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Abstract

This study offers a detailed overview of witchcraft beliefs and the witch hunt in Europe from the 15th century, when the “demonic imagery” was gradually constructed and witchcraft persecutions began to intensify, to the 18th century, when legislation on witchcraft began to be repealed or significantly modified, a process that had already been manifested in the courtrooms since the mid-17th century. The study examines both the witchcraft imagery and witchcraft as an everyday practice while also focusing on the interaction between witchcraft discourses, persecutions and community conflicts that often triggered the witch hunt. Thus, this book is about not

one but many “witches”: the heretic that attended the witches’ Sabbath, the “evil neighbour” who caused disease and death, the practitioner or “professional of witchcraft” who cured the body or the soul, the accused, who trapped in the webs of the law, struggled to defend herself through narratives of guilt or innocence, and the witch as a construction of historiography. The present study does not conceive magic as the opposite of science or religion. Rather, ideas on magic and witchcraft are studied in tandem with other fields of knowledge, such as theology, science, political theory, law, oral tradition, travel literature, fiction, and the art.

