

history of witchcraft in germany

****The History of Witchcraft in Germany: A Journey Through Darkness and Belief****

history of witchcraft in germany is a fascinating tale woven through centuries of folklore, religious upheaval, societal fears, and tragic persecutions. Germany's complex past with witchcraft is not only a reflection of local beliefs but also mirrors broader European anxieties during the late medieval and early modern periods. Exploring this history reveals much about the intersection of superstition, law, religion, and culture in German-speaking lands.

Early Beliefs and Folklore Surrounding Witchcraft in Germany

Before the infamous witch trials swept through Germany, the idea of witches was deeply embedded in local folklore and pagan traditions. In many rural communities, magic and witchcraft were often associated with healing, protection, and the manipulation of natural forces. Women, particularly those who practiced herbalism or midwifery, were sometimes labeled as witches—though not always negatively at this stage.

The Germanic tribes had a rich tapestry of mythological beings and spirits, some benign and others more malevolent, that shaped early perceptions of magic. The term “witch” (Hexe in German) itself evolved over time, initially referring to wise women or sorceresses believed to possess secret knowledge.

The Influence of Christianity and the Church

The Christianization of German territories brought about significant changes in how witchcraft was perceived. The Church began to associate witchcraft with heresy and devil worship, casting it as a grave spiritual threat. Medieval Church authorities preached that witches were not just practitioners of magic but agents of Satan, capable of harming communities through curses and pacts with the devil.

This religious framing intensified fears and laid the groundwork for later witch hunts. The Inquisition, although more prominent in southern Europe, influenced German regions by promoting the idea that rooting out witches was a divine duty.

The Height of Witch Hunts: 15th to 17th Century

The period between the 1400s and 1600s saw the most intense episodes of witch hunts in Germany. It was during this era that the infamous witch trials took on a terrifying momentum, with thousands accused, tried, and often executed.

Why Germany Became a Hotspot for Witch Trials

Several factors contributed to Germany's prominence in the witch trials:

- **Political Fragmentation:** Unlike centralized states such as France or England, the Holy Roman Empire was a patchwork of semi-autonomous territories. This decentralization meant local princes and courts had significant autonomy, leading to varied and often more brutal approaches towards witchcraft accusations.
- **Religious Turmoil:** The Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation heightened tensions and anxieties. Both sides sometimes used witch hunts to assert moral authority or suppress dissent.
- **Economic and Social Stress:** Periods of famine, disease (like the plague), and war created social instability. Communities sought scapegoats, and accused witches often fit the profile of vulnerable or marginalized individuals.
- **Legal Codifications:** Manuals such as the *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer of Witches), published in 1487, provided detailed instructions on identifying, prosecuting, and punishing witches. This book was widely used in German courts.

Notable Witch Trials and Regions

Germany witnessed some of the most notorious witch hunts in Europe. The following regions became infamous for their witch trials:

- **Würzburg:** The Würzburg witch trials (1626-1631) resulted in over 900 executions, a staggering number fueled by the Prince-Bishop's zeal and the chaos of the Thirty Years' War.
- **Trier:** In Trier, nearly 300 people were executed between 1581 and 1593, under the supervision of Archbishop Johann von Schönenberg.
- **Bamberg:** The Bamberg trials (1626-1631) saw hundreds of accused witches executed, including some members of the local elite.
- **Ellwangen and Fulda:** These areas also had significant witch hunt activity, reflecting how widespread these persecutions were.

Legal Procedures and the Role of Torture

Understanding the legal context helps explain why so many people were convicted. German witch trials often involved harsh interrogations and torture, which could coerce confessions regardless of actual guilt.

Judicial Processes

Trials typically began with an accusation, often based on rumors or personal vendettas. Once accused, the suspect was imprisoned and subjected to interrogation. The use of torture was common and legally sanctioned, as authorities believed it was necessary to extract the "truth."

Confessions obtained under torture were admissible in court and often led to convictions. Execution methods ranged from burning at the stake to beheading, depending on the region and the social status of the accused.

The Decline of Witch Trials and Changing Attitudes

By the late 17th and early 18th centuries, skepticism about witch hunts began to grow. Several factors contributed to this decline:

- **Enlightenment Thinking:** The rise of rationalism and scientific inquiry challenged superstition and the belief in witchcraft.
- **Legal Reforms:** Courts started requiring more evidence and grew wary of torture-induced confessions.
- **Political Stability:** The gradual centralization of state power reduced the autonomy of local courts and their capacity for mass persecutions.
- **Religious Shifts:** The Church's influence on witch trials diminished, and many theologians began to question the legitimacy of witch hunts.

