

Witchcraft in Europe:

The German Witch Hunts and Their Influence

by

Lianna Samoyedny

Submitted to the Department of History
School of Humanities
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College
State University of New York

May 2021

Sponsor: Lisa Keller

Second Reader: John Christian Bailey

Chapter I:

Throughout my educational experience, I have always had a strong interest in religious history, as well as topics that focused on women. With my focus in European history, I began researching witch trials. From my previous education, I only had ever studied the Salem witch trials in the United States—because that was all that was ever taught in my experience.

The most important goal of my overall education is to learn as much as I can, so with this in mind, I decided I wanted to research a topic that I had absolutely no prior knowledge of. When researching topics within European history during medieval times with a focus on religious and women's history, one topic clearly emerged: witchcraft. I had no knowledge of how largescale witch hunts had been throughout Europe during the 14th to 17th centuries. Many countries experienced different forms of the witch craze, but one region in particular stood out—the Germanic territories.

As I further researched the history of witch trials and patterns in Germanic lands, I shifted my perspective to challenge myself as a researcher and writer. Though sources are limited on German witchcraft in respect to other countries, this was a topic that had already been written about. I felt compelled to dig further into this topic, by analyzing the main source used throughout these trials, *The Malleus Maleficarum*. This book, written as a manual of how to find and eradicate witchcraft, proved to serve as a Bible of sorts throughout all German, and most European, trials for centuries to come. No work was more prominent in its influence during the trials than this book. *The Malleus* connected the witch trials not just to religion and the Church,

but to gender and women's sexuality, allowing me to study the topic from a fresh and provoking perspective.

The first section of this paper will examine the general background history of both Europe and Germany. My goal was to establish a time frame including a broad political, economic, and social history of Europe and to establish the state of the German territories. Next, I wanted to analyze the state of religion throughout these centuries, from early philosophical belief to the rise of the Church and the Protestant Reformation. The Church was the driving motivation behind the beginning of the witch trials and remained the one constant across the entire centuries of the witch hunts.

Following this, my goal was to analyze how the concept of witchcraft emerged overtime, from Biblical roots developing from natural magic and early pre-Christian beliefs. This, coupled with the Waldensian religious movement, created a path for the hunt for witches. Heresy had been a constant fear of the Church for centuries and from these facets birthed the concept of witchcraft as a similar, but far greater, threat. With such a complex topic of figuring out how and why witch trials began, grew, and plagued Germany for so many years with such a high death toll, it is crucial to analyze every detail this paper poses, in order to truly come to a valid conclusion.

The hunt to discover why these witch hunts took place is to not just document history, but more so to study the patterns of religion and the role of women's sexuality throughout. A central theme of this study is to analyze how sexuality and the views of women played such a heavy role. My hope is to enlighten the reader with the knowledge of how severe these witch hunts were, how prominent the persecution of women was, and how influential the Church was in every aspect of life.

Throughout this paper, several issues studied must be acknowledged. First, that although witches are fictional and are not a threat today in our society, they were a very real threat in the minds of those living at these times. Next, the Church held the highest power across all of medieval and early modern European society. *The Malleus* was able to gain significant influence due to it being both endorsed by the University of Cologne, but even more so for it including a papal Bull from Pope Innocent VIII. This book was used not only in trials but was used in sermons and preached throughout all of the German territories. This book was reprinted, traveled, and grew to become the source of knowledge for all things witchcraft. Lastly, it is important to grasp the role gender played. Women were viewed as weak and subordinate beings. Though women at this time did hold various crucial roles within their societies, the Church portrayed them and treated them as lustful in nature and the cause of much sin and heresy. This helps us understand how the vast majority of those executed in German lands during these panic periods were women.

I approach this subject by establishing a strong background for the topic through defining what exactly witchcraft was, what stereotypes it birthed, and how being accused took place. Understanding a general history and then diving into German religious and social history provides a solid background to understand just how this arose and lasted so long. I next approach my primary source, *The Malleus*, which provides invaluable insight firsthand into the views of women at this time, as well as exact detail into how trials took place. Lastly, I connect these themes into how this must be studied from a gender perspective and how it relates to sexuality.

I use a wide variety of sources to achieve this. Having *The Malleus* as my primary source allows me to focus on it in context while connecting its impact to all of my secondary sources. For secondary sources, I focus on a mix of scholarly books and articles, ranging from books on

German history to the history of the concept of the witch. I use only works published through credible sources by historians who have been established as valid sources of knowledge. I feel my sources provide a strong backbone to my argument and are vital to study in order to further understand what would become to be known as the German witch hunts.

Chapter II:

From the 12th to 18th-centuries, various European countries conducted extensive trials and executions for witchcraft accusations. These prosecutions were the consequence of societal beliefs, struggling economies, misogyny, influential writings, natural disasters, and unstable religious tensions. Germany experienced the most extensive witch craze across the continent, and it occurred in several waves. To better understand the German witch hunts and what influenced them, we must understand where Europe stood in these earlier medieval years.

The name Germany is used for convenience in discussion. In reality, Germany, at the time of its early witch hunts, was made up of 43 secular principalities, 70 imperial abbacies, 4 cantons of order, 75 imperial cities, and held over 1,000 imperial knights; the Reformation divided all of these territories even more.¹ The state we know today as Germany did not come into existence until 1860.² Since Germany was made up of 350 territorial states of all different sizes and populations, each was ruled differently. Some were secular principalities under a single ruler, others were ecclesiastical territories ruled by a prince bishop, and some were free cities ruled by a city council.³ When Charles V reinstated the *Carolina* as the official criminal code of the Church in 1532, he created a clause that allowed each principality to choose to either adhere

¹ Brian P. Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 179-180

² Erik H. C. Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562-1684*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972, 11

³ Johannes Dillinger, "The Political Aspects of the German Witch Hunts." *Magic, Ritual & Witchcraft* 4, no. 1 (Summer 2009): 75. doi: 10.1353/mrw.0.0121

to the code or to use their own laws and discretion.⁴ This enabled different principalities to pursue trials at different speeds throughout Germany. For example, “the dukedom of Wurttemberg made demonic pacts alone punishable offence” while other territories didn’t even define what a pact was.⁵

By the 14th-century, Europe had reached 74 million people. Europe is conventionally defined as the same geopolitical area as today. It had experienced two population declines, one during The Hundred Years War but a far more extreme one following The Black Death of 1347-50, when it dropped to 52 million.⁶ By the 16th-century, the population of Europe had slowly built back up to around 60 million, and in Germany alone it had reached 12 million.⁷ Population in Germany gradually rose until the first half of the 17th-century, where it experienced a significant drop to 12 million but then continued to rise the following centuries. This decline was largely attributed to smaller plagues, The Thirty Years War, and the Inquisition.⁸ France had the largest population within Europe, followed by Germany.

Germany and all of Europe experienced a long recovery period post-Plague when there was even more disease, food shortages, and invasions. Yet at the same time there was a significant increase in trade and overseas exploration, which increased income overall.

