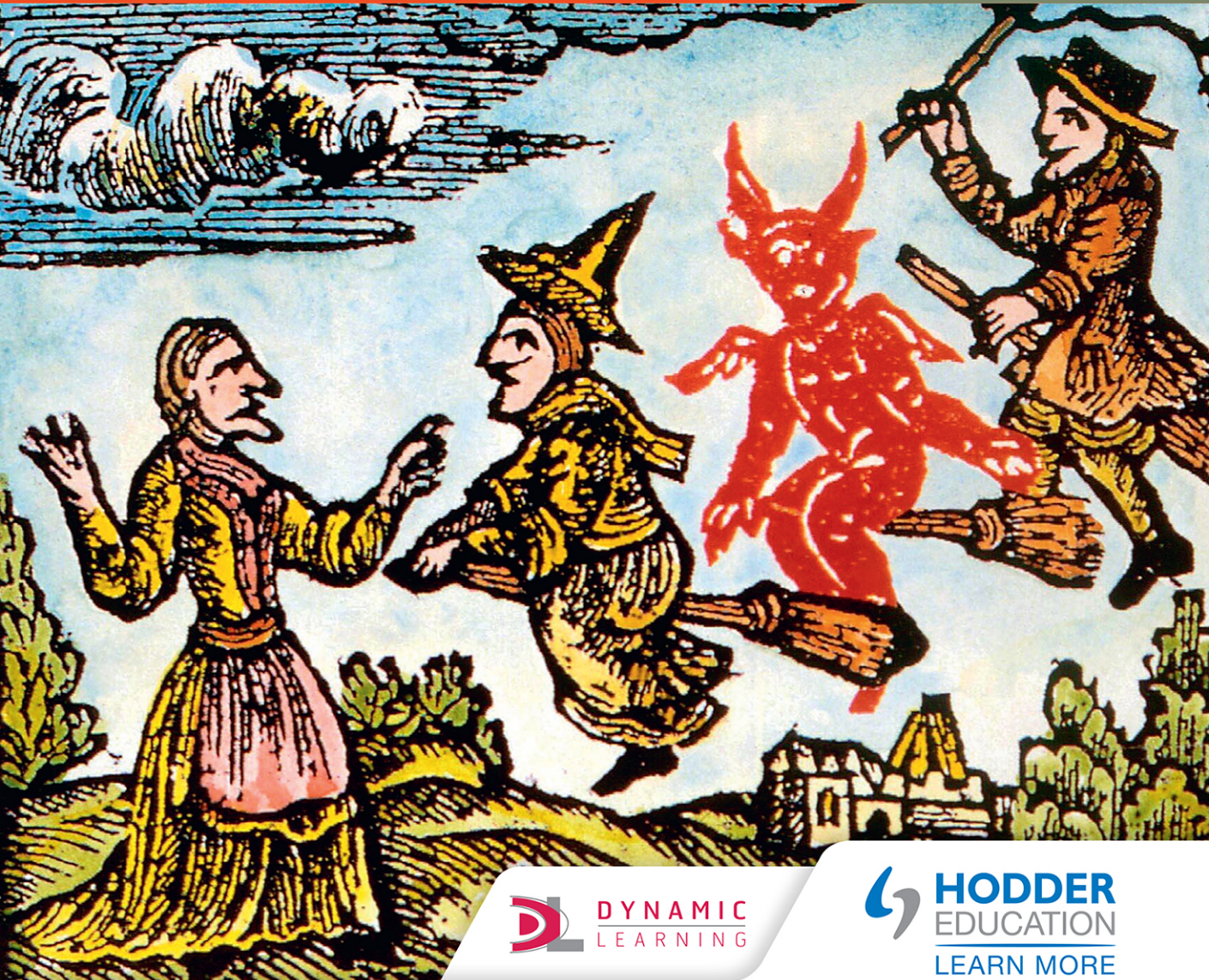


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The Witchcraze of the 16th and 17th Centuries

ALAN FARMER

SECOND EDITION



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Dedication

Keith Randell (1943–2002)

The *Access to History* series was conceived and developed by Keith, who created a series to 'cater for students as they are, not as we might wish them to be'. He leaves a living legacy of a series that for over 20 years has provided a trusted, stimulating and well-loved accompaniment to post-16 study. Our aim with these new editions is to continue to offer students the best possible support for their studies.

