



Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700: A Documentary History

Alan Charles Kors (Editor), Edward Peters (Editor)

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Selected by *Choice* magazine as an Outstanding Academic Book for 2001

The highly-acclaimed first edition of this book chronicled the rise and fall of witchcraft in Europe between the twelfth and the end of the seventeenth centuries. Now greatly expanded, the classic anthology of contemporary texts reexamines the phenomenon of witchcraft, taking into account the remarkable scholarship since the book's publication almost thirty years ago.

Spanning the period from 400 to 1700, the second edition of *Witchcraft in Europe* assembles nearly twice as many primary documents as the first, many newly translated, along with new illustrations that trace the development of witch-beliefs from late Mediterranean antiquity through the Enlightenment. Trial records, inquisitors' reports, eyewitness statements, and witches' confessions, along with striking contemporary illustrations depicting the career of the Devil and his works, testify to the hundreds of years of terror that enslaved an entire continent.

Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, Thomas Hobbes, and other thinkers are quoted at length in order to determine the intellectual, perceptual, and legal processes by which "folklore" was transformed into systematic demonology and persecution. Together with explanatory notes, introductory essays--which have been revised to reflect current research--and a new bibliography, the documents gathered in *Witchcraft in Europe* vividly illumine the dark side of the European mind.

Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700: A Documentary History Details

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Jamjam Panayo says

yeah :]

Amy says

This is a good collection of primary sources on witchcraft crazes. There's a lot of interesting, crazy, scary, infuriating stuff in here. Also, they include many contemporary illustrations of witches, which are always worth a peep. My two complaints are thus: not enough contextual information to go with the primary sources, and the images seem just randomly placed throughout the book without reason or theme. But this is a great source for those starting out on witchcraft information, or for those wanting to delve really deep into the exact language or ideas. Unfortunately, it's not always clear what's been translated by who, when, or from what.

Walt says

Although a bit dense with academic writing, this book provides an excellent overview - if long-winded - of the subject.

Jay says

While this book is a compilation of primary sources - many if not most of them translated from their original languages into English - everything that the editors did (with some exception) to make it easier to read and comprehend was more than welcome. Each author was introduced so that one understood their background, and most of the pieces had a brief summary that came before them, to make reading the actual source easier. Very good compilation, very informative. Excellent, for a textbook.

Lizzie Jones says

Boring, required reading for a class.

Aradia says

Contains writings and documents from the 400-1700ce, with the central topic of witchcraft/magic. Many of the writings are, of course, from ecclesiastical sources. If you have ever wondered where the modern

negative conception of witches or witchcraft originated then this book will be very enlightening-- and surprising: the middle ages were not "The Burning Times", rather, the Renaissance was.

E.M. Powell says

When writing historical fiction, it's always important to access historical research that's as accurate as possible. My fiction is set in twelfth century England and research into events or issues can present challenges with the passage of some eight centuries.

I wished to include the issue of witchcraft or, to be more accurate, sorcery in my current novel. Many books on witchcraft/sorcery tend to concentrate on later centuries but I was thrilled to find entries in this book that covered the time period I needed.

This book chronicles the rise and fall of witchcraft in Europe over 1,300 years, starting (as per the title) in 400 A.D. It presents contemporary accounts and primary documents. While of course these are at times more challenging to follow, the translations are accessible for the non-expert (such as me!).

There are notes on each entry, along with meticulous attribution of sources. There are also suggestions for further reading.

My only quibble would be the lack of an index as it makes finding specific issues a bit more laborious. But it is a minor criticism and certainly should not put off anyone who is interested in reading reliable information on the subject.

Bryn Hammond says

Consists of primary sources put together in such a way as to explore the inception, growth and decline of witch beliefs almost as a narrative. One of the better ways to approach this material. Includes not only the obvious trials and churchly tracts, pamphlets and bulls and the insane *Malleus* (certified by scholars), but a wider clutch of writers; for instance, in the decline section, Michel de Montaigne as a guru of scepticism in general was welcome, along with the philosopher Spinoza's new take on the Devil. Also in this section, retractions by once-inquisitors -- one whose investigative reports single-handedly ended witch-hunting in Spain. Works, or as close as you can hope, in 450 pages, as an overview of the thought that enabled, inevitable (made-up word) and at last escaped from these fucked-up persecutory mass mental events.

Grouped by time period/type, strung together by short orientations, and I liked the survey which served as an introduction. It means its pictorial content (41 figures) to be a serious study of sources alongside the text... b&w, decent reproduction, not great.

Don't be crazy.

Michael says

This is a collection of documents from the past which help to explain the intellectual context of the great

European witch-hunts of Early Modernity. The editors have drawn from vast amounts of demonological and theological sources to present materials that trace its development from early Christianity until the Reformation and beyond. Also included are two sections of plates with images relating to witchcraft as portrayed in a time when most Europeans believed in witches.

The documents range from statements from seminal figures like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas to Papal decrees to extracts from witch-finding manuals like the *Malleus Malificarum*. Most are quite short, and a professor or teacher could use them as examples of primary documents for undergraduates in a course pack, or assign the entire book to graduate students for discussion of its choices and methodologies. The editorial comments take into account the most current research on the witch hunts and recommend further reading for those interested in pursuing a given subject further.

Of course, such a sourcebook is no substitute for firsthand research, and inevitably leaves out a great deal of material that could be included. The editors lament that they could not include the entire *Malleus*, and their choices regarding which passages to include may disappoint some, who would prefer a deeper discussion of the kinds of powers attributed to witches and their analyses. This doubtless applies to many of the other texts included, which may be less familiar to readers and harder to find in translation. It remains a useful tool, and probably could be particularly valuable for readers new to the subject.
