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WITCH TRIALS IN GERMANY: POLITICS OR HYSTERICS?

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The late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for Germany were a time of political and religious upheaval. Politically, the Holy Roman Empire grew weaker while new territorial states gained power. In religion, the Protestant Reformation challenged Catholicism. The changes within these political and religious institutions threatened the social structure, causing people to be more insecure and vulnerable. The superstitious Germans readily accepted witchcraft because they were ignorant of science and given to excessive fear regarding religious heresies. During the political and religious turmoil, Germany was the center of the infamous European witch hunts. The witch trials resulted from shifting power structures and often were attempts by both secular and religious leaders to curb the hostilities such rivalries caused within the social communities. Witch hunts and trials were used as a means of controlling the people and frightening them back into quiet obedience and subservience.

Witch trials were not common in Germany until around 1570,[1] after the Council of Trent (1563) determined the goal to expunge Protestantism from Germany. This Catholic Counter

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Reformation, organized by the Jesuits, introduced witch hunting to Germany. The Jesuits ruled the bishoprics of Bamberg, Wurzburg, and Theves, and influenced anti-witchcraft laws in those areas. In 1589, the General of the Jesuit Society, Claudio Aquaviva, ordered his fellow Jesuits in the Rhineland to encourage local rulers to inaugurate trials for witchcraft and to encourage citizens to report on their neighbors who performed witchcraft.[2]

At that time Germany was made up of about three hundred autonomous territories, which constituted most of the Holy Roman Empire. The territories actually retained executive authority while the Empire provided a general court of legal complaint. Within the court, territorial rulers negotiated with each other.[3] The territories recognized the Empire's *Carolina Code* as the criminal code for all states in the Holy Roman Empire. Charles V of the Regensburg Reichstag introduced the *Code* in 1532. Article 21 of this *Carolina Code* read:

> Concerning proof of those who presume to tell fortunes by sorcery. Likewise, on mere indictment, no one of those who presume to tell fortunes by sorcery or other magic arts is to be imprisoned or put to torture.[4]

Yet, Article 44 reversed this reasoned decree by stating:

> Concerning sufficient proof of witchcraft. If anyone teaches others witchcraft, if he has associated with witches...or with such suspected things, actions, or words and ways as imply witchcraft; and moreover, if he is defamed by these same witches; these indications give *just proof* [italics added] of witchcraft and sufficient grounds for torture.[5]

Further, Article 109 read:

> Penalty for witchcraft. If someone did injury or damage to people through witchcraft, *she* [italics added] must be punished from life to death by burning.[6]

There was little concern for verification or a legal defense. For the *Carolina Code* stated that judges should not consider confessions made under torture. The statements of the person under torture should not be written down either.[7] The assumption of guilt was predicated on association.

Most of the early witch trials held in the Holy Roman Empire used the stipulations of the *Code,* but by the late sixteenth century most judges ignored them, saying that witch trials were exceptional cases. An exceptional case (or *crimen exceptum)* disregarded certain procedural rules, such as determining the qualification of witnesses or observing any restrictions against torture without tangible evidence.[8]

Political decentralization and religious fragmentation frustrated any effort to correct such legal abuses. Germany, composed of these hundreds of territories, had no single ruler with a unified control. Each territory had its own assemblies, administrations, law courts, and judicial procedures.[9] During the sixteenth century (before the Thirty Years' War), German social structures differed within each state depending on whether its ruler was Protestant or Catholic. In Protestant provinces, the clerical profession was open to commoners who had university degrees. As commoners entered the ranks, the nobility frequently deserted the clergy as a profession because the Protestant system lowered their social status, reducing them to mere assistants to the religious ruler as well as to the political prince. In addition to their religious duties, the Protestant clergy owed military, diplomatic, and general administrative services to the province. Meanwhile the Catholic clergy kept their higher social status. Unlike the Protestant clergy, they enjoyed the power and wealth of the Church.[10] Protestantism was predominant in the northern regions and Catholicism dominated the south. Because of these tangled lines of authority, the German system of government was inefficient. To keep law and order, states created many varieties of constitutional courts and other committees of arbitration.[11]

As a result of the complicated political structure, treatment of accused witches varied from state-to-state and from year-to-year. Rulers enforced or changed laws according to what they personally favored or believed.[12] For example, during 1573 in Alsace, a Protestant court accused and tried a woman for witchcraft. The courts freed her without any torture. In 1577, she was accused again, but the court had changed and was now Catholic.

This time they tortured her seven times, and her trial lasted a year. After much torture, she finally confessed and was burned to death.[13] In other areas of the country, Catholicism seemed more humane than Protestantism. Political competition was intense. When one religion superceded the other, this change seemed to manifest itself in sharp reversals in policies.