Europe’s economy by 1450 varied greatly region by region. This era moved between economic prosperity and depression. In Germany, the economy recovered and grew much faster than the rest of Europe. During these earlier centuries, The Hundred Years War helped stimulate

⁴ Dillinger, “The Political Aspects of the German Hunts”, 63

⁵ Dillinger, “The Political Aspects of the German Hunts”, 64-65

⁶ Tracy Oberman, *Handbook of European History, 1400-1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994, 10-13

⁷ Oberman. *Handbook of European History*, 10-13

⁸ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 32

German economy which relied heavily on mining and metallurgy.⁹ Unfortunately, by 1530, southern Germany had lost its economic leadership, which it continued to struggle with until the 1600s. On the other hand, western Germany flourished and went through an era of urbanization that revamped the local economy.

Following the Black Death, two reactions emerged regarding blame. One was to self-blame and say societal and individual evil was being punished; the other was to blame the Church for failing the people.¹⁰ Either way, religion became the source of much tension. Following the Reformation, the “true” Church, called Catholic, dominated southern Germany, as northern areas adopted Protestantism, either Calvinist or Lutheran.¹¹ Throughout the beginnings of the witch hunts though, much of the data points to a growing social disparity between rural and urban regions of the country. In smaller villages and areas, jurists were closer to local people which may have had a direct effect on their desire to share the same beliefs and charge people with witchcraft accusations.¹²

The expansion of interest in witchcraft and prosecuting witches stemmed from many causes. One was popular belief in the supernatural, which had dated back a thousand years to pre-Christian beliefs based in the cosmos, astrology, and the natural elements. Magical powers were attached to metals, gems, plants, animals, blood, and even specific body parts all had significant meaning.¹³ Most of the early popular magic focused on the moon, and in early Christianity priests would even bless objects to be used in nature-based rituals outside of the Church.¹⁴ Early ritual magic was also highly gendered by these elements. Women were deemed

⁹ Oberman, *Handbook of European History*, 18-19

¹⁰ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 44-47

¹¹ Oberman, *Handbook of European History*, 53

¹² Dillinger, “The Political Aspects of the German Witch Hunts”, 77

¹³ Gary K. Waite, *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft*, 55

¹⁴ Waite, *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft*, 13-14

cold and men hot, women were attributed to the negative poles in nature, and men the positive. Everything in these late middle ages focused on symbols of attraction or repulsion.¹⁵

Ritual magic had long been a key feature of medieval religions and the Church for many years and was often manifested in conjuring demons. The goal of ritual magic was always individualistic; it was not intended to cause physical harm but was solely for personal benefit.¹⁶ Love spells, career advancement, finding treasure, and fortune-telling were all common types of ritual magic. Necromancy was the most common type of ritual magic by far. Another word for demonic magic that was commonly used was “maleficum”, which meant to cause one physical harm by occult means.¹⁷ Demonic magic, or maleficum, differed in that its intent was to cause physical harm including disease, death, blindness, and insanity. Ritual magic, unlike maleficum, was primarily performed by men and done so in great respect and only within permission of God and the Church.¹⁸

Many books were written by ritual magicians for others to use, and none mentioned any sort of harmful magic or witchcraft which is important to note. Fasting, prayer, and devotion were all commonly required beforehand in order to gain protection from the demon that one would conjure up in spells.¹⁹ Though ritual magic and witchcraft in theory both required sacrifice and the supernatural, both shared more differences. What the Church described witchcraft as differed from ritual magic in terms of both intention and core belief. Logically, it is important to state that witchcraft was historically not ever real, despite the Church believing it was--whereas

¹⁵ Waite, *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft*, 18-19

¹⁶ Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 107

¹⁷ Waite, *Heresy, Magic, and Sorcery*, 45

¹⁸ Cohn. *Europe's Inner Demons*, 103

¹⁹ Alison Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany: Rothenburg, 1561-1652*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, 67-68

ritual magic was commonly practiced and respected within religion--which is a crucial and basic difference between the two.²⁰

Germany had a long history of devil lore and demonic fear, but it did not truly become a dominant part of its culture or a societal concern until the Reformation.²¹ There were three main reactions to witchcraft, in most areas, stemming from German regions, which divided those territories even more. On one hand, some believed that witches were not real but rather delusional women who the devil had preyed on. Others, more extremists, believed that witches were very real, and all extreme stereotypes were accurate and encouraged mass trials. Lastly, others believed that witches were real--not supernatural devil worshippers or delusional people--but they did not entirely write off all heretical stereotypes either. They believed that witches were spiritually evil, but that they held no physical threat; they simply felt witches were women who God was using to either test or punish everyone through the devil.²²

The idea of the sabbaths, flight, orgies, and rituals all developed, increasing the concept of witchcraft encompassing whole communities.²³ Sabbaths were described as covert gatherings that took place overnight, commonly in a wooded area; they involved dancing, orgies, and meeting with the devil himself.²⁴ Naturally, this reaffirmed the belief in the “night witch” who flew to these sabbaths, which offered an explanation for how they seemingly took place.²⁵ The idea of witchcraft being a collaborative effort is what sparked mass trials; witchcraft was no

²⁰ Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany*, 70

²¹ Hoak, Dale. “The Great European Witch-Hunts: A Historical Perspective.” *American Journal of Sociology* 88, no. 6 (May 1983): 1273. doi:10.1086/227806, 1271

²² Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 192

²³ Charles Alan Kors, *Witchcraft in Europe 1100-1700: A Documentary History*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1973, 144

²⁴ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 144-146

²⁵ Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 162

longer a singular crime but a large-scale type of organized demonic group work..²⁶ Much of the modern witch stereotype actually developed from this belief coupled with confessions resulting from Inquisitorial torture. This includes a witch being an elderly woman more often than not, who is desperate for something the devil can offer, be it money, company, or love.²⁷ Though witches were not real, and the concept was an unfortunate by-product of religious tension and fear, there was a small but significant number of women who happened to practice common natural or folk magic and were accused of being witches.²⁸

The actual number of those who were tried for witchcraft and executed is not precise. It ranges from 60,000 to 100,000 for all of Europe, with 80,000 being the most cited.²⁹ Between 75-85% of all those executed across Europe were women. From this total number, at least 30,000, but sometimes up to 45,000, of those executions were in Germany alone.³⁰

Church and state in 15th-century Germany vied for power, as in other countries. Princes maintained a dominant role, working with bishops and friars. The parishioners performed all baptisms, marriages, and burials, while priests controlled all legal and financial arrangements.³¹ Regional and localized churches both existed in Germany uniquely, which resulted in a very weakened state overall.³² The papacy, losing support from city councils, greatly increased all Church activity across Europe in the late 15th-century.³³ This contributed to the largest peaks in the hunt for witchcraft yet.