By the 18th century, witch trials had largely ceased in German-speaking lands, though the cultural memory persisted.

Legacy and Cultural Impact of Witchcraft in Germany

The history of witchcraft in Germany left a deep imprint on culture, literature, and collective memory. Stories of witches, trials, and hauntings became common themes in folklore and later artistic works.

Witchcraft in German Literature and Art

Classical German literature and Romanticism embraced witchcraft as a symbol of the mysterious and the supernatural. The works of Goethe, for instance, include references to witches and magic, reflecting an ongoing fascination with the subject.

Modern Reflections and Tourism

Today, many German towns with a history of witch trials commemorate this dark chapter through museums, guided tours, and festivals. These serve as both reminders of past injustices and attractions that educate the public about the dangers of mass hysteria and prejudice.

Understanding Witchcraft Beyond Persecution

While the tragic history of witch hunts dominates much of the narrative, it's also important to recognize that the concept of witchcraft in Germany encompassed a broad range of beliefs and practices. From folk healers to mystics, many individuals engaged with magic as part of everyday life, often in ways that were not sinister.

Exploring the history of witchcraft in Germany is a reminder of how societies construct otherness and the consequences of fear-driven justice. It encourages us to appreciate the complexities behind historical events and to approach folklore and superstition with both curiosity and critical thinking.

The story of witchcraft in Germany is not just about dark trials and executions; it is also a window into the evolving relationship between faith, power, and human understanding across centuries.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the historical significance of witchcraft in Germany?

Witchcraft in Germany holds significant historical importance due to the intense witch hunts and trials that occurred between the 15th and 17th centuries, reflecting social, religious, and political tensions of the time.

When did the witch hunts peak in Germany?

The witch hunts in Germany peaked between the late 16th century and the early

17th century, particularly during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648).

Which regions in Germany were most affected by witch trials?

Regions such as the Holy Roman Empire territories, including modern-day southwestern Germany, Bavaria, and the Rhineland, experienced some of the most severe witch trials.

What role did the Church play in the witchcraft persecutions in Germany?

The Church, especially the Catholic and Protestant authorities, played a central role by endorsing witch hunts as a means to combat heresy and maintain religious conformity.

How did the German legal system contribute to witch trials?

The German legal system, influenced by the Carolina Code of 1532, provided legal frameworks that facilitated witch trials, including the use of torture to extract confessions.

Who were typically accused of witchcraft in Germany?

Accused individuals were often women, particularly those who were marginalized, such as widows, healers, or those who deviated from social norms.

What were some common methods of trial and punishment for accused witches in Germany?

Trials frequently included torture to obtain confessions, and punishments ranged from imprisonment and exile to execution, often by burning at the stake.

How did the Thirty Years' War influence witch hunts in Germany?

The chaos and instability caused by the Thirty Years' War intensified fear and suspicion, leading to increased witch hunts as communities sought scapegoats for their suffering.

When and why did the witch hunts in Germany decline?

Witch hunts declined in the late 17th and early 18th centuries due to the rise of Enlightenment thinking, legal reforms, and skepticism about

witchcraft accusations.

What is the legacy of the witchcraft trials in modern Germany?

The legacy includes a historical reflection on injustice and persecution, with memorials and academic research highlighting the impact of witch hunts on German society and culture.

Additional Resources

History of Witchcraft in Germany: An Analytical Review of its Origins and Impact

history of witchcraft in germany is a subject deeply intertwined with the country's cultural, religious, and judicial evolution over several centuries. From the Middle Ages through the early modern period, Germany became one of the epicenters of witch trials and persecutions in Europe. Understanding this history requires a nuanced investigation into the social anxieties, theological shifts, and legal frameworks that contributed to the rise and eventual decline of witchcraft accusations in the region. This article explores the multifaceted aspects of witchcraft history in Germany, highlighting key events, regional differences, and the broader European context.

The Origins of Witchcraft Beliefs in Germany

The beliefs surrounding witchcraft in Germany emerged from a complex blend of pagan traditions, Christian theology, and popular folklore. Prior to the Christianization of the Germanic tribes, many rural communities practiced animistic and shamanistic rituals that were later demonized by the Church. As Christianity took firm hold during the early medieval period, the Church increasingly identified these practices as heretical and linked them to diabolical witchcraft.