The German government had many flaws, which accounted in part for the rash of witch trials. Philosopher Karl Siegfried Bader wrote *Blätter für deutsche Lander sechichte,* a book about the Holy Roman Empire's failures. In his book, Bader said, "Federal Empire and territorial State produced all those peculiarities which later sealed the fate of the German Federal Empire."[14] Bader suggested that internal rivalry and factionalism were counterproductive to unity and despoiled efforts at focusing sovereignty. The resulting turbulence was exacerbated by conflicting laws—the witch trials were symptomatic. Ultimately, that 'fate' Bader referred to was the dismemberment of the Holy Roman Empire.

In such a chaotic atmosphere, Germany became the center of witch trials in Europe.[15] Not only political instability, but also religious devotion, power struggles, and poor economic conditions in the country accounted for Germany's prominent role in these witch hunts. Religion and the Church played a huge part in the everyday lives of the Germans. Both Protestants and Catholics encouraged the witch trials in Germany and conducted their own witch trials because witchcraft threatened their power and authority.[16] The rival religions fought for and acquired the fanatical loyalty of the people. The Protestants and the Catholics disagreed on many issues, but they both agreed on the need to suppress witchcraft, which they saw as a sin.[17] The stereotype of flying witches who made pacts with the devil and who were dedicated to ruining Christianity spread through the Empire. Anti-Christian covens posed a threat to order and stability. Whether as devout Christians or as political opportunists, authorities played an active role in inciting witch hysteria.[18]

Both the ecclesiastical courts and the secular courts held witch trials. Between 1561 and 1670, courts executed at least 3,229

people for witchcraft in southwestern Germany. Out of these, 702 were executed in Protestant regions and 2,527 were from Catholic regions [please note that southwestern Germany was predominantly Catholic].[19] The worst of the trials were in the territories ruled by Catholic mid-level clergy: bishops of Mainz, Bamberg, Würzburg, Treves, and Starsbourg. Under the jurisdiction of the Abbey of St. Maximin near Treves, for example, the Church courts tried and sentenced to death the entire population of two villages; and in two other villages, only two women were left alive after the wrath of the courts.[20]

A number of instructional books prescribed how to punish and purge witches from a community. The main two books about witchcraft and conducting witch trials were the *Episcopi* and the *Malleus Maleficarum.* The first book about witchcraft to stir people's imagination was the *Episcopi,* written by Regino of Prüm in 906, Regino wrote, "The Bishops and their assistants must work with all their might to eradicate entirely from their dioceses the corrupting arts of soothsaying and sorcery invented by the devil."[21] This book had a providential point of view with an emphasis on God's control of human events. In about 1025, Bishop Burchard of Wörms used the *Episcopi* and wrote the *Beichtspiegel.* This book, a more detailed description of witch-superstition in Germany, stated that courts should ask every accused person certain questions during their trial about their witchcraft. Interrogation became a tool of the first witch trials.[22] Then in 1486, Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger wrote the *Malleus Maleficarum.* Both men were very influential in their positions at the Vatican. The Vatican named both of them Papal Inquisitors for Southern Germany. In fulfilling their duties, they wrote the *Malleus* in three separate parts. The first part established that disbelief in witchcraft was heresy, so all God-fearing Catholics had to believe that this form of evil was real and therefore had to be on guard against such wickedness. The authors then explained the nature of witches, and said witches were women because they were weaker than men. The *Malleus* said, "Since women are feebler both in mind and body, it is not surprising that they should come more [than men] under the spell of witchcraft."[23] In the Bible, Eve was portrayed as

weak because she succumbed to the devil's temptations first. That was another "reason" why witches were women. The second part of the *Malleus* explained what and how witches inflicted harm. Witches made a sexual pact with the devil, who then guided them to commit crimes of murder and destruction to the community. The *Malleus* said, "witches are compelled to do such things at the command of evil spirits..."[24] The third part explained that the best way to prosecute witches was first through the ecclesiastical court. If there was a question as to the accused's guilt, then the secular court could have jurisdiction. Because Kramer and Sprenger intended for priests and judges to use the book, it contained sermons against witchcraft and specific instructions for putting witches on trial. All the points brought up in the *Malleus* differed from what the *Episcopi* said. By saying that *not believing* in witches was heresy, the *Malleus* differed from the *Episcopi,* which said witchcraft was pure superstition.[25] The *Malleus* was the first encyclopedia about witchcraft. Maximilian I, the king of Bavaria, wrote a letter on November 6, 1428 that said that the *Malleus* was the highest authority on witches. Indeed the *Malleus* influenced witch hunts throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The popularity of the concept of witchcraft led to the enormous success of the book. The *Malleus,* originally written in Latin, was translated into German, so that more people in Germany could read it. This book fueled interest and hysteria.[26]

Witchcraft theories in Germany split between the providential point of view of the *Episcopi* tradition, and the fearful point of view of the *Malleus* tradition. Generally, Catholics and Protestants believed in both books until around 1590 when the Catholics rejected the *Episcopi* as a reaction against the Protestants. This accounted for the more severe witch trials the Catholics conducted because they believed that all witches or *anyone associated with witches* should be burned. They felt that the Protestants were soft on witches since they doubted the power of the devil. The Catholics viewed the Protestants as "patrons of the witches."[27] The Protestants accepted both the *Episcopi* and the *Malleus,* with seeming disregard for the contradictions.