²⁶ Kors, *Witchcraft in Europe*, 151

²⁷ Hoak, "The Great European Witch Hunts", 1271

²⁸ Sigrid Brauner, *Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews: The Construction of the Witch in Early Modern Germany*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995, 13

²⁹Mary E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 22

³⁰Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 179-180

³¹ Oberman. *Handbook of European History*, 320-321

³² Dillinger, "The Political Aspects of the German Witch Hunts", 70-71

³³ Oberman. *Handbook of European History*, 323

This peak of these trials coincided with The Hundred Years War from 1550-1650 in southwestern Germany, mostly in Catholic areas. The worst outbreaks were in Baden-Wurtemberg and Bavaria, where 9,000 people were executed in those years alone--over a third of the country's whole.³⁴ Religious tension had increased following the Reformation--Protestants viewed Catholics as weak and demonic in nature, solely based on the fact that Catholics believed the devil could cause physical harm himself. Protestants, particularly the Calvinists, were repulsed by the Catholic practices involving the sacramental bread and felt that Jesus should never be reduced to material objects.³⁵ This explains why they deemed Catholicism's use of relics and sacred objects as unholy as well. To Protestants, Catholicism itself was riddled with magical beliefs, superstition, and at its core was heretical at its best.³⁶

Some scholars argue that the roots of witch hunts can be found in the pre-Christian Dianic cult which centered on the worship of Dianus, a nature God from the Middle Ages.³⁷ Stemming from German medieval belief in the first two centuries following Christ, the concept of the "night witch" may have actually also been Roman in origin; the concept was always considered folklore rather than a real threat until the witch hunts when it was deemed a very real occurring form of heresy.³⁸ Much of the modern witch was carved from Pagan stereotypes overall.

The Inquisition at this time was still targeting and hunting the Waldensians--a growing Protestant movement that was deemed heretical by the Church; this conflict spanned over

³⁴ Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, 16

³⁵ Roper, *Witch Craze*, 48

³⁶ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 40-41

³⁷ Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 154

³⁸ Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 171

hundreds years.³⁹ To best understand how witch trials began, we must understand the Waldensian hunts first. Other scholars see the Inquisition's attack on the Waldensians, who occupied the French Alps and northern mountain regions across Europe, as the start of the witch craze.⁴⁰ These first ever Inquisitorial witch trials in France and Switzerland occurred when the Franciscan inquisitors were searching for Waldensians, and instead found peasants who practiced pre-Christian magic.⁴¹ Under interrogation and torture, they then confessed to sorcery, heresy, and witchcraft. These first waves of trials occurred from 1435-1500, while the first German trials were in 1480 led by Heinrich Kramer, who is a critical figure in the pursuit of witches.⁴²

One of the most significant shifts in the expansion of witch trials was the increased connection with women. Previously, there had been large numbers of both men and women tried for heresy, sorcery, or harmful magic.⁴³ But the publication in 1486 of *The Malleus Maleficarum*, changed that by placing blame solely on the shoulders of women.⁴⁴ Older women--over 50--and the poor and dependent were commonly accused.⁴⁵ Single women were especially suspect, and women overall were executed at a much higher rate.⁴⁶

The shifting role of women in religion may also have contributed to the large number of witchcraft accusations.⁴⁷ With convents dissolved, all women moved into the secular realm, serving as wives within the patriarchal family household. Midwives were especially suspect due

³⁹ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 80-81

⁴⁰ Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 208

⁴¹ Brauner, *Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews*, 6-8

⁴² Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 210

⁴³ Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 234

⁴⁴ Waite, *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft*, 121

⁴⁵ Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany*, 25

⁴⁶ Swales, J. K.1, and Hugh V.2 McLachlan. "Witchcraft and the Status of Women: A Comment." *British Journal of Sociology* 30, no. 3 (September 1979): 352. doi:10.2307/589913, 353

⁴⁷ Oberman. *Handbook of European History*, 254

to the high number of deaths of both mothers and babies.⁴⁸ Women were often blamed for unusual circumstances of death: dead cattle, a sudden death which could be poisoning, and babies suddenly dying. Perhaps the most critical connection between gender and witchcraft is the fear of female sexuality. Both the Old and the New Testaments paint women in negative lights. The “fall” of Eve in Genesis became transmuted in the New Testament to a major “sin” and the blame for much of what goes wrong. The roots of the core causes of this explosion of hunts in Germany can all be tied to Biblical values and beliefs held strong by the Church, especially in relation to female sexuality.

During witchcraft trials, women were forced to confess to having sexual relations with the devil.⁴⁹ The devil is always described as a man promising women love, marriage, and so on--none of which came of course.⁵⁰ Women were viewed as weak or more susceptible to evil, as the devil was thought to prey upon those who were misfortunate or lonely. From St. Augustine to Kramer, women throughout history were written about and viewed as subordinate, inherently weak, and morally inept.⁵¹ Aristotle wrote how women were simply “imperfect men.”⁵² Luther, Calvin, and most church leaders during these times viewed them the same way; Catholics viewed sex as a sin even in marriage in certain circumstances, though marriage itself was purposed for procreation.⁵³

Witchcraft trials were in the hands of the Inquisition courts rather than the secular courts. These courts relied on heavy torture and violence with the goal of producing confessions and

⁴⁸ Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 277

⁴⁹ Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 136-137

⁵⁰ Roper, *Witch Craze*, 72-73

⁵¹ Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 14-15

⁵² Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 16

⁵³ Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 47

new names from accusations to fuel their hunt.⁵⁴ Pope Innocent VIII issued a critical Papal Bull in 1484, which was reprinted across southwestern Germany, that not only acknowledged the threat of witchcraft, but encouraged the hunt to capture those practicing it.⁵⁵ Inquisitors were sent to Germany to implement these rules and order through their own means and interpretation, as prior to this many areas did not allow the Inquisition in their borders at all.⁵⁶ Anyone could accuse someone else, which instilled a new fear among the public.⁵⁷ The accused was then brought to a type of cell and only brought out for interrogation. If a confession was produced, they would go back to their cell to await execution. If they would not confess to the charges brought against them, they also went back to their cell, but only to await another interrogation which cycled endlessly.⁵⁸

During trials, torture was the key to confessions. Interrogators were in charge of asking the questions, then could suggest what torture and how much should be given. The council then officially decided and assigned it to the executioner. The executioner was then in charge of all torture, and these three roles worked together to produce confessions--more often than not.⁵⁹ All three positions were voluntary and made up of select people within each local community that the Inquisition and Church approved.⁶⁰ After the publication of *The Malleus Maleficarum* and other less witchcraft manuals, many were interrogated in the same style or with similar questions. The forced confession would then be repeated again without torture. If the accused denied their crimes, they were sent to torture again, which cycled until either a confession was

⁵⁴ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 92-94

⁵⁵ Oberman, *Handbook of European History*, 137

⁵⁶ Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 166-167

⁵⁷ Dillinger, "The Political Aspects of German Witch Hunts", 68-69

⁵⁸ Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 157

⁵⁹ Roper, *Witch Craze*, 53

⁶⁰ Dillinger, "The Political Aspects of German Witch Hunts", 71

officially made or they died.⁶¹ In handfuls of cases, they were let go or exiled, though these instances are rarer.⁶²

Torture would range in method but would typically begin by the accused being stripped down and searched for any demonic instruments or tools. Next, she would be bound with either cords or onto “some engine of torture.”⁶³ If, after this, she decided to confess, she would be offered life imprisonment or exile instead of execution. It is clearly advised that torture should be used throughout all questioning to help produce a quality confession. In between questioning, she would be kept in a cell and only brought out for interrogation. Once a confession was recorded, she would be led to another room to confess without torture--the only confession that could be used for official sentencing. If not, the cycle would continue. From stretching limbs, thumb screws, to general physical abuse, daily torture was a key element in all trials. A common but odd suggestion was to even shave the accused's entire body of all hair, in suspicion of any “instrument of witchcraft.”⁶⁴ The most common tool used for torture in German courts was a burning, hot “red iron.”⁶⁵ It’s crucial to note that all interrogations were ideally done on holy days and incorporated salt, holy water, and other relics of protection for those torturing the accused.⁶⁶