By the 15th century, the concept of witches as agents of Satan had become entrenched in theological discourse. Influential texts like the **Malleus Maleficarum** (1487), authored by Heinrich Kramer, a German inquisitor, played a critical role in shaping the witch-hunting ideology. This treatise not only provided a systematic guide for identifying and prosecuting witches but also reinforced the perception of witchcraft as a grave threat to Christian society.

Regional Variations in Witchcraft Beliefs

Germany was not a monolithic entity during the height of witch trials; rather, it was a patchwork of principalities, duchies, and free cities within the Holy Roman Empire. This fragmentation influenced how witchcraft was perceived and prosecuted. For example:

- **Southern Germany:** Regions like Bavaria and Swabia experienced some of the most intense witch hunts, with trials often marked by brutal interrogation methods and a high rate of executions.
- **Central Germany:** Areas such as Franconia and Thuringia also saw significant witch trials, but local courts occasionally displayed more skepticism, leading to varied outcomes.
- **Northern Germany:** Witchcraft accusations were generally less frequent, partly due to stronger urban governance structures and differing religious influences, such as Lutheranism.

These differences highlight how local politics, religious affiliations, and judicial practices shaped the manifestation of witchcraft fears.

Witch Trials and Legal Frameworks in Germany

The legal prosecution of alleged witches was a defining feature of the history of witchcraft in Germany. The Holy Roman Empire lacked a centralized legal system, which meant that witch trials were conducted under diverse legal codes and by different authorities, including ecclesiastical courts, secular courts, and local magistrates.

The Role of the **Malleus Maleficarum** and Judicial Practices

The **Malleus Maleficarum** heavily influenced German witch trials by endorsing the use of torture to extract confessions and by categorizing witchcraft as a capital crime. German courts adapted these recommendations with varying degrees of severity. Torture was frequently employed, often leading to forced confessions that fueled further accusations in a vicious cycle.

Prominent Witch Hunts and Their Impact

Some of the most notorious witch hunts in German history include:

1. **The Würzburg and Bamberg Trials (1626–1631):** Among the largest witch trials in European history, these resulted in hundreds of executions. The trials were emblematic of the height of witchcraft persecution during the Thirty Years' War, reflecting the social upheaval and religious conflict of the period.
2. **The Trier Witch Trials (1581–1593):** These trials were marked by widespread accusations and severe punishments, contributing to an atmosphere of fear and suspicion.
3. **The Fulda Witch Trials (1603–1606):** Known for their intensity, these trials exemplified the entanglement of judicial authority and religious zealotry.

These events underscore how witchcraft accusations were often intertwined with broader societal crises, such as war, famine, and political instability.

Social and Cultural Dimensions of Witchcraft in Germany

Witchcraft accusations in Germany were not solely a matter of religious or legal concern; they also reflected deeper social anxieties. Women, particularly those who were marginalized—such as widows, healers, and those living on the fringes of society—were disproportionately targeted. This gendered aspect reveals the intersection of misogyny and power structures within early modern German society.

Folklore, Superstition, and Popular Beliefs

Popular beliefs about witches often blended supernatural elements with everyday fears. Stories of nocturnal gatherings (witches' sabbaths), shape-shifting, and curses were widespread. These narratives were perpetuated through oral tradition and local customs, reinforcing the perception of witches as real dangers.

The Decline of Witch Hunts

By the late 17th and early 18th centuries, skepticism toward witchcraft prosecutions grew among intellectuals, theologians, and legal scholars in Germany. The rise of the Enlightenment introduced rational critiques of

superstition and the use of torture. Gradually, legal reforms limited the scope of witch trials, culminating in the cessation of large-scale persecutions.

Legacy and Modern Interpretations

The history of witchcraft in Germany remains a poignant reminder of the consequences of fear-driven justice and mass hysteria. Contemporary scholarship often revisits these trials to understand the social mechanisms that enable persecution. Museums, literature, and cultural events in Germany today acknowledge this dark chapter as part of the country's historical fabric.

Exploring the history of witchcraft in Germany offers critical insights into how religious ideologies, legal practices, and societal fears converged to produce one of the most tragic phenomena in European history. It also serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of scapegoating and the importance of due process and rational inquiry.

