

HISTORY OF WESTERN WITCHCRAFT

HISTORY 4485-04W

Spring 2009

Dr. Charles "Skip" Clark
School

OFFICE: Cobb Hall Graduate

TUES/THUR 12:30-1:45 pm

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CLASSROOM: Pafford 206

Office Hours: Wed. 1:30-3:30, TH. 2:00-3:30 and by appt.

NOTE: A "W" designation after a section number of a 3000- or 4000-level course signifies that the course is a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) course. WAC accepts as a guiding principle the idea that writing is a valuable tool for learning and communication. Therefore, the writing components of a course so designated are designed to help you learn the material and communicate what you have learned.

SYLLABUS

"You shall not allow a *witch* to live."

---Exodus, 22:18 [King James translation]

"...[S]ome wicked women, perverted by the Devil, seduced by illusions and phantasms of demons, believe and profess themselves, in the hours of the night, to ride upon certain beasts with Diana, the goddess of the pagans,...and in the silence of the dead of night to traverse great spaces of earth...and to obey her commands as of their mistress. But I wish it were they alone who perished in their faithlessness...for an innumerable multitude, deceived by this false opinion, believe this to be true [i.e., that these women are 'witches'], and so believing, wander from the faith and are involved in the error of the pagans when they think that there is anything of divinity or power except the one God."

----Gratian, Canon Episcopi (A Warning to Bishops), 1140)

"To disbelieve in witchcraft is the greatest of all heresies."

----Jakob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer, Malleus Maleficarum (1486)

"Human collectivities, large and small, certainly are capable of grotesque and monstrous deeds--no century has proved it more abundantly than our own. Nevertheless, there is no good reason to think that [witches' sabbats] ever happened; we have examined case after case and have found hardly any where the accusation did not include manifestly impossible features."

----Norman Cohn, Europe's Inner Demons (1975)

"Witchcraft is a notion so foreign to us that it is hard for us to appreciate Zande [an African tribe] convictions about its reality. Let it be remembered that it is no less hard for Azande to appreciate our ignorance and disbelief about the subject. I once heard a Zande say about us: 'Perhaps in their country people are not murdered by witches, but here [i.e., Africa] they are.'"

---E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande(1937)

"Looked upon in the light of a fertility cult, the ritual of witches becomes comprehensible. Originally for the promotion of fertility, it became gradually degraded into a method for blasting fertility, and thus the witches who had once been the means of bringing prosperity to the people and the land by driving out all evil influences, in the process of time were looked upon as being themselves the evil influences, and were held in horror accordingly."

----Margaret Murray, The Witch-Cult in Western Europe(1921)

“The fancies of the late Margaret Murray need not detain us. They were justly, if irritably, dismissed by a real scholar as ‘vapid balderdash’ [C.L. Ewen, Some Witchcraft Criticisms, (1938)].”

--Hugh Trevor-Roper, The European Witch-craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (1969)

“...Witchcraft is a religion, perhaps the oldest religion extant in the West. Its origins go back before Christianity, Judaism, Islam--before Buddhism and Hinduism, as well, and it is very different from all of the so-called great religions. The Old Religion, as we call it, is closer in spirit to Native American or the shamanism of the Arctic....Witchcraft takes its teachings from nature, and reads inspiration in the movements of the sun, moon, stars, the flight of birds, the slow growth of trees, and the cycles of the seasons....A Witch is a ‘shaper,’ a creator who bends the unseen into form, and so becomes one of the Wise, one whose life is infused with magic....Love for Life in all its forms is the basic ethic of Witchcraft....Serving the life force means working to preserve the diversity of natural life, to prevent the poisoning of the environment and the destruction of species....The Goddess [of the old religion] does not rule the world; She **is** the world....The image of the Goddess inspires women to see ourselves as divine, our bodies as sacred, our anger as purifying, and our power to nurture and create, but also to limit and destroy when necessary, as the very force which sustains all life.”

----Starhawk, The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess (1979)

“We must especially observe that this heresy, witchcraft, not only differs from all other heresy in this, that not merely by a tacit compact, but by a compact which is exactly defined and expressed it blasphemes the Creator and endeavours to the utmost to profane Him and to harm His creatures, for all other simple heresies have made no open compact with the devil, no compact that is, either tacit or expressed, although their errors and misbelief are directly to be attributed to the Father of errors and lies. Moreover, witchcraft differs from all other harmful and mysterious arts in this point, that of all superstition it is essentially the vilest, the most evil and the worst, wherefore it derives its name from doing evil, and from blaspheming the true faith.”

----Malleus Maleficarum (1486)

As you can see from the above selections, the very nature of witchcraft was and still is a matter of considerable debate among historians, anthropologists, and others. In fact, the quotations above represent merely the tip of the iceberg. Few historical topics have been as intensely debated as that of witchcraft. The very existence of historical witches has been ardently defended and denied by numerous scholars. In previous centuries, the existence of witches was real because the Devil himself was real and a tempter of souls. The Devil, however, could make people believe anything, even that they were witches when, in fact, some argued, witches did not exist. Instead, the Devil, as some insisted, seduced certain people into believing they actually were witches. This, indeed, is the attitude of the early Christian Church, dating from the Canon episcopi of the tenth century (included in Gratian’s Decretals).