Introduction: about this book

This book has been written primarily to support the study of the following courses:

- Pearson Edexcel Paper 3: The witch craze in Britain, Europe and North America, c1580–c1750
- OCR Unit 3: Popular Culture and the Witchcraze of the 16th and 17th Centuries.

The specification grid on page x will help you understand how this book's content relates to the course that you are studying.

The writer hopes that student readers will regard the book not simply as an aid to better exam results, but as a study which is enjoyable in itself as an analysis of a very important theme in history.

The following explains the different features of this book and how they will help your study of the course.

Beginning of the book

Context

Starting a new course can be daunting if you are not familiar with the period or topic. This section will give you an overview of the history and will set up some of the key themes. Reading this section will help you get up to speed on the content of the course.

Throughout the book

Key terms

You need to know these to gain an understanding of the period. The appropriate use of specific historical language in your essays will also help you improve the quality of your writing. Key terms are in boldface type the first time they appear in the book. They are defined in the margin and appear in the glossary.

Profiles

Some chapters contain profiles of important individuals. These include a brief biography and information about the importance and impact of the individual. This information can be very useful in understanding certain events and providing supporting evidence to your arguments.

Sources

Historical sources are important in understanding why specific decisions were taken or on what contemporary writers and politicians based their actions. The questions accompanying each source will help you to understand and analyse the source.

Interpretations

These extracts from historians will help bring awareness of the debates and issues that surround this fascinating history topic.

Chapter summaries

These written summaries are intended to help you revise and consolidate your knowledge and understanding of the content.

Summary diagrams

These visual summaries at the end of each section are useful for revision.

Refresher questions

The refresher questions are quick knowledge checks to make sure you have understood and remembered the material that is covered in the chapter.

Question practice

There are opportunities at the end of each chapter to practise exam-style questions, arranged by exam board so you can practise the questions relevant for your course. The exam hint below each question will help you if you get stuck.

End of the book

Timeline

Understanding chronology (the order in which events took place) is an essential part of history. Knowing the order of events is one thing, but it is also important to know how events relate to each other. This timeline will help you put events into context and will be helpful for quick reference or as a revision tool.

Exam focus

This section gives advice on how to answer questions in your exam, focusing on the different requirements of your exam paper. The guidance in this book has been based on detailed examiner reports since 2017. It models best practice in terms of answering exam questions and shows the most common pitfalls to help ensure you get the best grade possible.

Glossary

All key terms in the book are defined in the glossary.

Further reading

To achieve top marks in history, you will need to read beyond this textbook. This section contains a list of books and articles for you to explore. The list may also be helpful for an extended essay or piece of coursework.

Online extras

This new edition is accompanied by online material to support you in your study. Throughout the book you will find the online extras icon to prompt you to make use of the relevant online resources for your course. By going to www.hodderhistory.co.uk/accesstohistory/extras you will find the following:

Activity worksheets

These activities will help you develop the skills you need for the exam. The thinking that you do to complete the activities, and the notes you make from answering the questions, will prove valuable in your learning journey and helping you get the best grade possible. Your teacher may decide to print the entire series of worksheets to create an activity booklet to accompany the course. Alternatively they may be used as standalone activities for class work or homework. However, don't hesitate to go online and print off a worksheet yourself to get the most from this book.

Who's who

A level history covers a lot of key figures so it's perfectly understandable if you find yourself confused by all the different names. This document organises the individuals mentioned throughout the book by categories to help you get a clear understanding of who is who!

Further research

While further reading of books and articles is helpful to achieve your best, there's a wealth of material online, including useful websites, digital archives and documentaries on YouTube. This page lists resources that may help further your understanding of the topic. It may also prove a valuable reference for research if you decide to choose this period for the coursework element of your course.