Many of the books written about witchcraft also contributed to the growing witchcraze.[28] After hearing of a witch executed in 1505 at Tübingen, Martin Plantsch, a theologian at the University of Tübingen, preached against the evils of superstition. He wrote *Opusculum de Sagis Maleficism* in 1507, in which he defined witchcraft, explained how the devil preformed it, why God allowed it, and the means that men could use to guard against it. Plantsch, a nominalist, believed that God controlled everything on earth. He thought one should only fear God. He wrote, "This is stated against the many who, whenever they suffer or undergo harm, blame stars or demons, or fortune...The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away."[29] He thought that all witches deserved death, but first they should repent and seek help from the Church. His attitude towards witchcraft influenced both Catholics and Protestants.

In about 1540 Johann Zink, an Aristotelian philosopher and physician, preached his views about witchcraft. In contrast to Plantsch's idea of witches repenting, Zink said that whether witches, the devil, or God caused crimes and misfortunes, the fact that someone was associated with the devil was reason enough for them to be killed. He said witches had "a burning soul for the ruin of men, [if one pardoned witches] all corners would soon be full of witches."[30]

Before such views of these theologians, Germans did not know much about witchcraft because most of their knowledge came from the Sunday pulpits. Churches themselves started the fear in everyone about witches, causing the hysteria and chaos that would later come. During the Reformation, Protestant theories of reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin increased people's fear of the devil and witches. Martin Luther preached that the devil was everywhere. He believed that Christ would defeat Satan's evil powers, but the battle was difficult.[31] John Calvin preached ideas similar to Luther's. He thought that the power of the devil was very strong, but Christ would ultimately win the battle. Calvin said, in his book *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* that man will have an "unceasing struggle against him [the devil]."[32] Calvin's theories on the devil came from the New Testament, *Ephesians* VI: 11-12, "Put

on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood...but against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world."[33] The beliefs of Luther and Calvin contributed a certain heretical criterion, rather than a mere magical nature, to witchcraft.

The first witch hunts in Germany were started in Bavaria by William V in 1590, almost a hundred years after the *Malleus* was written. William's son Maximilian I became the king of Bavaria after his father, and he sponsored even stricter and harsher anti-witchcraft laws. He used the *Malleus* as a guide against witches. Maximilian nurtured a personal hatred towards witches because he thought that witchcraft was the reason his wife was not able to have children.[34]

Another German city that held early witch trials was Bamberg. Influenced by the *Malleus,* the civil authorities, wrote the *Interrogationskatalog,* which included 101 questions to ask during a witch trial. Some of the questions were: What did the devil promise the witch in return for her soul? Did he keep his promise? Where did the witch first pledge herself to the devil? What did they say to each other? What were the witch's intentions? Who were the accomplices of the black art? What did they do? Where did they commit their crimes?[35] Beyond these questions, there were three specified steps to the interrogation process. At first the witch would proclaim innocence. In the second step, called the *territio,* the accused was shown the torture instruments; and finally, if the accused did not confess after that, then the painful torture would be initiated. Ninety-nine percent of the people usually confessed after the torture, and the other percent usually died from the torture.[36]

Beyond these proscribed procedures, the Bamberg inquisition officials used many methods other than torture to force confessions. The courts of Bamberg also used the plea bargain method to extract confessions. The *Malleus* allowed and encouraged this method. An example of the fake promises would be that if the accused confessed, then he or she would be spared capital punishment and sentenced to imprisonment. In fact, the alleged

witch would be imprisoned for only about a year or so, but eventually burned at stake. That way it appeared that the witch did not receive capital punishment (but eventually she would be killed). The third method of forcing confessions was to deny the accused the Holy Sacrament, thus threatening her with eternal damnation.[37] Torture, promises, and threats succeeded in forcing confessions from practically all the accused. Now the accused did not question whether to confess, but instead what to confess.