Witchcraft accusations were rooted in Church teachings and religious manuals. The *Canon Episcopi*, originating from the 10th-century, explained how to treat heretics and witches.⁶⁷ Early on in 1258, Pope Alexander IV disagreed with and actually banned the early

⁶¹ Dillinger, “The Political Aspects of the German Witch Hunts”, 72-73

⁶² Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 83-85

⁶³ Sprenger, Jacob and Heinrich Kramer. *The Malleus Maleficarum*. Translated by Montague Summers. London: John Rodker, 1928. Reprinted ed. Minneola: Dover, 1971, 211

⁶⁴ Sprenger and Kramer. *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 229-230

⁶⁵ Sprenger and Kramer. *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 231

⁶⁶ Sprenger and Kramer. *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 230

⁶⁷ Kors, *Witchcraft in Europe 400-1700*, 33-34

inquisitors from targeting any form of magic that wasn't physically harmful, including necromancy.⁶⁸ He supported the *Episcopi* and firmly believed that witches were not capable of harmful magic. But, in 1320, Pope John XXII brought inquisitors back, believing that witches were indeed to blame for his own misfortunes, when he suspected someone poisoned him.⁶⁹

A popular handbook written by Nicolas Eymeric guided authorities on how to find, judge, and punish witches in 1376.⁷⁰ Then, in 1435 Johannes Nider wrote the *Formicarius* which detailed witches eating babies and performing harmful magic at sabbaths, encouraging the belief that witchcraft was indeed a communal effort.⁷¹ In Italy, Switzerland, and France, the first witchcraft-specific trials took off rampantly in the 1420s.⁷² At this point, anyone who openly agreed with the teachings of the *Episcopi* could be tried as a witch due to suspicion.

But no book was more important than *The Malleus Maleficarum* written in 1486 by Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer.⁷³ *The Malleus* was written at a particularly critical time, one of shifting religious tensions and wars, political conflict, and the start of the Reformation and counter-Reformation. *The Malleus*, sparking the beginning of a new era in witch hunts, marked the end of heresy trials and laid the groundwork for the perfect storm in Germany. The aggressive and unrelenting years that followed all held roots in these Inquisitorial beliefs and all could be traced back to *The Malleus*.

⁶⁸ Waite, *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft*, 33

⁶⁹ Waite, *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft*, 34

⁷⁰ Kors, *Witchcraft in Europe 400-1700*, 114

⁷¹ Waite, *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft*, 43

⁷² Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 47

⁷³ Kors, *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700*, 180-182

Chapter III:

Published in 1486 by Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, *The Malleus Maleficarum* proved to be one of the most significant pieces of historical writing in connection to witch hunts.⁷⁴ The two authors reflected the spirit of their times and provide important insight into how the witch hunts became so widespread.

The basic tenets of witchcraft include the concept of the devil having physical power, God allowing the devil to have this power, and a pact being created between the devil and the witch to perform physical harm with this power. *The Malleus* made all this possible by giving explanation as to how and why this worked.⁷⁵ It became its own type of bible for witchcraft procedures and laws throughout the rest of the following centuries.

This book not only influenced trials and the course of social-religious history, but also contributed greatly to history from a gender perspective. This book catalyzed the development of witchcraft to become a gendered female crime for the first time in history. Every underlying argument in *The Malleus* is based on the presumption that the authors held of women being weak, vulnerable, and full of lust.⁷⁶ This book changed women's roles in religion, painting women as more susceptible to evil and sexually and demonically ravenous. It is an extremely telling piece of history that gives us a very raw insight into how women were perceived by both

⁷⁴ Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer. *The Malleus Maleficarum*. Translated by Montague Summers. London: John Rodker, 1928. Reprinted ed. Minneola: Dover, 1971, 1

⁷⁵ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 67

⁷⁶ Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 47

the Church and greater society. Finally, to fully grasp the lasting significance of *The Malleus*, we must put both it, and the witch trials, in the context of women, gender, and sexuality. And to do that we must understand its authors.

Heinrich Kramer, born in 1430, was a well-educated man who was trained in the Dominican Order and was appointed prior in his local town of Schlettstadt, in present day lower Alsace, France.⁷⁷ He attended the University of Cologne in western Germany as a student to study theology. His early education included Aristotelian philosophy; he was considered one of the more promising students among his peers.⁷⁸ He received his doctorate in theology in Rome which led him to be appointed officially as Inquisitor in 1474, which at the time was his greatest achievement.⁷⁹

Prior to this, he built up experience to prove his aggressive devotion to his faith. In 1467, he worked in the Papal Commission in the fight against the Hussites in central Germany.⁸⁰ The Hussites were a Proto-Protestant Christian movement that occurred prior to the Protestant Reformation. The Dominican Order valued him because he was not only successful in preaching but also in collecting funds. His unusual broad powers emanated from the fact that he was not appointed to a specific province within Germany rather, he was given full Inquisitorial authority over all areas of the country, allowing him to travel and implement his methods wherever he chose.⁸¹ From having free reign over German regions to travel and preach, by 1484 Kramer was respected as the most experienced inquisitor Germany had seen.

⁷⁷ Rothman, David and Steven Marcus. *Medicine and Western Civilization*. Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 1995, ISBN 9780813521909, 173-174

⁷⁸ Hans Broedel. *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, 14-15

⁷⁹ Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 19

⁸⁰ Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 14

⁸¹ Kors, Alan Charles. *Witchcraft in Europe 1100-1700: A Documentary History*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1973, 176

Ironically, Kramer had a long history of personal legal issues within the Dominican Order. In 1474, during a very passionate sermon, he made certain comments about the pope and emperor that were deemed slander. After being jailed for this, the master-general of the Dominican Order wrote a letter that ultimately negotiated his sentence to be suspended, and eventually dropped.⁸² In 1482, he worked traveling and preaching again, with a main focus being collecting funds for the Order in Augsburg. But in this year, he was charged for embezzling donated funds that originally were raised for war against the Turks.⁸³ He was threatened with excommunication and imprisonment until a papal commission wrote to the bishop of Augsburg which led to the charges being dropped yet again.⁸⁴ Though he was protected to a certain extent by his position within the Dominican Order, he experienced an impressive series of clashes with Church authority prior to the publication of *The Malleus*. Much of this could be attributed to the fact that he was an egotistical person with a fragile self-image, resulting in his inability to handle conflict or criticism.

After being appointed Inquisitor in Rome in 1474, Kramer began his first hunts in nearby German towns, the closest being Innsbruck and Tyrol. As Inquisitor he now held official ranking to demonstrate his religious authority to eliminate heresy. He began writing short and informal manuals with the intention of them being used for judges in these earliest trials.⁸⁵ He found the city of Tyrol to be a major destination for witches; it was the first territory he ventured into coming back from Rome, where he could prove himself most active. In each German territory, he slowly gained local official authority to conduct full trials under each bishop's name

⁸² Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 24

⁸³ Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 29

⁸⁴ Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 25-26

⁸⁵ Gary K. Waite. *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 47

alongside his Inquisitorial authority that was already regionally established. In the initial German regions he traveled through, he preached not only scripture, but about the threat of witches, encouraging any and all accusations.