History Of Witchcraft In Germany

history of witchcraft in germany: Witchcraft, Madness, Society, and Religion in Early Modern Germany H.C. Erik Midelfort, 2024-10-28 H.C. Erik Midelfort has carved out a reputation for innovative work on early modern German history, with a particular focus on the social history of ideas and religion. This collection pulls together some of his best work on the related subjects of witchcraft, the history of madness and psychology, demonology, exorcism, and the social history of religious change in early modern Europe. Several of the pieces reprinted here constitute reviews of recent scholarly literature on their topics, while others offer sharp departures from conventional wisdom. A critique of Michel Foucault's view of the history of madness proved both stimulating but irritating to Foucault's most faithful readers, so it is reprinted here along with a short retrospective comment by the author. Another focus of this collection is the social history of the Holy Roman Empire, where towns, peasants, and noble families developed different perceptions of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations and of the options the religious revolutions of the sixteenth century offered. Finally, this collection also brings together articles which show how Freudian psychoanalysis and academic sociology have filtered and interpreted the history of early modern Germany.

history of witchcraft in germany: Witch Craze Lyndal Roper, 2004-12-11 From the gruesome ogress in Hansel and Gretel to the hags at the sabbath in Faust, the witch has been a powerful figure of the Western imagination. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries thousands of women confessed to being witches—of making pacts with the Devil, causing babies to sicken, and killing animals and crops—and were put to death. This book is a gripping account of the pursuit, interrogation, torture, and burning of witches during this period and beyond. Drawing on hundreds of original trial transcripts and other rare sources in four areas of Southern Germany, where most of the witches were executed, Lyndal Roper paints a vivid picture of their lives, families, and tribulations. She also explores the psychology of witch-hunting, explaining why it was mostly older women that were the victims of witch crazes, why they confessed to crimes, and how the depiction of

witches in art and literature has influenced the characterization of elderly women in our own culture.

history of witchcraft in germany: *Witchcraft in Early Modern Germany* Anne Sophie Günzel, 2007-11 Seminar paper from the year 2004 in the subject History Europe - Other Countries - Middle Ages, Early Modern Age, grade: English Grade:58% von 70%, University of Nottingham (School of History), course: Hauptseminar: Gender and Society in Early Modern Europe, language: English, abstract: 'Witch- hunting is seen as something pathological, a disease infecting like a plague the body of the communities in which it raged.'¹ With these words the historian Bob Scribner described witchcraft and witch-hunts. They are defined as something negative and pathological and it is obviously that witchcraft could easily emerge because of the traditional beliefs rooted in the early modern society of Germany. Witchcraft and witchhunts emerged in this period and made the population susceptible to the carrying out of denunciation and elimination of innocent people. The population had been easily influenced by the authorities like magistrates and their fellow citizens. In the following discussion/passage, witchcraft and witch-hunts concerning the early modern Europe will be less prominent rather than the study about witchcraft and witchhunts in early modern Germany. In particular the main focus will stress on the south of Germany because it was the centre of witchcraft and witch-hunts. In addition to that some examples will be mentioned to show special witchcraft and witch- hunt cases. First it will be examined how the term 'witch' is defined shown in a historical, linguistic and an etymological way. Then the two authors of the *Malleus maleficarum*² and their ideas about witches and witchcraft will be mentioned. In the forth chapter the social context shall be examined. In this passage the accused shall be represented and the reasons which led to their accusation. In the last chapter the witch-hunts in early modern Germany shall be represented. It keeps the question in what way the witch-hunts increased during the early modern period and which reasons contributed to their decline. Further

history of witchcraft in germany: *Witchcraft, Gender, and Society in Early Modern Germany* Jonathan Bryan Durrant, 2007 Using the example of Eichstatt, this book challenges current witchcraft historiography by arguing that the gender of the witch-suspect was a product of the interrogation process and that the stable communities affected by persecution did not collude in its escalation.

history of witchcraft in germany: *Witchcraft narratives in Germany* Alison Rowlands, 2013-07-19 This electronic version has been made available under a Creative Commons (BY-NC-ND) open access license. Looks at why witch-trials failed to gain momentum and escalate into 'witch-crazes' in certain parts of early modern Europe. Examines the rich legal records of the German city of Rothenburg ob der Tauber, a city which experienced a very restrained pattern of witch-trials and just one execution for witchcraft between 1561 and 1652. Explores the social and psychological conflicts that lay behind the making of accusations and confessions of witchcraft. Offers insights into other areas of early modern life, such as experiences of and beliefs about communal conflict, magic, motherhood, childhood and illness. Offers a critique of existing explanations for the gender bias of witch-trials, and a new explanation as to why most witches were women.

