "witchcraft was traditionally associated with weather-making," it was no great leap to blame the climate changes of the Little Ice Age on "poor old women" (Behringer 2004: 87–88).
 9. Leonard Shlain posits a connection between the severity of the witch hunts in Germany and the fastest rising literacy rate in Europe being located there (1998: 372).
 10. The English had no interest in the *Malleus*; there was no English edition of the *Malleus* and no translation until 1928 (Stark 2003: 274).
 11. Here are some illustrative numbers about local self-governments in contrast to appellate courts: "At the opposite extreme from French parlements, which generally rejected village testimony, stood the 550 villages and eleven small towns which today comprise Germany's Saarland. During the half-century after 1580, these virtually autonomous rustics executed 450 per cent more witches than the Parlement of Paris, in a corner of the Empire divided among four principal overlords, two Protestant and two Catholic" (Monter 2002: 9).
 12. The grossly exaggerated number of nine million women burned as witches has been perpetuated in scholarly literature despite the fact that Marilda Joslyn Gage, in her 1893 book *Woman, Church and State*, came up with this figure without any historical research or evidence (Stark 2003: 202, 398, n. 7).
 13. For further statistics on other prelates, rulers, and areas, see Monter (2002: 16–31).
 14. In England, "burning was reserved for wives killing their husbands or servants their masters" (Breslaw 2000: 6).
 15. For a more rehabilitating take on the *Malleus*, see Walter Stephens (2002: 32–57).
 16. The remaining percentage refers to trials in which defendants of both sexes were accused.
 17. Broedel cites an interesting comparison: "In Lucerne, where witches were tried by the secular authorities, over 90 percent of those accused of witchcraft between 1398 and 1551 were women. Judges in this region had a quite rudimentary knowledge of contemporary demonology, and focused principally upon the concerns of the witnesses themselves, especially *maleficium*. In Lausanne, on the other hand, witchcraft prosecution was controlled by the episcopal inquisition, for whom heresy and demonolatry were major concerns, and only 38 percent of those prosecuted were women" (2004: 169–70).
 18. Also see Barstow for further explanations on singling out healers and midwives (1994: 109–27).
 19. For statistics on Eastern Europe witch hunts, see Levack (2006: 230–7) and Monter (2002: 49–51).
 20. An example of civil disobedience can be seen in this incident: "A recently discovered royal pardon issued by King Charles VII of France in 1460 illustrates the case of a local man in southwestern France who killed a 'witch-finder' who had accused the man's female relatives of sorcery and witchcraft" (Kors and Peters 2001: 152).