



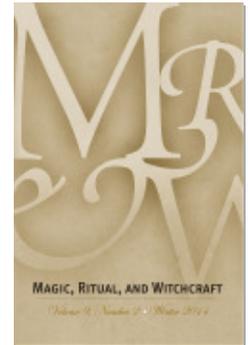
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The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe (review)

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materials from this period (although Levack does include the trial of Alice Kyteler, the case is so unusual and had so few consequences in the later literature that it hardly matters except for the overall record—Richard Ledrede’s ideas of sorcery and “witchcraft” came from his earlier career at the papal court in Avignon under the fearful John XXII, certainly not from the locals in Ossory) is to ignore the enormous work of thinkers between 400 and 1500 in constructing the intellectual and perceptual fabric of Latin Christianity.

One considerable virtue of Levack’s collection, indicated by his selection from Augustine discussed above, is that he often uses different passages from the writers translated in KP2, thus making more of their work available to interested students. The more of Christian Thomasius that gets Englished, the better—he is not an easy writer to translate.

Levack’s is certainly not *THE Witchcraft Sourcebook*, but it is a sourcebook chiefly dealing with witchcraft ideas and prosecutions between the mid-sixteenth and the early eighteenth centuries. And for those who think that this period is the beginning and end of the subject, it will serve just fine. For those who do not, it won’t.

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BRIAN P. LEVACK. *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd ed. Harlow, Eng., London, New York: Pearson Longman, 2006. Pp. xv + 344.

For nearly twenty years, this book has been the standard English-language introduction and survey text for the period of the major European witch hunts. With an excellent third edition, it is set to continue its dominance for years to come. In the preface to the new edition, Levack tells his readers that his purpose in updating the book was to take into account the flood of scholarly publications in the decade since the second edition. What is remarkable, given how much work has been done on witchcraft in that period, is how little Levack has needed to alter his book. While new information is scattered throughout, the main lines of argument and interpretation remain unchanged, a testament to how effective this book has been through all its editions.

Perhaps the most substantial alteration, made in the general introduction to the topic of the witch hunts that begins the book, is a reduction in the estimate of the total number of victims of witch trials in Europe. As careful

research into specific hunts has flourished, the number of those thought to have been executed as witches has generally declined. Responding to this, Levack reduces his overall estimate from 60,000 executions (given in the first two editions) to around 45,000 executions across Europe in the early modern period. There are similar alterations to many regional estimates made later in the book. German executions fall from 30,000 or more to between 20,000 and 25,000. For the Kingdom of France, the estimate falls from 4,000 to 3,000. Other figures remain unaltered, however; for example, the estimate that there may have been as few as 1,500 executions in Britain.

Other changes are nuanced but valuable. In the second chapter, on “Intellectual Foundations” of witch-hunting, Levack has restructured the section formerly on “The Challenge of the Renaissance,” which mainly looked at the skepticism of many humanist thinkers toward witchcraft and witch trials, into a more broadly conceived section on “The Sceptical Tradition” generally. This allows him to highlight the fact that from the very beginning of the witch hunts there was considerable skepticism at least about certain aspects of witchcraft from many quarters. In chapter 3, on “Legal Foundations,” the section formerly dealing with “Witchcraft and Local Courts” has been revised into “Witchcraft and the Early Modern State.” Here Levack retains his essential argument that smaller, local jurisdictions were more prone to conducting witch hunts, but he situates this analysis more effectively amid major issues of the growth of states in the early modern era. In chapter 5, on the social context of witchcraft, he has expanded his discussion of the gendering of witchcraft to give more attention to male witches, already included in earlier editions but enlarged here in light of recent research. These are only examples of the sort of useful refinements made throughout the book.

What formerly was the final chapter of the book, on the “Decline and Survival” of witchcraft, has been significantly expanded and divided into two chapters, on the “Decline and End of Witch-Hunting” and on “Witch-Hunting after the Trials.” In the “Decline” chapter, Levack gives a fuller account throughout. In addition to legal changes, intellectual developments that brought the idea of witchcraft into question are treated more fully in a section on “Disenchantment,” and religious changes that contributed to the end of witch-hunting are also given more attention. Most significantly, though, the edicts that actually ended witch trials in many regions, formerly treated as one aspect of legal change, are now given a separate section. This is fitting, as technical decriminalization of witchcraft typically occurred well after the actual end of witch trials in any region, and often these seemingly major legal pronouncements had very little practical effect.

The new final chapter deals with four general topics that were previously

all treated within a single section in the earlier edition. The discussion of lynching and other forms of popular justice against supposed witches even after the end of legal trials has not been significantly changed. Discussion of witch-hunting behaviors directed at groups other than witches in the modern period remains primarily focused on the McCarthy period of the 1950s, but mention is now also made of the PATRIOT Act and Abu Ghraib prison. The section on modern Wiccans and Satanists now includes substantial discussion of the McMartin and other alleged satanic ritual child abuse scares of the 1980s and 1990s. The section on witchcraft in Africa has been updated to include the rising numbers of trials and executions in several regions of that continent in the 1990s.

There have also been some cosmetic changes. The notes have been returned to the end of each chapter, where they were in the first edition, rather than the footnotes that were used in the second edition. Three new images have been added, including a helpful depiction of the use of the stappado for torture. Even better, these images are no longer clustered together in a special insert at the center of the book, but are now placed throughout the text, close to the material they help illustrate. A new chart has also been added, listing the last known trials for witchcraft in numerous regions, and also the last known legal executions. The bibliography has been thoroughly updated, and primary sources and collections of documents are now separated from secondary studies. Unfortunately, the “Bibliographical Note” that appeared in the first two editions and provided a helpful guide to particularly useful works in various areas of the field of witchcraft studies has been eliminated, leaving students to wander through the vast bibliography unguided. But that is a slight quibble with this fine new version of a book that was already the finest of its kind.

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ROBERT MUCHEMBLED. *A History of the Devil from the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Jean Birrell. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003. Pp. x + 349.

The first and most important point to recognize about this book is that it is only on one level a history of the Devil; on a deeper level it is a history of the shifting and fluctuating status the Devil has occupied in Western culture. The basic question is not so much the qualitative as the quantitative one: not so much how the Devil has appeared in different eras, but why the Devil's