Specification grid

Chapter	OCR	Pearson Edexcel
Chapter 1 Context	✓	✓
Chapter 2 Witch-hunting in early modern Europe		
1 The rise of witch-hunting	✓	✓
2 The legal foundations of witch-hunting	✓	✓
3 Explanations for witch-hunting	✓	✓
Chapter 3 Popular culture in early modern Europe		
1 The debate over popular culture(s)	✓	
2 Common cultures	✓	
3 Challenges to popular cultures	✓	
Chapter 4 Witch-hunting in Europe		
1 The dynamics of European witch-hunting	✓	✓
2 Witch-hunts in Trier, Würzburg, Bamberg and Cologne	✓	✓
Chapter 5 Witch-hunting in England		
1 Witchcraft in early modern England	✓	✓
2 English witch-hunting 1560–1612	✓	✓
3 The Lancashire witches 1612		✓
4 Matthew Hopkins and the East Anglian witch-hunt 1645–7	✓	✓
5 Key debate	✓	✓
Chapter 6 Witchcraft in Scotland and New England		
1 The North Berwick witch-hunt		✓
2 Witch-hunting in Scotland 1591–1670	✓	✓
3 The Salem witch trials		✓
4 Key debate	✓	✓
Chapter 7 The end of witch-hunting		
1 Reasons for the decline of European witch-hunting	✓	✓
2 The end of witch-hunting in England	✓	✓
Chapter 8 Conclusion		
1 Reasons for the witchcraze	✓	✓
2 The nature of the persecutions	✓	✓
3 Reasons for the decline of witch-hunting	✓	✓

Context

What exactly is a witch? There is no simple answer to this deceptively easy question. George Gifford, writing in the late sixteenth century, defined a witch as someone ‘that worketh by the Devil or by some devilish or curious art, either hurting or healing’. (Note that Gifford believed that witches could heal as well as hurt.) A contemporary of Gifford, William Perkins, had a similar definition: ‘A witch is a magician, who either by open or secret league, wittingly and willingly, consenteth to use the aid and assistance of the Devil in the working of wonders.’ Few people today would be happy with either Gifford’s or Perkins’ definition. Many doubt the existence of the Devil. Few people believe that witches exist or that they have magical powers. Few worry unduly about witches. This was not the case in Europe during the **early modern period**, when suspected witches were believed to have caused tens of thousands of deaths and threatened the very foundations of society. Across Europe, witches were feared and reviled in equal measure. As a result, the period from 1450 to 1750 saw a series of witch-hunts and the execution of thousands of people accused of witchcraft.

KEY TERM

Early modern period

The time from c. 1450 to c. 1700; the years that are regarded as bridging the medieval and modern worlds.

Definition

The present English word witchcraft is derived from the Old English word *wiccecraft*: a *wicca* or *wicce* was someone who practised sorcery. Most languages have a word meaning ‘witch’ or ‘sorcerer’. Nevertheless, witchcraft is a difficult term to define:

- Its meaning has varied through time and in different societies.
- Different cultures do not share a coherent pattern of witchcraft beliefs.
- Witchcraft is usually seen as the practice of – and belief in – magical skills and supernatural abilities. Those skills and abilities can be exercised by individuals or by groups.
- Individuals who wielded supernatural skills in the early modern period went by various names: sorcerers, magicians, wizards or witches. Wizards were perceived to be male. Witches, like magicians and sorcerers (or sorceresses), could be either male or female. But in most European societies, certainly from the fifteenth century, most people accused of being witches were female.
- In Britain (but not necessarily elsewhere), it was generally believed that anyone could learn to become a sorcerer. But opinion was divided on the nature of witchcraft. Some believed that to be a witch, one had to be born a witch. Others, by contrast, believed that people could become witches at some point in their lives. Thus, while witchcraft and sorcery were sometimes seen as different disciplines, the words ‘witchcraft’ and ‘sorcery’ tended to be used interchangeably in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

- Witches, it was believed, were able to cast spells. They were able to ensure that spells were carried out either by using physical techniques or by thought alone. A spell could consist of a set of words or a ritual action. Witches were commonly seen as making a wax or clay image (a poppet) of a person to afflict (or help) him or her magically. Magical potions were also believed to be effective – occasionally for good as well as for evil purposes.