After the interrogation, the judges of the Bamberg trials went to the ten steps of confession. These steps were the typical things that the accused witch would confess to have done. They included: fornication with the devil; diabolical death threats; pact and baptism with the devil; acceptance of the devil's gift; association with demons and conspirators; night flight; destructive black magic; blasphemy and sacrilege; denunciations; and ratification (which was the confession ratified without torture).[38]

Two typical trials in Bamberg that went through the ten steps of confession were the trial of Barthol Braun and the trial of Margareth Lichtenstern. Barthol Braun was thirty-nine when he was arrested for witchcraft in 1629. Prior to the accusation he was a council member in Bamberg and had testified in many other trials. The courts tortured him with the boot, thumbscrews, and leg vises. These forms were considered mild torture. Margareth Lichtenstern was twenty-six when she was arrested in 1629. Since her mother had been burned as a witch, it was inevitable that Lichtenstern would be found guilty because, according to the *Malleus,* all witches dedicate their children to the devil.[39] She confessed under torture with the boot and thumbscrews. Both Lichtenstern and Braun confessed to fornication with Satan—the first step in a Bamberg confession. Braun described the affair he had with his maid, saying that he turned the maid into a demon. In Lichtenstern's trial, she told of her love of a man, whom she portrayed as a demon. In each of these separate cases, after the first confession, the accused talked about the death threats demons used to get cooperation. Both Braun's and Lichtenstern's demons were going to break their necks if they did not cooperate. After the

pact and baptism with the devil, each described a gift given to them by the devil. Both Braun and Lichtenstern said that they got a piece of gold tied up into a kerchief (which turned into a turnip the next day). The changing of the devil's piece of gold was very common. Another thing both the accused confessed to was their 'night flight.' This explained how witches could move themselves from one place to another so quickly. Braun said he had a large black dog that he used as his vehicle for flight. Lichtenstern talked of the typical flight of riding a pole through the chimney, one hour before midnight. Each also talked about the use of destructive (or 'black') magic.

The imperial law said that capital punishment was only used if the bad deed could be proven. The Bamberg court, however, defied the law with their trials saying the act of heresy was enough to merit capital punishment. Harming people, animals, and crops were the three types of destruction. Braun did not talk about destructive magic in his confession, and Lichtenstern said she once planned destruction but never did it. The alleged witches also talked of blasphemy and sacrilege—which were the worst things a Christian could do. Braun said he denounced God and recited obscene prayers to the Virgin Mary. Lichtenstern said she took the Eucharistic wine from her mouth and gave it to the devil. Also during the confessions, the authorities expected the accused to denounce others or the Church would refuse them of the last sacraments. Braun denounced sixty-two people, half of them were already executed; and Lichtenstern denounced forty-five people, thirty-one of whom had been executed already.[40] Both Braun and Lichtenstern had very similar confessions in each of their trials although they confessed at different times. Both of them were found guilty and burned to death. These two trials were typical not just in Bamberg but of all witch trials throughout Germany.

Most of the confessions were alike because the accused were led to say what the judges wanted to hear. Johannes Junius, accused of witchcraft in 1628, was the mayor of Bamberg. He at first denied the charges, but then after torture from thumbscrews and leg vises he, not too surprisingly, confessed.[41] He went through

all the typical steps of confession, as had Braun and Lichtenstern. After his confession, Junius smuggled a letter from prison to his daughter, which told of his confession. He said, "Innocent have I come into prison, innocent have I been tortured, innocent must I die."[42] He then told of how he begged to see a priest after his torture and before his confession, but the court refused a priest to him. He was also forced to name others who practiced witchcraft with him. Junius said of his confession:

> When at last the executioner led me back to the cell, he said to me, 'Sir, I beg, for God's sake, confess something, whether it be true or not. Invent something, for you can not endure the torture...one torture will follow another until you say you are a witch. Not before that,' he said, 'will they let you go, as you may see by all their trials for one is just like another...' Now my dear child, here you have all my acts and confession, for which I must die. And it is all sheer lies and inventions, so help me God. For all this I was forced to say through fear of torture which was threatened beyond what I have already endured...Six have confessed against me...they know nothing but good of me. They were forced to say it, just as I myself was...[43]

Such were the unjust ways of the persecutors.

Bamberg was not any different than anywhere else; most of the German cities held trials like Bamberg's. There were, however, cities that held different beliefs; therefore, their trials and ways of witch hunting varied. Many of the preachers and theologians in Tübingen believed that God caused everything, and that witches did not do the crimes they were said to have done, such as cause famines and bad weather. Instead, God was punishing the people collectively for sinning. Such beliefs accounted for the more moderate record of witch trials in Tübingen.[44]

Politically, witch hunts actually stimulated the witch-craze and initially increased the power of magistrates. Eventually, however, there was a hostile backlash against institutions enforcing social and religious conformity. The rulers were ready to use hysteria and legal authority to increase their power but were not willing to create efficient law enforcement if that would prove too costly and actually take away some of their power.[45] With power as a motive, many different groups in society tried to profit from the

witch trials. Often persecution was a political device used to ease the hostilities within the community. Out of personal frustration, enemies accused each other of witchcraft. In the 17th century, Germany faced major political power shifts. In the turmoil that accompanied power transfers, there were social and economic divisions separating Germans. Having power over the poor through the witch trials attracted the upper classes, but also a lower-class citizen could accuse an upper-class citizen. This gave the lower class real power over the upper class, which they had never had before.[46] Consequently, there were a number of conflicts erupting between different social groups, which only added to the hysteria. Also, the lay folk and the clergy struggled for power. Citizens clashed with the officials over abuse of power.[47] Through the witch trials, clerics, doctors, and lawyers used their expertise as witnesses to increase their prestige. Some people also accused others of witchcraft to show their loyalty to their society and to gain favor with the leaders.[48]