history of witchcraft in germany: *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America* Brian P. Levack, 2013-03-28 The essays in this Handbook, written by leading scholars working in the rapidly developing field of witchcraft studies, explore the historical literature regarding witch beliefs and witch trials in Europe and colonial America between the early fifteenth and early eighteenth centuries. During these years witches were thought to be evil people who used magical power to inflict physical harm or misfortune on their neighbours. Witches were also believed to have made pacts with the devil and sometimes to have worshipped him at nocturnal assemblies known as sabbaths. These beliefs provided the basis for defining witchcraft as a secular and ecclesiastical crime and prosecuting tens of thousands of women and men for this offence. The trials resulted in as many as fifty thousand executions. These essays study the rise and fall of witchcraft prosecutions in the various kingdoms and territories of Europe and in English, Spanish, and Portuguese colonies in the Americas. They also relate these prosecutions to

the Catholic and Protestant reformations, the introduction of new forms of criminal procedure, medical and scientific thought, the process of state-building, profound social and economic change, early modern patterns of gender relations, and the wave of demonic possessions that occurred in Europe at the same time. The essays survey the current state of knowledge in the field, explore the academic controversies that have arisen regarding witch beliefs and witch trials, propose new ways of studying the subject, and identify areas for future research.

history of witchcraft in germany: *A Social History of Germany, 1648-1914* Eda Sagarra, 2017-07-12 This volume is a pioneering effort to examine the social, demographic, and economic changes that befell the Jewish communities of Central Europe after the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire. It consists of studies researched and written especially for this volume by historians, sociologists, and economists, all specialists in modern Central European Jewish affairs. The era of national rivalry, economic crises, and political confusion between the two World Wars has been preceded by a pre-World War I epoch of Jewish emancipation and assimilation. During that period, Jewish minorities had been harbored from violent anti-Semitism by the Empire, and they became torchbearers of industrialization and modernization. This common destiny encouraged certain common characteristics in the three major components of the Empire, Austria, Hungary, and the Czech territories, despite the very different origins of the well over one million Jews in those three lands. The disintegration of the Habsburg Empire created three small, economically marginal national states, inimical to each other and at liberty to create their own policies toward Jews in accord with the preferences of their respective ruling classes. Active and openly discriminatory anti-Semitic measures resulted in Austria and Hungary. The only liberal heir country of the Empire was Czechoslovakia, although simmering anti-Semitism and below surface discrimination were widespread in Slovakia. While one might have expected Jewish communities to return to their pre-World War I tendencies to go their independent ways after the introduction of these policies, social and economic patterns which had evolved in the Habsburg era persisted until the Anschluss in Austria, German occupation in Czechoslovakia, and World War II in Hungary. Studies in this volume attest to continuing similarities among the three Jewish communities, testifying to the depth of the Empire's long lasting impact on the behavior of Jews in Central Euro

history of witchcraft in germany: *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany* Alison Rowlands, 2003-06-28 This is the only book in English to take a case-study approach to the witch trials of a particular part of Early Modern Germany.

history of witchcraft in germany: *Witchcraft and Masculinities in Early Modern Europe* A. Rowlands, 2009-10-22 Men – as accused witches, witch-hunters, werewolves and the demonically possessed – are the focus of analysis in this collection of essays by leading scholars of early modern European witchcraft. The gendering of witch persecution and witchcraft belief is explored through original case-studies from England, Scotland, Italy, Germany and France.

history of witchcraft in germany: *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, Gareth Roberts, 1996 This important collection brings together both established figures and new researchers to offer fresh perspectives on the ever-controversial subject of the history of witchcraft. Using Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic* as a starting point, the contributors explore the changes of the last twenty-five years in the understanding of early modern witchcraft, and suggest new approaches, especially concerning the cultural dimensions of the subject. Witchcraft cases must be understood as power struggles, over gender and ideology as well as social relationships, with a crucial role played by alternative representations. Witchcraft was always a contested idea, never fully established in early modern culture but much harder to dislodge than has usually been assumed. The essays are European in scope, with examples from Germany, France, and the Spanish expansion into the New World, as well as a strong core of English material.