Other historians have seen witches as symbolic of the social protest movements of the early modern period. In this scenario, witches are “victims” of repression on the part of authorities trying to establish rigid conformity to the prevailing ideology in a time when everything is breaking down. Society needs scapegoats and, in this case, scholars argue, local people found witches to fulfill that function. Some see witches as scapegoats of the changing nature of charity as a result, in part, of the Protestant Reformation where witches “cursed” those who refused them charity. Others have seen witches as protesters of their dreary lives who turn to fantasy as a means of protest. In their hovels, according to Jules Michelet, the nineteenth-century historian, women placed their hopes, dreams, and wishes on the Fairies and the witches they imagined inhabiting the world around them. These powerless women invested these supernatural creatures with a power to

help or harm, and to live lives they could not themselves. So, witchcraft might be seen as a rebellion of women against the patriarchal structure of the Christian Church and society of the early modern period.

Witchcraft as rebellion, as protest, as a means to explain evil in society, as a demonic way of attempting to destroy Christianity, as invention of the power structure to suppress the common people, as a survival of the oldest form of religion, all of these and more have been advanced as reasons for the existence of witches. However, did witches really exist? Did certain people, especially women, believe themselves capable of performing magical acts affecting others? Who were the witches or who were those accused of being witches? What were the characteristics of a witch and how were those characteristics developed and by whom? Why were the majority (80-90%) of those executed for witchcraft in Europe women? What caused the “witch-craze” of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe and America? Why did the witch craze occur at the same time that colonists were settling the New World, the scientific revolution was under way and the Renaissance and Reformation were changing the way people looked at the world? How did demonologists, victims, accusers and judges work together to fashion the idea of the witch and witchcraft? What was the relationship between theology and witchcraft? Why has there been a resurgence in the interest in witchcraft? Is there really any connection between the primitive “mother goddess” religions and witchcraft (or Wicca), as many believe? Is witchcraft, therefore, the oldest of all religions? What is the significance of the study of witchcraft for us today? Is there any relevance in the term “witch-hunts” as used now to depict certain practices of one group toward another? We will consider these and many other questions during the term.

Learning Outcomes:

Students completing this class successfully will be able

- to summarize the major schools of thought on the problems of interpreting the history of witchcraft;
- to identify the major causes of the witchhunts;
- to recognize stereotypes of “witches” and their origins;
- to demonstrate an understanding of the literature of witchcraft through oral and written presentations;
- and to demonstrate an understanding of the origins and development of modern “witchcraft” and its various forms.

Required books:

Levack, Brian P. (ed.) The Witchcraft Sourcebook. New York: Routledge, 2004

Levack, Brian P. The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe. 3rd Ed. New York: Longman, 2006

Magliocco, Sabina. Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004

Rosenthal, Bernard. Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Procedures, policies, etc.:

Class meetings: Students are expected to attend class each day and to participate in the class discussions. More than **two** unexcused absences will result in a lower final grade. Please make sure that all cell phones, pagers, etc., are turned off before coming into the classroom. Also, disruptive students will be removed from the class rolls.

Tests, Quizzes, etc.: There will be **two** tests covering the material in the reading assignments and a **final exam** that will have at least one cumulative question on it. If class discussion wanes, “pop quizzes” on the assignments may be given. Students with documented special needs must see me to make special arrangements for test taking and/or other needs.

Writing Assignments:

1) **Case study:** In the paper, you will discuss the main and common elements of the trials, the methods of the questioners, and what these trials tell you about the nature of witchcraft beliefs and practices as understood at the time. You will find the trials in Levack, Brian P. (ed.) *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*. Pp. 190-197 “Elizabeth Sawyer,” and pp. 203-209, “The Witch-Hunt at Eichstätt.” This paper will be due **20 January 2009 by class time**. 5%

2) **Research Paper:** Students will prepare a seven-ten page research paper on a question related to this class. We will discuss topical questions in class. The instructor must approve all paper topics. We will discuss the requirements for the paper in class. You will be graded, however, on content, form, grammar, and spelling. A completed draft of the paper is due **7 April 2009 by class time (10%)**. You will revise the paper and turn in the final copy by **28 April 2009 by class time (15%)**. These sites might be useful: <http://academic.bowdoin.edu/WritingGuides/>. To use the standard History citation method, see this site by Diana Hacker. <http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/> or this one by Longwood College: <http://www.longwood.edu/history/HDPTSTS2.htm>

3) **A two-three page Argumentative Essay on source(s) of witches and witchcraft:** On the first day of class, we will generate a list of the ideas and sources associated with witches and witchcraft. You will prepare a paper discussing at least five of the ideas, words, etc., from that list and their origin(s). This is not a research paper; you will write the paper from your readings and in-class notes. **Due: 3 March 2009.**

Class discussions: Students will complete the reading assignments on the days listed below. Class discussion is an integral part of the class and an important part of your grade. Please come prepared ready to contribute to the class discussions.