Beyond political advantage, witch hunts developed into a means of economic profit. Some gained a lot of money from the witch trials. The witch or her relatives paid for the salaries of all who worked at the witch trials, including the judges, court officials, torturers, physicians, clergymen, scribes, guards, and attendants. Even the people who made the stakes and scaffolds for executions gained from the conviction and death of each witch. In 1592, Father Cornelius Loos said:

> Wretched creatures are compelled by the severity of the torture to confess things they have never done and so by cruel butchery innocent lives are taken; and, by new alchemy, gold and silver are coined from human blood.[49]

Another man, Canon Linden, noticed the growing trend of the witch trials as a means of making money. He commented:

> So far at length, did the madness of the furious populace and of the courts go in this thirst for blood and booty that there was scarcely anybody who was not smirched by some suspicion of this crime. Meanwhile, notaries, copyists, and innkeepers grew rich. The executioner rode a blooded horse, like a noble of the court, and went clad in gold and silver; his wife vied with noble dames in the richness of her array.[50]

These two comments on the witchcraze exposed a profit motive as one sick perversion of the witch trials.

Still, another possible economic advantage for the active participation of the Church and State in the witch trials was the courts' right to appropriate the property of the heretic. During 1627 in Offerburg, a small town of about 2,000 to 3,000 citizens, the town council started looking for wealthy witches, which could, of course, increase the town's treasury. They also stimulated the hysteria by offering a reward of two shillings for each witch reported. Certain officials of Austria, who owned a lot of the property in the town, claimed the witches' properties for their emperor. The accusations against witches ceased after that because the German city councils did not want to contribute to the Austrian emperor's gain.[51] Thus, city officials cared less about ridding their city of witches and more about the money gained from it. Similarly, Bamberg gained a lot of money during the trials. During April in 1631, the courts of Bamberg gained 500,000 florins from seven executed and 222,000 florins from those still in jail. When property confiscation was no longer allowed, the witch hunts and the zeal for witch hunting soon stopped.[52]

Seeking a scapegoat for their misfortunes, such as famines and epidemics, the German people and their courts blamed witches. The State did not want to look impotent against such natural disasters, and the Church believed that either God punished people who sinned, or the devil was causing the problems. The Church's explanation of why the plagues were occurring made the prince look like he was actually doing a good job because the blame for misfortunes, like crop failures and illnesses, was put on the witches. According to *Erweytterte Unholden,* written in 1590, witch activity caused the famines.[53] Interestingly, the climax of the witch trials was between 1627 and 1631 in the wake of a terrible plague.[54] The Church and the State paved the way for the hysteria in Germany with their flurry of confusion and condemnations causing everyone to be fearful of everyone else. With all the hysteria and chaos people could easily be convinced that anyone, even themselves, might be a witch.

Leaders throughout Germany accepted the delusions of witchcraft and promoted them. Since the majority of educated men supported witch hunts, the poorly educated men followed them, reducing the community's chances of reaching a logical resolution to witch hunts. Johann Meyforth, a Protestant professor and student of scholar–priest Friedrich von Spee,[55] described the logic of witch hunts. When asking the accused questions about alleged witchcraft, the judges set them up for conviction as guilty. An accused witch would be asked if she was scared. If she said yes, she was automatically a witch; if she said no, then she was a witch because, of course, witches would always try to seem innocent.[56] In 1608, an Italian friar, Guazzo, explained why a ninety-year-old priest, waiting to be executed, killed himself. Guazzo said:

> A demon appeared to him and tempted him so that...he cut his own throat with his own knife...yet the demon...seized violently on his soul and carried it to hell. For so did Divine Justice dispose, which rewards every man according to his works, and God willed that he, who had ninety years lived a follower of Satan, should end his life at the hands of Satan.[57]

Instead of logically saying that an old man killed himself because of the cruel torture inflicted upon him, the friar gave a very illogical explanation to justify the way of the trials. No one was safe from witches—not even a priest!

The State persecuted witches to restore order out of the chaos going on at the time. The people believed that God created the world with order and harmony, but something had ruined the order and harmony. Some thought witch hunting was the key to restoring order. What they did not realize was that witch hunting and witch trials were adding to the hysteria. Hunting witches in Germany seemed to be the way to stop evil from ruining God's harmony and order. Some of the smartest people conducted and encouraged the witch hunts with the good motive of following God's orders and stopping the devil's work. This helped explain why so many were tried and executed relentlessly.[58]