During these travels and the early manuals he wrote, he produced a draft of *The Malleus* by 1487. This discussed the threat of witchcraft and how he felt it should be approached religiously and legally. He attempted to get this manuscript endorsed through the faculty at the University of Cologne but was not successful. In this same year, he met and joined forces with Jacob Sprenger; this was when the final *Malleus* was formed and finalized.⁸⁶

Jacob Sprenger, born in 1436, grew up in the Rheinfelden region in Austria.⁸⁷ Though much less is known of his upbringing, Sprenger joined the Dominican Order in 1452. His greatest achievements before publishing *The Malleus* included being the founder of the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary in Germany while earning his doctorate in Theology at the University of Cologne in 1480 where he lectured and later became the Dean.⁸⁸ From his growing reputation through his lectures, in 1481 he was appointed Inquisitor for several territories in western Germany.

Kramer sought out Sprenger, likely due to his new Holy jurisdiction over western German provinces. Having the endorsement of the prestigious University of Cologne proved to be crucial.⁸⁹ Getting *The Malleus* endorsed by the faculty of the Theology department there posed a new set of challenges for the pair, as it was formally rejected once; but soon after all of the faculty signatures were added after a second attempt, it was officially fully endorsed. This

⁸⁶ Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 33

⁸⁷ Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 22

⁸⁸ Waite, *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft*, 52

⁸⁹ Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 19

has since caused a historical debate over whether signatures were forged or not, with most scholars believing they were.

Ultimately, Sprenger and Kramer experienced personal issues that years later caused their split. But as they first began their relationship, the two worked well together; since Sprenger was well-liked and a very respected scholar at this time in Germany, Kramer knew this would only add to his image and reputation.⁹⁰

The Malleus introduces itself to the reader by opening with the papal bull written by Pope Innocent VIII. Titled “*Summis Desiderantes*” written in 1484; this bull acts as a formal letter recognizing witchcraft as a real threat while giving the Inquisitors absolute authority to hunt witches. It was written after Kramer’s insistence on having full authority to find and condemn witches.⁹¹ Germany was a highly divided region made up of hundreds of principalities under different forms of rule, and tensions among many areas did not allow the Inquisition within their borders.⁹² This bull gave Kramer a unified sense of authority that surpassed all of those formalities, allowing him to go anywhere he pleased to carry out his searches.

The papal bull was a radical document, asserting that too many people across Germany were guilty of apostasy, the act of straying from the Church, by serving the devil instead, particularly in the forms of incubi and succubi through conjuring, spells, and sacrifices.⁹³ Incubi and succubi are particularly important to note, as a main basis of witchcraft in the Church’s eyes was sexual in nature. Incubi were demons that created a pact with women through sex, whereas

⁹⁰ Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 21

⁹¹ Gerhild Williams. *Defining Dominion: The Discourses of Magic and Witchcraft in Early Modern France and Germany*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995, 124-125

⁹² Lyndal Roper. *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, 42

⁹³ Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, xliii-xlv

succubi were demons that created a pact with men through sex.⁹⁴ Pope Innocent then goes on to explain the unfortunate limitations Kramer and Sprenger faced in trying to combat this threat of witchcraft. He ordered all of the principalities to grant them full permission and respect in order to carry out their holy duties. He finished the Bull with stern caution, revealing that if anyone is to hinder the inquisitors in any way, they will face excommunication and possibly “more terrible penalties”, going so far as to even cite the wrath of God specifically in driving these punishments.⁹⁵ Without this Bull, Kramer and Sprenger would not have been able to carry out the witch hunts they did, and *The Malleus* may not have gained as much power as it did.

The book consists of three sections. The first section, striking and direct, “defines” witchcraft for the reader. This section is made up of a series of questions that tackle all questions regarding witches while instilling urgency in the reader. We uncover the root explanation of how witchcraft occurs--by the process that the devil exists only through God and that God is either testing the faithful or punishing the heretics. According to Kramer in this section, witches are not powerful or creatures of strength but rather simple and vulnerable women who are susceptible to evil.⁹⁶ In discussing the pact women make with the devil through sex, he writes, “Let us now chiefly consider women; and first, why this kind of perfidy is found more in so fragile a sex than in men.”⁹⁷

Kramer questions religious morality in the belief of witches, asking the reader if it is within Christian doctrine to suspect witchcraft or if the belief itself is heresy.⁹⁸ He affirms that the search for witches is not heresy, as they are a real threat and the only thing questionable

⁹⁴ Roper, *Witch Craze*, 112

⁹⁵ Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, xlv

⁹⁶ Mary E. Wiesner. *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 98

⁹⁷ Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 41

⁹⁸ Sprenger and Kramer. *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 7-9

about it would be denying their existence; he explains that only someone ignorant or a fellow witch would dare do so. He elaborates, saying, “God allows [the devil] sometimes to do harm...God is using the devil, unwilling though he be, as a servant and slave.” in order to either test the faithful or punish the unfaithful.⁹⁹

A common theme throughout this first part of *The Malleus* is the relationship between witches, God, and the devil.¹⁰⁰ He continuously comments on the mutually beneficial dynamic between all three. He believes that while always present, witchcraft had spread in recent times. Because of an increased presence of evil and an increased number of women who were susceptible to demonic vulnerability.¹⁰¹ To further elaborate, “it has been recognized even from the very earliest times...that witchcraft is an evil thing” yet it is only in this time of religious tension and overall uncertainty that its presence has strengthened, according to them.¹⁰²

Even before *The Malleus* came out, both men and women were accused and punished for heresy and diabolical magic¹⁰³. This book only spread the distorted information. One of the most notable things this book did was to reinforce the notion of witchcraft as a sex-specific crime.¹⁰⁴ The first section strongly argues that women are supremely vulnerable to witchcraft, feeding into the misogynistic stereotypes that had emerged during Christianity.

One of the main sources of evil within the witchcraft according to these authors throughout all sections actually, is a woman’s sexuality and lust. Witchcraft, said Sprenger and Kramer, is an attack on men. One charge was that witches stole male genitals producing

⁹⁹ Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 10-11

¹⁰⁰ Brauner, *Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews*, 56

¹⁰¹ Waite, *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft*, 53

¹⁰² Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, xiii

¹⁰³ Alison Rowlands. *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany: Rothenburg, 1561-1652*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, 23-24

¹⁰⁴ Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 265

infertility and lack of libido through spells.¹⁰⁵ Kramer wrote that women not only attack men sexually, but also are known to eat and sacrifice both men and babies.¹⁰⁶ He warns the reader that midwives should be examined and interrogated extra cautiously, as they represent a whole new level of evil within witchcraft.¹⁰⁷ All in all, a running theme in this chapter is the weight of women as child-bearers and sexual creatures as the most threatening part of their gender.

In chapter 2, the authors go into salacious details of this sexual mischief. Men were seduced by women who then revealed themselves as demonic or a witch.¹⁰⁸ Each example portrays the men as not only innocent but as honest victims. Women are portrayed as ravenous and unrelenting in their acts, causing all sorts of problems.¹⁰⁹ One relevant example is one man who lost all of his horses from witchcraft.¹¹⁰ Following this are numerous examples of men losing all of their livestock to strange disease and death, due to witches.