Good and bad witchcraft

Throughout history, most of the authorities on the subject of witchcraft agreed that there were both bad ('black') and good ('white') witches. By the fifteenth century, most witches were perceived as evil – servants of the Devil who were intent on destroying the established order. People feared that they were able to influence the mind, body or property of others against their will. The main crimes attributed to 'black' witches included the causing of death or injury to another person, the harming of farm animals, or interfering with nature by ruining a harvest, or frustrating some other domestic operation. In Europe (but not so much in Britain), their powers were believed to extend to commanding the weather. In Wiesensteig, in south-western Germany, 63 women were executed as witches in 1562–3 for allegedly causing a violent hailstorm.

But not all witches in the early modern period were necessarily considered evil. There were a number who were thought to perform 'good' magic. Such people in England were often known as 'cunning folk', 'unbinding' witches or 'wise-women'. Cunning folk used their powers to provide a range of useful services to their communities, curing people and animals of disease, countering the effects of 'bad' witches, identifying the supposed evil-doers, finding lost or stolen goods, predicting the future, or improving the fertility of animals or fields. The folk magic used to identify or protect people against malicious magic was often indistinguishable from that used by 'bad' witches. Sometimes people found it hard to tell the difference between bad witches and cunning folk. If a good witch failed to heal a person who had sought their medical assistance, he or she might well be accused of being bad.

Ancient witchcraft

The concept of witchcraft and the belief in its existence have persisted throughout recorded history. Witchcraft provided an explanation for a host of misfortunes: disease, sickness in animals, sudden death, crop failure and so on. In many parts of the Middle East and North Africa, there was a belief in the existence of evil spirits. Both religion and magic were thought to be needed to appease and offer protection from these spirits. People who were seen as responsible for a society's misfortunes or an individual's problems were persecuted. The first known prosecution for witchcraft took place in Egypt around 1300BC for a crime that today would be for practising medicine without a licence.

Historically, the predominant concept of witchcraft in the western world derives from the Bible's Old Testament. In the book of Exodus it is stated: 'Thou shalt

not suffer a witch to live.’ One of the earliest records of a witch in the Bible is in the book of Samuel, thought to have been written between 931BC and 721BC. It tells the story of King Saul seeking help from the witch of Endor to summon the dead prophet Samuel’s spirit to help him defeat the Philistines. The witch roused Samuel, who then prophesied the death of Saul and his sons. The next day, according to the Old Testament, Saul’s son died in battle and Saul killed himself.

In Greek and Roman civilisation, authors such as Horace and Virgil described sorceresses, furies and harpies with hideous pale faces, clothed in ragged garments who met at night to sacrifice both animals and humans. But in Greek and Roman mythology, witches, enchantresses and sorceresses could be beautiful and deadly. The legendary Greek sorceress Circe had the ability to turn people into animals. Odysseus, who visited Circe’s island of Aeaea on his voyage from Troy, was protected by moly, a magical herb, and forced Circe to restore his men to human form.

A variety of ancient religions had fertility gods and goddesses who presided over the forces of nature. Such gods and goddesses needed placating.

Early Christian views of witchcraft

The Bible’s New Testament, while notably free of witches and wizards, has frequent references to sorcery. It strongly condemns sorcery and sorcerers and attacks magic in general as an abomination. For much of the early Middle Ages (500–1000AD) witchcraft was generally dismissed as nonsense by Christian authors. They saw it as essentially a pagan practice. However, most ordinary Europeans seem to have believed in witches. They did not regard them as belonging to a secret or **pagan** cult. They simply believed that some people had the supernatural power to influence events for good or evil. Such people were feared and respected. Early converts of Christianity looked to Christian clergy to work magic more effectively than the old methods under Roman, Celtic and Germanic paganism. Christianity did indeed provide a system of magic involving prayer, saints and relics, similar in many respects to the magical methods of the pagan world.