The witch hunts kept growing in Germany and the number of people executed grew too. The stereotypical "witch" in Germany was generally thought to be an old, poor woman. In

southwest Germany, eighty-two percent of the people tried for witchcraft were women. Despite that high percentage in this region, many men and children were also accused and executed in other areas.[59] During the witch scare of 1627-1629 in Würzburg, 160 people were executed. At first only adults were accused. Then as the scare continued, more and more children were executed. By the end of 1629, seventeen percent of those executed were children.[60] Duren, a priest in Alfter, wrote to Count Weiner von Salm:

> The victims of the funeral pyres are for the most part male witches. Half of the city must be implicated; for already professors, law students, pastors, cannons, vicars, and monks have been arrested and burned...The chancellor and his wife have already been apprehended and executed...to sum up, things are in such a pitiful state, that one does not know with what people one may talk and associate.[61]

The torture grew even worse. Jurists in Germany invented new and grotesque methods of torture.[62] An executioner at Neisse built an oven where, from 1651 to 1660, he burned to death over a thousand people suspected of witchcraft.[63] Different torture methods included: sitting on a chair heated by fire, filling the nostrils with lime and water, rolling a pin with spikes on it up and down the spine, and igniting sulfur over a victim's naked body. Torture also forced sleeplessness, keeping a victim awake for over forty hours. This was effective because the victim would be delirious and easily trapped into confession.[64] In 1570 in Frankfort-on-the-Main, an accused man was subjected to every known device of torture to get him to confess his crime. When all the torture devices failed, they bound a starving rat on his naked body until he finally confessed. Frankfort-on-the-Main was a large imperial city, notorious for severe tortures.[65] A Dutch jurist, Damhouder, greatly influenced German law with his writings. He wrote, "These are the tortures in use with us. In case a first application fails to extort confession, a second is made and a severe scourging added."[66] He thought these kinds of torture were the most "productive" ways of revealing and punishing a sinner.

With all the chaos caused by the witch trials, it was only a matter of time (years actually) before people would see the

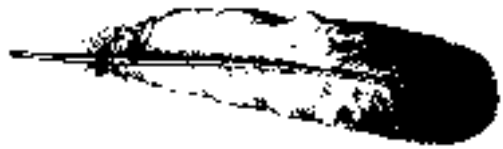
gratuitous hysteria around them. In 1563, Johann Weyer wrote *De Praestigis Daemonum.*[67] Weyer was a respected physician at the court of Jülich-Cleves; he was the first to stand up and openly speak against witch trials.[68] His book admitted that the devil had a lot of power but did not need human help. Weyer said that the devil loved to make women think they could perform magic. Also, there was no pact between the devil and a witch. Weyer wrote that witches need Christ's help and not execution. He said that magicians were the evil ones because they knowingly invoked the devil, but they escaped execution, unlike witches. He also said, that there was no use punishing witches by death because God will punish each one individually, not the whole population.[69] But for a while no one listened!

Another who spoke in favor of the accused was Friedrich von Spee, a renowned scholar and parish priest who accompanied witches to the stake in Würzburg during the late 1620s. He was appalled by the trials and wrote an anonymous attack on the persecutions in 1631 called the *Cautio Criminalis* (later in the century, the philosopher Leibniz revealed Spee's identity). Von Spee said that the clergy were against witches because they were going against God, but also that the Princes were against witches because they needed the Church to be on their side. If both the State and the Church were against witches then the judges would be against witches and so would the citizens.[70] Therefore, everyone would always be against witches. Weyer also wrote about the inevitable spread of the witch-craze generated by the trials. He said, "Previously I never thought of doubting that there were many witches in the world; now, however, when I examine the public record, I find myself believing that there are hardly any."[71] Weyer said that in witch trials if the accused were silent, they were found guilty, but by accusing others, the witchcraze spread. He predicted that if the trials continued, nobody would be safe.[72]

By the end of the 17th century, Germans realized that hunting witches to help restore order was counterproductive. Instead of bringing security, the witch trials increased fear and anxiety. In the 18th century, early Enlightenment thinkers in-

creased doubt about the threat of witchcraft. Enlightened German philosophers looked down upon people involved with witch hunts.[73] The gradual end to the persecution came because there was no control over the direction and extent of the persecutions. No one was safe from accusations.[74] In Würzburg, even family members of the prince-bishop were executed.[75] Since the witches were tortured into denouncing others, anyone—no matter what age, sex, or social position—could be accused. A crisis of confidence in the judicial procedures caused the panic to stop. People began to notice that plagues, and crimes, supposedly done by witches, still existed. People realized that they did not even have the ability accurately to detect witches, if any, and that the act of getting rid of the "witches" was not worth the agony. The last official execution for witchcraft was at Swabia in 1775.[76]

Ironically, conformity and obedience to both government and religious institutions was crucial both in starting and in ending the witch trials. Von Spee called the chaotic witch craze in Germany "the fatal consequence of Germany's pious zealotry."[77] The Germans easily believed in witches because of their naive approach towards reality and natural sciences. By the 1700s people saw the world differently and abandoned their old medieval theories and beliefs of spiritual presences. Without demons, there could not be witches. There was an increased mood of confidence in man's abilities. Instead of believing in medieval notions of helpless man surrounded by hostile spirits, people gradually assumed responsibility for their own actions. People began to doubt the existence of witches, and they demanded greater dignity and rights in Germany in the Age of Reason.[78]



Endnotes

[1] Rossell Hope Robbins, The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1974) p. 219

In Alsace before 1571, only two people were burned for witchcraft, but between 1571 to 1620 eighty-eight people were burned for witchcraft. In Thann before 1572, four people were burned for witchcraft, but one hundred and fifty people were burned between 1572 and 1620.