history of witchcraft in germany: *Witchcraft in Early Modern Poland, 1500-1800* W. Wyporska, 2013-10-17 This comprehensive study examines Polish demonology in relation to witchcraft trials in Wielkopolska, revealing the witch as a force for both good and evil. It explores the use of witchcraft, the nature of accusations and the role of gender.

history of witchcraft in germany: Witchcraft and Magic in Europe, Volume 4 Bengt Ankarloo, Stuart Clark, E. William Monter, 2002-12-23 A compact survey of the European witch craze of the early modern period—a craze that later spilled over to America.

history of witchcraft in germany: *Heresy, Magic and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* Gary K Waite, 2019-10-10 In the fifteenth century many authorities did not believe Inquisitors' stories of a supposed Satanic witch sect. However, the religious conflict of the sixteenth-century Reformation - especially popular movements of reform and revolt - helped to create an atmosphere in which diabolical conspiracies (which swept up religious dissidents, Jews and magicians into their nets) were believed to pose a very real threat. Fear of the Devil and his followers inspired horrific incidents of judicially-approved terror in early modern Europe, leading after 1560 to the infamous witch hunts. Bringing together the fields of Reformation and witchcraft studies, this fascinating book reveals how the early modern period's religious conflicts led to widespread confusion and uncertainty. Gary K. Waite examines in-depth how church leaders dispelled rising religious doubt by persecuting heretics, and how alleged infernal plots, and witches who confessed to making a pact with the Devil, helped the authorities to reaffirm orthodoxy. Waite argues that it was only when the authorities came to terms with pluralism that there was a corresponding decline in witch panics.

history of witchcraft in germany: Ideas and Cultural Margins in Early Modern Germany Marjorie Elizabeth Plummer, 2016-12-14 While the assumption of a sharp distinction between learned culture and lay society has been broadly challenged over the past three decades, the question of how ideas moved and were received and transformed by diverse individuals and groups stands as a continuing challenge to social and intellectual historians, especially with the emergence and integration of the methodologies of cultural history. This collection of essays, influenced by the scholarship of H.C. Erik Midelfort, explores the new methodologies of cultural transmission in the context of early modern Germany. Bringing together articles by European and North American scholars: this volume presents studies ranging from analyses of individual worldviews and actions, influenced by classical and contemporary intellectual history, to examinations of how ideas of the Reformation and Scientific Revolution found their way into the everyday lives of Germans of all classes. Other essays examine the ways in which individual thinkers appropriated classical, medieval, and contemporary ideas of service in new contexts, discuss the means by which groups delineated social, intellectual, and religious boundaries, explore efforts to control the circulation of information, and investigate the ways in which shifting or conflicting ideas and perceptions were played out in the daily lives of persons, families, and communities. By examining the ways in which people expected ideas to influence others and the unexpected ways the ideas really spread, the volume as a whole adds significant features to our conceptual map of life in early modern Europe.

history of witchcraft in germany: Vexed with Devils Erika Gasser, 2019-12-15 Stories of witchcraft and demonic possession from early modern England through the last official trials in colonial New England Those possessed by the devil in early modern England usually exhibited a common set of symptoms: fits, vomiting, visions, contortions, speaking in tongues, and an antipathy to prayer. However, it was a matter of interpretation, and sometimes public opinion, if these symptoms were visited upon the victim, or if they came from within. Both early modern England and colonial New England had cases that blurred the line between witchcraft and demonic possession, most famously, the Salem witch trials. While historians acknowledge some similarities in witch trials between the two regions, such as the fact that an overwhelming majority of witches were women, the histories of these cases primarily focus on local contexts and specifics. In so doing, they overlook the ways in which manhood factored into possession and witchcraft cases. *Vexed with Devils* is a cultural history of witchcraft-possession phenomena that centers on the role of men and patriarchal power. Erika Gasser reveals that witchcraft trials had as much to do with who had power in the community, to impose judgement or to subvert order, as they did with religious belief. She argues that the gendered dynamics of possession and witchcraft demonstrated that contested meanings of manhood played a critical role in the struggle to maintain authority. While all men were not capable of accessing power in the same ways, many of the people involved—those who acted as if they were

possessed, men accused of being witches, and men who wrote possession propaganda—invoked manhood as they struggled to advocate for themselves during these perilous times. Gasser ultimately concludes that the decline of possession and witchcraft cases was not merely a product of change over time, but rather an indication of the ways in which patriarchal power endured throughout and beyond the colonial period. *Vexed with Devils* reexamines an unnerving time and offers a surprising new perspective on our own, using stories and voices which emerge from the records in ways that continue to fascinate and unsettle us.