The early Church was more concerned with winning converts than persecuting witches or blaming them for misfortunes. Many Church leaders repudiated the view that witches had special powers and were sceptical of witchcraft accusations. Nevertheless, most medieval Europeans, including most clergymen, believed that those who attempted to harm by magic should be prosecuted and punished.

Moreover, the Church did attack heretics – those people who did not accept the established teachings of the Church (see page 7). The persecution of heretics grew in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as Church authorities attempted to suppress dissent. Those who dissented were depicted as evil, working in cooperation with Satan – the Devil. The Devil was depicted as the greatest enemy of Christ – a totally evil figure intent on destroying social life, family, community, Church and state.

KEY TERM

Pagan A person who is not a Christian, Muslim or Jew. Pagans often believe that there are a large number of gods and goddesses.

KEY TERMS

Apocalyptic

A momentous struggle between two forces – one good, one evil – which could lead to the complete destruction of the world.

Inquisitors Men who worked to preserve the supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church by means of formally organised persecution.

Demons Evil spirits who worked for the Devil.

The witchcraze

By the fourteenth century, many churchmen believed that there was an **apocalyptic** conflict between God and the Devil: a great struggle for control of people's souls. Witches, as well as heretics, were perceived as the Devil's servants. In 1326, Pope John XXII charged his **inquisitors** with the task of clearing Europe of Devil worshippers. In 1374, Pope Gregory XI declared that all magic was done with the aid of **demons** and was thus open to prosecution for heresy. The number of witchcraft trials began to increase.

The real explosion in witchcraft trials came in the fifteenth century in the Alpine region of Europe (see page 7). By the late fifteenth century, the witch – in central Europe at least – was seen as attending lurid orgies, which he or she reached by flying on broomsticks. Moreover, the witch, previously a unisex term, was increasingly thought likely to be a woman. Women, at this time, were seen as inherently more wicked and more susceptible to satanic overtures. 'When a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil', declared the *Malleus Maleficarum* or *Witches' Hammer*. This work, first published in 1486, claimed that witches posed a major threat to Christian society. It outlined how to identify witches, how to put them on trial and how to punish them (see page 9).

Given that witches were seen as the Devil's willing servants, good Christians, whether Catholic or Protestant, believed they should do their utmost to combat the threat by persecuting them. Thus began the great European witchcraze, involving witch-hunts and executions. Beginning in the mid-fifteenth century, the witchcraze continued into the eighteenth century. An Italian inquisitor in the late fifteenth century boasted of killing a thousand witches in a year. A French inquisitor in the late sixteenth century claimed that he had cleared the province of Lorraine of 900 witches. (Recent research suggests that this figure was probably an exaggeration.) In the early seventeenth century, numerous German states killed thousands of witches. Between 1580 and 1680, England, Scotland and Wales killed some 2000 witches. Witch-hunting even spread to the new colonies in America. In 1692, nineteen people, plus two dogs, were executed for witchcraft at Salem in New England. For the most part, English and American witches were hanged; French, Italian and German witches were usually burned at the stake.

Prosecution levels fluctuated over time and affected different regions in different ways. Witchcraft cases, moreover, varied in character and cause. England, for example, experienced only one witch-hunt worthy of the name – that is, a sustained persecution over a wide area, orchestrated by people calling themselves witchfinders. This happened in the counties of East Anglia during the Civil War in the mid-1640s (see pages 114–22). Many of those accused of being witches in England were unpopular – often old or surly women who cursed people who refused to give them charity. They were people who had often built up a local reputation for witchcraft and if misfortune befell people in a village, pressure was put upon – often sceptical – authorities to arrest the

suspect. Accusations of witchcraft were sometimes linked to personal disputes, jealousy and conflicts between neighbours or families over land or inheritance. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at every level of society, intelligent – and not so intelligent – people across Europe and America believed in both the supernatural and witchcraft. Most believed that the world was full of spiritual and occult forces with the power to shape earthly events. Witchcraft provided an explanation for the unexplainable. The fear of witches led to deeds and actions that today seem inexplicable. But that fear at the time was very real – a fact that helps to explain the terrible persecution of those suspected of witchcraft.