[2] Ibid., p. 218

[3] G. Benecke, Society and Politics in Germany 1500-1750 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974) p. 31

[4] Robbins, p. 77

[5] Ibid., p. 77

[6] Ibid., p. 77

[7] Johannes Janssen, History of the German People After the Close of the Middle Ages (New York: Ams Press, Inc., 1996) pp. 179-180

[8] Brian P. Levack, The Witch-hunt in Early Modern Europe (New York: Longman, 1989) pp. 73-74

[9] Benecke, pp. 4-7

[10] Ibid., pp. 10-11

[11] Ibid., pp. 24-26

[12] Robbins, pp. 215-218; Wolfgang Behringer, "Witchcraft studies in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland," in Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe ed. Johnathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp. 90-91

Robbins wrote about the Prince Bishop of Wurzburg, Philip Adolf von Enrenberg, to show how rulers can change their ways arbitrarily. Von Enrenberg ruthlessly burned many accused "witches," including his own heir. After his heir died, he stopped the witch trials completely. To me, this information seems confusing and raises serious questions. For example, if he had the power to stop the trials, why didn't he do it before his heir was killed? Did he intend to kill his heir for personal or political reasons? Another question is how could he stop all the trials if he could not stop his heir from being burned? Because of these questions, I chose not to put information about von Enrenberg in my paper.

[13] Robbins, pp. 215-216

[14] Benecke, p. 26

[15] Many historians have done extensive research on the German witch trials ever since they began. Historians have proved some and discredited other explanations for the German witch trials. In "The Persecution of Witches as Restoration of Order: The Case of Germany, 1550s-1650s," Central European History 21 (June 1988) p. 107, Hartmut Lehmann catalogues the different explanations. Two hundred years ago the Enlightened philosophers, historians, and theologians said the witch trials were centered in Germany because the witch hunts were the result of barbaric superstition. During the era of Bismarck's Kulturkampf (over 140 years ago), the Protestants blamed the Catholics' Counter Reformation for the intense witch trials in Germany. The Catholics blamed the Protestants for the intense witch trials during the era after Martin Luther and John Calvin. A more detailed analysis of the two religions' effect on the witch trials is discussed later in the paper. It is important to note that the religious wars and conflicts between the two religions did not spark the witch hunts. The wars actually assisted in the decline of the witch hunts because authorities and rulers had to pay more attention to the wars than to the witch trials (as noted in Levack, p. 108). Through my research, I noticed that the more recent studies on German witch trials tend to offer many reasons for the witch trials. They also analyze the psychological aspects of society at that time. By understanding what and how the German people thought, it is easier to see why they gave in to the witchcraze.

[16] H.C. Erik Midelfort, Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562-1684 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972) pp. 30-31

[17] Geoffrey Scarre, Witchcraft and Magic in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Europe (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1963) p. 49

Scarre comments on the fact that the medieval Church believed in the existence of witchcraft but did not see it as a threat; therefore there was no need to conduct witch trials.

[18] Ibid., pp. 45-50

[19] Midelfort, pp. 30-33

From these numbers it should not be concluded that the Catholics executed more than the Protestants because no information about the ratio of Catholic to Protestant killings exists. The Catholics may have outnumbered the Protestants, resulting in more accusations and executions.

[20] Robbins, p. 219

[21] Janssen, p. 219

[22] Ibid., p. 225

[23] Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, The Malleus Maleficarum trans. Montague Summers (New York: Dover Publications, 1971) p. 44; the same quote is used in Sigrid Brauner, Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews: The Construction of the Witch in Early Modern Germany (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995) p. 36 (Brauner received her information from Summer's translation of the Malleus.)

[24] Kramer and Sprenger, pp. 89-150; The quote is on page 141.

[25] Brauner, pp. 31-32

[26] Ibid., p. 32

[27] Midelfort, pp. 6-66

[28] Janssen, p. 229

[29] Midelfort, pp. 34-36

[30] Ibid., pp. 58-59

Midelfort said that Johann Zink preached ideas similar to Plantsch, but I disagree with this statement. Plantsch denounced superstition and called for witches to repent, while Zink believed that all witches should be killed.

[31] Levack, pp. 96-97; Janssen, pp. 269-274

[32] Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters, Witchcraft in Europe 1100-1700 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989) p. 204; Levack, p. 97 (He used the same quote from Kors and Peters.)