history of witchcraft in germany: *Witchcraft Persecutions in Bavaria* Wolfgang Behringer, 2003-11-13 A groundbreaking study of witchcraft in modern-day Bavaria between 1300 and 1800.

history of witchcraft in germany: *The European Witch-Hunt* Julian Goodare, 2016-05-12 The European Witch-Hunt seeks to explain why thousands of people, mostly lower-class women, were deliberately tortured and killed in the name of religion and morality during three centuries of intermittent witch-hunting throughout Europe and North America. Combining perspectives from history, sociology, psychology and other disciplines, this book provides a comprehensive account of witch-hunting in early modern Europe. Julian Goodare sets out an original interpretation of witch-hunting as an episode of ideologically-driven persecution by the 'godly state' in the era of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Full weight is also given to the context of village social relationships, and there is a detailed analysis of gender issues. Witch-hunting was a legal operation, and the courts' rationale for interrogation under torture is explained. Panicking local elites, rather than central governments, were at the forefront of witch-hunting. Further chapters explore folk beliefs about legendary witches, and intellectuals' beliefs about a secret conspiracy of witches in league with the Devil. Witch-hunting eventually declined when the ideological pressure to combat the Devil's allies slackened. A final chapter sets witch-hunting in the context of other episodes of modern persecution. This book is the ideal resource for students exploring the history of witch-hunting. Its level of detail and use of social theory also make it important for scholars and researchers.

history of witchcraft in germany: Witchcraft and Magic in Europe, Volume 4 Stuart Clark, William Monter, 2002-01-01 The fifteenth to eighteenth centuries was a period of witchcraft prosecutions throughout Europe and modern scholars have now devoted a huge amount of research to these episodes. This volume will attempt to bring this work together by summarising the history of the trials in a new way - according to the types of legal systems involved. Other topics covered will be the continued practical use made of magic, the elaboration of demonological theories about witchcraft and magic, and the further development of scientific interests in natural magic through the 'Neoplatonic' and 'Hermetic' period. Amongst the topics included here are Superstition and Belief in high and popular culture, the place of Medicine, Witchcraft survivals in art and literature, and the survival of Persecution.>

history of witchcraft in germany: Witchcraft, Exorcism and the Politics of Possession in a Seventeenth-Century Convent Nicky Hallett, 2017-11-22 Presenting a remarkable set of previously unpublished papers, this book concerns the bewitchment, possession and exorcism of two seventeenth-century nuns living in exile in an English convent in the Spanish Netherlands. The two women left behind an extensive set of personal writing that reveals unprecedented detail about their devotional lives and spiritual states before, during and after exorcism. Unlike other similar cases, here the women write for themselves; for the first time in 350 years this book allows their voices - and their silences - to resound in all their vibrancy. An extensive introduction discusses the politics of piety and possession at a time when exorcism had become increasingly contentious, amidst conflicting claims for rival church reform. The book includes both autobiographical and biographical material, written by the nuns and about them, and casting new light on processes of female self-writing at just the time when the 'modern subject' is often said to have emerged.

history of witchcraft in germany: *Superstition and Magic in Early Modern Europe: A Reader* Helen L. Parish, 2014-11-20 Superstition and Magic in Early Modern Europe brings together a rich selection of essays which represent the most important historical research on religion, magic and

superstition in early modern Europe. Each essay makes a significant contribution to the history of magic and religion in its own right, while together they demonstrate how debates over the topic have evolved over time, providing invaluable intellectual, historical, and socio-political context for readers approaching the subject for the first time. The essays are organised around five key themes and areas of controversy. Part One tackles superstition; Part Two, the tension between miracles and magic; Part Three, ghosts and apparitions; Part Four, witchcraft and witch trials; and Part Five, the gradual disintegration of the 'magical universe' in the face of scientific, religious and practical opposition. Each part is prefaced by an introduction that provides an outline of the historiography and engages with recent scholarship and debate, setting the context for the essays that follow and providing a foundation for further study. This collection is an invaluable toolkit for students of early modern Europe, providing both a focused overview and a springboard for broader thinking about the underlying continuities and discontinuities that make the study of magic and superstition a perennially fascinating topic.

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