Plagiarism: Please look at the Department of History’s policy on plagiarism: www.westga.edu/~history/plagiarismhtm.htm . No work prepared for another class is acceptable in this course. Students who plagiarize will flunk the course and may be referred for other disciplinary action.

NOTE: Please bring 3 small blue books to class for use in taking your tests. You should write your name in the upper right-hand corner of the blue book. Please turn those in by the end of the second week of class.

This syllabus is subject to change, so please attend class to keep up with assignments.

Grading:

The final grade for the course will consist of the following:

Assignments #1, 3 @ 5% each	10%
Research paper	15%
Draft	10%
1st test	15%
2nd test	15%
Class participation	15%
(Includes in-class writing and “pop” quizzes if needed)	
Final Exam	<u>20%</u>
	100%

Schedule:

January

8 **Introduction: definition of “Witch” and “Witchcraft” by class**

Part I: The Ancient and Medieval Roots of the Witch-Hunts

13 Witchcraft and Magic in the Ancient World

 Reading: Levack, Witch-hunt, Preface and ch. 1; Levack, Sourcebook, Introduction and part I pp. 5-26.

15 Witchcraft and Magic in the Ancient World (con’d)

 Reading: Levack, Witch-hunt, Preface and ch. 1; Levack, Sourcebook, Introduction and part I pp. 5-26.

20 Witchcraft and Magic in the Early Medieval Period

 Reading: Levack, Witch-hunt, ch. 2; Levack, Sourcebook, pp.27-38

22 Witchcraft and Magic in the Early Medieval Period (con’d)—The Devil, the Pact and the Sabbat(h)

 Reading: Levack, Witch-hunt, ch. 2; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 39-68

Case Study paper due by class time

27 Witchcraft and Magic in the Early Medieval Period (con’d)—The Devil, the Pact and the Sabbat(h)

 Reading: Levack, Witch-hunt, ch. 2; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 39-68

Part II: THE AGE OF THE WITCH-HUNTS

- 29 Witchcraft and Magic in the Later Medieval Period—The Legal Foundations
Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 3; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 117-144

February

- 3 Witchcraft and Magic in the Later Medieval Period—The Legal Foundations
(con'd)
Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 3; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 117-144

- 5 The Reformation and Its Impact on Witchcraft Beliefs and Prosecutions
Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 4; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 69-103

- 10 The Reformation and Its Impact on Witchcraft Beliefs and Prosecutions (con'd)—
Catholics, Protestants and stereotypes
Reading: same; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 104-116

12 FIRST HOUR EXAMINATION

- 17 TBA

- 19 The Social Context—Who Were the Witches? I. Context
Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 5; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 173-209

- 24 The Social Context—Who Were the Witches? II. Gender and Witchcraft
Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 5; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 210-219

- 26 The Trials: Dynamics, Chronology and Geography
Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 6-7

March

- 3 The Trials: Dynamics, Chronology and Geography (con'd)
Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 6-7

Two-Three page paper on Sources of Witches and Witchcraft Due by Class

PART III: The American Context of Witchcraft

- 5 Witchcraft at Salem—Background and Context--Movie
Reading: Rosenthal, Salem Story, Introduction and ch. 1

- 10 Witchcraft at Salem—1692
Reading: Rosenthal, Salem Story, ch. 2-6; Levack, Sourcebook,
pp. 220-229; 261-273

- 12 Witchcraft at Salem—1692

Reading: Rosenthal, Salem Story, ch. 7-10

March 16-20 Spring Break

Part IV: Skepticism and the Decline of Witch-hunting

24 Doubts about Witchcraft

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 8; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 145-172

26 Second Hour Examination

31 Doubts about Witchcraft (con'd)

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 8; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 275-317

PART V: Survival and Revival of Witchcraft Beliefs and Practices

April

2 Survival of magic and witchcraft

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 9

7 Modern Witchcraft: Ideas, Folklore and History

Reading: Magliocco, Witching Culture, Introduction and ch. 1.

First draft of research paper due today by class

9 **No class**

14 TBA

16 Modern Witchcraft: Ideas and History

Reading: Magliocco, Witching Culture, ch. 2-4.

21 Modern Witchcraft—movie

23 Modern Witchcraft—Varieties

Reading: Magliocco, Witching Culture, ch. 5-7.

28 Summary and conclusions

Final revised research paper due today

Final Exam: May 7, 2009 11:00am-1:00pm

***Note:** In addition to the readings for the above, some students might be interested in pursuing the witch in fiction and popular literature. If so, there are several good places to

start: Robert Graves, The White Goddess, Aldous Huxley, The Devils of Loudun (a true story of the possession of a group of nuns in the 17th century, cf. movie “The Devils”), Julio Carlo Baroja, The World of the Witches. Trans. O.N.V. Glendinning, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); Grimm’s fairy tales (as reflections of folk lore), various popular accounts and novels of the Salem witch trials, etc.