Contemporary witchcraft

The stereotypical image of a witch (an image which developed hundreds of years ago) as an evil old hag with a conical hat, a black robe, a broomstick and a cackling laugh lives on in our consciousness today. This image of a witch appears in countless fairy tales, films and other fictional creations, notably *The Wizard of Oz*. Witches also enjoy their heyday every year on All Hallows' Eve. The fact that Halloween has become an increasingly popular date in the annual cycle of celebrations suggests that the witch will continue to fascinate (and possibly terrify) people for many years to come.

Thankfully, in most modern societies, people tend to be sceptical of the existence of magical powers. Scientific experimentation and empirical evidence has been able to disprove most supernatural fears. But witchcraft has not entirely disappeared. Unfortunately, witch-hunting and the killing of people suspected to be witches continues to occur in the modern era across the globe: in Tanzania, India, Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya. Even in the UK today, children believed to be witches or possessed by evil spirits can be subject to serious beatings, traumatic **exorcism** and other abuse.

During the twentieth century, a 'softer' form of witchcraft known as Wicca emerged in Britain and other western nations. Wiccan beliefs involve varying degrees of magic, folk medicines and spiritual healing as well as the veneration of ancient deities. Generally, Wicca followers seek to attune with the forces of nature. The number of practising Wiccans has increased significantly over the past 50 years, especially in Britain and the USA. It has been estimated that there are as many as 300,000 in these two countries alone. The main religious organisations have little to do with them and there are some devout Christians and Muslims who still see witchcraft, whatever its form, as a threat – to the extent that they will not even read the *Harry Potter* series of children's books. Wiccan beliefs may be frowned upon – even mocked – by most people. But to their adherents they represent the continuation of an ancient and vital tradition, celebrating witchcraft as a symbol of femininity and the secret powers of nature. Contemporary Wiccans are proud to call themselves witches. Their sixteenth- and seventeenth-century counterparts, by contrast, shrank from being given this name by others because it carried with it the likelihood of persecution and an unpleasant death – as this book will demonstrate.

KEY TERM

Exorcism Ritual efforts to deliver a person from the influence of evil spirits.

Witch-hunting in early modern Europe

From the mid-fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries, but mainly in the period 1560–1660, thousands of Europeans were tried and executed for witchcraft. This chapter will examine the factors that led to the rise of witch-hunting by focusing on the following themes:

- ◆ The rise of witch-hunting
- ◆ The legal foundations of witch-hunting
- ◆ Explanations for witch-hunting

KEY DATES

1420s	Large-scale witch-hunts in the Alpine region	1517	Martin Luther's <i>Ninety-five Theses</i> : the start of the Reformation
1484	Pope Innocent VIII's papal bull <i>Summis desiderantes affectibus</i>	1560–1660	Large-scale witch persecutions across Europe
1486	Kramer published <i>Malleus Maleficarum</i>		

1 The rise of witch-hunting

■ *Why was there a growth of witch-hunting in the early modern period?*

Most people in Europe in the early modern period believed in the reality of witches and witchcraft. When Europeans talked about witchcraft in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they were invariably referring to two types of activity:

- Black or maleficent magic: the performance of harmful deeds by means of some sort of occult or supernatural power, for example, by killing a person by piercing a doll made in his or her image, inflicting sickness by reciting a spell or blighting crops by bringing down hail.
- White magic: the performance of good deeds which could help the growth of crops, cure disease, foretell the future and help to counter evil sorcery.

‘White’ witches (often known as ‘cunning folk’ in England) were usually considered a ‘good thing’ at a local level. By contrast, most Europeans thought that evil witches should be hunted down and persecuted.

Developments in Christian doctrine

Until the thirteenth century, mainstream Christian teaching denied the existence of witchcraft, condemning it as a pagan superstition. However, two

? SOURCE QUESTION

Look at Source A. What do you think was the purpose of the illustration?



The Witches' Sabbat, a seventeenth-century engraving by Matthäus Merian the Elder (1593–1650).

female ones as succubi. It was believed that they could take on the appearance of a human or an animal form, for example, a black cat. (Hence the association of witches and black cats.)

