Malleus Maleficarum Key Notes

**What was the Malleus Maleficarum of 1486?**

* The *Malleus* raised awareness and conviction of the reality of witchcraft amongst the literate.
* Between the years 1487 and 1520 the work was published thirteen times. It was again published between the years of 1574 to 1669 a total of sixteen times.

**How did the Malleus help to change the popular conception of witches?**

* By the fifteenth century, belief in witches was once again openly accepted in European society, but they typically suffered penalties no more harsh than public penances such as a day in the stocks.
* Persecution of witches became more brutal following the publication of the *Malleus*, with witchcraft being accepted as a real and dangerous phenomenon.
* The *Malleus Maleficarum* asserted that three elements are necessary for witchcraft: the evil-intentioned witch, the help of the Devil, and the Permission of God.
* The treatise is divided into three sections: The first section tries to refute critics who deny the reality of witchcraft, thereby hindering its prosecution. The second section describes the actual forms of witchcraft and its remedies. The third section is to assist judges confronting and combating witchcraft.
* The Malleus Maleficarum relied heavily upon earlier works such as Visconti and, most famously, Johannes Nider's *Formicarius* (1435).
* Between 1487 and 1520, twenty editions of the *Malleus* were published, and another sixteen editions were published between 1574 and 1669.

**How did the Malleus help to change the popular conception of witches?**

* In 1490, only 3 years after it was published, the Catholic Church condemned the *Malleus* as false.
* In 1538, the Spanish Inquisition cautioned its members not to believe everything the *Malleus* said, even when it presented apparently firm evidence
* Its publication was actually followed by a slump in witch-hunting, this being reversed in the post-Reformation period, when heightened concerns over religious conformity helped renew official interest in what were considered to be the devil’s agents.
* Important as was the Malleus, it was rarely mentioned in sermons and trial records of the period.
* At the time, it was never accorded the unquestioned authority that modern scholars have sometimes given it.
* While the *Malleus* did not directly inspire a frenzy of witchcraft prosecutions, nevertheless it did make an important contribution to the development of the entire European witch-hunt’.
* There was then a lull in publications for 40 years until the 1560s.
* It was printed and widely circulated therefore making witch-hunting plausible but still needing the support of illiterate villagers to be possible on an intensive scale.