[33] Kors and Peters, p. 202

[34] www.witchcraft.simplenet.com

[35] Hans Sebald, "Witches' confessions: Stereotypical structure and local color, the case of the Prince-Bishopric of Bamberg," Southern Humanities Review 24 (Fall 1990) pp. 303-304

All of my information about the Bamberg trials comes from Sebald's article.

[36] Ibid., p. 305

[37] Ibid., pp. 301-302

[38] Ibid., pp. 306-316

A thorough definition of the things confessed during trial comes later in the paper when the two trials are analyzed. Biggs, p. 60, said that out of the 300 confessions he read, none of the elements listed was confessed. I did not use his

information because the books I studied and the confessions I read had most of these elements. His confessions only came from Lorraine.

[39] Sebald, pp. 304-305

[40] Ibid., pp. 314-316

[41] Kors and Edwards, pp. 253-257

[42] Ibid., pp. 257-259

[43] Ibid., pp. 257-259; Robbins, pp. 12-13

[44] Midelfort, pp. 32-51

[45] Robin Briggs, "Many Reasons Why: Witchcraft and the Problem of Multiple Explanations," in Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe ed. Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 60

[46] Ibid., p. 56

[47] Bob Scribner, "Witchcraft and Judgment in Reformation Germany," History Today 40 (April 1990) pp. 12-19

[48] Scarre, p. 44

[49] Robbins, p. 16

[50] Ibid., p. 16

[51] Ibid., p. 221

[52] Ibid., p. 222

[53] Lehmann, pp. 110-111

[54] Midelfort, pp. 193-196

Behringer, p. 92, comments on misfortunes, such as crop failures and epidemics, causing a rise in witch persecutions. Scarre, pp. 38-39, disagrees with Midelfort because the witch-hunts were declining in the 1630s. This decade had the worst problems because of hard times from the Thirty Years' War, such as famine and economic hardships. Scarre wrote, "There is insufficient basis for claiming that witch persecution was a method of responding to disaster." (p. 39) I agree with Midelfort and Behringer's theory of witch trials used to control people during their hard times and as a way to 'scapegoat.'

[55] Friedrich von Spee accompanied witches to the stake for many years. He wrote a famous book against the witch trials called Cautio Criminalis. Von Spee is discussed more later on in the paper.

[56] Robbins, pp. 17-18; Prince Hubertus Zu Lowenstein, The German in History (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945) p. 186

Lowenstein used the same analysis of questions, but said that von Spee wrote it in his Cautio. Lowenstein and Robbins could both be correct since Meyforth was a student of von Spee.

[57] Robbins, p. 18

[58] Lehman, pp. 108-111

[59] Behringer, p. 93; Scarre, p. 25

[60] Midelfort, p. 182; Scarre, pp. 28-29

[61] Robbins, p. 221

[62] The witchcraze kept going, killing thousands of innocent people who were forced to confess because of torture. Friederick von Spee wrote, "Woe to the poor wretch who has set foot in the torture-chamber! He will not be let out again till he has confessed everything imaginable. I have often thought that the reason why we are not all of us avowed sorcerers is only that torture have never falled upon our lot, and very true is the boast recently made by the inquisitor of a great prince, that if the Pope himself should come under his hands and his torturing, even his Holiness would end in confessing himself a sorcerer." Janssen, p. 297

[63] Robbins, p. 215

[64] Levack, pp. 72-75

[65] Janssen, p. 118

[66] Ibid., p. 183

[67] Midelfort, pp. 25-26

[68] Janssen, pp. 311-315

[69] Midelfort, p. 26

[70] Kors and Edward, pp. 351-352; Lowenstein, p. 187

[71] Robbins, p. 15

[72] Ibid., p. 15

[73] Lehmann, pp. 119-121

[74] Sebald, p. 305

[75] Ibid., p. 305

[76] www.witchcraft.simplenet.com

[77] Behringer, p. 87

[78] Scarre, pp. 55-58

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April 5, 2000

Will Fitzhugh
The Concord Review, Inc.
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Sudbury, MA 01776

Dear Mr. Fitzhugh,

As you know, we at the AFT have long been supporters of your efforts to encourage more serious academic writing at the high school level in history through your quarterly, *The Concord Review*. As you complete your tenth volume year, I wanted to add my voice in support of this work.

I was interested to learn about your new venture, the National Writing Board, which will read and rate academic papers in the humanities written by high school students, and pass the scores and comments on to college admissions officers. It's significant that the Deans of Admission at Harvard, Notre Dame, Princeton, and Yale have endorsed this project, and I hope many more college admissions people will do so.

My good wishes to you for the success of the National Writing Board, and I hope through it you will inspire many more high school students to do the hard work to improve both their knowledge of the humanities and their skills in academic writing.

Best wishes,
Sincerely,
(signed)
Sandra Feldman
President, American Federation of Teachers