Women made pacts with the devil—an expansion of the nastiness of their gender. The devil is described as a man offering an emotionally or morally vulnerable woman marriage and sex, promising her wealth, company, and happiness--which never come to fruition.¹¹¹ But it is in this act of sex with the devil, that she forms an eternal pact to perform harmful deeds and physical “maleficum.”¹¹² Kramer defines this term as a mutually beneficial agreement to harm another person, that involves both the witch and the devil, and requires a pact in order for any demonic and physical harm to occur.

¹⁰⁵ Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 58

¹⁰⁶ Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 65

¹⁰⁷ Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 66-67

¹⁰⁸ Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 91-96

¹⁰⁹ Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 49

¹¹⁰ Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 97

¹¹¹ Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 278

¹¹² Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 99-100

The transformative power of witches was another focus: they could turn men into beasts and animals.¹¹³ *The Malleus* authors add, however on rare occasions that men could become witches. The book argues that men are only witches in the circumstances that they commit sin, in which a turn of vulnerability allows the devil to enter the man's soul, and possibly is able to occupy the physical body of him, too.

In this mode, witches attack the very heart of Christianity, said the authors, arguing that women could stab crucifixes and curse Mary.¹¹⁴ The death of cattle could be attributed to witches.¹¹⁵ Even the weather was subject to magic. Germany commonly did experience heavy storms, but later on beginning around 1539 to the end of the 17th-century, southwestern Germany had its most severe storms ever up until this point.¹¹⁶ *The Malleus*, which became more widely read during the late 16th-century, became a fixture of trials later on during this exact specific period of time. This can be heavily attributed to this section of this book, as it connects the disastrous hailstorms directly to a real cause. In this time specifically, witch trials increased very dramatically as well, some of them becoming known as the largest waves of trials in history.

Kramer and Sprenger ask—how witchcraft could be cured or destroyed—and answer it by saying only by the death of the witch. Kramer suggests that attempts to remove a spell or hold any ceremonies in an effort to fight witchcraft are both unholy and unlawful.¹¹⁷ They insist that the only real way to abolish witchcraft as a whole is to kill every witch. They also suggest that every person possessed by a demon who is a witch, may have very flighty and fast “lucid

¹¹³ Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 122-123

¹¹⁴ Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 135

¹¹⁵ Erik H. C. Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562-1684*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972, 47

¹¹⁶ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 54-55

¹¹⁷ Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 192

intervals” and that if they do, they must seek out religious help and immediately seek to break the pact with the devil they had once made.¹¹⁸ They explain this by stating that they, “shall not suffer witches to live upon the earth...since this kind can only be exterminated by secular law.”¹¹⁹ Lastly, he does explain that there are ways to alleviate punishments and ailments caused by witchcraft, which mainly include adhering to Catholic practices and maintaining and nourishing a strong relationship with God and the Church. The authors describe this as the “ultimate remedy.”¹²⁰

The Malleus includes an analysis of witchcraft from a legal and judicial standpoint. Witchcraft is not something the Inquisition needs to battle, but something every person must be aware of and have a desire to fight, in order to eradicate it completely. Only the inquisitorial courts, they argue, can deal with this—not even the ecclesiastical ones are fit for this purpose.¹²¹ They elaborate on this explaining, “when the crime is not purely ecclesiastical, as is the case with witches because of the temporal injuries which they commit, it must be punished by the Civil and not by the Ecclesiastical Court.”¹²² Kramer cites canon law first explaining that normally there are three ways to formally begin a trial. First, someone must accuse another person in front of a judge and adhere to punishment if their evidence is found not true. Second, a person can denounce another person without evidence, claiming that he cannot provide any due to faith. Third, inquisitors may be used when there is no one providing an accusation or any information-- rather, the inquisition relies on word of mouth and travels to areas that claim to have witchcraft.¹²³ This was the main method used throughout Germany during this era. This type of

¹¹⁸ Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 193

¹¹⁹ Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 193

¹²⁰ Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 193-194

¹²¹ Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 31-32

¹²² Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 195

¹²³ Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 205-206

trial became dominant, because the inquisitors would commonly suggest, urge, or pressure false confessions out of each town, fueling accusatory and denunciation methods through a blanket of disguising it as inquisitorial.¹²⁴

Even if the other methods were used, the inquisition would be required to step in and produce further confessions and details.¹²⁵ This made inquisitors critical. Court procedures were very strict in terms of roles--but little to no experience or formal requirements was needed.¹²⁶ Notaries, scribes, judges, witnesses, executioners, torturers, and priests all played major roles in each trial. First, either the person--or inquisitor--coming forward with an accusation or information must present their findings to the judge.¹²⁷ An oath under God is taken, and the judge directly asks questions to determine the case. Another reason the inquisitorial method is the most cited could be the fact that it allows the accuser to remain anonymous and does not require them to present themselves before a judge and witnesses.¹²⁸

The next step is the examination of all witnesses, which was used as direct evidence under oath. Next, the witch is brought to interrogation and questioning, where they are tortured to either confess or are sent back to their cell. They are only then brought to the judge for their confession to be repeated formally without torture and to be sentenced, and then they are returned to wait for their execution in the days to follow.¹²⁹ Otherwise, if they refuse to confess, they are brought back to their cell and will undergo interrogation until they do confess. During execution they are brought out publicly; in Germany they were most commonly hung. In extreme

¹²⁴ Rowlands, *Witchcraft Narratives*, 68

¹²⁵ Waite, *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft*, 122

¹²⁶ Johannes Dillinger, "The Political Aspects of the German Witch Hunts." *Magic, Ritual & Witchcraft* 4, no. 1 (Summer 2009): 75. doi: 10.1353/mrw.0.0121, 71-72

¹²⁷ Sprenger and Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 210

¹²⁸ Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 54

¹²⁹ Waite, *Magic, Heresy, and Witchcraft*, 73

cases, bodies would be burned after hanging, as well, as a form of severe punishment for the soul.¹³⁰ Since witchcraft was a very special and extraordinary type of heresy according to Kramer, it was treated and justified in its punishments as such.

Most rational people do not believe in witches, but history shows that previous society did. The torture and persecution of people, mostly women, for this cause plagued Europe for several hundred years between the 14th to 17th centuries and spread rapidly throughout Germany for several long waves.¹³¹ *The Malleus* was critical in reinforcing hysteria about witchcraft, as it was heavily referenced and re-printed throughout all of Germany for centuries.¹³² It created this sense of witchcraft being a communal lifestyle instead of a single heinous act, as previously thought. This encouraged more accusations which led to more trials. Although rumors involving topics like orgies, flight, and sabbaths were viewed as skeptical at best at first, they spread more after this publication.¹³³ By 1500, even Pope Alexander VI made it papal policy to combat witchcraft in all regions after the publication of this book.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Roper, *Witch Craze*, 124

¹³¹ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 44-45

¹³² Williams, *Defining Dominion*, 22

¹³³ Waite, *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft*, 183

¹³⁴ Kors, *Witchcraft in Europe*, 189

Chapter IV:

In order to grasp how witchcraft became such a strong focus in Germany throughout the 14th to 17th centuries, we must understand it from a context of a gender perspective. One main issue emerges that is central to German history, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, and the waves of trials that overtook the country for years: women were at the center of it all.

