

HISTORY OF WESTERN WITCHCRAFT

HISTORY 4485

Dr. Clark

MWF: 10:00-11:45 A.M.

CLASSROOM: Pafford 208* [*Note room change]

Office Hours: MWF 1:00-2:00 P.M.

SUMMER 2006

OFFICE: TLC-3206

678-839-6031

Assigned Readings:

Ankarloo, Bengt and Clark, Stuart (eds.) Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Twentieth Century. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999

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

Levack, Brian P. The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe. 2nd Ed. New York: Longman, 1995. For a brief outline of Levack book see this site.

<http://www.roanoke.edu/history/Leeson/Witchcraft/newlectures.html>

Norton, Mary Beth. In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002

Learning Outcomes:

Students completing this class successfully will be able

- to summarize the major modern schools of thought on the problems of interpreting the history of witchcraft;
- to differentiate between facts, interpretations and inferences concerning the subject 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.

Course Description and Questions to Ponder:

Between about 1500 and 1700, as many as 100,000 people were executed for the crime of witchcraft in Europe and the American colonies. How did that happen? Where did the ideas come from that certain people, especially women, had the magical power to harm people, animals and crops by bewitching them? How were these people identified, prosecuted and executed? Why did the trials and executions stop? What is the relationship between the witchcraft accusations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the revival of modern neo-paganism and Wicca?

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 could make people believe anything, however, even that they were witches when, in fact, some argued, witches did not exist. Instead, as some insisted, certain people were seduced into believing they were witches by the Devil. 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, contemporaries "found" witches to fulfill that function. Some see witches as scapegoats for the changing nature of charity as a result, in part, of the Protestant Reformation. 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 couldn't 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, scholars have advanced all of these reasons and more for the existence of witches. Did witches really exist, however? Did certain people believe themselves capable of performing magical acts affecting others? That is one of the questions we will explore. 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 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 the New World was being settled, the scientific revolution was under way and the Renaissance and Reformation were changing the way people looked at the world? How did victims, accusers and judges work together to create 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, 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.

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. 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. No extra credit assignments will be given.

Papers: There will be **three [3]** papers due for this class. The first paper is a two-three page paper in which you will write a response to your reading of the “cases” from the *Sourcebook* (pp. 179-184, 190-196). In the paper, you will discuss the main features of the trials, the methods of the questioners, the common elements of the trials, and what these trials tell you about the nature of witchcraft beliefs and practices as understood at the time. [More on this paper](#). This paper will be due **June 16, 2006**. The second and third papers will be three-five-page typed double-spaced, typically margined papers in which you will take **one** article each from Levack, Brian. (ed.) *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology*. 6 vols. New York: Routledge, 2001 [BF 1566 .n48 2001] **ON RESERVE AT THE LIBRARY**, and you will write a summary and analysis of the article following the guidelines in the link provided. Click on the link to see [table of contents](#).

The first paper will be due **July 5, 2006** and the second due **July 21, 2006 by 4:00 PM** in my office.

Here is a site from Bowdoin College. <http://academic.bowdoin.edu/WritingGuides/> that may help. 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>

Class discussions: Students will be reading material for their papers that will form an integral part of class discussions of the topics that will be covered.

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:

1st paper	10%
2nd paper	10%
3 rd paper	10%
1st test	20%
2nd test	25%
Class participation (includes presentation and “pop” quizzes if needed)	<u>25%</u>
	100%

[Grading rubric](#): Look at this site to see what constitutes an “A” paper, etc.

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.

Schedule:

June:

5 Witchcraft and Magic in the Ancient World—Near Eastern and Egyptian Roots

In-Class Assignment: Stereotypes of “witches” and “witchcraft”

7 Witchcraft and Magic in the Ancient World—Biblical and Classical Antiquity

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

9 Witchcraft and Magic in the Early Medieval Period

Reading: Levack, Witch-hunt, ch. 2; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 27-8

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

Reading: same; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 31-35

14 Witchcraft and Magic in the Later Medieval Period—Heresy and the Cumulative Concept of Witchcraft

Reading: same; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 36-68

16 Witchcraft and Magic in the Later Medieval Period—The Legal Foundations

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 3

Short Paper Due Today by class time.

19 The Reformation and Its Impact on Witchcraft Beliefs and Prosecutions

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 4; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 69-116.

21 The Social Context—Who Were the Witches? I. Context

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 5

23 The Social Context—Who Were the Witches? II. Gender and Witchcraft—Sexuality, Theology and Witchcraft

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 5; Levack, Sourcebook, Part VI

26 FIRST HOUR EXAMINATION

28 Trial and Punishment of Witches— The legal use of torture

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 6; Levack, Sourcebook, Part IV

30 Trial and Punishment of Witches—The Geographical and Chronological

Scope

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 7; Levack, Sourcebook, Part V, pp.214-219

July

3 **Witchcraft at Salem—Background and Context--Movie**

Reading: Norton, In The Devil's Snare, Introduction and ch. 1; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 220-229; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 261-265

5 **Witchcraft at Salem—1692**

Reading: Norton, In The Devil's Snare, ch. 2-3

First Article Review Due Today

7 **Witchcraft at Salem—1692 and beyond**

Reading: Norton, In The Devil's Snare, ch. 4-conclusion

10 **Doubts about Witchcraft**

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, ch. 8, pp. 238-250; Levack, Sourcebook, pp. 158-172

12 Movie

14 Movie

17 Movie

19 **Survival of magic and witchcraft**

Reading: Levack, Witch-Hunt, pp. 250-260; Ankarloo, The Twentieth Century, Part 3, pp. pp. 141-180

21 **Modern Witchcraft: Ideas and History**

Reading: Ankarloo, The Twentieth Century, “Modern Pagan Witchcraft,” Section 1

Paper Due today by 4:00 P.M.

24 **Modern Witchcraft: Ideas and History**

Reading: Ankarloo, The Twentieth Century, “Modern Pagan Witchcraft,” Section 2

Final Examination July 27: 10-12.

[Useful Sites for the study of Witchcraft](#)