In early modern Europe, witchcraft and demonic possession were considered to be distinct but related phenomena. Possession was the process by which a demonic spirit supposedly invaded the body of a human being, assumed control of its physical movements, and altered its personality. This assault on the possessed person resulted in bodily contortions and convulsions, the vomiting of foreign objects, insensitivity to pain, speaking in strange voices and so on. Demonic possession sometimes seemed to afflict not just individuals but groups of people, particularly children. The victims of possession could be distinguished from witches on the grounds that, being involuntary victims of demonic power, they were not responsible for their actions. Instead, witches were often persecuted for causing the possession of other people. In England, the connection between witchcraft and possession was so common that the words 'possessed' and 'bewitched' became almost synonymous.

Rather than isolated individuals dabbling in the occult, witches were therefore increasingly seen as members of a heretical sect, a menace to Christianity. They thus needed to be hunted down and destroyed – in the same way that Cathar and Waldensian heretics had been persecuted:

- Inquisitors, appointed by the pope, were dispatched to investigate witchcraft.
- Just as heretics were burned at the stake, so were witches.

In December 1484, Pope Innocent VIII issued *Summis desiderantes affectibus* ('Desiring with passionate ardour'), a **papal bull** in which he declared

KEY TERM

Papal bull An edict issued by the pope.

witchcraft to be a *crimen exceptum* (an exceptional crime), thereby removing all legal limits on the application of torture in cases where evidence was difficult to find.

SOURCE B

From a tract written by William West in 1594, quoted in Tracy Borman, *Witches: James I and the English Witch-hunts*, Vintage, 2014, p. xiii.

A witch or hag is she who – deluded by a pact made with the Devil through his persuasion, inspiration and juggling – thinks she can bring about all manner of evil things, either by thought or imprecation, such as to shake the air with lightnings and thunder, to cause hail and tempests, to remove green corn or trees to another place, to be carried on her familiar spirit (which has taken upon him the deceitful shape of a goat, swine or calf, etc.) into some mountain far distant, in a wonderfully short space of time, and sometimes to fly upon a staff or fork, or some other instrument, and to spend all the night after with her sweetheart, in playing, sporting, banqueting, dancing, dalliance, and divers [diverse] other devilish lusts and lewd disports [frolics].

SOURCE QUESTION

According to Source B, why were witches a menace to society?

The spread of the idea of demonic witchcraft

Literature became the main vehicle for transmitting knowledge about demonic witchcraft, especially with the introduction of the printing press in the late fifteenth century.

Malleus Maleficarum

The first witchcraft treatise that had a major impact was the *Malleus Maleficarum* (*Witches' Hammer*). First published in 1486 and reprinted thirteen times before 1520 (and a further sixteen times by 1660), it appeared under the name of two Dominican friars, **Heinrich Kramer** and Jacob Sprenger. Kramer, who had been appointed as an Inquisitor for southern Germany in 1478, was probably the sole author. The book was based on his own investigations. In 1484 he had prosecuted witches in Ravensburg. A witch-hunt in the Tyrol in 1485 followed. This was eventually halted by the Bishop of Brixen, who opposed Kramer's brutal methods.

Malleus lent a new urgency to the eradication of witches, who, in Kramer's view, were invariably women. It was one thing to have a troublesome old woman in the community whose spells and potions might or might not be effective. It was quite another to imagine her as part of a conspiracy led by the Devil which aimed at Christianity's destruction. *Malleus* claimed that witchcraft was the worst of all crimes, combining heresy with terrible secular crimes such as murder and sodomy. Because it was difficult to trace, legal inhibitions and procedures had to be abandoned. About a third of the book was devoted to informing judges how to prosecute witches.

KEY FIGURE

Heinrich Kramer (c.1430–1505)

Kramer, who was born in Alsace, joined the Dominican order. In the early 1470s he was appointed inquisitor for the Tyrol, Salzburg, Bohemia and Moravia. In 1487 he published *Malleus Maleficarum*, a hugely influential book on (what he saw as) the dangers of witchcraft. Many leading theologians condemned the book, claiming that it was inconsistent with Catholic doctrines and practice.