From Genesis onwards, Christianity viewed women as the “temptress and corruptor” and inferior and weaker than men, because of their lust and sexuality.¹³⁵ Women were consistently treated by the Church as inferior to men. Much of early Christian writing portrays women as being the cause of man’s downfall--the disastrous, sexually ravenous being that man had no choice but to fall victim for. Women were not just inferior beings but were deemed “a projection of man’s sinful desire.”¹³⁶

Women’s daily life in the late 14th to early 15th centuries in Europe was far from easy. Women’s rights remained extremely limited politically and legally, though socially they often broke away from their limitations. By law, men inherited, and women did not, though they are many examples of where women did inherit. Working class girls were raised with gender-specific tasks to be learned such as pinning, sewing, cooking, and agricultural tasks.¹³⁷

One cannot discuss witchcraft without referencing the Christian Church’s ingrained belief in the destructive sexuality of women. St. Augustine, for example, asserted that women were

¹³⁵ Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages*, New York: Routledge, 2003, 277

¹³⁶ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 277

¹³⁷ Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 54

subordinate by nature and morally inept due to their lustful sexuality.¹³⁸ He based this on writing from Aristotle, who fifteen hundred years earlier had written that women in fact were simply “imperfect men.”¹³⁹ Nider’s *Formicarius*, published in 1435, highlighted the sexual nature of witchcraft in relation to the incubi and succubi, which was later highlighted in *The Malleus*.¹⁴⁰ Nider published this book during the Council of Basel and included 25 manuscripts to illuminate the threat of witchcraft even this early on in the 15th century. All of these beliefs hinged around the concept of women being highly promiscuous beings.

Despite restrictions, women were central in many areas of both rural and urban life. Especially in the farms, women played a large and powerful role, working alongside men in agriculture, markets, and within the home sphere.¹⁴¹ During the witchcraft craze, single women, either unmarried or widowed, were particular targets of accusation. It was less common to accuse married women. Marriage acted as a measurement of social maturity and achievement; men and women gained more responsibility and acceptance within their society.¹⁴²

The stereotypical image of the witch actually tended to be an older, single woman. Though it is accurate to say that the clergy helped create this stereotype for women, many other factors came into play. In the earlier years, people did believe in and practice the magic of the cosmos, astrology, and natural elements.¹⁴³ Necromancy, love spells, and popular magic were practiced in the early medieval years. Eventually though, all forms of magic became seen as

¹³⁸ Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 57

¹³⁹ Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 58

¹⁴⁰ Alan Charles Kors. *Witchcraft in Europe 400-1700: A Documentary History*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1973, 43

¹⁴¹ Tracy Oberman. *Handbook of European History, 1400-1600 : Late Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999, 32

¹⁴² Waite, *Heresy and Magic*, 75

¹⁴³ Norman Cohn. *Europe’s Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973, 104

harmful magic, and by the time that the Inquisition began searching for it, any women who still practiced any forms of ritual or older magic were deemed witches.

Before the 1400s, both men and women were seen as spiritually vulnerable.¹⁴⁴ This meant that they posed no physical threat or harm to others but were seen as morally heretical and religiously threatening. It was only after the growing popularity of *The Malleus*, that the focus was turned to women specifically. *The Malleus* argues that women were driven toward this evil pact with the devil due to an inherent, carnal lust. It was believed that in order to become a witch, the woman and the devil would copulate and in doing so, create a spiritual pact to commit evil. Heinrich Kramer believed that women did not choose to become witches, but that they rather intrinsically were. Kramer believed the witch craze was women-specific because he viewed women as transitioning from this “wanton woman” to the “bad wife”¹⁴⁵.

Kramer’s beliefs influenced many other authoritative figures throughout different regions, including Jean Bodin, a French philosopher who wrote on demonology. Bodin argued that women were up to fifty times more susceptible to witchcraft than men, which is why witches were almost always women.¹⁴⁶ He viewed women as sexually weak in nature, and sexuality ultimately is what became believed to be the cause of witchcraft itself.

The young Martin Luther claimed to have met several witches during his childhood and early life. Luther ended up writing about these memories that spread among preachers and pamphlet makers during the early 1500s, which encouraged parallel beliefs.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Sigrid Brauner. *Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews: The Construction of the Witch in Early Modern Germany*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995, 54

¹⁴⁵ Brauner, *Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews*, 72

¹⁴⁶ Alison Rowlands. *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany: Rothenburg, 1561-1652*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, 212

¹⁴⁷ Waite, *Heresy and Magic*, 173

From this, it was commonly encouraged by the Church that the devil preyed on women who were more vulnerable. By the 16th century, though witchcraft was deemed an extreme form of heresy specifically, the actual prosecution of the charge transitioned from accusatory to inquisitorial, giving the Inquisition full authority legally.¹⁴⁸ It was thought that the women who were deemed witches were either those experiencing misfortune or those simply lonely or isolated from society.¹⁴⁹ Since *The Malleus* made witchcraft sex-specific, and vulnerable women became targets, the stereotype solidified; women who were aged 50 years or older were most commonly accused. Many poorer women, or those more dependent on their communities and neighbors were commonly victims, as well.¹⁵⁰ Even *The Malleus* discusses that witches are commonly found in lower socioeconomic classes. With infertility being a great fear, many post-menopausal women were accused as well.¹⁵¹ Overall, any misfortunes that were not attributed to a specific cause would be directly then tied to witchcraft. A very crucial part of the accusatory process to understand as well was that if you were related to anyone who was at any point accused or tried--that made you extremely suspicious and would lead to you most likely being accused next.¹⁵²

The Malleus commonly describes the devil as a man who seduces the woman with money, love, or anything she may lack in her life.¹⁵³ This perpetuates this idea of women being weaker and inferior. In this sense then, the devil owned these women through their act of

¹⁴⁸ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 272

¹⁴⁹ Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 112

¹⁵⁰ Rowland, *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany*, 68

¹⁵¹ Rowland, *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany*, 73

¹⁵² Waite, *Heresy and Magic*, 91

¹⁵³ Lyndal Roper. *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, 121

foolishly sacrificing their free will in exchange for empty promises. Within the established stereotype, certain types of women were commonly targeted as witches.

Wet nurses and midwives, two common professions for women, were particularly vulnerable to accusations.¹⁵⁴ This was at a time when infant mortality rates were so high, midwives and wet nurses were especially suspect.¹⁵⁵ The concept of the witch's sabbath, in which where infanticide, the act of killing a baby, was a main component was another main theme. These mythical events were also said to be marked by orgies, emphasizing witchcraft as a communal, group sin. Sexual insecurity revolving around women was the main underlying theme throughout the witch craze. *The Malleus* went as far as blaming witchcraft even for infertility and at the most extreme, for causing male genitalia to disappear.¹⁵⁶ Infertility was a heightened fear, and this gave it a cause that could be explained. This is why cattle dying, agricultural failure, poisoning, sudden deaths, infant deaths, and such were all thought to be signs of possible witchcraft practices.¹⁵⁷

In addition to causing malformations and deaths, witches, especially in the southwestern region, were also believed to affect weather.¹⁵⁸ The height of German trials in the early 16th century, the region was plagued by constant hailstorms. These storms devoured crops, destroyed homes, and raised suspicion. A particularly bad storm in 1539 reaffirmed a rising theory within the Church. It was believed that the devil had the ability to tell when God was going to send a

¹⁵⁴ Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 125

¹⁵⁵ Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 219

¹⁵⁶ Gerhild Williams. *Defining Dominion: The Discourses of Magic and Witchcraft in Early Modern France and Germany*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995, 132

¹⁵⁷ Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 242

¹⁵⁸ Erik H. C. Midelfort. *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562-1684*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972, 178

storm and then would simultaneously ask the witches that served him to create a storm--causing these witches to incorrectly believe they had indeed caused it.¹⁵⁹

This was tied to the growing idea that women were indeed impressionable, weak, and foolish. Many respected male figures at this time had even argued in favor of women being these delusional and less intelligent beings, supporting this argument by saying that it would be impossible that women could actually logically cause storms themselves while they are commonly incapable of simpler tasks.¹⁶⁰ This is why witches were thought to be older women who were deemed mentally unstable or unfit.¹⁶¹ The earlier texts of Gratian, written in the 4th century, discuss this matter extensively; he furthered this by stating, “only a fool believes that which takes place in the spirit also occurs in the body”, alluding to the delusional nature of women¹⁶². Any previous ritualistic magic, including folk magic and natural magic which had been practiced for hundreds of years, was now seen as a threat. Small portions of those accused were in fact simply those who still practiced herbal medicine and healing. Some were simply failed midwives, other prostitutes, and some simply were those considered promiscuous.¹⁶³ This explains the transition from pre-Christian accepted magic that was performed by both genders to witchcraft as a women-specific act.

Idolatry, or the presumed worship or anything outside of the Christian Church, was seen as the root cause. Spiritual idolatry was seen as a great sin, but physical idolatry, which commonly was what separated heresy from witchcraft, was deemed far worse, becoming the

¹⁵⁹ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 184

¹⁶⁰ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 202

¹⁶¹ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 280

¹⁶² Brian P. Levack. *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 72

¹⁶³ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 275

focus of defense for the Church.¹⁶⁴ Spiritual idolatry meant holding religious beliefs outside of Church doctrine, whereas physical idolatry meant doing so through causing physical harm or magic, as well.

The sexual pact with the devil comes from the concept of dark or ritual magic in earlier years involving invoking demons.¹⁶⁵ The witch craze in German lands developed from the hunts for Waldensians and heresy. It is vital to note that many women were Waldensians, many of which would be vulnerable to accusations.¹⁶⁶ Catharism, which also spread throughout this 14th-century in German lands, was the other main religious threat to the Church.¹⁶⁷

Women did hold religious roles in the later years of the witch craze in Germany during the Protestant Reformation. The later peak of the worst of the German trials coincided with the Protestant Reformation; consecrated women were respected within the Church until this point, when the Reformation abolished convents, limiting women's sphere even more.¹⁶⁸ Nunneries were crucial for women at this time, from seeking religious fulfillment to providing women with a lifestyle that differed from secular and married society. From genuine religious desire, to fear of marriage, for widows avoiding a second marriage, for freedom from male authority, or even economic or familial reasons.¹⁶⁹ Without this, women's roles now were re-established with a greater emphasis on the family, which had been a constant for centuries. Male dominated moral codes and societal expectations were strengthened, sparking a new pressure on women as they developed to become the center of magic, heresy, and what would become the witch craze.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁴ Brauner, *Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews*, 183

¹⁶⁵ Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 82

¹⁶⁶ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 259

¹⁶⁷ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 260

¹⁶⁸ Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, 91

¹⁶⁹ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, 264-265

¹⁷⁰ Oberman, *Handbook of European History*, 42

In the trials themselves, witnesses brought forward under pressure would name specific families or women in group accusations, and then each witch would be tortured to name a high number of other witches, snowballing into constant, growing accusations.¹⁷¹ This created the idea that witchcraft was not a single sexual act of heresy, but indeed a real, much larger, sexually driven religious and physical threat that was spreading across these German regions. From one single southwest region alone, 3,229 people were executed--almost all thought to be women according to what records exist. In Baden-Wurttemberg and Bavaria, over 9,000 people were recorded as executed at this time as well. They were almost all women as well--the rarer cases of men being accused and found guilty of witchcraft in these regions, typically occurred due to a man being related to a woman found guilty.¹⁷² Interestingly enough, from the theory that witchcraft sprouted from the relationship with the devil, the proportion of those accused being women rose dramatically in the 15th century onward.

With the rise of the Church, growing suspicion of heresy, the publication of *The Malleus*, and women's role within society morphing, we can comprehend why the witch hunts held women and female sexuality to blame. Understanding the general history of events, alongside analyzing key sources such as *The Malleus*, this period of German witchcraft can only accurately be studied through this gender perspective.

¹⁷¹ Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 140

¹⁷² Erik H. C. Midelfort, "Witch Craze? Beyond the Legends of Panic." *Magic, Ritual & Witchcraft* 6, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 11-33. Doi: 10.1353/mrw.2011.0011

Bibliography:

Primary Sources:

Sprenger, Jacob and Heinrich Kramer. *The Malleus Maleficarum*. Translated by Montague

Summers. London: John Rodker, 1928. Reprinted ed. Minneola: Dover, 1971.

Secondary Sources:

Books:

Brauner, Sigrid. *Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews: The Construction of the Witch in Early Modern Germany*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995

Broedel, Hans. *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.

Cohn, Norman. *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973

Kors, Alan Charles. *Witchcraft in Europe 400-1700: A Documentary History*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1973

Levack, Brian P. *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013

Levack, Brian. *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*. New York: Rutledge, 2003.

Midelfort, Erik H. C. *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562-1684*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972

Oberman, Tracy. *Handbook of European History, 1400-1600 : Late Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999

Roper, Lyndal. *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, 121

Rowlands, Alison. *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany: Rothenburg, 1561-1652*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003

Shahar, Shulamith. *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages*, New York: Routledge, 2003

Waite, Gary K. *Heresy, Magic, and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003

Wiesner, Mary E. *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000

Williams, Gerhild. *Defining Dominion: The Discourses of Magic and Witchcraft in Early Modern France and Germany*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999

Articles:

Dillinger, Johannes. "The Political Aspects of the German Witch Hunts." *Magic, Ritual*

& *Witchcraft* 4, no. 1 (Summer 2009): 62-81. doi: 10.1353/mrw.0.0121

Hoak, Dale. "The Great European Witch-Hunts: A Historical Perspective." *American Journal of Sociology* 88, no. 6 (May 1983): 1270–74. doi:10.1086/227806.

Midelfort, H. C. Erik. "Witch Craze? Beyond the Legends of Panic." *Magic, Ritual & Witchcraft* 6, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 11-33. doi: 10.1353/mrw.2011.0011.

Rothman, David and Steven Marcus. *Medicine and Western Civilization*. Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 1995, ISBN 9780813521909.

Swales, J. K.1, and Hugh V.2 McLachlan. "Witchcraft and the Status of Women: A Comment." *British Journal of Sociology* 30, no. 3 (September 1979): 349–58. doi:10.2307/589913.